

THE SCROLL OF ANTIOCHUS מגילת אנטיוכוס

Translated by
Rabbi David Sedley

A PROJECT
OF
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www.torahlab.org
info@torahlab.org

FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN OF TORAHLAB

Rabbi Yaacov Haber

PRESIDENT

Max Thurm

TRANSLATIONS

Rabbi David Sedley

EDITOR

Bayle Haber

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Rayzel Broyde

Daniella Sopher

FOREWORD

Like the story of Esther, The Scroll of Antiochus is a story about heroes. In it we learn of individuals who with their great dedication and conviction were able to save the Jewish community in Israel, delay the destruction of Yerushalayim by 200 years and topple the powerful Greek army. The sons of Mattisyahu, grandsons of Yochanan the Kohein Gadol, waged war against Antiochus and his governors and eventually succeeded in toppling the Greek forces.

On Chanukah we celebrate the miracle of quality over quantity. The Talmud (Shabbos 21b), emphasizes the miracle of the oil. After the Greek invasion and defilement of the Second Beis HaMikdash, the victorious Maccabees discovered only a small amount of pure olive oil sealed with the distinctive seal of purity of the Kohein Gadol. Even though there was only enough oil to light the Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash for one day, the oil miraculously lasted for eight days. The codifiers of the Siddur, in the *Al HaNissim* prayer, emphasized the miracle of the armed rebellion, which is also the subject of *Megillas Antiochus*.

The lesson of these two stories is that a little bit of purity can go a very long way. It is not the quantity of the oil that matters; it is the quality of its purity.

The greatest developments in world history did not take place because of large armies or mega-corporations. Change for the better is effected by individuals with courage and by heroes of faith. It is not the fire power of an army that wins the battle, but the purity, power and conviction of its cause.

This is the story of the Jewish people. “Not because you are larger than all the nations did God desire you and choose you, for you are the minority of the nations.” (Devarim 7:7). Our ability to be a

‘light unto the nations’ is in direct proportion to the purity of that light.

The scroll that we put before you in this short volume is an ancient historical account of the Chanukah story. The Scroll of Antiochus was originally written in Aramaic. Rabbi Saadia Gaon (ninth century) claimed that the earliest written copy of this scroll can be traced back to the period of Beis Hillel and Beis Shamai, Talmudic scholars who lived one hundred years before the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdash; approximately 30 BCE. However, in his opinion, the scroll originated one hundred years older before that and was originally written by the Maccabees themselves.

For generations it was the custom of communities in Italy and Yemen to read the Scroll of Antiochus in the synagogue on Chanukah (see thirteenth century *Tosfos Rid*; commentary on *Talmud Bavli, Sukkah 42*). It is printed in many Siddurim including *Otzar HaTefillos*.

The Maccabees, like the oil found in the Beis HaMikdash, were a small drop of purity amongst an enormous amount of contamination.

We need heroes in order to survive as a people. The story of Chanukah is a story of pure spiritual heroism. It is our hope that the republishing of this story with a new and modern translation will serve to inspire purity, integrity and the heroism which we so direly need.

Rabbi Yaacov Haber
Jerusalem
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It happened in the days of Antiochus¹, King of Greece². He was a great and mighty king, a powerful ruler whom all the kings obeyed. He conquered many countries and strong kings, destroying their castles, setting fire to their palaces, and capturing their soldiers. Since the time of Alexander the king, there had never been a king as powerful as him on the other side of the Euphrates River³. He built a great city at the edge of the sea as his royal palace, and named it the city of Antiochia, after himself. His general was Bagris⁴ and he also built himself a city, opposite it. He named it Bagris, after himself and these are their names until today.

ANTIOCHUS, A
POWERFUL RULER

In the twenty third year of his reign⁵, which is the two hundred and thirteenth year since the rebuilding of our House of God he determined to attack Yerushalayim.

¹Antiochus IV Epiphanes (the epithet Epiphanes in Greek means "The Shining One") (ca. 215–164 BCE) ruled the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire from 175 BCE until his death.

² He claimed that his dynasty was the legitimate successor to Alexander, who was king of Greece and the entire known world. However, the reality is that after Alexander's death the kingdom was divided into four separate kingdoms who remained at war with one another for the next 200 years. Antiochus was the ruler of the Seleucid dynasty which comprised the area of Mesopotamia along with the Middle East. He is called 'Greek' because he attempted to 'Hellenize' (bring Greek culture and values to) his entire kingdom.

³ He waged war against Ptolemaic Egypt and almost defeated them. He also had plans to conquer Rome, though he never succeeded in doing so. He also proclaimed himself to be a god; coins minted by Antiochus Epiphanes on the reverse side read 'King Antiochus...god made visible'.

ויהי בימי אנטיוכוס מלך יון, מלך גדול וחזק היה ותקיף בממשלתו, וכל המלכים ישמעו לו. והוא כבש מדינות רבות ומלכים חזקים, והחריב טירותם, והיכליהם שרף באש, ואנשיהם בבית האסורים אסר. מימי אלכסנדרוס המלך לא קם מלך כמוהו בכל עבר הנהר. והוא בנה מדינה גדולה על חוף הים להיות לו לבית מלכות, ויקרא לה מדינת אנטיוכיא על שמו. וגם בגריס משנהו בנה מדינה לנגדה, ויקרא לה בגריס על שמו, וכן שמותן עד היום הזה.

בשנת עשרים ושלוש שנים למלכו, היא שנת מאתים ושלוש עשרה שנים לבנין בית האלוהים, שם פניו לעלות לירושלים.

⁴ The name Bagris only appears in the Scroll of Antiochus. We have no other records of a general or a city by this name. There was a general called Bacchides (mentioned in Maccabees I 7:8) who marched against Yerushalayim at the instruction of King Demetrius who ruled the Selucid empire after Antiochus. In Josephus' War of the Jews (chapter 1:2) Bacchides is described as the general of Antiochus.

⁵ This is hard to understand historically, as he only ruled for 11 years. It is most likely that the war against Yerushalayim began after his defeat in Egypt, approximately 168 BCE. This date is 19 years since the death of Antiochus III. Perhaps the author of this scroll thought that Antiochus III was the immediate predecessor or Antiochus IV. According to Seder HaDoros he conquered the land of Israel in the year 3460, which is almost 100 years earlier than minted coins from Antiochus's reign. However, Seder HaDoros also claims that the revolt of the Chashmonaim began in 3622 (139 BCE) which is later than historical documentation allows.

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Therefore he said to his officers “You know that the Jews of Yerushalayim are in our midst. They do not offer sacrifices to our gods and they do not follow our religion and they abandon the rites of the king to follow their own rituals. They also look forward to a day when the kings and rulers are destroyed, saying, ‘When will our own king rule over us, and we will rule the land and the sea and the whole world will be given into our hands’. It does not give honor to the king to leave them on the face of the earth. Now let us come and ascend against them and annul the covenant that their God made with them; Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Bris Milah”. This was good in the eyes of his ministers and in the eyes of all his soldiers.

At that time Antiochus arose and sent Nikanor⁶ his commander, with a huge army and many people. He came to the city of Yehuda – to Yerushalayim. He slaughtered a huge number of people and built an altar in the Beis HaMikdash in the place where the God of Israel had said to His servants the prophets “There I will rest My Presence forever.”⁷ In that place they slaughtered a pig and brought its blood into the holy sanctuary.

It happened when Yochanan ben Matisyahu the Kohein Gadol⁸ heard that such a deed had been done, he was filled with fury and anger and his face changed color. He took advice within himself as to

⁶ Nikanor the son of Patroclus, is described in Maccabees II (9:9) as one of the special friends of King Ptolemy of Egypt.

⁷ This is based on the words of the Amida prayer, ‘May You return to Yerushalayim in compassion and may You rest within it as You have spoken’.

מגילת אנטיוכוס

ויען ויאמר לשריו: הלא ידעתם כי יש עם היהודים אשר בירושלים בינינו. לאלהינו אינם מקריבים, ודתינו אינם עושים, ודתי המלך עוזבים לעשות דתם. וגם הם מייחלים ליום שברון המלכים והשלטונים, ואומרים ‘מתי ימלוך עלינו מלכנו, ונשלוט בים וביבשה, וכל העולם ינתן בידינו’. אין כבוד למלכות להניח לאלה על פני האדמה. עתה בואו ונעלה עליהם, ונבטל מהם הברית אשר כורת להם: שבת ראש חודש ומילה. וייטב הדבר בעיני שריו ובעיני כל חילו.

באותה שעה קם אנטיוכוס המלך וישלח את ניקנור משנהו בחיל גדול ועם רב. ויבוא לעיר יהודה לירושלים. ויהרוג בה הרג רב, ויבן במה בבית המקדש, במקום אשר אמר אלוהי ישראל לעבדיו הנביאים שם אשכן שכינתי לעולם, במקום ההוא שחטו את החזיר, ויביאו את דמו לעזרת הקודש.

ובהיות זה, כאשר שמע יוחנן בן מתתיהו כהן גדול כי זה המעשה נעשה, נמלא קצף וחמה, וזיו פניו

⁸ Yochanan was the third son of Matisyahu. It is unclear whether he was Yochanan the High Priest mentioned in the Talmud, who served for 80 years and became a Sadducee at the end of his life (Brachot 29a). In the Al HaNissim prayer we say Matisyahu ben Yochanan the High Priest. The son must be named for his grandfather.

ANTIOCHUS DECIDES TO ASCEND TO YERUSHALAYIM TO WAGE WAR AGAINST THE JEWS.

A HUGE ARMY IS SENT TO YERUSHALAYIM. MANY ARE KILLED, AN ALTAR IS BUILT IN THE BEIS HAMIKDASH AND A PIG IS SLAUGHTERED IN THE SANCTUARY.

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what could be done about this. Then Yochanan ben Matisyahu made himself a sword with a double blade. It was two zeres long and one zeres wide⁹ and he concealed it under his clothing. He came to Yerushalayim and stood in the gate of the king. He called to the gatekeepers and said to them, “I am Yochanan ben Matisyahu. I came to appear before Nikanor”. The gatekeepers and the guards came and said to Nikanor “The Kohein Gadol of the Jews is standing at the entrance” Nikanor answered and said to them “Let him come in”.

Then Yochanan was brought before Nikanor. Nikanor said to Yochanan “You are one of the rebels who rebelled against the king and who does not want peace in the kingdom”. Yochanan replied to Nikanor and said “My master, I am he, now I have come before you. Whatever you wish I shall do.” Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan “If you will do what I wish, take a pig and slaughter it on the altar. Then you may wear royal robes and ride on the king’s horse and be as one of the king’s close friends.” When Yochanan heard this he answered deviously. “My master, I am afraid that the Israelites will hear what I have done. They will stone me with rocks! Please remove all the people from before you, lest they make it known.” So Nikanor sent out every man from the place.

Then Yochanan ben Matisyahu cast his eyes to the

Yochanan ben Matisyahu armed with a concealed sword comes to Yerushalayim to appear before Nikanor.

Nikanor asks Yochanan to slaughter a pig on the altar. Yochanan asks for a private audience with him.

⁹ A zeres is approximately 1 foot/30 cm.

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נשתנה, ויוועץ בליבו מה שיוכל לעשות על זה. ואז יוחנן בן מתתיהו עשה לו חרב, שתי אמות ארכה וזרת אחת רחבה, תחת בגדיו עטופה. ויבוא ירושלים, ויעמד בשער המלך, ויקרא לשוערים. ויאמר להם: אני יוחנן בן מתתיהו באתי לבוא לפני ניקנור. ואז באו השוערים והשומרים, ויאמרו לו: הכהן הגדול מהיהודים עומד בפתח. ויען ניקנור ויאמר להם: בא יבוא

ואז יוחנן הובא לפני ניקנור. ויען ניקנור ויאמר ליוחנן: אתה הוא אחד מן המורדים אשר מרדו במלך, ואינם רוצים לשלום מלכותו. ויען יוחנן לפני ניקנור ויאמר: אדוני, אני הוא, עתה באתי לפניך, אשר תרצה אעשה. ויען ניקנור ויאמר ליוחנן: אם כרצוני אתה עושה, קח חזיר ושחטוהו על הבמה, ותלבש בגדי מלכות, ותרכב על סוס המלך, וכאחד מאוהבי המלך תהיה. וכאשר שמע יוחנן השיבו דבר: אדוני, אני ירא אנוכי מבני ישראל, פן ישמעו כי עשיתי כן וסקלוני באבנים. עתה יצא כל איש מלפניך, פן יודיעום. אז ניקנור הוציא מלפניו כל איש

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Lord of Heaven and prayed before His God. He said “My Lord and Lord of my fathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Please do not allow me to fall into the hand of this non-Jew, for if he kills me he will go and offer praise in the Temple of Dagon his god¹⁰ and will say ‘My god gave him into my hand’.” At that moment he took three strides forward and stabbed the sword into Nikanor’s heart and threw his corpse in the holy sanctuary before the Lord of Heaven.¹¹

Yochanan prays for salvation and kills Nikanor. He throws the corpse into the sanctuary.

Yochanan cried out and said, “My Lord, do not consider this as a sin even though I killed him in the sanctuary. Now also give us all his men that came with him to cause pain to Yehuda and Yerushalayim.” Then Yochanan ben Matisyahu went out on that day and fought with the people and slaughtered very many of them. The number of people who were killed on that day was 772,000, who were killed by their own allies. When he returned he built a pillar in his name and he was called ‘Maccabee who kills the strong’.

Yochanan leads the Jews out to battle and is victorious.

When King Antiochus heard the news that Nikanor his commander had been killed he was very distressed, and sent for the wicked Bagris, deceiver of his people. Antiochus said to Bagris “Do you not know, have you not already heard what the Children of Israel have done to me; they have killed my soldiers and plundered my camps and my officers.

¹⁰ Dagon was a fish shaped god worshipped by several ancient sea-faring or shore-dwelling nations.

¹¹ According to Maccabees II (15:25) Nikanor was killed by Yehuda Maccabee.

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בעת ההיא נשא יוחנן בן מתתיהו עיניו לשמים ותיקן תפלתו לפני אלוהיו, ויאמר: אלוהי ואלוהי אבותי, אברהם יצחק ויעקב, אל תתנני נא בידי הערל הזה, כי אם יהרגני, וילך וישתבח בבית דגון אלוהיו, ויאמר אלהי נתנו בידי. באותו שעה פסע עליו שלש פסיעות, ויתקע החרב בלבו, וישלך אותו חלל בעזרת הקודש לפני אלוהי השמים.

ענה יוחנן ויאמר: אלוהי, לא תשים עלי חטא כי הרגתי בקודש, עתה כן תתן את כל העמים אשר באו עמו להצר ליהודה ולירושלים. אז יצא יוחנן בן מתתיהו ביום ההוא, וילחם בעמים ויהרוג בהם הרג רב. מספר ההרוגים אשר הרג ביום ההוא שבע מאות אלף ושנים (ושבעים) אלף, אשר היו הורגים אלה לאלה. בשובו בנה “עמוד על שמו, ויקרא לו “מכבי ממית החזקים

ויהי כאשר שמע אנטיוכוס המלך כי נהרג ניקנור משנהו, צר לו מאוד, וישלח להביא לו את בגריס הרשע המטעה את עמו. ויען אנטיוכוס ויאמר לבגריס: הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת, אשר עשו לי

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Now can you still rely on your money or your homes to protect you? Come let us ascend against them and annul their covenant which their Lord of the Heaven made with them; Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Bris Milah”.

ANTIOCHUS SENDS
BAGRIS AGAINST THE
JEWS.

Then the wicked Bagris and all his camp came to Yerushalayim and massacred many people and made an absolute decree against Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Bris Milah. When this decree was put into effect, the command of the king was speedily carried out. When they found a man had circumcised his son they took him and his wife and hanged them in front of the child. One woman gave birth after the death of her husband and circumcised her son on the eighth day. She climbed on the walls of Yerushalayim with her newly circumcised son in her arms. She cried out “To you we say, wicked Bagris, you think you can annul our covenant that He made with us. The covenant of our ancestors will never be nullified! Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Bris Milah will never leave our descendants!” She threw her son to the ground and threw herself after him, and they both died together. Many were the Children of Israel who would do likewise in those days, and they did not renounce the covenant of their ancestors.

BAGRIS COMES TO
YERUSHALAYIM
WITH HIS ARMY.
MANY PEOPLE
ARE MURDERED. A
DECREE IS MADE
AGAINST KEEPING
SHABBOS, ROSH
CHODESH AND BRIS
MILAH. MANY
OF THE CHILDREN
OF ISRAEL DO NOT
RENOUCE THE
COVENANT OF THEIR
ANCESTORS.

At that time the Children of Israel said to each other ‘Let us spend the Shabbos in a cave, lest we violate Shabbos”. People betrayed them to Bagris. Then the

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בני ישראל. הרגו חיילי ויבזזו מחנותי ושרי. עתה על ממונכם אתם בוטחים, או בתיכם לכם הם, בואו נעלה עליהם ונבטל מהם הברית אשר כרת להם אלוהיהם: שבת ראש חודש ומילה.

אז בגריס הרשע וכל מחנותיו באו לירושלים, ויהרוג בהם הרג רב, ויגזור גזרה גמורה על שבת ראש חודש ומילה. בהיות זה כאשר היה דבר המלך נחפז, מצאו איש אשר מל את בנו, והביאו האיש ואשתו ויתלו אותם כנגד הילד. וגם אישה אשר ילדה בן אחרי מות בעלה, ותמל אותו לשמנת ימים, ותעל על חומת ירושלים ובנה מהול בידה. ותען ותאמר: לך אומרים בגריס הרשע, אתם חושבים לבטל מאתנו הברית אשר כורת עמנו, ברית אבותינו לא נבטל ממנו, שבת ראש חודש ומילה מבני בנינו לא יוסר. ותפל את בנה לארץ, ותיפול אחריו, וימותו שניהם כאחד. ורבים מבני ישראל אשר היו עושים כן בימים ההם, ולא שינו את ברית אבותם

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wicked Bagris sent armed men who came to the mouth of the cave. They said “Jews, come out to us, eat our bread and drink our wine and act like us.” The Children of Israel cried out and said to each other “We remember what God commanded us on Mount Sinai ‘Six days you shall toil and do all your work and on the seventh day you should rest.’¹² Now it is better that we die in this cave than profane the day of Shabbos.” When the Jews did not come out to them, they brought wood and set fire to the entrance of the cave and killed approximately one thousand men and women.

JEW'S COME
TOGETHER TO SPEND
SHABBOS IN A CAVE.
THE SOLDIERS OF
BAGRIS KILLS ONE
THOUSAND MEN AND
WOMEN.

After this, the five sons of Matisyahu set out; Yochanan and his four brothers, and fought against the foreigners and killed very many of them, and exiled them¹³ to the islands of the sea, for they trusted in the Lord of Heaven.

YOCHANAN AND
HIS BROTHERS FIGHT
AGAINST THE ENEMY
AND KILL MANY OF
THEM.

Then wicked Bagris and all the refugees from the battle boarded a ship and fled to Antiochia to the king. Bagris said to King Antiochus “You are the king who gave commands to remove Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Bris Milah from the Jews. Now there is great rebellion and uprising in their midst. Even if all the peoples and nations of the world would go to war, they would not be able to conquer the five sons of Matisyahu. They are stronger than lions, lighter than eagles and quicker¹⁴

BAGRIS AND HIS
MEN FLEE TO KING
ANTIOCHUS.

¹² Shemos 20:9-10

¹³ According to the original Aramaic it says: ‘The survivors fled’.

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בזמן ההוא אמרו בני ישראל אלו לאלו:
בואו ונלך ונשבות במערה, פן נחלל את
יום השבת. וילשינו אותם לפני בגריס
אז בגריס הרשע שלח אנשים חלוצים, ויבואו
וישבו על פי המערה. ויאמרו אליהם: יהודים,
צאו אלינו, אכלו מלחמנו ושתו מייננו ומעשינו
תהיו עושים. ויענו בני ישראל ויאמרו אלה
לאלה: זוכרים אנחנו אשר צונו ה' על הר סיני
”ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית כל מלאכתך וביום
השביעי תשבות”, עתה טוב לנו אשר נמות
במערה מאשר נחלל את יום השבת. בהיות זה
כאשר לא יצאו אליהם היהודים, הביאו עצים
וישרפו על פי המערה, וימותו כאלף איש ואישה

אחרי כן יצאו חמשה בני מתתיהו, יוחנן וארבעת
אחיו, וילחמו בעמים ויהרגו בהם הרג רב,
ויגרשום לאיי הים, כי בטחו באלוהי השמים

אז בגריס הרשע נכנס בספינה אחת, וינס אל
אנטיוכוס המלך, ועמו אנשים פליטי חרב. ויען
בגריס ויאמר לאנטיוכוס: אתה המלך שמת
ציווי לבטל מן היהודים שבת ראש חודש ומילה,
מרמה גדולה ומרד בתוכה. אשר אם ילכו כל
העמים והאומות והלשונות, לא יוכלו לחמשת

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than bears. Now, King, my advice, if it is good to you, is that you cannot fight with only a few men. For if you do you will become degraded in the eyes of all the kings. Therefore you should send messengers to all the countries of your kingdom without exception, and they should send armed officers along with elephants covered in armor.” This was good in the eyes of King Antiochus and he sent messengers to all the countries in his realm, and all the nations and kingdoms came, and brought with them armored elephants.¹⁵ Wicked Bagris launched a second attack and came to Yerushalayim. He broke through the wall, shattered the entrance and made thirteen breaches in the wall of the Beis HaMikdash.¹⁶ He also ground up the rocks until they were like dust. He thought to himself and said “This time they will not overpower me, for I have at my disposal a large and strong army.” But the Lord of Heaven did not agree.

BAGRIS DESCRIBES THE STRENGTH OF THE JEWS. ARMIES ARE SENT FROM ALL KINGDOMS. A SECOND ATTACK IS LAUNCHED AGAINST YERUSHALAYIM.

When the five sons of Matisyahu heard, they arose and came to Mitzpeh Gilad where there had been salvation for the House of Israel in the time of Shmuel the prophet.¹⁷ They decreed a fast and sat on the ground to ask for mercy before the Lord of Heaven. Then a good idea occurred to them; Yehuda, the first born; Shimon, the second son; Yochanan the third; Yonasan, the fourth son and the fifth son, Elazar. Their father blessed them and this is what he said: “Yehuda my son, I will compare you to Yehuda the

THE FIVE SONS OF MATTISYAHU COME TO MITZPEH GILAD. THEY FAST AND PRAY.

¹⁴ The original Aramaic text says ימן דובין חציפין 'more energetic'.

¹⁵ The Seleucids (particularly those from Syria) were famous for using Asian elephants in battle, which were approximately 2.5-3.5 meters (8-10 ft) at the shoulder. These

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בני מתתיהו: מאריות הם חזקים ומנשרים הם קלים ומדובים הם ממהרים. עתה המלך, עצתי תיטב עליך, ולא תלחם באנשים מעט. כי אם תלחם בהם, ותבוש בעיני כל המלכים. לכן כתוב ושלח ספרים בכל מדינות מלכותך, ויבואו שרי החילות, ולא ישאר מהם אחד. גם פילים מלובשים שריונים יהיו עמהם. וייטב הדבר בעיני אנטיוכוס המלך, וישלח ספרים לכל מדינות מלכותו, ויבואו שרי כל העמים והממלכות, וגם פילים מלובשים שריונים עימהם באו. שנית קם בגריס הרשע, ויבוא לירושלים, בקע בחומה וינתק המבוא, וישבר במקדש שלוש עשרה פרצות. וגם מן האבנים שיבר, עד אשר היו כעפר. ויחשוב בלבו ויאמר: הפעם הזאת לא יוכלו לי, כי רב חילי ועוז ידי. ואלוהי השמים לא חשב כן.

וכששמעו חמשה בני מתתיהו, קמו ויבואו למצפה גלעד, אשר היה שם פליטה לבית ישראל בימי שמואל הנביא. צום גזרו, וישבו על האפר לבקש רחמים מלפני אלוהי השמים. אז נפל בלבם עצה טובה יהודה הבכור, שמעון השני, השלישי יוחנן, הרביעי יונתן, החמישי אלעזר.

were bigger and therefore more terrifying than the North African elephants used by Romans and Carthaginians. For example, Hannibal's favorite elephant was described as an impressive animal named Sarus ('the Syrian').

¹⁶ These breaches are mentioned in the Mishna (Midos 2:3): The soreg was ten tefachim in height. There were thirteen breaches in it, which had been made by the Greeks. The breaches were later rebuilt, and thirteen 'bowings' when passing them were established. Shmuel I chapter 14

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son of Yaakov who was likened to a lion.¹⁸ Shimon my son, I will compare you to Shimon the son of Yaakov who killed the inhabitants of Shechem.¹⁹ Yochanan my son, I will compare you to Avner son of Ner, General of the Army of Israel.²⁰ Yonasan my son, I will compare you to Yonasan the son of Shaul who killed the Philistines single-handedly.²¹ Elazar my son, I will compare you to Pinchas son of Elazar who wrought the vengeance of his God and saved the Children of Israel.²² With this, the five sons of Matisyahu set out on that day and waged war against the nations, and killed very many of them. But Yehuda was killed. At that time when the sons of Matisyahu saw that Yehuda had been killed, they returned to their father.

MATSYAHU BLESSES EACH OF HIS FIVE SONS. THEY SET OUT TO WAR AND KILL MANY OF THEIR ENEMIES. YEHUDA IS KILLED IN THE WAR.

He said to them “Why have you returned?” They replied “Because Yehuda, our brother, who was the most important amongst us, has been killed.” Matisyahu their father said to them “I will go out with you and wage war against the nations, lest the House of Israel is destroyed while you remain agitated about your brother.”

THE SONS RETURN TO THEIR FATHER.

Matisyahu went out with his sons on that day and fought against the nations. The Lord of Heaven

¹⁸ Bereishis 49:9 ‘A lion cub is Yehuda...’

¹⁹ *ibid.* chapter 34. Yaakov’s sons Shimon and Levi killed all the townspeople in the city of Shechem in retaliation for the rape of their sister Dina.

²⁰ He was King David’s most successful general. See Shmuel I, 14:50, 20:25

²¹ Shmuel I chapter 14

²² Bamidbar 25

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ברך אותם אביהם וכן אמר: יהודה בני, אדמה אותך ליהודה בן יעקב, אשר היה נמשל כאריה. שמעון בני אדמה אותך לשמעון בן יעקב, אשר הרג יושבי שכם. יוחנן בני אדמה אותך לאבנר בן נר שר צבא ישראל. יונתן בני אדמה אותך ליונתן בן שאול, אשר הרג עם פלישתים. אלעזר בני אדמה אותך לפנחס בן אלעזר, אשר קנא לאלוהינו והציל את בני ישראל. על זה יצאו חמשה בני מתתיהו ביום הזה, וילחמו בעמים, ויהרגו בהם הרג רב. ויהרג מהם יהודה.

באותה שעה, כאשר ראו בני מתתיהו כי נהרג יהודה; שבו ויבואו אל אביהם. ויאמר להם: למה שבתם? ויענו ויאמרו: אשר נהרג יהודה אחינו, אשר היה חשוב ככולנו ויען מתתיהו אביהם ויאמר אליהם: אני אצא עמכם ואלחם בעמים, פן יאבדו בית ישראל, ואתם נבהלתם על אחיכם.

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gave into their hands all the mighty soldiers of the nations, and they slaughtered them. Of all the sword bearers and archers, all the officers in the armies and the commanders there did not remain a single one, and all the nations fled to foreign shores. Elazar was trying to kill the elephants, but he drowned in elephant dung. When they returned from battle they sought him and could not find him, until eventually they found that he had drowned in elephant dung.

MATSYAHU AND HIS SONS GO OUT TO FIGHT AGAINST THE NATIONS. THE ENEMY IS GIVEN INTO THEIR HANDS. ELAZAR DIES IN BATTLE. THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL REJOICE IN THEIR VICTORY. KING ANTIOCHUS FLEES.

The Children of Israel rejoiced, for their enemies had been given into their hands. Some were burned in fire, some were killed with the sword and some were hanged on the gallows. The wicked Bagris, who misled his country was burned in fire by the House of Israel. Then King Antiochus, when he heard that wicked Bagris had been killed along with all the officers of the army that were with him, boarded a ship and fled abroad. Everywhere he went they rebelled against him and called him 'the coward'.

After this the House of Chashmonai came to the Beis HaMikdash and rebuilt the gates that had been smashed and repaired the breaches in the walls; they purified the courtyard from the corpses and the impurity. They tried to find clear olive oil with which to light the Menorah, but they could only find a single jar which was sealed with the signet ring of the Kohein Gadol. They knew that it was pure, but there was only enough oil to burn for a single day. The Lord of Heaven, Who causes His name to dwell

THE HOUSE OF CHASHMONAI COME TO THE BEIS HAMIKDASH AND REPAIR AND PURIFY IT. THEY ONLY FIND ONE SEALED JAR OF OLIVE OIL.

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ויצא מתתיהו ביום ההוא עם בניו, וילחמו בעמים. ואלוהי השמים נתן כל גיבורי העמים בידם, ויהרגו בהם הרג רב, כל אחוזי חרב וכל מושכי קשת, שרי החיל והסגנים, לא נותר בהם שריד. וינוסו שאר העמים למדינות הים. ואלעזר היה מתעסק להמית הפילים, ויטבע בפרש הפילים. וכאשר שבו, בקשוהו בין החיים ובין המתים ולא מצאוהו, ואחר כך מצאוהו אשר טבע בפרש הפילים וישמחו בני ישראל כי ניתנו בידהם שונאיהם. מהם שרפו באש, ומהם דקרו בחרב, ומהם תלו על העץ. ובגריס הרשע, המטעה את עמו, שרפו אותו בית ישראל באש ואז אנטיוכוס המלך, כאשר שמע אשר נהרגו בגריס הרשע וכל שרי החיל אשר עמו, נכנס בספינה וינס למדינת הים. כל מקום אשר היה "בא שמה, מורדים בו וקוראים אותו "הבורח

אחרי כן באו בני חשמונאי לבית המקדש, ויבנו השערים הנשברים, ויסגרו הפרצות, ויטהרו העזרה מן ההרוגים ומן הטומאות. ויבקשו שמן זית זך להדליק המנורה, ולא מצאו כי אם צלוחית אחת, אשר הייתה חתומה בטבעת הכהן הגדול, וידעו כי היתה טהור, והיה בה כשיעור הדלקת יום אחד. ואלוהי השמים אשר שיכן שמו שם, נתן בה ברכה והדליקו ממנה שמונה ימים. על כן קיימו בני חשמונאי קיום, וחזקו איסר ובני

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there, gave a blessing to the oil and they lit from it for eight days.

THE OIL LASTS FOR EIGHT DAYS.

Thus the children of the Chashmonaim along with the Children of Israel established as a lasting memory, and strengthened it with the force of a prohibition, to keep these eight days as days of feasting and rejoicing, like the festivals written in the Torah. And to light candles and publicize the victory that Lord of Heaven did for them. It is forbidden to eulogize on these days; or to decree a fast, unless it was already accepted as a fast beforehand; and to pray before their Lord. But the Chashmonai and his sons and their bretheren did not forbid working or the types of activities forbidden on Shabbos.

THESE EIGHT DAYS ARE ESTABLISHED AS DAYS OF FEASTING AND REJOICING.

From that time forth there was no remnant of the Greek kingdom. The sons of the Chashmonai and their children made themselves into kings from then until the destruction of the House of God, two hundred and six years later²³. Therefore, the Children of Israel from that day, in all their exiles, observe these days. They call them days of feasting and rejoicing; from the twenty fifth of Kislev for eight days. From that time and forever more it did not depart from them, that which was (established) in the Beis HaMikdash, the Kohanim, the Levi'im and the Sages, which they accepted upon themselves and upon their children's children for all eternity.

FOR EIGHT DAYS, FROM THE TWENTY FIFTH OF KISLEV WE OBSERVE THESE DAYS FOR ALL ETERNITY.

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ישראל עימהם כאחד, לעשות שמונה ימים האלה ימי משתה ושמחה, כימי מועדים הכתובים בתורה, ולהדליק בהם נרות, להודיע אשר עשה להם אלוהי השמים ניצוחים. ובהם אין לספוד, ולא לגזור צום ותענית, זולתי אשר מקובל עליו מלפני זה, ויתפלל לפני אלוקיו. אך חשמונאי ובניו ואחיהם לא גזרו בהם לבטל עבודת מלאכה

ומן העת ההוא לא היה שם למלכות יון. ויקבלו המלכות בני חשמונאי ובני בניהם מהעת הזאת ועד חרבן בית אלוהים מאתים ושש שנים

על כן בני ישראל מהיום ההוא בכל גלותם, שומרים את הימים האלה, ויקראו להם ימי משתה ושמחה מחמשה ועשרים לחודש כסליו שמונה ימים. מן העת ההיא ועד העולם לא יסורו מהם אשר היו בבית מקדשם הכוהנים והלויים וחכמיהם, אשר קיימו עליהם ועל בני בניהם עד עולם.

האל אשר עשה עמהם נס ופלא, הוא יעשה לנו נסים ונפלאות, ויקוים בנו מקרא שכתוב "כימי "צאתך מארץ מצרים אראנו נפלאות

²³ Thus, according to this text, the Second Beis HaMikdash stood for a total of 420 years. 213 before the war with the Greeks, one year of fighting, and 206 after the defeat of the Greeks.

GLOSSARY

Al HaNissim	lit. 'Regarding the Miracles'; a prayer included in the liturgy during the days of Chanukah and Purim	Shechem	city of Shechem also known as Nablus
Amida	lit. 'standing'; silent prayer, mainstay of each prayer service, recited while standing	Shemos	second book of the Bible; Exodus
Avraham	Abraham	Shimon	Simon
Bamidbar	third book of the Bible; Numbers	Shmuel	Samuel; here referring to the Prophet Samuel and the biblical book by the same name
Beis HaMikdash	Holy Temple of God that stood in Jerusalem	Siddur	Prayer Book
Ben	son of	Talmud Bavli	Babylonian Talmud
Bereishis	first book of the Bible; Genesis	Torah	Bible; specifically the Five Books of the Old Testament
Bris Milah	ritual circumcision	Tosfos Rid	commentary on the Babylonian Talmud
Chashmonai, Chashmonaim	Hasmonean/s	Yaakov	Jacob
Devarim	fifth book of the Bible; Deuteronomy	Yehuda	Judah
Kislev	name of the third Jewish month from the beginning of the New Year	Yerushalayim	Jerusalem
Kohein Gadol	High Priest	Yitzchak	Isaac
Levi'im	Levites	Yochanan	Jochanan
Matisyahu	Matthew; Matthias	Yonason	Jonathan
Menorah	candelabrum; referring here to a special ceremonial object in the Temple		
Mitzpeh Gilad	lit. 'the lookout post of Gilad'; Gilad was a minor prophet who waged war against the Philistines		
Otzar HaTefillos	lit. 'Treasury of Prayers'; a compendium of Jewish prayer and liturgy		
Rosh Chodesh	(celebration of the) Beginning of the (Lunar) Month; important in determining the calendar dates of the Jewish holidays.		
Seder HaDoros	lit. 'The Order of the Generations'; a volume of Jewish History		
Shabbos	Sabbath		