

The Second Book of the Maccabees

Contents

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MACCABEES

The Second Book of the Maccabees is recognized as Deuterocanonical Scripture by the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Russian Orthodox Churches.

1The kindred, the Jews who are in Jerusalem and those who are in the country of Judea, send greetings and good peace to the kindred, the Jews who are throughout Egypt. ² May God do good to you, and remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his faithful servants, ³ and give you all a heart to worship him and do his will with a strong heart and a willing soul. ⁴ May God open your heart to his law and his statutes, and make peace, ⁵ and listen to your requests, and be reconciled with you, and not forsake you in an evil time. ⁶ Now we are praying for you here.

7In the reign of Demetrius, in the one hundred sixty-ninth year, we the Jews have already written to you in the suffering and in the distress that has come upon us in these years, from the time that Jason and his company revolted from the holy land and the kingdom, ⁸ and set the gate on fire, and shed innocent blood. We prayed to the Lord, and were heard. We offered sacrifices and meal offerings. We lit the lamps. We set out the show bread. ¹ ⁹ Now see that you keep the days of the feast of tabernacles in the month Chisleu in the one hundred eighty-eighth year.

10The people of Jerusalem and those who are in Judea, with the senate and Judas, to Aristobulus, King Ptolemy's teacher, who is also of the stock of the anointed priests, and to the Jews who are in Egypt, we send greetings and health.

11Having been saved by God out of great perils, as men arrayed against a king, we thank him greatly. ¹² For he threw out into Persia those who fought against us in the holy city. ¹³ For when the prince had come there, with an army that seemed irresistible, they were cut to pieces in the temple of Nanaea by the treachery of Nanaea's priests. ¹⁴ For Antiochus, on the pretense that he would marry her, came into the place, he and his friends who were with him, that they might take a large part of the treasures as a dowry. ¹⁵ And when the priests of Nanaea's temple had set the treasures out, and he had come there with a small company within the wall of the sacred precinct, they locked the temple when Antiochus had come in. ¹⁶ Opening the secret door of the panelled ceiling, they threw stones and struck down the prince. They cut him and his company in pieces, and cut off their heads, and threw them to the people who were outside. ¹⁷ Blessed be our God in all things, who handed over those who had committed impiety.

¹ + 1:8 Gr. loaves

18Since we are now about to celebrate the purification of the temple in the month Chislev, on the twenty-fifth day, we thought it necessary to notify you, so that you may also keep a feast of tabernacles, and remember the fire which was given when Nehemiah offered sacrifices, after he had built both the temple and the altar.

19For indeed when our fathers were about to be led into the land of Persia, the godly priests of that time took some of the fire of the altar, and hid it secretly in the hollow of a well that was without water, where they made sure that the place was unknown to anyone. ²⁰ Now after many years, when it pleased God, Nehemiah, having received a charge from the king of Persia, sent in quest of the fire the descendants of the priests who hid it. When they declared to us that they had found no fire, but thick liquid, ²¹ he commanded them to draw some of it out and bring it to him. When the sacrifices had been offered, Nehemiah commanded the priests to sprinkle with that liquid both the wood and the things laid on it. ²² When that was done and some time had passed, and the sun shone out, which before was hidden with clouds, a great blaze was kindled, so that all men marveled. ²³ The priests made a prayer while the sacrifice was being consumed—both the priests and all the others. Jonathan led and the rest responded, as Nehemiah did.

24The prayer was like this: “O Lord, Lord God, the Creator of all things, who are awesome, strong, righteous, and merciful, who alone are King and gracious, ²⁵ who alone supply every need, who alone are righteous, almighty, and eternal, you who save Israel out of all evil, who chose the ancestors and sanctified them, ²⁶ accept the sacrifice for all your people Israel, and preserve your own portion, and consecrate it. ²⁷ Gather together our scattered people, set at liberty those who are in bondage among the heathen, look upon those who are despised and abhorred, and let the heathen know that you are our God. ²⁸ Punish those who oppress us and in arrogance shamefully entreat us. ²⁹ Plant your people in your holy place, even as Moses said.”

30Then the priests sang the hymns. ³¹ As soon as the sacrifice was consumed, then Nehemiah commanded that the rest of the liquid be poured on large stones. ³² When this was done, a flame was kindled; but when the light from the altar shone back, it went out. ³³ When the matter became known, and it was told the king of the Persians that, in the place where the priests who were led away had hid the fire, the liquid appeared which Nehemiah and those who were with him purified the sacrifice, ³⁴ then the king enclosed the place and made it sacred after he had investigated the matter. ³⁵ When the king would show favor to any, he would exchange many presents and give them some of this liquid. ³⁶ Nehemiah and those who were with him called this thing “Nephthar”, which is by interpretation, “Cleansing”; but most men call it Nephthai.

2It is also found in the records that Jeremiah the prophet commanded those who were carried away to take some of the fire, as has been mentioned,² and how that the prophet charged those who were carried away, having given them the law, that they should not forget the statutes of the Lord or be led astray in their minds when they saw images of gold and silver, and their adornment.³ With other such words exhorted he them, that the law should not depart from their hearts.

4It was in the writing that the prophet, being warned by God, commanded that the tabernacle and the ark should follow with him,² when he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and saw God's inheritance.⁵ Jeremiah came and found a cave, he brought the tabernacle, the ark, and the altar of incense into it; then he sealed the entrance.⁶ Some of those who followed with him came there that they might mark the way, and could not find it.⁷ But when Jeremiah learned about that, he rebuked them, saying, "The place shall be unknown until God gathers the people together again and shows mercy.⁸ Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord shall be seen with the cloud, as it was also shown to Moses, also as Solomon implored that the place might be consecrated greatly,⁹ and it was also declared that he, having wisdom, offered a sacrifice of dedication, and of the finishing of the temple.¹⁰ As Moses prayed to the Lord and fire came down out of heaven and consumed the sacrifice, even so Solomon also prayed, and the fire came down and consumed the burnt offerings.¹¹³ Moses said, 'Because the sin offering had not been eaten, it was consumed in like manner.'¹² Likewise Solomon kept the eight days."

13The same things were reported both in the public archives and in Nehemiah's records, and also how he, founding a library, gathered together the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about sacred gifts.¹⁴ In like manner Judas also gathered together for us all those books that had been scattered by reason of the war, and they are still with us.¹⁵ If therefore you have need of them, send some people to bring them to you.

16Seeing then that we are about to celebrate the purification, we write to you. You will therefore do well if you celebrate the days.¹⁷ Now God, who saved all his people, and restored the heritage to all, with the kingdom, the priesthood, and the consecration,¹⁸ even as he promised through the law—in God have we hope, that he will soon have mercy upon us, and gather us together out of everywhere under heaven into his holy place; for he delivered us out of great evils, and purified the place. _____

²+ 2:4 Gr. and when. The Greek text here is probably corrupt.

³+ 2:11 See Leviticus 10:16 and 9:24.

19 Now the things concerning Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers, the purification of the greatest temple, the dedication of the altar, ²⁰ and further the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and Eupator his son, ²¹ and the manifestations that came from heaven to those who fought with one another in brave deeds for the religion of the Jews; so that, being but a few, they seized the whole country, chased the barbarous multitudes, ²² recovered again the temple renowned all the world over, freed the city, and restored the laws which were about to be overthrown, seeing the Lord became gracious to them with all kindness. ²³ These things which have been declared by Jason of Cyrene in five books, we will attempt to abridge in one book. ²⁴ For having in view the confused mass of the numbers, and the ⁴ difficulty which awaits those who would enter into the narratives of the history, by reason of the abundance of the matter, ²⁵ we were careful that those who choose to read may be attracted, and that those who wish us well may find it easy to recall, and that all readers may benefit. ²⁶ Although to us, who have taken upon ourselves the painful labor of the abridgement, the task is not easy, but a matter of sweat and sleeplessness, ²⁷ even as it is no light thing to him who prepares a banquet, and seeks the benefit of others. Nevertheless, for the sake of the gratitude of the many we will gladly endure the painful labor, ²⁸ leaving to the historian the exact handling of every particular, and again having no strength to fill in the outlines of our abridgement. ²⁹ For as the masterbuilder of a new house must care for the whole structure, and again he who undertakes to decorate and paint it must seek out the things fit for its adorning; even so I think it is also with us. ³⁰ To occupy the ground, and to indulge in long discussions, and to be curious in particulars, is fitting for the first author of the history; ³¹ but to strive after brevity of expression, and to avoid a labored fullness in the treatment, is to be granted to him who would bring a writing into a new form. ³² Here then let's begin the narration, only adding this much to that which has already been said; for it is a foolish thing to make a long prologue to the history, and to abridge the history itself.

3 When the holy city was inhabited with unbroken peace and the laws were kept very well because of the godliness of Onias the high priest and his hatred of wickedness, ² it came to pass that even the kings themselves honored the place and glorified the temple with the noblest presents, ³ so that even King Seleucus of Asia bore all the costs belonging to the services of the sacrifices out of his own revenues. ⁴ But a man named Simon of the tribe of Benjamin, having been made guardian of the temple, disagreed with the high priest about the ruling of the market in the city. ⁵ When he couldn't overcome Onias, he went to Apollonius of ⁵ Tarsus, who at that time was governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia. ⁶ He brought him word how that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the multitude of the funds was innumerable, and that they didn't pertain to the account of the sacrifices, but that it was

⁴ + 2:24 Or, weariness

⁵ + 3:5 Greek Thraseas

possible that these should fall under the king's power. ⁷ When Apollonius met the king, he informed him of the money about which he had been told. So the king appointed Heliodorus, who was his chancellor, and sent him with a command to accomplish the removal of the reported money. ⁸ So Heliodorus set out on his journey at once, ostensibly to visit the cities of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, but in fact to execute the king's purpose.

⁹When he had come to Jerusalem and had been courteously received by the high priest of the city, he told him about the information which had been given, and declared why he had come; and he inquired if in truth these things were so. ¹⁰ The high priest explained to him that there were in the treasury deposits of widows and orphans, ¹¹ and moreover some money belonging to Hyrcanus the son of Tobias, a man in very high place, not as that impious Simon falsely alleged; and that in all there were four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold, ¹² and that it was altogether impossible that wrong should be done to those who had put trust in the holiness of the place, and in the majesty and inviolable sanctity of the temple, honored over all the world. ¹³ But Heliodorus, because of the king's command given him, said that in any case this money must be confiscated for the king's treasury.

¹⁴So having appointed a day, he entered in to direct the inquiry concerning these matters; and there was no small distress throughout the whole city. ¹⁵ The priests, prostrating themselves before the altar in their priestly garments, and called toward heaven upon him who gave the law concerning deposits, that he should preserve these treasures safe for those who had deposited them. ¹⁶ Whoever saw the appearance of the high priest was wounded in mind; for his countenance and the change of his color betrayed the distress of his soul. ¹⁷ For a terror and a shuddering of the body had come over the man, by which the pain that was in his heart was plainly shown to those who looked at him. ¹⁸ Those who were in the houses rushed out in crowds to make a universal supplication, because the place was about to come into dishonor. ¹⁹ The women, girded with sackcloth under their breasts, thronged the streets. The virgins who were kept indoors ran together, some to the gates, others to the walls, and some looked out through the windows. ²⁰ All, stretching out their hands toward heaven, made their solemn supplication. ²¹ Then it was pitiful to see the multitude prostrating themselves all mixed together, and the anxiety of the high priest in his great distress.

²²While therefore they called upon the Almighty Lord to keep the things entrusted to them ⁶ safe and secure for those who had entrusted them, ²³ Heliodorus went on to execute that which had been decreed. ²⁴ But when he was already present there with his guards near the treasury, the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused a great manifestation, so that all who had

⁶+ 3:22 Gr. safe with all security.

presumed to come with him, stricken with dismay at the power of God, fainted in terror. ²⁵ For they saw a horse with a frightening rider, adorned with beautiful trappings, and he rushed fiercely and struck at Heliodorus with his forefeet. It seemed like he who sat on the horse had complete armor of gold. ²⁶ Two others also appeared to him, young men notable in their strength, and beautiful in their glory, and splendid in their apparel, who stood by him on either side, and scourged him unceasingly, inflicting on him many sore stripes. ²⁷ When he had fallen suddenly to the ground, and great darkness had come over him, his guards picked him up and put him on a stretcher, ²⁸ and carried him—this man who had just now entered with a great retinue and all his guard into the aforesaid treasury, himself now brought to utter helplessness, manifestly made to recognize the sovereignty of God. ²⁹ So, while he, through the working of God, speechless and bereft of all hope and deliverance, lay prostrate, ³⁰ they blessed the Lord who acted marvelously for his own place. The temple, which a little before was full of terror and alarm, was filled with joy and gladness after the Almighty Lord appeared.

³¹But quickly some of Heliodorus's familiar friends implored Onias to call upon the Most High to grant life to him who lay quite at the last gasp. ³² The high priest, secretly fearing lest the king might come to think that some treachery toward Heliodorus had been perpetrated by the Jews, brought a sacrifice for the recovery of the man. ³³ But as the high priest was making the atoning sacrifice, the same young men appeared again to Heliodorus, arrayed in the same garments. They stood and said, "Give Onias the high priest great thanks, for for his sake the Lord has granted you life. ³⁴ See that you, since you have been scourged from heaven, proclaim to all men the sovereign majesty of God." When they had spoken these words, they vanished out of sight. ³⁵ So Heliodorus, having offered a sacrifice to the Lord and vowed ⁷ great vows to him who had saved his life, and having bidden Onias farewell, returned with his army to the king. ³⁶ He testified to all men the works of the greatest God, which he had seen with his eyes.

³⁷When the king asked Heliodorus what sort of man was fit to be sent yet once again to Jerusalem, he said, ³⁸ "If you have any enemy or conspirator against the state, send him there, and you will receive him back well scourged, if he even escapes with his life; because truly there is some power of God in that place. ³⁹ For he who has his dwelling in heaven himself has his eyes on that place and helps it. Those who come to hurt it, he strikes and destroys."

⁴⁰This was the history of Heliodorus and the keeping of the treasury.

⁴The previously mentioned Simon, who had given information about the money against his country, slandered Onias, saying that it was he who had

⁷ + 3:35 Gr. greatest.

incited Heliodorus and had been the real cause of these evils. ² He dared to call him a conspirator against the state who was actually the benefactor of the city, the guardian of his fellow countrymen, and a zealot for the laws. ³ When his hatred grew so great that even murders were perpetrated through one of Simon's approved agents, ⁴ Onias, seeing the danger of the contention, and that ⁸ Apollonius the son of Menestheus, the governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, was increasing Simon's malice, ⁵ appealed to the king, not to be an accuser of his fellow-citizens, but looking to the good of all the ⁹ people, both public and private; ⁶ for he saw that without the king's involvement it was impossible for the state to obtain peace any more, and that Simon would not cease from his madness.

7When Seleucus was deceased, and Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes, succeeded to the kingdom, Jason the brother of Onias supplanted his brother in the high priesthood, ⁸ having promised to the king at an audience three hundred sixty talents of silver, and out of another fund eighty talents. ⁹ In addition to this, he undertook to assign one hundred fifty more, if it might be allowed him ¹⁰ through the king's authority to set him up a gymnasium and a body of youths to be trained in it, and to register the inhabitants of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. ¹⁰ When the king had assented, and Jason had taken possession of the office, he immediately shifted those of his own race to the Greek way of life. ¹¹ Setting aside the royal ordinances of special favor to the Jews, granted by the means of John the father of Eupolemus, who went on the mission to the Romans to establish friendship and alliance, and seeking to overthrow the lawful ways of living, he brought in new customs forbidden by the law. ¹² For he eagerly established a gymnasium under the citadel itself, and caused the noblest of the young men to wear the Greek hat. ¹³ Thus there was an extreme of hellenization, and an advance of a foreign religion, by reason of the exceeding profaneness of Jason, who was an ungodly man and not a high priest; ¹⁴ so that the priests had no more any zeal for the services of the altar; but despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices, they hastened to enjoy that which was unlawfully provided in the wrestling arena, after the summons to the discus-throwing. ¹⁵ They despised the honors of their fathers, and valued the prestige of the Greeks best of all. ¹⁶ For this reason, severe calamity overtook them. The men whose ways of living they earnestly followed, and to whom they desired to be made like in all things, these became their enemies and punished them. ¹⁷ For it is not a light thing to show irreverence to God's laws, but later events will make this clear.

18Now when certain games that came every fifth year were kept at Tyre,

⁸ + 4:4 Compare 2 Maccabees 4:21. See also 2 Maccabees 3:5. The Greek as commonly read means Apollonius, as being the governor...Phoenicia, did rage, and increase etc.

⁹ + 4:5 Gr. multitude.

¹⁰ + 4:9 Gr. through his.

and the king was present, ¹⁹ the vile Jason sent sacred envoys, ¹¹ as being Antiochians of Jerusalem, bearing three hundred drachmas of silver to the sacrifice of Hercules, which even the bearers thereof thought not right to use for any sacrifice, because it was not fit, but to spend it for another purpose. ²⁰ Although the intended purpose of the sender this money was for the sacrifice of Hercules, yet on account of ¹² present circumstances it went to the construction of trireme warships.

21Now when Apollonius the son of Menestheus was sent into Egypt for the ¹³ enthronement of Philometor as king, Antiochus, learning that Philometor had shown himself hostile toward the government, took precautions for the security of his realm. Therefore, going to Joppa, he travelled on to Jerusalem. ²² Being magnificently received by Jason and the city, he was brought in with torches and shouting. Then he led his army down into Phoenicia.

23Now after a space of three years, Jason sent Menelaus, the previously mentioned Simon's brother, to carry the money to the king, and to make reports concerning some necessary matters. ²⁴ But he being commended to the king, and having been glorified by the display of his authority, secured the high priesthood for himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver. ²⁵ After receiving the royal mandates, he returned bringing nothing worthy of the high priesthood, but having the passion of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage animal. ²⁶ So Jason, who had supplanted his own brother, was supplanted by another and driven as a fugitive into the country of the Ammonites, ²⁷ Menelaus had possession of the office; but of the money that had been promised to the king nothing was regularly paid, even though Sostratus the governor of the citadel demanded it— ²⁸ for his job was the gathering of the revenues—so they were both called by the king to his presence. ²⁹ Menelaus left his own brother Lysimachus for his ¹⁴ deputy in the high priesthood; and Sostratus left Crates, who was over the Cyprians.

30Now while this was the state of things, it came to pass that the people of Tarsus and Mallus revolted because they were to be given as a present to Antiochis, the king's concubine. ³¹ The king therefore quickly came to settle matters, leaving for his ¹⁵ deputy Andronicus, a man of high rank. ³² Then Menelaus, supposing that he had gotten a favorable opportunity, presented to Andronicus certain vessels of gold belonging to the temple, which he had stolen. He had already sold others into Tyre and the neighboring cities. ³³ When Onias had sure knowledge of this, he sharply reproved him, having

¹¹ + 4:19 See ver. 9.

¹² + 4:20 Some authorities read the bearers.

¹³ + 4:21 The exact meaning of the Greek word is uncertain.

¹⁴ + 4:29 Gr. successor.

¹⁵ + 4:31 Gr. successor.

withdrawn himself into a sanctuary at Daphne, that lies by Antioch. ³⁴ Therefore Menelaus, taking Andronicus aside, asked him to kill Onias. Coming to Onias, and being persuaded to use treachery, and being received as a friend, Andronicus gave him his right hand with oaths and, though he was suspicious, persuaded him to come out of the sanctuary. Then, with no regard for justice, he immediately put him to death. ³⁵ For this reason not only Jews, but many also of the other nations, had indignation and displeasure at the unjust murder of the man. ³⁶ And when the king had come back from the places in Cilicia, the Jews who were in the city appealed to him against Andronicus (the Greeks also joining with them in hatred of the wickedness), urging that Onias had been wrongfully slain. ³⁷ Antiochus therefore was heartily sorry, and was moved to pity, and wept, because of the sober and well ordered life of him who was dead. ³⁸ Being inflamed with anger, he immediately stripped off Andronicus's purple robe, and tore off his under garments, and when he had led him round through the whole city to that very place where he had committed the outrage against Onias, there he put the murderer out of the way, the Lord rendering to him the punishment he had deserved.

³⁹ Now when many sacrileges had been committed in the city by Lysimachus with the consent of Menelaus, and when the report of them had spread abroad outside, the people gathered themselves together against Lysimachus, after many vessels of gold had already been stolen. ⁴⁰ When the multitudes were rising against him and were filled with anger, Lysimachus armed about three thousand men, and with unrighteous violence began the attack under the leadership of Hauran, a man far gone in years and no less also in folly. ⁴¹ But when they perceived the assault of Lysimachus, some caught up stones, others logs of wood, and some took handfuls of the ashes that lay near, and they flung them all in wild confusion at Lysimachus and those who were with him. ⁴² As a result, they wounded many of them, they killed some, and they forced the rest of them to flee, but the author of the sacrilege himself they killed beside the treasury.

⁴³ But about these matters, there was an accusation laid against Menelaus. ⁴⁴ When the king had come to Tyre, the three men who were sent by the senate pleaded the cause before him. ⁴⁵ But Menelaus, seeing himself now defeated, promised much money to Ptolemy the son of Dorymenes, that he might win over the king. ⁴⁶ Therefore Ptolemy taking the king aside into a cloister, as if to get some fresh air, convinced him to change his mind. ⁴⁷ He who was the cause of all the evil, Menelaus, he discharged from the accusations; but these hapless men, who, if they had pleaded even before Scythians, would have been discharged uncondemned, them he sentenced to death. ⁴⁸ Those who were spokesmen for the city and the families of Israel and the holy vessels soon suffered that unrighteous penalty. ⁴⁹ Therefore even certain Tyrians, moved with hatred of the wickedness, provided magnificently for their burial. ⁵⁰ But Menelaus, through the covetous dealings of those who were in power,

remained still in his office, growing in wickedness, established as a great conspirator against his fellow-citizens.

5Now about this time Antiochus made his second invasion into Egypt. ² It happened that throughout all the city, for almost forty days, cavalry appeared in the midst of the sky in swift motion, wearing robes woven with gold and carrying spears, equipped with troops for battle— ³ drawing swords, squadrons of cavalry in array, encounters and pursuits of both armies, shaking shields, multitudes of lances, throwing of missiles, flashing of golden trappings, and putting on all sorts of armor. ⁴ Therefore everyone prayed that the manifestation might have been given for good.

5When a false rumor had arisen that Antiochus was dead, Jason took not less than a thousand men, and suddenly made an assault upon the city. When those who were on the wall were being routed, and the city was at length nearly taken, Menelaus took refuge in the citadel. ⁶ But Jason slaughtered his own citizens without mercy, not considering that good success against kinsmen is the greatest misfortune, but supposing himself to be setting up trophies over enemies, and not over fellow-countrymen. ⁷ He didn't win control of the government, but receiving shame as the result of his conspiracy, he fled again as a fugitive into the country of the Ammonites. ⁸ At last therefore he met with a miserable end. Having been imprisoned at the court of Aretas the prince of the Arabians, fleeing from city to city, pursued by all men, hated as an rebel against the laws, and abhorred as the executioner of his country and his fellow citizens, he was cast ashore in Egypt. ⁹ He who had driven many from their own country into exile perished in exile, having crossed the sea to the Lacedaemonians, hoping to find shelter there because they were ¹⁶ near of kin. ¹⁰ He who had thrown out a multitude unburied had none to mourn for him. He didn't have any funeral at all and no place in the tomb of his ancestors.

11Now when news came to the king concerning that which was done, he thought that Judea was in revolt. So, setting out from Egypt in a rage, he took the city by force of weapons, ¹² and commanded his soldiers to cut down without mercy those who came in their way, and to kill those who went into their houses. ¹³ Then there was killing of young and old, destruction of boys, women, and children, and slaying of virgins and infants. ¹⁴ In a total of three days, eighty thousand were destroyed, of which forty thousand were slain in close combat, and no fewer were sold into slavery than slain.

15Not content with this, he presumed to enter into the most holy temple of all the earth, having Menelaus for his guide (who had proved himself a traitor both to the laws and to his country), ¹⁶ even taking the sacred vessels with

¹⁶ + 5:9 See 1 Maccabees 12:7.