

TO FIGHT OR NOT TO FIGHT: THE SABBATH AND THE MACCABEAN REVOLT

SIGVE K. TONSTAD
Loma Linda University

When Mattathias and his followers in the second century BCE committed to armed resistance against the forced Hellenization of Antiochus Epiphanes, some of the insurgents initially refused to fight on the Sabbath (1 Macc 2:31–34). The consequences of Sabbath non-combatancy were militarily disastrous (2:25–38), leading Mattathias to urge abandonment of this stance (2:39–41). Taking my point of departure in this story, I will address three questions. (1) To what extent might the Sabbath be seen as an impediment to war or as an anti-war measure, as the initial policy of Sabbath non-combatancy in 1 Maccabees might suggest? (2) To what extent did Maccabean militarism influence Jewish messianism in the late Second Temple period? (3) Is there a residue of a pacifist stance in Matt 24:20, where Jesus urges followers to pray that their flight “may not be in winter or on a sabbath?”

The Sabbath and Non-Combatancy in the Maccabean Uprising

It must be admitted from the outset that the case for seeing the Sabbath as an anti-war measure will not be easily sustained by the account in 1 Maccabees. This book says that those who rejected the program of forced Hellenization that had been instigated by Antiochus Epiphanes “had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness” (2:31).¹

Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. They [the pursuers] said to them, “Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live.” But they said, “We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day.” Then the enemy quickly attacked them. But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, for they said, “Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly.” So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons (2:32–38).²

1 Maccabees characterizes the victims of this massacre as people “who were seeking righteousness and justice” (2:29). They went into the wilderness, we are told, “because troubles pressed heavily upon them” (2:30). Mattathias “and his friends” do not seem to have been part of this group, but they may have been similarly disposed with respect to non-combatancy on the Sabbath.

¹NRSV is used throughout this article for 1 and 2 Maccabees.

²See also Josephus, *Ant.* 12.274.

After the massacre, the insurgents were quick to absorb the lesson. “If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth” (2:30).³ The massacre seemed to pronounce certain doom on the stance of non-combatancy on or apart from the Sabbath. For this reason, we read, “they made this decision that day, ‘Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places’” (3:31). From then onward, the insurgents in 1 Maccabees shed their scruples with respect to fighting on the Sabbath (8:34–35; 43–49).⁴

Immediately after the Sabbath massacre the reader is introduced to the *Hasideans* [Ἀσιδαίων].⁵ “Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law” (2:42). This detail and the sequence of events are important because the Hasideans may have been pacifists. If so, the thinking goes, the reason for non-combatancy on the Sabbath may have been grounded in a general commitment to non-combatancy and not only to non-combatancy on the Sabbath.

John J. Collins shows in his Daniel commentary that this view runs into a number of difficulties.⁶ First, taking the sequence of events at face value, the Hasideans join with Mattathias *after* the massacre so as to cast doubt on the idea that they were the ones committed to the stance of non-combatancy in the first place. Second, they join forces with Mattathias *after* his core group has decided *not* to follow the example of the martyrs (2:42). Third, with the ideology of the Hasideans no longer the central question, it is not certain that the commitment to abstain from military activity on the Sabbath was motivated by pacifist sentiments in the first place.⁷ Fourth, a number of translations, including the NRSV, refer to the Hasideans as “mighty warriors”

³Similarly, *Ant.* 12.276–77.

⁴In 2 Macc 8:26–28, Judas Maccabeus halts his pursuit of the defeated forces of Nicanor on account of the Sabbath, but this passage does not support the idea that the Maccabees had returned to a policy of non-combatancy on the Sabbath.

⁵The origin and identity of the *ḥāsīdīm* are subject to debate. Victor Tcherikover sees the *ḥāsīdīm* as a defined sect that was organized under Simon the Just at the beginning of the second century BCE (*Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, 2nd ed., [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999 (1959)], 125, 197). John Kampen disputes the evidence for the early locus of origin, arguing instead that the *ḥāsīdīm* define themselves as a group within the context of the Jewish resistance during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (*The Hasideans and the Origin of Pharisaism: A Study in 1 and 2 Maccabees*, SCS 24 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988]).

⁶John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 67–69.

⁷To Collins, it may well be that “the refusal of the martyrs to defend themselves was due not to pacifism but to their strict construction of the laws of sabbath rest” (*Daniel*, 67).

(ἰσχυροὶ δυνάμει; 2:42). This translation sounds the death knell to an identity construct of the group as pacifists. But even if we allow that this group should be seen as “the chief scribes and authoritative interpreters of the regulations and commandments of the Torah”⁸ or simply translate ἰσχυροὶ δυνάμει as “leading citizens,”⁹ it does not confer upon this group the distinctive ideology of pacifism.¹⁰ Having identified them as authoritative interpreters of the Torah, Victor Tcherikover is careful to point out that they were not “harmless and peaceful people.”¹¹ In other words, pacifism was not the ideology of the leading, and presumably orthodox, interpreters of the sacred scriptures.¹²

While it is not given that the victims of the Sabbath massacre in 1 Maccabees were pacifists, it is not entirely irrelevant that they did not fight on the Sabbath. “We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day,” they say in response to the ultimatum of the king’s forces (2:34). To each other, they say this: “Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly” (2:37). The fact that the Sabbath precipitates the ensuing massacre and that the victims decide that victimhood is the lesser evil gives the Sabbath at least a slight deterrent role.¹³

We will have to cast a wider net and try other options in our quest for the theological character of the Sabbath with respect to war and violence. If peace does not make the argument for the Sabbath, perhaps war will do it—

⁸Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 125, 197.

⁹Kampen, *The Hasideans*, 107, 113.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 115, 121–22.

¹¹Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 198.

¹²Jub. 50:12 appears to take an absolutist stance against warfare on Sabbath, possibly reflecting a pre-Maccabean halakah (cf. Kampen, *The Hasideans*, 78).

¹³It is possible that non-combatancy on the Sabbath was considered the orthodox position. Alger F. Johns argues that notable battles against Israel may have been launched, and won, on the Sabbath (“The Military Strategy of Sabbath Attacks on the Jews,” *VT* 13 [1963]: 482–86). Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on Jerusalem in 597 BCE may be a case in point. If this is so, the Maccabean decision could be seen as a turning point. Herold Weiss provides persuasive evidence that “Josephus does not consider a Jew who fights on the Sabbath a good Jew” (“The Sabbath in the Writings of Josephus,” *JSJ* 29 [1998]: 382). However, Josephus wanted the Jews to cease and desist the fight against the Romans in 67 CE, using the Sabbath as leverage for the Jews to give up the fight. Aaron Soloveichik says that it is forbidden to start a war on Shabbat according to Rabbinic teaching (“Waging War on Sabbath,” *Tradition* 20 [1982]: 179–87), but the same teaching distinguishes between a ‘permitted war’ and an ‘obligatory war.’ In case of the latter, a war may be initiated on the Sabbath. He portrays a discussion within Judaism that resembles just war theory in the Christian context.

or at least clarify matters? Within the ‘Maccabean corpus,’¹⁴ I wish to draw attention to three features. The first relates to intra-Jewish conflicts playing out under the pressure of Hellenization. The conflict depicted in 1 Maccabees is not solely a conflict of Israel against the world or of Jewish faith against Hellenization. It is even more a conflict internal to the Jewish community (1 Macc 1:11–15; 2 Macc 4:12–20; 6:1–6). Elias Bickerman has highlighted that the Maccabean resistance was an uprising by force of arms not only against the militant Hellenization of Antiochus Epiphanes but also against those in the Jewish community who actively promoted Hellenization at the expense of Jewish distinctives.¹⁵ The stance of 1 and 2 Maccabees is also against them. “In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us’” (1 Macc 1:11).

When the Maccabees fight, they do not fight only against the Seleucids. They also fight against fellow Jews. When they kill, they do not only kill Seleucids. They also kill their own apostate kin. Thus, says Bickerman, “the Maccabees of whom Scripture speaks were not merely martyrs. They were also militants for their faith who, sword in hand, fought for what is God’s. Thus, they became the model for every ‘crusade.’”¹⁶ In pointed ways, the Maccabean narrative appropriates the logic and ideology of the original conquest and the struggle against pagan influences.¹⁷ As soon as Mattathias won over his group to a stance of combatancy that applies to all days of the week, they were off to their two-fold mission against Antiochus Epiphanes *and* against their own.

They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. And Mattathias and his friends went around and tore down the altars; they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the

¹⁴There is no ‘Maccabean corpus,’ of course. Here the term includes 1 and 2 Maccabees.

¹⁵Elias Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees: Studies in the Meaning and Origin of the Maccabean Revolt* (Leiden: Brill, 1979). “The Maccabean movement was, above all, a civil war, a religious struggle between reformers and orthodox” (ibid., 90). Tcherikover agrees with Bickerman that the Hellenistic reform arose as a Jewish initiative but not with the idea that the persecution under Antiochus was initiated by the Jewish reformers (*Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, 183–200). See also, William R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1956), 50; János Bolyki, “As soon as the Signal Was Given’ (2 Macc 4:14): Gymnasia in the Service of Hellenism,” in *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology: Papers of the Second International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 131–39.

¹⁶Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees*, 24.

¹⁷Bickerman (ibid., 95) sees an archaizing intent patterned on Judges and the books of Samuel, finding it to be quite successful.

borders of Israel. They hunted down the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands. They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand (1 Macc 2:44–48).

What we see in the Maccabean corpus, therefore, is not only war as a means of defense against an outside enemy but violence in the service of revival and reformation. Israel will be purged, if need be by the sword. The historiography of 1 and 2 Maccabees borrows luster from the exodus narrative, conferring legitimacy on violence by showing that its heroes were merely emulating the founding fathers.¹⁸

The second feature, here meant as a reservation with regard to the Maccabean ideology of war in defense of the faith, comes in the form of divinely-inspired bloodshed.

But Judas and his men, calling against the great Sovereign of the world, who without battering-rams or engines of war overthrew Jericho in the days of Joshua, rushed furiously upon the walls. They took the town by the will of God, and slaughtered untold numbers, so that the adjoining lake, a quarter of a mile wide, appeared to be running over with blood (2 Macc 12:15–16).

Judas pressed the pursuit with the utmost vigor, putting the sinners to the sword, and destroyed as many as thirty thousand (2 Macc 12:23).

But the Jews called upon the Sovereign who with power shatters the might of his enemies, and they got the town into their hands, and killed as many as twenty-five thousand of those who were in it (2 Macc 12:28).

So, fighting with their hands and praying to God in their hearts, they laid low at least thirty-five thousand, and were greatly gladdened by God's manifestation (2 Macc 15:27).

Judas and his men do not quite prevail the way Joshua did against Jericho,¹⁹ but his mandate, source of inspiration, and the final outcome run on parallel tracks with the earlier story. The amount of bloodshed does not trouble the Maccabean chronicler, to whom piety and military prowess are a seamless garment. I submit that there could be an anti-war message in these books, not in the sense that people do not fight, Sabbath or not, but that they fight. Their effort carries an unacknowledged cost. Stories that may

¹⁸Katell Berthelot, "The Biblical Conquest of the Promised Land and the Hasmonean Wars according to 1 and 2 Maccabees," in *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology: Papers of the Second International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 45–60.

¹⁹How Joshua prevailed has been subject to debate in Judaism. According to Moshe David Herr, the 'orthodox' position held that Joshua, long before the Maccabees, engaged in legitimate warfare on the Sabbath ("The Problem of War on the Sabbath in the Second Temple and the Talmudic Periods," *Tarbiz* 30 [1960–1961], 242–56, [English summary, vii–ix]). However, post-Mishnaic and post-Talmudic interpreters found Joshua in violation of the Sabbath by waging war, or, taking a different tack, that Joshua did not fight on the Sabbath.

have inspired faith and belief in divine providence in the Torah, problematic in their native context, are less convincing when they are recapitulated in the historiography of these books. The insurgents win, but at what price? The narrator is careful to provide continuous ideological cover, but it is not entirely convincing. What does victory in a war fought by such means in order to preserve the faith do to the self-understanding of the faith? What does victory by militant means do to the victor? The treatment of the wicked Nicanor, now slain, is to these questions a case in point.

When the action was over and they were returning with joy, they recognized Nicanor, lying dead, in full armor. Then there was shouting and tumult, and they blessed the Sovereign Lord in the language of their ancestors. Then the man who was ever in body and soul the defender of his people, the man who maintained his youthful goodwill toward his compatriots [Judas Maccabeus], ordered them to cut off Nicanor's head and arm and carry them to Jerusalem. When he arrived there and had called his compatriots together and stationed the priests before the altar, he sent for those who were in the citadel. He showed them the vile Nicanor's head and that profane man's arm, which had been boastfully stretched out against the holy house of the Almighty. He cut out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor and said that he would feed it piecemeal to the birds and would hang up these rewards of his folly opposite the sanctuary. And they all, looking to heaven, blessed the Lord who had manifested himself, saying, "Blessed is he who has kept his own place undefiled!" (2 Macc 15:28–34).

Had God manifested himself in this manner? Was this the way to keep "his own place undefiled?" Might it, contrary to his vision, be defilement of God's place by other means? The writer of 2 Maccabees has no compunctions; he seems oblivious to the possibility that victory by such means might do damage to the victor and to the character of faith. Is the content of faith unaffected by the means by which it is promoted? Could it be, as Helmut Gollwitzer once said, that "the force with which we fight evil, has mainly the consequence that we ourselves become the victims of evil?"²⁰ "As we resort to force against others," he claimed, "evil attacks us from behind and makes us evil ourselves."²¹

The third observation relates to the evident corrupting effect of power in the Maccabean experience and the gradual dimming of the spiritual luster of the Hasmoneans. Power corrupts even if it is not absolute power. We see it in the early concession to *Realpolitik* as the Maccabees negotiate treaties with Rome (1 Macc 8:1–2, 21–30; 12:1); we see it in the embrace of imperial patronage (1 Macc 10:18–21; 11:23–27; 14:38–39); we see it in the evident relish of court ceremony with "a purple robe and a golden crown" (1 Macc 10:62–66); we see it in the early hint of dynastic aspirations (1 Macc 13:27–

²⁰Helmut Gollwitzer, "Predigt über Offenbarung Johannes 12:7–12," in *Festschrift für Ernst Fuchs*, ed. Gerhard Ebeling (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 128.

²¹Ibid.

30); and we see it, or we ought to see it, in the uncritical embrace of Simon and Jonathan as warrior priests (1 Macc 14:29–43).²² Beyond the horizon of 1 Maccabees, we also see it in the biography of John Hyrcanus (135–104 BCE), the son of Simon Maccabeus and the grandson of Mattathias. “No longer was it with him merely a question of religious freedom or political independence. He dreamt of a kingdom, an empire. He began to wage aggressive war on all sides,” says Isidore Epstein.²³ In this light, the decision to abandon non-combatancy on the Sabbath, the choice framed as a choice between killing or being killed,²⁴ is not altogether straightforward and may not be an unqualified triumph for faith even when considered from the point of view of the results.²⁵

To cast a wider net means including the ideology and the visions of Daniel into the Maccabean equation of armed struggle—and not only because Daniel is the most important OT background text for visions of the end in the NT Synoptic Apocalypse (Mark 13; Matt 24). I will be more equivocal than most scholars with respect to the generative locus of Daniel, but the provenance is not decisive for the question of ideology. What matters here is that Daniel presents a competing vision to the Maccabean story. Apocalyptic consciousness upends the perceived trajectory of how the kingdom of God will come. In the apocalyptic perspective, divine intervention takes precedence over human action. Human action, in turn, is construed as faithfulness without recourse to arms. In contrast to 1 Maccabees, “the book of Daniel does not espouse a militant ideology,” says Rainer Albertz.²⁶ Collins likewise draws a contrast between the Maccabean militant stance and “Daniel’s ethic of quietism.”²⁷ While Collins qualifies his admiration for the *maskilim* in

²²The blend of religion and politics in the Maccabean hagiography might be seen as a forerunner of Eusebius’s accolade to Constantine with respect to the shared interests of church and state.

²³Isidore Epstein, *Judaism: A Historical Presentation* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1959), 95. Josephus says of John Hyrcanus that he was “accounted by God worthy of three of the greatest privileges, the ruler of the nation, the office of high-priest, and the gift of prophecy” (*Ant.* 13.299).

²⁴Herr casts it as the choice “between death and war” (“War on the Sabbath,” vii). Farmer sets up the contrast between “willingness to fight and kill for the Torah” and “willingness to suffer and die for the Torah” (*Maccabees*, 60–69).

²⁵John J. Collins commends the pragmatism of the Maccabees over the quietism of Daniel, but he admits that “the legacy of the Maccabees had its own ambiguities. While the armed rebellion against Antiochus Epiphanes was successful, similar struggles against Rome later would prove catastrophic” (“Daniel and His Social World,” *Int* 39 [1985], 143).

²⁶Rainer Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, 2 vols., ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1, 171.

²⁷Collins, “Daniel and His Social World,” 142.

Daniel with circumspection worthy of Reinold Niebuhr, he admits that the *maskilim* “avoided the violence of the Maccabees and the compromises which it involved. One cannot fail to be impressed when integrity is maintained at the cost of life itself.”²⁸

Daniel espouses an awareness of the connection between the content of faith and the method of its promotion that not only is different from the Maccabees but remains underappreciated even in competent readings of this book. Three texts in Daniel are suggestive.

As you looked on, a stone was cut out, *not by human hands* [דַּיָּב אֶל־יָדַי] (BHS); ἄνευ χειρῶν (LXX, Theodotion)], and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces (Dan 2:34 NRSV).

. . . just as you saw that a stone was cut from the mountain *not by hands* [דַּיָּב אֶל־יָדַי] (BHS); ἄνευ χειρῶν (LXX, Theodotion)], and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold (Dan 2:45 NRSV).

“When *the power* of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed” (Dan 12:7 NIV, emphasis mine).²⁹

(Dan 12:7 BHS) הֲלֹא־לְךָ הַנִּלְכָּת שֶׁדָּק־מַעֲדֵי זַפְנָן תּוֹלְכָבוּ

In these texts, we should see not only a vision of God’s hand in contrast to human agency but also a hint of the divine method. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s interpretation, the question of agency is implicit but the method is explicit: ‘a stone was cut out but not by *power*’ (Dan 2:34, 45) is a legitimate translation. Confirming the absence of the use of *power*; indeed, confirming the apparent triumph of the use of force over those who resort to force, the end will come “when the *power* of the holy people has been broken” (Dan 12:7, translation mine).³⁰ The stance exemplified by Daniel and his friends in Babylon are ideologically of one piece with the theology espoused in the visions in the book.

Daniel, I submit, is concerned to drive home not only the result of a certain action but also the means, not only *who* is doing it but also *how* it is done. The pacifist stance of this book stands out more strikingly when it is held up to the Maccabean narrative, to which it represents an alternative and a contrast. For the faithful in Daniel, the solution is that Michael, “the great prince, the protector of your people, shall stand up” (Dan 12:1).³¹ Despite

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Dan 12:7 is a difficult text. The less radical reading of the NRSV, “when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end,” does not change the essential relationship between ‘the holy people’ and those who oppress them. Note that דַּיָּ (jad) accommodates a literal and a metaphorical interpretation, ‘hand’ and ‘power.’

³⁰This text is ambiguous, but there is merit to the translation of the NIV that defines the end with reference to the breaking of the holy people and not only with reference to the breaking of those who break them.

³¹Lewis O. Anderson, Jr. sees only a fine line between the notion that “Michael

unprecedented hardship and tribulation, the trusting faithful will not come to grief. Their pacifist stance is not a losing gambit. Deliverance by divine intervention, not militant struggle, is the bottom line of this book (Dan 12:1). Short-term, non-combatancy may seem a losing proposition, but it will be vindicated in the resurrection (Dan 12:1–2). Albertz, concerned to establish Daniel’s provenance as well as its ideology, says that the author of the Hebrew text of Daniel “belonged to the quietistic wing of the Hasidim who fought against the militant one, emphatically denying the theological legitimacy of military resistance.”³² Collins is equally clear-cut, claiming that there is “an ideological gulf between the militant ethos of 1 Maccabees and the apocalyptic quietism of Daniel.”³³ In this perspective, the question is not whether to fight on the Sabbath but whether to fight at all. If Daniel is given a say in deciding the ideological character of the Sabbath, the answer is non-combatancy. A similar stance has been attributed to the Qumran sectarians.³⁴

Maccabean Militarism and Jewish Messianism

Did Maccabean militarism influence Jewish messianism?³⁵ I want to raise the question, but I dare not attempt to answer it within the confines of this presentation.³⁶ Suffice it to say that the footprint of the Hasmonean uprising is significant to this day in the Jewish context. The annual festival of Hanukkah

shall arise” and the thought that “at that time shall Yahweh arise” as expressed in Isa 3:13 and Isa 11:10 (“The Michael Figure in the Book of Daniel,” PhD diss., Andrews University, 1997, 288).

³²“Book of Daniel,” 201.

³³*Daniel*, 72.

³⁴Valentin Nikiprowetzky says with respect to the Essenes that “war being considered *the supreme impurity, the absolute wrong*, one can understand the passion the Essenes put into excluding from their activities all that could have any relation with war or in any way have an aggressive connotation” (“Le sabbat et les armes dans l’histoire ancienne d’Israël,” *REJ* 159 [2000], 5, translation mine).

³⁵The pacifism espoused in Daniel suggests a diversity of views on the subject of pacifism in general, a diversity that persists in later Jewish interpretation and practice. Herr, as noted, shows that the Karaites and others questioned the dispensation allowing hostilities on the Sabbath (“War on the Sabbath,” vii–ix).

³⁶The literature on this subject is large and divergent; see Robert L. Wilken, “Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism, and the Idea of the Holy Land,” *HTR* 79 (1986), 298–307; Stanley Isser, “Studies of Ancient Jewish Messianism: Scholarship and Apologetics,” *JES* 25 (1988), 56–73. Isser highlights two main messianic paradigms, one political, national, and this-worldly, as espoused by Mordecai Kaplan (*Judaism As a Civilization* [New York: Schocken Books, 1934]), the other eschatological and universal, as espoused by Sigmund Mowinckel (*He That Cometh: The Messianic Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, trans. G. W. Anderson [New York: Abingdon, 1954; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005]).

has institutionalized the memory of the Maccabean struggle with approval, albeit without an explicit messianic connotation.³⁷ Josephus commends Judas Maccabeus without reserve,³⁸ but he is constrained by his context, his abandonment of the Jewish cause, and by his Roman patrons. He can praise the Maccabean uprising because the Maccabees were on friendly terms with Rome, but he cannot praise their stance on principle even though the war against Rome in 66–73 CE broke out in response to a similar provocation.³⁹ Significantly, Josephus tries to strengthen his argument for surrender by the argument of non-combatancy on the Sabbath.⁴⁰ For Josephus, the task of dissuading his fellow countrymen from taking up arms against the Romans could not succeed by recalling the triumph of the divinely inspired Maccabean revolt. *That* story could only serve to empower and embolden the case for armed resistance. Moreover, Josephus was hardly ready to concede that the pro-war party, his ideological enemies, was the true spiritual heirs of the Maccabees.⁴¹ A pro-war stance *and* a messianic connotation seem undeniable with respect to the Second Jewish-Roman War (132–135 CE). Even the great Rabbi Akiba (c. 50–135 CE), foremost among the Mishna teachers, believed that Shimon Bar-Kokhba was the Messiah.⁴²

“Not in Winter or on a Sabbath”

“Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath,” Jesus says in the context of the so-called ‘Synoptic Apocalypse’ in Matthew (Matt 24:20). Is there a residue of a pacifist stance in this text, framed by the context of persecution with the Sabbath serving as a magnifying glass on a stance of non-combatancy? Links to Daniel and possibly to 1 Maccabees are evident in the pericope (Matt 24:3–31). “So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains,” says Jesus (Matt 24:15–16). The Maccabean link is *flight*, and the link to Daniel and its vision of triumph without recourse to violence comes with the injunction to

³⁷Farmer, *Maccabees*, 132–35.

³⁸*Ant.* 12.11.2.

³⁹Thomas A. Idinopulos, “Religious and National Factors in Israel’s War with Rome,” in *Jewish Civilization in the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, ed. Shemaryahu Talmon (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991), 50–63.

⁴⁰Weiss concludes that “there would seem to be no reason to suppose that from the days of Mattathias to Josephus, all Jews agreed that it was permissible on the Sabbath in self-defense. Clearly that had been an open question, and was still such in Josephus’ own day” (“Writings of Josephus,” 390).

⁴¹Farmer, *Maccabees*, 126–29.

⁴²Epstein, *Judaism*, 117–18.

understand. Interpretation is complicated by the tendency of interpreters to locate the text in a hypothetical community of Matthew rather than to treat it as a straightforward teaching of Jesus,⁴³ but my point can be made either way. Among a host of diverse and mutually exclusive interpretations for praying to avoid flight on the Sabbath,⁴⁴ I believe that it is best to see Matt 24:20 as a teaching of Jesus, spoken to followers on the assumption that the Sabbath remains in force. However, the exhortation to pray to avoid flight on Sabbath is not given because flight would be in violation of good Sabbath practice but because flight on the Sabbath might expose them to additional danger and hardship.⁴⁵ Ideologically, the decision facing the Sabbath-keepers in Matthew is not between fight or flight on the Sabbath. The only implied option open to them is flight, hopefully and by God's grace not on the Sabbath.

Conclusion

The decision to fight or not to fight on the Sabbath in 1 Maccabees may actually have clarifying potential for the larger question to fight or not to fight at all, even in the Maccabean context. William Farmer perceptively says that it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Maccabean decision "once it is seen that as long as the heathen could attack the Jews on sabbath with impunity, just so long was the possibility of national independence out of the question."⁴⁶ Within such a construct, the Sabbath will be linked to

⁴³This tendency is with justification traced to Rudolf Bultmann, who claimed that the gospels reflect the situation in which they originated and not the historical situation they describe (see e.g., "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem," in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden [London: Collins, 1964], 42–43). Krister Stendahl adopted the community hypothesis in his exposition of Matthew (*The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament* [Lund: Gleerup, 1954]). In the *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), Bauckham and others point out serious flaws in the hypothesis.

⁴⁴Graham N. Stanton ("Pray That Your Flight May Not Be in Winter or on a Sabbath' (Matthew 24.20)," *JSNT* 37 [1989], 17–30) envisions a 'Matthean community' that does not observe the Sabbath and is exhorted to avoid flight in order to avoid further hostility from Jewish leaders. Eric Kun-Chun Wong ("The Matthean Understanding of the Sabbath: A Response to G. N. Stanton," *JSNT* 44 [1991]: 3–18) counters that Matthew is not anti-sabbatarian and that persecution by Jewish leaders would be a moot point in the context of flight for reasons of war. Instead, the implied referent in the text is observant of the Sabbath, and flight on the Sabbath would entail additional hardship.

⁴⁵W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1997), 3:350; see also *ibid.*, 2:304–28.

⁴⁶Farmer, *Maccabees*, 76. Even after their "compromise" (Farmer's terminology), the Sabbath "remained the weakest point in the armor of national defense."

the character of the messianic kingdom and its advent. The subject takes on enormous significance because the question is now whether the Sabbath defines itself along lines of a national or spiritual identity.⁴⁷ A decision not to fight on the Sabbath puts a national and political project in jeopardy; a decision not to fight on the Sabbath may, in fact, be the first down payment toward a commitment not to fight at all.

Whether or not to fight on the Sabbath is not in the same category as other stipulations for Sabbath observance, such as travel or preparation of food. War and killing put the character of the messianic kingdom to the test. I will close by suggesting that 1 Maccabees, negatively and unintentionally, along with Daniel and Matthew, positively and intentionally, serve to clarify the ideological character of the Sabbath with respect to violence, war, and the character of the kingdom “that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 2:44). With the Sabbath leading the way, the option these texts offer us is flight and not fight.

⁴⁷Writing with reference to the inclusive Sabbath vision in Isa 56:1–8, Claus Westermann says that Isaiah thinks in individual and not in national terms. In this passage, “the chosen people has turned into the confessing community” (*Isaiah 40–66*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, OTL [London: SCM, 1969], 313).