

The Death of Antiochus Epiphanes

1 Maccabees 5:1 – 6:17

2 Maccabees 9

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Judas Maccabeus and his brothers fought long and hard to defeat any who came against Judea or indeed against any of the lands once held by the people of Israel. They inspired fear wherever they went.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes attacked a city in Persia famed for its wealth. The city's temple was said to contain "a king's ransom" in gold and silver. Antiochus was determined to possess the treasure. But the people of the city banded together against him and defeated his army.

Retreating in shame, the king received news of a multitude of defeats in the Maccabean Revolt. In a rage Antiochus headed for Judea saying, "When I reach Jerusalem, I will turn it into a graveyard of resistant Jews." Suddenly he doubled over in pain and fell from his chariot. His body was broken, but his resolve was intact. He continued on toward Jerusalem until it became clear he was dying.

His illness was a mystery until he began to regurgitate handfuls of maggots. The man's body was swarming with them. He now suffered horribly as had all those he himself had tortured.

The stench of the king's rotting flesh became intolerable. His superhuman arrogance was shattered, and he said, "A man should never consider himself equal to God." He issued a decree that any Jew who had been faithful to him should be granted full citizenship with all its rights and privileges. "The rest," he said, "should be exterminated."

His final act was to name his successor. His son Antiochus V Eupator became the next ruler in the Seleucid dynasty.