

The apostle Peter wrote, *“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2nd Peter 1:20-21). Thus, prophecy is not, in all cases or even most, foretelling the future, but imparting to man the mind of God; it is speaking as one is moved by the Holy Spirit.

When the Maccabean writer stated, repeatedly, that there were no prophets in Israel in those days, he was acknowledging a lack of inspiration. The Holy Spirit was communicating nothing new to the Jews of that time.

Second Maccabees not only does not claim to be sourced from the Holy Spirit, but actually concludes with an explicit statement that it might be “mediocre”, but was the best the historian could manage: “I will bring **my own story** to an end here too. **If it is well written and to the point, that is what I wanted; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that is the best I could do**” (2nd Maccabees 15:37-38).

In addition to admitting a lack of inspiration, Second Maccabees also contains flagrant doctrinal error.

One passage teaches prayer and sacrifice on behalf of the dead to absolve them of their sins (2nd Maccabees 12:42-46). The notion that a dead person’s sins could be expiated by the prayers and sacrifices of the living is totally contrary to the biblical truth of personal accountability, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2nd Corinthians 5:10).

In another place, suicide is taught as a noble act to be spared from undignified suffering (2nd Maccabees 14:41-43). This concept defies the plain teaching of God’s word to endure. *“When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps”* (1st Peter 2:20-21).

FIRST AND SECOND MACCABEES VERIFY SCRIPTURE.

Inspiration repeatedly invokes the principle that *“by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established”* (2nd Corinthians 13:1), so third-party verification of what Scripture presents is welcome. In that vein, the book of Esther nears its end with an invitation to

compare its content to secular history: *“All the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?”* (Esther 10:2).

This is what the Maccabean records are good for. They are not inspired, nor do they claim to be, despite their acceptance as such by Catholic and Orthodox churches. They contain doctrinal error, so they are excluded from the canon. Nevertheless, they are third-party sources that confirm the truth of God’s word.

At the close of the written Old Covenant, the ruling empire was Persia, which had conquered Babylon, which had taken the Jews into captivity. When the New Testament opens, the ruling empire is Rome, but most of the world is speaking Greek because the Romans had conquered the Greek empire. No inspired books were written while Greece held control, but the Old Covenant includes relevant prophecies. Daniel foretold that the Persian empire would be conquered by Greece and he even foresaw the Wars of the Diadochi following Alexander the Great’s death (Daniel 8:21; 10:20; 11:2). Greece is only referred to in the Old Covenant through prophetic foretelling, never as a current player on the world stage, but Zechariah’s prophecy is specific. *“Return to the stronghold, You prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you. For I have bent Judah, My bow, fitted the bow with Ephraim, and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you like the sword of a mighty man”* (Zechariah 9:12-13). Before Greece had a foothold in Israel, Zechariah foresaw the Jews rising up against the Greeks and securing a military victory. The books of First and Second Maccabees record the Maccabean Revolt whereby Judas Maccabeus, that is Judas the Hammer, raised up Jewish armies to fight against the Greeks. Essentially, these books provide the historical fulfillment of God’s words through Zechariah. Victory was gained in three forms for the Jews: economic freedom, religious liberty, and the right to bear arms. Antiochus VII wrote to the Jewish nation: “I authorize you to coin your own money, as legal tender in your country. Jerusalem and its sanctuary shall be free. All the weapons you have prepared and all the strongholds you have built and now occupy shall remain in your possession” (1st Maccabees 15:6-7).

Because the sanctuary in Jerusalem was set free, the desecration previously perpetrated by Antiochus Epiphanes (1st Maccabees 1:21-

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24) was reversed. “Judas and his brothers said, ‘Now that our enemies have been crushed, let us go up to **purify the sanctuary and rededicate it**’” (1st Maccabees 4:36). Having rededicated the temple, “then Judas and his brothers and the entire assembly of Israel decreed that every year for eight days, from the twenty-fifth day of the month Chislev, the days of the dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness on the anniversary” (1st Maccabees 4:59; cf. 2nd Maccabees 10:1-8). “Dedication” is the meaning of the word “Chanukkah”, which became an annual observance in the days of Judas Maccabeus. Although this holiday was established when there was no prophet in Israel, it was being celebrated when Jesus was on earth. *“Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch”* (John 10:22-23). Whether or not Jesus personally celebrated Chanukkah is not stated, but He was present at the temple when the feast was kept and did not chase anyone out with a whip (John 2:15), so He tacitly approved, at least.

Insomuch as the books of Maccabees depict the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy and the basis of a Jewish feast Jesus approved of, they are relevant for study as historical reference, even though they remain secular works, not inspired writings.

“THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER”

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.
Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

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“WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

“WHOLE COUNSEL”

ACTS 20:27

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THE RELEVANCE OF FIRST & SECOND MACCABEES

Bryan Matthew Dockens

The books of First and Second Maccabees belong neither to the New Testament nor the Old, but the apocrypha, meaning of doubtful authenticity. These writings are not inspired of the Holy Spirit; nevertheless, they can be useful in study.

FIRST AND SECOND MACCABEES ARE NOT INSPIRED TEXTS.

Neither of these books lay claim to inspiration. On the contrary, both acknowledge in straightforward terms they are of human origin.

Not less than three times in First Maccabees, the narrator makes plain that there were no prophets living at the time:

- “They stored the stones in a suitable place on the temple hill, **until a prophet should come** and decide what to do with them” (1st Maccabees 4:46).
- “There had not been such great distress in Israel **since the time the prophets ceased to appear** among the people” (1st Maccabees 9:27).
- “The Jewish people and their priest have, therefore, made the following decision. Simon shall be their permanent leader and high priest **until a true prophet arises**” (1st Maccabees 14:41).

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