

Ptolemy's Madness

3 Maccabees 2:25 – 5:44

by Don Falkos

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Upon arriving home in Alexandria, Ptolemy IV Philopator directed that any Jew who would worship the Greek god Dionysus be granted the full rights of a native Alexandrian. Any who declined would be killed. Some of the Jews accepted the king's proposition. Most refused to desert the Lord their God. Instead, they offered bribes to any officials who could protect them from death.

Jews from all over the kingdom were brought to Alexandria to be executed. They were detained in the hippodrome just outside the city gate. As more and more Jews were brought in, the king became unhinged with excitement, behaving oddly and talking nonsense.

Philopator ordered, "Tomorrow, bring five hundred elephants. Give them as much wine as they'll drink. When they're angry and confused, release them into the hippodrome to trample the Jews!"

The next day, God caused the king to oversleep. Although the elephants were prepared, the extermination did not take place.

The following morning, when it was announced the elephants were ready to kill the Jews, Philopator suddenly became very confused and had no idea what was going on. God had caused him to forget his plan. The king praised the loyalty of his Jewish subjects. But a few minutes later he demanded to know why they still hadn't been executed. The king's trusted friends and military commanders thought he had gone mad.

In a violent rage, Philopator shouted, "I swear by my own life the elephants will trample the Jews to death at dawn! I will destroy the cities of Judea and burn their Temple to the ground. Since I wasn't allowed to enter it, no one else will ever enter it again."