

1:1-9

1/	To the brothers, the Jews throughout Egypt, greetings from the brothers, the Jews in Jerusalem and those in the territory of Judea. 2/ Best wishes, and may God treat you well and recall his covenant in the presence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his faithful servants. 3/ May he give you all a heart to reverence him, and to do what he wants with a full heart and a willing spirit. 4/ May he open up your heart in his law and in his statutes. May he make peace 5/ and may he hearken to your entreaties and may he be reconciled to you and may he not abandon you at a bad time. 6/ And now we are praying for you.	a	Codices 62 and 55 read 148, the year of the dedication of the altar (1 Macc 4:52).
7/	When Demetrius was king, in the year 169, we Jews wrote to you: "In the extreme oppression that came upon us during those years, from the time that Jason and his companions left the holy land and the kingdom 8/ and they burnt the gate and shed innocent blood, we besought the Lord and we were heard. We offered sacrifices and choice flour and we kindled the lamps and we set out the breads."		
9/	So now celebrate the days of Booths in the month of Kislev.		
10a/	In the year 188.^a		

Commentary by Verse

■ 1 The initial address follows the pattern “To B *χαίρειν* A,” where A (nominative case) sends greetings to B. This pattern is found in letters from the Ptolemaic period,¹ and differs from the customary opening, “A to B, greeting.” The pattern “To B, A” is frequently found in Aramaic letters.²

“brothers.” In Aramaic letters, familial language is sometimes used in an honorific sense, as in “To my brother Pir-amurri from your brother Bel-etir” in a letter between two military officers,³ even though no family connection is attested. Sometimes the relationship of “brother” is used in the address even if not correct—for example, a father addresses a letter, “To my son Sheloman from your brother Oshea.”⁴ The use of fraternal

1	Francis X. Exler, <i>The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter: A Study in Greek Epistolography</i> (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1923) 42–44, 65–66; John L. White, <i>Light from Ancient Letters</i> (FF; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 194–96.	3	Ashur ostracon in James M. Lindenderger, <i>Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters</i> (ed. Kent Harold Richards; 2nd ed.; WAW 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) §1.
2	Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography,” <i>JBL</i> 93 (1974) 201–25, here 211–14.	4	Lindemberger, <i>Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters</i> , no. 9.

language emphasizes the close bonds between sender and recipient. Familial language was used also by various associations to stress group identity.⁵

Ἰουδαῖοι. This word has the connotation of one from the land of Judea. Elias Bickermann and Claire Préaux held that such a designation reflects the Ptolemaic practice of identifying noncitizens by their point of origin, be it Macedonian, Lycian, Athenian, or Judean, even if sometimes the original city-state no longer existed and if those so designated had lived in Egypt for generations.⁶ But the situation is not quite so clear cut. Csaba La'da has shown that “ethnic designations in demotic (and Greek) official documents from Hellenistic Egypt are generally not trustworthy indicators of real ethnicity” and some ethnic designations “became occupational-status designations.”⁷ A *Ἰουδαῖος* could be labeled ethnically as *Πέρσης τῆς ἐπιγονῆς*, a *Ἰουδαία* is referred to by the civic label *Γαργάρισσα* (*P. Polit. Jud.* 8.11–15). Later, one of two brothers, *Ἰουδαῖοι*, is labeled *Μακεδών*.⁸ A *Ἰουδαῖος*, therefore, could have several ethnic designations. As Sylvie Honigman shows, “there was in Alexandria a Jewish community whose members had diverging legal statuses: . . . we met Jews who were Ἄλεξανδρεῖς, Μακεδόνες or perhaps Ἕλληνες), *Ἰουδαῖοι* members of the *politeuma*, *Ἰουδαῖοι* from Egypt or

Syria.”⁹ Even if the ethnic designation *Ἰουδαῖος* signified point of origin, point of origin involves much more than geography. In the felicitous phrase of Paula Fredriksen, “gods run in the blood,”¹⁰ and so geography, ethnicity, and cultural practices—including religious ones—are intimately connected. A preferable translation is “Jews.” In modern English, “Judean” has much too narrow a geographic connotation, as Daniel Schwartz has noted.¹¹ Therefore, I have translated the term *Ἰουδαῖοι* throughout this commentary as “Jews,” and speak of Jews rather than Judeans.

“Best wishes” is literally “good peace.” Scholars have puzzled over the presence both of the initial greeting usual in Greek, *χαίρειν*, and of the phrase in the accusative, *εἰρήνην ἀγαθήν*, which seems to reflect the initial greeting found in Aramaic or Hebrew, כּוּשׁ, כּוּשׁ (“greetings,” literally “peace”). Most scholars have taken the wording to be duplication, perhaps caused by a redactor. Christian Habicht suggests either eliding one of the greetings or adding the conjunction *καί* (“and”) before *εἰρήνην ἀγαθήν*.¹² Jonathan Goldstein has the most radical solution. Noting that *εἰρήνην ἀγαθήν* is in the accusative and is not an initial greeting formula, he suggests taking it as the object of the succeeding verb. He then reads this verb not as *ἀγαθοποιήσαι* (“treat

5 Philip A. Harland, “Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: ‘Brothers’ (*Ἀδελφοί*) in Associations of the Greek East,” *JBL* 124 (2005) 491–513.
6 Elias Bickermann, “Beiträge zur antiken Urkundengeschichte, I: Der Heimatsvermerk und die staatsrechtliche Stellung der Hellenen im ptolemäischen Ägypten,” *Archiv für Papyrussforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 8 (1927) 223–25; Claire Préaux, “Les Étrangers à l’époque hellénistique (Égypte-Delos-Rhodes),” in *L’Étranger/Foreigner* (Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l’histoire comparative des institutions 9; Paris: Dessain et Tolra, 1984) 141–93, esp. 189–93. See further Koen Goudriaan, *Ethnicity in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 5; Amsterdam: Gieben, 1988); Per Bilde, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Lise Hannestad, and Jan Zahle, eds., *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt* (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization 3; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992); Margaret H. Williams, “The Meaning and Function of *Ioudaios* in Graeco-Roman Inscriptions,” *ZPE* 116 (1997) 249–62; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Steve Mason, “Jews, Judae-

ans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007) 457–512.

7 Csaba A. La'da, “Ethnicity, Occupation and Tax-status in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in *Acta demotica: Acts of the Fifth International Conference for Demotists, Pisa, 4th–8th September 1993* (Pisa: Giardini, 1994) 189.
8 *CPJ* 2, nos. 142–143. See the discussion in Sylvie Honigman, “*Politeumata* and Ethnicity in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt,” *Ancient Society* 33 (2003) 61–102, here 80.

9 Honigman, “*Politeumata*,” 90.

10 Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time to Go Has Come,” *SR* 35 (2006) 231–46, here 232.

11 Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Judean’ or ‘Jew’? How Should We Translate *Ἰουδαῖο* in Josephus?” in Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and S. Grippentrog, eds., *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World/Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 71; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 3–27.

12 Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch*, 43.

you well”) but, following q, as ἀγαθὰ ποιῆσαι. His translation reads, “A good peace may God make for you.” Since Goldstein thought that this prayer for peace would then duplicate the prayer at 1:4, εἰρήνην ποιῆσαι (“may he make peace”), he argued that the clause in 1:4 was a marginal note that was later incorporated into the main text.¹³ Such a complex reconstruction of the text and its transmission history seems unwarranted.

When the form of the greeting is “To A, peace,” the nominative form is used, εἰρήνη, as at Ezra 5:7 (= 2 Esdr 5:7) and Dan 4:1 (Theodotion) and 6:26. Here, however, the sender is placed in the nominative and so one could not have the nominative εἰρήνη. Double formulas are found in the greeting of letters, as at Lachish 3 יהוה שמע טוב (“May Yahweh hear my lord, may you hear peace and may you hear good”); Hermopolis 3 שלם ורחן שלחת לך (“I send you peace and life”); Lachish 5.9 יהוה את אדני שמעת שלם וטוב (“May Yahweh hear my lord, may you hear peace and good”).¹⁴ Double formulas are therefore to be found, although not usually as far apart from each other as here and without a connective.

I therefore suggest that the accusative εἰρήνην ἀγαθὴν, literally “good peace,” is similar to the wish formula found in the Lachish letters: שלם וטוב, literally “peace and good.” Since the first part of 1:1 follows the initial greeting pattern of letters of petition, To A χάλειν B, I have separated εἰρήνην ἀγαθὴν from this initial greeting and placed it, as does Goldstein, among the wishes for well-being. One should presuppose a verb such as “we send,” שלחנו in Hebrew.

■ 2-5 These verses contain a series of eight expressions of wish in the optative mood arranged paratactically with the conjunction καί. The series appears to be divided into two parts: the first four expressions (vv. 2-4a) begin with the optative ἀγαθοποιῆσαι, which picks up on ἀγαθὴν in the first wish for well-being at the end of v. 1; the second four begin with εἰρήνην ποιῆσαι, which picks up on εἰρήνην, which is the other component of the first wish for well-being at the end of v. 1.

■ 2 The preposition πρὸς here governs the indeclin-

able names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the genitive of “his faithful servants.” Since, in the construction “a covenant πρὸς . . .” πρὸς is usually followed by the accusative,¹⁵ one finds in the manuscripts either that πρὸς is changed to περὶ (19-62) or the genitive is changed to the accusative (46-52, 55). Carl L. W. Grimm suggested that the writer either was thinking that the verb μιμνήσκω (“to remember”) takes the genitive and so put the appositive “his faithful servants” as the object of the verb or followed a pattern like διαθήκη τῶν πατέρων (1 Macc 2:20, 50; 4:10). Πρὸς can govern the genitive¹⁶ both with a local sense, as is found in the LXX Josh 15:8 (πρὸς θαλάσσης, “toward the sea”); Ruth 3:4, 7, 8, 14 (πρὸς ποδῶν, “near his feet”); and 1 Sam 19:13; 26:7 (πρὸς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, “near its head”), and with other relations, as is found in Gen 29:34 (πρὸς ἐμοῦ ἔσται ὁ ἀνὴρ μου, “my husband will be on my side”) and Gen 31:5 (ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν πρὸς ἐμοῦ, “he is not on my side”). Πρὸς + genitive also has the sense of “in the presence of, in the sight of” as in 4 Macc 6:20 (καταγελάμενοι πρὸς ἀπάντων ἐπὶ δειλίᾳ, “being mocked in the sight of all for cowardice”); Homer *Il.* 1.339 (μάρτυροι ἔστων πρὸς τε θεῶν μακάρων πρὸς τε θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων, “let them be witnesses in the sight of the blessed gods, in the sight of mortal men”). If one takes the text as in the majority of manuscripts, one need not assume a mistake on the part of the writer, but translate “his covenant in the sight of Abraham,” rather than “his covenant with Abraham.” In this sense, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were witnesses to the compact that God established with his people.

In 1 Macc 4:10, Judas Maccabeus prays that God will remember the ancestral covenant (μνησθήσεται διαθήκῃ πατέρων), since Mattathias had decided to follow the ancestral covenant (1 Macc 2:20, 50), but no specification of the “fathers” is given as it is here. God promised, if the Israelites were punished and then repented, to remember his covenant with Jacob, his covenant with Isaac, and his covenant with Abraham (Lev 26:42; see also Ps 105:8-10 and Deut 4:31). When God heard the groaning of the Israelites in Egypt, he remembered his

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13 Goldstein, *II Maccabees*,

14 Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, §§62, 4.5 (see also 9); 66-67.

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16 Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920) §1695.

covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:24: *καὶ ἐμνήσθη ὁ θεὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ τῆς πρὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαακ καὶ Ἰακώβ*; see also Exod 6:5-8). The Jews in Egypt would probably have picked up the allusion to the exodus event. When Hezekiah urged all the people to celebrate the Passover, his letter began, “O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so that he may turn again” (2 Chr 30:6).

Abraham is said to be faithful in Neh 9:8 and Sir 44:20; Moses is said to be “faithful” in Num 12:7; Nathan prophesies that David will be faithful in my house” (1 Chr 17:14: *καὶ πιστώσω αὐτὸν ἐν οἴκῳ μου*); it is prophesied that a faithful priest will arise to replace the house of Eli (1 Kgdms 2:35). Only here, however, are the three patriarchs called “faithful servants.”

■ **3-4** In the third and fourth wishes, the term *καρδία* (“heart”) is found three times. The two wishes are therefore bound together: the heart given to reverence God and do what he wants (*τὰ θελήματα*, which literally means “wills, desires”) is a heart open to perceive God’s will expressed in the law and statutes. The general term *τὰ θελήματα* is specified as being in the law and the statutes. Psalm 102:7 LXX states: “[The Lord] made known his ways to Moses, to the children of Israel what he wanted [*τὰ θελήματα αὐτοῦ*].” The idea recalls the promise in Ezek 11:19-20: “I will give them one heart [*δώσω αὐτοῖς καρδίαν ἑτέραν*] . . . so that they may follow my statutes [*ὅπως ἐν τοῖς προστάγμασίν μου πορεύωνται*].”¹⁷

■ **3** In 1 Chr 29:19, David prays that God will give a heart to Solomon to do God’s commands; in 2 Chr 17:6, of King Jehoshaphat it is said that “his heart was exalted [*ὑψώθη*] in the way of the Lord.”

In 1 Chr 28:9, David prays that Solomon serve God with a whole heart and a willing mind (*בלב שלם ובנפש* *הפצה*, *ἐν καρδίᾳ τελείᾳ καὶ ψυχῇ θελούσῃ*). The phrase *לב שלם* is found at Qumran (CD 1:10; 1QH^a

8:15, 25), as is its variant *לב טוב* (4QpsEzek^a frg. 5 line 2 [4Q385]).¹⁸ Qohelet (9:7) advises his readers to drink their wine “with a contented heart” (*בלב טוב*). For a “contented heart”, see also Sir 13:26.¹⁹ The phrase *הפצה בנפש* has been reconstructed in 4QpsEzek^a frg. 5 line 2 (4Q385) by the editor, Devorah Dimant, and is also found at 4Q302 3 ii 5, but, as Dimant rightly notes, the phrase here probably should be read negatively, as in Isa 66:3. Willingness of heart is expressed also by the combination *לב נדיב*, as in Exod 35:22, 2 Chr 29:31, and 1QM 10:5. The combination of whole heart and willing mind resonates with Deut 6:5 and is reflected in CD 15:9-10 and 1QH 6:26-27. See also the prayer in *Ap. Const.* 8.6.15, *ἐν καρδίᾳ πλήρει καὶ ψυχῇ θελούσῃ*.

■ **4** In the Qumran *Hodayot*, the hymnist declares that “my heart opens to an everlasting spring” (1QH 18:31), that God has “opened a broad space in my heart” (1QH 13:32-33), and that he has “opened my heart to your knowledge” (1QH 22 [frg.4]:12). In the concluding hymn in 1QS 11:15-16, the poet says, “Blessed be you, my God, who opens the heart of your servant to knowledge” (*הפתח לדעה לב עבדכה*). The phrase “to open the heart/mind” is also found in Acts 16:14 and Luke 24:45.

“in his law.” To some²⁰ the preposition *ἐν* appeared superfluous, as it does not seem to have the meaning of instrument, means, or manner by which the heart is opened. If the sense is that the heart be opened to accept into it the law and statutes, a simple dative would suffice. C. C. Torrey inserted a verb to account for the preposition.²¹ Grimm suggested that the phrase refers to the area in which the opening of the heart ought to take place. However, as noted above on vv. 3-4, the phrase seems to specify what God wants of his followers. Schwartz has pointed to a phrase in the prayer of Mar, the son of Rabina: “May you open my heart in your law, and may my soul pursue your commandments” (*תהיחפתח לבי בתורתך ובמצותיך תרדוף נפשי*) (*b. Ber.* 17a). Similarly, in the prayer in *Ap. Const.* 8.6.5 is found: “May

17 See also Ezek 36:26-27; Jer 31:31-34 (= LXX 38:31-34).

18 See Devorah Dimant, ed., *Qumran Cave 4.XXI: Pseudo-Prophetic Texts* (DJD 30; Oxford: Clarendon, 2001) 42-44.

19 Yochanan Muffs (*Studies in the Aramaic Legal Papyri from Elephantine* [Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 1: The Near and Middle East 66; Brill:

Leiden, 2003]) has investigated the history and meaning of the Aramaic phrase “my heart is satisfied” in the legal papyri from Elephantine, where it signifies the satisfaction of a seller on receipt of payment and relinquishment of the title to a property.

20 The preposition is omitted in V 107 L/ 55 (La^M).

21 Charles C. Torrey, “The Letters Prefixed to Second Maccabees,” *JAOS* 60 (1940) 119-50, here 141 n. 14.

he open the ears of their hearts to engage in his law” (διανοίξῃ τὰ ὦτα τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτοῦ καταγίνεσθαι).

Law and statutes are found in tandem in Exod 18:16, 20; 2 Chr 31:21; Isa 24:5; Amos 2:4; Bar 4:1; and Tob 14:9 (AB).

“may he make peace.” Here begins the second part of the expression of wish. This phrase is usually connected with the previous phrase about opening the heart. However, the peace sought is a covenantal peace, similar to the peace treaty that Demetrius seeks to make between himself and the Jews in 1 Macc 13:40, whereby God will act as covenantal ally toward the Jews. As the succeeding three phrases in 1:5 are all concerned with such covenantal issues, I have connected the phrase with them.

■ 5 The meaning of καταλλάσσω, “to reconcile,” is common in Greek,²² but as Stanley Porter has pointed out, its use in speaking about reconciliation with the gods is rare before its appearance in 2 Maccabees in 5:20; 7:33; 8:29. It is found in Sophocles *Ai* 744: “Well, [Ajax] has gone, intent on the purpose best for him, to be reconciled to the gods after his anger [θεοῖσιν ὡς καταλλαχθῆ ἡ χόλου].”²³

As in any treaty, when infringements occur, the parties are to patch up differences, and when one party is attacked, the covenant partner is to help. So God, as a covenant partner, is to listen to his people when they call on him. He is not to be angry with them but is to show his mercy and not desert his covenant partners when they are in trouble. Toward the end of his prayer at the dedication of the temple, Solomon asks that, if the people go out to battle and pray to the Lord, the Lord “hear from heaven their petition” (εἰσακούει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῆς δεήσεως αὐτῶν) and their prayer and do the right thing by them. Solomon prays that if the people sin and repent, God will hear their plea and be merciful to them (ἴλεως ἔσῃ) and listen to them because of what God spoke through Moses (1 Kgs 8:44-52). In Deut

4:29-31, Moses advises the people that, when dispersed among the nations they turn to the Lord and seek the Lord in their distress (ἐν τῇ θλίψει), the merciful God will not abandon (ἐγκαταλείψει) them, nor forget the covenant with their ancestors. In Judg 10:10-16, when the Israelites sin against the Lord and he is angry with them, he tells them that they had abandoned (ἐγκατέλιπετε) him and so now they should cry to those other gods in the time of their distress (ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως). Nevertheless, the Israelites put away those other gods and the Lord is merciful to them. See also Neh 9:26-27, where Nehemiah tells God that the people are in great distress (ἐν θλίψει μεγάλη). In some sense, the covenant is summed up in 2 Chr 15:2: “If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will abandon you [ἐὰν ἐγκαταλίπητε αὐτόν, ἐγκαταλείψει ὑμᾶς].” See the similar sentiment in 2 Chr 24:20. As the psalmist states in Ps 94:12-14 (LXX 93:12-14), God will give those whom the Lord teaches by his law respite from days of trouble (ἀφ’ ἡμερῶν πονερῶν), for the Lord will not abandon (ἐγκαταλείψει) his heritage. Sirach recalls how he prayed to the Lord not to forsake him in the days of his trouble (μὴ με ἐγκαταλιπεῖν ἐν ἡμέραις θλίψεως) and how God rescued him in time of trouble (ἐκ καιροῦ πονηροῦ) (Sir 51:10-12). See also Pss 9:10 and 102:2 (LXX 101:3).

“at a bad time.” This phrase, found also in Ps 36:19 LXX; Mic 2:3; Qoh 9:12, has been seen by some scholars as having a specific historical reference, the hostility of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (Physcon) against the Jews of Egypt. The references in the previous paragraph suggest rather that “at a bad time” should be understood in a general sense, as part of a covenant partner’s responsibility. Moreover, as will be discussed below, it is by no means sure that Physcon was always hostile to the Jews.²⁴

22 The active voice is found in Herodotus 5.29.1; 6.108.5; Aristotle *Oec.* 1348b9; the middle voice in Herodotus 1.61.2; 7.145.1; the passive in Euripides *Iph. Aul.* 1157; Xenophon *An.* 1.6.1; Thucydides 4.59.4. An interesting use of the verb is found in *P. Oxy.* 104.25–27. It discusses the case of whenever a woman is estranged from her husband (ἐὰν ἀπαλ-

λαγῆ τοῦ ἀνδρός) until she is reconciled to him (μέχρι οὗ . . . καταλλαγῆ).

23 See Stanley E. Porter, *Καταλλάσσω in Ancient Greek Literature, with Reference to the Pauline Writings* (Estudios de filología Neotestamentaria 5; Cordoba: El Almendro de Cordoba, 1994).

24 See Victor Tcherikover, *CPJ* 1:21–24.

■ **6** *Περί* begins to encroach on the meaning of *ὑπέρ* in the Hellenistic period,²⁵ and so I have translated “praying for you.”

The formula “and now” is found both in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the corpus of Aramaic letters and occurs in various spellings: כעת, וכעת, כעת, וכעת, כעת, וכעת. In the corpus of Aramaic letters, it can introduce the body of the letter or can be a message divider;²⁶ here, however, the formula does not introduce the body of the letter but is part of the initial greeting. Nor does the formula fit easily into any of the situations that André Laurentin has found for the phrase in legal and liturgical contexts.²⁷ Rather, the sense is that of a continuation whereby the spirit of community set in 1:1-5 is maintained and evidenced in the prayers of the Jews for their Egyptian kinsfolk.

■ **7** This verse has given rise to many difficulties. Is *γεγραφομεν* the perfect tense of the verb “to write,” to be taken as an epistolary perfect²⁸ and the verse translated, “In the year 169 with Demetrius as king, we Jews write to you in the extreme oppression . . .”? Or is the verb to be read as a perfect tense, “we Jews wrote to you”? The perfect tense of *γράφειν* is used in letters to refer to previous correspondence.²⁹ If one takes the former meaning, then two problems arise. (1) What does one do with the date given in 1:10a? Is it to be placed in the second letter? Dates are usually given at the end of

letters, not at the beginning.³⁰ (2) The extreme distress for the Jews in Jerusalem in 144/143 B.C.E. would surely have been the capture and execution of their leader Jonathan. However, no mention is made of this event; rather, the treachery of Jason over twenty years previously is highlighted. That the commonly used noun *θλίψις* (“distress,” “oppression”) is found both here and in the speech given by Simon Maccabeus after Jonathan Maccabeus had been captured and Jerusalem threatened (1 Macc 13:5) is not enough to establish that the letter was written in 143 B.C.E.

Since Bickermann’s brilliant analysis,³¹ most scholars have been convinced that the authors are quoting here from a letter written in the year 169 of the Seleucid era. Bickermann provides examples where no hint is given that a quotation is being introduced. There has been considerable discussion over the precise reference of “when Demetrius was king, in the year 169.” According to the Seleucid Macedonian calendar, year 1 fell between fall 312 and fall 311, while a Seleucid Babylonian calendar has been posited in which year 1 ran from spring 311 to spring 310.³² Following the Seleucid Macedonian reckoning, year 169 would be fall 144/fall 143, while in the Seleucid Babylonian counting, year 169 would be spring 143/spring 142. Which reckoning should one choose?

The Demetrius of this letter is Demetrius II Nicator, who became king in year 165 of the Seleucid era (1 Macc

25 Maximilian Zerwick, *Graecitas Biblica* (3rd ed.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1955) no. 69; James H. Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963) 3:269–70.

26 Fitzmyer, “Some Notes,” 201–25.

27 André Laurentin, “We‘attah–Kai nun: Formule caractéristique des textes juridiques et liturgiques,” *Bib* 45 (1964) 168–95.

28 Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §1942.

29 *SEG* 39 (1989) no. 1133; C. Bradford Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period: A Study in Greek Epigraphy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934) no. 19.16.

30 Schwartz (2 *Maccabees*, 522) states that, since “the first epistle is plainly a Semitic document, to interpret it according to the standards of Greek letters, and to translate it according to what is usual in Greek and without regard for the fact that they render a Hebrew or Aramaic text, would seem to be a mistake.” However, Bickermann’s argument (“Ein

jüdischer Festbrief,” 233–54) is based on the form of a letter. As Lindenberger (*Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 8) noted, the date in ancient Aramaic and Hebrew letters, where one is found, is placed at the end of the letter. In one case the date is given after the initial greeting: the Passover letter from Elephantine; see Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, no. 30. However, in this case the specific date is given because it refers to the date of Passover for that year (וכעת שנתא זא). So the evidence we have from letters in Aramaic and Hebrew shows that they follow the same form as Greek letters with the date at the end of the letter.

31 Bickermann, “Ein jüdischer Festbrief,” 233–54.

32 See Bickermann, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, 101–11.

11:19).³³ However, his position was attacked by one of the previous ruler's generals, Diodotus Tryphon, in the name of that ruler's son, Antiochus VI. Demetrius II had to flee Antioch in the summer of 144 B.C.E. but maintained control of Cilicia, Mesopotamia, and Babylonia. The Jews under Jonathan switched allegiance from Demetrius II to Antiochus VI but then later switched back to Demetrius II. The reference to Demetrius as king must be dated after the Jews had left Antiochus VI and Tryphon. The sequence of events that led to this turnabout is described in 1 Maccabees: Tryphon feared that Jonathan would thwart his attempt to usurp the position of Antiochus VI and so treacherously captured him (1 Macc 12:39-48); Simon was elected leader in Jonathan's place (13:1-10); Simon paid ransom to Tryphon (13:12-20); Tryphon invaded Judea anyway but was foiled by an unexpected snowstorm (13:20-22); Jonathan was executed (13:23); later Antiochus VI was murdered (13:31); Simon strengthened fortifications and stored food to resist a siege (13:33); then he reconciled with Demetrius (13:34); as a consequence, in 170 the Jews start their own calendar reckoning (13:41-42).

In the attempt to fix an absolute time frame for this relative chronology, three elements have taken center stage. First, coins of Antiochus VI were minted dated 170, which, according to the official Seleucid Macedonian reckoning, would be fall 143/fall 142³⁴ and dated 171, fall 142/fall 141.³⁵ Bickermann did not know of these coins from 171 and so argued that the many coins of Antiochus VI from 170 signified that he had been murdered most likely in spring 142 B.C.E. As a consequence, Tryphon would have invaded Judea in late fall

143, and after this date the Jews would have gone over to Demetrius. The letter would therefore come from the end of the year 143 B.C.E.³⁶ Goldstein knew of the coins but argued that some local cities, out of partisanship, may have kept on issuing coins even though Antiochus VI was dead.³⁷ The existence of these coins does, however, cast doubt on the "absolute" date of Antiochus VI's death in 142 B.C.E. Livy places that event in 138/137 B.C.E.³⁸ Henri Seyrig suggests that Tryphon first ousted Antiochus VI, in 142/141 B.C.E., but did not kill him until later.³⁹ Here Seyrig is trying to make sense of the confused account of the boy's death in Josephus *Ant.* 13.187, 218.

The second historical peg is the unexpected snowfall that stopped Tryphon's march on Jerusalem (1 Macc 13:22). In Bickermann and Goldstein's chronology, this snowfall would have taken place in late fall. Klaus Bringmann rightly points out that snow usually falls in Judea in January/February.⁴⁰

Bringmann also brings into play the third historical peg: fall 143/fall 142 B.C.E. was a sabbatical year. He bases this calculation on the mention of a sabbatical year in 1 Macc 6:49. Bringmann argues that a shortfall of food would occur at the end of the sabbatical year, and so the invasion of Lysias recounted in 1 Macc 6:28-54 took place in the summer of 163 B.C.E., that is, at the end of the sabbatical year that ran from fall 164 to fall 163 B.C.E.⁴¹ This would entail that a sabbatical year fell in fall 143/fall 142. Bringmann concludes that Simon would not have been able to store provisions in strongholds (1 Macc 13:33) during this sabbatical year and must therefore have stocked up before the sabbatical

33 The year is known from Demotic Papyrus Strassburg 21 (*PW* 23.2, col 1717).

34 Ernest Babelon, *Les Rois de Syrie, d'Arménie et de Commagène* (Paris: Rollin & Feuadent, 1890) cxxxiv-cxxxv.

35 S. Ben-Dor, "Some New Seleucid Coins," *PEQ* 78 (1946) 43-48; Georges Le Rider, *Suse sous les Séleucides et les Parthes: Les trouvailles monétaires et l'histoire de la ville* (Mémoires de la Mission archéologique en Iran 38; Paris: Geuthner, 1965) 370 n. 2.

36 Bickermann, "Ein jüdischer Festbrief," 143-44.

37 Johathan A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 41; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 478-79.

38 Livy *periocha* 55; see Justin 36.1.7; Appian *Syr.* 67.

39 Henri Seyrig, *Notes on Syrian Coins* (Numismatic Notes and Monographs 119; New York: American Numismatic Society, 1950) 16.

40 Bringmann, *Hellenistische Reform*, 22.

41 *Ibid.*, 20, 22 n. 29. Lester L. Grabbe ("Maccabean Chronology: 167-164 or 168-165 B.C.E.?" *JBL* 110 [1991] 59-74, here 63 n. 21) also holds that a sabbatical year fell on 164/163. See also Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus*, 543-45.

year began; in other words, he was already preparing to defend himself against Tryphon well before the fall of 143 B.C.E., and his overtures to Demetrius II probably took place before the beginning of the sabbatical year, that is, in year 169 according to the Seleucid Macedonian reckoning. This reconstruction would thus not follow the sequence of events as recounted in 1 Macc 13:31-34, where Antiochus VI's death precedes the buildup of Simon and the sending of emissaries to Demetrius. This sequence has difficulties. The author of 1 Maccabees likes to group events together, and one can see how he has skillfully tied the events under Tryphon and Antiochus VI together. First Maccabees 13:31-32 ("Tryphon dealt treacherously with the young king Antiochus; he killed him and became king in his place, putting on the crown of Asia" [ἐβασίλευσεν αὐτὸν καὶ περιέθετο τὸ διάδημα τῆς Ἀσίας]) forms an *inclusio* with 1 Macc 12:39 ("Then Tryphon attempted to become king in Asia and put on the crown" [Βασιλεῦσαι τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ περιθέσθαι τὸ διάδημα]). The clustering of these events also highlights the treachery of Tryphon and works to justify the switching of allegiance to Demetrius II. This sequence should not therefore be accorded absolute stability, and Antiochus VI could have been murdered after the rapprochement with Demetrius II. The main sticking point for Bringmann's hypothesis remains the uncertainty surrounding the dating of the sabbatical year.⁴²

There are thus numerous problems in ascertaining the precise date for the letter. Bringmann's scenario remains the most probable: Tryphon captured Jonathan,

and in response Simon strengthened the strongholds and may have made overtures to Demetrius. Tryphon then invaded Judea in the winter of 143 B.C.E., was foiled by a snowfall, and executed Jonathan. Simon was elected leader, and negotiations with Demetrius were finalized. The date 169 thus should be located according to the Seleucid Babylonian reckoning, that is, from 5 April 143 to 26 March 142 B.C.E.⁴³ The letter would have been written when the Jews were subjects of Demetrius II, before the yoke of the Gentiles was lifted in 170 S.E. (1 Macc 13:41). It must have been composed while negotiations were continuing with Demetrius II and before documents were dated according to the years of Simon (1 Macc 13:42); these negotiations could have begun as soon as Simon was aware of Tryphon's intention to invade Judea.

"in⁴⁴ the extreme oppression." The Greek phrase ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀκμῇ is best seen, following Grimm, as a hendiadys, where ἀκμῇ would have the sense, frequent in medical works, of "critical point." Ms 58 uses another word found in combination with θλίψις—ἀνάγκη ("constraint")—as in Job 15:24; Zeph 1:15; and Ps LXX 106:6, 13, 19, 28. The Syriac uses the frequent formula ܠܠܘܟܘܢ ܠܥܡܘܢܘܢ ("in distress and oppression"). These appear to be attempts to make sense of the more unusual ἀκμῇ rather than to preserve the most likely reading. Ἀκμῇ has the meaning of "high point" in 4:13. Habicht understands the extreme distress to refer to the time after Jonathan's execution by Tryphon, but the phrase refers to the following temporal clause, that is, to the time of Jason.

"left the holy land and the kingdom." The verb

42 See Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles during the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *HUCA* 44 (1973) 153-96. His study was critiqued by Don Blosser, "The Sabbath Year Cycle in Josephus," *HUCA* 52 (1981) 129-39, to which Wacholder replied in "The Calendar of Sabbath Years during the Second Temple Era: A Response," *HUCA* 54 (1983) 123-33. Goldstein (*I Maccabees*, 315-18) also criticized Wacholder. See also Robert North, "Maccabean Sabbath Years," *Bib* 34 (1953) 501-15; and Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus*, 544-45.

43 See Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.-A.D. 75* (Brown University Studies 19; Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1956) 41.

44 As he sees this prepositional phrase joined to the

previous γεγράφαμεν, Schwartz translates ἐν as "concerning" and refers to Deut 6:7, where the Hebrew, ודברתה בם, is translated in the LXX as καὶ λαλήσεις ἐν αὐτοῖς. While the Hebrew preposition ב can have the meaning of "about," this meaning is usually found only with verbs of speaking, considering, remembering: דע, שיח, הנה, חלל, דבר. Sometimes ב appears simply to mark the object. For example, in Deut 3:26, the LXX simply ignores the preposition. "Write concerning" would seem to be על כהב as in 2 Kgs 22:13; 2 Chr 9:29; Esth 8:8: ואתם כתבו על היהודים, "and you shall write concerning the Jews"; 4Q177 frg. 2, line 3: כן אשר עליהם כתוב, "as it is written concerning them"; 11Q13 frg. 2, line 23: כאשר כתוב עליו, "as it is written concerning him."

ἀπέστη has usually been taken to mean “rebel, revolt.”⁴⁵ Goldstein senses that there are problems in talking about a revolt against a land rather than against a person and suggests only that “the differences probably reflect the historical facts confronting the senders.”⁴⁶ In 5:8, Jason is called an ἀποστάτης, but the meaning of “apostate, rebel” is given by the qualifier “against the laws,” and also by the context—Antiochus IV hears the Jews are rebelling (5:11). F.-M. Abel suggested, with David Sluys,⁴⁷ that ἀπέστη be understood in an absolute sense, with no reference to the holy land. The prepositional phrase “from the holy land and the kingdom” would qualify rather “his companions.” This suggestion is difficult to accept, however, for with whom would the Jews be contrasted? With partisans from outside the Seleucid realm? Further, ἀφίστημι ἀπό + place-name is common. The position taken by Abel does focus the problem on the issues surrounding the translation of the verb as “rebelled.” The most normal way of translating ἀφίστημι ἀπό + place is “to leave from such and such a place”: in Josh 8:15-16, “Joshua and Israel retreated from their face, and they pursued after the sons of Israel and they themselves left the city” (ἀπεστησαν ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως); in 1 Esdr 1:28, “Take me from the battle” (ἀποστήσατέ με ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης); in Sir 47:24, “Jeroboam, son of Nabal, who led Israel into sin and gave to Ephraim the way of sin, and their sins increased greatly so that they left their land” (ἀποστήσαι αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς αὐτῶν). For further examples see Num 12:10; 16:27; and Job 31:22. The same meaning of moving from a place is found also in phrases where someone is removed from someone’s face (1 Sam 19:10; 2 Kgs 17:18; 23:27; 24:3; 2 Chr 35:19) or sleep leaves from one’s eyes (Dan 4:15). The locative meaning found in LXX 3 Kgdms 11:29, to lead someone off the way, is evident also in the phrases found at Ezek 33:8A and Jdt 5:18 (“When they departed from the way which he had laid down for them” [ὅτε δὲ ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ὁδοῦ ἧς διέθετο αὐτοῖς]). One exception may

seem to be Tob 1:4: “All the tribe of Naphtali my ancestor left the house of Jerusalem” (ἀπέστη ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου Ἰεροσολύμων); even here, however, a physical removal is basic, as the northern tribes returned to their tents.

The simplest translation, therefore, is that Jason and his companions left the holy land and the kingdom. The phrase “the holy land” undergoes change over time. In Zech 2:16 it refers to an area larger than Judea; in Wis 12:3 and Ps.-Philo *Ant. Bib.* 19:10 it refers to the land to be given to Israel; it is used in 2 *Bar.* 63:10 to refer to the kingdom at the time of Hezekiah. In 4 *Ezra* 13:48 the phrase refers to a special place where those who are within in its borders will be saved at the coming of the Lord. In *T. Job* 33:5 the holy land refers to the unchangeable world.

“the kingdom.” What is the relation of “holy land” to “kingdom”? Habicht held that “kingdom” here refers to the kingdom of God and therefore implies that “holy land” and “kingdom” are in some sense identical, as does Schwartz. Habicht cited Bickermann,⁴⁸ but Bickermann had previously shown that the official name of the Seleucid Empire was “the kingdom.”⁴⁹ One should also note that, in v. 7, Demetrius is said to be king (βασιλεύοντος Δημητρίου). Heinemann, Abel, and Goldstein see “kingdom” here as referring to the Seleucid kingdom, so that “holy land” would fall within the confines of the Seleucid realm. If one accepts that ἀποστήναι has here a locative meaning, 1:7 would refer to Jason’s withdrawal from Judea and from the Seleucid kingdom.

■ 8 “burnt the gate and shed innocent blood.” Second Maccabees 5:5 does not state that when Jason and his followers stormed Jerusalem, they burned the gate; 8:33 records this act as the work of Callisthenes. According to 1 Macc 1:31, the chief collector of tribute (5:24: Apollonius, captain of the Mysians) burned the city with fire and tore down its houses and surrounding walls. As for shedding innocent blood, Jason is said to have slaughtered fellow citizens mercilessly (5:6) but to have done so in the context of besieging a city. In 1 Macc

45 Abel; Bickermann (*Der Gott der Makkabäer*, 34), Habicht, Goldstein, Schwartz.

46 Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 148.

47 David M. Sluys, *De Maccabaeorum libris I et II [i.e. primo et secundo] quaestiones*, (Amsterdam: J. Clausen, 1904).

48 Bickermann, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, 34.

49 Elias Bickermann, *Institutions des Séleucides* (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 26; Paris: Geuthner, 1938) 3.

[AQ: This is not in the list of short titles of commentaries or bibliographies. Give first name here and add bibliography]

1:38, those stationed in the Akra are said to have shed innocent blood in a treacherous attack, a more appropriate narrative setting for the phrase. Rather than looking for precise instances where the gates of Jerusalem were burned or innocent blood shed, one might recall that these are stock phrases. Burned gates evoke the image of a defenseless city, as the city's enemies can no longer be closed out (Jer 17:27; Isa 45:1 on open gates). Wicked men pour out innocent blood (Isa 59:7; Jer 7:6; 22:3, 17; Ps 106:38 [LXX 105:38]; Prov 6:17), and those wicked men who did so, Manasseh and Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 21:16; 24:4; 2 Chr 36:5 LXX), brought about the destruction and capture of Jerusalem. The perpetrators in 1:8 are thus shown to be wicked traitors and to bring about the destruction of Jerusalem. Since Jason is not said elsewhere to have burned the gates, I once argued that one might take the third person plural verbs "they burned" (ἐπύρισαν) and "they shed" (ἐξέχεαν), as passive.⁵⁰ However, there is no sound grammatical reason for such a reading: the verb "he left" (ἠπέστη) is singular, as Jason is the more important subject,⁵¹ but both he and his followers combine to burn the gate and here the verb is in the plural. The leaving of the land and the treacherous destruction of the city are seen as occurring together. One can find examples in the LXX, following closely the MT, where "and" (καί) introduces an anterior action, for example, Jer 43:20 LXX (= MT 36:20): "And they went in to the king into the court, and they gave the scroll to keep in the house of Elishama." The scroll must have been left in the house of Elishama before the officials went in to report to the king, but this action is placed after the entry into the court. See also Num 17:15.⁵² The Syriac translator made sense of the verse by translating: "After Jason and his companions were sent from the kingdom to the holy land and they burnt the gate." In this translation, Jason is seen as coming into the holy land, as did the collector of tribute in 1 Macc 1:29-49; he is not leaving the land.

"we besought." This verb is connected to "they burnt

the gate and shed innocent blood" by the connective καί. Should it be connected to the temporal clause "from the time that Jason," or does it signal the beginning of the main clause? The most appropriate place for a change from a dependent to a main clause is where the subject of the verbs changes. Here the third person changes to the first person. Καί before "we besought" reflects the use of the Hebrew conjunction waw.⁵³ The Jerusalem Jews' response to the crisis was prayer, and they were heard as Solomon had asked (1 Kgs 8:29-30). "We besought . . . and we were heard" (ἐδεήθημεν . . . καὶ εἰσηκούσθημεν). The action of the Jews and its result reflect linguistically what the Jerusalem Jews asked of their Egyptian kin in v. 5: "hearken to your entreaties" (ἐπακούσαι ὑμῶν τῶν δεήσεων).

The list of rituals here is often taken to refer to the daily ritual offerings and those made weekly. The daily offering consisted of the morning sacrifice of one lamb with "one-tenth of a measure of choice flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering" and a similar evening sacrifice (Exod 29:38-42; Num 28:3-8). The lamps were to be kept lit before the Lord continually (Exod 27:20-21; Lev 24:1-4). The bread of the Presence was to be set out every Sabbath (Lev 24:5-9; Exod 25:30). Goldstein properly asks why there is no mention of incense, as in Exod 30:7-8, in the summary of ritual activity in 2 Chr 13:11, and in the description of what Judas Maccabeus and his followers did when they purified the temple (1 Macc 4:50-53; 2 Macc 10:3). However, the authors of this letter are not putting forward a complete picture of ritual activity—why no mention of the drink offering or of the consecration of the new altar?—but rather are showing how normal ritual activity has been resumed. One might also note that this list of activities seems close to the outline of Leviticus where first a burnt offering is mentioned ("sacrifice" [θυσία]) punctuates the verses in 1:9, 13, 17) and then a grain offering, where the offering shall be of fine flour (σεμίδαλις, in Lev 2:1, 2, 4, 5, 7).

50 Robert Doran, "The Second Book of Maccabees," *The New Interpreter's Bible* (13 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994-2004) 4:190.

51 Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §966.

52 Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. Takamitsu Muraoka; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996) no. 166j.

53 See Anneli Aejmelaesus, *Parataxis in the Septuagint: A Study of the Renderings of the Hebrew Coordinate Clauses in the Greek Pentateuch* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae: Dissertationes humanarum litterarum 31; Helsinki: Suomalainen, 1982) 126-47.

After a description of the sacrificial system and the system of purity come a list of appointed festivals (Leviticus 23) and then the lighting of the lamps and the bread of the Presence (Lev 24:1-9). In Leviticus, the references to incense are sparse. Leviticus 4:7, 18; 10:1 are concerned with the sprinkling of blood on the altar of incense during a purification ceremony; 16:12-13 focuses on the ritual of the Day of Atonement. The four ritual activities mentioned in 2 Macc 1:8 seem to encapsulate the description of ritual activity in Leviticus.

■ 9 “So now” (καὶ νῦν) is best understood here not in terms of a transitional formula (see comment on 1:6) but rather, as used frequently in the Hebrew Scriptures, to introduce an imperative, a decision to be taken after the description of a situation (Gen 50:16-17; 1 Sam 9:6, 13).⁵⁴ Here the authors of the letter have provided the historical background, and now they call for a decision by the Egyptian community.

Imperatival ἵνα is found in Hellenistic Greek. However, Nigel Turner suggests that, given the “wealth [of LXX examples] and the secular poverty of examples, we may claim the imperatival ἵνα as virtually a Semitism.”⁵⁵

The festival of Booths is celebrated in the seventh Hebrew month, Tishri. Kislev is the ninth month of the Hebrew calendar.

■ 10 “in the year 188.” Bickermann, Abel, and Schwartz connect the genitive of the year to the preceding “month of Kislev.” Schwartz argued that normally the date of a letter gives the day in the dative with the month and year in the genitive, as in 11:21, 33. Since he had previously argued in his comment on 1:7 that the letter was written in 169 S.E., he concluded that the year date given here could not be 188 S.E. but must be 148 S.E., which is found in some manuscripts. The Jews in Egypt are therefore being asked to celebrate “the days of Booths of the month Kislev of the year 148 S.E.” Schwartz provides no Hellenistic parallel to this way of referring to a festival.⁵⁶ Just as I argued above on formal grounds that 1:7 could not provide the date of the letter, so too here, in agree-

ment with Goldstein, I propose that the date placed at the end of a letter is meant to be the date of the letter. When the date of a letter is given, normally the year in the genitive comes first, followed by the month and then the day, as in 11:21, 33. I suggest that in transmission the year was kept but not the day and month. On formal grounds, since the letter is quoting a letter from 169 S.E., the date must be 188 S.E.⁵⁷

The year 188 of the Seleucid Macedonian era would run from 9 October 125 to 27 September 124, of the Seleucid Babylonian era from 5 April 124 to 25 March 123.⁵⁸ As the letter calls upon the Egyptian Jews to celebrate in the month of Kislev (Nov.–Dec.), according to the Seleucid Macedonian era it could have been written in 125 or 124, whereas according to the Seleucid Babylonian era it would have to have been written in 124. As I have argued above that the date in 1:7 is according to Seleucid Babylonian reckoning, I would hold that here too the date is according to Seleucid Babylonian reckoning.

No farewell formula is found at the end of this letter, but this absence is not unusual.⁵⁹

General Commentary

Several basic questions need to be answered about this letter: What kind of a letter is it? Who wrote it and why? To whom was it written?

(1) What kind of a letter is the first prefixed letter?

Scholars have dubbed this a festal letter and pointed to parallels in the Hebrew Scriptures (2 Chr 30:1-9; Esth 9:20-32), in the Elephantine corpus (the “Passover” letter),⁶⁰ and in the rabbinic corpus (*t. Sanh.* 2:5-6; *b. Sanh.* 11a-b), where letters were sent out to celebrate a festival. While recognizing that these texts all point to a literary topos, one should also be alert to the differences between them. Some letters are commands from officials. The incident reported in 2 Chr 30:1-9 is found

54 See Laurentin, “We‘attah.”

55 Moulton and Turner, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3:95.

56 Schwartz’s reference to United States commemorations of the Fourth of July and 9/11 is unpersuasive.

57 The fact that 188 S.E. is a less-important year for the history of Israel than 148 S.E., the year of the

rededication of the temple (1 Macc 4:52), is also a *lectio difficilior* argument for accepting it.

58 Parker and Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology*, 42.

59 See Fitzmyer, “Some Notes,” 217.

60 Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 30.

in a description of the reinvigoration of the worship of Yahweh (2 Chr 29:3–31:21) that is not paralleled in the account of the reign of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 18:4-8. The proper celebration of Passover is ascribed to King Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:21-23 (2 Chr 35:1-19), where Josiah commands all the people, “Keep the Passover to the Lord.” Such a command from a king to celebrate a festival may be evidenced also in the fragmentary Passover letter from the Elephantine corpus, dated 419 B.C.E. From an otherwise unknown Judean Hananyah to the garrison of Jews at Elephantine, this letter conveys news of a command from King Darius sent to Arshama, the Persian satrap of Egypt, about the celebration of Passover. Such a letter reinforces the sense of the literary topos in 2 Chr 30:1, where King Hezekiah is said to have written letters to Ephraim and Manasseh. The topos has been used rhetorically to show the division between Israel and Judea, as most of the cities in Ephraim and Manasseh mock and scorn the couriers with their letters, while the cities in Judea have one heart to do what the king and his officials command (2 Chr 30:10-12).

In Esth 9:20-21, Mordechai, now second in command to the Persian king, is said to have written scrolls to all the Jews in the Persian provinces enjoining them to celebrate the festival of Purim. It is a letter of full written authority (Esth 9:29). Yet, as it introduces a new feast, the letter contains a summary of important recent events (9:24-26); the Jews accept the proposal (9:23, 27: ויקבלו, προσεδέξαντο, προσεδέχοντο). The Greek verb is the same as that found in inscriptions from Magnesia on Maeander calling on other cities to celebrate a festival. The pattern remains one of a high official enjoining a festival.

Some letters do not enforce or command. The pattern in the rabbinic passages is different. They are not precisely about the celebration of a festival but about ritual and calendar events. In this they may be similar to the Passover letter from Elephantine. Rabbi Gamaliel is said to have written letters, but they simply state what the proper time for observing the festival is. These letters, said to exemplify the humility of Rabbi Gamaliel, contain a prayer for well-being (“May your peace increase,”

שלומכון יסגא). The body of the letters to Upper and Lower Galilee and to the south does not contain any imperative to collect, in this case, the tithe, but says, “We make known to you that the time of ‘removal’ has arrived.” To those in Babylon and Media, the rabbi wrote that “the doves are still tender and the lambs still too young and the crops not yet ripe and the affair was pleasing in my sight and in the sight of my colleagues and I added to this year thirty days” (*b. Sanh.* 11b). Here the tone is not that of an order but rather that of a respectful statement of facts.

Outside Jewish tradition, one finds several examples of Greek cities inviting other cities to participate in a festival to commemorate the rescue of a temple or the liberation of a city-state. One of the best examples of this process is evidenced by more than seventy inscriptions found at Magnesia on Maeander. A festival had been established in 220/219 B.C.E. in honor of Artemis Leucophryene (“White-browed”), for her epiphany to save the city during an incursion of the Gauls, who remained a menace even after their defeat by Attalus I around 237 B.C.E. After a temple to Artemis had been built, the Magnesians sent envoys in 206 B.C.E. to invite numerous Greek cities to participate in a festival for the goddess. The inscriptions at Magnesia include letters from kings and votes from cities that recognized the festival as ranking with the Pythian games and promised to send envoys and participants for the athletic and musical festivals. The envoys, according to the decree from the city of Epidamnus, in Illyria,

delivered the decree and they discoursed with great distinction as they set forth, through the oracles of the god, through the poets and through the historians writing the acts of the Magnesians, the epiphany of Artemis, the help given by their ancestors to the temple in Delphi when they conquered in battle the barbarians who were marching to seize and plunder the property of the god, and the good service they did to the Cretan community by putting an end to the civil war. They also set forth the good services done to the other Greeks.⁶¹

61 Otto Kern, *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander* (Berlin: W. Spemann, 1900) no. 46, lines 7–14, p. 36.

Here we see that the envoys have marshaled all their facts, providing elaborate footnotes to their discourse before the assembly of Epidamnos. One should imagine that the bearers of this first letter in 2 Maccabees would have orally communicated and expanded upon its theme to the major Judean communities in Egypt. They, too, would have stressed the epiphany of Yahweh, and their exposition could have referred to historians of the events, like Jason of Cyrene. But one should note that the rhetoric of the letter in 1:1-10a leads the audience in a direction other than that of the epitome of Jason's work and if the envoys were true to the letter's rhetoric, their exposition would have sounded different from that of the epitome, for there is no mention of Antiochus IV or of any Seleucid threat, no mention of an epiphanic deliverance. The disaster came upon the Jews in Jerusalem solely because of Jason the high priest. We will explore later why this letter may have taken this approach.

This letter therefore falls within a range of letters written to bring about participation in a festival. In the Elephantine Passover letter and those of Mordechai, the festival has to be celebrated by the recipients of the letter; the letters of Hezekiah call the Israelites to celebrate the festival in Jerusalem (2 Chr 30:1); in the Greek tradition, envoys were sent from various cities to represent their city at the celebration in the city of the senders. The Elephantine Passover letter and those of Hezekiah and Mordechai are orders to celebrate; the letters from Magnesia on Maeander are requests to participate. In Esther, both elements are combined: Mordechai enjoins the celebration, and the recipients accept the proposal to celebrate Purim in their own cities. The festival at Magnesia, the festival of Purim, and the feast of Sukkoth in Kislev are all recently established festivals, whereas the others are traditional festivals. Since the letter in 1:1-10a is a request to celebrate a recently established festival, it appears closer to the Magnesians correspondence. However, as the letter wants the recipients to celebrate the festival in their own community, it also diverges from the Magnesians tradition. It is also not an invitation to celebrate a new festival, for at the time of the letter's composition Hanukkah had been celebrated for over

twenty years. It is interesting to note that three of the inscriptions at Magnesia from cities in Pergamon are dated fifty years after the inauguration of the festival.⁶²

(2) Who wrote the first prefixed letter?

Although John Hyrcanus had assumed the high priesthood on the death of his father, Simon, in February 135 or 134 B.C.E. (1 Macc 16:24), no mention is made of either John Hyrcanus or the council of the Jews in this letter of 125/124 B.C.E. Later rabbinic statements are sometimes adduced to show that the king and the high priest were not involved in liturgical decisions (*t. Sanh.* 2:15; *m. Roš Haš.* 2:7).⁶³ Even if these statements could be reliably retrojected to the Hasmonean era, however, they concern only the question of determining whether a year should be intercalated. One would expect the head of a community to be involved in the writing of a letter requesting another community to celebrate a recently established festival. There is no indication that John Hyrcanus forwent any of his privileges as high priest. Rather, here all marks of hierarchy within the community are effaced to emphasize the solidarity among all Jews.

But why was the letter written in 124 B.C.E.? The historical details of this period are scanty, so any suggestions must be extremely tentative. What information we have about these years is political, concerning either internal politics or international relations. Given the state of our knowledge, one is tempted to place the first letter within this political framework and ask what political motivations may have lain behind its composition. This is a proper question, but it should not blind us to the possibility of other motivations of which we have no knowledge—personal and religious—which could have prompted the writing.

(3) To whom was the first prefixed letter written?

The question of the historical situation of the senders cannot be divorced from the historical situation of the recipients.⁶⁴ The replacing of Jerusalem under Seleucid control by Antiochus VII Sidetes in 131/130 B.C.E. had driven home to John Hyrcanus that his desired independence depended on a weak Seleucid power. When

62 Ibid., nos. 85–87.

63 See Elias Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* (AGJU 9; Leiden: Brill, 1976–86) 2:147–48; Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 139.

64 For a fuller account of the events summarized here, see Édouard Will, *Histoire politique du Monde hellénistique (323–30 av. J.-C.)* (2 vols.; Annales de l'Est. Mémoire 30, 32; Nancy: Berger-Levrault, 1966,

Antiochus VII Sidetes was killed, the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II Physcon supported Alexander Balas against the returned Demetrius II, who was put to death in 126/125 B.C.E. When Alexander showed signs of independence, Ptolemy supported Antiochus VIII Grypos, and in 123 B.C.E. Alexander was put to death. After the death of Antiochus VII, Hyrcanus is said to have extended his control north, south, and east (Josephus *Ant.* 13.254-258) and to have faced no threat from the Seleucids (Josephus *Ant.* 13.267, 270-274). However, he no doubt realized that with Demetrius II dead, the power of Alexander Balas could be curtailed only through the Ptolemies.

Unfortunately, we know little about the Jews in Egypt during the turbulent time of Ptolemy VIII. We know from papyri that Jews were spread throughout Egypt in all kinds of occupations—as soldiers, farmers, police, tax gatherers (*CPJ* 1:11-19)—so one must always be cautious and not assert that there was a single attitude toward this disparate group. Josephus (*Ap.* 2.49-56) mentions the importance of the Judean generals under Ptolemy Philometor and Cleopatra II, Onias and Dositheos, and of their support of Cleopatra II against Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II Physcon in 145 B.C.E. He embellishes this report with a story of a miraculous deliverance of the Jews in Alexandria, an event also known from 3 *Maccabees* but there placed in the time of Ptolemy IV Philopator. For the rest of the reign of Ptolemy VIII down to 116 B.C.E., we possess two inscriptions that dedicate synagogues to Ptolemy VII and to both of his queens.⁶⁵ Later, under Cleopatra III, the Jews Chelkias and Ana-

nias were held in high favor (Josephus *Ant.* 13.284-87, 353-54). There is no evidence that the Jews in Egypt or Alexandria supported Cleopatra II in her break with Ptolemy VIII, nor that Ptolemy VIII took vengeance on them when he retook Alexandria in 127 B.C.E. Scholars like Walter Otto have presupposed that the Jews in Egypt were a monolithic group and that the Judean generals would have remained loyal to Cleopatra II through thick and thin, even though it is known that later they supported her rival, Cleopatra III.⁶⁶ The Judean soldiers were based outside Alexandria, and their loyalty probably reflected their own best interests. There is no evidence to support the assumption about the loyalty of the Judean generals to Cleopatra II and every reason to question the assumption about the monolithic nature of the Jews in Egypt.

Given the diffusion of Jews throughout the whole of Egypt,⁶⁷ the greeting in the letter in 1:1-10a presupposes some system of communication among the various communities “from the slope into Libya to the boundaries of Ethiopia” (Philo *Flacc.* 43). Presumably, messengers would have been sent out to announce the request from Jerusalem. Although the dispersion of Jews throughout Egypt is well known, scholars still often interpret the addressees of the letter in 1:1-10a as dominated by the Jews settled in the Heliopolite nome at Leontopolis and as being chided for their “sin” in building a temple at Leontopolis.⁶⁸ However, there is no indication that the Jews in Egypt lost their attachment to the temple in Jeru-

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1967) 306, 356-66; Peter Green, *From Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 1; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 533-44.

65 *SB* 1, §5862; 4, §7454; possibly also *OGIS* 1:96 and 129, though doubted by Walter Otto (*Zur Geschichte der Zeit des 6. Ptolemäers: Ein Beitrag zur Politik und zum Staatsrecht des Hellenismus* [Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1934] 66 n. 3) but accepted by Leo Fuchs (*Die Juden Ägyptens in ptolemäischer und römischer Zeit* [Vienna: Rath, 1924] 14-15).

66 See Walter Otto, *Zur Geschichte der Zeit des 6. Ptolemäers: Ein Beitrag zur Politik und zum Staatsrecht des Hellenismus* (Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1934).

67 *CPJ* 1:3-4; appendix 1.

68 We know little about this temple at Leontopolis. Josephus, our main source, provides two divergent accounts of its founding. He gives five motivations for the building of a temple at Heliopolis: (1) to fulfill the prophecy of Isa 19:19 (*Ant.* 13.64; *Bell.* 7.432); (2) to make the Jews allies of the Ptolemies and hostile to the Seleucids (*Bell.* 7.423-25); (3) to unite the Jews in Egypt (*Ant.* 13.65-66); (4) for Onias IV to gain glory for himself (*Ant.* 13.63); and (5) to set up a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem (*Bell.* 7.431). In his discussion of the temple at Leontopolis as modeled on the one in Jerusalem, Josephus evidences his dislike of it. Apart from the first motivation, the other four seem supplied by Josephus. In *Bell.* 7.432, he grudgingly admits the Isaian prophecy, but accepts it more fully in *Ant.* 13.64. One suspects that this verse of Isaiah may

salem because of the temple at Leontopolis,⁶⁹ and they continued to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Ananias, a descendant of Onias IV, advised Cleopatra III not to launch an attack on Jerusalem (Josephus *Ant.* 13.352–55). Whatever the position of the temple at Leontopolis among Jews in Egypt, it was the military base of the Oniads, who were active in Ptolemaic politics. Any letter sent from Judea in 124 B.C.E. to the Jews throughout Egypt would have come to their attention.

Herein lies the answer, I think, to the form and content of the letter. The form, a letter of petition, implies recognition of the higher status of the group petitioned. The Jews in Jerusalem recognized that whoever sat on the Seleucid throne depended on Egyptian support or neglect, and so they wrote to their brethren in Egypt, some of whom were powerful players on the Egyptian scene. As noted before, there is no evidence either that the Oniads were curtailed in any way or that Jews throughout Egypt were persecuted on the return of Ptolemy Physcon in 127 B.C.E. That the content of the letter blames Jason the high priest for all the troubles in Judea is put in a new light if we recall that the same Jason ousted Onias III from the high priesthood (4:7-10). Jason had also gone to Egypt after his abortive attack on Jerusalem to regain power (5:5-8). The highly colored and condensed account of this incident in 5:7-10 specifies neither when Jason arrived in Egypt (probably after the repulse of Antiochus IV from Egypt by the Romans in July 168 B.C.E.) nor how long he stayed. We cannot reconstruct the reception he was given in Egypt, but as a former high priest exiled by the enemy of the Ptolemies and with an openness to Greek culture, Jason may have found a friendly reception, if not among the Oniads in Heliopolis. The letter of 124 B.C.E. would thus be a pro-Oniad, anti-Jason document appealing to the powerful

base of the Oniads in Egypt to celebrate the feast of Sukkoth in Kislev. Such motivation could lie behind both the letter of 143 B.C.E. and that of 124 B.C.E.

As noted above, the letter of 124 B.C.E. would have been written as John Hyrcanus was extending his control over territories on the borders of Judea and as the Seleucid ruler was dependent on Ptolemaic support. The letter would have been appropriate, as John Hyrcanus sought political support for his independence. The rhetoric of the letter is most interesting. First, the letter has the respectful form of a letter of petition. Second, neither high priest nor senate is mentioned, unlike another letter said to have been sent under Jonathan (1 Macc 12:6). Rather, all signs of hierarchy and status are missing, as is any reference to the territories captured by Jonathan. The emphasis remains squarely on the homeland of Judea with its capital, Jerusalem. Third, the letter is top-heavy, with over half given to the prayer for the well-being of the Jews in Egypt. Within this prayer, the mention of God's remembering his covenant in the presence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob conjures up the exodus tale, the foundation narrative of the Israelite nation and worshiping community, a story inextricably bound to Egypt. The description of the cultic practices of the Jews is metonymic, the part standing for the whole. It reinforces this sense of shared community, as in the exodus narrative Yahweh had led the Israelites out of Egypt to worship on his holy mountain. Finally, the letter makes no reference to the persecution by Antiochus IV and the tumultuous surrounding events but mentions only actions of Jason the high priest. The rhetoric strongly appeals to the bonds of kinship as well as emphasizes the rejection of Jason.

As for the letter of 143 B.C.E., it would have been written as Simon was building up the strongholds of Judea

have been used by the proponents of the Heliopolis temple. However, since the temple had a history of around two hundred years, one cannot be sure it was part of the motivation of Onias IV for building. The introductory formula in Isa 19:19, "on that day," with its eschatological overtones and the prediction of cooperation between Egypt and Assyria in Isa 19:23 might be associated with the expectations found in *Sib. Or.* 3:652-56. If the Isaianic text was used at the time of Onias IV, it might well fit with Ptolemy VI Philometor's designs on Syria, almost realized in 145 B.C.E. (1 Macc 11:13).

69 *Letter of Aristeas; 3 Maccabees; Sib. Or.* 3:657-731, 767-80, 564-67, 286-94.

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(1 Macc 13:33), when Demetrius II and Tryphon were struggling against each other for the Seleucid throne, and as the Jews prepared to claim independence (1 Macc 13:41-42). This would have been an excellent time to write to Egypt to ask their brethren to celebrate the festival marking the beginning of their freedom. The letter's

emphasis on Jason as the bad guy would have helped squelch any hint that the Jews in Jerusalem were promoting independence movements outside Judea. Since we have only this snippet from the letter of 143 B.C.E., little more can be said of it.