

# Matthew 24 and the Maccabees

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(The complete listing of Scripture versions used and their abbreviations and their copyright information appears at the end of the article)

*Matthew 24:3 (NASB) Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"*

## **Take Heed That No One Leads You Astray**

When you read the Matthew chapter 24 (and 25 also) one of the things that should strike us is this admonition by the Messiah:

*Matthew 24: 4 (ISR) And Yeshua answering, said to them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray."*

Other translations, such as the New King James version, render Messiah's words as: "Take heed that no one deceives you." Paul Younan, in his Aramaic Peshitta interlinear renders this passage as: "Beware, let no man deceive you." The Aramaic verb used here, *na'eykuon*, means to deceive, delude, lead astray, forget, err or wander.

Clearly, the Messiah is giving His disciples (taught-ones) a stern warning, something to which they should be taking heed: Don't be led astray. He certainly gave this warning for a reason. Something or someone is coming that will lead them astray or make an attempt to do so.

## **Chanukah**

Beginning with Messiah's admonition, it is startling to compare His words with those from the first book of the Maccabees. This book tells the historical background for the winter holiday of Chanukah, also transliterated as Hannukah. The holiday is also known as the feast of dedication (the meaning of Chanukah in Hebrew), since the reason for this holiday is the cleansing and rededication of the Temple after its defilement by the Syro-Greeks of Antiochus Epiphanes. In particular, the altar was desecrated by sacrificing a pig upon it. If you would like to see how Chanukah is used in the Tanakh ("old testament"), look it up as Strong's # 2598. You may be surprised to read about it in the New/Renewed Covenant (*Brit Chadashah*) or Apostolic Scriptures as well. However, this might be more difficult to make this connection if you didn't know that "feast of dedication" is a reference to Chanukah:

*John 10:22-23 (NASB) 22 At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; 23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.*

"Messianic" translations such as the Institute for Scripture Research (ISR) and the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) do not leave any question about which holiday is being referenced by the gospel writer:

*Yochanon/John 10: 22-23 (ISR) 22 At that time the Hanukkah came to be in Yerushalayim, and it was winter. 23 And Yeshua was walking in the Set-apart Place, in the porch of Shelomoh.*

*Yochanon/John 10: 22-23 (CJB) <sup>22</sup> Then came Hanukkah in Yerushalayim. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Yeshua was walking around inside the Temple area, in Shlomo's Colonnade. Given that Chanukah is all about the re-dedication of the Temple, we really should not be too surprised to find Yeshua in the Temple during this holiday. Later in this passage in John, the Messiah's countrymen pick of stones with which they intend to stone Him. If they are in the Temple, where did they get the stones?*

*1 Maccabees 4:45-46 (NRSV) 45 And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, 46 and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them.*

It may well be that they picked up stones from the old defiled altar to stone Yeshua! In any case, it is clear that Yeshua was certainly familiar with the holiday.

### **Leading People Astray**

With this link clearly established, we can now turn our attention back to the connection between Yeshua's warning in Matthew chapter 24 ("Take heed that no one leads you astray") with the historical events recorded in Maccabees.

*1 Maccabees 1:11-15 (NJB) 11 It was then that there emerged from Israel a set of renegades **who led many people astray**. 'Come,' they said, 'let us ally ourselves with the gentiles surrounding us, for since we separated ourselves from them many misfortunes have overtaken us.' 12 This proposal proved acceptable, 13 and a number of the people eagerly approached the king, who authorised them to practise the gentiles' observances. 14 So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, such as the gentiles have, 15 disguised their circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant, submitting to gentile rule as willing slaves of impiety.*

These who were leading people astray in the time of the Maccabees were from inside the camp, from among the brethren, from Israel. They sought to emulate the pagan practices of the nations, including their holidays ("the gentiles' observances"). Now, take a look at a larger portion of the first chapter of 1 Maccabees that appears later in the text:

*1 Maccabees 1:41-61 (NJB) 41 The king then issued a proclamation to his whole kingdom that all were to become a single people, each nation renouncing its particular customs. 42 All the gentiles conformed to the king's decree, **43 and many Israelites chose to accept his religion, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath**. 44 The king also sent edicts by messenger to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, directing them to adopt customs foreign to the country, 45 banning burnt offerings, sacrifices and libations from the sanctuary, profaning Sabbaths and feasts, 46 **defiling the sanctuary and everything holy**, 47 building altars, shrines and temples for idols, **sacrificing pigs** and unclean beasts, 48 leaving their sons uncircumcised, and prostituting themselves to all kinds of impurity and abomination, 49 so **that they should forget the Law** and revoke all observance of it. 50 Anyone not obeying the king's command was to be put to death. 51 Writing in such terms to every part of his kingdom, the king appointed inspectors for the whole people and directed all the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice city by city. 52 **Many of the people -- that is, every apostate from the Law -- rallied to them and so committed evil in the country**, 53 forcing Israel into hiding in any possible place of refuge. 54 **On the fifteenth day of Chislew in the year 145 the king built the appalling abomination on top of the altar of burnt offering**; and altars were built in the surrounding towns of Judah 55 and incense offered at the doors of houses and in the streets. 56 Any books of the Law that came to light were torn up and burned. 57 **Whenever anyone was discovered possessing a copy of the covenant or practising the Law, the king's decree sentenced him to death**. 58 Month after month they took harsh action against any offenders they discovered in the towns of Israel. 59 **On the twenty-fifth day of each month, sacrifice was offered on the altar erected on top of the altar of burnt offering**. 60 **Women who had had their children circumcised***

*were put to death according to the edict 61 with their babies hung round their necks, and the members of their household and those who had performed the circumcision were executed with them.*

Here, then, are some of the characteristics of those who lead astray:

1. They want to do what the pagan nations are doing.
2. They seek approval and justification for doing gentile customs and festivals instead of doing Yah's instructions contained in the Scriptures, the Torah.
3. They disguise their identity as "wolves in sheep's clothing" in order to lead people away from Yah's Biblical instructions.
4. They choose to accept the religion of the gentiles because it is much easier than taking a stand for Yah's Torah.
5. They choose to profane the Master's Sabbath and keep pagan customs instead.
6. They choose to reject the Biblical Feasts and keep the customs of the pagan nations instead.
7. They choose to reject Yah's definition of what constitutes clean and unclean meat and counsel others to do the same.
8. They leave their sons uncircumcised.
9. They forget about Yah's Torah instructions and revoke all observance of it.

The Messiah has already warned us to take heed so that we are not led astray. He also tells us this:

*Matthew 24:11 (CJB) many false prophets will appear and fool many people;*

*Matthew 24: 24 (CJB) For there will appear false Messiahs and false prophets performing great miracles-amazing things!- so as to fool even the chosen, if possible.*

Are there any people today that call themselves prophets or say they have an anointing? (Keep in mind that the meaning of Messiah or Christ is "anointed one"). Are these same people speaking out against keeping the biblical Sabbath or any of the instructions of the Torah? Do they keep the traditional feasts and holidays of the nations, while avoiding Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles? Before you answer this question, let's continue on with our comparisons between 1 Maccabees and Matthew 24.

### **Matthew 24: 7/1 Maccabees 1: 11: Plagues**

Look again at 1 Maccabees 1: 11 and compare it to Matthew 24: 7

*1 Maccabees 1:11 (NJB) It was then that there emerged from Israel a set of renegades who led many people astray. 'Come,' they said, 'let us ally ourselves with the gentiles surrounding us, for since we separated ourselves from them **many misfortunes** have overtaken us.'*

*Matthew 24: 7 (ISR) "For nation shall rise against nation, and reign against reign. And there shall be **scarcities of food**, and **deadly diseases**, and **earthquakes** in places."*

We submit that famine, plagues and earthquakes would be equivalent to the "many misfortunes" of 1 Maccabees 1: 11. What is the message? Despite these events – Do not be led astray! Do not avoid doing what the Scriptures say in response to famine, or in response to plagues or in response to natural disasters. Do not say: "Yah is not in control, or Yah is not loving, or Yah doesn't really exist if He allows famines in Africa or the plagues of AIDS or tsunami's to happen." Do not be led astray!

### **Matthew 24: 6 – 8/1 Maccabees 1: 1 – 4 : Wars and Rumors of Wars**

Next, let's compare Matthew 24: 6-8 with the beginning of 1 Maccabees:

Matthew 24:6-8 (NASB) 6 "You will be hearing of **wars and rumors of wars**. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 "**For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom**, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."

1 Maccabees 1:1-4 (NJB) 1 Alexander of Macedon son of Philip had come from the land of Kittim and defeated Darius king of the Persians and Medes, whom he succeeded as ruler, at first of Hellas. 2 He undertook **many campaigns, gained possession of many fortresses**, and put the local kings to death. 3 So he advanced to the ends of the earth, **plundering nation after nation**; the earth grew silent before him, and his ambitious heart swelled with pride. 4 He assembled very powerful forces and subdued provinces, nations and princes, and they became his tributaries.

If Alexander the Great does not fit the description of a warlike king, then no one does. After his death, Alexander's empire was divided into four kingdoms under four of his generals. These kingdoms frequently fought against each other, kingdom against kingdom, and it is the backdrop of these wars that we find the time of the Maccabees.

### **Matthew 24: 9 – 10/1 Maccabees 1: 44 – 53 : Deliver You Up**

Matthew 24: 9 -10 (ISR) "Then **they shall deliver you up** to affliction and **kill you**, and you shall be hated by all nations for My Name's sake. 10 "And then many shall stumble, and **they shall deliver up one another**, and shall hate one another."

1 Maccabees 1:44-53 (NJB) 44 **The king also sent edicts by messenger** to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, directing them to adopt customs foreign to the country, 45 banning burnt offerings, sacrifices and libations from the sanctuary, profaning Sabbaths and feasts, 46 defiling the sanctuary and everything holy, 47 building altars, shrines and temples for idols, sacrificing pigs and unclean beasts, 48 leaving their sons uncircumcised, and prostituting themselves to all kinds of impurity and abomination, 49 **so that they should forget the Law and revoke all observance of it**. 50 **Anyone not obeying the king's command was to be put to death**. 51 Writing in such terms to every part of his kingdom, the king appointed inspectors for the whole people and directed all the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice city by city. 52 **Many of the people -- that is, every apostate from the Law -- rallied to them and so committed evil in the country**, 53 **forcing Israel into hiding in any possible place of refuge**.

The Messiah's words in Matthew 24: 9 – 10 should cause us to reflect upon how brotherly our "brethren" really might turn out to be. Verse 9 is in the second person here in Matthew, and we think it would be advantageous to allow the Messiah to speak to each of us directly. When He says "you," let Him speak to you personally. First, He said that "they shall deliver you up and kill **you**." Who is the "they"? It appears that these correspond to the king's army, the external government forces of the ruler. Then, in the next verse the Messiah says speaks about delivering up one another. This is not the king's army turning you in, but your brothers delivering you up. This corresponds directly 1 Maccabees 1: 50 – 53 where first we see the king's messengers and inspectors enforcing the king's command against obeying the Torah, then next, your ("apostate) brothers joining with the king's enforcers to turn in those who are Torah observant – forcing **you** into hiding. Interestingly, the Messiah doesn't say that **you** will hate one another, or even that **your** brothers will deliver **you** up. Perhaps this is because of the apparent distinction made in 1 Maccabees 1: 52 and 53: "The people" vs. "Israel." To be an "apostate from the Law" (i.e. the Torah, the instructions given by Yah to His people) you have have believed the Torah in the first place. So, "the people" are of your own people, so to speak, yet they forced Israel into hiding. These people are from Israel, but they are distinct from Israel, the true body of believers seen in 1: Maccabees 1: 53. From this, we see that **you** are hiding not only from the king's army, but also from **your own people** who have traitorously aligned themselves with the king. When placed in this context, the words of

Messiah become chilling indeed. Will your “brother” turn you in for obeying the written instructions in the Bible?

### **Matthew 24: 13/1 Maccabees 1: 2: 15-22: Enduring Until the End**

*Matthew 24:13 (KJV) But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

According to the words of Messiah, he that endures to the end shall be saved. At this point in our comparison, we come to a portion of 1 Maccabees to which we have not previously made reference.

*1 Maccabees 2:15-22 (NJB) 15 The king's commissioners who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modein for the sacrifices. 16 Many Israelites gathered round them, but Mattathias and his sons drew apart. 17 The king's commissioners then addressed Mattathias as follows, 'You are a respected leader, a great man in this town; you have sons and brothers to support you. 18 Be the first to step forward and conform to the king's decree, as all the nations have done, and the leaders of Judah and the survivors in Jerusalem; you and your sons shall be reckoned among the Friends of the King, you and your sons will be honoured with gold and silver and many presents.' 19 Raising his voice, Mattathias retorted, 'Even if every nation living in the king's dominions obeys him, each forsaking its ancestral religion to conform to his decrees, 20 I, my sons and my brothers will still follow the covenant of our ancestors. 21 May Heaven preserve us from forsaking the Law and its observances. 22 As for the king's orders, we will not follow them: we shall not swerve from our own religion either to right or to left.'*

There is a very great temptation here. The messengers or commissioners from the king have come to enforce the apostasy, the great turning away from the Torah. These representatives spoke on behalf of the king and offered great rewards (“gold and silver and many presents”). If Mattathias and his sons would abandon the Torah and the Covenant, then they would be counted “among the Friends of the King.” It is obvious that these commissioners had the power to enforce the king’s decrees, up to and including the death penalty. Would Mattathias and his sons succumb to this temptation or this threat? Or, would they endure or stand firm to the end? We read Mattathias’ response. They defied the king’s enforcers and refused to abandon Yah’s teachings and instructions. They would stand firm even if it killed them. They would endure to the end.

### **Matthew 24: 15/1 Maccabees 1: 54: Abomination of Desolation/That Lays Waste**

Perhaps one of the Bible’s best known prophecies is the “Abomination of Desolation” or the “Abomination that Lays Waste,” as it is variously rendered into English.

*Matthew 24:15 (NKJV) " Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),*

*Matthew 24: 15 (ISR) “So when you see the ‘abomination that lays waste,’ spoken of by Dani’el the prophet, set up in the set-apart place” – he who reads, let him understand –*

As Messiah says, this echoes the prophecy recorded by Daniel:

*Daniel 11:31 (NASB) "Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.*

*Daniel 12:10-11 (NASB) 10 "Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. 11 "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.*

At the time of Yeshua, though, this prophecy had already found fulfillment, as His hearers were no doubt aware, hence the “let the reader understand” statement found in the gospel:

*1 Maccabees 1:54 (NJB) On the fifteenth day of Chislew in the year 145 the king built the appalling abomination on top of the altar of burnt offering; and altars were built in the surrounding towns of Judah*

So, the Messiah is giving us a concrete hint that He is referencing the Maccabees when speaking about the future. It wasn't a past abomination, but another fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about which the Messiah warned his taught-ones.

### **Matthew 24: 16-18/1 Maccabees 2: 27-28: Flee to the Mountains**

After the abomination is identified, the Master said that those in the land of Judea must flee to the mountains:

*Matthew 24:16-18 (NASB) 16 then those who are in Judea **must flee to the mountains**. 17 "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18 "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.*

This future flight parallels the historical events of the Maccabees:

*1 Maccabees 2:27-30 (NJB) 27 Then Mattathias went through the town, shouting at the top of his voice, 'Let everyone who has any zeal for the Law and takes his stand on the covenant come out and follow me.' 28 **Then he fled with his sons into the hills, leaving all their possessions behind in the town.***

The Maccabees text continues and says that others fled with their cattle into the desert, but we will get to those individuals a little later.

### **Matthew 24: 19/1 Maccabees 2: 27-28: Woe to Those Who are Pregnant**

Anyone who has traveled with young children knows how difficult this can be. Yet, Messiah's statements go beyond just difficulty. He says “woe” to those who are pregnant or nursing:

*Matthew 24:19 (NASB) **"But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!"***

Remember, the Messiah has just told his taught-ones to flee to the mountains when they see the abomination of desolation. This is not a ski trip, it is fleeing for your lives! Women who are pregnant or who have very young children with them just cannot move very quickly or need more frequent breaks. Those who are with them are also more likely to be captured. The example given in the Maccabees shows the price of obedience to young mothers and their households:

*1 Maccabees 1:60-61(NJB) 60 **Women who had had their children circumcised were put to death according to the edict 61 with their babies hung round their necks, and the members of their household and those who had performed the circumcision were executed with them.***

### **Matthew 24: 20/1 Maccabees 2: 29-38: Pray that Your Flight Not be...on a Sabbath**

We next encounter this command from the Messiah:

*Matthew 24:20 (NASB) "But pray that your flight will **not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.***

Messiah commands us to pray that our flight not be in winter, nor on a Sabbath. Winter is the season in which we celebrate Chanukah, so this adds another connection. The Sabbath must still exist, by the way, if we are to pray that our flight not be on that day. This verse also serves to connect those that fled to the desert with their cattle, as discussed earlier:

*1 Maccabees 2:29-38 (NJB) 29 **Many people who were concerned for virtue and justice went down to the desert** and stayed there, 30 taking with them their sons, their wives and their **cattle**, so oppressive had their sufferings become. 31 Word was brought to the royal officials and forces stationed in Jerusalem, in the City of David, that those who had repudiated the king's edict had gone down to the hiding places in the desert. 32 A strong detachment went after them, and when it came up with them ranged itself against them in battle formation, preparing to attack them on the Sabbath day, 33 and said, 'Enough of this! Come out and do as the king orders and you will be spared.' 34 The others, however, replied, '**We refuse to come out, and we will not obey the king's orders and profane the Sabbath day.**' 35 The royal forces at once went into action, 36 but the others offered no opposition; not a stone was thrown, there was no barricading of the hiding places. 37 They only said, 'Let us all die innocent; let heaven and earth bear witness that you are massacring us with no pretence of justice.' 38 **The attack was pressed home on the Sabbath itself, and they were slaughtered, with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of one thousand persons.***

Those from the king have no regard for Yah nor for His Sabbath and will freely profane it. They will use this to their advantage, as they did in verse 38 above. The faithful were slaughtered by the king's army.

Pray that your flight not be in winter nor on a Sabbath.

### **Matthew 24: 21-22/1 Maccabees 2: 29-38: Great Distress**

At the time of fleeing to the mountains, the Messiah says there will be great distress or a time of great tribulation:

*Matthew 24: 21 – 22 (ISR) 21 "For then there shall be **great distress**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

*22 "And if those days were not shortened, no flesh would be saved, but for the sake of the chosen ones those days shall be shortened.*

*Matthew 24:21-22 (NASB) 21 "For then there will be a **great tribulation**, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 22 "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."*

During the period spoken of by the Messiah, the distress or tribulation will overshadow all previous times of trouble. Yet, there is clearly a taste of that in the Maccabees. There were many who steadfastly remained faithful to the Covenant – even to the point of death:

*1 Maccabees 1:62-64 (NJB) 62 Yet there were **many in Israel who stood firm** and found **the courage to refuse unclean food**. 63 **They chose death rather than contamination by such fare or profanation of the holy covenant, and they were executed.** 64 It was a **truly dreadful retribution that visited Israel.***

### **Summary and Conclusion**

How many direct references does it take to establish a connection? The undisputed reference to Daniel the prophet should be enough by itself to make a connection to the Maccabees. The comparison of the additional Scripture references serve to cement the connection beyond any doubt. In order to understand what Messiah is

telling us, we need to go back and review what happened to Israel at the time of the Maccabees. Based upon the Messiah's Olivet discourse, the story of the Macabees is both historical and prophetic.

From this, we can conclude that the king, Antiochus Epiphanes, is a type and shadow of the anti-Christ/anti-Messiah. If this conclusion is accurate, then it appears that the sole purpose of the Anti-Messiah is to cause mankind to forget the Torah and revoke all observance of it. This would include the seventh day Sabbath, the Biblical festivals, the Temple service, the physical mark of the Abrahamic covenant, the difference between clean and unclean and the Torah altogether.

We can see the formulation of this allure in 1 Maccabees 2: 18:

*1 Maccabees 2:18 (NJB) Be the first to step forward and conform to the king's decree, as all the nations have done, and the leaders of Judah and the survivors in Jerusalem; you and your sons shall be reckoned among the Friends of the King, you and your sons will be honoured with gold and silver and many presents.'*

As a consequence, by accepting the laws of the gentile king (the type and shadow of the Anti-Messiah) you are reckoned as a friend of the king, a friend to the Anti-Messiah. By accepting his laws, his decrees and his festivals you show yourself to be a subject of his kingdom.

This is not the route that the Messiah is challenging us to follow. The path opposed to the gentile king and his customs is the path to which the Messiah is directing us. By accepting His Torah, His instructions, you are a reckoned as a friend of the true king of Israel (Yeshua the Messiah) and you show yourself a loyal subject of His kingdom.

Be willing to stand to the end and do not be led astray...

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