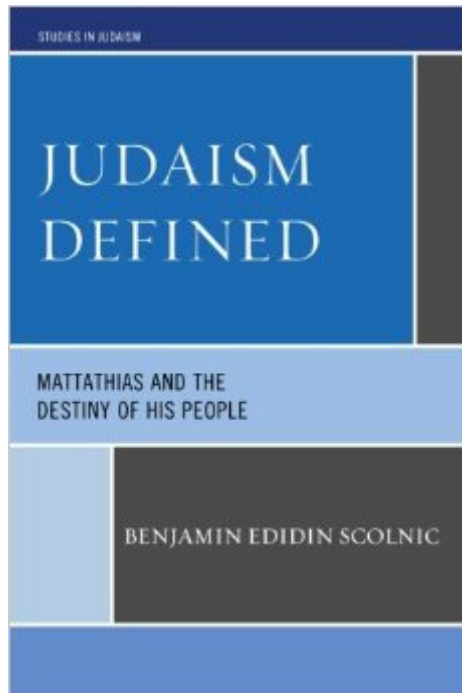


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Judaism Defined: Mattathias And The Destiny Of His People (Studies In Judaism)



Synopsis

Scholars have questioned every aspect of the story of Mattathias in 1 Maccabees; the revisionist narrative turns Mattathias and his Maccabees from the heroes of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah and idealistic fighters for religious freedom, into merely ambitious men who ruthlessly strove for power and usurped the high priesthood of Judaea. Dr. Benjamin Edidin Scolnic takes a fresh, unbiased approach to every element of the story: the incident at Modeʿan, Mattathias's priestly credentials and their implications for his beliefs, the meaning of personal ambition and the greater ambition to create the Jewish kingdom promised by the sacred biblical texts, the meaning of circumcision in his time, and the decision to fight on the Sabbath. Mattathias's actions of zealous violence, as controversial as they were in both his day and as they often are seen today, were primarily for the preservation of his religion and people. Dr. Scolnic asserts that it was Mattathias who defined Judaism and Jewishness for his time.

Book Information

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This book is primarily a commentary on parts of 1 and 2 Maccabees, often (but not always) focusing on the differences between them. For example: 1 Maccabees has Mattathias (father of the Maccabee brothers) start the rebellion, while 2 Maccabees ignores him. Scolnic finds 1 Maccabees more plausible, and discusses 1 Macc.'s treatment of Mattathias in great detail. He notes that 1 Macc. has a Hellenistic streak, in that Mattathias tells his sons that they shall win "great glory"- a

value that is more commonly emphasized in Greek literature than in Jewish literature. By contrast, 2 Macc. is a bit more pious in that it emphasizes the afterlife more and worldly glory less.*Why did Antiochus punish circumcision? Scolnic notes that in addition to being a hot-button issue, it was more easily discoverable than other Jewish rituals. And for the same reason, the Maccabees forced circumcisions when they took over.*1 Macc. suggests that Hellenist Jews disguised their circumcision and engaged in naked athletic contests with Greeks, while 2 Macc. is more ambiguous about such things. Scolnic prefers the former source, reasoning that if Jews sent a delegation to Greek games (as 2 Macc. admits) they must have participated, and if they participated they would have looked as Greek-like as possible to avoid ridicule. Not wrong but a bit speculative to say the least. Why, then, does 2 Macc. not discuss such behaviour? Scolnic suggests that it wants to emphasize martyrdom more and Jewish bad behavior a little less.*Why were Jews willing to martyr themselves for circumcision in response to Antiochus's edicts? Scolnic discusses other Jewish literature, and suggests that some Jews thought their salvation in their afterlife was at stake.*1 Macc.

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