

MEGILLAT HANUKKAH

with
Introduction, Translation
and
Commentary by
ARTHUR A. CHIEL

The Rabbinical Assembly • New York

מגלת חנוכה

עם

מבוא, תרגום אנגלי ופירוש קצר

מאת

אברהם אביש חיל

כנסת הרבנים

ניו-יורק

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Preface

In publishing *Megillat Hanukkah*, we are in a very real sense repaying a debt to our glorious ancestors. As Rabbi Arthur Chiel indicates in his introduction, it is only a chronological accident that the Bible does not have a Megillah for Hanukkah. The holiday itself is at least as significant in the history of our people as the Feast of Purim. In our day, Hanukkah has assumed an importance and achieved a popularity which rivals that of Passover.

When the Book of Maccabees was consigned to the Apocrypha, the intention was not to bury it but to preserve it. In time, however, the Apocryphal books became virtually unknown to the vast majority of the Jewish people. Aside from the fact that it could not be included in the canon of the Bible, the Talmud makes no reference to the Book of Maccabees and ignores the military events that are recorded in it. For the Rabbis, the miracle of the cruse of oil that burned for eight days and the rededication of the altar constituted the essential message of Hanukkah.

With the rise of Zionism and the sacrificial struggle to reestablish the national homeland of the Jewish people, the story of the Maccabean Revolution has taken on contemporary meaning. It is hardly to be wondered that in the State of Israel the observance of Hanukkah has become a major national holiday.

We believe that it is important to reintroduce this historical classic to our people. We are indebted to Rabbi Chiel for his painstaking labors in preparing this volume. His fine introduction, his excellent translation and illuminating notes will enable the reader to experience the stirring events of those

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Introduction

Five *Megillot*, or Scrolls, are to be found in our Hebrew Bible, arranged in the sequence of their reading in the synagogue during the year. The *Song of Songs* is read on Passover, *Ruth* on Shavuot, *Lamentations* on Tisha B'Av, *Ecclesiastes* on Succot, and *Esther* on Purim. A sixth *Megillah*, for Hanukkah reading, might have been included in the Bible except for the fact that the event it would have commemorated occurred too late to allow for its eligibility among the sacred writings. Chronology ruled out I and II Maccabees from consideration. Having been written after prophecy had ceased, these books that chronicle the Hanukkah epic were considered unqualified for inclusion in the canon. Thus was Hanukkah left without a *Megillah* in the Bible.

That our forefathers sensed the need for such a chronicle is attested by the fact that, at some time between the seventh and eighth centuries, the *Megillat Bet Hashmonai* came into being. Written in Aramaic, it is a dramatic account of the Hasmonean wars and of the origin of the festival of Hanukkah. The anonymous author of this scroll was a fine story-teller and his literary creation has a fine narrative character. Saadia Gaon (882-942), the first to make mention of this work, referred to it as *Ketab Bene Hashmonai* [the Book of the Hasmoneans]. By Saadia's time, then, this scroll was held in considerable esteem by the Jews and it grew steadily in its popularity during the ensuing centuries. By the thirteenth century it had become part of synagogue ritual as a supplementary reading on the Sabbath during the Hanukkah festival. This ritual was read before congregations in Jewish communities as distant from each other as Italy and Yemen. In later centuries it began to appear in some prayer book editions including some in eastern Europe.

days and to rejoice in this moving account of Jewish faith and heroism.

It is our hope that *Megillat Hanukkah* will find its way into our synagogues, schools and homes. It should help enrich and deepen our celebration of the Feast of Hanukkah.

Max J. Routtenberg, Chairman
Publications Committee
The Rabbinical Assembly

stronger in that area, even after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E.

At Alexander's death, his empire was divided among his generals, though not without a struggle. Ptolemy secured Egypt, Antigonus took Phrygia and Seleucus acquired Syria and Mesopotamia. Palestine now became an area of contention between the kingdoms of Syria and Egypt. For a long period Palestine remained an unsettled issue between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. In 301 B.C.E. Palestine came under Ptolemaic rule and it remained an Egyptian colony until 198 B.C.E., when the Syrian Seleucids under King Antiochus III wrested control from Ptolemy IV.

Antiochus III died in 187 B.C.E. and was succeeded by his son Seleucus IV, who reigned until 175 B.C.E., when his younger brother, Antiochus Epiphanes, came to the throne. Eager to tie Palestine to his larger kingdom, it was this Antiochus who set to the task of zealously disseminating his form of Hellenistic culture among his Hebrew subjects. Part of the Judean populace had already acquiesced to the Hellenistic influence during the previous century of Ptolemaic rule, especially those of the upper classes and including those in the higher priesthood in Jerusalem. To these segments of the population the Greek language was essential for their relations with the Ptolemaic government and for contact with the sizeable Jewish population of Egypt, the largest portion of which lived in the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria.

Soon after the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes, a deliberate attempt was made to promote Hellenism among the total Judean population. A brother of the high priest Onias, who had Hellenized his Hebrew name of Joshua to Jason, won favor with the Syrian king by demonstrating a zeal for his form of civilization and by a willingness to pay handsomely for it. Besides the substantial price which he offered for the appointment to the high priesthood in place of his brother Onias, he offered large sums for the right to build a gymnasium in Jerusalem, and for the registration of Jews as Antiochian citizens. Antiochus was completely amenable to Jason's propositions, especially since they were accompanied by monetary incentives. "Let us enter into a treaty with the pagans around

The precedent for a Hanukkah *Megillah* has been set for us in the fairly distant past, and with the need for the renewal of such a tradition in our time, this *Megillat Hanukkah* is published for usage and inspiration in our contemporary synagogues. An advantage which we enjoy over our ancestors is the fact that we have available to us a dependable historical work which was not available to them: the *First Book of Maccabees*, a part of the Apocrypha which we have used as the source for this *Megillat Hanukkah*.

I

A proper understanding of Hanukkah requires a survey of events that transpired nearly three centuries before the Maccabean uprising. The conquests of Alexander the Great which began with his crossing of the Hellespont in 334 B.C.E., marked the start of an extraordinary cultural revolution in eastern Mediterranean history. At the Granicus River, Alexander's troops won their first victory against a Persian army, which opened for them the gateway to Asia Minor. Alexander then moved southward, down to the plain of Issus where, in 332 B.C.E., he was met by a huge Persian army under the personal leadership of Emperor Darius III. The Persians' superior numbers proved no match for the skill and discipline of Alexander's army. At the battle of Issus, the victorious Alexander achieved his domination of the Middle East; he now marched along the Phoenician coast headed southward for Egypt.

The Talmud and Josephus both relate that Alexander the Great at this stage was welcomed to Jerusalem by the High Priest Simon and a solemn procession of Hebrew dignitaries. While this story is most likely a legend, there is no doubt that Alexander's victories in Palestine, Egypt and Syria had their gradual influence on Judea. In the wake of the conquests of this region, he established garrisons in Samaria and other points not too far from Judea. In time, a network of at least thirty Hellenistic centers came into existence along the coasts of Phoenicia and Philistia as well as in Trans-Jordan. The Hellenistic cultural factor would continue to grow ever

Many fled to outlying wilderness hideouts to escape the king's officials.

This persecution provoked the uprising headed by Judah Maccabee and his brothers. Their bands moved through the country, destroying altars, circumcising male children, and attacking traitors who had submitted to Antiochus' decree. The Syrian military leaders underestimated the guerilla enemy, and the defeats which they suffered in the early battles stirred larger numbers of Jews to rally to Judah Maccabee and raised the morale of his followers. In the Fall of 165 B.C.E. Judah took possession of the Temple, which he restored and rededicated. Faithful priests were returned and the worship resumed its ancient, authentic form. The Temple was properly fortified. The Seleucids were at last persuaded that their attempt to extirpate Judaism was a failure. Negotiations with Judah were begun. Full liberty was guaranteed to the Judeans to worship God in their own way and to live according to their traditional law and custom. Moreover, an amnesty was offered in the king's name to all who had participated in the revolt.

But the change in policy by the Syrian government did not bring immediate peace. Judah and his brothers did not consider their goal accomplished so long as their fellow-Jews beyond the Jordan, in the Galilee, on the Mediterranean coast and in Idumea, were persecuted by the pagans, and proceeded on expeditions on their behalf. Judah Maccabee himself died in battle while on such an expedition in 160 B.C.E. He was succeeded by his brothers Jonathan and Simon who achieved the Maccabean dream of Judean independence by 140 B.C.E.

II

17 The First Book of Maccabees covers the period of forty years from the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes (175 B.C.E.) to the death of Simon Maccabee (135 B.C.E.). The events are chronicled with intense interest and sympathy. The style is direct, restrained and objective. It is clearly modeled after the historical books of the Bible.

From the idioms which occur throughout this work it

us," argued Jason's sympathizers, "for since we separated from them many misfortunes have befallen us" (First Book of Maccabees 1:11).

Jason was appointed high priest in 175 B.C.E. Jerusalem was given a Greek constitution, and its citizens were given the privilege of citizenship. A gymnasium was built below the Jerusalem citadel. Athletic young Hebrews quickly became sports enthusiasts. Even the Temple priests would rush the sacred rituals in order to reach the nearby athletic arena. Many underwent surgical procedure to efface the mark of circumcision, to avoid ridicule by audiences who would see the Jewish youths stripped for their gymnastic performances. The Hellenization of Jerusalem was in full swing.

In 168 B.C.E. Antiochus Epiphanes, frustrated in his efforts to conquer Egypt, turned his anger on Judea. His grand plan to Hellenize the Jews with the help of the corrupt priests and the upper-class aristocracy had borne results dramatically opposite to his dream. For Antiochus' Hellenizing had catalyzed a national opposition among the Judeans. In revenge, he proceeded to demolish the walls of Jerusalem and to destroy many of its houses. On the eastern hill, to the south of the Temple, he built a smaller city which he fortified and settled with foreign colonists. When this had been completed, Antiochus converted the Temple to the worship of the Olympian Zeus. The large altar in the Temple court became the foundation for a smaller altar of Greek character, on which swine were offered for sacrifice. Thus was the traditional Temple ritual completely supplanted.

Antiochus Epiphanes knew full well that the opposition to him was religious. He determined therefore to uproot the religion of the Jews. All its observances, including circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath and the Festivals, were prohibited under the penalty of death. The sacred Scrolls were destroyed; possession of a Torah Scroll constituted a capital offense. Altars were set up in towns and villages. Participation in the pagan sacrifices was made to be a test of loyalty to the king. Many obeyed the edict either voluntarily or under threat. The Jews who refused to comply publicly were put to death.

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would appear that the work was written in Aramaic, though more likely in Hebrew. The original work was translated very early into Greek, and only the Greek version survived. Concerning the author we know nothing. We can only surmise that he was a devout and patriotic Jew who lived in Palestine close to the heroic era of the Maccabees. He was an admirer of the Hasmonean family; he believed that to them his people owed their redemption and independence.

The First Book of Maccabees is our primary source, then, for the history of the Maccabean period. *Megillat Hanukkah* is a rendering of the first four chapters, concluding with the dedication of the altar and the eight days of celebration which followed. It is on this ancient chronicle that this *Megillat Hanukkah* is based.

MEGILLAT HANUKKAH

chapter one Alexander's Conquests and Legacy

1. It came to pass after Alexander, the son of Philip of Macedon, who marched from the land of Chittim, defeated Darius, king of the Persians and Medes, and seized his throne. 2. And he waged many wars, in which he captured fortified towns, and slew kings; 3. and moved steadily forward to the ends of the earth, plundering many nations. At last the world lay quiet under Alexander's rule, and he was full of pride. 4. He built up a very mighty army, and ruled over countries, peoples and principalities; all paid him tribute.

5. Afterward he took ill, and knowing that he was dying, 6. he summoned his generals, men who had been brought up with him from his youth, and divided his empire among them while he was still alive. 7. Alexander had reigned twelve years when he died. 8. His generals took over the rulership, each in his own province. 9. At his death they were all crowned as kings, and their descendants after them for many years. They brought much misery upon the world.

empire extended from the Danube River to the Indian Ocean, an area consisting of civilized Europe, the Middle East and beyond.

1:5 **HE TOOK ILL.** Ancient historical sources offer contradictory reports as to the nature of Alexander's death, ranging from a natural disease to overdrink, or by a poison plot.

1:9 **ALL CROWNED AS KINGS.** For seventeen years following Alexander's death, his generals battled each other for power. At last, in 306 B.C.E., Alexander's empire was divided among five of them: Antigonus, Ptolemy, Seleucus, Lysimachus and Cassander.

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א

א ויהי אחרי הכוח אלכסנדר בן-פילפוס המקדוני אשר-יצא מארץ פתים [את-חיל פרס] ונף את-דרגוש מלך פרס ומדי ומלך פתתיו בראשונה בארץ יון: ב ויערך מלחמות רבות וילכד מבצרים וישחט מלכי ארץ: ג ויבא עד-קצות-הארץ וינח שכל-גוים רבים ותשקט הארץ לפניו ויהם ויגבה לבו: ד ויאסף חיל כבד מאד ומלך על-ארצות גוים ורוזנים ויהיו לו למס:

ה ויהי אחר הדברים האלה ויפל למשכב וידע פיימות: ו ויקרא לעבדיו הנקבדים אשר-נגדלו אתו מנעוריו ויחלק להם את-מלכותו בעורנו חי: ז ומלך אלכסנדר ששים-עשרה שנה וימת: ח וישלטו עבדיו איש במקומו: ט וישימו כלם פתרי מלכות בראשיהם אחרי מותו ויבניהם אחריהם שנים רבות וירבו רעות בארץ:

1:1 **ALEXANDER.** The First Book of Maccabees appropriately begins with the outstanding event of ancient history, the wide-ranging conquests of Alexander the Great, which took place between 336-323 B.C.E.

CHITTIM. Actually the islands between Asia Minor and Greece, including Cyprus, but here intended as a term for all of Greece.

DARIUS. Darius III who reigned 336-331 B.C.E. and was defeated twice by Alexander, first at Issus and again at Arbela.

1:3 **THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.** At his death, Alexander's

10. From among these there descended a wicked individual, Antiochus Epiphanes, the son of King Antiochus. He had been a hostage in Rome before he succeeded to the throne of Syria in the year 137 of the Greek era.

11. In those days there arose out of Israel a group of lawless men, who misled many of their people. "Let us enter into a treaty with the pagans around us," they proposed, "for ever since we separated ourselves from them, many misfortunes have come upon us." 12. The people considered this a good plan, and some of them were eager to carry it out. 13. They went to the king, and he gave them the authority to introduce the customs of the pagans. 14. They built a stadium in Jerusalem, in the pagan style. 15. They removed the marks of their circumcision, and rejected the Holy Covenant. They intermarried with the pagans, and turned to evil ways.

16. And when, in Antiochus' opinion, his kingdom was solidly established, he determined to become the ruler of Egypt, so that he might reign over two kingdoms. 17. He invaded Egypt with a powerful force of chariots, elephants, cavalry and a great fleet. 18. He waged war against Ptolemy, king of Egypt, but Ptolemy panicked, fled, and many fell wounded. 19. The fortified cities were captured and the land of Egypt was plundered.

20. After conquering Egypt, in the year 143, Antiochus turned back and marched up against Israel and Jerusalem with a strong force. 21. In his arrogance he entered into the Temple, and carried off the golden altar, and the lamp for the

Greek *polis*, a stadium was required. It was the center of Hellenistic social life and affiliation with it a prerequisite for Hellenistic citizenship.

1:15 REMOVED THE MARKS OF THEIR CIRCUMCISION. They underwent a difficult operation in which the prepuce was drawn forward.

1:17 HE INVADED EGYPT. This was the seventh war between Syria and Egypt within a century.

1:20 THE YEAR 143. Corresponds to 170 B.C.E.

י ויצא מהם שרש רשע אנטיוכוס אפיפנס בן-אנטיוכוס המלך אשר היה בן-תפוצות ברומי ומלך בשנת מאה ושלשים ושבע למלכות היונים:

יא בימים ההם יצאו מקרב ישראל בני-בליעל וריחו רבים לאמר גלגה ונקתה ברית את-הגוים אשר סביבותינו כי מן-היום אשר סרנו מעמקם מצאנו רעות רבות: יב ויטב הדבר בעיניהם: יג ויתנדבו אנשים מן-העם וילכו אל-המלך וישליטם המלך לעשות כחקי הגוים: יד ויבנו גמנסיון בירושלם כמשפטי הגוים: טו ויעשו להם ערלה ויעזבו ברית-קדש ויצמדו לגוים ויתמכרו לעשות רע:

טז ותפון המלוכה לפני אנטיוכוס ויתנשא למלך בארץ מצרים למען מלך על-שתי הממלכות: טז ויבא מצרימה בעם כבד ברכב ובפילים ובפרשים ובאני גדול: יח ויערך מלחמה עם-תלמי מלך מצרים ויסוג תלמי מפניו ויגס ויפלו חללים רבים: יט וילכדו ערי המבצר בארץ מצרים ויחזק שלל ארץ מצרים:

כ וישב אנטיוכוס אחרי הפוזתו את-מצרים בשנת מאה וארבעים ושלש ויעל על-ישראל ועל-ירושלם בעם כבד: כא ויבא אל-המקדש בגאונה ויחזק את-מזבח הזהב ואת-מנורת המאור ואת-כל-כליה:

1:10 ANTIOCHUS. Antiochus IV, surnamed Epiphanes, the great. He ruled from 176-163 B.C.E.

A HOSTAGE IN ROME. When his father, Antiochus III, was defeated at Magnesia, in 190 B.C.E., Antiochus Epiphanes was turned over to the Romans as a hostage for twelve years.

THE YEAR 137 OF THE GREEK ERA. The Seleucid kings reckoned their calendar from the founding of their dynasty. Seleucus I came to the Syrian throne in 312 B.C.E. The Seleucid year 137 corresponds to 176 B.C.E.

1:11 LAWLESS MEN. Hellenized Jews who collaborated with the Syrian authorities, they argued that traditional Judaism was the source of Israel's economic troubles.

1:14 A STADIUM. To gain recognition for Jerusalem as a

light, and all its equipment, 22. the table of the showbread, the cups, the bowls, and the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns; and the golden adornment on the front of the Temple he stripped off completely. 23. He seized the silver, the gold, and precious vessels, and whatever hidden treasures he found. 24. And having taken everything, he carried them away to his own country. He had massacred many people and gloated over all he had done.

25. Great was the sadness throughout Israel.
26. Rulers and elders groaned;
girls and young men were depressed,
the beauty of women faded away.
27. Every bridegroom did lament,
and every bride sat grieving in her chamber.
28. The land trembled for its inhabitants,
and the whole house of Jacob was clothed in shame.

29. After two years, the king sent to the towns of Judea a chief tax official, who arrived at Jerusalem with a strong force. 30. His conversation was clever and they trusted him. But, having won their confidence, he suddenly attacked the city. He dealt it a powerful blow, and killed many people of Israel. 31. He plundered the city, setting it to blaze. He tore down the houses in it and the walls around it. 32. And they took the women and children captive, and seized the cattle.

33. Then they fortified the City of David with a great, strong wall, with strong towers, and it was made into a citadel. 34. And they garrisoned there pagan people and violators of the Law. 35. They accumulated weapons and provisions, collected together the spoils of Jerusalem, and stored them there. 36. There they lay in ambush, a serious threat to the Temple, and a steady menace to Israel.

37. They shed innocent blood round the Temple,
they defiled the Sanctuary.
38. The inhabitants of Jerusalem fled for fear of them.
She became the dwelling place of strangers,
she became a stranger to her offspring,
her children deserted her.

כב וְאֶת־שִׁלְטָן הַמַּעֲרָכָה וְאֶת־הַקְּשֹׁת וְאֶת־הַמִּזְרָקוֹת וְאֶת־כַּפּוֹת הַזָּהָב
וְאֶת־הַפְּרָכֶת וְאֶת־הָעֵטֻרוֹת וְאֶת־עֲדֵי־הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי הַהִיכָל וְיִפְצֹל
הַכֹּל: כג וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף וְאֶת־הַזָּהָב וְאֶת־כָּל־הַחֲמֻדָּה וַיִּקַּח אֶת־
אֲצִרוֹת הַמַּטְמוּנִים אֲשֶׁר מְצָא: כד וּבִקְהָתוֹ הַכֹּל שָׁב לְאָרְצוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ הָרֶג
רַב וַיַּדְבֵּר בְּגֵאוֹת רַבָּה:

כה וַיְהִי אֵבֶל גָּדוֹל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־מְקוֹמוֹתֵיהֶם:

כו [— —] וַיֵּאָנְחוּ רָאשִׁים וַיִּקְנִימוּ בְתוֹלוֹת וּבַחֲוָרִים אִמְלָלוּ
וַיִּפִּי נָשִׁים שָׁנָה:

כז וְכָל־חֲתָן נָשָׂא קִינָה יוֹשֶׁבֶת בַּחֲפָה הִתְאַבְּלָה:

כח וְהָאָרֶץ חָלָה עַל־יֹשְׁבֶיהָ וְכָל־בֵּית יַעֲקֹב לִבְשׁ בִּשְׁת:

כט מִקֵּץ שָׁנָתִים יָמִים שָׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־שְׂרֵי־הַמּוֹסִיס לְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה
וַיֵּבֵא יְרוּשָׁלַיִם בַּחֵיל כָּבֹד: ל וַיַּדְבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם דְּבָרֵי שְׁלוֹם בְּמֶרְמֶה
וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ לוֹ וַיִּפֹּל עַל־הָעִיר פָּתָאם וַיֵּךְ בָּהּ מַכָּה רַבָּה וַיֵּאָבֵד עִם רַב
מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: לא וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שָׁלַל הָעִיר וַיִּשְׂרָפָה בָּאֵשׁ וַיַּהַרֵם אֶת־בִּתְיָהּ
וְאֶת־חֹמֹתֶיהָ מִסָּבִיב: לב וַיָּשָׁבוּ אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת־הַטָּף וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה
בְּזָוִי:

לג וַיִּבְנוּ אֶת עִיר־דָּוִד בְּחוֹמָה גְּדוֹלָה וּחֻקָּה וּבְמִגְדָּלִים בְּצוּרִים
וַתְּהִי לָהֶם לְמִצְדָּה: לד וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ־שָׁם גִּי חֲטָא אֲנָשֵׁי־אֲנֹן וַיִּתְבַּצְּרוּ בָּהּ:
לה וַיִּצְבְּרוּ נֶשֶׁק נָאֵבֶל וּבָאֶסֶפֶס שָׁלַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם שָׁמוּ שָׁם וַיְהִי לְמוֹקֵשׁ
גָּדוֹל: לו וַיְהִי לְמַאֲרֵב לְבֵית־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ וּלְשֹׁטֵן רָע לְיִשְׂרָאֵל תָּמִיד:

לו וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ דָם נָקִי מִסָּבִיב לְמִקְדָּשׁ וַיִּטְמְאוּ אֶת־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ:

לז וַיִּנּוֹסוּ יוֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּגִלְלָם וַתְּהִי מוֹשֵׁב זָרִים וַתְּהִי נִכְרִיָּה
לְזֹרְעָה וּבִנְיָה עֲזוּבָה:

1:25-28 AND THERE WAS GREAT MOURNING. An elegy in biblical style.

1:33 A CITADEL. This citadel was manned by Syrian troops. It dominated the Temple site along with Jerusalem.

39. Her Temple became desolate as a wilderness,
her festivals turned to mourning,
her Sabbaths to shame, her honor to contempt.
40. Her dishonor was as great as her glory had been,
and her pride was bowed low in grief.

41. Then the king issued a decree throughout his kingdom that they should all become one people and abandon their own laws and religions. 42. And all the pagan nations accepted the royal command. 43. And many in Israel agreed to this form of worship, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath. 44. The king also sent written word by messengers to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah that they should follow customs foreign to the country, 45. and that they should stop the burnt-offerings, sacrifices, and drink-offerings in the Temple. 46. Sabbaths and festivals were to be profaned. The Temple and its priests were to be polluted. 47. Altars, sacred groves, and shrines for idols were to be established; swine and other unclean animals were to be offered in sacrifice. They must leave their sons uncircumcised, and defile themselves in every way unclean and abominable. 49. So that they might forget the Law and change all of their religious ordinances. 50. Whoever would not obey the order of the king was to die.

51. Such was the decree which the king issued for the whole of his kingdom. He appointed officials over all the people, and he commanded the towns of Judea, every one of them, to offer sacrifice. 52. Many of the people, who were willing to forsake the Law, joined them and did evil in the land. 53. Their wicked conduct caused Israel to hide in places of refuge.

54. On the twenty-fifth day of Kislev in the year 146, he erected a dreadful desecration upon the altar, and in the surrounding cities of Judah they erected altars. 55. They offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. 56. The Scrolls of the Law which they found, they tore to shreds and they burnt. 57. Anyone discovered in possession of a Book of the Covenant, or fulfilling the Law, was put to death by the king's sentence. 58. Month after month they used force against

לֹט בֵּית־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הָשֵׁם בַּמִּדְבָּר חֲגִיגָה נִהְפְּכוּ לְאֹכֵל שְׁבֻחוֹתֶיהָ
לְכַלְמָה כְּבוֹדָה לְבוֹי:
מ כָּרֵב כְּבוֹדָה גָּדֹל קְלוֹנָה וְגִדְלָה נִהְפָּךְ לְאֹכֵל:

מֵא וַיִּכְתֹּב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־כָּל־מַלְכוּתוֹ לִהְיוֹת כָּלֶם לְעַם אֶחָד:
מִב וְלַעֲזֹב כָּל־אִישׁ אֶת־חֻקֹּתָיו וַיִּקְבְּלוּ כָל־הָעַמִּים בְּדָבָר הַמֶּלֶךְ:
מִג וְרַבִּים מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל רָצוּ בְּעִבְדוּתוֹ וַיִּנָּחֲמוּ לְאִלִּילִים וַיַּחֲלִלוּ אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת:
מִד וַיִּשְׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ סָפְרִים בְּיַד־מַלְאָכָיו לִירוּשָׁלַם וּלְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר:
אֲחֵרֵי חֻקִּים נִכְרִים לְאַרְצִי: מֵה וְלִמְנַע עֲלוֹת זֶבֶח וְנִסֵּךְ מִן־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ
וּלְחַלֵּל שְׁבֻחוֹת וְחֻגִּים: מִז וְלִטְמֹא מִקְדָּשׁ וּקְדוּשִׁים: מִנ לִכְנוֹת בְּמוֹת
וְהִיכָלוֹת וּפְסִילִים וּלְהַקְרִיב חֲזִירִים וּבְהֵמוֹת טְמֵאוֹת: מִח וּלְהַגִּית אֶת־
בְּגִיָּהם בְּלִמֵּי מוֹלִים וּלְשַׁקֵּץ אֶת־נַפְשוֹתָם בְּכָל־טְמֵא וּפְגוּל: מִט לְשַׁכַּח
אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה וּלְהַחֲלִיף כָּל־הַחֻקִּים: נ וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא־יַעֲשֶׂה כִּדְבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ
יָמוּת:

נֹא כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּתֹב לְמַלְכוּתוֹ וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקִידִים עַל־כָּל־
הָעָם וַיִּצְוּ לְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה לְהַקְרִיב בְּעִיר וָעִיר: נִב וַיַּחֲזִקוּ אֲלֵיהֶם רַבִּים
מִן־הָעָם כָּל־עֹבֵב אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ רָעוֹת בְּאַרְצִי: נִג וַיִּשְׁמֹו אֶת־
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַחְבֹּאִים בְּכָל־מְנוּסָם:

נִד וּבְחֻמְשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בְּכִסְלֹו בְּחֻמֶּשׁ וְאַרְבָּעִים וּמֵאָה שָׁנָה בָּנוּ
שָׁקוֹץ מְשׁוֹמֵם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּבְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה מִסְּבִיב בָּנוּ כְּמוֹת: נִה וּבְפִתְחוֹתֵי
הַבָּתִּים וּבְרַחוּבוֹת זִבְחוֹ: נו וְסָפְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר מָצְאוּ שָׂרְפּוּ בָּאֵשׁ
בְּקֶרְעָם: נז וּבְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יִמְצָא בְּיַד אִישׁ סֵפֶר בְּרִית וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִחַפֵּץ
בַּתּוֹרָה דָּת־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַמִּיתוֹ: נח בְּחֻקָּפָם עָשׂוּ כֵן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְנִמְצָאִים

1:41 BECOME ONE PEOPLE. All should follow the Hellenistic way of life.

1:47 SWINE. Pigs were sacred to Astarte and important in fertility cults of Greece and Asia Minor.

1:54 ON THE TWENTY-FIFTH DAY OF KISLEV. December, 167 B.C.E. (146 Seleucid Era = 167 B.C.E.).

the Israelites whom they found in their cities. 59. On the twenty-fifth of the month they offered sacrifices on the pagan altar which was set on the altar of the burnt-offering. 60. And, according to the royal decree, they put to death the women who had circumcised their children. 61. Their infants, their families, and those who had circumcised them, they hanged by the neck. 62. Yet many in Israel were determined in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose death rather than be defiled by food or violate the holy covenant; and they did die. Great was the suffering which came upon Israel.

chapter two Revolt of Mattathias

1. In those days Mattathias, son of Johanan, son of Simeon, a priest of the family of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modin. 2. He had five sons: Johanan called Gaddi, 3. Simon called Thassis, 4. Judah called Maccabee, 5. Eleazar called Auran, and Jonathan called Apphus.

reflecting specific characteristics. Johanan, the eldest, was called *Gaddi* because of his round head.

2:3 SIMON. Surnamed *Thassi* or zealous.

2:4 JUDAH CALLED MACCABEE. Various interpretations have been offered for Maccabee. "Hammer" from the Hebrew *maqaba* is one of these, suggesting Judah's heroic hammering of the enemy. Maccabee is an acronym derived from the first letters of: *Mi kamoha ba-elim Adonai*—"Who is like unto You among the gods, O Lord!" the motto inscribed on Judah's banner.

2:5 ELEAZAR. His surname *Auran* meaning possibly the "piercer." Jonathan's surname *Apphus* suggests "cunning."

חֹדֶשׁ בְּחֹדְשׁוֹ בְּעָרִים: נֹט וּבְחֻמְשָׁה וְעֶשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ הִקְרִיבוּ עַל-הַבִּמְכָּה אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ס וְאֶת-הַנָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר מָלוּ אֶת-בְּנֵיהֶן הַמִּיתוּ עַל-פִּי הַפְּקָדָה: סא וַיָּהָלוּ אֶת-הָעוֹלָלִים בְּצוּאָרֵיהֶן וְאֶת-בְּנֵי-בְתֵינָהּ וְאֶת הַמָּלִים אוֹתָם [הַמִּיתוּ]: סב וְרָפִים בִּישְׂרָאֵל הָיוּ אֲמִיצִים וַיַּחֲזִיקוּ לְבָלְתִּי אֶכֶל טָמֵא: סג וַיִּבְחָרוּ לָמוֹת לְבָלְתִּי הַטָּמֵא בְּמַאֲכָלִים וּלְבָלְתִּי חֲלָל בְּרִית-קֹדֶשׁ וַיָּמוּתוּ: סד וַיְהִי קֶצֶף גָּדוֹל עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאָדָּה:

ב

א בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם קָם מַתְתִּיָּהוּ בֶן-יֹחָנָן בֶּן-שִׁמְעוֹן כֹּהֵן מִבְּנֵי יְהוֹנָדָב מִירוּשָׁלַם וַיָּשָׁב בְּמוֹדִיעִים: ב וְלוֹ חֻמְשָׁה בָנִים יֹחָנָן הַנִּקְרָא גָּדִי: ג שִׁמְעוֹן הַנִּקְרָא תַרְסִי: ד יְהוּדָה הַנִּקְרָא מַקְבִּי: ה אֶלְעָזָר הַנִּקְרָא חוֹרֶן יוֹנָתָן הַנִּקְרָא חַפּוּשׁ:

1:60 THE WOMEN. Among the heroines of this era was Hannali, mother of the seven martyred sons (Second Book of Maccabees, 7).

2:1 MATTATHIAS. Mattathias was a Jerusalemite who fled to Modin when Antiochus' officials began the religious persecution of Jews.

FAMILY OF JOARIB. One of twenty-four classes of priests.

MODIN. An ancient Israelite town south-east of Lydda, about seventeen miles from Jerusalem.

2:2 JOHANAN. He and his four brothers acquired surnames

6. When Mattathias saw the blasphemous things that were done in Judah and in Jerusalem, 7. he said:

- "Woe is me, why was I born to see this,
the crushing of my people,
the destruction of the holy city,
and to sit still while it is surrendered to the enemies,
the holy place into the hands of foreigners?
8. Her Temple has become like a man without honor,
9. her glorious treasures captured, taken away.
Her infants have been killed in her streets,
her young men by the sword of the enemy.
10. What nation has not exploited her,
and what kingdom has not plundered her?
11. She has been robbed of all her adornment;
instead of a free woman, she has become a slave.
12. Behold, our Temple and our beauty
and our glory have been laid waste,
the pagans have profaned them!
13. Why should we live any longer?"

14. Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned bitterly.

15. Then the king's officers who were forcing the people to renounce God came to the town of Modin, to make them offer sacrifice. 16. And many Israelites came forward to them. But Mattathias and his sons gathered themselves together. 17. The officers of the king spoke to Mattathias, "You are a leader, a great and important man in this town. You are supported by sons and brothers. 18. You be the first to come forward and carry out the king's command as all the pagans, the men of Judah, and those left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be counted among the Friends of the King; you and your sons will receive high honors, rewards of silver and gold and many gifts."

19. Mattathias answered in a loud voice, "Though all the nations in the king's dominions obey him and forsake each of them the religion of his ancestors, and have chosen to follow

ו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הַנְּאֻצֹּת אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשׂוּ בִיהוּדָה וּבִירוּשָׁלַם: ז וַיֹּאמֶר

אוי לי למה ילדתי לתועות
בשר עמי ושר עיר-הקדש
ולשבת בה בהנתנה ביד-אויבים
בית המקדש ביד-נכרים:
ח הֲיָה הִיכָלָה בְּ[בֵית־]אִישׁ נִקְלָה:
ט בְּלִי־תַפְאָרֶת בְּשָׂבִי הוּכְלוּ
יְלָדֶיהָ הָרְגוּ בְּרַחֲבוּתֶיהָ
בְּחֹרֶבָהּ בְּחָרֵב אוֹיֵב:
י אֵי־זֶה עִם לֹא יִרָשׁ בְּמַלְכוּתָהּ
וְלֹא תִפְשׁ מִשְׁלָלָהּ:
יא כָּל־הַדָּרָה לָקַח
יב תַּחַת תַּפְשִׁיָה הִתָּה שְׁפָחָה:
וְהִנֵּה קָדְשֵׁנוּ וְהַדְּרָנוּ
וְתַפְאָרְתֵּנוּ הָעֵם
נִחְלָלוּהוּ גוֹיִם:
יג [אִם־ — — —] לָמָּה לָנוּ עוֹד חַיִּים:

יד וַיִּקְרַע מִתְּתִיהוּ וּבְנָיו אֶת־בְּגָדֵיהֶם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שָׂקִים וַיִּתְאַבְּלוּ
מֵאֵד:

טו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמְּאֻלָּצִים עַל־הַמַּעַל לַמִּוֹדִיעִים הָעִיר
לְזִבְחָה: טז וַיָּרִבִּים מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל בָּאוּ אֲלֵיהֶם וּמִתְתִּיהוּ וּבְנָיו גָּאֻסִּים: יז וַיַּעֲנוּ
אֲנָשֵׁי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּדְּבֵרוּ אֶל־מִתְתִּיהוּ לֵאמֹר רֹאשׁ וְנִכְבָּד וְגָדוֹל אַתָּה בְּעִיר
הַזֹּאת וְנִהְיָמָךְ בְּבָנִים וּבְאֲחִים: יח עַתָּה קֵרֵב רֹאשׁוֹן וַעֲשֵׂה מִצְוַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ כָל־הָעַמִּים וְאֲנָשֵׁי יְהוּדָה וְהַנְּשָׂאִים בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְהָיִיתָ אִתָּהּ
וּבְנֶיךָ מֵאֲהָבֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאַתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ תִּכְבְּדוּ בְּכֶסֶף וּבְזָהָב וּבְמִתְנֻחַת רַבּוֹת:
יט וַיַּעַן מִתְתִּיהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל אִם־כָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית־
מַלְכוּת הַמֶּלֶךְ שׁוֹמְעִים לוֹ יִסּוּרוּ כָל־אִישׁ מִעֲבוֹדַת אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּבְחָרוּ

his commands, 20. yet will I and my sons and brothers walk in the covenant of our fathers. 21. Far be it from us to abandon the Law and its ordinances. 22. We will not obey the decree of the king by departing from our worship, either to the right or to the left."

23. When he ceased speaking these words, a Jew stepped forward, in full view of all, to sacrifice upon the pagan altar in Modin, in keeping with the king's decree. 24. When Mattathias saw him, he was roused to indignation; his soul was stirred. With righteous anger he rushed forward and slew him on the altar. 25. At the same time he killed the officer sent by the king to enforce the sacrifice, and pulled the altar down. 26. Thus Mattathias showed his zeal for the Law, as Phineas had done by killing Zimri son of Salu. 27. "Follow me," he shouted through the town, "every one of you who is zealous for the Law, and wishes to maintain the covenant." 28. He and his sons fled to the mountains, and left all that they possessed in the town.

29. At that time many who wanted to uphold their faith and righteousness went down to the wilderness to settle there, 30. with their sons, their wives and their cattle, because misfortunes had fallen hard on them. 31. And it was reported to the king's officers and the troops in Jerusalem, the city of David, that men who had disobeyed the king's order had gone down to the hiding-places in the wilderness. 32. A large force pursued them, overtook them, and occupied positions opposite them. They prepared to attack them on the Sabbath day. 33. "It will be enough," they shouted to them, "if you come out and do as the king commands; your lives will be spared." 34. But the Israelites answered, "We will not come forth, nor will we obey the king's command to break the Sabbath day." Then they attacked them. 35. The Israelites did not defend themselves; they neither threw a stone against them, nor did they barricade their hiding places, 36. for they said, "Let us all die with a clear conscience. We call heaven and earth to testify that you destroy us unlawfully." 37. So they attacked them on

2:36 THREW NO STONE. They would not fight back on the Sabbath day.

במצותיו: כ נאני וכני ואחי גלף בקרית אבותינו: כא תלילה-לנו לעוב תורה ומצות: כב לדברי המלך לא-נשמע לסור מעבודתנו ימין או שמאל:

כג וככלותו לרבר את-הדברים האלה קרב איש יהודי לעיני כלם לזבח על-הבמה במודיעים פמצות המלך: כד וירא מתתיהו ונקא וישתונן כליותיו וישלח חרונו כמשפט ותרץ ויזבחהו על-הבמה: כה ואת איש-המלך המאלץ לזבח המית בעת ההיא ואת הבמה הריס: כו ונקא לתורה כאשר עשה פינחס לוקרי בן-סלוא: כז ויקרא מתתיהו בעיר בקול גדול לאמר פל-המקנא לתורה העומד בקרית ילף אתרי: כח וינס הוא וכניו אל-ההרים ויעזבו כל אשר-היה להם בעיר:

כט אז ירדו רבים מבקשי צדק ומשפט אל-המקדש לשבת שם: ל הם ובניהם ונשיהם ומקניהם כירבו הרעות עליהם: לא ויגר לאנשי המלך ולחליל אשר היו בירושלם בעיר-דוד כירדו אנשים אשר-עברו את-מצות המלך למחבואים במקדש: לב וירדפו אחריהם רבים וישיגום ויחננו עליהם ויערכו עליהם מלחמה ביום השבת: לג ויאמרו להם רב לכם צאי ועשו כדבר-המלך וחיו: לד ויאמרו לא נצא ולא נעשה דבר המלך לחלל את-יום-השבת וימהרו [לעשות] אתם מלחמה: לה ולא ענו להם ולא השליכו עליהם אבן ולא סתמו את-המחבואים: לו באמרם גמות כלנו בתחנונו עדים לנו השמים והארץ כי בלא-משפט תספנו: לו ויערכו עליהם מלחמה בשבת

2:26 PHINEAS. He had been zealous in his time on behalf of the Law (Numbers 25:7,8).

2:29 TO THE WILDERNESS. In the Judean wilderness there are countless caves and grottoes which could be used for hiding-places. In an earlier period as many as six hundred Benjaminites had found refuge here as did many others at different periods (Judges 20:47).

the Sabbath, and they were massacred, they, their wives, their children and their cattle, a thousand people.

38. When Mattathias and his friends heard the news, they mourned bitterly over them. 39. They said to one another, "If we all do as our brothers have done, and do not fight against the pagans for our lives and for our laws, they will soon destroy us from the face of the earth." 40. On that day they decided: "If anyone attack us in battle on the Sabbath day, let us fight against him, rather than all die, as our brothers did in their hiding-places."

41. It was then that they were joined by a company of Hasidim, strong Israelite loyalists, each one willingly offering himself in the cause of the Law. 42. And all who fled from harsh treatment joined them, and added to their strength. 43. They organized an army and struck down sinners in their anger, and in their wrath those who violated the Law. Those who escaped their attack fled to the pagans to save themselves.

44. And Mattathias and his friends went about the country and tore down pagan altars, 45. and circumcised by force as many of the uncircumcised children as they found in Israel's borders. 46. They hunted down the arrogant ones, and the cause prospered in their hands. 47. So they rescued the Law from the hands of the pagans and their kings, and would not let the sinners triumph.

48. When the time drew near for Mattathias to die, he said to his sons, "Arrogance and reproach have grown strong. This is a time for destruction and anger. 49. My children, be zealous for the Law, and give your lives for the covenant of our fathers. 50. Remember the deeds they did in their generations, and great glory and everlasting fame shall be yours. 51. Was not Abraham faithful in time of trial, and so gained credit for

2:52-60 ABRAHAM. The meritorious actions of the ancestors are held up as an inspiration to them, beginning with Abraham and continuing through the generations down to the act of faith by the three companions in the story of Daniel.

וַיָּמוּתוּ הֵם וְנָשֵׁיהֶם וּבְנֵיהֶם וּמִקְנֵיהֶם כָּאֶלֶף נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם:

לח וידע מתתיהו ואוהביו ויתאבלו עליהם עד-מאד: לט ויאמרו איש אל-רעהו אם-נעשה כלנו כאשר עשו אחינו ולא נלחם בגוים על-נפשנו ועל תורתנו עתה מהרה ימחו אותנו מעל פני-הארץ: מ וינעצו ביום ההוא לאמר כל-אדם אשר יבוא אלינו למלחמה ביום השבת נלקחם-בו ולא נמות כלנו כאשר מתו אחינו במחבואים:

מא אז גאסף אליהם קהל-חסידים גבורי חיל מישראל כל-המתנדב לתורה: מב וכל הבורחים מפני הרעות חבדו אליהם ויהיו להם למשען: מג ויערכו חיל ויכו את-הרשעים בקצפם ואת האנשים הפושעים בנקמתם והשרידים נסו אל-הגוים להנצל:

מד ויסב מתתיהו ואוהביו ויהרסו את-הקמות: מה וימולו את-הבנים אשר לא-נמולו אשר-מצאו בגבול ישראל בחזקה: מו וירדפו את-בני זדון ויצלח הדבר בידם: מז ויגאלו את-התורה מיד הגוים וימד המלך ולא הניחו קרן לרשע:

מח ויקרבו ימי מתתיהו למות ויאמר לבניו עתה גבר זדון ותוכחה יום מהפכה וחרון אף: מט ועתה בנים קנאו לתורה ותנו נפשותיכם על-בית אבותיכם: נ זכרו מעשי אבות אשר עשו בדורותיהם וינחלתם כבוד גדול ושם עולם: נא אברהם הלא כנפיון

2:42 A COMPANY OF HASIDIM. These were strict observers of the Jewish tradition. They were not of a nationalistic mind as were the Maccabees. But after the mass slaughter inflicted upon them by Antiochus' forces, they joined the Maccabean revolt, withdrawing at a later time when political independence was near realization.

2:47 THE ARROGANT ONES. This refers to the Syrians along with the collaborationist Hellenized Jews.

2:51 EVERLASTING FAME. Immortality is offered as reward.