



# **First and Second Maccabees (NEW COLLEGEVILLE BIBLE COMMENTARY: OLD TESTAMENT)**

*Daniel Harrington SJ*

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These accounts of the Maccabean revolt, by which the sons of Mattathias reclaimed the temple of Jerusalem, tell an important story of the founding of the Jewish people. "The Hammerers" is the meaning of the nickname "Maccabees," given to Mattathias's sons, who lived in a time of revolution. Empires struggled for control of Greece, Egypt, and Asia, and the small population of Jews tried to preserve their claim to Judea. The five brothers also made heroic contributions to the practice of Judaism. Their rededication of the temple establishes the annual celebration of Hanukkah, and the martyr stories in Second Maccabees emphasize faithfulness to the law of Moses.

The books of First and Second Maccabees are also important for Christians, as in them is told how the Jewish people established the political and religious culture into which Jesus was born. The martyr stories inform the early Christian martyrdoms, and the books are written in Greek, the language in which the Jews of Jesus' time read the Scriptures. As Father Harrington notes, without the Maccabees "the fate of Judaism (and with it Christianity and Islam) was uncertain."

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