CHAPTER THREE

THE HASMONEAN REVOLT AND THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF MENELAUS

Introduction

In the previous chapter an attempt has been made to set forth the sequence of the events in Judea down to 167. Various socio-political, economic, juridical, cultural and religious factors which led to a chain of revolts have been highlighted. The struggles for the control of the temple developed into religious and cultic disputes. By the time of the Hasmonean revolt it had involved most of the temple priesthood.

The origins and the aim(s) of the Hasmonean revolt are the primary focus of this chapter. The period under study is between 166 and 162, when the high priest Menelaus was arrested. It is necessary to understand the nature of this revolt and its significance for the institution of the Hasmonean high priesthood. Three main questions will guide the present chapter: First, what attitude did the Hasmoneans have towards Menelaus and the temple authorities? Second, what impact did the policy of this high priest have on the Hasmonean revolt? Third, how did the Hasmoneans view the Seleucid dominion after 167?

The importance of this treatise is twofold: First, it will study the Hasmonean revolt in relation to the high priestly office in Jerusalem and in the context of the diplomatic relations of the high priest Menelaus with the Seleucid royal chancellery. Second, special attention will be paid to the role of Judas in the revolt, especially his control of the temple between December of 164 and early 162. The results of this second point will also serve as a basis for the discussion of the alleged high priesthood of Judas in the next chapter.

1. The Beginnings of the Hasmonean Revolt

Unlike the revolts discussed in the previous chapter, the Hasmonean revolt under the leadership of ᾿Ιούδας (Yehudah) Μακκαβαῖος developed in the countryside (2 Macc 8:1–7; cf. 5:27). It is reasonable to place its
beginning after December 6 of 167 (cf. 1 Macc 1:54), and very probably before the reported death of Mattathias in 166 (2:70).

Against whom did the Hasmoneans revolt? Neither First nor Second Maccabees explicitly state that the five Hasmonean brothers (cf. 1 Macc 2:2–5) fought against the government of the high priest. Their enemies are identified with Gentiles (1 Macc 2:10, 12, 40, 48, 66, 68; 3:10, 25–26, 52–53, 58), and Jews qualified as “sinful” (2:44; cf. 1:34), “lawless” (2:44, 48; 3:5–6; 7:5), or “impious” (3:8, 15; 7:5). The contemporary author of Dan 11:32 refers to “breakers of the covenant” (מהרשים ברית) but never mentions the Hasmoneans explicitly.¹

A unification occurred between the Hasmoneans and a certain assembly of Hasideans (ᾼσιδαιών) defined as “men of strength” (1 Macc 2:42; cf. 2 Macc 14:6). The identity of these people has been the object of long debates, and no convincing identification has yet been offered.² From the meager evidence First and Second Maccabees provide, it seems that the Hasideans were well known in Judea.

The first description of battles in which Judas is portrayed as the leader of the rebellions comes from 1 Macc 3:10–26, but this is not contained in Second Maccabees (cf. 8:5–7). It narrates two such battles: one with a certain Apollonius who came with an army from Samaria (1 Macc 3:10–12);³ the second with a certain Seron at Beth-Horon (3:13–26).⁴ The provenance of these commanders indicates that by this time the Jerusalem Akra alone was unable to decide the issue. First Maccabees 3:15 adds that Seron was joined by an “army of impious,” referring probably to forces sent from Jerusalem. Apollonius was reportedly killed by Judas while Seron fled into the land of Philistines (3:11, 24). In both cases, it appears to have been rather an ambush attack. Some historians defend the historicity of both stories.⁵

¹ The same expression is found in 1QM i 2. For Ibba, “Rotolo della Guerra,” 44, 46, it refers to the same group as in 1 Macc 1:11, i.e. Hellenizing Jews.
² For a survey of views, see Sievers, Hasmoneans, 38–40. On the problematic use of the term `Ἀσιδαῖοι, see Kampen, Hasideans, 45–63.
³ Usually identified either with the μεριδαρχῆς in Ant. 12.261, or with the Mysian commander in 2 Macc 5:24/1 Macc 1:29. Abel, Maccabées, 55–56, followed by Bar-Kochva, Judas, 202–3, combines the two views.
⁴ On Apollonius, see Bengtson, Strategie, II, 170–72; Bar-Kochva, Judas, 133; Gera, Judaea, 231–33. The ascent of Beth-Horon was located about half way on the northern road which connected Lydda to Jerusalem. See further Fischer et al., Roman Roads, II, 135–39.
⁵ For instance Bar-Kochva, Judas, 199–201, 207–8. The author admits though the inferiority of the description of the battle with Apollonius.