

The Desolating Abomination

1 Maccabees 1:16-64

2 Maccabees 5:1 – 6:6

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Antiochus IV Epiphanes attacked Egypt and made it part of his kingdom. At the same time, the exiled Jason returned to Jerusalem and tried to take over the city. He killed fellow Jews as though they were hated enemies. His actions were so disgraceful he was forced back into exile, where he died a miserable death.

Because of the fighting in Jerusalem, Antiochus thought Judea was rebelling. He led his army into the city and spent three days in a killing spree. Many thousands died or were sold into slavery. Antiochus then plundered the Temple, carrying off many of its treasures.

Having made war on the Jewish people, Antiochus then made war on the Jewish religion. His soldiers burned any copies of the Jewish Scriptures they found and killed the people who owned them. They tortured and killed every faithful Jew they captured. They murdered any woman who let her son be circumcised, killing her, her child, her entire family, and the person who performed the circumcision. It became a crime to observe the Sabbath, or to celebrate the ancient feast days, or even to admit to being a Jew.

An altar to Olympian Zeus was set up in the Temple – the desolating abomination. And regular pagan sacrifices were offered there. A similar fate befell the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim.

A small number of faithful Jews escaped to the Judean wilderness. They survived eating only what they could find growing wild. The Temple of the Lord had been defiled; they were determined they themselves would not be.