

# Megillat Chanukah

## *The Scroll of Dedication*

*Megillat Chanukah: an abridgment of I Maccabees I-4, with additional material supplemented from the Megillat Antiochus; the Talmud Gemara Shabbat 21b; and Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews XII 7:7. Compiled by J. Jury for Chanukah 2014, and Revised for Chanukah 2015 for free distribution for non-commercial use in its unaltered state.*

### **Blessings before Candle Lighting**

Blessed are You, HASHEM our God, King of the Universe, who sanctifies us by His commandments, and gave to us Yeshua our Messiah, the Light of the World.

Blessed are You, HASHEM our God, King of the Universe, who wrought miracles for our fathers in days of old, at this season.

### **Blessing for the First Night**

Blessed are you, HASHEM our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and has preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.

### **Blessing after Candle Lighting**

We kindle these lights because of the miracles, the deliverances, and the wonders which You did for our fathers, by means of Your holy priests. During the eight days of Chanukah, we look at these these lights, in order that we may give thanks to Your Name, for Your miracles, Your deliverances, and Your wonders.

### **The Story of Chanukah**

It came to pass, that a man named Antiochus Epiphanes became king of the Greeks. He was a powerful ruler, and all the others kings obeyed him. He overtook many provinces and mighty rulers; he destroyed their castles, burned their palaces and imprisoned their men. Since the reign of Alexander there had never been a king like him beyond the Euphrates. He built up a large city on the seacoast to serve as his royal residence, and called it "Antioch," after his own name. Opposite it his governor Bagris built up another city, and called it "City of Bagris," after himself; and these are their names to this day.

Antiochus then came to Israel, and went up against Jerusalem with a great army. He proudly entered into the sanctuary, and took away the golden altar, the candlestick of light, and all of its vessels. He took the table of the show bread, the pouring vessels, the vials, the golden censers, the veil, the crown, and the golden ornaments that were before the temple. He also took the silver and gold, the precious vessels, and all of the hidden treasures which he found. When he had taken it all away, he returned to his own land, having spoken very proudly. There was a great mourning across the whole land of Israel.

King Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that they all should be as one people, and that everyone should leave behind his own laws. The nations around him consented to the commandment of the king. For the Israelites, this meant that they would have to profane the festival days, to pollute the sanctuary, to set up altars for idols, to sacrifice unclean animals, to leave their sons uncircumcised, and– worst of all– to forsake the Shabbat. This was done so that they might forget the Torah, and change all of God’s commandments. “Whoever will not conform my to commandment,” Antiochus said, “will be put to death.”

Now on the fifteenth day of the month Kislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year of the Greeks, (167 BCE) they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar, and built idol altars throughout the cities of Judah on every side. They burned incense at the doors of their houses, and in the streets. They tore all of the copies of the Torah they found into pieces, and burnt them with fire. Whoever was found with the Book of the Covenant in their possession, or if anyone committed themselves to the Torah, the king’s commandment was that they should be put to death. On the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev they sacrifice a pig upon the altar of the Temple, which was upon the altar of God.

In those days there arose a man named Mattathias, son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein, and he saw the wickedness that was being done in Judah and Jerusalem. He had five sons: John, Simon, Judah, Eleazar, and Jonathan. Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes; they put on sackcloth, and mourned in great sorrow.

In the meantime, the king’s officers, who had compelled the people to apostasy, came into the city Modein, to force them to sacrifice. Many of the people of Israel consented and came to them, but Mattathias and his sons stood firm. The king’s officers said to Mattathias, “You are a great and honorable ruler in this city, strengthened with sons and brothers. Be the first to come and fulfill the king’s commandment, like all the heathen have done, so that you and your household will be counted among the king’s friends, and will be honored with silver and gold.”

Mattathias answered, with a loud voice, “Even though all the nations that are under the king’s dominion obey him, and every one of them has fallen away from the faith of their fathers, I and my sons will walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the Torah and His ordinances! We will not obey the king’s words, to fall away from our faith, either to the right hand, or the left.” Mattathias cried throughout the city with a loud voice, saying, “Whoever is zealous for the Torah, and maintains the Covenant, let him follow me!” He and his sons fled into the mountains, leaving all their possessions behind in the city.

Many who sought after justice and judgment went out to the wilderness, to dwell there; for they were being greatly afflicted, and many had died for refusing to forsake the Shabbat. A group of Hassideans came to him; they were mighty men of Israel, all of whom were voluntarily devoted to the Torah. Those who fled for persecution also joined their forces, and added to their strength, so that they all joined forces together.

Mattathias and his friends went all around, pulling down the altars of idols within the coast of Israel. They chased after the wicked men, and what they sought to do was prosperous in their hand. They recovered the Torah out of the hand of the heathen, and they did not allow the wicked to triumph.

When the time drew near for Mattathias to die, he said to his sons, “My sons, be zealous for the Torah, and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers. Always remember the deeds our fathers did in their time; for no one who puts their trust in God will be overcome. My sons, be valiant, and show yourselves as men who stand for the Torah; for by it, you will obtain glory. Take all who observe the Torah, and avenge the wrong of your people. Repay the heathen in full, and take heed to the commandments of the Torah.”

Their father then blessed them, saying,

“Judah, my son, I compare you to Judah, the son of Jacob, who was likened to a lion.

“Simon, my son, I compare, you to Simeon, the son of Jacob, who slew the men of Shechem.

“John, my son, I compare you to Abner, the son of Ner, a general of Israel’s army.

“Jonathan, my son, I compare you to Jonathan, the son of Saul, who defeated the Philistines.

“Eleazar, my son, I compare you to Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, who was zealous for his God, and rescued the Israelites.”

After he had finished his blessing, he was gathered to his fathers. His sons buried him in the tombs of his fathers at Modein, and all Israel wept for him greatly.

Judah, called Maccabi, rose up in the place of his father Mattathias. His four brothers helped him, as did all those who had joined his father; and together they fought the battle of Israel with gladness.

In the days that followed, a man named Seron, a prince of the Syrian army, had heard that Judah had gathered a large company of faithful soldiers to go with him to war, he said, “I will get a name for myself, and a place of honor in the kingdom, for I will go fight against Judah, and those who are with him, who despise the king’s commandment.” So he made himself ready to go, and he took with him a large army of the ungodly, to take vengeance on the children of Israel.

When he came near, Judah went forth to meet him with a small handful of men. When they saw the enemy’s army coming to meet them, they said to Judah, “How will we, being so few, be able to fight against such a large army that is so strong?”

Judah answered, “It is no great matter for many to be taken in the hands of a few, for with the God of heaven it makes no difference to deliver with a great multitude or with a small handful. The victory of battle does not stand in the size of the army, but in the strength that comes from heaven. They come against us in arrogance and wickedness to destroy us, our wives, and our children, but we fight for our lives and our customs. Do not be afraid of them, for Himself will overthrow them before us!” As soon as he had finished speaking, he leaped upon them, so that Seron and his army were overthrown before him.

Then the nations around them began to fear Judah and his brothers. All the nations talked of the battles of Judah, but when King Antiochus heard these things, he was very angry. The king’s wicked governor, Bagris, accompanied by those who had escaped the sword, boarded a ship and fled to the king. “O king,” he said, “You have issued a decree abolishing the Torah in the land of Israel; but now there is complete rebellion there! The five sons of Mattathias cannot be defeated unless they are attacked by all the combined forces; they are stronger than lions, swifter than eagles, and braver than bears. Be pleased to accept my advice, and do not fight against them with this small army, lest you be disgraced in the sight of all the kings.”

So Antiochus gathered together all the forces of his realm, and made a very strong army. He thought to himself, “This time they shall not defeat me; my army is numerous, my hand is mighty.”

But the God of heaven did not agree.

Judah and his brothers saw that their miseries were increased, and that the king had given the commandment to bring about the total destruction of their people. They said one to another, “Let us restore the decayed fortune of our people, and let us fight for our people and the sanctuary.”

So the congregation gathered together, that they might be ready for battle, and that they might pray, and ask for mercy and compassion. The Israelites assembled themselves together, and came to Mizpah, on the opposite side of Jerusalem. They laid open the Torah, as if to consult God in these matters. They brought the priests' garments, the first fruits, and the tithes, and they stirred up the Nazarites, who had finished their days. They cried they with a loud voice toward heaven, saying, "What will we do with these, and where will we take them to? Your sanctuary is trodden down and profaned; Your priests are in heaviness, and are brought low. Behold! The nations are assembled against us, to destroy us. Whatever they imagine against us, You know. How will we be able to stand against them, except You, O God, be our help?"

They sounded with trumpets, and cried with a loud voice. After this Judah ordained captains over the people, even captains over thousands, over hundreds, over fifties, and over tens. But concerning those who were building houses, or had betrothed wives, or were planting vineyards, or were fearful, he commanded them to return to their own homes, according to the instruction in the Torah.

Judah said, "Arm yourselves, and be valiant men; see that you are ready by early morning, that you may fight with these nations that are assembled together against us to destroy us and our sanctuary. It is better for us to die in battle, than to behold the calamities of our people and our sanctuary. Nevertheless, as the will of God is in heaven, so let Him do."

Judah said to the men who were with him, "Do not fear the size of their army, and do not be afraid of their assault. Remember how our fathers were delivered in the Red sea, when Pharaoh pursued them with an army. Now let us cry to heaven, if see if HASHEM will have mercy upon us, and remember the covenant of our fathers, to destroy this army before our face this day, so that all the heathen may know that there is One who delivers and saves Israel."

The foreigners lifted up their eyes, and saw them coming against them. They went out of the camp to battle, but the men who were with Judah sounded their trumpets. They engaged in battle, and the heathen, being broken, fled into the plain, and those in the rear were slain with the sword, so that three thousand of their men were slain that day.

After this they went home to sing a song of thanksgiving, and to praise HASHEM in heaven, *"For He is good, for His loving kindness endures forever."* (Psalm 118:1) So Israel had a great deliverance that day.

Judah and his brothers said, "Behold, our enemies are dismayed. Let us go up to cleanse and dedicate the sanctuary." So all the army assembled themselves together, and went up to Mount Zion. When they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, the gates burned up, shrubs growing in the courts as they would in a forest or the mountains, and the priests' chambers pulled down, they tore their clothes, fell down to the ground flat upon their faces, and cried out toward heaven. Judah chose priests who delighted in the Torah to cleanse the sanctuary, and he carried out the defiled stones to an unclean place. They rebuilt the sanctuary, and the things that were within the temple, and they consecrated the courts. They also made new holy vessels, and brought the candlestick, the altar of burnt offerings and incense, and the table into the Temple.

They burned incense upon the altar, and lit the lamps that were on the candlestick, that they might give light in the temple. They set the loaves on the table, spread out the veils, and finished all the works which they had begun to make.

They looked for pure olive oil to light the Menorah, but found only one bottle with the seal of the High Priest, so that they were could be sure of its purity; for when the Greeks had entered the Temple, they had defiled all the oils they found. Though its quantity seemed sufficient only for one day's lighting, it lasted for eight days, owing to the blessing of the God of heaven, who had established His Name there.

They rose up early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev, and, according to the Torah, offered sacrifice upon the new altar of burnt offerings which they had made. On that very day in the same season that the nations had profaned it, it was rededicated with songs, lutes, harps, and cymbals. All the people fell upon their faces, worshipping and praising the God of heaven, who had given them good success.

So they kept the dedication of the altar for eight days, and they did not leave out any sort of good pleasures. They offered burnt offerings with gladness, and sacrificed the sacrifice of deliverance and praise. They adorned the forefront of the temple with crowns of gold and with shields, and hung doors upon the gates and chambers they renewed. There was a great gladness among the people, for the reproach of the heathen had been taken away. They were so very glad at the revival of their customs; for after such a long time, they had unexpectedly regained the freedom of their worship. From that time on, we celebrate this festival, and call it the Festival of Lights, because it was a this time that liberty— beyond our hopes— appeared to us.

Judah and his brothers, with the whole congregation of Israel, ordained that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept with joy and gladness in their season, from year to year, for eight days, from the twenty-fifth day of the month Kislev.

May the Almighty, who performed a miracle and wonder for them, also perform miracles and wonders for us, that we should see the fulfillment of what is written, *“As in the days when you left the land of Egypt I will show it wonders.”* (Micah 7:15)