for the miraculous deliverance. The Modim blessing, into which this prayer is inserted on Hanukkah, Purim, and Israel Independence Day, speaks about “Your miracles that daily attend us.” Mention is therefore made here of each of the so-called “minor” holidays, those added after the time of the Torah, since each has a miraculous deliverance connected to it. Each commemorates the deliverance of Israel from its enemies under difficult circumstances. The miracles referred to are not supernatural interferences in nature, but rather God working through history. We experience the ability to overcome adversity as a divine act.

— until our time. The wonders of deliverance are not confined to ancient times. They have occurred in modern times as well. In recent times a third holiday, Yom Ha-atzma’ut, has been added to the two ancient ones. Here too we see a wonder, in the establishment of the State of Israel and its ability to overcome its adversaries. The prayer for Yom Ha-atzma’ut does not appear here since this service is intended for Friday afternoon before Shabbat; Yom Ha-atzma’ut is never commemorated on Friday, in order to avoid possible desecration of Shabbat.

— In the days of Mattathias. The revolt against the Syrians was also an internal conflict between Jewish Hellenists and those remaining true to Judaism. The priest Mattathias and his sons led the struggle and gained control of the Temple in 164 B.C.E.

— abandon Your Torah. Under the rule of the Syrians and the Hellenists, the Torah, which was the official law of Judea, was first made optional and then outlawed altogether.

—inkindled lights. The Menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum representing the universe and also the Tree of Life, is the ancient symbol of Judaism. See Exodus 25:31–40. It was kindled every evening and burned continually through the night in the Sanctuary. Rekindling this light was one of the major features of the rededication ceremony of Hanukkah by the Maccabees, and is commemorated by the lighting of lamps each night of the festival in our own day.

—in the days of Mordecai. The story of Purim is related in the biblical Book of Esther, which is set in Persia, probably during the reign of King Xerxes I (486–465 B.C.E.). Many scholars believe that Esther was written some time in the second century B.C.E. and is historical fiction, weaving together several traditions of various events that were typical of the life of Jews in the Persian diaspora.

—in kindled lights. The Menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum representing the universe and also the Tree of Life, is the ancient symbol of Judaism. See Exodus 25:31–40. It was kindled every evening and burned continually through the night in the Sanctuary. Rekindling this light was one of the major features of the rededication ceremony of Hanukkah by the Maccabees, and is commemorated by the lighting of lamps each night of the festival in our own day.

—in the days of Mordecai. The story of Purim is related in the biblical Book of Esther, which is set in Persia, probably during the reign of King Xerxes I (486–465 B.C.E.). Many scholars believe that Esther was written some time in the second century B.C.E. and is historical fiction, weaving together several traditions of various events that were typical of the life of Jews in the Persian diaspora.

—in kindled lights. The Menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum representing the universe and also the Tree of Life, is the ancient symbol of Judaism. See Exodus 25:31–40. It was kindled every evening and burned continually through the night in the Sanctuary. Rekindling this light was one of the major features of the rededication ceremony of Hanukkah by the Maccabees, and is commemorated by the lighting of lamps each night of the festival in our own day.

—in the days of Mordecai. The story of Purim is related in the biblical Book of Esther, which is set in Persia, probably during the reign of King Xerxes I (486–465 B.C.E.). Many scholars believe that Esther was written some time in the second century B.C.E. and is historical fiction, weaving together several traditions of various events that were typical of the life of Jews in the Persian diaspora.
The Rededication
(From the Apocrypha)

Taking uncut stones as prescribed by the
Torah, they (the Jews) built a new altar after
the pattern of the old. They repaired the
sanctuary and sanctified the interior of the
house and the courts. They also made new
sacred vessels, and they brought the cande-
labrum and the altar of incense and the table
into the nave. They burned incense on the
altar and kindled the lights on the cande-
labrum so that they illuminated the nave.
They set loaves upon the table and hung the
curtains and brought to completion all the
work which they had done. They rose early
on the morning of the twenty-fifth day of the
ninth month (that is the month of Kislev) in
the year 148 and they brought a sacrifice
according to the Torah upon the new altar of
burnt offerings which they had built. At the
very time of year and on the very day on
which the gentiles had profaned the altar, it
was dedicated to the sound of singing and
harp and lyres and cymbals. The entire peo-
ple prostrated themselves and bowed and
gave thanks to Heaven Who had brought
them victory. . . Judah and his brothers and
the entire assembly of Israel decreed that the
days of the dedication of the altar should be
observed at their time of year annually for
eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth of
the month of Kislev, with joy and gladness.

I Maccabees 4:47–59

On Hanukkah:
We thank You for the miraculous deliverance, for the heroism, and
for the triumphs of our ancestors from ancient days until our time.

In the days of Mattathias son of Yohanan, the heroic Hasmonean
Kohen, and in the days of his sons, a cruel power rose against
Your people Israel, demanding that they abandon Your Torah and
violate Your mitzvot. You, in great mercy, stood by Your people
in time of trouble. You defended them, vindicated them, and
avenged their wrongs. You delivered the strong into the hands of
the week, the many into the hands of the few, the corrupt into the
hands of the pure in heart, the guilty into the hands of the
innocent. You delivered the arrogant into the hands of those who
were faithful to Your Torah. You have revealed Your glory and
Your holiness to all the world, achieving great victories and
miraculous deliverance for Your people Israel to this day. Then
Your children came into Your shrine, cleansed Your Temple,
purified Your sanctuary, and kindled lights in Your sacred courts.
They set aside these eight days as a season for giving thanks and
chanting praise to You.

On Purim:
We thank You for the miraculous deliverance, for the heroism, and
for the triumphs of our ancestors from ancient days until our time.

In the days of Mordecai and Esther, in Shushan, the capital of
Persia, the wicked Haman rose up against all Jews and plotted
their destruction. In a single day, the thirteenth of Adar, the
twelfth month of the year, Haman planned to annihilate all Jews,
young and old, and to permit the plunder of their property.
You, in great mercy, thwarted his designs, frustrated his plot, and
visited upon him the evil he planned to bring on others. Haman,
together with his sons, was put to death on the gallows he had
made for Mordecai.

According to [the Book of Esther itself] this feast of Purim originated in the escape of the Jewish people
from a threat of total annihilation. From the way the story is told, however, it is fairly evident that
though its core may well be some such peril and deliverance, they cannot have happened exactly in the man-
ner related. For the Book of Esther may be described, if one stretches a point or two, as a mock-learned dis-
quisition to be read as the opening of a carnival-like celebration. . . Must we conclude, then, that our
author was a religiously indifferent man? Not at all. The holiday whose cause he was pleading was, in his
time no less than in ours, not one of solemnity but one of licit levity . . . If the book is read in the spirit in
which it is written, all misgivings — on the scores of both credibility and spirituality — will be dissipated,
the very extravagances and historical improbabilities will be relished, and the ingenuity of the plot will be
admired.

H.L. Ginsberg