

## Elephants in the Bible

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The major denominations of Christianity are Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism <[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)>. The Protestant Bible includes the Old and New Testaments while the Catholic and Orthodox Christian Bibles include the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha books.

[Apocrypha: those books of the Bible included in the ancient Greek and Latin versions of the Old Testament, but not in the Hebrew version, and which are excluded from the modern Protestant Bible but included in the Roman and Orthodox Bible (Chambers Dictionary 21<sup>st</sup> Century)].

Maccabees refer to a priestly family of Jews, who organized a successful rebellion against the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV. They also managed to re-consecrate the defiled Temple of Jerusalem. The city State of Jerusalem – Judah lay between the two great powers of Egypt and Syria. Judah became a province of Egypt and Jews wanted independence and hence the rebellion.

Apocrypha books like Maccabees 1 and 2 are believed to have been written in B.C 180-161 and 175-125 respectively. There are additional books such as Maccabees 3 to 8. Here I am confining myself to Maccabees 1 and 2 since only these two books are included in the Bible.

These books describe elephants as animals used in war. In olden days elephants were one of the 'arms' of armies in some elephant range countries of Asia, which were called *Chathuranga Pada* meaning army with four wings. The other three 'arms' being chariots, cavalry, and foot soldiers. But it is interesting to note that the Maccabee books describe elephant use in armies along with soldiers and cavalry in non-range countries.

Some quotes from the books of Maccabees 1 and 2, which were written B.C. 175-125 and 180-161, respectively, with references to elephants are as follows:

- “He attacked Egypt with well organized battalion of chariots, cavalry, elephants and Navy.” (1. Mc. 1:17)
- “He gave half of his army and elephants to him and instructed what is to be done.” (1. Mc. 3:34)
- “And upon the elephants were wooden towers, strong and covered; they were fastened upon each beast by special harness, and upon each were four armed men who fought from there, and its Indian drivers.”
- “He became proud of his tens and thousands of foot soldiers, thousands of cavalry, and eighty elephants.” (2. Mc. 11:4)
- “Each Greek Battalion had 140,000 soldiers, 5000 cavalry, and 22 elephants and 300 chariots armed with sword.” (2. Mc. 13:2)
- “He attacked the king’s tent in the night. He killed 2000 men and one elephant and its driver.” (2. Mc. 13:15)
- “They strategically arranged elephants and cavalry on sides.” (2. Mc. 15:20)

The above quotations suggest that elephants were used regularly if not widely in battles and armies of Egypt, Greece and the Middle East.