

# God in the second book of Maccabees: The connection between words and deeds



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This article focuses on God's image and role in 2 Maccabees. My analysis will build on narratology, especially characterisation, and on the differentiation proposed by Barbara Schmitz in connection with the book of Judith: the distinction between God's role as a character depicted in the narrative (God's acts and statements) and references to God in statements about God by other characters in the narrative. How does this differentiation work out for 2 Maccabees? Does the book describe any miracles performed by God, and if so, do these take place within or outside the normal processes of nature, as God, for example, did according to Joshua 10, 11–14, which reports that God made the sun stand still at Gibeon?

**Contribution:** Firstly, this article presents the results of a narratological analysis of 2 Maccabees. Secondly, since the statements about God and God's actual role are prominent in the book, this analysis is important for establishing the meaning of the book for the narratees, the intended readers. Thirdly, this reading is relevant for theological studies dealing with the image and role of God in the contexts of early Judaism and early Christianity.

**Keywords:** 2 Maccabees; God; miracles; narratology; power; words and deeds.

## Introduction

This contribution in honour of my dear colleague Nicholas Allen focuses on God's image and role in the second book of Maccabees. My analysis will build on narratology in general and on characterisation, especially (eds. De Temmerman & Van Emde Boas 2018), focusing on direct and indirect characterisations of God and on what God does as a character in the narrative. It will take the distinction proposed by Barbara Schmitz in connection with the story of Judith as a point of departure: the references to God in statements by characters in the narrative should be distinguished from God's acts and statements as described in the narrative (Schmitz 2016:218). Judith's glowing statements about God's power (e.g. 9:8–9, 11, 14; 13:7, 19; 16:2, 13), are hardly matched by what God explicitly does in the story (Schmitz 2016:220–222). How does the differentiation between statements about God by actors, the narrator and the actual deeds by God, work out for 2 Maccabees? I will, therefore, revisit 2 Maccabees' passages about God by attempting to differentiate between the perspectives of the narrators and characters in the story, and by elaborating the distinction between statements about God and deeds by God in the narrative. In doing so, I will consider the implied authors of the festal letters in 1:1–2:18 as narrators, and the epitomist as narrator of the historical part of the work (2:19–15:39).

## Statements about God by the narrator, or a character in the festal letters (1:1–2:18)

Focusing on the statements about God, by either the voice of the narrator or words by a character in the narrative, the prominence of prayers in 2 Maccabees becomes quickly apparent, both in the festal letters (1:1–2:18; Herkenne 1904) and the history (2:19–15:39).<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, the first festal letter, which is usually taken as authentic (Bickerman 1933; Doering 2012:160–162; Doran 2012:1–3; Schwartz 2008:1–15), starts with a prayer by the authors of this letter to their addressees, their fellow-Jews in Egypt. The text refers to a prayer in verse 6, but vv. 2–5 read in fact like a prayer (cf. Doering 2012:161). The prayer expresses the hope that God will treat the Egyptian Jews well (καὶ ἀγαθοποιήσαι ὑμῖν ὁ θεός, 1:2) and points to guidelines to worship God in the proper way

1. List of all prayers in 2 Maccabees: 1:1–6; 1:24–29; 2:7–12 (references to prayers); 3:15, 20, 22; 3:31 (reference to prayer); 8:2–4; 8:15; 9:20; 10:4; 10:16–27 (reference to prayer); 10:25–27; 11:6–7; 12:6; 12:15–16; 12:22; 12:28; 12:36; 12:42, 44; 13:10–12; 14:15; 14:34–36; 15:21–24; 15:25–27 (reference to prayer).

and live according to his law and commandments (1:3–4; cf. 2:2–3).<sup>2</sup> It also refers to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (1:2). It presupposes that the covenant relationship is disturbed because it points to a future reconciliation with God: 'may he give ear to your entreaties and become reconciled with you (καὶ καταλλαγείη ὑμῖν). And may he not abandon you during a bad period' (1:5).<sup>3</sup> The prayer presupposes that God will support and deliver the Egyptian Jews if the covenant relationship is intact. What happened with the covenant relationship is not explained, but the idea that this relationship between God and the Jews can be disturbed and restored again underlies the pattern of the narrative of the historical part (e.g. 4:1–10:8; Van Henten 1997:19–36).

Other prayers in the festal letters add an important motif to what we have just seen in 1:2–5, namely that God is said to act as protector and saviour of the Judean Jews. The second and inauthentic letter (Doering 2012:162–163) states in 1:11: 'Because we were saved from great dangers by God, we greatly thank him as the one who draws himself up against a king' (1:11). This introduces yet another motif, which is also prominent in the historical section: God opposes godless and evil kings and is, as a matter of fact, the supreme ruler (below). The king in question here is Antiochus IV, who was killed during his attempt to plunder the temple of Nanaia in Persia (1:13–16). His death is attributed to God: 'In every way is our God to be blessed, who handed over those who acted impiously' (1:17; similarly: 9:4). The letter seems to identify 'those who acted impiously' in 1:17, with Antiochus IV and his friends as plunderers (1:13–16), and 'the ones who drew themselves up in the holy city' (1:12). The reference in 1:12 is only understandable in the light of the history in chapters 3–15. The festal letters, therefore, highlight three aspects of the image of God that are also important in history: God's unique covenant relationship with Israel, God as the saviour of the Jews, and God as supreme ruler. The prayer in 1:24–29 includes petitions to God (vv. 26–29) that build upon God's role as deliverer of Israel. It also calls for a return from the Diaspora. The conclusion of the festal letters makes several statements about God, which by and large correspond with the tenor of the prayer in 1:24–29. God is the saviour of the Jewish people (2:17: 'God saved his entire people'; 2:18: '(God) delivered us from great evils'; cf. 1:2, 4) 'and he is the initiator of the covenant as the giver of the inheritance (τὴν κληρονομίαν) to all' (2:17; cf. 1:2) as promised in the law (2:17). The conclusion expresses the hope that God will soon be merciful again (cf. 1:5, 26) and that he will gather us [the Jews] from (all regions) under the sky to his holy place (2:18; similarly: 1:27–29; 2:7). And, finally, it mentions that God has purified the place (τὸν τόπον ἐκαθάρισεν, 2:18), which refers here to the Temple (also 2:8). The image of God as protector and saviour returns in the historical section, and it is expanded with motifs that present God with various phrases as the ultimate ruler of the universe, but, as we will see, the

2. About the mixture of Greek and Semitic elements in the opening of this letter, see Doering (2012:134–138; 161).

3. Unless indicated otherwise, the translations of passages from 2 Maccabees are my own.

actual description of God's deeds in 2 Maccabees in the historical section is different from the letters.

## Statements about God by the narrator or a character in the historical narrative (2:19–15:39)

Almost the entire repertoire of references to God in 2 Maccabees' historical section can be found in the final chapter, chapter 15. The epitomist of the history frequently emphasises that the God of the Jews observes everything, that he is the supreme ruler in the universe and that he supports the Jews who remain faithful to him in battle after the covenant relationship is restored. This view of God is not only presented by the narrator but also by characters in the narrative, as the beginning of chapter 15 shows, which is set before the final battle between Judas the Maccabee and the Seleucid commander, Nicanor. This passage narrates a discussion between Nicanor and some Jews who are forced to fight on Nicanor's side (15:1–5). This dialogue addresses the question of who the real ruler is, the God of the Jews as ruler of heaven, or Nicanor as ruler of the earth. This theme is also important in the stories of martyrdom and the section on the death of Antiochus IV (2 Macc 9:1–18, e.g. 9:12; Van Henten 1997:169–172). Nicanor is presented here as an enemy of God like Antiochus IV in chapter 7<sup>4</sup>:

... (2) But the Jews who were forced to follow him said: 'You should surely not destroy (them) harshly and savagely but accord honor to the day that is honored in particular with holiness by the One who watches over everything (τοῦ πάντα ἐφορᾶντος)'. (3) But the triple sinner asked whether there is a ruler (δυνάστης) in heaven who had commanded to celebrate the day of the Sabbath. (4) When they declared: 'The living Lord (ὁ κύριος ζῶν) who is ruler (δυνάστης) in heaven is the one who has ordered to observe the seventh day', (5) he said: 'And I am the ruler on earth (Κάγώ ... δυνάστης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) who commands to take up arms ...' (2 Macc 15:2–5)

A text-critical issue is relevant to our discussion. In 15:3 codex A and other manuscripts include the article before δυνάστης. This reading is followed by Hanhart (1976:112) and Doran (2012:286), but Rahlfs (1932:1136), Habicht (1979:277), Goldstein (1983:495), Schwartz (2008:497) and Ehorn (2022:305) leave it out because the article would undermine Nicanor's implicitly sarcastic point that there was no such ruler (Nicklas 2011:1415). Doran maintains the article because it would specify the ruler referred to and constructs a contrast between this ruler in heaven and Nicanor as ruler on earth (Doran 2012:286). This specification is unnecessary since 2 Maccabees 15:2–5 clearly implies such a contrast already, with other statements in verses 2, 4 and 5: 'the One who watches over everything' (v. 2), 'the living Lord who is ruler in heaven' (v. 4), versus 'the ruler on earth' (v. 5). There is, therefore, no need to add the article before δυνάστης in verse 3. Leaving it out turns Nicanor's statement into a sarcastic one, which may enhance the involvement of the narratees in

4. Cf. 2 Maccabees 7:19: 'But do not think that you will get off scot-free after having attempted to fight God'.

this conversation. In any case, the conflict between Nicanor and the Jews commanded by Judas, is put in the framework of a power struggle between earthly rulers and God in his role as king of heaven (cf. 2 Macc 11:4). Nicanor's defeat and his punishment by God, unmistakably demonstrate that God is the highest ruler, as the previous power struggle between Antiochus IV and God implies (2 Macc 5:17–20; 7 and 9:1–18). With his interventions in the affairs of the Seleucid administration, God proves to be 'the decisive factor in history' (Van Henten 1997:165).

Chapter 15 also highlights God being the saviour of the Jewish people, as the name of the old martyr Eleazar and Judas' own brother (Ἐλεάζαρ/Ἐλεάζαρος, 6:18; 8:23) deriving from לעזר The Lord helps' (Goldstein 1983:286) and the watchword, 'The help of God' (θεοῦ βοήθεια, 8:23; cf. 13:15: 'the victory of God'), already implies. The narrator of 2 Maccabees 15 subsequently reports that Judas remains confident that God would support him and his followers in battle (15:7–11), and he encourages his soldiers by pointing to the previous support from heaven (15:8), to previous victories described in the Law and the Prophets (15:9), and the dream appearances of the high priest Onias, and the prophet Jeremiah (15:11–16). Judas expects 'for the present situation that the victory would be theirs through the Almighty One' (ὁ παντοκράτωρ, 15:8; also 1:25; 3:22, 30; 5:20; 6:26; 7:35, 38; 8:11, 18, 24; 15:32), which is another name for God that suggests an opposition between God and earthly rulers, although it was rarely used in Hellenistic ruler ideology (Montevecchi 1999; Schmitz 2009:133–134; 2010:75; 2012:270–275; Ten Kate 2001; Van Henten 1996).<sup>5</sup>

A vision, a dream in an awake state, is the major point of encouragement of Judas' soldiers.<sup>6</sup> The passage briefly depicts how Jeremiah and the deceased high priest Onias, act as heavenly intercessors for the Jewish people. This activity presupposes a posthumous vindication by God for both figures, which may have seemed obvious after a violent death. Onias' violent death is described in 2 Maccabees 4:30–34, but Jeremiah's death is not mentioned in 2 Maccabees. The *Life of Jeremiah*, however, part of the *Lives of the Prophets*, is explicit about Jeremiah's violent death: he was stoned to death by the people (Lif Jer 1.1; cf. 4 Bar 9:21–32; Avemarie, Van Henten & Furstenberg 2023:151–158). The dream has an important function in the narrative with the transfer of the golden sword by Jeremiah to Judas:

[A]nd Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and handed over a golden sword to Judas, and while giving it to him he spoke these words: 'Take the holy sword as a gift from God with which you will crush your opponents'. (2 Macc 15:15–16)

5.R. Feldmeier ('Almighty παντοκράτωρ', *DDD*<sup>2</sup>, 20–23), argues that the title originated within Hellenistic Judaism as a response to the claim of global power by Alexander the Great and subsequent rulers, but it occurs already in a hymn devoted to Isis (*SEG* 8.548) from ca. 80 BCE and has several forerunners referring to the omniscience or universal providence of deities (e.g. παγκρατής, cf. 3 Maccabees 3:22, and πασικράτης; Ten Kate 2001:5–35).

6.The reading ὑπάρ τι (of L 311, followed by Abel (1949:473), Doran (2012:287), and Rahlf's (1932:1137), is the more difficult reading, which may have been corrected in ὑπέρ τι ('beyond measure', 'more than everything') in other MSS, which is followed by Goldstein (1983:498), Hanhart (1976:113) and Schwartz (2008:500). The accusative of ὑπάρ ('appearance', '[waken] vision') is sometimes used as an adverb ('in a waking state'), *LSJ* 1853 s.v. II.

The gift of the sword shows the divine support for Judas and serves as a prelude to the triumph over Nicanor (Van Henten 2007:274–277; differently: Gera 2013:120–126).

Before the actual battle against Nicanor, Judas prays to God in heaven, as he and his companions have done in previous situations (cf. 8:15, 29; 13:10–12). He refers once again to the miraculous defeat of Sennacherib (cf. 2 Ki 18:13–19:35; Is 36–37) with the sending of God's angel, who killed Sennacherib's soldiers (15:22–23; see also 8:19 and 1 Macc 7:41–42). The prayer builds on the analogy between the times of King Hezekiah and the situation of Judas and his soldiers. Judas appeals in this way to a kind of collective archive about the pre-history of the Jews known to him and his soldiers, and as we may assume, also to the intended readers of this passage. He does not refer to Scripture, although the event referred to is recalled in Jewish Scripture as we have seen. Judas calls for a good angel who would frighten the Gentyles, similarly to the angel who brought defeat upon the Assyrians (vv. 22–23; cf. 1 Macc 4:9). God is called here 'Ruler of the heavens' (δυναστα τῶν οὐρανῶν; cf. 8:20; 11:10; 15:8, 34), which recalls the dialogue in 15:1–6. God is also called τερατοποιός ('working wonders': 'the Maccabee ... extended his hands to heaven and called upon the Lord who works wonders', 15:21), a word which occurs only once elsewhere in the Septuagint (3 Macc 6:32; Muraoka 2009:676). Judas finally also refers to God's mighty arm: 'May those who come with blasphemy against your holy people be terrified by the greatness of your arm' (15:24). This phrase echoes biblical language (see esp. Ex 15:16 and Odes 1:16). So, the divine support for Judas the Maccabee and his soldiers, also comes from heaven (8:20; 11:10; 15:8 and especially 15:34). The victory in chapter 15 is attributed to the manifestation of God (ἐπιφάνεια, 15:27), which becomes apparent from the punishment of Nicanor, who was the first victim who had fallen of the enemy (15:28–35).<sup>7</sup> Nicanor's face was hung from the citadel, as a sign of the help of God (φανερὸν τῆς τοῦ κυρίου βοήθειας σημείον).

If we compare chapter 15 with the rest of the historical section, we can observe that the basic picture remains the same, but that details in the other chapters further articulate the image of God in 2 Maccabees 3–15. God is very much supposed to be present and active in the affairs on earth, in line with Deuteronomistic and Sapiential views (Schmid 2012; Steck 1967). Apart from the common titles, θεός ('God') and κύριος ('Lord'), other titles are found, like δεσπότης ('Lord', 'Master'; 5:17, 20; 6:14; 9:13; 15:22) and δυναστής ('Powerful one', 'Master'; 3:28; 12:15, 28; 15:3, 4, 5, 23, 29; cf. 3:24).<sup>8</sup> Such titles evoke associations with earthly rulers and suggest an interplay with the role of kings, as is even more explicitly the case in 3 Maccabees (Schmitz 2010:65–68; 75–79).<sup>9</sup> As we have seen, the contrast between God and Nicanor

7. See also 15:34: τὸν ἐπιφανῆ κύριον.

8. In 2 Maccabees 13:4 the Persian royal title 'King of Kings' (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλέων) for God, is found (Schmitz 2010:76).

9. The overlap in titles for God and titles for earthly kings calls for a separate study, I can only give a few examples here: the κύριος 'Lord' title is found as royal title in Ptolemaic priestly decrees, for example the Rosetta Stone Greek version lines 1–2 (*OGIS* 90), and the σωτήρ 'Saviour' title was common in the dynastic cult of the Ptolemies (Walbank 1984:97).

implies a competition about who the real ruler is. Nicanor's defeat is telling that God appears to be the ruler of heaven and earth, and he is also the 'Great Ruler of the Universe' (12:15). God is also the 'Founder', or 'Creator' (κτιστής) of everything (1:24), or of the universe (τοῦ κόσμου, 7:23; 13:14). This goes far beyond the role of Hellenistic kings as founders of city-states. God is a panoptic deity, who observes as overseer (ἐπόπτης, 3:39; 7:35; *LSJ* 676 s.v.; cf. 7:6; 9:5; 12:22; 15:2; 3 Macc 2:21; Wis 1:1–11):

[W]hat happens on earth and intervenes as the living God in the affairs of humans in accordance with their behaviour, sometimes not immediately, but in the end, he will deliver those who have remained faithful to him and have served him. (2 Macc 7:33; Avemarie et al. 2023:81)

This contrasts God once again with earthly rulers, especially with Antiochus IV, who transgresses the limits of earthly powers in his arrogance. Being 'the actual ruler of heaven and earth ... implies that God has power over life and death as well' (Avemarie et al. 2023:351). This view is presupposed in 6:26 when Eleazar expresses that God could have punished him even after death, had he agreed to participate in the sacrificial meal ordered by the king (Avemarie et al. 2023:351–352).

There is an ambiguity about God's residence: God is clearly the patron deity of the Jerusalem Temple, but he dwells in heaven, according to several passages (2:21; 3:15, 20, 34; 8:20; 9:4; 11:10; 15:3–4, 21, 23, 34), also in passages that concern the Temple (e.g. 3:15, 20). God is sometimes called Heaven and apparently identical with it (e.g. 7:11, 34; 14:34; 15:8; cf. 9:20 and the horseman in 11:10 who is called 'their heavenly ally'). This ambiguity about God's residence becomes explicit in the Heliodorus section: 'for there really is some kind of godly power attached to that place' (διὰ τὸ περὶ τὸν τόπον ἀληθῶς εἶναι τινα θεοῦ δύναμιν). For that is the One who has his dwelling-place in heaven (ὁ τὴν κατοικίαν ἐπουράνιον ἔχων, 3:38–39; cf. 14:34–36).

## Deeds of God described

Switching to the actual description of God's acts in 2 Maccabees, the evidence implies that the image of God and God's actual deeds as described in the narrative, match each other to a great extent. God intervenes directly or indirectly during the conflicts between the Jews and the Seleucids. The nature of his interference depends closely on the behaviour of the protagonists involved (Ego 2007, 2017; Schmitz 2009, 2010; Van Henten 1997:125–186). God acts as the saviour of the Jews who remain faithful to him. Military victories depend on God's support, as chapter 15 shows (similarly: 8:24, 27, 35; 10:1; 11:8–13; 12:11, 16; 13:13–17).

It should be noted, however, that the description of God's interventions is articulated in various ways. God's interference remains implicit in the festal letters. The context in the second

festal letter, implies that God causes the ignition of the fire on the rebuilt altar, by making use of natural processes (1:22, 32), as the Persian King acknowledges afterwards (1:33). God's interference can also be explicit in a rather vague way, as in 9:5 about Antiochus IV's punishment, where God gives the king a blow that leads to his death, which remains unspecified (Schmitz 2016:226). As is well-known, God's intervention is sometimes highlighted as a divine manifestation in the historical section, several times as an actual appearance of superhuman figures (3:24–26, 31–34; 10:29–30; 11:8–12; 12:22; Schmitz 2010). 'One of these passages in the Heliodorus story makes explicit that God causes these epiphanies (3:24):

[W]hen he [*Heliodorus*] with his bodyguards was already on the spot at the treasury, the One who is in power of the spirits and all authority (ὁ τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης ἐξουσίας δυνάστης), caused a great apparition (ἐπιφάνειαν μεγάλην ἐποίησεν), so that all who had been reckless enough to come together, terrified by the power of God, fell in a state of stupor and cowardice.

This is slightly different from what 3:30 tells us: 'after the Almighty Lord had manifested himself' (τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἐπιφανέντος; cf. 3:28 and 3:33: 'you were flogged from heaven').<sup>10</sup> The description of the apparition indicates that superhuman figures appeared, which caused Heliodorus to be paralysed. Their appearance (3:25–26) is rather similar to manifestations of Greek gods or semi-gods (see also 10:29–30; 11:8–10; Doran 1981; Schmitz 2012; Van Henten 1997:245–247), but their performance is attributed to God (3:28–30). The prologue refers already in an unspecific way to apparitions from heaven (τὰς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ γενομένας ἐπιφανεῖας, 2:21) for those who fought honourably and bravely for the Jewish cause. This is matched by several passages in chapters 3–15 (ἐπιφάνεια in 3:24; 5:4; 12:22; 14:15; 15:27; ἐπιφαίνειν in 3:30; 12:9, 22; 15:13; ἐπιφανής in 14:33; 15:34; Lührmann 1971). As argued by Barbara Schmitz, the book's epiphanic motif and its strong focus on God's ability to manifest himself may be triggered by Antiochus IV's self-styling as Epiphanes, 'manifest god' (Schmitz 2012).

There is one passage that is different from the explicit descriptions of God's acts in 2 Maccabees, but still implies God's actual interference. It concerns the recovery of the fire of the altar by Nehemiah in the second festal letter (1:18–36). God's role remains here implicit, which contrasts with the powerful statements about God in the prayer that precedes it (1:24–29). The spontaneous combustion of the altar fire (1:22) is in principle understandable as a natural thing, that does not imply God's interference. The continuation of the narrative specifies the fuel of the fire: the thick water was *nephthai* (*naphtha*; 1:36), which can indeed combust spontaneously (Plutarch, *Alex.* 35.1; Ehorn 2020:44). The narrative context, however, implies with several signals that the ignition of the altar fire is caused by God. Firstly, the narrator tells us that the recovery of the fuel happened with the consent of God: 'After enough years had passed, when God deemed it right ...' (1:20). Secondly, the narrative context implies that the combustion of the altar fire was a miracle. The remains of the altar fire were kept in a pit in which it was refound as thick

(footnote 9 continues...)

The δυνάστης title occurs in the so-called Nomos Inscription of Nemrud Dağ about Antiochus IV of Commagene, 'And whoever [...] takes over this dominion as king or dynast (δυνάστης), may he [...] enjoy the favor of the deified ancestors and all the gods' (*RIG* 735, ll 228–234; transl Dörner). This is reminiscent of earlier Hellenistic universalistic imagery, including the procession staged by Antiochus IV during the festival at Daphne in ca 166 BCE (Strootman 2021:309–310).

10.Cf. also 2 Maccabees (5:1–4; 8:19–20; 15:11–16, 25–36).

water, which Nehemiah had sprinkled over the wood on the altar (1:19–21). It combusted spontaneously because of the warmth of the sun. The presupposition seems to be that this was God's doing because the sun was previously covered by clouds: 'When this took place [the preparation of the altar] and time had passed, the sun shone brightly, which was previously covered by clouds. A great fire inflamed (cf. 2:10; 10:3), so that all were amazed' (1:22; cf. 1:31–32). Thirdly, the implication that the combustion was God's doing, is apparent from the prayer, the sacrifice is accepted as the prayer requests (1:26). Fourthly, the Persian king erected a temple in response to it (1:33–35), which supports the idea of God's interference. The context suggests in this way that a miracle took place through God's intervention in nature, as in some Wisdom passages (Wis 16:16–19; 19:6–7; cf. Dan 3:46–51LXX/Theod; Lebram 1978:12–14; Van Rooden 1986). Fifthly, the name *nephthai*, for the fuel, is associated with the word *nephthar*, which once again implies that the combustion was God's doing (1:36): 'Nehemiah's people called this *nephthar* (νεφθαρ), which in translation means purification (καθαρισμός). It is called *nephthai* (νεφθαί) by most people'. The word *nephthar* may derive from a Hebrew verbal form (the *nif'al* of פטר; Jastrow 1950:2.1157), which may have been associated with the verb פטר (καθαρίζω) through 'al *tiqre* exegesis (cf. Goldstein 1983:181). If so, 2 Maccabees 1:36 would reflect the statements by the narrator of the letter and the epitomist, that God acted as the one who purified the Temple (2:18; 10:7): '... For, he delivered us from great evils and purified the place (καὶ τὸν τόπον ἐκαθάρισεν, 2:18)'; '... the one who enabled the successful purification of his own place (τῷ εὐδώσαντι καθαρισθῆναι τὸν ἑαυτοῦ τόπον) ... (10:7)'.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion: the statements in 2 Maccabees about God imply that God is the protector and saviour of the Jews and the supreme ruler in the universe as well, who opposes godless and evil rulers and commanders. God's actual deeds as described in the narrative, basically match the extremely powerful image implied by the statements about God. God acts mostly indirectly in 2 Maccabees, either through the manifestation of superhuman figures, or through nature (as in 2 Macc 1:18–36). This means that the distinction proposed by Schmitz, which forms the starting point of my analysis, is not confirmed by the evidence in 2 Maccabees. This implies a significant difference from the strong discrepancy between statements about God and actual deeds of God, as described in the narrative found in Judith (see the introduction, above) as well as 1 Maccabees, where God's intervention in human history is implied in several statements by the book's characters, but never described in the narrative (Van Henten, forthcoming). This difference between both Maccabean books may be explained by the different origins of both books: 1 Maccabees was composed in Judea, and the historical section of 2 Maccabees at least, may derive from a minority situation in the Diaspora, that calls for a powerful divine helper.<sup>12</sup>

11. Differently: Doran (1981:8) considers the tradition in 1:36 a *prôtos heuretês* legend.

12. Discussion in Schwartz (2022).

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### Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Author's contributions

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### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, J.W.v.H., upon reasonable request.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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