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# The Real Story of Chanukah

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A translation of

“Megillat B’ne Chashmona’i”

Written by either the Chashmonaim themselves  
or the elders of Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel  
with insights.

Compiled by Adam Abraham

# Megilat B'ne Chashmona'i



## The Real Story of Chanukah

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# Megilat B'ne Chashmona'i

## First Candle Lighting

1. *And it was in the days of Antiuchas<sup>1</sup>, King of the Greek Empire. He was a mighty and powerful king who had a strong rulership; all the kings heeded him. 2. He conquered many states, imprisoned mighty kings, burned their castles, burned their temples and tied up their mightiest of men with ropes. 3. He built a large city on the seacoast to serve as his royal residence, and called it "Antuchya" after his own name<sup>2</sup>. 4. Opposite it, his viceroy<sup>3</sup> – Bagras, also built himself a city and called it "City of Bagras" and such are their names to this day.<sup>4</sup> 5. Since the days of Alexander the Macedonian [Alexander the Great] there had never been a king as strong as him beyond the Euphrates<sup>5</sup>.*

א. ויהי בימי אנטיוכס מלך יון, מלך גדול וחזק היה, וחסון בממשלתו, וכל המלכים נשמעים אליו: ב. הוא כבש מדינות רבות, ומלכים חזקים אסר, והשם טירותם, והיכליהם שרף באש, וגיבוריהם בכבלים כבל: ג. הוא בנה עיר גדולה על חוף הים, להיות לו לבית מלכות וקרא לה אנטוכיא על שמו: ד. וגם בגרס משנהו בנה לו עיר אחרת למולה ויקרא לה עיר בגריס וכן שמותן עד עתה: ה. מימי אלכסנדרוס מקדון לא קם מלך חזק כמוהו בכל עבר הנהר:

<sup>1</sup> “Antiuchas”; This is how the name is pronounced in the ancient books, unlike ‘Antiochus’ which is widely spread these days.

<sup>2</sup> This was the practice of Kings, to build cities and name them after themselves. (מהר"י ונה)

<sup>3</sup> The Viceroy [or; second in command] is a great general who takes the place of the King if he dies leaving no son fitting to be king. (מהר"י ונה)

<sup>4</sup> Just as the Megillah testifies, to this day, on the journey between חלאב to אנטוכיא there is a desolate & destroyed city called באגריס! (ספר פרי-תבואה לר"י שווארץ)

<sup>5</sup> Once Alexander died and his empire was torn into four, Greece was weak. But now Antiuchas elevated Greece back to a similar strength as in those days of Alexander the Great.

6. In the twenty-third year of his reign, the two hundred and thirteenth year after the Temple had been rebuilt, he directed his face to march on Jerusalem<sup>6</sup>.

7. He said to his officers: "You are aware that the Jews that are in our midst neither serve our gods nor observe our laws! they abandon the king's laws to practice their own. 8. They hope moreover for the day when the kings and dominions shall fall, saying: "When will our own King<sup>7</sup> reign over us, so that we will rule the sea and the land, and the entire world will be handed over to us."<sup>8</sup> It is indeed a disgrace for the royal government to let them remain on the face of the earth. 9. Come now, let us abolish the covenant made with them: Shabbat, Chodesh and Brit Milah."

10. The proposal pleased his officers and all his armies.

ו. בשנת שלש ועשרים למלכו היא שנת שלש עשרה ומאתים לבנין בית האלקים הזה שם פניו לעלות לירושלים:

ז. ויען ויאמר לשריו הלא ידעתם עם היהודים אשר בינינו לאלקנו אינם עובדים וחקינו אינם עושים ומשפטי המלך עוזבים לעשות משפטיהם: ח. וגם הם מקוים ליום שברון המלכים והממשלות ואומרים, מתי ימלוך עלינו מלכינו ונמשול בים וביבשה וכל העולם ימסר בידינו. אין גדלת המלכות להניח את אלה על פני האדמה: ט. עתה בואו ונשבית מהם הברית הכרותה עליהם, שבת, חרש, ומילה: י. וייטב הדבר הזה בעיני שריו, ובעיני כל צבאותיו:

<sup>6</sup> According to this, the decrees and wars of the Greeks started in the 213<sup>th</sup> year of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beit HaMikdash, which was the last year of the Greek Empire and therefore this whole story took place in the duration of one year! In the 214<sup>th</sup> year of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beit HaMikdash, the Chashmonayim already took control and continued for 206 years until the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed. (מהר"י ונה) However others write (using other sources) that the story was for a duration of a few years. According to the Rambam (in his 'Igerret Teman'), the Jews suffered the decrees of the Greeks for 52 years!!

<sup>7</sup> The Moshiach.

<sup>8</sup> Rav Yechezkel Sarna זצ"ל in his notes on this Megillah writes that this claim that 'the Jews want to rule over the entire world' is the eternal claim that our enemies amongst the other nations have against the Jewish people. He explains that this is because there is a prophetic knowledge deep in their hearts that this in fact will happen! The Jewish people *will* be the rulers of the world, with our King – the Moshiach – leading us. This is why our enemies despise and hate us with a passion! And so we see that even though Antiochus "conquered many countries...", however he only "...imprisoned mighty kings, burned their castles, burned their temples and tied up their mightiest of men with ropes"! Never did he decide to wipe them off the map of the world! But when he came to conquer Israel, only then did he say "it is indeed a disgrace for the royal government to let them **remain on the face of the earth**"!!

And even though they claim that they are doing this because "it is a disgrace for the royal government" this is the way of evil people; to cover up their true intentions [being that they hate us and are threatened by us] with logic and reason but in truth it's all lies and words of nothingness.

## Second Candle Lighting

11. Immediately King Antiuchas dispatched Nikanor - his viceroy<sup>9</sup> - with a large army and multitude of people who came to the city of Jerusalem. 12. He massacred many people and set up an idol in the Beit HaMikdash. In the place where the G-d of Israel had said to his faithful prophets: "There will I establish my residence forever." 13. At that same time, they slaughtered a swine [pig] and brought its blood into the holy court.

14. When Yochanan ben Matityah heard of this, he was very much pained and was filled with rage and fury, and his face changed color<sup>10</sup>. He thought deeply as to what he can do regarding this. 15. He then made himself a dagger, two pinkie's long and one pinkie wide, and concealed it under his clothes.

16. He came to Jerusalem and stood at the royal gate, calling to the gate-keepers and guards: "I am Yochanan son of Matityah Cohen of the Jews, I have come to appear before Nicanor." 17. The guards informed Nicanor that the high priest of the Jews was standing at the door. "Let him enter!" Nicanor said.

18. Yochanan was brought to Nicanor, who said: "You are one of the rebels who rebel against the king and do not care for the welfare of his government!"

יא. באותה שעה קם אנטיוכס המלך וישלח את ניקנור משנהו בעצב גדול ועם רב. ויבוא לעיר ירושלים: יב. הרג בה הרג רב, ויטע פסל בבית המקדש, במקום אשר אמר אלוהי ישראל לעבדיו הנביאים שם אשרה שכינתי לעולם: יג. באותו זמן שחטו חזיר, וישאו מדמו לעזרת הקודש:

יד. וכאשר שמע יוחנן בן מתתיהו, צר לו מאד, וימלא רגז וחמה, ודמות פניו נשתנתה. ויחשב בלבו מה לעשות על זה: טו. אז יוחנן עשה לו חרב, שתי זרתות ארכה ורחבה זרת אחת. ותחת בגדיו כסה: טז. ולירושלים בא, ויעמוד בפתח העיר. ויקרא לשוערים ושומרים, ויאמר להם, אני יוחנן בן מתתיהו כהן היהודים עתה באתי להכנס לפני ניקנור: יז. אז נכנסו השוערים ושומרים, ויאמרו לניקנור הכהן הגדול אשר ליהודים עומד בפתח. ויאמר אליהם בא יבוא: יח. אז הובא יוחנן לפני ניקנור. ויענהו ניקנור ויאמר אתה הוא אחד מן המורדים אשר מרדו במלך, ואינם מבקשים שלום מלכותו:

<sup>9</sup> Even though Nikanor was also called viceroy, Bagras was higher than him. This was the way of the Kings to make generals and viceroys, one greater than the next. When they would go out to war, they send the least important general out first with his armies, if he is successful, they raise him up to greater levels of importance, but if not, they send the greatest of the generals.

<sup>10</sup> "...his face changed color": from anger. Alternatively; the image of G-d that man has, is only when he is happily doing Hashem's will and is not pained. However if/when this changes, this image of G-d also changes to something else. (מובא בשמן למאור בשם כתיי אחד.)



19. Yochanan replied: "I have now come before you to do whatever you demand"<sup>11</sup>. 20. Nikanor answered; "If you wish to do as I please, take a swine and sacrifice it to the idol. You shall wear royal clothes and ride the king's own horse; you shall be counted among the most loved generals of the king.

21. When Yochanan heard this, he answered: "My lord, I am afraid of the Jewish people. If they hear that I have done such a thing, they will stone me. Let everyone leave your presence, so as not to inform them."

22. Immediately Nicanor ordered everybody out.

23. At that moment<sup>12</sup> Yochanan raised his eyes to heaven and arranged a prayer before the Master of the world. He said; "My G-d and G-d of my fathers; Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. 24. Do not hand me over to this heathen (uncircumcised man); for if he kills me, he will boast in the temple of 'Dagon'<sup>13</sup> that "my god has handed him over to me"<sup>14</sup>.

יט. ויען יוחנן ויאמר עתה באתי לפניך, לעשות כל אשר תחפוץ: כ. וישיבהו ניקנור ויאמר אם [לעשות] כחפצי אתה מבקש, קח חזיר ושחטהו לפסל. ואלבישך לבוש מלכות, וארכיבך על סוס המלך, ובאחד מאוהבי המלך תהיה:

כא. וכשזה הדבר שמע, השיבו יוחנן ויאמר: אדוני, אני ירא מבני ישראל, אשר ישמעו אשר עשיתי כן וסקלוני באבנים. עתה יצאו כל איש מלפניך, פן יגידו לבני ישראל:

כב. אז ניקנור הוציא כל איש מלפניו:

כג. אז יוחנן נשא עיניו לשמים ויערוך תפלתו לפני אדון העולם, ויאמר: אלהי ואלהי אבותי, אברהם יצחק וישראל:

כד. וכך אמר, אל תמסרני ביד הערל הזה, פן יהרגני, וילך ויתפאר בבית דגון אלהיו, ויאמר אלהי נתנו בידי:

<sup>11</sup> **"I have now come before you to do whatever you demand"**: There is a halacha (שו"ע יורה דעה סי' קנ"ז סעי' ב) that it is forbidden for a person to claim to be a gentile even if it is in order to save his life. This is because by saying such a thing, he is agreeing to their religion and is denying Hashem. That is the Halacha. Of course the person is just saying these words exteriorly to save his life and has no intention of really being like a gentile etc, but even so, the halacha is that it is still forbidden! How then was Yochanan able to say what he did?! True it was all part of his plan and he definitely had no real intention to fulfill anything Nikanor said, but even so, it seems from his words that he is ready to leave the Torah and do all that Nikanor requests, including offering a pig to their G-ds!! (ממלכת כהנים). Rabbi Tzvi Kushelevsky *shlita* answers that for the purpose of saving the Jewish nation from destruction, it was permitted to transgress what seemed to be Avodah Zara.

<sup>12</sup> Whilst the soldiers and guards were leaving (שמן למאור – לרה"ג ירצאבי)

<sup>13</sup> **"The temple of 'Dagon'"**: This is the name of their Avodah Zara. Our sages teach us that it was an image of a fish. (מהר"י ונה)

<sup>14</sup> **"My god has handed him over to me"**: In other words; "I am not asking this from you for my own merit, but rather so that there should not be a Chilul Hashem! For the gentiles will mistakenly think that it was their idols that caused their success and not that You Hashem handed us over to them." (שמן למאור – לרה"ג ירצאבי)

25. *At that moment, he advanced three steps<sup>15</sup> toward Nicanor, thrust the dagger into his heart, and slung him as a corpse into the court of the Temple.* 26. *Yochanan further prayed to the G-d of the heavens and said; My G-d, do not count it a sin that I killed this heathen in the Beit HaMikdash<sup>16</sup>; pass all the gentiles who came to misdirect the Jews<sup>17</sup> in Jerusalem.*

27. *On that day Yochanan set out and fought the enemy, he killed multitudes of them. Those who managed to escape fled by ship back to King Antiuchas.* 28. *The number of those who were slain on that day were seventy two thousand seven hundred, for they were killing each other.* 29. *Upon returning, he built a Menorah and called it "Makbe<sup>18</sup>", Destroyer of Tyrants.*

כה. באותו שעה פסע אליו פסיעות שלש, וידקור החרב בלבו, וישלך אותו חלל בעזרת הקודש: כו. ויען יוחנן לפני אלהי השמים ויאמר: אלוהי, לא תשת עלי חטאים אשר הרגתיו לערל הזה בבית המקדש עתה תמסור כל הגוים אשר באו להטעות היהודים אשר בירושלים:

כז. אז יצא יוחנן בן מתתיה ביום ההוא, וילחם בגוים ההם, ויהרוג בהם הרג רב. וינוסו העם אשר נעולו מן המלחמה באניה אל אנטיוכס המלך: כח. ויהי מספר ההרוגים אשר נהרגו ביום ההוא, שבע מאות אלף ושנים ושבועים אלף. כי היו הורגים איש בחבירו: כט. בשובו בנה מגורה ויקרא לה "מקבי" [נ"א מכבין] הרג החזקים:

<sup>15</sup> **"Three steps"**: That the merit of the three Fathers mentioned in his prayer should be activated on his behalf. Alternatively; in the merit of the three steps one takes at the end of the Amidah. (מהר"י ונה)

<sup>16</sup> **"In the Beit HaMikdash"**: Thereby causing an impurity to be in the Beit HaMikdash

<sup>17</sup> **"Who came to misdirect the Jews"**: to worship foreign g-ds. [Avodah Zara] (שמן למאור – לרה"ג י.רצאבי)

<sup>18</sup> **"Makbe"** This is the source of the name 'Macabee' that we are familiar with. Some say it is from the word "מקבת" *Makebel* which means Hammer (שמן למאור – לרה"ג י.רצאבי) bringing out that in the war, Yochanan would smash like a hammer. (ממלכת כהנים)

## Third Candle Lighting

30. *When king Antiuchas heard that his governor Nicanor had been slain, he was greatly distressed. He sent for Bagras<sup>19</sup> the wicked one, misdirector of his people<sup>20</sup>.*

31. *Antiuchas told him: "Do you not know, have you not heard, what the Israelites did to me? They killed my armies and ransacked my camps and my generals<sup>21</sup>!*

32. *Can you now be sure of your own wealth? Or of your homes that belong to you?<sup>22</sup> Come now, let us rise up against and attack them and abolish the covenant made with them: Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Brit Milah."*

33. *Then, Bagras the wicked and all his armies invaded Jerusalem. 34. He killed multitudes of people and instituted 'the decree of the bride' as well as Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Brit Milah.*

35. *So drastic was the king's decree that anyone discovered to have circumcised his son, would be brought, the man and his wife, and were hung opposite the child<sup>23</sup>.*

ל. וכאשר שמע אנטיוכס המלך אשר נהרג ניקנור משנהו, צר לו מאוד, וישלח ויקרא לבגס הרשע מטעה עמו:

לא. ויען אנטיוכס המלך ויאמר לבגס: הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת, את אשר עשו לי בני ישראל. הרגו עבאותי ובזזו מחנותי ושרי: לב. עתה על נסכיהם אתם בטוחים, או על בתיכם אשר לכם? עתה בואו ונעלה עליהם ונשבית מהם הברית הכרותה עליהם שבת וחדש ומילה:

לג. אז קם בגס הרשע וכל חילותיו ויבא לירושלים: לד. הרג בה הרג רב, ויגזור בה גזירת כלה, על שבת וחדש ומילה:

לה. בעבור זאת מפני שדבר המלך נחפז, כל אשר ימול את בנו הביאו את האיש ואשתו ויתלום לנגד הילד.

<sup>19</sup> **"Bagras"**: This is the viceroy that was mentioned at the start of this Megillah. He was greater than Nikanor. (מהר"י ונה)

<sup>20</sup> **"Misdirector of his people"**: Misdirecting them to serve idols. It seems that he also made himself into Avodah Zara! This is why he has the added label of "הרשע – the wicked one", which was not written by Nikanor. (שמן למאור – לרה"ג י.רצאבי)

<sup>21</sup> They ransacked the entire army that came up with Nikanor including the gold and silver which Nikanor brought to give his soldiers. (מהר"י ונה)

<sup>22</sup> **"Or of your homes that belong to you?"**: For after such a great victory by the Jews, maybe they will further contend against us and remove us from our land! Antiuchas said this to scare him and fire him up. (הרה"ג י.רצאבי שליט"א)

<sup>23</sup> We are taught in the Gemara (מסכת סנהדרין עד.) that there are three things that one is required to give over his life rather than transgress: murder, illicit relations and idol worship. However if one is told to



36. *There was even a woman who gave birth to a son after her husband's death and had him circumcised when he was eight days old.<sup>24</sup> She climbed up to the top of the wall<sup>25</sup> with the child she circumcised in her arms. 37. She cried out: "We say to you, wicked Bagras; This covenant of our fathers [which you intend to destroy] shall never cease from us nor from our children's children." She cast her son down to the ground and flung herself after him so that they died together.<sup>26</sup> Many Jews of that period did the same, refusing to renounce the covenant of their fathers.*

לו. ואף אישה ילדה בן אחרי מות בעלה, ותמולתו לשמונה ימים, ותעל על חומת העיר ובנה אשר מלתחו בידה: לו. ותען ותאמר: לך נאמר בגרס הרשע, ברית אבותינו לא תחדל ממנו, ולא מבני בנינו ותפל את בנה אל תחת החומה, ותיפול אחריו, וימותו שניהם. ורבים מבני ישראל היו עושים כן, ולא הפרו ברית אבותיהם:

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transgress any of the other mitzvot – including circumcising ones child – or die, he should transgress and not allow himself to be killed. The Gemara however continues to explain that during a time of governmental decrees or persecutions [designed to stamp out Torah observance], every mitzvah becomes a reason to die for! This explains why many Jews – as told in this megillah – and so too throughout our history in the many persecutions and holocausts we went through, died for things like circumcision, Shabbat and many other mitzvot, even though they are not the three cardinal sins.

<sup>24</sup> The obligation of circumcising ones son is upon the father and not the mother. [If the father did not circumcise him, the obligation falls upon the beit din, and if the beit din do not circumcise him, so then it is up to the child to circumcise himself when he is older (סו"ה)] Why then did this mother initially put her life in danger for a mitzvah she is not even obligated to fulfil?!

This is difficult because even though as we mentioned above that at a time of persecution every single mitzvah becomes a reason to die for, but here, she isn't obligated in any way to fulfil this mitzvah so maybe she should be held liable for putting her life in danger! (ממלכת כהנים די פד) (This question doesn't apply according to the opinions that a woman is in fact obligated in this mitzvah. It is less of an obligation comparison to the obligation of the father, however she is in fact obligated to give her life for this. Accordingly this woman acted according to the letter of the law. Especially in this specific case where the father had died, which meant that even though her obligation is less than that of the father but now her obligation is activated more than ever.)

The answer however is that true she is not obligated in this mitzvah, however she did so from the great desire she had to sanctify Hashem's Great Name – that is, to make a Kiddush Hashem in public. And even though this seems difficult from the question above as how she was allowed to die for a mitzvah she is not even obligated to fulfil, we can answer that the Gemara there continues to explain that at a time of governmental decrees and persecutions, a Jew must be willing to die for even a minhag! A woman dying for the mitzvah of circumcision is surely not worse than a man dying for a minhag!

So this story wants to bring out how much self sacrifice the Jewish people had. For even a woman, who is exempt from circumcising her son (for the mitzvah is upon the father and as was mentioned in verse 36, he was deceased) did such a thing to sanctify Hashem's name in public. (קונטרס מאי חנוכה)

<sup>25</sup> Opposite the place where Bagras set up his residence. (שמן למאור – לרה"ג ירצאבי)

<sup>26</sup> Another question: based on the Gemara above, she is to "allow herself to be killed", she should have waited for the Greeks to come and kill her. But as we see, she went to them herself and took her own life! **Isn't that suicide** which is forbidden?! The commentaries answer that in such a case, she was permitted to do so and it is not considered suicide. This is in accordance with the *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch (יו"ד סימן) (שמ"ה) that one is permitted to take his own life if he is in the situation similar to King Shaul. King Shaul was in a position with no way to escape the Pelishtim. Death was inevitable and had they got their hands on him, they would have surely dealt with him in a cruel and painful way (רד"ק שמואל א' לא. ה).

*Continuation of footnote on next page...*

## Fourth Candle Lighting

38. *At that same time, some of the Jews said to one another: "Come, let us keep Shabbat in a cave lest we violate it." But the Jews were betrayed to Bagras! 39. Bagras then dispatched armed men who came to the entrance of the cave and said: "You Jews, come out to us, eat our bread, drink our wine<sup>27</sup> and do what we do!" 40. But the Jews said to one another: "We remember what we were commanded on Mount Sinai: 'Six days you shall labour and on the seventh day you shall rest.' It is better for us to die than to desecrate Shabbat." 41. When the Jews failed to come out, damp wood<sup>28</sup> was brought and set on fire at the entrance of the cave. About a thousand men and women died there.*

לח. באותו זמן אמרו בני ישראל איש לחבירו:  
בואו ונשבות במערה, פן נחלל את יום השבת.  
וילשינו את היהודים לפני בגרס: טל. אז שלח  
בגרס אנשים חמושים, ויבואו אל פי המערה  
ויאמרו. בני ישראל, עאו אלינו, אכלו מלחמנו  
ושתו מייננו ומעשינו תהיו עושים: מ. ויענו  
ויאמרו בני ישראל אחד לחבירו: זוכרים אנחנו  
מה שצוינו על הר סיני ששת ימים תעשו  
מלאכתכם וביום השביעי תשביתו, עתה טוב  
לנו למות מאשר נחלל את יום השבת:  
מא. בעבור זאת כאשר לא שמעו להם, הביאו  
עצים לחים ושרפו על פי המערה, וייהרגו  
כאלף איש ואישה:

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The same applies here. This woman – as well as many other Jews who did the same as her (as the Megillah testifies) during this period of time, are similar to the case of King Shaul in the sense that they themselves will certainly be hunted down to be killed in a cruel way for circumcising their children just as the Greeks decreed and were there to enforce! They were therefore allowed to take their own lives. Especially here, which unlike a time of war as in the episode with King Shaul, it was a time of persecution which meant that a great Kiddush Hashem was made through them.

One final question: **how was she allowed to kill her son!?**

The commentaries deal with this question too. There is a difference of opinion in whether one is permitted to kill his own child at a time of persecution so that the enemy will not turn the child away from Judaism - killing him spiritually. It is clear from this episode, that the Jews of those times held by the opinion permitting such a thing. This is especially seen in the next *pesukim* which state that this was not a unique episode, but rather “*Many Jews of that period did the same*”! In short, this mother was afraid that after her death, the Greeks would turn the child’s heart away from Torah and Mitzvot. She was afraid they would kill him spiritually as they succeeded doing with some other unfortunate Jews who weren’t able to withstand the difficult tests. She rather chose to kill him physically keeping his pure soul untainted.

<sup>27</sup> At first, they wanted to try and talk to them, to convince them to be like them and leave the ways of the Torah ח"ו. This is why they invited them first to feast for a person is easily persuaded and convinced through food and drink. The Greeks therefore invited them to “eat our bread and drink our wine” because if they do, just maybe they will be persuaded and reach the next step of their request which is “...and do what we do”! (ממלכת כהנים)

<sup>28</sup> “**Damp wood**”; Which brings out thick smoke thereby choking the people inside the cave. (– שמן למאור – לרה"ג ירצאבי)

*[After this, the wicked Bagras decreed that no bride shall enter to her husband before coming first to the King<sup>29</sup>! This Chashmunai had a bride and they were considering to hand her over to Bagras [as the decree required]. When the bride saw that they were considering such a thing she let out a great and bitter cry and tore her garments. She told her father and brothers; "you are really going to go through with this?! to hand me over to this wicked gentile?! ... And why don't you do what your forefathers did? Get fired up just like they got fired up for Dinah their sister<sup>30</sup>. ... do this and the Creator of the heavens and earth will help you!]*

*42. After this, the five sons of Matityah, Yochanan and his four brothers, set out and waged war against those gentiles. 43. They killed many of them - and the survivors of them fled to islands of the sea - for they<sup>31</sup> trusted in the G-d of heaven.*

**[ואחרי כן גזר עליהם בגרס הרשע, שלא תבא נערה אצל בעלה, עד אשר תבא בתחילה אל המלך: והיתה לחשמנאי זה נערה. והיו סבורים לתת אותה לבגרס הרשע: וכאשר ראתה הנערה, שהיו סבורים לעשות כן, צעקה צעקה גדולה ומרה ותקרע בגדיה. ותאמר לאביה ולאחיה: אחי, כך תעשו, למסור אותי לערל רשע? ולמה לא תעשו כאשר עשו אבותיכם? תקנאו אתם, כמו שקנאו על דינה אחותם. ובורא שמים וארץ יעזרכם על זאת:]**

**מב. אחר זאת יצאו המשת בני מתתיה, יוחנן וארבעת אחיו, וילחמו בגוים ההם: מג. הרג רב הרגו בהם, ויננסו הנשארים לאיי הים, אשר בטחו על אלהי השמים:**

<sup>29</sup> Meaning that a bride after the chupa must first have relations with the Greek king or general of that town before going to her husband!

**We** find in the Midrash that Betuel [father of Rivkah] also decreed such a thing. This is why when Eliezer came to take Rivkah as a wife for Yitzchak, Hashem struck Betuel down. The reason they gave for this 'minhag' was that in the service of idol worship, by the husband allowing such a thing, he would have gained atonement for all his sins! (שמן למאור - לרה"ג י.רצאבי)

<sup>30</sup> Shimon and Levi who killed an entire city for the abduction of their sister.

<sup>31</sup> The five sons of Matityahu...

## Fifth Candle Lighting

44. *Wicked Bagra, together with those who had escaped the sword, boarded a ship and fled to king Antiuchas.*

45. *Bagra said; "You the king, issued a decree abolishing Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and Brit Milah from the Jews, now there is great rebellion there! And even if you bring all the nations, all the countries and all the languages, they will not be able to overcome the five sons of Matityah who are stronger than lions, swifter than eagles, mightier than bears. 46. O' King, be pleased to accept my advice, and do not fight them with these [small] armies, for if you do, you will be disgraced in the sight of all the kings. 47. Therefore, send letters to all the countries of your kingdom, calling all the army officers and with them all the populations, not one person should remain. Also come with armored elephants<sup>32</sup>. 48. This pleased king Antiuchas. He sent letters and called for all the generals of various countries. All the nations arrived along with armored elephants.*

49. *Bagra the wicked invaded Jerusalem for the second time. He made thirteen breaches in the Temple wall, closed down the city and burnt its stones to dust. 50. He thought to himself: "This time they shall not defeat me; for my army is abundant and my hand is mighty." However, the G-d of heaven did not think so.*

מד. אז ישב בגרס הרשע באניה, וינס אל אנטיוכס המלך, ואתו אנשים אשר נצולו מן החרב: מה. ויען בגרס ויאמר לאנטיוכס המלך: אתה המלך גזרת דבר להשבית מן היהודים שבת וחדש ומילה, ומרד גדול בתוכה. ולו באו עליהם כל הגוים האמות והלשונות, אינם יכולים לחמשת בני מתתיהו, אשר הם מן האריות חזקים ומן הנשרים קלים ומן הדובים עזים: מו. עתה המלך, עצתי תיטב עליך, ולא תלחם עמהם במחנות האלה. ואם תלחם עמהם במחנות האלה תבוש בפני כל המלכים: מז. לכן שלח אגרת לכל מדינות מלכותך, ויביאו שרי העבאות, ואתם כל העמים ולא ישאר מהם איש. ואף פילים מלבשי שריון: מה. אז הוטב הדבר בעיני אנטיוכס וישלח ויקרא לשרי המדינות, ויביאו את כל העמים, ואתם פילים מלבשי שריון:

מט. שנית קם בגרס הרשע, ויבא לירושלים, פרץ בה שלש עשרה פרצות בחומת בית המקדש. ויסגור העיר וישרוף אבנה עד אשר היה כעפר: נ. ויחשב בלבו ויאמר: זאת הפעם לא יוכלו לי, כי גדול צבאי וחוזק ידי רב. ואלוה השמים לא חשב כן:

<sup>32</sup> "Armoured elephants": Upon these gigantic elephants – which were the military tanks of those days – they built wooden towers big enough to fit 6 – 10 soldiers who would shoot arrows and throw spears down to the enemy. Seeing as these elephants were armoured and shielded, the sons of Matityahu – had to get under the elephant and attack it from its stomach until it would fall. Then they were able to 'take care' of the soldiers riding the elephant. (שמן למאור – לרה"ג ירצאבי)

## Six Candle Lighting

51. When the five sons of Matityah heard, they went to 'Mizpeh Gilad, to the place where they had been saved in the days of Shmuel Hanavi<sup>33</sup>. 52. They decreed a fast<sup>34</sup> and sat in ashes praying to the G-d of heaven for mercy.

53. Then a good plan came to their mind, these were their names: Yehudah, the firstborn; Shimon, the second; Yochanan, the third; Yonatan, the fourth; Elazar, the fifth. 54. Before sending them out to war, their father blessed them saying: "Yehudah my son, may you be greatly successful, worthy enough to thank you for it. Like Yehudah the son of Yaakov who is likened to a lion.

55. And you, Shimon my son, may you be greatly successful, worthy enough to thank you for it. Like Shimon the son of Yaakov who slew the men of Shchem for sinning with their sister Dina<sup>35</sup>. 56. And you, Yochanan my son, may you be greatly successful, worthy enough to thank you for it. Like Avner the son of Ner<sup>36</sup>, general of Israel's army. 57. And you, Yonatan my son, may you be greatly successful, worthy enough to thank you for it. Like Yonatan the son of Shaul who

נא. וכאשר שמענו חמשה בני מתתיה, קמו והלכו אל מיצפה גלעד, במקום אשר היתה להם הצלה בימי שמואל הנביא: נב. גזרו צום, וישבו על אפר לבקש רחמים מלפני אלוה השמים:

נג. אז נפלה בלבם עצה טובה והיו שמותיהם יהודה הבכור, שמעון השני, יוחנן השלישי, יונתן הרביעי, אלעזר החמישי: נד. ויברך אותם אביהם לפני ששלח אותם למלחמה ויאמר להם: יהודה בני, אודה מעשיך כיהודה בן יעקב, הנמשל באריה:

נה. ואתה שמעון בני אודה מעשיך כשמעון בן יעקב, אשר הרג את יושבי שכם אשר הטאו על דינה אחותו: נו. ואתה יוחנן בני אודה מעשיך כאבנר בן נר שר עבא ישראל: נז. ואתה יונתן בני אודה מעשיך כיונתן בן שאול, אשר הרג את הפלשתים:

<sup>33</sup> In this place there was a great salvation for Am Israel and became a place where people would gather to pray. The sons of Matityahu too wanted to follow in their ancestors path so went there to pray for another salvation. (שמן למאור – לרה"ג ירצאבי)

<sup>34</sup> The fast was decreed upon all Am Israel.

<sup>35</sup> "These Greeks defiled many the Jewish women and now wanted to do the same to your sister!!"

<sup>36</sup> Avner ben Ner was a great army general in the days of King Shaul. No one was as strong and mighty as he was. Our Rabbis further tell us that a mighty man may be able to move a 6 X 6 *amot* wall, however he would not be able to move even one limb of Avner ben Ner. (פירוש עתיק שמובא בשמן למאור)

defeated the Pelishtim. 58. And you, Elazar my son, may you be greatly successful, worthy enough to thank you for it. Like Pinchas the son of Elazar, who was zealous for his G-d and rescued the Jewish nation from the fury."

נת. ואתה אלעזר בני אודה מעשיך כפנחס בן אלעזר, אשר קנא לפני אלהיו והציל את בני ישראל מן החמה:

## Seventh Candle Lighting

59. With this<sup>37</sup>, the five sons of Matityah rose up on that day and waged war against those nations. They killed many and of them. Of them, Yehudah was killed!  
60. At that moment when the sons of Matityah saw that Yehudah had been killed, they returned to their father. He asked them: "Why have you come back?" 61. They replied: "Yehudah our brother - who alone equalled all of us<sup>38</sup> - has been killed!" 62. Matityah answered and told them: "I will come out with you and join you in the battle against these nations lest they destroy the house of Israel. Be comforted for the loss of your brother."

נט. על זאת קמו חמשת בני מתתיה ויצאו ביום ההוא, וילחמו בגוים ההם, ויהרגו בהם הרג רב. ויהרג מהם יהודה:  
ס. באותה שעה, כאשר ראו שנהרג יהודה שבו אל אביהם. ויאמר להם: למה שבתם?:  
סא. ויענו ויאמרו: יהודה אחינו נהרג, אשר היה נחשב כמו כלנו: סב. ויען מתתיה ויאמר להם: אני אצא עמכם ואלחם בגוים האלה, פן יאבדו את בני ישראל, ואתם תתנחמו על אחיכם:

63. That same day Matityahu went out with his sons and they waged war against those nations. 64. The G-d of heaven delivered into their hands all the nations, they killed a multitude of people. All the swordsmen

סג. ויצא מתתיה ביום ההוא עם בניו, וילחמו בגוים האלה: סד. ואלוה השמים נתן את כל גיבורי הגוים האלה בידיהם, ויהרגו מהם הרג רב, כל שולף חרב וכל תופש קשת, וגדולי

<sup>37</sup> Meaning, in light of these blessings they received from their father, they went out to war. (רב סעדיה גאון) (בתרומו הערבי) We can now understand what 'big plan' they had. For in Passuk 53 it states that they had 'a good plan' but mentions nothing other than immediately speaking about the blessings they received from their father. This then was the 'good plan' – to be blessed by their father.

<sup>38</sup> Yehudah was the firstborn. Now apart from being physically mightier, he was also greater spiritually and in righteousness than all of his brothers. The brothers felt that in his merit, because of his excellence, they will win the war and this is what they are expressing to their father Matityahu saying, "we don't know what to do... Yehudah who alone equalled all of us has been killed!" (שמן למאור – לרה"ג ירצאבי)

*and all the archers, army officers and high officials, there was not even one survivor left of them. Others fled to the islands of the sea. In attacking the elephants, Elazar was engulfed in their dung. 65. His brothers searched for him among the living and the dead, and could not find him. Eventually, however, they did find him engulfed in the dung of the elephant*<sup>39</sup>.

*66. The Jews rejoiced for their enemies were handed over to them. Some of whom were burned while others, were hanged on the gallows. The wicked Bagras, the misdirector of his nation, was burnt in the fire by all of the house of Israel.*

*67. When king Antiuchas heard that his governor Bagras and all the army officers with him had been killed, he boarded a ship and fled to the coastal cities. And wherever he would arrive, the people would rebel against him and call him "the fugitive, the fugitive," so he threw himself in the sea*<sup>40</sup>.

הפחות ולא נשאר מהם פליט. וינס מי שנשאר מהם לאיי הים. ואלעזר היה מתעסק בהריגת הפילים, ויטבע בפרש הפיל: סה. ויבקשוהו אחיו בין החיים ובין המתים ולא מצאוהו, ואחרי כן מצאוהו טבוע בפרש הפיל:

סו. וישמחו בני ישראל כי ניתנו שונאיהם בידיהם. מהם שרפו באש, ומהם תלו על עץ ובגרס הרשע מטעה עמו, שרפוהו באש עם בית ישראל:

סז. ואנטיוכס המלך, כאשר שמע שנהרג בגרס משנהו וכל שריו אשר עמו, ישב באניה וינס לאיי הים. וכל מקום אשר יבוא, מורדים בו ואומרים לו הבורח הבורח ויטל את עצמו לים:

<sup>39</sup> It is not clear from the words of the Megillah here whether they found him dead or alive. There are those who say that he did not die but was rather engulfed to the extent that he was unable to free himself and had to wait for his brothers to pull him out. Others say however that he did in fact die. Regardless, we know that Yehudah was killed. This is explicit. But this matter needs explanation for if this entire war was a miracle, so why did Yehudah have to die! If it was a regular war – within the laws of nature – okay so it happens... even the greatest warriors could be killed. But this was no 'normal' war. There must be a higher reason behind his death.

Once possible answer is that a big purpose of this intervention of Hashem in such a miraculous way, was to notify all mankind of Hashems existence and Oneness. Now because of Yehudah's greatness, it may just be that the victory will be attributed to him and G-d will be put to the side. Therefore he was killed and people with no shadow of doubt understood that this victory was all by the hand of G-d. (שמך למאור - לרה"ג ירצאבי)

Another possibility to answer this question is based on how Bagras spoke about the Hashmonayim to Antiuchas. He told him; Even if you bring all the armies in the world...you will not be able to overcome the five sons of Matityah who are stronger than lions, swifter than eagles, mightier than bears'. With these words, this evil man placed upon him Ayin Hara, and this is what killed Yehudah during the war. (מהר"י ונה)

<sup>40</sup> The vengeance against Antiuchas – unlike Nikanor and Bagras who were killed by the Jews – was to suffer this embarrassment. Just imagine it, the mightiest king since Alexander the Great who practically



## Eighth Candle Lighting

68. After this, the Jewish people came to the Beit HaMikdash, rebuilt the gates and purified the Beit HaMikdash from the slain and the impurities<sup>41</sup>. 69. They looked for pure olive oil to light the Menorah, and found only one bottle which was sealed with the stamp of the Cohen Gadol from the days of Shmuel HaNavi so they were sure of its purity. 70. Though it was sufficient only for one day's lighting, it lasted for eight days after the G-d who had established His Name there placed upon it blessing.

71. Hence, the Hashmonaim established the following establishment and prohibited the following prohibition, them and the entire Jewish nation alike: 72. To notify the Jewish people to institute these eight days as a time of happiness and honor, like any festival prescribed in the Torah, to light during these days to notify to anyone who comes later in time of the salvation that G-d had given them from the Heavens. 73. Mourning and fasting are forbidden during these days and any individual who made a vow may execute that vow. 74. Nevertheless, the Hashmonai, and his sons and his brothers did not prohibit work during these days. From that time on, the Greek empire was stripped of its name. 75. The Hashmonai and their descendants

סח. אחר זה באו בני ישראל לבית המקדש, ויבנו השערים, ויטהרו בית המקדש מן ההרוגים ומן הטמאות: סט. ויבקשו שמן זית זך (טהור) להדליק הנרות, ולא מצאו רק צנצנת אחת, והיתה חתומה בטבעת הכהן הגדול, מימי שמואל הנביא וידעו שהיא טהורה: ע. כהדלקת יום אחד היה בה. והאלהים אשר שכן שמו שם, נתן בה ברכה והדליקו ממנה שמונה ימים:

עא. על כן קימו בני חשמונאי זה הקיום, ואסרו זה האסור הם ובני ישראל כלם: עב. להודיע לבני ישראל לעשות שמונת ימים אלו שמחה וכבוד, כימי המועדים הכתובים בתורה, להדליק בהם להודיע למי שיבוא אחריהם כי עשה להם אלהיהם תשועה מן השמים: עג. בהם אין להספיד, ואין לגזור צום, וכל איש אשר יהיה עליו נדר, ישלמנו: עד. אך חשמונאי ובניו ואחיו לא גזרו בהם לעזוב עבודה ומלאכה. ומחזמן הזה לא היה שם למלכות יון: עה. ויקבלו המלכות בני חשמונאי ובני בניהם מחזמן הזה ועד חרבן בית האלהים הזה שש ומאתים שנה:

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ruled the world, runs from place to place trying to regain control, but he is greeted with mockery and jokes. Nobody is afraid of him, nobody honors him. He is the laughingstock wherever he goes. This embarrassment was for him more bitter than death itself. (שמון למאור שהביא מסי' המטעמים חדש)

<sup>41</sup> **“From the slain”**: referring to the body of Nikanor who Yochanan killed in the Holy Courtyard.

**“From the impurities”**: the swine that they offered on the alter they erected in the Azara – courtyard. (פירוש עתיק)

*accepted Kingship from this period until the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash - two hundred and six years. 76. And so, the Jews everywhere observe these days in all their exiles and call them 'Days of Happiness' beginning on the twenty-fifth day in the month of Kislev. 77. These days shall never cease from them for in the Beit HaMikdash the Cohanim, the Leviim and the Sages of those times instituted and established for themselves and on their descendants and on future descendants, forever.*

עו. על כן בני ישראל שומרים את הימים האלו, בכל גליותהם וקוראים להם ימי שמחה. מחמשה ועשרים יום לחודש כסלו: עז. ועד העולם לא יסורו מהם אשר בבית מקדשם הכהנים והלויים וכל חכמיהם, קימו עליהם ועל בניהם ועל בני בניהם עד עולם:



גיבורים ביד חלשים  
ורבים ביד מעטים  
ורשעים ביד צדיקים  
וטמאים ביד טהורים  
וזדים ביד עוסקי תורתך

