

Jerusalem After the Maccabees

The effects of the revolt on the city

By LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN

The period following the Maccabean Revolt ushered in tremendous expansion in the city of Jerusalem and even on the Har Habayit (Temple Mount). Jerusalem ex-

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panded westward to include the area known as the Upper City and a combination of enlargement and refurbishing of the enclosure of the Har Habayit resulted as well. As a result, Jerusalem in this period once again became a prosperous and beautiful city. But to understand these important developments, it is necessary first to know what happened in the aftermath of the reconquest of the city and Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple) under Yehudah (Judah) the Maccabee in the revolt of 168-164 BCE.

The Hasmonean Dynasty

Contrary to what many think, the miraculous conquest and purification of the Beit Hamikdash on the 25th of Kislev in 164 BCE was not the end of the Hanukkah story. The enemy of the Jews, the Yevanim (“Greeks”), were the Hellenistic rulers of Syria known as the Seleucids. (This dynasty was named for Seleucus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great.) Through clever diplomacy and playing on the inner politics of the Jewish people,

When an internal conflict developed in Syria over who would rule (some things never change!), Yonatan wisely sided with the successful of the two pretenders to the throne and in return was granted official recognition as the ruler of Judea. He was then accepted by the people as ruler and kohen gadol. It is he who effectively established the dynasty of the *Chashmonaim* (Hasmoneans) which lasted from 152 BCE through the Roman conquest of Eretz Yisrael in 63 BCE. After his death, his brother Shimon ruled (142-135 BCE) and successfully took a major step towards independence when he expelled the troops occupying the Akra, the Seleucid fortress recently discovered and excavated south of the Har Habayit. From a legal point of view, this meant that the Hasmonean state was now fully independent.

Jerusalem was now the capital of the Hasmonean state, which quickly began to conquer surrounding territories, a process that continued under the later rulers, Yochanan Kohen Gadol (John Hyrcanus, 134-104 BCE) and Yannai Hamelech (Alexander Janneus, 103-76 BCE). By the time of Yannai, the Hasmonean rulers were called kings, as can be seen on their coins. Along with this process of geographic expansion came the extirpation of idolatry and tremendous economic prosperity of the country. We



An artist's rendition of Jerusalem depicts how the city looked during the reign of the Roman-appointed King Herod.

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The period of the Hasmonean rulers was central to Jewish history.



Titus Flavius Josephus, a Roman-Jewish historian who lived after the Hasmonean Empire whose account of it is our main source of information about the era.

which still included some pro-Hellenistic elements that supported Greek culture, the Seleucids managed to dislodge Yehudah and his supporters from the Beit Hamikdash. Then they installed Yaqim (Alcimus), a Hellenist as *kohen gadol* (high priest). Yehudah and his men were left again to fight a war of resistance from fortresses in the Judean Hills. After Yehudah's death on the battlefield, he was succeeded by his brother Yonatan who was the commander of about 10,000 troops.

should add that the coins of this period had no human images and are decorated with various Jewish traditional symbols.

Expansion of Jerusalem

Soon after the accession of Yonatan, the city of Jerusalem began to grow. Over the course of the Hasmonean period it went from

not much more than 5,000 residents to over 30,000. This increase may have begun somewhat earlier. Already before the Maccabean Revolt, the population had begun to expand westward from the area of *Ir David* (City of David), which had constituted the entire city during the time of Ezra and Nechemiah. Tremendous impetus was given to this process by the Hasmoneans when they began to rebuild the city walls that had surrounded the city in the time of the first Beit Hamikdash. In the last years before the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the Upper City on the Western Hill had been fully occupied. Much of the line of the walls from the period of Bayit Rishon (before the Babylonian conquest and destruction of the Temple) could still be seen above ground. As the wall was being rebuilt, it constituted the effective boundary within which the city would grow in Hasmonean times. (Later it would expand further toward the north.) This wall, studded with defensive towers, is the one termed by Josephus as the Old (or First) Wall, one of three that the Romans would have to penetrate to take the Har

Habayit in 70 CE. That this wall was rebuilt by the Hasmoneans is supported both by archaeological evidence and also by the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees (10:10-11, 13:10). There we learn that the project was begun by Yonatan and concluded by Shimon. Because the wall was rebuilt over time, the architectural style is not uniform. Apparently, sections were built in accord with defensive needs, leaving areas defended by natural features for last.

The expansion of the city at this time took place on the Western Hill, more or less today's Jewish Quarter in the Old City. This area had been settled during the time of the first Beit Hamikdash, but for the most part remained abandoned after the destruction by the Babylonians. The new construction was very much in the style of Hellenistic architecture, as can be learned both by archaeological excavations and from the historian Josephus. A few tombs from this era also display Hellenistic design. The Upper City included the City Council building, a gymnasium, and the Hasmonean palace. This building has not been unearthed, but a sense

of what must have been its grandeur can be gained from study of the magnificent Hasmonean palaces excavated at Jericho. Unfortunately, details of the city in this period were obliterated by the extensive building activity that took place under the rule of Hordos (Herod “the Great” 38-4 BCE).

Har Habayit and the Beit Hamikdash

Although we always speak of two Temples, the first, built by Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon), and the second, built after Koresh (Cyrus the Great) allowed Jews from the Babylonian exile to return home, the second Beit Hamikdash went through various stages. When it was rebuilt in the time of Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the last of the *Nevi'im* (prophets), it was a small structure, and those who remembered its predecessor cried when they saw its foundations being laid (Ezra 3:12, cf. Chaggai 2:3). Much later, starting in 18 BCE, Herod, the “half-Jewish” (on his father's side) Roman client King of Judea, built a magnificent structure that became one of the wonders of the ancient

world. This Temple is described in great detail by Josephus in the context of his narration of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

But actually, we now know that a much larger structure than that erected by the returnees from the 70-year Babylonian exile existed way before Herod began his massive building project. Archaeologi-

Kotel northward, along the outer wall of the Har Habayit as it was expanded by Herod. When walking northward through the tunnels, one comes to a point when the Herodian period pavement ends and we are walking on a plastic gangway with water flowing below.

The excavators have laid bare the ancient water tunnel that provided water for the Beit Hamikdash in the Hasmonean period. This water system originated south of Beit Lechem (Bethlehem) and ran for a great distance, using the sloping hills to move the water by gravity. It met the Beit Hamikdash at its northwest corner. However, when Herod expanded the Har Habayit on the north and south, this water source was cut and covered with pavement similar to the others. This is the point where the Har Habayit ended in Hasmonean times. North of it was a fortress called the *Birah* (Baris) with which the Maccabean kings protected the Temple. It may also have served as a royal residence. All of this area was included by Herod in his northern expansion of the Har Habayit. While it is not too safe to visit there today on foot, on the eastern side of the Har Habayit, towards the south, not far from the southeast corner, one can see a clear seam separating the Hasmonean-period stonework from the area in which Herodian builders extended the Temple Mount to the south. Much of this addition is the area known as Solomon's Stables, where the Arabs have built a mas-

sive underground mosque. The Mishnah (Middos 2:3) records that the "kings of Greece," clearly the Seleucids, made 13 openings in the *soreg*, a fence surrounding the

one that matches the description of the Beit Hamikdash in Maseches Middos. This is the well-known description of the Har Habayit of 500 x 500 *amos* (cubits, each ap-

proximately 1.5 ft.). Innumerable scholars have tried to reconcile this Mishnaic description with that provided by Josephus for the Herodian Temple. This is all mistaken. Both descriptions are correct, but they describe different stages in the architecture of the Beit Hamikdash. So one who wants to know what the Temple looked like in the time of the Hasmonean Empire needs only to look at the descriptions of the Mishnah. The beautiful model of Jerusalem that is now displayed at the Shrine of the Book, the Israel Museum building dedicated to the Dead Sea Scrolls, represents the city and Temple as described by

Josephus, as it stood in the time of Herod and later. The period of the Hasmonean rulers was central to Jewish history. Sadly, the decline of this

Starting in 18 BCE, Herod ... rebuilt the Second Temple, creating a magnificent structure that became one of the wonders of the ancient world.

cal evidence for this earlier, Hasmonean "Second Temple" architecture has no doubt been seen by many of our readers. However, depending on the knowledge of their tourist guides, they may or may not have realized it. Many have taken their tour of the tunnels that run from the



Front and back of a coin minted during the reign of the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus.

Temple enclosure on the Har Habayit. 1 Maccabees (9:54) assigns responsibility to Alcimus, and scholars have explained that he sought to destroy the boundary on which were posted the signs indicating that from here on in non-Jews were not allowed to go further. The repairs mentioned in the Mishnah were certainly done by the Hasmoneans, who must have been responsible for the expanded Har Habayit described in the Mishnah.

The reason that this is so significant is because this second, Hasmonean Beit Hamikdash that existed before Herod's massive expansion and reconstruction is the

dynasty paved the way for the Roman takeover of Eretz Yisrael in 63 BCE and, in turn, to the Second Temple in 70 CE. But we need to remember that these were the years of the *zugos*, the pairs of Tannaim listed in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of Our Fathers). From the Sages Josephus gathered and transmitted our *mesorah* (Jewish tradition) and passed it on to the great teachers Hillel and Shammai and their students. This is also the period in which we learn so much from Chazal, Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls about the competing sectarian groups. Hasmonean Jerusalem served as the backdrop for the famous disputes between the Perushim (separatists) and Tzedukkim (righteous ones), and it was the city from which the Dead Sea sectarians removed themselves, unable to live in the "real

world" of Judea's capital. These are the years for which we have tried here, despite the meager evidence, to get a picture of Jerusalem and the Beit Hamikdash and, in so doing, to fill in another link in the chain of our everlasting relationship to Jerusalem and Eretz Yisrael.

Soon after the accession of Yonatan, the city of Jerusalem began to grow.

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Ruins of the City of David, site of Jerusalem in the earliest days of the monarchy.