

Menelaus, Our Worst Enemy

1 Maccabees 1:10-15

2 Maccabees 4:7-50

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Antiochus IV Epiphanes became the leader of the Seleucid dynasty based in Antioch of Syria. Shortly thereafter, Jason usurped his brother Onias to become high priest by bribing the new king. Jason did away with the Jewish way of life and forced everyone to live like Greeks. He built a gymnasium, where young men exercised in the nude. He ordered young Jewish men to participate in its games. Some of them even had surgery to hide the fact they had been circumcised.

Jason sent a man named Menelaus on an errand to King Antiochus. Menelaus bribed the king to make him high priest, usurping Jason. Jason fled into exile to save his life.

Jason's brother Onias, the rightful high priest, was not so fortunate. He discovered Menelaus was stealing treasures from the Temple of the Lord and selling them for personal gain. Onias publicly renounced Menelaus, and Menelaus had Onias assassinated. Antiochus Epiphanes had the assassin marched through the city naked and had him executed on the very spot where he had murdered the former high priest.

Menelaus was not untouched by this scandalous activity. He was put on trial for stealing from the Temple and for contracting a murder. Three upstanding men of Jerusalem testified against him. But through bribery, all the charges against Menelaus were dropped, and the three men were swiftly and wrongfully executed.

The high priest Menelaus became known by the Jewish people as "our worst enemy."