

## **Donnybrook**

15 November 2021

### **Welcome**

For the next week, we listen to the first book of Maccabees and you might well wonder why we are being treated to the history lesson. The telling is dramatic but some of the stories are extremely gruesome.

### **Topic**

The first book of Maccabees, helps us understand the emergence of belief in life after death.

### **Steps**

It probably seems strange to us but for most of their ancient history, the Israelites did not believe in life after death. God would be faithful to you in this life and give you blessing, but when you were dead, you were dead. In this they were very different to their neighbours the Egyptians who had a richly elaborate idea of the next world. All this began to change because of the actions of the *Antiochus IV Epiphanes*, named in our first reading.

Antiochus ruled a vast empire, stretching from Syria to India. One of his policies was the elimination of cultural and religious differences. This led to a clash with Judaism and the first real religious persecution in human history (also the first burning of books). He desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, cause great offence. There were two reactions. Some people simply collapsed under pressure and conformed, perhaps most. But some resisted. This led to a rebellion and to martyrdom, as we shall see in the readings on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Martyrdom raised a serious question. If there is no life after death, when can God be faithful to those who have been faithful to him to the point of death? It was at the very point that the Jews expanded their religious imagination to include life after death. This can be observed in 1 Maccabees and in the book of Daniel (from the same period).

### **Conclusion**

This significant development just before the time to Jesus meant that in the first century AD, many did believe in life after death, such as Jesus himself, the Pharisees and Paul while still a Pharisee. We who believe in Jesus risen from the dead, the first fruits of all who sleep, are their spiritual heirs.