



3 Maccabees

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1. 3 Macc. 1:3

“Jew Foils Plot against King Ptolemy

Theodotus...took some of Ptolemy’s best soldiers...went to Ptolemy’s tent intending to kill him...However Dositheus, son of Drymilus, who was a Jew by birth but later renounced the Law and abandoned his ancestral beliefs, removed Ptolemy and placed a poor unknown fellow (in his place)...and he suffered the fate intended for Ptolemy.

2. According to Polybius (Histories, Book 5)

June 22, 217 BCE: Battle of Raphia

- Ptolemy IV Philopater deploys 70,000 infantry
- 5,000 cavalry
- 73 Elephants
- Antiochus III (“The Great”) deploys 62,000 infantry
- 6,000 cavalry
- 102 Indian Elephants

3. Ptolemy prevented from entering the Jerusalem Sanctuary

3 Macc. 1:9ff.

Ptolemy came to Jerusalem, sacrificed to God...(and) asked whether he should enter the sanctuary. They told him this was improper...however he was not convinced

But he spiritedly ignored everything and attempted to enter...Then God, who watches over everything and is holy among the holies before all, heard the prayer (of the high priest) and flogged the king... Sometime later he recovered, not having developed any regrets at all, and he departed with bitter threats...

4. 3 Macc. 2:25-30

King Issues Decrees against Jews

When he had returned to Egypt and his evil impulse had increased,... He tasked the public with passing a censure against the race [of the Jews]. Then he set up a stele ... chiseling an inscription, 28 saying that no one who was not sacrificing could go into their temples, that all the Jews were to be enrolled in a poll tax and given servile status, and that those

who resisted with force were to be removed from life, 29 and those who were enrolled were to be marked with fire on their bodies with the symbol of Dionysos - an ivy-leaf - and they also were assigned to their earlier, humbled status. 30 But so that he would not appear detestable to everyone he added that, if anyone preferred to be converted into one of those who had been initiated into the mystic rites, they would be equal to Alexandrian citizens.

5. 3 Macc. 2:31-33

Most Jews refuse the “offer”; Tension within the Community

So some in the city, showing their hatred for the means of maintaining the piety of the city, unscrupulously surrendered themselves, as if they were gaining a share of something great - glory from their future interaction with the king. But the majority were empowered with a noble spirit and did not abandon their piety and exchanged their money for their lives, they fearlessly attempted to protect themselves from the registration. They remained hopeful that they would receive assistance and they detested those who abandoned them, considering them enemies of the nation and refused to live alongside them or give them assistance.

6. 3 Macc. 3:1

Anti-Jewish Decree spreads to All of Egypt

When the ungodly man (=Ptolemy) learnt these things he was so angry that not only did he rage at those in Alexandria, but he even opposed those deep in the countryside and he ordered that all those who were zealous should be gathered together in the same place and be executed in the worst way possible

7. 3 Macc. 3:3-4

Jews remain loyal - to God and the King

The Jews (nevertheless preserved) their unchangeable goodwill and faith towards the kings but they worshiped God and conducted their affairs according to His laws, maintaining a distinction in accordance with the law about foods, for which reason they seemed hateful to some people

8. 3 Macc. 3:6-7

Jews accused of disloyalty

But since they conducted their interactions with all people with the good conduct of the just, they had achieved good repute. (But some) of the foreigners took no account of the good conduct of the [Jewish] race which was commonly spoken about by everyone; instead, they spoke about the separation of their worship and their food, saying that they were not people who made the same sacrifices to the king and the armed forces and that they were hostile to them and deeply opposed to their affairs. And they attacked them with extraordinary criticism.

9. 3 Macc. 3:8-10

Reaction of the “Good Greeks”

Since the Greeks in the city had not been wronged at all, when they saw the unexpected fuss about the [Jewish] people and unexpected riots taking place, they were not able to

help, because of the tyrannical government, but they consoled them, felt terrible and assumed that these [orders] would be changed, 9for such a great community which had done no wrong would not be overlooked in this way. 10 But now, some neighbours, friends, and co-workers drew some of them in secretly, giving promises that they would vouch for them and would contribute everything eagerly in support.

10. 3 Macc. 3:21-23

Ptolemy issues a Decree against all Jew

King Ptolemy Philopator to the Generals and soldiers in Egypt and every [other] place, greetings and good health! (Ptolemy proceeds to describe the events in Jerusalem and Egypt leading to the decrees against the Jews) ...we went so far as to change their state completely, deciding to reward them with citizenship of Alexandria and to make them participants in all our holy things. But they reacted in the opposite manner and thrust away this beautiful thing in favour of their innate evil behaviour, continually turning to badness Not only did they reject the priceless citizenship, but they even despised (out loud and silently) the few among them who behaved properly towards us...

11. 3 Macc. 3:26ff.

Jews ordered arrested and rounded up

For, once they have all been punished, we will have finally managed to bring our affairs into stability ...Whoever hides one of the Jews, whether old, young, or infants, will be annihilated with the most shameful torture, along with their whole family. Anyone who is willing to inform [on them], will receive in exchange the property of the person who comes under judgment and two thousand drachmas of royal silver, will get their freedom, and will be crowned. Any place whatsoever in which a Jew is found to be hiding, shall be made desolate and burnt up, and shall be rendered useless in every way to all mortal beings for all time.”

12. 3 Macc. 5:1-12

Failure to carry out decree against Jews

Then he summoned Hermon and he ordered him to give all the elephants (there were five hundred of them) bountiful handfuls of frankincense and lots of undiluted wine to drink. Once they had become wild from the plentiful supply of drink, he was to lead them in, so that the Jews would meet their doom...(here follows the Jews praying for reversal of the decree)...But there is a beautiful creation for all time, which is granted night and day by gracious [God] to everyone he wishes: a bit of sleep, and he sent some to the king. ..So he fell into a deep, sweet sleep by the power of the Lord; his unlawful plan was entirely thwarted, he was entirely cheated of his unalterable calculation

13. 3 Macc. 5:29

Another attempt; another failure

But Hermon explained... “the beasts and the forces are ready, King, in accordance with your strict command.” At these words, he (=the King) was filled with deep wrath because God’s will in this matter was scattering all his thinking, and he said obstinately and threateningly, 31 “If your parents were here or the children of your children, I would cast them to wild beasts as a rich meal, rather than blameless people who accepted my ancestors and always remained solidly faithful, like the Jews

14. 3 Macc. Chapter 6

Eleazar's Prayer and the Miracle of the Elephants

Now, Eleazar was a distinguished man, one of the priests... He calmed the old men around him to invoke the holy God and prayed like this: "O King, great-powered, highest, all-powerful God, who guides the whole of creation with pity, look down on the seed of Abraham, on the children of sanctified Jacob, the people of your sanctified inheritance who are perishing unjustly as strangers in a strange land."

15. 3 Macc. 6:16ff.

The Miraculous Turnaround

When Eleazar stopped speaking, the king came into the hippodrome with the beasts and all the grunting of his forces. When the Jews saw this, they shouted to the sky... Then the super-glorious, all-powerful and true God showed his holy face, opening the heavenly gates, from which two glorious and fearsome angels descended, visible to everyone except the Jews, and stood in the way, and filled the opponents' forces with disorder and terror and bound them with unmoving shackles. Even the body of the king shuddered a bit and forgetfulness took his deep-spirited boldness. Then the beasts turned upon the armed forces following them, trampled them down, and destroyed them

16. 3 Macc. 6:22ff.

The King's Remorse

Then the king's anger was transformed into pity and tears at the things he had previously plotted. Weeping with anger, he threatened his friends, saying, ... Who is it who has removed the men who hold the strongholds of the land in faith for us from their homes and irrationally gathered them here? Who is it who has inflicted such wrongful suffering on people from our realm who have been distinguished from all people from the beginning by their goodwill for us in all things and have often shown themselves to be the best of men in dangerous circumstances?

Release them! Remove these unjust chains! Send them out to their own places in peace, after apologising for what has been done! You destroyed the sons of the all-powerful living God who is in heaven, who has provided uninterrupted tranquility with glory to our affairs from the time of our ancestors up till now." So he said these things. The Jews were released right away and praised the holy God, their saviour, since they had escaped death.

17. 3 Macc. 7:10-12

Punishment of Jewish Apostates

So they took this letter and were not eager to be quick about their departure, but asked the king also that those people from the race of the Jews who had voluntarily transgressed against the holy God and God's law for their own benefit receive punishment, claiming that, since they had transgressed the divine commands, they would never ever be well-disposed towards the affairs of the king. And he thought that they spoke the truth and agreed to give them complete license to utterly destroy those who had transgressed against the law of God, in every place subject to his kingship...So on that day they killed over three hundred men and they were happy with joy because they had subdued the unhallowed people

18. The Jews return “Home”

Then returned home peacefully making appropriate thanksgiving, as they had decided to treat these days as festive,... They consecrated them with an inscription on a pillar... and went away secure, free, rejoicing, returning safely by land, sea, and river thanks to the command of the king, each to their own home with more power over the enemies than before