

**A SOURCE-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *MA'ASEH HANUKKAH*, *NUSACH BET*
AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HANUKKAH IN MIDRASHIC TRADITION**

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INTRODUCTION

Jewish learning and tradition are represented by a deep and broad array of literature, including Torah, *mishna*, *gemara*, biblical commentaries, and *midrash*. The Hebrew word "midrash" is best translated as "search." The word's root implies a meaning of "search out," "inquire," or "demand." With this sentiment in mind, one understands that midrash is not just a genre of rabbinic literature, rather it represents a creative attitude by which one approaches the reading of biblical texts. Following the destruction of the Second Temple, in the first century of the Common Era, and continuing through the medieval period, many rabbis and sages approached Scripture with such an attitude, producing a variety of texts now grouped under the rubric of "midrash." These texts range from interpretive translations of the Bible, to sermons, homilies, liturgical poems, and prayers, to exegetical interpretations found in the Mishnah and Talmud, to collections of *drashot* and medieval commentaries.¹

Midrash can be divided into two broad categories, though they often intersect and overlap: "halakhic," having to do with legal texts, and "aggadic," having to do with narrative texts. Both types of midrash focus on past events, primarily those found in the Bible. As one scholar hypothesizes, "The sadder the life of the Jewish people, the more it felt the need of taking refuge in its past."² During particularly difficult times, Jewish sages looked back to the Bible, in which their ancestors had enjoyed periods of independence and redemption. Then, as Joseph Heinemann explains, "by developing a method of 'creative exegesis,' the aggadists were able to find in Scripture—which might

¹ James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," *Midrash and Literature*, Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 91-92.

² Louis Ginzberg, "Preface," *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 1. Henrietta Szold, trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

otherwise have come to seem irrelevant to contemporary needs—the new answers and values which made it possible to grapple with the shifts and changes of reality.”³

Midrash, in general, and aggadic midrash, in particular, is reflective of great creativity and imagination on the part of the rabbis. While most rabbinic academies have traditionally emphasized the study of *halakhah*, the law which one must live by, it is study of the aggadic, or narrative passages, that allows one to access the mind of the rabbis. Indeed, Judah Goldin explains that a person who created *aggadah* was “at liberty to draw cheerfully on his own intellect or imagination, on popular narratives and folk sayings, on anything congenial to his own spirit, to interpret a biblical verse or create a homily or amplify a scriptural anecdote or solicit parables or invoke a national or universal bon mot and so on.”⁴ Through the window of midrash, one can understand how the rabbis saw history, how well they knew and used the Bible, and how they viewed the world around them.

There are a number of specific qualities and techniques that characterize narrative or aggadic *midrashim*. First, it was common for the midrashists to expand upon biblical narratives by filling in missing details, adding characters, identifying unknown characters, and applying knowledge from a later period to the events of the original text. Isaac Heinemann termed these methods “creative historiography.”⁵ The rabbis filled in information where it was lacking, regardless of its practicality or historical likelihood.

³ Joseph Heinemann, “The Nature of the Aggadah,” *Midrash and Literature*, Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 43.

⁴ Judah, Goldin, “Freedom and Restraint of Haggadah,” *Midrash and Literature*, Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 63.

⁵ Isaac Heinemann, *Darkhei Ha-aggadah*, quoted in H.L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 238. For the complete work, see Isaac Heinemann, *Darkhei Ha-aggadah* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University and Massada Publications, Ltd., 1954).

Second, the rabbis juxtaposed various verses as a way of weaving the meaning of one text into another completely different text; this technique is called "intertextuality." As Daniel Boyarin explains, "Midrash interprets by correlating text to text....What is so striking (and strange) about midrash is its claim that the new context is implied by the old one, that the new meanings (Oral Torah) revealed by recontextualizing pieces of the authoritative text are a legitimate interpretation of the Written Torah itself, and indeed given with its very revelation."⁶ Reading different texts together allows a new meaning to emerge, one that goes beyond the meaning that either text has on its own.

A third characteristic of narrative midrash is the composite nature of the text.⁷ Many *midrashim* are the product of layer upon layer of material, which may have been written by different authors and then ultimately put together by one or more editor, or "redactor." Additionally, it was common for texts to circulate in different settings and be used for different purposes, so changes would be made to the text to accommodate its unique circumstances. For these reasons, there are several variant versions in existence of the same midrash. Different versions were normative at different points in history, until another redactor came along and added yet another layer, creating a text that contained a novel meaning.

The tradition of aggadic midrash is so rich that there remain many small works of this nature that have not yet received critical scholarly attention. These "minor" *midrashim* are described as such because they are generally short in length and are not frequently referred to in other rabbinic texts or in modern scholarly writing. Despite the

⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 20, 23.

⁷ Halakhic midrash is also characterized by a composite nature.

modern resurgence of Hanukkah in Jewish holiday celebration, a group of minor *midrashim* on the holiday have not yet been thoroughly explored. As one of the two major festivals not ordained in the Torah, all of the reasons and means to celebrate Hanukkah were defined by rabbis and sages and explained in rabbinic texts. There are two popular stories about the miracle of Hanukkah that appear in various rabbinic texts: One focuses on the military victory of the Hasmoneans over their Greek enemies as the reason for the festival. The other story attributes the holiday to the miracle that occurred when the Hasmoneans reclaimed the Holy Temple; though they found only one day's worth of pure oil to light the menorah, the cruse of oil lasted for eight days. These accounts were created at different times and places, and different schools of thought championed one story over the other. Nonetheless, these two traditions—which remain separate in most of the mainstream talmudic and midrashic works—come together in some of these minor *midrashim*.

One such work is "*Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet*" (MH2), published in J.D. Eisenstein's collection of minor *midrashim*, *Ozar Midrashim*.⁸ The text is a short midrashic telling of a selection of events during the Hasmonean revolution in 165 BCE. The text appears to be liturgical, in that it is short, straightforward, and easy to read aloud in the liturgical context, and it concludes with a few rules regarding what one can and cannot do on Hanukkah. It could have been read in the synagogue much as Megillat Esther is read on Purim, to explain the reason for the holiday of Hanukkah. The text includes each of the three characteristics of aggadic midrash: It is made up of several layers of material from different rabbinic texts; it contains numerous biblical verses and

⁸ "*Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet*," *Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim*, J.D. Eisenstein, ed. Vol. 1 (New York, 1915), pp. 190-192.

references that deepen its meaning; and it is a fictional expansion of an historical framework that is contained in earlier texts. A thorough examination of this text, which has never before been translated into English, will reveal much about the genre of narrative midrash as well as about the time period during which this text was produced.

In analyzing MH2, there are a number of similar texts, minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah, which help to identify the layers of the midrash. The text which most closely resembles MH2 is *Megillat Antiochus* (MA), which is sometimes referred to as *Megillat Ha-Hashmonaim* or *Sefer Beit Hashmonai*. This liturgical text was originally composed in Aramaic, though it was probably revised in Babylonia.⁹ It was subsequently translated into Hebrew. Today, there are several extant versions of the text, in both Hebrew and Aramaic, *geniza* fragments, manuscripts, and printed editions. Although the narratives are extremely similar, there are sections that are much lengthier in some versions, and some versions contain added phrases and details. This analysis primarily uses one commonly referenced version of MA, which is readily available in Philip Birnbaum's *Daily Prayer Book*.¹⁰ In addition to MA, there are several other minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah, all published in *Ozar Midrashim*. *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* (MH) is a legendary account of the Jews' persecution and salvation during the Hellenistic period.¹¹ *Midrash L'Hanukkah* (ML) is a compilation of a variety of traditions on Hanukkah,¹² which contains some elements of MH2 that do not appear in other

⁹ H.L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 331.

¹⁰ "Megillat Ha-Hashmonaim," *Daily Prayer Book*, Philip Birnbaum, trans. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 713-726. Occasionally, other versions of MA will be discussed when relevant. The version that is published in *Ozar Midrashim* is found in the Appendix.

¹¹ "Midrash Ma'aseh Hanukkah," *Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim*, J.D. Eisenstein, ed. Vol. 1 (New York, 1915), pp. 189-190.

¹² "Midrash L'Hanukkah," *Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim*, J.D. Eisenstein, ed. Vol. 1 (New York, 1915), pp. 192-194.

midrashim. Finally, *Ma'aseh Yehudit* (MY) is a midrashic retelling of some events in the Book of Judith.¹³ Its style is remarkably similar to that of MH2. Taken together, these aggadic texts illustrate a variety of characteristics of midrashic writing as well as the larger issues that the rabbis who wrote them were confronting.

This thesis consists of a translation of and commentary on *Ma'aseh Hanukkah*, *Nusach Bet* followed by a detailed textual analysis of the midrash and some of the related Hanukkah *midrashim*.¹⁴

In Part I, the Commentary, MH2 is divided into 14 sections, based on the natural breaks in the narrative. At the top of each section is the original Hebrew text of MH2. Directly underneath the Hebrew is this author's translation of the text into English. The translation represents an attempt to capture both the meaning and tone of the original. The "Annotations" section describes the parallels between MH2 and biblical, post-biblical, and rabbinic literature. The parallel texts are presented after the line number in the Hebrew version of MH2, along with a few Hebrew words beginning the sentence to which the note applies, in order to demonstrate the text's use of and occasional modification of earlier sources. Each section of MH2 concludes with a "Commentary," which explores the parallel texts, explains difficult words and phrases, identifies literary themes, and raises questions. Critical elements from this preliminary discussion are expanded upon in Part II.

Part II, the textual analysis, consists of three chapters. The first chapter provides a source-critical analysis of MH2; it identifies all of the texts on Hanukkah that are used

¹³ "Ma'aseh Yehudit," *Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim*, J.D. Eisenstein, ed. Vol. 1 (New York, 1915), p. 203.

¹⁴ The complete texts of MH, ML, and MY are found in the Appendix.

in MH2, beginning with the Books of Maccabees and going through the Talmud and mainstream midrashic works. This chapter demonstrates which elements of the historical tradition were known and used by the MH2 redactor, as well as which aspects of the rabbinic tradition were combined in the midrash.¹⁵ Chapter 2 analyzes MH2 in comparison with the other minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah. It focuses on narrative, stylistic, and thematic similarities and differences among the texts. By identifying the sections that MH2 is lacking, as well as the material that it shares with one or more of the other texts in the genre, one can begin to recognize the specific message, or agenda, of the redactor. Finally, Chapter 3 analyzes MH2 from a literary perspective, noting the repetition of words, phrases, and imagery that ultimately reveal the message of the text.

This study will provide English speakers with access to a segment of the rabbinic tradition that has been unavailable until now. In addition, it will illustrate some of the literary techniques that the rabbis used in creating aggadic midrash. Another important aspect of the study involves looking underneath the midrash to understand the issues to which the rabbis may have been responding in creating this text. Lastly, this text provides modern Jews with another perspective on the holiday of Hanukkah, in the form of a literary response to the challenges of assimilation.

¹⁵ It is quite possible that there was more than one redactor who contributed to the creation of MH2 and the other rabbinic texts discussed here; however, for the purposes of this thesis, the "redactor" will be referred to in the singular.

PART I
COMMENTARY

Section 1

- 1 בשנת כ"ג שנים למלך אנטיוכוס הוא שנת רי"ג לבנין בית שני רוח רעה נססה בו וחרב חדה
2 לשונו שלופה מתערה להכות ארץ בשבט פיו. ויען ויאמר לכל שריו ועבדיו הפרתמים
3 היושבים ראשונה במלכות, הלא תדעו הלא תשמעו כי הנה עם בני ישראל אשר בירושלם
4 גוי עז פנים ודתיים שונות מכל עם ואת דתי המלך אינם עושים, אשר גאון וגובה להם
5 האומרים ידינו רמה ותמיד כל הימים מקוים שברון המלכים, לאמר כי הנה החשך יכסה
6 ארץ וערפל לאומים וזרח בחושך אור לישרים ולכל בני ישראל יהיה אור במושבותם. ולי אני
7 המלך אין שוה להניחם, ועתה קומו ונקומו עליהם למלחמה לכו ונכחידם מגוי ולא יזכר שם
8 ישראל עוד, הבה נתחכמה לו לבטל מהם את יום השבת ומילה ור"ח, וייטב הדבר בעיני
9 שריו ועבדיו לעשות כדבר המלך. בעת ההיא שלח את ניקנור משנהו בחיל גדול ועם רב ויבא
10 לירושלם ויצר עליה בקול ענות וחרופים לחרף מערכות אלהים ויהרוג בה הרג רב.

In the twenty-third year [of the reign] of King Antiochus, which was the 213th year after the building of the Second Temple, an evil spirit brewed in him, and his tongue, which was a sharp sword, was drawn and exposed, striking the land with the rod of his mouth. He spoke, saying to all of his ministers and to the servants of the noblemen who were closest to power, "Do you not know, have you not heard that there is a people, the children of Israel, who are in Jerusalem: a shameless nation whose religion is different from every people, and who do not uphold the laws of the king, who are haughty and arrogant, who say, 'Our hands are exalted and always, every day, bring about destruction of kings.' They say: 'So behold, darkness will cover the land, cloud and mist around the nations, but through the dark, a light shines for the upright and for all the children of Israel there will be light in their dwelling-places.' And [as for] me, I am the king and it is impossible to leave them alone. So now arise and take revenge on them in war. Up and let us destroy them from our midst. And the name of Israel will not be remembered any more. Let us become wiser than [Israel], abolishing from them Shabbat, circumcision, and Rosh Hodesh." And this [pronouncement] found favor in the eyes of his ministers and his servants, to do as the king said. At that time, he sent Nicanor, his viceroy, with a great force and many soldiers, and he came to Jerusalem. And he besieged it with shouts of oppression and insults to abuse the army of God, and he killed a great many people there.

Annotations

1. "בשנת כ"ג שנים" MA 6

3. "הנה עם בני ישראל אשר בירושלם" MY, Esther 3:8: "Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, 'There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in your Majesty's interest to tolerate them.'"

5-6. "כי הנה החשך יכסה ארץ" Isaiah 60:2

6. "זרח בחושך אור לשרים" Psalms 112:4

6. "ולכל בני ישראל יהיה אור במושבותם" Exodus 10:23, MY

8. "השבת ומילה ור"ח" MA 9

10. "ויהרוג בה הרג רב" MA 11

Commentary

3. Haman's description of the Jews in Esther 3:8 which includes the phrase "whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws," is extremely similar to Antiochus' description of the Jews. It is possible that the redactor modeled aspects of MH2 after an already established liturgical text for Purim.

5-6. The author chose to put these biblical quotations, from Isaiah, Psalms, and Exodus, in the mouth of Antiochus. He employs them to mock the Jews' hope that they will survive even in the midst of the harsh nations of the world. All three verses are based on the image of light, which pours into the darkness and hopelessness for the children of Israel. These words will come back to mock the king himself when the Hasmoneans emerge victorious. Exodus 10:23 also appears at the end of MY, one of many biblical verses and phrases that the authors of both texts used.

7. It is interesting that the Greeks wanted "revenge" against Mattathias at this point in the narrative, before he had even initiated the revolt. Perhaps the author, who already knew the outcome of the events, chose this word to add an element of irony to the story and to emphasize the unlikely odds that the Jews would ultimately prevail.

8. "לבטל" means "to cancel" or "to neglect." It is the word used throughout the text in connection with the three *mitzvot*, Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Hodesh, that the Greeks want to abolish completely from Jewish practice. The phrase is repeated numerous times to emphasize that the Greek king did not want to get rid of the Jews, rather he wanted to abolish their distinctive actions.

8. This trio of *mitzvot* appears frequently throughout this midrash. They are the preeminent markers of Jewish behavior and thus become the targets of the decrees that Antiochus made against the Jews. One 17th century rabbi and leader of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam, Saul Levi Morteira, explained in a sermon on Hanukkah that the two most problematic commandments during the Hellenistic period were circumcision and the Sabbath. Basing his statement on "historical records" which the preacher does not identify in the sermon, he relates that Jews who attempted to keep these *mitzvot* were put to death.¹ The reason for including Rosh Hodesh is less clear; it is possible that it was not as important as the other two *mitzvot* historically, but the rabbis chose to elevate and emphasize its importance by including it in the same category with Shabbat and circumcision.

9. In MA2, Nicanor is the king's viceroy. In I Maccabees 3:38, Antiochus chooses Nicanor as one of his military leaders. This is presumably the same Nicanor (son of Patroclus) mentioned in II Maccabees 8:9, who leads the king's army. Nicanor is eventually defeated in I Maccabees 7:26-50. The Jewish army cut off Nicanor's head and hand and displayed them outside of Jerusalem; according to I Maccabees, this day became a holiday observed on 13 Adar, which is confirmed in the Babylonian Talmud, *Ta'anit* 18b and in *Megillat Ta'anit*, *mishna* 30. While some scholars suggest that there were two separate people named Nicanor in the Books of Maccabees,² Rappaport argues convincingly that there was only one Nicanor who fought against the Hasmoneans.³

Section 2

- 1 א"ר שמעון בן יוחאי בת היתה לו למתתיהו כ"ג שאין כיופיה בכל העולם ומקודשת לאחד
2 מבני חשמונאי, ובא אחד מן היונים ותפסה בבלוריתה והציע ספר תורה תחתיה ובא אליה
3 בפני ארוסה, ולהעלות חמה ולנקום נקם בנה במה בביהמ"ק ושחטו דבר אחר (חזיר) ויביאו
4 את דמו אל עזרת הקדש.

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said: Mattathias, the High Priest, had a daughter, and there was none as beautiful as she in all the world. And she was promised to another from the house of the Hasmoneans. But one of the Greeks came; he grabbed her by her plait [braid of hair] and he spread a Torah scroll under her and raped her in front of her fiancé. And in order to arouse his [Mattathias'] anger and revenge, he built an altar in the Temple, and they slaughtered a pig and brought its blood to the holy court [of the Temple].

Annotations

1-4. MH, ML

Commentary

1. This passage is attributed to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai in both MH2 and ML. He was a second century *tanna*, a student of Rabbi Akiva. He lived during a period of great persecution under Rome, and thus expressed distrust and hate toward Rome and Roman culture, which extended to gentiles of times past.⁴ This could account for the redactor's decision to attribute this section to him.

1-4. In ML, the victim is not the daughter of Mattathias (there is no evidence that Mattathias was the High Priest); rather she is the daughter of Yochanan, the High Priest. In addition, ML mentions her groom's name, Eleazar, the Hasmonean. Thereafter, Yochanan asks Mattathias to help him fight the enemy. This section is not present in MH2 but it does allow the redactor of ML to harmonize the two accounts by including Mattathias. This section has some similarities with other stories in MH and ML that also involve the violation of a bride on her wedding day; there, too, the victim could be the daughter of either Mattathias (MH) or Yochanan (ML). It is not clear in ML, as it is in MH2, whether the Greek assailant actually raped her.

3. The pig was particularly offensive to Jews and, based on accounts in Maccabees, the Greek authorities consistently tried to force the Jews to touch and eat its flesh. In this section, the Greeks slaughtered a pig, thereby defiling the holy altar in the Temple. The rabbis so disliked this animal that they called it not by its name, but rather by the words "*d'var acher*," meaning "another thing."

Section 3

1 ורוח ה' לבשה את יוחנן בן מתתיהו ויקנא קנאת ה' צבאות ויחמול על עם הקדש שה פזורה
 2 ישראל וילבוש בגדי נקם לנקום נקמת בני ישראל מאת היונים ויועץ בלבו ויעש לו חרב
 3 קטנה ויחגור אותה תחת מעילו, ויצא לרחוב העיר ויבא עד לפני שער המלך ויקרא
 4 לשוערים ויאמר אליהם אני יוחנן בן מתתיהו הנני בא לבא לפני אדוניכם, ויאמרו נערי
 5 המלך אל המלך הנה יוחנן הכהן הגדול עומד בחצר, ויאמר המלך יבא ויבא יוחנן לפני
 6 המלך ויאמר לו ניקנור מדוע אתה עובר את מצוות המלך ואינך חפץ בשלום מלכותו, הלא
 7 ידעת אם לא שמעת כי יש לאל ידי בכח גבורת חיילות לעשות עמכם רע עד בלתי השאיר
 8 לכם שריד ופליט, כי עתה גם אותך הרגתי ואותם שרפתים כקש לפני רוח, ומי בכל אלהי
 9 הארצות אשר הצילו את ארצם מידי כי יציל ה' את ירושלם מידי. ויען יוחנן למלך לאמר
 10 עתה באתי אליך כל אשר תחפוץ אעשה לא אסור ממצותך ימין ושמאל. ויאמר לו המלך
 11 במה יודע איפה כי אתה סר אל משמעתי הלא כאשר תקרב אל המזבח ותעשה את חטאתך
 12 ואת עולתך בחלב ודם החזיר הזה ותלבש בגדי מלכות אשר לבש בו המלך ותרכב על
 13 מרכבת המשנה אשר לו ואשר ניתן כתר מלכות בראשך. ויאמר יוחנן אנכי אעשה כדברך
 14 כאשר אדוני מצוה רק אין דבר כי יגורתי מפני האף והחמה עם בני ישראל, הן אובח תועבת
 15 ה' על המזבח לעיניהם ולא יסקלוני אך בזאת יאות לי לעשות בדברך בהוציאך כל איש
 16 מלפניך ואני ואתה ואין זולתך ואז אעשה כדבר המלך, פן יודיעון הדבר אל עם בני ישראל.
 17 ויטב הדבר בעיני המלך ויצו לאמר הוציאו כל איש מעלי ולא עמד אתו מכל הנצבים
 18 עליו.

And the spirit of the Eternal seized Yochanan, the son of Mattathias, and he became
 zealous with the jealousy of the Eternal of Hosts, and he had mercy on the holy people
 "Israel, a scattered sheep." And he dressed for revenge, to avenge the children of Israel
 on the Greeks. He contemplated and he took a dagger and he girded it underneath his
 jacket, and he went out into the street of the city and he came up to the gate of the king.
 And he called to the gate-keepers and he said to them, "I am Yochanan, the son of
 Mattathias, and I come here to appear before your master." And the king's lads said to
 the king, "Behold, Yochanan, the High Priest, is standing in the courtyard." And the king
 said, "Let him come." And Yochanan came before the king. And Nicanor said to him,
 "Why do you transgress the commandments of the king? Do you not desire the welfare
 of his kingdom? Do you not know, have you not heard, that God has hands of power
 [which are found] in the might of soldiers [who will] do evil with you until not a trace of
 you remains? Because now also I will kill you, and I will burn you like chaff in the wind.
 And who among all the gods of the lands saved their land from me, so that the Eternal
 will save Jerusalem from me?" Yochanan answered the king saying, "Now, I came to
 you. Anything that you desire I will do. I will not stray from your commandments,
 neither to the right nor to the left." The king said to him, "How can I know that you will
 come around and submit to my discipline? Are you willing to approach the altar and

perform the sin offering and sacrifice the fat and blood of this pig, and wear the clothes of the kingdom which the king himself wore, and ride on the chariot of the viceroy which is his and have the crown of kingship placed on your head?" And Yochanan said, "I will do as you say, as my master commands, only I fear the anger and the wrath of the people of the children of Israel. So if I sacrifice the abomination of the Eternal on the altar before their eyes, will they not stone me? It is fitting for me to do according to your words, but remove every man before you, and I and you [will remain alone]. When there is no one with you, then I will do as the king said, lest the thing will be made known to the people of the children of Israel." And this thing found favor in the eyes of the king, and he commanded saying, "Remove every man from before me," and no one, not even those usually in his entourage, stood with him.

Annotations

1-18. MA 13-21

1. "שה פזורה ישראל" Jeremiah 50:17: "Israel, a scattered sheep."

10. "לא אסור ממצותיך ימין ושמאל" I Mac. 2:22: Mattathias said, "We shall not listen to the words of the king, that we should transgress against our religion to the right or to the left." Deut. 5:29: "Be careful, then, to do as the Eternal your God has commanded you. Do not turn aside to the right or to the left." Deut. 28:14: "Do not deviate to the right or to the left from any of the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day and turn to the worship of other gods."

15. "הן אובח תועבת ה' על המזבח לעיניהם ולא יסקלנו" Exodus 8:22: When Pharaoh tells Moses that the Hebrews may offer their sacrifices to God in the midst of the Egyptians, Moses says, "If we sacrifice that which is untouchable to the Egyptians before their very eyes, will they not stone us?" (In MH2, Yochanan changes this last statement to the singular to apply to himself.)

Commentary

1. Yochanan is one of the sons of Mattathias, according to I Maccabees 2:2.

5. Here, and in a few other places in the Hanukkah *midrashim* (see Section 2, Commentary), Yochanan is called the High Priest. According to the prayer addition to the *Amidah* during Hanukkah, "*Al Ha-nissim*," Mattathias himself is the son of Yochanan, *Kohen Gadol*. It is also possible that Mattathias' son Yochanan had this title too, though if that is the case, it is odd that I and II Maccabees would not have mentioned

it. Perhaps the author of MH2 confused the different Yochanans of the Second Temple period.⁵

6. While Yochanan asks to come before the king, it is Nicanor who actually greets him inside the king's court. In MA, the king is not present at all. In MH2, it also appears that the king is not actually present, for when Nicanor dismisses all of his ministers, the two men are left alone. Nonetheless, throughout the conversation, the text uses such phrases as, "the king said" or "Yochanan answered the king." Once again, it seems that the author briefly confused the character of King Antiochus with that of Nicanor. There is no such confusion in MA, where the entire conversation—although somewhat shorter—takes place between Yochanan and Nicanor.

6, 10, 14, 17. Four times in this section, the author uses the root צוה, which means "to command" with King Antiochus or Nicanor as its subject. Nicanor asks Yochanan, "Why do you transgress the *mitzvot* of the king?" Later, Yochanan tells Nicanor, "I will not stray from your *mitzvot*." Nicanor even "commands" everyone to leave the room. This use of the verb is ironic, since for Jews, it is only God who gives commandments. The repetition of the word serves to emphasize the fact that Yochanan, and the Jews he represents, realize that they must not heed the commands of Antiochus when they conflict with the *mitzvot* from the King of Kings.

10. The author took Yochanan's father, Mattathias' words from I Maccabees, and puts them in the mouth of Yochanan; ironically, this time the statement is made in relation to the commands not of God, but of the enemy, Antiochus. Similarly, Deuteronomy 28:14 uses the phrase to express Israel's requirement to adhere to God's *mitzvot*. The end of the verse, however, provides a warning against idolatry. Given the context in Deuteronomy, it is ironic that the redactor of MH2 chose these words for Yochanan to accept upon himself the idolatrous behavior that Nicanor demands; the phrase serves to foreshadow that Yochanan would not deviate from God's laws in the end.

15. Despite the context of the Exodus verse, in MH2 the situation is quite the opposite. Rather than worrying that the Egyptians will be offended by the legitimate sacrifices of the Israelites to their God, Yochanan agrees to obey Nicanor's request to sacrifice a pig,

but he is concerned that his people will be offended if they witness this illegitimate sacrifice. Thus he asks, "will they (the Israelites) not stone me?" Perhaps the use of this quote—which hearkens back to the days of Pharaoh, Israel, and the Pesach sacrifice—is a sign of what is to come, that Yochanan's actions will lead not to sin but instead to fulfillment of God's commands and his eventual redemption.

Section 4

1 ויהי בלכתם ויתפלל יוחנן לפני ה' ויאמר: ה' אלהי ישראל יושב הכרובים אתה הוא האלהים
2 לבדך לכל ממלכות הארץ, אתה עשית את השמים ואת הארץ, הטה אזנך ושמע פקח עיניך
3 וראה את דברי אנטיוכוס אשר שלחו לחרף מערכות אלהים חיים ומלך עולם, אמנס ה'
4 החריבו מלכי אשור את הגוים ואת ארצם ונתנו את אלהיהם באש, כי לא אלהים תמה כי
5 אם מעשה ידי אדם עץ ואבן ויאבדום. ואתה ה' אלהינו הושיעני נא מידו פן ילך וישתבח
6 ויתפאר בבית דגון אלהיו לאמר אלהי נתנם בידי וכחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה.
7 וככלות עתרתו חיזק ואמץ לבבו ויאמר ה' אלהים זכרני נא וחזקני נא אך הפעם הזה
8 ואנקמה נקמת בני ישראל, ויקרב יוחנן אליו ויתקע חרב בלבו, ויהי כאשר כרע שם נפל
9 שדוד את פני הקדש. ויהי אך יצא יצא יוחנן כ"ג מאת פני הקדש וירע תרועה גדולה ויערוך
10 מלחמה בעמים ויהרוג בהם הרג רב שבעה אלף ושבע מאות ושנים ושבעים מבלעדי העם
11 אשר נהרגו איש בחרב רעהו.

And when they left, Yochanan prayed before the Eternal and he said, "Eternal, God of Israel, who sits between the cherubim, you are the only God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. Bend your ear and hear; open your eyes and see the words of Antiochus that he spewed out to insult the armies of the living God and the King of the World. Indeed, Eternal One, the kings of Assyria destroyed the nations and their lands, and cast their gods into the fire, because they are not gods, rather the work of human hands—of wood and stone—and they destroyed them. And You, the Eternal our God, please save me from his hand, lest he will go and give praise and glory in the house of Dagan, his god, saying, 'My god, put them in my hand and my power and strengthen my hand.' Rather strengthen me." And when he finished his prayer, he became strong and courageous of heart. And he said, "Eternal God, please remember me and please make me strong this time, and I will take revenge for the children of Israel." And Yochanan came close to [Nicanor] and he drove the dagger into his heart. And when he bent over, he fell slain before the holy ark. And then Yochanan, the High Priest, immediately went out from before the holy ark, and he sounded a great blast [of the shofar] and he waged war against the [Greek] people and they [Yochanan's followers] killed a great many of them—seven thousand, seven hundred and seventy-two aside from the one who was killed by the sword of his neighbor.

Annotations

1-11. MA, 22-26

1-5. "ה' אלהי ישראל יושב הכרובים" II Kings 19:14-19, Isaiah 37:16-20, MY

6. "בֵּית דָּגָן" I Mac. 10:83: "Beit Dagan, the temple of their idol."

Commentary

1-8. The prayer offered by Yochanan is significantly longer in MH2 than in MA. The heroes of MH2 and MY both recall the past victory over the Assyrians, asking God that this enemy, too, be delivered into his hands. In MA, Yochanan is concerned that he could be punished for killing a man in the Temple; he asks God not to see this as a sin, and only then does he go out to fight.

9. The phrase "פְּנֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ" appears twice in this line; it has the meaning of a "holy place," such as the ark in the Temple sanctuary.

10. After this battle, MA recounts that 7,000 people were killed. The source of the count in MH2, 7,772, is unclear.

11. At the end of this section in MA, Yochanan returns victorious and erects a column with the inscription "Maccabee, Destroyer of Tyrants." This claim is problematic for a few reasons. First, this occurrence appears in none of the other texts on Hanukkah that are being considered. Second, according to I Maccabees 2:4, only Judas was called Maccabeus, so it does not make sense that Yochanan's statue bear this name. And third, only later on did this group of heroes come to be known as Maccabees (primarily because Judas is the hero of most accounts), so it is unlikely that the author would have thought "Maccabee" should apply to Yochanan. These facts about the name "Maccabee," along with its absence from MH2, indicate that this line was a later addition to the original text of MA.

Section 5

- 1 ויהי כאשר שמע אנטיוכוס כי נהרג משנהו ניקנור ויצר לו מאד וישלח ויקרא לכל שריו
2 ועבדיו וגם למשנהו הגדול ויאמר אליהם האם בגוי הזה לא תתנקם נפשי אשר השחיתו
3 וחבלו חיילות ויגזו מחנותי ושריי, ועתה מה אני מחשים הבא נא נבוא אליהם למלחמה
4 לבטל מהם את השבת ור"ח ומילה, ומי האלהים אשר יציל אותם מידי. וישלח את בגריס
5 בחיל גדול ועם רב ויבא לירושלם ויצא עליה, וימרו את אלהים עליון ויכעיסוהו בבמותם
6 ובפסיליהם יקניאוהו במזבח אלהיהם, ויעבירו קול במחנה מטעם המלך לאמר כל איש
7 ואיש אשר ישמור שבתות ה' ור"ח ומילה יומת.

And when Antiochus heard that his viceroy, Nicanor, was killed, he was greatly troubled. He sent and called for all of his ministers and servants and his highest viceroy, and he said to them, "Shall I not take revenge on this nation that slaughtered and wounded the soldiers and plundered my camps and my ministers? So now, why are we silent? Please, let us go against them in battle to abolish their [observance of] the Sabbath and Rosh Hodesh and circumcision. And who is the God who will save them from me?" And he sent Bagris with a great army and many soldiers and they came to Jerusalem and besieged it. They made the Supreme God bitter and they made Him angry with their altars and their gods. They made Him jealous with the altar to their gods. A decree was sent into the camp from the king saying, "Everyone who keeps the Sabbaths of the Eternal and Rosh Hodesh and circumcision will die."

Annotations

2. "האם בגוי הזה לא תתנקם נפשי" Jeremiah 5:9: About the rebellious ones and idolaters amongst the people Israel, God asks, "Shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?"

4. "לבטל מהם את השבת ור"ח ומילה" MA 30

6-7. "כל איש ואיש אשר ישמור שבתות ה' ור"ח ומילה יומת." MA 32

Commentary

2. Once again, the author places a biblical verse into the mouth of Antiochus, and this time they are the words of God. While God in the original context and Antiochus here both refer to the people of Israel as "the rebellious ones," the expected behaviors from which Israel has departed are completely opposite. In the Torah, God is disappointed that the Israelites have resorted to worshipping false gods, while in MH2, Antiochus is

disappointed that the Israelites have refused to worship his gods, remaining loyal to the One God of Israel. The use of the quote in this context serves to emphasize the Israelites' steadfastness and righteousness in the face of the enemy king's threats.

4. Bagris plays a central role in MH2 and in MA. He is not mentioned in the Books of Maccabees, nor does he appear in the other Hanukkah *midrashim*. It is possible, however, based on their similar roles in MH2 and Maccabees, that the "friend of the King" named Bacchides in I Maccabees 7:8 and in Josephus' Antiquities XII 10-11 is the same person called Bagris in the Hanukkah *midrashim*. This is supported by the events in I Maccabees. After Nicanor was killed and Judas prevailed in the battle, Bacchides was sent to Judea to continue the fight. The two names share similarities in pronunciation as well, so it is reasonable to see that the name may have been transformed from the Greek to the Hebrew.

5-6. The sequence of events in MA is similar, however there is no mention of Bagris and his troops causing God to become jealous or angry. The language describing God's reaction is extremely strong: they made God "bitter," "angry," and "jealous." Each verb is harsh on its own, and grouped as they are, the author intends to communicate God's wrath—certainly representative of the Jews' wrath—when the Greeks set up an altar to their gods in Jerusalem.

Section 6

1 ורבים מבני ישראל בימים ההם מסרו נפשם בעבור כבוד המקום ב"ה ולא בטלו ברית
2 אבותם. ואשה אחת מבני הלויים מלתה את בנה לשמונה ימים בתופים ומחולות, והיא עלתה
3 על חומת ירושלים ובנה חתן דמים מהול בידה ותען ותאמר לפני ה': כל זאת באתנו ולא
4 שכחנוך ולא שקרנו בבריתך, לא נסוג אחר לבנו, ותט אשרנו מני ארריך, והשליכה עצמה
5 עם בנה מעל החומה וימותו שניהם. וכמוה עשו רבים מבני ישראל ולא הפרו את ברית
6 אבותם ואת קדוש ישראל יעריצו.

And many of the children of Israel in those days gave their lives for the sake of the honor of God, Blessed be He, and they did not abandon the covenant of their fathers. And one woman from among the Levites circumcised her son on the eighth day accompanied by drums and timbrels. She went up on the wall of Jerusalem and her son, a "bridegroom of blood," who was circumcised, was in her arms. And she said before the Eternal, "All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten You or been false to Your covenant. Our hearts have not gone astray nor have our feet swerved from Your path." She threw herself, with her son, from the wall, and the two of them died. And many of the children of Israel acted as she did, and they did not abandon the covenant of their fathers, and they venerated the Holy One of Israel.

Annotations

2-6. "ואשה אחת מבני הלויים" II Mac. 6:10: "Two women were brought to trial for having circumcised their children. Their babies were hanged from their breasts, and the women were paraded publicly through the city and hurled down from the walls." MA 34-36

3. "חתן דמים" Exodus 4:25-26: After Zipporah circumcised her son she said, "You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me. A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision."

3-4. "כל זאת באתנו ולא שכחנוך" Psalms 44:18-19

Commentary

2-6. The details of the accounts in MH2 and Maccabees are different, but the common thread is the woman who dares to circumcise her son in accordance with the commandment and who ends her life by jumping from the city walls. In MH2 the woman jumps of her own accord, while in Maccabees it seems that she is forced to jump by Greek officials. This scenario in Maccabees does not support MH2's glorification of martyrdom, so the details of the story had to be altered to serve the author's purpose.

3-4. The biblical quotes from Exodus and Psalms do not appear in MA. Psalm 44 recounts events in the past in which God intervened to punish Israel's enemies and allowed Israel to emerge victorious, while communicating the sense that in the present, a time of many troubles, God has deserted them. The woman cries out these words, feeling that God has left her, that there is no justice.

6. MA 36 is similar, but once again the author of MH2 adds that they "venerated the Holy One," putting extra emphasis on God and making it clear that those in the story sanctified God by giving up their lives.

Section 7

1 וקהל קדושים אמרו איש אל רעהו הנה דבר המלך בחמה שפוכה לבטל ממנו את השבת,
2 דברי הרב ודברי התלמיד דברי מי שומעים, וכתוב בתורתנו ששת ימים תעבוד וביום
3 השביעי תשבות הלא טוב לחסות בה' ונשבות את שבתותינו אם יחינו ונחיה ואם ימותנו
4 ומתנו. ויועצו לשבות השבת במערה אחת הם נשיהם וטפם. ויוגד למלך לאמר הנה אנשים
5 באו הנה במערה אחת לשבות את שבתותם, וישלח המלך את חיילותיו חלוצים לצבא וישבו
6 על פי המערה ויקראו אותם אליהם בדבר המלך לאמר מדוע מריתם את דת המלך ועתה
7 בא נא וסורו נא אל משמעתו של מלך והצלתם את נפשותיכם ממוות ויענו כל העם יחדיו
8 לאמר אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע, אשר ציוני על הר סיני ששת ימים תעבוד וביום השביעי
9 תשבות, הלא טוב לנו מות ביד ה' פה ולא נחלל את יום השבת ח'ו. וכאשר ראו כל אנשי
10 הצבא כי לא אבו הלך בדתי מלכיהם, וביאו עצים ושרפו על פי המערה וימותו לפני ה'
11 כאלף איש ואשה.

The members of the holy congregation said to one another, "Here is the command of the king, poured out with great anger, to remove the Sabbath from us. The words of the teacher and the words of the student: to whose words should one listen? And it is written in our Torah, 'Six days you shall work and on the seventh day you shall rest.' Is it not good to trust in the Eternal, so we should rest on our Sabbaths? If He causes us to live, we will live; and if He causes us to die, we will die." And they consulted, [deciding] to observe Shabbat in one cave: they, their wives, and their children. And it was told to the king saying, "Behold, people came there, into one cave to observe their Shabbat." And the king sent his devoted soldiers to the army, and they sat at the entrance of the cave, and they called out to them with the word of the king, saying, "Why do you rebel against the decree of the king? Now please come and turn to obedience of the king and save your souls from death!" And all of the people answered together saying, "That which the Eternal said, we will do and we will listen, that which He commanded me on Mount Sinai: 'Six days you shall work and on the seventh day you shall rest.' Is it not better for us to die by the hand of the Eternal here, and not profane the Sabbath day? Heaven forbid!" And when all the men of the army saw that they did not want to follow the laws of their king, they brought wood and burned it in the mouth of the cave and about one thousand men and women died in the presence of the Eternal.

Annotations

2. "ששת ימים תעבוד וביום השביעי תשבות" Exodus 34:21

4-11. "ויעצו לשבות השבת במערה אחת" I Mac. 2:29-38. II Mac. 6:11: "Other Jews hastily assembled nearby in the caves to observe the Sabbath in secret. On being denounced to Philip they were all burned to death because they refrained from defending themselves, out of respect for the holiest of days." Antiquities XII, 6:2; MA 37-40

8. "אשר דבר ה' נעשה ושמע" Exodus 24:7

8-9. "ששת ימים תעבוד וביום השביעי תשובת" Exodus 34:21

Commentary

1-3. These lines do not appear in MA. The inclusion of this rabbinic paradigm is not surprising. In this parable, the teacher is God, who commanded the observance of Shabbat, while the student is the king, who gave his own commands against God's. The text asks the rhetorical question, "Should one listen to the teacher or the student?"—the obvious answer being that God's commands supersede those of the king. In any case, these three lines serve to emphasize the importance of Shabbat. Perhaps in the time of the redactor, it was Shabbat even more than the other two commandments (circumcision and Rosh Hodesh) that was being abused and neglected, or perhaps it was the central act that defined one outwardly as a Jew. The importance of Shabbat is repeated in lines 8-9, a section that does appear in MA. Both mentions of the Exodus 34:21 verse are followed by a rhetorical question in the form, "Is it not good...?"

8. The statement "*na'aseh v'nishma*," meaning "we will do and we will listen," in Exodus was the Israelites' unconditional agreement to accept and fulfill God's commandments. The author puts it into the mouths of the Israelites here to affirm their commitment to God's *mitzvot*. Surely it was also a message to those Jews who were hearing or reading this text that they too are part of this legacy and thus should perform God's *mitzvot* faithfully.

4-11. I Maccabees records events similar to MH2: the people hide in caves and refuse to profane the Sabbath, and they are willing to die without defending themselves. In the end, about 1,000 people were killed. Nonetheless, there is no mention of the Greek soldiers lighting a fire to kill the people hiding in the caves. The account in II Maccabees is more concise, but it does mention the fire. Josephus' account of this event is quite similar, including the report of the number of people who died in the caves. Nonetheless,

Josephus emphasizes the fact that the Jews were given the opportunity to comply with the king's orders on numerous occasions. When the Jews decided not to comply, Josephus' tone indicates his disappointment that there was no resistance on the part of the Jews, that they just accepted their fate: "They were not willing to break in upon the honour they owed the Sabbath, even in such distresses; for our law requires that we rest upon that day."⁶

6-7. In MA, the messengers of the king are more specific than those in MH2. Rather than asking why they violate the king's orders, the messengers in MA actually invite the Jews to join them: "Eat of our bread, drink of our wine, and do what we do!" This is similar to Nicanor's demand of Yochanan in Section 3, Lines 11-13, when he asks Yochanan whether he will offer the sacrifices as the Greeks do, wear the clothes of the king and ride on his chariot. The text suggests that the Greeks wanted the Jews to adopt their ways in every possible area.

Section 8

1 ויהי כשמוע יוחנן בן מתתיהו וד' אחיו את כל זאת אזרו חיל בגבורתם ובעזרם ומגינם של
2 אביהם שבשמים אשר בטחו בו וילחמו בעמים ויהרגו הרג רב אין חקר ואין מספר, לא
3 נשאר בהם עד אחד, אפס (זולתי) בגריס אשר נס אל אנטיוכיא אל המלך ועמו אנשים
4 פליטי חרב מוכים ומעונים, ויעץ בגריס ויאמר לאנטיוכס הן אתה שמת טעם לבטל את
5 השבת ר"ח ומילה, נבול תבול גם אתה וכל העם הזה אשר ברגליך, כי אם ילכו כל העם וכל
6 הלשונות האלה לא יוכלון לעמוד בפני חמשת בני מתתיהו כ"ג אשר מאריות גברו ומנשרים
7 קלו.

And when Yochanan, son of Mattathias, and his four brothers heard of all this, they girded their loins with their strength [gathered courage], and with the help and the protection of their Father who is in heaven in whom they trusted, they fought against the people, and they killed a great many—immeasurable and uncountable. Not one witness remained among them, except Bagris who escaped to Antioch, to the king, and with him the few that escaped the sword, crushed and tortured. Bagris offered this advice to Antiochus, saying, "Yes, you issued a decree to do away with the Sabbath, Rosh Hodesh and circumcision. Now, you and all of this people who are at your feet will surely wear yourselves out. Because if they will go, this whole people will not be able to stand before the five sons of Mattathias, the High Priest, [for] 'they were stronger than lions, they were swifter than eagles.'"

Annotations

1-7. MA 41-44

5. "נבול תבול גם אתה וכל העם" Exodus 18:18: "You will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well."

6-7. "מאריות גברו ומנשרים קלו" II Samuel 1:23: "They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions."

5-7. MY uses the same two verses in a similar context; an advisor to the king warns him, "You will surely wear yourself out along with this people who are at your feet. And you shall not be able to wage war with Israel who is swifter than eagles and stronger than lions."

Commentary

1-7. In both MH2 and MA, Bagris is afraid of Mattathias and his sons. However the wording in the two texts is quite different; in MH2, Bagris warns the king that his people

will be disgraced. In MA, Bagris actually says that the five sons of Mattathias "cannot be defeated" unless attacked by all of the kingdom's forces.

3. In II Maccabees 8:34-6, it is Nicanor who, after much of his army has been destroyed, escapes in fear to Antioch. Maccabees and MH2 use the name of the city, Antioch, while in MA, Bagris escaped to King Antiochus himself.

5. In Exodus, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, offers him the advice that he cannot do everything alone; rather, Moses must seek the help of capable people if he is to endure. In MH2, it is Bagris who offers this advice to the king. He tells Antiochus in Section 9 that he must call for warriors from throughout his kingdom to face the sons of Mattathias.

6-7. In II Samuel, this verse refers to Saul and Jonathan, two great warriors. The line is part of a song that the Judaite were supposed to learn. In MH2, the two parts of the quote are reversed. MA has added another phrase, "braver than bears," to the end of the inverted Samuel quote.

Section 9

1 ועתה המלך עצתי תיטב עליך ולא תלחם במתי מעט פן נהיה לבוז ולקלס לעיני כל העמים
2 ומלכי ארץ וכל לאומים, אם על המלך טוב יכתב ונשלוח ספרים בכל מדינות מלכותך
3 ויבואו כל שרי עם ועם ולא ישאר מהם עד אחד, ויעש המלך כדבר בגריס, ויבואו מכל
4 מדינות המלך שרי עם ועם עם אלפים ורבבות חיילות חלוצי צבא, וכאשר ראה בגריס כי
5 כביר מצאו ידו וחיללים יגבר ורב מאד מחנהו אין חקר ואין מספר, קם בגריס ויבא
6 לירושלם ויצר עליה, ויחל לחרף מערכות אלהים חיים ומלך עולם, ויבקע החומה וינתק
7 וישבק במקדש י"ג פרצות ויחשוב בלבו לאמר הפעם הזאת לא יוכלו לי, כי רב חילי וכי כביר
8 מצאה ידי.

"And now, King, my advice will be good for you: Do not fight against the few in number, lest we will be disgraced in the eyes of all the peoples and kings of the land and all the nations. Better that the king write and send scrolls to all of the provinces of your kingdom. And all the commanders of all peoples will come, and there will not remain of them even one." And the king did according to the word of Bagris, and the commanders of all peoples came from all the provinces of the king with thousands and ten thousands, devoted soldiers of the army. And when Bagris saw how mighty they were, [that] they were able, and the soldiers were filled with strength, and very great was his army—immeasurable and uncountable his camp, Bagris rose and he came to Jerusalem, and he laid siege upon it. And he began to insult the cohorts of the Living God and the King of the world. And he broke through the wall and he made thirteen breaches in the Temple. And he thought to himself, "This time they cannot [defeat] me because my army is great, and I am mighty."

Annotations

1-8. MA 45-49

Commentary

1-8. This section is longer than the corresponding section in MA. The content is virtually identical, but MH2 expands Bagris' advice. One difference in content is that MA presents Bagris asking not only for soldiers to come, but to bring with them armored elephants. Once the soldiers arrive, both texts portray Bagris' siege on Jerusalem, but only MH2 explains that this siege was an insult to God's people. Nonetheless, after

Bagris thinks to himself that he cannot be defeated, the author of MA adds the following inside information: "The God of heaven did not think so."

7. Mishnah *Middot* 2:3 confirms the number of breaches. It says, "Inside [the Temple mount] is a low wall of lattice, ten hand-breadths high. There were thirteen breaches in it which the kings of Greece opened up."

Section 10

- 1 א"ר יצחק בר נחמני אלף ושמונים ריבוא גייסות באו עם בגריס הרשע ואמר לישראל
2 שוטים אתם שתעשו מלחמה עם חיילים שאין להם שיעור, אם תאמרו אלהיכם יביא מבול
3 כבר נשבע שלא יביא מבול לעולם, ואם גבריאלי יעמוד בנו לשרוף אותנו כמו שעשה
4 לסנחריב הרי אנו סכים עצמנו בדם חזיר ובש"ז (ובשכבת זרע) של סוסים ולא יגע בנו.
5 נשאו ישראל עיניהם למרום ויאמרו לא לנו ה' לא לנו כי לשמך תן כבוד שלא יתבזה
6 בעכו"ם, עכשיו יאמרו אין לאלהיהם עצה אחרת, וכך כתיב גדול העצה ורב העלילה. אמר
7 הקב"ה חייכם מחשבתי גדולה משלכם כי לא יטוש ה' עמו ונחלתו לא יעזוב

Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani said: 1,080 myriads (10,000) of troops came with Bagris, the evil one, and he said to Israel, "You are fools to make war with the soldiers who are uncountable. If you say Your God will bring a flood, He already swore that He would never again bring a flood; or if Gabriel would stand upon us and burn us, as he did to Sennacherib, behold we would anoint (smear) ourselves with the blood of a pig and with the semen of horses, and he would not touch us." Israel lifted their eyes to the heavens and said, "'Not for us, O Eternal, not for us, but rather for Your name bring glory,' so that it will not become despised by idolaters." Now they will say, "Their God does not have another counsel," and so it is written, "Great in purpose and mighty in deed." God said, "By your lives, My plan is greater than yours, 'for the Eternal will not forsake His people, and He will not abandon His inheritance.'"

Annotations

1-7. ML

5. "לא לנו ה' לא לנו כי לשמך תן כבוד" Psalms 115:1

6. "גדול העצה ורב העלילה" Jeremiah 32:19: "Great in purpose and mighty in deed, whose eyes observe all the ways of men, so as to repay every man according to his ways, and with the proper fruit of his deeds."

7. "כי לא יטוש ה' עמו ונחלתו לא יעזוב" Psalms 94:14

Commentary

1. This section of the text appears in ML, albeit in a slightly different order and in an altered form. The section of ML which includes the rape of Hannah, the Hasmonean daughter, is attributed to "Rabbi Yitzhak," presumably "Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani" in

MH2. He is a second or third generation Palestinian *amora*, a student of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.⁷

2-7. Both ML and MH2 have the same literary pattern, although the examples used are different. Each text begins, "If you say [that your God will do this]", and then provides a response for why God will not be able to bring about that stated event. While MH2 and ML both refer to the Flood (Genesis 7-9), MH2 recalls Sennacherib (II Kings 18-19), and ML references Sisera (Judges 4). Despite the different references, both serve as examples of occasions in which God actively delivered the enemy into the hands of the Israelites. Bagris uses these examples as a way of asserting that God will not be able to come through this way yet again, and that his forces will be prepared to resist God. Thus, he claims, the Israelites, whose forces are dwarfed by his own, are sure to be defeated.

5. This praise of God was offered in a psalm whose context is similar to the situation in MH2; Israel wants the idolatrous nations to know that their God is real and true. At the same time the song encouraged the people Israel to believe in their "invisible" God and to resist temptation to worship the images of their neighbors. It is no coincidence that Psalm 115 is included here, for it is one of the psalms that comprises the Hallel, which is read both on Hanukkah and during the Passover seder. The use of this verse in MH2 is a reminder that God has redeemed Israel in the past and an assurance that once again, God will redeem them.

5-7. Israel's prayer to God is similar in MH2 and ML, although God's response is somewhat different. In ML, God calms the Israelites, saying "Be quiet my children, stand and see the vengeance of God that God will do to the nations." This is quite similar to God's words in Exodus 14:13, as He comforts the Israelites at the Red Sea: "Have no fear! Stand by and witness the deliverance which the Eternal will do for you today." Afterwards, ML then flows immediately into MH2's Section 12.

5-7. There is a greater concentration of biblical quotes in this section than in the rest of MH2. One of these verses (Jeremiah 32:19) is introduced with the word "*k'tiv*," meaning "it is written." This word is used often in midrash to introduce a biblical verse,

although virtually all of the verses included in MH2 are simply part of the text and are not explicitly designated as biblical quotes.

6. The Jeremiah verse in the Bible comes immediately after the statement that "You show kindness to the thousandth generation, but visit the guilt of the fathers upon their children after them." This statement assured Israel, as well as the Hasmoneans and their followers, that God protects the righteous and punishes the wicked.

7. Psalm 94 assures the people Israel that God is omniscient and that evildoers will be punished, while God will protect those who are faithful.

Section 11

- 1 באותה שעה היו ישראל מצפים להרי מזרח אולי יבואו להם עכו"ם פרסיים לעזרתם, אז
2 חרה לו למתתיהו כ"ג וא"ל לחשמונאי ולא כתיב ארור הגבר אשר שם בשר זרועו לו ומן ה'
3 יסיר לבו וברוך הגבר אשר שם ה' מבטחו? א"ל יפה אמרת אני ושבעה בני ואתה ושלושה
4 בנים הם י"ב שבטי יה עדות לישראל, מובטח אני בהקב"ה שיעשה לנו נסים ונפלאות,
5 ויצומו וילבשו שקים ואפר לבקש רחמים מלפני אלהי השמים עזרם ומגינם של ישראל,
6 וככלותם להתפלל קמו מכרוע על ברכיהם ויעצמו עשתנותם, מנשרים קלו ומאריות גברו
7 וילחמו בעמים ויהרגו בהם הרג רב.

At that time, Israel was looking to the mountains of the East, [thinking that] perhaps Persian idolaters would come to them to help them. Then, Mattathias, the High Priest, became angry and he said to the Hasmonean, "Is it not written: 'Cursed is the man who makes flesh his strength and turns his heart away from God. But blessed is the man who puts his trust in God'?" [Mattathias] said to [Yochanan, High Priest], "You spoke well. Myself and my seven sons and you and your three sons, they are the twelve tribes of God, witnesses for Israel. I trust in the Holy One, Blessed be God, who will do miracles and wonders for us." And now they fasted and wore sackcloth and dust in order to ask for mercy from the God of heaven, the help and shield of Israel. And when they finished praying, they got up from bowing on their knees and they strengthened themselves—they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. And they fought against the nations, and they killed a great many of them.

Annotations

2-3. "ארור הגבר אשר שם" Jeremiah 17:5, 7. MH2 eliminates two words from the Jeremiah verse after "cursed be the man who..." It skips the phrase "*yivtach ba-adam*," meaning "who trusts in God" and goes straight to the phrase "who makes flesh his strength."

3-4. "אני ושבעה בני ואתה ושלושה בנים הם י"ב שבטי יה" ML

5. "ויצומו וילבשו שקים ואפר לבקש רחמים מלפני אלהי השמים" MA 51

6. "מנשרים קלו ומאריות גברו" II Samuel 1:23

7. "ויהרגו בהם הרג רב" MA 58

Commentary

1-3. These lines and quote do not appear in the other *midrashim* considered here. The quote affirms the need to trust in God, but there is no smooth flow from this line into the next part about Mattathias' sons. This suggests that these lines were inserted by the redactor. The Israelites were looking to the East, for it is from that direction that redemption often comes. The statement about the Persians is a reference to King Cyrus' overthrow of the Babylonians and his subsequent allowance that Jews return from exile to Jerusalem. In an almost mocking tone, the author is suggesting that without Mattathias and his sons, the Israelites would have been simply waiting for an outside party to come save them.

3-4. This text is not in its original order, because Mattathias' "you spoke well" is not a response to any particular person or statement, as it is in ML. In ML, these lines appear close to the end of the text, after the recounting of the rape of Hannah. Yochanan speaks to Mattathias about their need to fight together; this leads naturally into the comparison of their sons to the twelve tribes. One explanation for this change is that the statement about the tribes was placed at this point in MH2 to correspond with the section in MA in which Mattathias blesses his sons individually, comparing them to tribes of Israel. Perhaps Sections 11-13 of MH2 were taken from the source for ML, but the redactor wanted to maintain the parallelism to MA, so he switched the order of the text so that mention of the tribes occurred here. This caused an awkward separation between the two Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani passages that appear as one section in ML.

4. This is the first usage of the word "miracle" in MH2. The Hasmoneans believed that God would do miracles for them; thus, their eventual military victory is considered a miracle. The word is used several more times in the remaining sections, including a description of the oil that lasted for eight days. The notion of what constitutes the central miracle of Hanukkah varies from text to text, and from time to time, but this word has become central to the festival; indeed, the talmudic principle behind the kindling of lights is to "publicize the miracle."

4. Both ML and MH2 have the Hasmoneans' leader—Yochanan or Mattathias—professing trust that God will do miracles for them. This is not the case in MA. This suggests that the redactor of MH2 was unsatisfied with the lack of God's intervention in the Hasmonean victory story, as he received it from MA. Thus he lifted this material from a source which eventually became a part of ML.

7. MA 58 also shows the brothers fighting, but it adds some extra information: Judah was killed, Mattathias agreed to join them in battle, and Eleazar, while attacking the enemies' elephants, was engulfed in elephant dung. On the other hand, MH2 shows little concern for Judah, Eleazar or any of the brothers aside from Yochanan. It is interesting to note that Eleazar, son of Mattathias, does play a role in ML, for it is he who kills Hannah's rapist. This is a more significant role than he assumes in MA.

Section 12

1 א"ר יצחק בר נחמני באותה שעה תפס הקב"ה שבעים שרים של מעלה משרי או"ה ורצע
2 אותם במרצע של אש ויאמר להם הרגו איש את קרובו ואם ימלט אחד מהם נפשיכם תחת
3 נפשו. וכשהיו היונים מורים חצים וחרבות באו המלאכים ונעצו אותם בלבו של היונים, הוי
4 חרבם תבוא בלבם וקשתותם תשברנה, והיו בני חשמונאי רואים הנסים ואומרים ה' ילחם
5 לנו. וכל מלך ומלך מהמלכים שנהרג היו באים המלאכים ומבזבזים ממנו והטילו לבתיהם
6 של ישראל, שהם לא היו יכולים ליטול את השלל מפני החללים.

Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani said: "At the same time God grabbed seventy angels from above associated with the nations of the world and lashed them with an awl of fire and said to them, 'Each man will kill his neighbor, and if one of them escapes, your lives will be taken for his life.' And when the Greeks shot their arrows [and drew] swords, the angels came and pressed them into the hearts of the Greeks. Their own sword pierced their hearts and their bows were broken, and the Hasmoneans witnessed the miracles and they said, 'The Eternal will fight for us.' And every single king from among the kings who were killed, angels came and plundered him and the booty was taken to the houses of Israel, for they were not able to take the spoil from the dead."

Annotations

1-4. "תפס הקב"ה שבעים שרים של מעלה" ML

4. "ה' ילחם לנו" Exodus 14:14: "The Eternal will fight for you."

Commentary

1-4. This is the continuation of Section 10. The attribution is repeated here because of the interruption caused by Section 11. The attribution to "Rabbi Yitzhak" is not repeated in ML because there is no interruption. The beginning of the corresponding section in ML—immediately prior to the rape of Hannah—actually provides a preview of the upcoming event: "Their swords will come into their hearts, and their bows will break. Rabbi Yitzhak said, 'These are the Greeks who waged war upon the Hasmoneans and their sons.'" It is this event which is repeated in ML and related here in MH2, both in greater detail.

4. In Exodus, Moses says, "The Eternal will fight for you," to assure the Israelites—who were skeptical about their chances of escaping the rapidly approaching Egyptian army—that God would save them. In MH2, the Hasmoneans, like Moses, believed that God would do miracles for them. The slight change in the Hebrew from "*lachem*" to "*lanu*" allows the Hasmoneans to include themselves in the group for whom God will fight. I Maccabees 4:8-10 depicts Judah's recollection of the Israelites' deliverance at the Red Sea.

5. The alliteration in this line is impossible to ignore; the author played with the sounds of the letters מ, ל, and כ in repeating combinations. The word מלך is repeated in different forms three times, followed by its sound-alike, המלאכים. The words יכולים, ילחם, כל, and החללים surround this line and carry these sounds throughout the end of the section. The midrashic writer often played with words in this way.

5-6. There is no mention of the plunder in ML.

5-6. I Mac. 4:16-17 leads to one explanation for why the Israelites in MH2 could not take the spoil; there Judas said to his forces, "Do not be greedy for plunder, for there is a battle before us."

Section 13

- 1 ואת חיילותיהם מהם שרפו בני ישראל מהם דקרו בחרב ומהם תלו על העץ ובגריס הרשע
2 שרפו אותו בית ישראל באש. ואז אנטיוכוס המלך כאשר שמע אשר נהרגו בגריס וכל שרי
3 החיל אשר עמו וינס במדינות הים והיה כל מוצאו אותו במקום אשר היה שם, ששם באו
4 המורדים בו, היו קוראין אותו הבורח.

And the Israelites burned some of [the Greek] soldiers, and they stabbed some of them with swords and they hung some of them on a tree. And the house of Israel burned Bagris, the evil one, by fire. And when he heard that Bagris was killed as were all of his mighty ministers that were with him, Antiochus, the king, fled to the provinces of the sea, and anyone who found him in that place, for the rebels came there, called him "the fugitive."

Annotations

1-4. MA 65-67

Commentary

3-4. In II Maccabees 9:2, Antiochus was defeated and made to flee.

4. MA adds that Antiochus drowned himself.

Section 14

- 1 ואח"כ באו בני חשמונאי לבית המקדש ויבנו הערים ויסגרו הפרצות ויטהרו את העזרה מן
2 ההרוגים ומהטומאות, ויבקשו שמן זית זך להדליק את המנורה ולא מצאו כי אם צלוחית
3 אחת אשר היתה חתומה בטבעת הכ"ג וידעו כי הוא שמן טהור, והיה בה כשיעור הדלקת
4 יום אחד ואלהי השמים אשר שכן שמו שם הניח ברכה בשמן, והיו מוצאים כל לילה ולילה
5 אחר עריכת הנרות האסיד מלאה שמן והעלו הנרות ממנו שמונה ימים, ועל הצלתם ונס
6 האסיד ההוא קבלו וקיימו היהודים עליהם ועל זרעם להיות עושים את שמונת ימי חנוכה
7 בהלל ובהודאה בכל שנה ושנה וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם. ברוך הרב את ריבנו והנוקם את
8 נקמתנו והמשלם גמול לכל אויבי נפשינו, ברוך האל המושיע. תם מדרש מעשה חנוכה.

Afterwards, the Hasmoneans came to the Temple and they built the cities and they sealed the breaches and purified the Temple court from the dead and from the impurities. And they searched for clear olive oil to light the menorah. But they only found one small bottle that was sealed with the ring of the High Priest, so they knew that it was pure oil. It held an amount sufficient to light [the menorah] for one day. But the God of heaven, whose name dwelt there, blessed the oil, and they found, each and every night after the setting of the lights, that the cruse was full of oil and the lamps were lit for eight days. And for their salvation and the miracle of the cruse, the Jews accepted upon themselves and upon their offspring to fulfill [the obligation] to keep the eight days of Hanukkah with Hallel and with thanksgiving each and every year, and its memory will never depart from their offspring. Blessed is the One who fought our fight and the One who took revenge for us and who paid retribution to all the enemies of our souls. Blessed is the God who saves! Thus ends *Midrash Ma'aseh Hanukkah*.

Annotations

- 1-5. "באו בני חשמונאי לבית המקדש" I Mac. 4:43-9; II Mac. 10:3; BT *Shabbat* 21b; MA 68-69; ML
6. "שמונת ימי חנוכה" I Mac. 4:56: "So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days." II Mac. 10:5-6; *Antiquities* XII, 7:7; ML
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Commentary

2-7. There are actually two versions of the miracle of oil account in ML; they are similar, though the first is more detailed and mentions Hallel as part of the holiday observance.

5-8. The author or redactor makes a sound play on the words **הַאֵסֶךְ** and **נֹס** in lines 5 and 6, and **לֹא יִסּוּךְ** in line 7. The "s" sound ties these words together, and the three words send the message of the entire section on their own: the "cruse" of oil was a "miracle" that "will never depart" from the Jews. By singling out these words based upon their sound, the author draws attention to the section's fundamental message.

6. I Maccabees 4:54, II Maccabees 10:5, and Josephus' Antiquities XII, 7:6 indicate that the day that the Temple was purified was the 25 Kislev, exactly two years to the day after it was originally profaned.

6. II Maccabees adds that the purification of the Temple was celebrated for eight days "in the manner of the festival of Booths."

6-7. Josephus does not mention the miracle of the oil. He does explain that Judas celebrated the festival for eight days with feasting and psalms (Hallel).⁸ He adds that this festival, celebrated every year, is called "Lights."

6-7. MA adds a number of specifics about Hanukkah, including that it is a time for feasting, that it should be observed as seriously as any festival prescribed in Torah, that it involves kindling lights, that no mourning or fasting is permitted, and that work was allowed by the Hasmoneans. It is interesting to note that there is no mention of Hallel in MA. Nonetheless, all of this detail about the observance of the day was probably added much later; this seems especially likely since its different parts resemble parts of various texts including the Babylonian Talmud (BT) *Shabbat* 21b and in *Megillat Ta'anit*, in the commentary to *mishna* 23. It made sense to include this practical information about the festival in this liturgical text so that those who heard it would know the holiday's origin as well as how to observe it. And the prescription to observe Hanukkah like any festival from the Torah suggests that the festival was not being widely observed and that the introduction of MA into Jewish liturgy to address the lack of a sacred text on Hanukkah was attempting to reverse this trend.

8. None of the other *midrashim* considered in this thesis end with a blessing. This powerful conclusion establishes yet again the MH2 redactor's desire to attribute the

Hanukkah miracles entirely to God, and it suggests strongly that this text was created to serve a liturgical function.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ MS 3:189v, *Va-era*, Exodus 6:6, 1622, quoted in Marc Saperstein, "History as Homiletics: The Use of Historical Memory in the Sermons of Saul Levi Morteira." *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, eds. Elisheva Carlbach, John M. Efron, David N. Meyers (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), p. 117.
- ² Jonathan A. Goldstein, "Notes," *Anchor Bible: I Maccabees* Vol. 41. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 259.
- ³ Uriel Rappaport, "Nicanor," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. Vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 1105.
- ⁴ Israel Burgansky, "Simeon Bar Yohai," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 14. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), p. 1551.
- ⁵ "Yochanan the Kohen Gadol," *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Shabbat* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1996), appendix.
- ⁶ *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, William Whiston, trans. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), p. 364.
- ⁷ Mordechai Margalioth, *Encyclopedia of Talmudic and Geonic Literature* (Tel Aviv: Joshua Chachik, 1946), pp. 590-1.
- ⁸ Hallel consists of Psalms 113-118 today, and it is recited on several festival days, including Hanukkah, Passover, and Rosh Hodesh. Its inclusion in several rabbinic texts about the observance of Hanukkah suggests that recitation of Hallel during Hanukkah became a part of the holiday's observance extremely early. Nonetheless, it is not clear exactly which Psalms—if there was even a fixed set—were a part of the Hallel during the tannaitic period.

PART II
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1:

SOURCE-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *MA'ASEH HANUKKAH*, *NUSACH BET*

Ma'aseh Hanukkah Nusach Bet (MH2) is consistent with the genre of narrative midrash, in that the techniques that the author and redactor used to send their message are present in other aggadic works. First, they infused the text with Divine authority by drawing upon biblical verses. This also allowed them to remind their readers of past events in the Bible which have a connection to the events of MH2. Second, they used the literary technique of irony to jolt their readers, as a way of emphasizing their message. Finally, they incorporated historical references, which may or may not have been accurate, from a wide range of sources, to lend a sense of authenticity to the midrash.

A. BIBLICAL SOURCES

The author and redactor incorporate biblical texts throughout MH2; they assumed that the reader would be learned enough to recognize the references, and even to be able to know where they came from and in what context. Therefore, while a few of the verses are identified as biblical, most of them are not so identified. The use of biblical verses adds layers of meaning to the text. The author appropriates the Divine authority of Torah to emphasize Torah law and God as the Supreme One and the Giver of that law.

One way that the author and redactor employed biblical verses in MH2 was to use phrases from Torah as descriptions of the individuals in the midrash, or more often to place these words of Torah in the mouths of the heroes of the story and in the mouths of their followers. There are several instances in which the author and redactor have removed a verse from its biblical context and placed it into a completely new context in the midrash. For example, in MH2 Section 8, Bagris offers advice to Antiochus with regard to the Hasmonean rebels, who have proven much stronger than their numbers

would suggest. Bagris adopts the words of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who tells Moses in Exodus 18:18 that he cannot serve as the only judge for all Israel; he says, "You will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well." Bagris explains that if they do not get more soldiers from the surrounding provinces, "you [Antiochus] and all of this people who are at your feet will surely wear yourselves out." The verse in Exodus has nothing to do with military strength or struggle, but the author of MH2 appropriated the verse for use in this new context.

Verses from Exodus and Jeremiah figure prominently into MH2; this is no accident. The author and redactor wanted to imbue their message with the central meaning of these two books. Exodus tells the story of Israel's preeminent redemption; it is this story that is told over and over again as hope for future redemption. For example, in MH2 Section 3, Yochanan negotiates with Nicanor to avoid performing a sacrificial offering of pig in front of his fellow Jews. He asks Nicanor to send everyone away, providing this excuse: "If I sacrifice the abomination of the Eternal on the altar before their eyes, will they not stone me?" This is a reference to Exodus 8:22, in which Moses is concerned that if the Israelites offer up sacrifices in the midst of the Egyptians, who would find their sacrifices offensive, the Egyptians would stone him. Yochanan uses the same argument to bring a sinful offering that Moses uses for his right to bring an acceptable one. By putting Moses' words in Yochanan's mouth, the author foreshadows that Yochanan would eventually emerge as a savior of Israel, following in Moses' footsteps.

In Section 12 of *Ma'aseh Hanukkah*, *Nusach Bet*, once the Hasmoneans have witnessed God's miracles, they proclaim that: "God will fight for us." In Exodus 14:14,

it was Moses who told the Israelites at the Red Sea that "God will fight for you." In MH2 the Hasmoneans choose to include themselves in the hopeful statement. By choosing a verse that came from the Israelites' escape to the Red Sea, the author recalls a similar time of persecution and hope for redemption.

Biblical verses are used not only by the heroes and villains in MH2, but by the ordinary Jews as well. In Section 6, a woman disobeys a Greek edict and has her son circumcised on the eighth day. Knowing she would be put to death, she climbs to the top of the wall of Jerusalem and, before throwing herself and her son from the wall, pronounces a string of biblical phrases. First, using Zipporah's words from Exodus 4:25-26, she calls her son "a bridegroom of blood." Then she uses the words of Psalm 44 to declare her faithfulness to God: "All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten You or been false to Your covenant. Our hearts have not gone astray nor have our feet swerved from Your path."¹⁶ Similarly, the children of Israel declare their faithfulness to God in Section 7; they repeat the promise that the Israelites made at Mount Sinai in response to receiving God's Torah and *mitzvot*, "We will do and we will listen" (Exodus 24:7). In MH2, this statement comes in conjunction with the specific commandment from Exodus 34:21, to keep the Sabbath. The juxtaposition of these verses emphasizes the importance of Shabbat even over other commandments in the Torah.

The repeated references to Jeremiah seem less hopeful, but the fact that Jeremiah survived the Babylonian attack and exile, all the while delivering his message of Jewish continuity, was inspirational for the MH2 redactor. Jeremiah prophesied God's word to the rebellious Israelites: the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. When the people did not listen to God's warnings, they were punished horribly by the

¹⁶ This narrative will henceforth be referred to as "the martyrdom of the wall."

Babylonians. Jeremiah lived through the Babylonian assault and exile, an event that the rabbis used as a paradigm for all later attacks on Jerusalem and Judaism.¹⁷ The rabbis set Antiochus up as the next great threat, but the message of the midrash was that if the Israelites obeyed the word of God while they still had the chance, their fate did not have to be the same as that of their ancestors in the Book of Jeremiah.

In Section 3, even before Yochanan approaches Nicanor in the king's court, Yochanan decides to fight against those who imposed the harsh decrees on the Israelites, characterizing "Israel, a scattered sheep (Jeremiah 50:17)." Yochanan implies that Israel is in need of a shepherd, a leader, to bring them together. Specifically, it reminds the reader of Jeremiah 23:1-4, when God absolves the scattered flock of their sins and decides to "appoint over them shepherds who will tend them." Yochanan's allusions indicate his intention to take a leadership role among the Jews.

Once again, in Section 10, the Israelites pray to God, borrowing words from the books of Psalms and Jeremiah. They begin with the words from Psalm 115: "Not for us, O Eternal, not for us but rather for Your name bring glory." This Psalm is part of the Hallel, a group of psalms in praise of God, which is said on Hanukkah and Passover. As a result, the knowledgeable reader would draw a connection between this verse, the redemption in the Book of Exodus, and the celebration of Hanukkah. Shortly afterwards, they describe God as being "Great in purpose and mighty in deed," leaving out the second half of this verse from Jeremiah 32:19, which continues "whose eyes observe all

¹⁷ Yosef Yerushalmi explains that the rabbis were interested in history only as an indication of what would happen in the future; they understood the world as a cycle of destruction and redemption. "For the rabbis the Bible was not only a repository of past history, but a revealed pattern of the whole of history, and they had learned their scriptures well. They knew that history has a purpose, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, and that the Jewish people has a central role to play in the process." Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 21.

the ways of men, so as to repay every man according to his ways, and with the proper fruit of his deeds." The Israelites who lived during Greek persecution, and the Jews who wrote and read this text while living during a later period of persecution, had to believe that God would reward their faithfulness while punishing those who ignored God's ways and made the Jews suffer. Without saying it directly, but by including the first part of the verse, the author captures this belief. The section closes with reassurance from God in the words of Psalm 94:14: "The Eternal will not forsake His people, and He will not abandon His inheritance."

MH2 contains verses from other prophetic books of the Bible as well. After several battles, Yochanan and his brothers come together and emerge victorious; in Sections 8 and 11, their enemies call the sons of Mattathias, despite their small number, "swifter than eagles, stronger than lions." This verse from II Samuel 1:23 originally described Saul and Jonathan, who were mighty warriors of Israel. In the eyes of the author, Yochanan and his brothers were destined to follow in their footsteps simply by bearing this title.

In one of the longest biblical quotes in MH2, the redactor supplies Yochanan with words from Kings and Isaiah in Section 4. He offers a prayer to God with the words of King Hezekiah; the author has simply substituted the name of Yochanan's enemy, King Antiochus, for the name of Hezekiah's enemy, Sennacherib, King of Assyria. The section in MH2 is much as it appears in II Kings 19:14-19 and Isaiah 37:16-20, with Yochanan praying:

Eternal, God of Israel, who sits between the cherubim, you are the Only God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. Bend your ear and hear, open your eyes and see the words of Antiochus that he sent to insult the armies of the living God and the King

of the world. Indeed, Eternal One, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and put their gods into the fire, because they are not gods, rather the work of human hands—of wood and stone, and they destroyed them. But You, the Eternal our God, please save me from his hand.

Antiochus does not represent Assyria, but the prayer applies all the same: Yochanan wants God's help—against the Greeks—to escape the fate of the nations who succumbed to Assyria. The redactor recalls the outcome of the struggle in II Kings, when Hezekiah defeated Sennacherib and his forces, to foreshadow the outcome of Yochanan's struggle with Antiochus.

By using biblical verses in MH2 to describe the Hasmoneans, by putting words of Torah in the mouths of the Israelites, and by reminding them of God's promise of redemption, the Jews in the text are meant to be models of appropriate knowledge and behavior. The rabbis, who were concerned that the Jews of their day might abandon the Torah in favor of aspects of the secular culture, emphasize the importance of Torah and its commandments—both for the Jews under Greek rule and for the Jews who would be reading the text.

The use of biblical text in midrash lends historical authenticity to the Hasmoneans and their plight by endowing them with the knowledge of Torah. This, in itself, helps to achieve the author's purpose. But the use of biblical verses serves another purpose as well, and that is to infuse the midrash with the context of past events and their outcomes. For example, in Jeremiah 16, God angrily tells Jeremiah that the Israelites will suffer as a result of their worship of false gods. Then, in 17:4, God explains that in punishment for their rebellious ways, "I will make you a slave to your enemies." In MH2, Mattathias tires of the Israelites' waiting to be saved by an outside force; he makes a speech to encourage his sons and followers to rise up against their enemy. He asks, "Is it not

written, 'cursed is he [who trusts in man,] who makes flesh his strength, and turns his thoughts from the Eternal?'" This quote is intended to remind the characters in the midrash as well as the readers of MH2 of the punishment and suffering their ancestors endured when they turned away from God's Torah to the ways of their neighbors. Jerusalem was attacked by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Holy Temple was destroyed, and they were sent into exile. Mattathias' words serve as both a warning as well as an incentive to follow his leadership and to remain loyal to the God of Israel.

Another of the redactor's techniques is the use of irony. It is normal that the Jewish characters in the text invoke words of Torah, but it is less expected to hear words of Torah from the enemies of the Jews. Nonetheless, the author and compiler of MH2 use this rhetorical device to define what a Jew is and, conversely, what a Jew is not. For example, in Section 1 of MH2, Antiochus—attempting to turn his ministers against the Jews—describes the Jewish approach to the world. He explains that the Israelites say, "Behold, darkness will cover the land, cloud and mist around the nations, but through the dark a light shines for the upright, and for all the children of Israel, there will be light in their dwelling-places." The redactor portrays Antiochus, King of the Greeks, as being able to string together these verses—all of which focus on the images of light and darkness—from Isaiah, Psalms, and Exodus. He quotes these lines in order to provoke the anger of his ministers, so that they would wreak their revenge on Israel.

In a similar case, in Section 5, Antiochus adopts the words of God. In Jeremiah 5:9, God becomes angry with the Jews who have turned to idolatry. As a result, God asks, "Shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?" In an ironic twist, when Antiochus speaks these words, he, too, is referring to the Israelites, but he is angry

because they will *not* adopt his idolatrous practices. The use of irony makes it quite clear who will be punished.

B. POST-BIBLICAL SOURCES

The author and redactor of *Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet* used a variety of sources, spanning the centuries, in order to create the MH2 that has come down from the Gaonic period. Aside from the biblical verses used throughout the midrash, there are references to material from I and II Maccabees, events that are reported in Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, as well as material from early rabbinic texts, including *Megillat Ta'anit* and the Babylonian Talmud. The author and redactor's choices of what to include, and equally importantly what not to include, reveal much about the message that they convey through the text. The main goal of MH2 was to communicate the rabbis' agenda through a text that was disguised as an historical account.

I & II Maccabees

MH2 bears some small resemblance to I and II Maccabees, which are found in the Apocrypha¹⁸ and date to the first century BCE.¹⁹ While they did become a part of the Christian canon, they were not incorporated into the Hebrew Bible. While these books are the primary historical sources for the events of the Hasmonean revolution and reign,

¹⁸ Meaning "things that are hidden," the word "apocrypha" refers to a group of 15 books that, for a number of reasons, were not included in the canon of the Hebrew Bible. Bruce M. Metzger, "Introduction to the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books," *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version: The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. iii.

¹⁹ Sherman E. Johnson and Mary C. Callaway, "Introduction to I and II Maccabees," *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version: The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament*, pp. 186, 228.

the author of MH2 may not have had access to them. Despite the theory that I Maccabees was composed in Hebrew first, the Books of Maccabees exist only in Greek.²⁰ The work likely circulated exclusively among Christian circles, and even if some Jewish scholars did know of the works, they may not have wanted to use them because of their connection to the Christian world. As a result, there are very few similarities between the events in MH2 and in Maccabees.

However, the texts do share proper names, including specific individuals like Antiochus, Mattathias, Nicanor, and the Hasmonean sons. However, the individual roles in the story are so different that it suggests that the author of MH2 was not familiar with the Maccabees source texts. It is more likely that the events recorded in Maccabees came to the author through indirect means; perhaps they existed as oral traditions that the author of MH2 did know. This would explain his familiarity with the characters in the text along with his lack of consistency regarding the details of the story. For example, the Hasmonean hero in Maccabees is Judah, son of Mattathias. Yet, his brothers are introduced and do appear from time to time throughout the narrative. I Maccabees 2:1 recounts the names of Mattathias' five sons: "John, surnamed Gaddi, Simon, called Thassi, Judas, called Maccabeus, Eleazar, called Avaran, and Jonathan, called Apphus."²¹ On the other hand, MH2 does not mention Judah or any of the other brothers by name, with the exception of Yochanan, son of Mattathias, on whom it focuses exclusively. One possibility is that the author used some of the same names in order to lend historical authenticity to his work, even though that was not his primary concern.

²⁰ Jonathan A. Goldstein, "Commentary," *I Maccabees* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 14.

²¹ All quotes from I and II Maccabees are taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Despite the existence of a few parallel details, there are other major differences between MH2 and Maccabees. All accounts name Antiochus as the king of the Greeks; however, there is less uniformity concerning Antiochus' ministers. MH2 names only Nicanor and Bagris. Unlike Bagris, Nicanor does appear in Maccabees as a general of the king's army. In II Maccabees 8:34-6, it is Nicanor who escapes to Antioch, much as Bagris does in MH2 Section 8. The use of Yochanan, Antiochus, and Nicanor suggests the probability that the author of MH2 was aware of some of these names, but not the precise details of Maccabees; thus the names in MH2 are accurate, but their actions do not correspond with the appropriate ones in Maccabees.

Aside from the characters in the story, there are a number of parallel martyrdom stories in the various texts on Hanukkah, though the author and redactor of MH2 glorified martyrdom to a greater extent than did the author of Maccabees. The greatest similarity lies in the story of the thousand Jews who died while hiding in a cave on Shabbat.²² I Maccabees 2:29-38 recounts the story of Jews who went to live in the wilderness rather than heed the king's decrees. Because they refused to defend themselves on the Sabbath day, the enemy attacked, and 1,000 people were killed. II Maccabees 6:11 contains only a brief mention of the incident. It says, "Others who had assembled in the caves nearby, in order to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip [king after Antiochus IV] and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day." Despite its brevity, only II Maccabees relates that the rebellious Jews were burned to death. Section 7 of MH2

²² This narrative will henceforth be referred to as "the martyrdom of the cave."

narrates a version of this story, which bears resemblance to the account in I Maccabees, including the extra detail from II Maccabees. It says,

And they consulted, [deciding] to observe Shabbat in one cave: they, their wives, and their children. And it was told to the king saying, "Behold, people came there, into one cave to observe their Shabbat." And the king sent his devoted soldiers to the army, and they sat at the entrance of the cave, and they called out to them with the word of the king, saying, "Why do you rebel against the decree of the king? Now, please come and please turn to obedience of the king and save your souls from death!" And all of the people answered together saying, "That which the Eternal said, we will do and we will listen, that which He commanded me on Mount Sinai: 'Six days you shall work and on the seventh day you shall rest.' Is it not better for us to die by the hand of the Eternal here, and not profane the Sabbath day? Heaven forbid!" And when all the men of the army saw that they did not want to follow the laws of their king, they brought wood and burned it in the mouth of the cave and about one thousand men and women died in the presence of the Eternal.

In MH2, unlike I Maccabees, the Jews' primary reason for going to the cave was to keep the Sabbath; the king's men tried to convince these Jews to heed the king's orders, but when they refused, they were burned to death.

Another example of Jewish martyrdom appears in II Maccabees 6:10 in which "two women were brought in for having circumcised their sons. [The Greeks] publicly paraded them around the city, with their babies hanging at their breasts, and then hurled them down headlong from the wall." This is similar to the martyrdom of the wall in MH2 Section 6. The woman willfully defies the king's edict against circumcision, after which she chooses death.

Another common account in MH2 and Maccabees is the rededication of the Temple. I and II Maccabees each describe the rededication of the Temple once it was in the hands of the Hasmoneans. I Maccabees 4:41-57 explains that the Hasmoneans cleansed the sanctuary, removed the impure stones from the Greek altar, built a new altar, and made new vessels for the sacrificial cult. On the 25th day of Kislev, "they rose and

offered sacrifices, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals....So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings." Verse 59 concludes that "Judah and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the 25th day of the month of Kislev." The account of II Maccabees, although more concise, is almost identical to that of I Maccabees. However, II Maccabees 10:6 adds that "they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing in the manner of the festival of booths." Section 14 of MH2 does not mention the rebuilding of the altar, rather it simply says that "they sealed the breaches and purified the Temple court from the dead and from the impurities." MH2 focuses instead on the story of the miracle of oil, which does not appear in the Books of Maccabees; it appears in later texts about the miracle of Hanukkah.²³

Josephus' Antiquities

Aside from the Books of Maccabees, a number of other sources dedicated some space to the discussion of Hanukkah; the later the text, the more likely that the author and redactor of MH2 had access to those accounts. Flavius Josephus, a first-century CE Jewish historian who recorded the events of the Hasmonean revolution, is another source for the events that led to the celebration of Hanukkah. His account is based primarily upon Maccabees, so it sheds little light on the creation of MH2. In his *Antiquities of the*

²³ The story of the miracle of oil will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

Jews, Book XII 7:7, Josephus recounts a version of the martyrdom of the cave. It is quite similar to the account in I Maccabees and in MH2. In *Antiquities*, Book XII, 6:2, he explains:

Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the Temple for eight days, and he omitted no sort of pleasures thereon...he honored God and delighted the Jews with hymns and psalms. They were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights.²⁴

Although Josephus does not recount the story of the miracle of oil, he is the first one to mention the connection between the festival of Hanukkah and the kindling of lights.

C. RABBINIC SOURCES

Unlike every other major festival—including Purim, a holiday that was similarly instituted by the rabbis—there is no talmudic tractate dedicated to the discussion of Hanukkah. Where the Talmud does mention Hanukkah, it is often in the context of a legal matter, such as when and how Hanukkah lamps should be lit, where they should be placed, and what to do when Hanukkah falls on the Sabbath. Nonetheless, there are some references to Hanukkah in rabbinic literature that the author and redactor of MH2 may have known when creating that text.

Megillat Ta'anit

²⁴ *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, p. 364.

Megillat Ta'anit, a core of which is contemporary with the Mishnah, lists the 36 special days on which fasting and eulogizing were forbidden; many of these days corresponded with military victories of the Jews.²⁵ The commentary to this text was completed several centuries later, probably around the time of the Talmud or even later. The festival of Hanukkah and the Hasmoneans are mentioned numerous times in both the list of days and in its commentary. Many of these traditions are also found in other contemporary and later rabbinic texts, making *Megillat Ta'anit* and its commentary one of the most important sources on Hanukkah. One scholar has even claimed that the text was created in the Beit Midrash of the Hasmonean House.²⁶ This would account for the disproportionate number of references to Hanukkah in the text.

The first time Hanukkah is mentioned in *Megillat Ta'anit* is with regard to the 7th of Iyar, "the day of dedication (*hanukkat*) of the wall of Jerusalem; eulogizing is forbidden."²⁷ The commentary subsequently explains that this refers to the period when the Greek kings breached the wall and the Hasmoneans repaired the breaches. The commentary to the section on the 17th of Elul is also relevant to MH2. It explains that Greek kings appointed officers in the towns of the land of Israel to ravish all Jewish brides; only afterwards could they marry their intended husbands. The text presents a specific example:

Mattathias, son of Yochanan High Priest, had a daughter, and when it came time for her to get married, a *kastarin* (Greek official) came and defiled her; Mattathias and his sons became zealous and their hands were strengthened against the Greek kingdom, and the enemy troops were

²⁵ Nahum N. Glatzer, "*Megillat Ta'anit*," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 11 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1971), p. 1230.

²⁶ Ben Zion Lurie, "*Megillat Ta'anit u'beit Hashmonai B'aspeclaria shel M'soret Ha-halakhah V'ha-aggadah*," *Megillat Ta'anit* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1964), pp. 18-32.

²⁷ All quotes from *Megillat Ta'anit* are taken from Ben Zion Lurie, *Megillat Ta'anit* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1964).

delivered into their hands and they killed [the enemy]. This day when they obviated [his plan], they made it a festival (*yom tov*).

The similarities in the two accounts suggest that *Megillat Ta'anit* may be the original source for the story in Section 2 of MH2:

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said: Mattathias, the High Priest, had a daughter, and there was none as beautiful as she in all the world. And she was promised to another from the house of the Hasmoneans. But one of the Greeks came; he grabbed her by her plait [braid of hair] and he spread a Torah scroll under her and raped her in front of her fiancé.²⁸

The longest discussion of Hanukkah in the commentary to *Megillat Ta'anit* appears under the 25th of Kislev, which is the first day of Hanukkah. This is one of the first appearances of the miracle of oil story, which later becomes a primary explanation for the festival of Hanukkah. The version of the story in *Megillat Ta'anit* says:

Because the Greeks entered the sanctuary and defiled all the oils inside, there was no oil to light inside the Temple. But when the House of the Hasmoneans was strengthened and they prevailed, they looked but could not find oil except for one cruse of oil that was not impure lying with the seal of the High Priest. There was only enough in it to light [the lamp] for one day, but a miracle happened with it and they lit from it the lights for eight days.

The text then presents several reasons for the establishment of the festival of Hanukkah aside from the miracle of oil: the purification of the sanctuary and the construction of a new altar and new vessels—reasons enumerated in Maccabees and Josephus. The commentary also refers to the kindling of lights when it says, “they brought in eight iron spears and lit them,”²⁹ and it mentions the command to say Hallel on Hanukkah, “to learn that God should be praised first for all acts of salvation that God does.”

²⁸ This narrative will henceforth be referred to as “the rape of the Hasmonean daughter.”

²⁹ This tradition, found in Palestinian texts including the Tosefta and *Pesikta Rabbati*, piska 2, describes the creation of a menorah with seven branches out of military spears. The Palestinian rabbis were interested in glorifying the Hasmoneans' military victory. It was the Babylonian tradition that carried the story of the miracle of oil, which eventually became much more widespread. The Babylonian rabbis wanted to

A more obscure Hanukkah reference in *Megillat Ta'anit* is the 28th of Tevet, for on that day "Antiochus was carried off from Jerusalem." Neither I or II Maccabees records such an event, nor do they single out the 28th of Tevet. Nonetheless, the fact that that occasion was important enough to merit a day of celebration indicates the importance that the author of this text ascribed to the Hasmoneans' endeavors. In the very next month, *Megillat Ta'anit* designates the 13th of Adar as Nicanor Day. The commentary retells the downfall of Nicanor that is reported in I Maccabees 7, in which the Hasmoneans killed him and hung his head and limbs facing Jerusalem for all to see.

Babylonian Talmud

There are only a few non-*halakhic* references to Hanukkah in the Babylonian Talmud. The main narrative material is found in BT *Shabbat* 21b. The reason given for the observance of Hanukkah is almost identical to *Megillat Ta'anit*, suggesting that the texts either shared a common source or one borrowed from the other. It begins with the question, "What is the reason for Hanukkah?" Immediately afterwards it says:

The 25th of Kislev begins the days of Hanukkah; eight days on which it is not permitted to eulogize or fast. For when the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they contaminated the oil that was in the sanctuary, and when the Hasmonean House was strengthened and defeated them, they searched and found one flask of oil that was lying there with the seal of the High Priest. It contained only enough to kindle for one day, but a miracle was performed and they stayed lit for eight days. In the following year, they established these eight festival days with Hallel and Thanksgiving.³⁰

downplay the military victory and emphasize the Divine miracle. Aaron D. Panken, *The Liturgy of Hanukkah*, Unpublished Rabbinic Thesis, HUC-JIR, 1991, pp. 96, 126.

³⁰ *Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shabbat*, Schottenstein Edition (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1996). All Talmudic quotes are taken from this edition of the Babylonian Talmud.

While this account alludes to the military victory, it emphasizes the miracle of oil. One reason may be that the rabbis of the Talmud were not particularly interested in preserving the story about the Hasmoneans' strength, for they thought it safer to attribute their festival to a supernatural miracle than to their victory over the gentiles.³¹ Another possible explanation is that the rabbis were politically motivated to minimize the accomplishments of the Hasmoneans, a priestly family. As a result, in rabbinic literature the heroes are not mentioned individually, rather they are grouped under one title, the "Hasmonean House," and their accomplishments are overshadowed by Divine miracles.³²

BT *Yoma* 16a makes a passing reference to the Temple's altar that was deemed impure after the Greeks used it for their sacrifices. It says that in the northeastern chamber of the Temple, "the Hasmoneans concealed the stones of the altar that had been defiled by the kings of the idolaters." This fills in the picture of what the Hasmoneans had to do to purify the Temple; they had to rid it of the impure, erect a new altar, and bring in new vessels. While this is most clearly described in I Maccabees, MH2 Section 14 does make reference to this process.

Similar to *Megillat Ta'anit*, BT *Ketubot* 3b also makes reference to the law that during the earlier time of danger, "every Jewish maiden who married had to first consort with the local officer." This lends credibility to the rape of the Hasmonean daughter in MH2. Given these examples, it is quite likely that the author and redactor of MH2 had access to the talmudic tradition, even though it does not include a great deal of aggadic material about Hanukkah. Indeed, most of the aggadic material from the Talmud appears in some form in the contemporary source *Megillat Ta'anit*.

³¹ J.D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Midrashim*, p. 185.

³² Lurie, "*Megillat Ta'anit u'beit Hashmonai B'aspeclaria shel M'soret Ha-halakhah V'ha-aggadah*," p. 19.

Midrash

Finally, there are some midrashic sources that make mention of Hanukkah, but they are rare. According to Brigitte Kern-Ulmer, most *midrashim*—even those meant to be read during Hanukkah—do not recount events related to the Hanukkah story, rather they try to connect the festival to other events or verses in the Bible.³³ References to Hanukkah in midrashic literature are often secondary and, accordingly, brief. *Pesikta Rabbati* is a collection of homilies for the festivals and special Sabbaths which dates to the sixth or seventh century CE.³⁴ In *piska* 2, the text poses the question, “Why does one kindle lights on Hanukkah?” And it responds, “because of the time when the sons of the Hasmonean High Priest triumphed over the Greek kingdom.... They entered the Temple and found there eight iron spikes, and they fixed them [in the ground] and kindled in them lights.”³⁵ The end of the same *piska* enumerates seven different dedications, one of which is “the dedication which we are now considering, the Hanukkah instituted by the Hasmonean family.” *Piska* 6:1 similarly explains that “this feast of dedication which we celebrate is in remembrance of the dedication by the Hasmonean family. Because they carried on a war and were victorious over the people of Greece, we kindle lamps to this day.”

Exodus Rabbah 15:6, a late homiletical midrash, says with regard to the Greek kingdom in its discussion of *Parashat Bo*, “All were afraid of it, but Mattathias, the priest, and his sons stood firm in their faith in God, with the result that the Greek legions

³³ Brigitte Kern-Ulmer, “The Midrashim for Hanukkah: A Survey and a Sample Analysis,” *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) p. 165.

³⁴ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 302.

³⁵ All quotes from *Pesikta Rabbati* are taken from *Pesikta Rabbati*, William G. Braude, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

fled from before them and were all slain.”³⁶ *Midrash Tehillim*, Psalm 93 recalls the Hasmoneans, who “wore cloaks of zeal” and in Psalm 36, that the Hasmonean sons “rose up and redeemed them.”³⁷ The content of these midrashic sources, which all date as being significantly later than the Talmud, and which all likely originated in Palestine, differs from the Talmudic material.³⁸ Whereas the Babylonian Talmud focuses on the miracle of oil, these Palestinian texts offer credit to the Hasmoneans for bringing about the “miracle” and dedication. The redactor of MH2 seems to lean towards these midrashic accounts in narrating the military accomplishments of the Hasmoneans, though he also included the miracle of the oil at the end of the midrash.

It is apparent that the author and redactor of MH2 were aware of the breadth of the tradition; they drew on numerous biblical sources, stories from the books of Maccabees (of which they likely did not have first-hand knowledge), Megillat Ta’anit, and other rabbinic texts. Nonetheless, the main sources for MH2 were an Aramaic liturgical work called Megillat Antiochus along with some other midrashic traditions on Hanukkah that appeared in minor midrashim like MH2.

³⁶ *Midrash Rabbah: Shemot*, Joshua Eli Grossman, ed. Vilna Folio Edition, Vol. 1. New York, 1953.

³⁷ *Midrash Tehillim*. Solomon Buber, ed. (Vilna, 1891).

³⁸ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, pp. 301, 309, 322.

CHAPTER 2:

COMPARISON OF HANUKKAH *MIDRASHIM*

There are several minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah, all different in style and content, which nevertheless share important elements. The texts included in this analysis are *Ma'aseh Hanukkah Nusach Bet* (MH2), *Megillat Antiochus* (MA), *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* (MH), *Midrash L'Hanukkah* (ML), and *Ma'aseh Yehudit* (MY). Common elements among these texts help the reader understand the genre of Hanukkah midrash as well as the genesis and meaning of the individual texts. The texts date from roughly the seventh to the tenth centuries CE, and they range from liturgical texts to midrashic compilations. A chart below presents the narrative sequences of four of these *midrashim*, with the objective of highlighting similarities and differences among them.³⁹ A detailed comparison of the five *midrashim*—their narratives, purposes, and themes—follows.

The chart below, "Narrative Comparison of Hanukkah *Midrashim*," illustrates the high degree of narrative similarity between MH2 and MA; perhaps more importantly, it highlights the few instances of narrative departure between the two parallel texts. MH and ML are included to provide additional examples of the genre. In addition, the narrative content they share with MH2 indicates the likelihood that their redactors used common source materials. Furthermore, they provide some explanation for the discrepancies between MH2 and MA. The material in the chart is arranged to most adequately demonstrate the parallels between the texts. It is not meant to be a comprehensive account of each midrash; it contains paraphrases, not direct translations, of the text, and some details are excluded. The complete texts, as published in *Ozar Midrashim*, are found in the Appendix.

³⁹ MY shares few narrative elements with the other texts. As a result, it is not included in the comparative chart. A discussion of the common literary and thematic elements in MY and MH2 is included in this chapter.

A. NARRATIVE COMPARISON OF HANNUKAH MIDRASHIM

<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet (MH2)</i>	<i>Megillat Antiochus (MA)</i>	<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah (MH)</i>	<i>Midrash L'Hanukkah (ML)</i>
	Preliminary information about Antiochus	biblical verses: Jeremiah 50:33-34	Bless God who dwells in the 390 levels (firmament) in heaven. Each level has angels and a throne; this should not be surprising, since real kings have many places and houses. And since the earth is God's, heaven is made of 390 levels.
In 23 rd yr. of Antiochus' reign, Antiochus asks ministers to destroy Jews; abolish Shabbat, circumcision, Rosh Hodesh	In 23 rd yr. Of Antiochus' reign, Antiochus asks ministers to destroy Jews; abolish Shabbat, circumcision, Rosh Hodesh	Greeks made 4 decrees against Jews in order to make them despise their God and believe in Greek gods:	When the Temple was standing and the people of Israel were doing God's will, He sat on the 7 th level of heaven. But after Israel sinned, God ascended higher and higher, 390 levels, as it says, "I will go and return to my place."
Nicanor besieges Jerusalem	Nicanor besieges Jerusalem, sets up heathen altar in Temple	First, they decreed that Jews must not have locks on their doors; homes must be open all the time; one who disobeys will be stabbed	
Rabbi Shimon b. Yochai: Story of Mattathias' daughter (unnamed); she was beautiful, engaged to Hasmonean man; but a Greek grabs her, spreads a Torah scroll under her, and rapes her in front of her fiancé. Then he slaughters a pig and brings its blood to the holy court.		They obeyed; but robbers came in; Jews couldn't eat, drink, or have sex.	
	Nicanor sacrifices pig in Temple	Second, they decreed that Jews can't eat meat, milk, or cheese and must cut the horns of their oxen and goats	Mari b. Mar: Drash on <i>mitzvah</i> and <i>or</i> . Other rabbis add; Rav Huna says: <i>b'ner Hanukkah</i> . There were wise students, they brought light with the <i>mezuzah</i> which merited a pleasant home, and the <i>kiddush ha-yom</i> (Shabbat) brought light which merited a full jug of wine.
Yochanan ben Mattathias comes before Nicanor; agrees to sacrifice a pig if they're alone; prays to God; Yochanan kills Nicanor (longer version)	Yochanan ben Mattathias comes before Nicanor; agrees to sacrifice a pig if they're alone; prays to God; Yochanan kills Nicanor	They obeyed and sold all of their animals—pure and impure alike. But God sent them clean animals.	
Yochanan wages war; kills 7,772 people	Yochanan wages war; kills 7,000 people; erects column with inscription "Maccabee, Destroyer of Tyrants"	Third, they decreed that women were not allowed to ritually immerse or their husbands would be stabbed. And the one who sees her immerse will obtain her as his wife and her children are his slaves.	The rabbis taught: In the days of the evil Greek kingdom, they made four decrees against the Israelites. (Same four decrees as MH, much more concise here.)
Antiochus calls for battle vs. Jews and abolition of Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh,	Antiochus calls Bagris and charges him to fight Jews and abolish Shabbat, Rosh	As a result, the Jews refrained from sexual relations. When the Greeks heard this, they wanted to have sex with the Jewish women. But	

<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet (MH2)</i>	<i>Megillat Antiochus (MA)</i>	<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah (MH)</i>	<i>Midrash L'Hanukkah (ML)</i>
<p>circumcision Antiochus sends Bagris to siege Jerusalem</p> <p>God is angry</p> <p>Antiochus repeats decree against Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, circumcision</p> <p>Many Jews were martyrs</p> <p>Woman from tribe of Levi circumcises her son, then says some biblical verses and jumps from wall in Jerusalem; many Israelites do the same, refusing to transgress covenant, they venerate the Holy One.</p> <p>Jews observe Shabbat in cave; King sends army to burn them; about 1,000 people die.</p> <p>Yochanan and brothers fought and killed many; they trusted in their Father in Heaven</p> <p>Bagris escapes to Antioch; tells Antiochus they need combined forces, the only way to defeat the five sons of Mattathias, for they are "stronger than lions, swifter than eagles." Bagris tells Antiochus to send scrolls throughout his kingdom to gather soldiers. And thousands came and strengthened his army.</p> <p>Bagris lays siege on</p>	<p>Hodesh, circumcision</p> <p>Bagris invades Jerusalem and decrees against Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, circumcision</p> <p>A man circumcised his son and they were both hanged, as was his wife</p> <p>Woman circumcises her son, then says to Bagris, "You can't destroy the covenant," then jumps from wall in Jerusalem Many Israelites do the same, refusing to transgress the covenant.</p> <p>Jews observe Shabbat in a cave (much shorter); King sends army to burn them; about 1,000 people die.</p> <p>Yochanan and brothers fight; they trust in the God of Heaven</p> <p>Bagris escapes to King Antiochus; tells Antiochus they need combined forces, the only way to defeat the five sons of Mattathias, for they are "stronger than lions, swifter than eagles, braver than bears." Bagris tells Antiochus to send scrolls throughout his kingdom to gather soldiers and bring armored elephants.</p> <p>Bagris invades Jerusalem a</p>	<p>the Jewish men returned to their wives who had not immersed. They asked God for forgiveness, and God agreed to make the women pure by opening a spring in each of their homes.</p> <p>Greeks could not believe that Jews had withstood their decrees.</p> <p>Fourth, they decreed that a bride could not enter her husband's chamber on the first night of marriage, rather she must sleep with the local governor first.</p> <p>So the Jews refrained from marriage, even though there were many miserable virgins among Israel.</p> <p>After 3 years and 8 months, there was an incident with the daughter of Mattathias, the High Priest. On her wedding day, Hannah was to marry Eleazar, the Hasmonean. She was on the throne, and all of the great people were coming to honor Mattathias and his sons, when a Greek came and tore her clothes and she was exposed before all Israel, before her father, mother, and groom. Her brothers were ashamed, they put their faces on the ground and tore their clothes. They were about to kill her.</p> <p>Hannah pleaded with them to be like the brothers of Dinah, and then she asked God to seek revenge for them. The brothers consulted with each other</p>	<p>After 3 years and 8 months, the daughter of Yochanan, the High Priest, was getting married. When they were taking her to her groom, the leader came and tore her clothes and stood her up before the people. Immediately, Judah and his brothers were full of shame and they said, "We are taking her to the fire, but don't tell the authorities." But she said to them, "Why am I more despised than this uncircumcised, impure man? You want to circumcise him and lead me to sleep with him." When Judah and his friends heard this, they decided to kill this leader. Immediately they dressed the girl in royal clothes and made a <i>chuppah</i> of palm, and they went from the House of Hasmoneans to the house of this leader</p>

Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet (MH2)	Megillat Antiochus (MA)	Ma'aseh Hanukkah (MH)	Midrash L'Hanukkah (ML)
<p>Jerusalem, insults the Living God, makes 13 breaches in wall. He thinks, "They can't defeat me because my army is great and I am mighty."</p> <p>R. Yitzhak bar Nahmani: Bagris said to Israel, "If you say God will bring a flood..." "Should we smear ourselves with the blood of a pig and with the semen of horses, and he would not touch us." God reassures Israel</p> <p>Mattathias compares his sons (generally) to the 12 tribes; says he trusts God will do miracles for them; they fought and killed many</p> <p>R. Yitzhak bar Nahmani: God took 70 angels and lashed them with fire and told them to kill Greeks. Angels plundered the kings and took the booty for Israel</p> <p>Israelite forces burn, stab, and hang enemy soldiers; burn Bagris.</p> <p>Antiochus flees to the sea; they call him the "escaped one/fugitive"</p>	<p>second time, makes 13 breaches in the wall. He thinks, "They can't defeat me because my army is great and my hand is mighty." God did not think so.</p> <p>Five sons of Mattathias go to Mizpeh where Israel had been saved in the days of Samuel. They prayed to God; here are their names; their father blessed them individually.</p> <p>Brothers go to fight; Judah is killed; they return to their father who fought with them; God delivers swordsmen and archers into their hands; Eleazar is engulfed in dung while attacking elephants.</p> <p>They rejoice at their victory. They burn, stab, and hang enemy soldiers; burn Bagris.</p> <p>Antiochus flees to the sea; they call him the "escaped one/fugitive"</p>	<p>and said, "We will lead our sister to the king. Our sister is the daughter of the High Priest, and there is none greater than he. We will see that our sister won't just sleep with the local leader, but with the king. But they entered and killed him, and began with his servants and ministers. They said, "God will help us, send us counsel." And God brought them great salvation; they heard a <i>bat kol</i> from the Holy of Holies: all Israel won in the time of Antioch, so does God save us in these days.</p>	<p>with musicians and dancers. The leader said to them, "See these great ones from the line of Aaron the priest, how happy they are to do my will. Judah and his friends went into the house with his sister, and cut off [the leader's] head and plundered all that he had. They killed his ministers and servants and trampled the Greeks to the end of the kingdom. The <i>bat kol</i> went out and said, "Those who did battle in Antioch won. The lads returned and closed the gates and did <i>teshuvah</i> and engaged themselves in Torah and deeds of kindness.</p> <p>When the King of the Greeks heard that they had killed his leader, he gathered his people and besieged Jerusalem. The Jews were afraid. There was a widow there named Judith, who took her servant and went to the gates of Jerusalem and said, "Let me in, perhaps God will do a miracle for me." She went before the king and said, "I am related to prophets and they said tomorrow Jerusalem will fall in your hands." The king proposed to her. She got permission to go immerse in a spring without punishment. He threw a celebration and she seduced him, then cut off his head, and wrapped it in a sheet. She went to the gates of Jerusalem and told them, "Open the gates for God has done a miracle for me." At first they accused</p>

<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet (MH2)</i>	<i>Megillat Antiochus (MA)</i>	<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah (MH)</i>	<i>Midrash L'Hanukkah (ML)</i>
<p>Hasmoneans rebuild cities, repair breaches and purify the Temple, find cruse of olive oil. Miracle of eight days</p> <p>Jews accept Festival; Eight days with Hallel</p> <p>Blessing to God</p>	<p>Hasmoneans rebuild cities, repair breaches and purify Temple, find cruse of olive oil. Miracle of eight days</p> <p>Jews accept Festival; eight days of feasting and rejoicing, like any festival prescribed in Torah, with kindling of lights to commemorate the victories God gave them. Mourning and fasting are forbidden on Hanukkah, except in the case of a vow. But Hasmoneans did not prohibit work on this holiday.</p> <p>Greeks fell from power after that.</p> <p>Jews everywhere observe festival for eight days, beginning on 25 Kislev, These days—instituted by priests, Levites, and sages of Temple times—shall be celebrated by their descendants forever.</p>		<p>her of being a whore, then she showed the king's head. They opened the gates and a voice said, "Shema Yisrael..." When the Greeks heard this, they went to tell the king and found him without a head and they fell on him in fear. They fled, and Israel pursued them and killed many of them. This is how God takes vengeance on our enemies and grants us salvation.</p> <p>Generations come and go and still the land endures. The evil Greeks decreed that any one who mentions God's name would be stabbed. So many in Israel converted; one evil apostate gave bad advice to Israel about sacrifices.</p> <p>Greeks decreed that anyone who wrote a <i>ketubah</i> for his wife would have his fingers torn off. The Greeks knew about the mitzvah of lighting candles in the Temple. They rose and destroyed all of the symbols in the temple; only one cruse of oil remained, for they did not realize it lay under the altar. And a miracle was done for us; it stayed lit eight days. So God established for them eight days of Hanukkah, that had not been a festival until now. God says, "I bring you eight days and seven Hasmoneans...and to contradict the decree against mentioning my name, I institute the Hallel to my name for the eight days."</p>

<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet (MH2)</i>	<i>Megillat Antiochus (MA)</i>	<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah (MH)</i>	<i>Midrash L'Hanukkah (ML)</i>
			<p>When the Greeks entered the Temple, one took a Sefer Torah and took Hannah, the daughter of Yochanan, High Priest, who was marrying Eleazar the Hasmonean, and raped her before her father and husband. Yochanan, the High Priest, said to Mattathias, "My three sons and I plus you and your seven sons are like the 12 tribes of Israel. I am sure that God will do a miracle for us." Eleazar raised his sword and killed this Greek man.</p> <p>Many men came to fight the Hasmoneans. Rabbi Yitzhak said: Enemy leader says, "If we smear ourselves with the blood of a pig and with the semen of horses, they will not touch us."</p> <p>And if you say, "He'll bring a flood, He already swore that He would never again bring a flood, and if you say He will send beasts...as he did with the Cutites, we will ride on elephants and the beasts will not touch us"</p> <p>Israel prayed to God, "We only fight for the sake of Your name. Do a miracle for us." God's mercy turned toward them and he took vengeance on the Greeks. And he took the angels of 70 nations and told them to have the Greeks kill each other, and if one escaped, the angel would lose life. And every Greek who was about to shoot an arrow at Israel turned the arrow into his</p>

<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet (MH2)</i>	<i>Megillat Antiochus (MA)</i>	<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah (MH)</i>	<i>Midrash L'Hanukkah (ML)</i>
			<p>own heart. Israel saw that God was doing a miracle for them.</p> <p>More decrees: One who mentions the name of God will be stabbed by the sword. A man who writes a <i>ketubah</i> for his wife will have his fingers torn off.</p> <p>The most important <i>mitzvah</i> is to kindle a light in the Temple.</p> <p>They defiled all of the symbols in the Temple except for one small cruse of oil that was in the pit by the side of the altar, and there was only enough oil to light for one night. But a miracle was done for us and the oil stayed lit eight days, therefore they fixed eight days of Hanukkah.</p>

B. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MH2 AND MA

Of the four minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah, MH2 most resembles MA in style and in substance. In fact, it is likely that the redactor of MH2 used MA as a base, and then added other narrative pieces to it to achieve his desired result. Some of those pieces appear in other minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah, including MH, ML, and MY (*Ma'aseh Yehudit*). Noting the similarities and differences between these texts sheds light upon the genre as a whole, as well as on the particular meaning of MH2.

The narrative flow of MH2 is almost identical to that of MA. The characters are the same, as are the main events: Yochanan, son of Mattathias, is the heroic figure; Nicanor and Bagris are generals to the Greek King Antiochus; and most of the action occurs between these characters. Additionally, both texts emphasize a trio of *mitzvot* (commandments)—Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision, repeating the Greek decree against them numerous times. Both texts place value on martyrdom, recounting specific events in which loyal Jews choose to die instead of obeying the mandates of the Greek king. Both stories recount versions of the martyrdom of the wall and the martyrdom of the cave. The details of these and other events, including Yochanan's plan to kill Nicanor, the fate of Bagris and Antiochus, and even the death-tolls from his battles are extremely close in these two texts. Finally, both texts include prayers—offered either by the hero himself or by Israel as a whole.

Despite the high degree of resemblance between these texts, there are some telling differences between MH2 and MA. The two most noticeable departures from MA are narrative interludes, both of which are attributed to rabbis. The first, in the name of

Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai, is the rape of the Hasmonean daughter. In this narrative, Mattathias' daughter is raped by a Greek official on her wedding day. Various versions of this story appear in texts about Hanukkah, including MH and ML, liturgies in the Ashkenazic *siddur* for the Sabbaths during Hanukkah,⁴⁰ and the *Shulchan Aruch*.⁴¹ The additional versions supplement the details provided in MH2. According to MH, ML, and the commentary on *Megillat Ta'anit*, *mishna* 14 (17 Elul), there was a decree that Jewish brides could not marry their husbands until a Greek official had sex with them first. This suggests that the incident in MH2 was not an isolated one, inciting the anger of Yochanan and causing him to take action. The end of this section in MH2 reports that the Greek rapist sacrifices a pig and brings its blood into the holy court. The narratives of MH2 and MA return to congruence when Nicanor likewise sacrifices a pig in the Temple.

The other major addition to MH2 is attributed to Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani. It appears in two pieces, interrupted by a small narrative segment. The first piece relates instances in Israel's history in which God intervened to save the Israelites. Bagris, who appeared with tens of thousands of troops, says to Israel, "If you say your God will bring a flood, He already swore that He would never again bring a flood. Or if Gabriel would stand upon us and burn us, as he did to Sennacherib, behold we would smear ourselves with pig's blood and horse's semen, and he would not touch us." Bagris is confident that God will not be able to intervene again, but in Section 10, Israel prays, using biblical verses that focus on reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked. After a brief interruption, the second section attributed to Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani reports the

⁴⁰ These liturgies were authored by Rabbi Yosef bar Shlomo. See Hersh Goldwurm, "The Daughter of the Kohen Gadol," *Chanukah: Its History, Observance, and Significance* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1981), p. 79.

⁴¹ *Orach Hayim* 670:2.

Divine miracle that allowed the Jews to prevail over their mighty enemy. God appointed angels to help the Israelites, and "when the Greeks shot their arrows [and drew] swords, the angels came and pressed them into the hearts of the Greeks." The redactor of MH2 includes God's active role in the Hanukkah story and in Jewish history, neither of which MA emphasizes. Thus, he adopted this section from another text; it appears in ML as well, albeit in a different order, where it is also attributed to "Rabbi Yitzhak."

The redactor deliberately attributes both of these additions to rabbis. The redactor—who was departing from his base text of MA—wanted to invest the sections with the authority of well-known rabbis. For example, Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani was a second-generation *amora* from Palestine, whose teacher was the great Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.⁴² Using his name in the text gives it additional authority. Perhaps the redactor also included the attributions because the circumstances of the individual rabbis added meaning to the text. Indeed, Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai lived during the mid-second century; having witnessed the suffering and martyrdom of his teachers during the Hadrianic era, he distrusted and even hated gentiles.⁴³ The attribution of the rape of the Hasmonean daughter to Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai was appropriate, and it may have even invested the text with more meaning, coming from a person who had experienced such hardship and persecution.

In the small narrative piece that interrupts the Yitzhak bar Nahmani section, Mattathias makes a general statement comparing his sons to the twelve tribes of Israel; it then adds that Mattathias trusted that God would perform miracles for the Jews. This fits

⁴² Mordechai Margalioth, "R. Yitzhak bar Nahman(i)," *Encyclopedia of Talmudic and Geonic Literature* (Tel Aviv: Joshua Chachik, 1946), pp. 590-591.

⁴³ Israel Burgansky, "Simeon Bar Yohai," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 14 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1971.), pp. 1551-1553.

perfectly with the theme of the Yitzhak Bar Nahmani section. It also corresponds to a much more elaborate, though similar event in MA. In MA 50-57, Mattathias compares each of his sons to a different biblical figure. For example, Mattathias says, "Judah, my son, I compare you to Judah, the son of Jacob, who was likened to a lion...Yochanan, my son, I compare you to Abner, the son of Ner, general of Israel's army." Here, all five sons are mentioned by name, which does not occur in MH2. Nevertheless, in the Bokhara manuscript of *Megillat Antiochus*, which bears a great deal of similarity to MA in terms of the general flow of the narrative, even if not in the words it uses, this section is significantly longer. In fact, the blessing for each son follows a specific formula: "My son, to whom do I compare you? I compare you to Simon, the son of Jacob our father." The text then provides several biblical references about that heroic figure, after which it adds, "I bless you in the name of the Holy One Blessed be He."⁴⁴ In both versions, by bringing up some of Israel's past heroes, this section in MA does what the rest of the midrash does not: it recalls events in Israel's past. This part of MA is the most substantial section that does not appear in MH2, though it would have fit quite well.

There are a few additional lines and details scattered throughout MA that do not show up in MH2. After Yochanan's first battle, MA 27 claims that he erected a column with the inscription, "Maccabee, Destroyer of Tyrants."⁴⁵ Given that his brother, Judah, and not Yochanan, was called Maccabeus,⁴⁶ this would not have been an inscription in Yochanan's honor. This sentence may have been added later, when the Hasmonean

⁴⁴ MS Rab. 1682/4, folios 240r to 250r. Bokhara 1498-99. Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

⁴⁵ The version of MA printed in J.D. Eisenstein's *Ozar Midrashim*, mentions that Yochanan erected a column which he named after himself with the addition "Killer of the Strong." There is no mention of the name "Maccabee."

⁴⁶ See I Maccabees 2:1-5 for the full names of Mattathias' sons.

House was referred to as the "Maccabees," which would also account for its absence in MH2.

Both MA and MH2 portray Yochanan as the hero of the story. MH2 makes no effort to mention the deeds of his brothers; however, MA 58 records the death of Judah, "who alone equaled all of us." Surprisingly, the Bokhara manuscript of Megillat Antiochus includes Judah in a more substantial way; it portrays a conversation between Antiochus and Judah, who then came back and reported to his father and brothers, encouraging them to fight. It is possible that—in the same way the MA was a base text for MH2—a short form of MA was a base text for this longer manuscript version, to which Judah was added by a redactor who knew the books of Maccabees. It is unclear whether the redactor of MH2 had heard of Judah as the Hasmonean hero, but he did not see the necessity of mentioning him. Either he chose to ignore that short phrase in MA, or the death of Judah was added to MA later, once the focus on Judah had become more established in Jewish lore.

In MA 49, Bagris and his army attack Jerusalem for a second time. Bagris expresses his certainty that, with his fortified army and elephants, he could not be defeated. Despite his confidence, the section ends with an editorial comment that does not appear in MH2: "The God of Heaven did not think so." Another difference is that MH2 has no mention of elephants, while in MA, the armored elephants play an important role in the enemy's army. Indeed, in attacking the Greeks' elephants, Eleazar, Yochanan's brother, becomes entrapped in elephant dung for a period of time, until his brothers could find and uncover him. Whether the redactor of MH2 was uninterested in

comic relief, or whether he did not care to report the fate of Yochanan's brothers, the absence of this vignette from MH2 is noticeable.

Another difference between MH2 and MA is the two texts' use of biblical quotations. MA includes only a few, easily recognizable biblical verses. For example, in MA 42, the text describes the sons of Mattathias as "stronger than lions, swifter than eagles, braver than bears." The first two phrases are from II Samuel 23, while the third was added for literary effect. Most readers would recognize this verse. Similarly, in MA 39, the Jews who are hiding in the caves refer to the commandment to observe the Sabbath: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work; on the seventh day you shall rest." The verse is from Exodus 34:21, and it is introduced in the text with the words, "we remember what we were commanded on Mt. Sinai." Even if the reader did not recognize the phrase from Exodus, this introduction makes the connection eminently clear.

By contrast, the author and redactor of MH2 incorporated numerous biblical verses into the text. Often, they are not easy to identify, fitting smoothly into the flow of the narrative. Only a learned reader would be able to recognize and understand all of the references. And it is precisely these references that add an entirely separate level of meaning to the narrative, one that does not occur in MA. For example, in MH2 Section 5, Antiochus asks his ministers, "Shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?" This quote from Jeremiah 5:9 fits into the narrative easily; it makes sense and reads well, even if one does not recognize it as biblical. However, if one is aware that these words were pronounced by God about His own people, one can begin to delve into the possible meanings: Perhaps it is a clue that Antiochus, who dares to assume the words of God,

will be the one who receives Divine retribution. Maybe instead it is a comment about the people of Israel who have changed their ways; they used to offend God with their idolatrous behavior, and now they offend Antiochus with their righteous acts.

One final difference between the two texts is the way in which they conclude. MH2 ends with the recounting of the miracle of oil, after which it briefly describes the festival of Hanukkah, which the Jews must observe with the recitation of Hallel and with thanksgiving every year. MA contains the story of the oil as well, but afterwards it continues with a long discussion of what is and what is not permissible on the holiday. It even mentions the custom of kindling lights to commemorate the victories of the Hasmoneans. MA also relates that the Greeks lost power after these events and the Hasmoneans and their descendents ruled for 206 years, until the destruction of the Temple. It is possible that this detailed section—with its legalistic perspective and its historical commentary—was added to MA after the redactor of MH2 had already appropriated the text. This is supported by the fact that this final section does not appear in the Bokhara manuscript of MA.

MA appears to be a liturgical text—once read in synagogue during Hanukkah—which explains the background and reasons for the festival. This version, in particular, with its command to observe the festival “like any festival prescribed in the Torah,” is meant to lend authority to the holiday, to encourage Jews to observe the eight-day festival. It is possible that the festival was slow to become accepted because God did not ordain it in the Torah. The goal of the author was simple, and the text that achieved that goal was simple; there are few biblical quotes, few instances where God actively takes part in the narrative, and an enormous emphasis on how the festival should be observed.

The redactor of MH2 found MA to be useful, for he borrowed almost every single part of it as the basis of an entirely new liturgical text.⁴⁷ Unlike MA, this new text would not only explain the reason for Hanukkah, but also communicate another level of meaning through the use of biblical verses and their contexts. In addition, the redactor of MH2 chose to illustrate God's active role in Jewish history. Some of the biblical quotations and the other rabbinic material that the redactor added to the MA version serve this purpose, by encouraging the MH2 audience to have faith that, just as in the time of their ancestors, God could rescue them from their plight. The MH2 redactor was clever, using excerpts from other *midrashim* on Hanukkah, including MH and ML, to accomplish this goal.

C. MA'ASEH HANUKKAH (MH), MIDRASH L'HANUKKAH (ML), & MA'ASEH YEHUDIT (MY)

MH relates the story of Jews living under Greek rule. Unlike MH2 and MA, there is no mention of Antiochus or any other specific villain in MH. The Greek decrees against the Jews are also different. Rather than making decrees against Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision—*mitzvot* that were of particular interest to the rabbis who wrote MA and MH2—the Greeks in MH made decrees that may have reflected more accurately the period during which it was written. There are four Greek decrees in MH: the Jews were not permitted to have locks on their doors, so that the Greek officials could enter at any time; the Jews were not permitted to eat certain foods including meat, milk,

⁴⁷ The large amount of the MA text that appears in MH2, and the way that the redactor added other pieces to MH2 in keeping with the thematic flow of MA, strongly suggests that the "borrowing" went from MA to MH2, and not the other way around.

and cheese; Jewish women were not permitted to ritually immerse, which prevented them from engaging in sexual relations; and a Jewish bride was not permitted to enter her husband's chamber on their wedding night, rather she had to have sexual relations with a Greek governor. Although failure to observe these decrees was punishable by death, God intervened, allowing the Israelites to continue to eat kosher animals, to ritually immerse, and to have sexual relations.

While the decrees in MH2 deal primarily with public *mitzvot*—the observance of Shabbat and circumcision were acts that the entire community had to do and could witness—the decrees in ML were meant to prevent the Jews from living their personal daily lives according to Jewish law. These decrees were meant to interfere with their home life, their eating habits and their sex lives. The prohibitions regarding the private *mitzvot* in MH and ML were more devastating to the Jewish community since they pertained to everyday activity; but the authors of MH2 were more interested that the Jews retain the *mitzvot* that publicly distinguished them from the outside culture. They were concerned with maintaining the boundaries that defined the community and ensuring the continuation of the Jewish people.

The text of MH continues with a version of the rape of the Hasmonean daughter. As an illustration of the fourth decree, MH relates that Hannah was stripped and shamed on her wedding day by a local Greek governor. Following this encounter, her brothers, the sons of Mattathias, entered the home of the king under the pretext that Hannah would sleep with him; instead, they killed him. The text concludes with the statement, "All Israel won in the time of Antioch, so does God save us in these days." There is no mention of the miracle of oil, no mention of the Temple, or the war, rather just the simple

conclusion that God was responsible for the outcome and was still present to save the people Israel. Perhaps the author and redactor of *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* did not want to include any reference to the military victory, including the repossession and purification of the Temple. Leaving these out allowed the miracle to be entirely Divine, unassisted by the Hasmonean fighters.

Midrash L'Hanukkah (ML) is a compilation of many different traditions about Hanukkah; it does not maintain a consistent narrative thread, rather it reads like many small narratives, one after another. After some preliminary material that turns the reader's focus to Hanukkah, the text begins with the same four decrees as MH, although they are quite condensed in form. Subsequently, it relates the rape of the Hasmonean daughter, as in MH. This is consistent with the other Hanukkah *midrashim*, all of which include versions of this narrative. Although the victim's name, as well as her husband's and father's identities differ from text to text, the core facts remain the same: a Hasmonean woman is attacked on her wedding day by a Greek man. This suggests that the story was well-known in rabbinic circles; for while in MH2 and the second time in ML the story is attributed to Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai, it is not attributed in MH or the first time in ML. In ML, unlike the other versions, Hannah comes up with the plan for her brothers to outwit and eventually kill her attacker. This character type of the clever female must have reminded the compiler of the story of another clever woman, namely Judith, found in the eponymous book in the Apocrypha.

Although the Apocryphal story of Judith is set during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the same narrative is also part of a minor midrash, *Ma'aseh Yehudit* (MY), which the redactor set during the Greek reign. This latter version was

subsequently incorporated into ML. In both the MY and the ML versions, Judith earns the trust of the Greek king. Taking advantage of an alcohol-induced slumber, Judith beheads the king and brings his head back to Jerusalem for all to see. Mehlman and Polish explain the reasons why the Judith story and Hanukkah may have become linked:

Historiographically, the events it describes are from the same period of time as the events of the Maccabean revolt. In both instances the adversary is depicted as a Greek king. Thematically the heart of the tale of Judith and that of the Hasmoneans is the same: the salvation of the people from a foreign domination through the valiant acts of heroic individuals. Finally, the *Ma'aseh [Yehudit]* is linked to the celebration of Chanukkah through a minor element in its narrative, [cheese].⁴⁸

Indeed, in the midrash, Judith prepares a final meal for the king that features this traditional Hanukkah food. Given that the Judith story had already become associated with Hanukkah, it may have been natural for the redactor of ML to include it in his midrash for Hanukkah.

Following a description of a Greek decree prohibiting Jews from writing *ketubot*, the redactor of ML tells of the miracle of oil that occurred when the Hasmoneans took control of the Temple. After the account of the miracle, the text makes the claim, unlike any of the other Hanukkah *midrashim*, that "God established for them eight days of Hanukkah that had not been a festival until now." Since Hanukkah is not biblically ordained, it does not hold the same authority as the other festivals. As a result, some Jews may have resisted its celebration. At the very least, there were objections to it on the part of the Karaites,⁴⁹ who fulfilled only commandments set forth in the Written

⁴⁸ Bernard H. Mehlman and Daniel F. Polish, "Ma'aseh Yehudit: A Chanukkah Midrash." *Journal of Reform Judaism*. (Winter 1979), p. 75.

⁴⁹ "The name of the sect 'Karaites' (... 'People of the Scriptures') betokens advocacy for a return to the Scripture as the sole source of Divine Law and rejection of the Oral Law in the talmudic-rabbinic sense. The Karaite sect was founded by Anan Ben David (Baghdad, eighth century), who opposed the halakhic authority of the Geonim." Michael Corinaldi, "Karaite Halakhah," *An Introduction to the History and*

Torah, ascribing no authority to the Oral Torah.⁵⁰ Most texts on Hanukkah, including MH2, MA, and MH acknowledge that the holiday was created by the Hasmoneans, the priests and levites of the day, or the rabbis and scribes. Perhaps the redactor of ML decided to approach the problem of Hanukkah's lack of acceptance by claiming that it was a Divinely ordained festival.

Although the miracle of the oil seems like an ending point for the text, ML continues for three more sections, two of which appear earlier in the midrash. Due to their numerous parallels, the redactors of ML and MH2 most likely shared common sources for these three final sections. First, ML retells the rape of the Hasmonean daughter, this time resembling the version in MH2. It is followed by the Yitzhak bar Nahmani piece that also appears in MH2. The redactor of MH2 may have rearranged the text to fit in with the MA material, for it appears in a different order in ML. This section focuses on God's role in saving the Israelites of both the biblical and Hasmonean periods. ML ends with another version of the miracle of oil story that closely resembles the one in MH2.

Neither MH nor ML mentions the military campaign of the sons of Mattathias. The only time that the Hasmonean sons enter into the narrative is in relation to their sister who is attacked on her wedding day. In MH2, the military struggle is the primary focus, while the narrative material found in MH and ML is secondary. By contrast, *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* and *Midrash L'Hanukkah* focus on the decrees against the Jews and on the plights of the ordinary people during the Greek reign. Both texts also demonstrate the

Sources of Jewish Law, N.S. Hecht, B.S. Jackson, S.M. Passamaneck, D. Piattelli, A.M. Rabello, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 251.

⁵⁰ S. Atlas and M. Perlmann, "Saadia on the Scroll of the Hasmoneans," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* Vol. 14 (1944), p. 22.

important role of God in fulfilling the miracles of Hanukkah and in protecting the Jews. The redactor of MH2 chose to add this portrayal of God's active involvement to his base material of MA.

Although the narrative content of MH2 and *Ma'aseh Yehudit* are not similar, they resemble one another in style to such an extent that comparing the texts illuminates aspects of MH2. MY is a Hebrew text that retells historical events from the Greek Book of Judith.⁵¹ The story only appeared in Hebrew in the form of a late midrash.⁵² In MY, the redactor altered some of the historical details of the Greek text to achieve his desired message for the midrashic text. The preliminary details, which set the scene for the story, underwent the most revision; on the other hand, the details about Judith's plot to kill the king are quite similar to those in the Book of Judith. Similarly, MH2 is a Hebrew text, based on events that were first recorded in Greek, in which a redactor crafted the base text to communicate a certain message.

Not only are there general similarities between the two texts, but there are also a number of strikingly similar phrases, lines, and biblical verses that appear in MY and MH2. This suggests that the redactors drew upon common source materials, or that one redactor copied from the other. For example, in MY the King of Greece, called Holofernes, says, "The children of Israel who are in Jerusalem differ in their religion and do not practice the religion of the king....Arise and let us go up against them in battle, so

⁵¹ The Book of Judith is "a folktale about a pious widow who, strengthened by her faith in the God of Israel, takes matters into her own hands and so saves her people and Jerusalem....Despite the story's post-exilic setting and a significant number of Persian nouns and names, it also has unmistakable Hellenistic, as well as distinctively Maccabean/Hasmonean elements....The story is extant in four slightly different Greek versions...as well as several later Hebrew recensions." Robert C. Dentan and Carey A. Moore, "Introduction to Judith," *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version: The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 20.

⁵² Mehlman and Polish, "*Ma'aseh Yehudit*," p. 73.

that their name is no more remembered." This call to eliminate the Jews resembles MH2, Section 1, in which Antiochus says, "Have you not heard that there is a people, the children of Israel, who are in Jerusalem: a shameless nation whose religion is different from every people, and who do not uphold the laws of the king....Arise and let us take revenge on them in war, up and let us destroy them from our midst." This formula is commonly used in Jewish texts by enemies of the Jews; indeed, in Esther 3:8-9, Haman says to Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and is it not in your Majesty's interest to tolerate them? If it please your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction." It is possible that the redactors of MH2 and MY drew upon the Scroll of Esther for this element of their narratives.

As in MH2, Israel is referred to as "swifter than eagles, stronger than lions" in MY 1. Both texts take special care to report the number of soldiers who took part in the battles; indeed in MY 2 Holofernes' army was reported to consist of "120,000 foot soldiers, 12,000 horsemen." Both the Hasmonean brothers in MH2, Section 11, and Judith in MY 4 put on sackcloth and ashes, fast, and pray to God for mercy. And both have their prayers answered, for they arise, go out to fight, and emerge victorious for Israel. MY 14 reports that, after Judith's victory, "when all Israel had cleansed themselves, they offered up burnt offerings, sacrifices, and vows. Judith dedicated all of her booty to the House of God. The people celebrated this deliverance for three months....And all the children of Israel enjoyed light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:23). Though the details are different, both texts end with a cleansing, a refocus on the Temple

cult, and a declaration that the people celebrated the great salvation. The final Exodus quote in MY alludes to the Hanukkah miracle with its image of light, for it is the very same verse found in MH2, Section 1, that sets up the opposition between good and light, evil and darkness.

Perhaps the greatest similarity between the texts is the use of the passage found in both II Kings 19:15-19 and Isaiah 37:16-20 as the prayer of the Israelite leaders. Both MH2 and MY keep the biblical verses intact, with the exception of substituting the name of the evil king, Antiochus and Holofernes, respectively. MY says:

O Lord of Hosts, enthroned on the Cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. O Lord, incline Your ear and hear, open Your eye and see. Hear all the words that Holofernes has sent to blaspheme the living God! True, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have annihilated all the idolaters⁵³ and their lands and have committed their gods to flames—for they are not gods, but man's handiwork of wood and stone—and have destroyed them. But now, O Lord Our God, deliver us from his hands.

MY does add some other verses onto the end of this prayer. Nonetheless, pure coincidence serves as a poor explanation for the fact that both texts invoke these verses as a way of recalling the prayer of Hezekiah, found in II Kings 19:14-19 and Isaiah 37:16-20.

D. PURPOSES OF THE HANUKKAH MIDRASHIM

Based on the analysis of the different minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah, it is possible to understand some of the agendas of their redactors. The redactors of *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* (MH) and *Midrash L'Hanukkah* (ML) were focused primarily on the midrashic legends relating to the period of the Hasmoneans. As a result, the redactors

⁵³ Both II Kings and Isaiah refer to "nations" instead of "idolaters."

made little effort to appear historically accurate or to teach about the past, rather the narrative material they chose was meant to send a message about the present—namely, that if the Israelites maintained their loyalty to God's commandments, God would be there to save them and to punish their enemies. Although the redactor of MH2 did not choose to take this as his main approach, he did adopt aspects of it to supplement the historical perspective of the midrash.

The redactors of *Megillat Antiochus* (MA), *Ma'aseh Hanukkah*, *Nusach Bet* (MH2), and *Ma'aseh Yehudit* (MY) attempted to relate details of the military struggle between the Hasmoneans and the Greeks, however they were probably relatively unconcerned with being historically accurate. In his work on Jewish history and Jewish memory, Yosef Yerushalmi explains that the rabbis had a different concept of history than modern historians. Rather than record details for the sake of preserving the past, "they salvaged what they felt to be relevant to them, and that meant, in effect, what was relevant to the ongoing religious and communal (hence also the 'national') life of the Jewish people."⁵⁴ The authors' and redactors' use of proper names, detailed death-tolls, and repeated decrees against three specific commandments project the appearance of a historical document, but they changed historical details where necessary and shaped the imprecise oral tradition to create the effect that they wanted. For example, Mehlman and Polish, in their analysis of MY, even suggest that the redactors made deliberate changes to remove the story from its historical context in the Book of Judith.⁵⁵ It was only by doing so that the story could have become associated with Hanukkah. Jewish storytellers

⁵⁴ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Mehlman and Polish, "*Ma'aseh Yehudit*," p. 74.

wanted to focus "on that which was most comprehensible and of greatest moment to them."⁵⁶

The redactor of MH2 was an expert rhetorician, employing sophisticated techniques in his midrashic writing. He combined the "historical" approach of MA and MY with the mythical narratives of MH and ML to create his desired outcome. The redactor of MH2 attempted to create a balance between the Hasmoneans' bravery and strength, and the involvement of God in the Hanukkah miracles. The former came primarily from MA, while the latter came mainly from sources that became a part of ML.

The comparison of these different texts with their distinct approaches yields a message. The redactor of MH2 wanted his readers to internalize the centrality of three *mitzvot*—Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision—to being Jewish. In addition, he wanted to increase the observance of this festival of Hanukkah, which may have declined during his time. Through the stories in the text, the redactor also wanted the Jews to resist the temptation to assimilate, and to retain the hope that God would deliver them if they remained loyal to God's path. This message is expressly evident in the literary motifs that the author and redactor employ throughout MH2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

CHAPTER 3:

LITERARY AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF MH2

The recurring themes, symbols, and words in *Ma'aseh Hanukkah*, *Nusach Bet* and in the other *midrashim* on Hanukkah reveal much about the political and religious agendas of the authors and redactors. The emphasis on specific commandments (*mitzvot*), the parallel between the Hellenistic period of persecution and assimilation and similar historical periods, the glorification of martyrdom, and the role of the Divine in these texts are all found in this group of Hanukkah *midrashim*.

A. MITZVOT

A triad of commandments—Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision—is repeated throughout *Ma'aseh Hanukkah*, *Nusach Bet* (MH2) and *Megillat Antiochus* (MA). King Antiochus vows to abolish these practices from the people of Israel. From the beginning of the text, in MH2 Section 1, Antiochus admonishes his ministers, “Let us become wiser than [Israel], abolishing from them Shabbat, circumcision, and Rosh Hodesh.” His antipathy intensifies in Section 5, when Antiochus repeats his intention to destroy these practices. The section then concludes with the king’s decree that “everyone who keeps the Sabbaths of the Eternal and Rosh Hodesh and circumcision will die.”⁵⁷ After these three mentions of the targeted *mitzvot*, the narrative narrows its focus to Shabbat and circumcision. Section 6, which tells the martyrdom of the wall, emphasizes the commandment to circumcise male children on the eighth day after birth as a physical sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. The martyrdom of the cave, in Section 7, is a story about Jews who chose to accept death rather than “profane the Sabbath day.” Rosh Hodesh is emphasized at the beginning of MH2, but no specific

⁵⁷ Parallel occurrences of the triad of *mitzvot* appear in MA 9, 30, and 44.

examples illustrate this *mitzvah* later in the text, as in the case of Shabbat and circumcision. This is almost certainly due to the frequent focus on Shabbat and circumcision in rabbinic texts, some of which was eventually incorporated into the latter part of MH2.

Combinations of *mitzvot*, including Shabbat and circumcision, occur in other rabbinic texts as well. For example, in Exodus Rabbah 15:7, God says:

Israel cannot be joined with the idolaters of antiquity, but must keep themselves apart. For even if an enemy decrees that they should desecrate the Sabbath, abolish circumcision, or serve idols, they should suffer martyrdom rather than be assimilated with them, for it says: 'Lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations (Numbers 23:9).' And what will I do? I will slay all their foes that make decrees against them.⁵⁸

The midrash continues by recounting the enemies of Israel who made decrees against them, citing the biblical verses in which God destroys their enemies.

Song of Songs Rabbah 2:34 is similar in terms of its focus on the hostile relationship between Israel and the nations, as well as the nations' targeting of two particular commandments. It says, "For the nations make war with Israel and say to them, 'What do you want with the Sabbath and circumcision?' And the Holy One, blessed be He, makes Israel strong, and they become in the presence of the nations like wild beasts to subdue them before God and before Israel."⁵⁹ This is an accurate description of the Hasmoneans' situation with Greece: the Greek ruler pronounced decrees against important Jewish practices, and, in response, the Jews were strengthened and emboldened—compared to lions and eagles in MH2 Sections 8 and 11—vanquishing their enemies.

⁵⁸ *Midrash Rabbah: Shemot*, Joshua Eli Grossman, ed. Vilna Folio Edition, Vol. 1. New York, 1953.

⁵⁹ *Midrash Rabbah: Shir Ha-shirim*, Joshua Eli Grossman, ed. Vilna Folio Edition, Vol. 2. New York, 1953.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah also emphasizes the superiority of two *mitzvot* over the rest. Commenting upon Ecclesiastes 11:2 which says, "Divide portions [of food] to seven or even to eight, for you cannot know what misfortune may occur on earth," two rabbis discuss the meaning of the numbers seven and eight. Rabbi Eliezer concludes that the number seven alludes to the days of the week, with an emphasis on the seventh day, Shabbat. He explains that the number eight refers to the days of circumcision. The text continues, "He spoke before the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'Lord of the Universe, even if there be in the possession of Your children only these two commandments, Sabbath and circumcision, it is right that You should have mercy upon them?'"⁶⁰ Thus, this rabbi argues that even if the people of Israel neglect all of the commandments other than these two, they are fulfilling the most important aspect of the covenant, and thus deserve God's mercy.

Throughout history, Shabbat was a target of Israel's enemies, because its observance was testament to the world's Divine creation. Antiochus wanted the Jews to abandon their God and to worship his gods and observe his traditions. This would have been impossible while the Jews continued to observe God's appointed day of rest each week. Similarly, "circumcision demonstrates that the physical and the spiritual must be intertwined. The body must bear the mark of allegiance to God's covenant."⁶¹ Antiochus had to target circumcision because the most visible way to break the covenant between God and Israel was to do away with the sign of that covenant. Additionally, both of these practices are reminders that there is a Ruler above all human beings who is more powerful than any mortal king.

⁶⁰ *Midrash Rabbah: Kohelet*, Joshua Eli Grossman, ed. Vilna Folio Edition, Vol. 2. New York, 1953.

⁶¹ Nosson Scherman, "An Overview/Light Banishes Darkness," *Chanukah: Its History, Observance, and Significance* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1981), p. 27.

One mystery of MH2 is that Rosh Hodesh—which is elevated to a level of parity with Shabbat and circumcision in the text—does not appear in combination with these *mitzvot* anywhere else in rabbinic literature. One possible explanation is that this supports the redactor's agenda to increase the observance of Hanukkah. Rosh Hodesh is fundamental to the proper observance of Jewish holy days. The community could not know when the holidays should be observed unless they knew the date of the Hebrew month. Since Rosh Hodesh was the beginning of the month, coinciding with the new moon, its observance indicated when the holidays should be celebrated. Nosson Scherman, in considering the reason for the Greek decree against Rosh Hodesh explains that the Jewish calendar, with its holy days and festivals, is a testament to the existence and sovereignty of a Higher Being. He adds that, "Antiochus had to fight this concept, for it meant that culture had value only as a means toward a higher purpose."⁶² Antiochus recognized that Rosh Hodesh and the Jewish holy days were a reminder to Israel of the purpose of Jewish life and the emptiness of Greek culture; Antiochus had to do away with these Jewish practices before he could convince the Jews to adopt his ways.

Although the Torah and its 613 commandments were important to the rabbis, there were periods of stress on the Jewish people during which it was difficult to observe the commandments. The three *mitzvot* targeted by the Greeks were outward markers of Jewish identity. The observance of the festivals and Shabbat, as well as the sign of the covenant were acts that set Jews apart from the majority culture. It was for this reason that the Greeks targeted them and for this same reason that the rabbis elevated them to supreme importance. The leaders of the community determined that these were the

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

commandments that the Jews should make an effort to uphold, even under the threat of punishment or death.

Whether the emphasis in MH2 accurately reflects the decrees of the Hasmonean period is unclear. The commentary to *Megillat Ta'anit*, in the entry regarding the 17th of Elul, mentions the Greek decree that Jewish brides could not sleep with their husbands until they had sexual relations with a Greek leader.⁶³ This suggests that the decrees set forth in MH are more historically accurate than the decrees against the triad of *mitzvot* found in MA and MH2. Given that the redactors were relaying a specific message through the texts, they probably saw fit to alter the *mitzvot* to address their audience. The main idea—that the evil rulers prohibited the Jews' central acts of religious observance—was preserved, but the redactors used the text as a forum for expressing which were the main commandments that a Jew should keep.

Section 6, as an introduction to the two sections describing the specific martyrdoms, says, "Many of the children of Israel in those days gave their lives for the sake of the honor of God, Blessed be He, and they did not desecrate the covenant of their fathers." In addition, the Israelite woman of the martyrdom of the wall in Section 6 proclaimed that "we have not forgotten You nor have we been false to Your covenant." In Section 7, the Israelites from the martyrdom of the cave reaffirm the promise that they made with regard to the entire Torah at Mt. Sinai: "That which the Eternal said, we will do and we will listen." This time, however, the statement is made only with reference to the *mitzvah* of Shabbat. Therefore, in MH2 the covenant between God and Israel is essentially defined as consisting of three commandments: Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision. This is confirmed in MA 30, when Antiochus urges his general, Bagris, to

⁶³ Lurie, *Megillat Ta'anit, mishna* 14, p. 142.

"move against them and abolish the covenant which their God made with them: Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision."

Another commandment, the biblical prohibition against eating pig, appears throughout the Hanukkah texts, even though it does not assume the status of Shabbat, circumcision, and Rosh Hodesh. In Maccabees, *kashrut* was one of the commandments that the Jews struggled to maintain despite Greek persecution. II Maccabees 6:18-31 relates the martyrdom of an old scribe named Eleazar, a leader of the Jewish community: he refused to eat swine's flesh and decided he would rather "die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws (6:28)." Immediately after that, II Maccabees 7 relates the account of the mother and seven brothers who are arrested and forced to eat pig's flesh. One by one, each brother declares his allegiance to God, refusing to eat the pig, and each dies a horrible death of torture.

Although MH2 contains no specific decree forcing the Jews to sacrifice or eat pig, the unclean animal enters the narrative on a few occasions. At the end of Section 2, after the rape of the Hasmonean daughter, "they slaughtered a pig and brought its blood to the holy court" of the Temple.⁶⁴ The Hebrew text fails to use the word "*hazir*," meaning pig, rather it uses the common rabbinic euphemism "*davar acher*," meaning "another thing." The pig was so offensive to the rabbis that they did not even want to mention the word and taint their holy writings. In Section 3, Nicanor attempts to convince Yochanan to sacrifice a pig as a sin offering. Yochanan leads Nicanor to believe that he will fulfill this request, although he ultimately tricks Nicanor, killing him instead of the pig. In this section, Nicanor uses the word "*hazir*," but when Yochanan responds to his request, he

⁶⁴ See the parallel in MA 12.

uses the description "abomination of the Eternal" to acknowledge the Jews' attitude toward pig. This is indeed how the rabbis felt about pig. Finally, in MH2 Section 10, Bagris alludes to the Israelites' rejection of the animal, when he threatens that he and his army would smear themselves in the blood of a pig in order to keep God from attacking his army. Unlike the appearance of pig in the books of Maccabees,⁶⁵ these examples focus on the impurity of the pig and its blood in holy places rather than on the Jews' having to eat the animal.

The redactor of MH2 chose not to emphasize the *mitzvah* prohibiting consumption of pig when he crafted the text, even though, based on its presence in Maccabees and in MH2, it was a concern for the Jews living under Greek rule. Perhaps this was because, during the Gaonic period, when the text was redacted, the Jews were living under Islamic sovereignty. Since Islam, like Judaism, forbids the consumption of pig, this was not a commandment that the rabbis had to emphasize. The rabbis were apt to focus on the *mitzvot* that their followers were most likely to abandon. The rabbis responsible for creating MH2 were more worried about the fate of the Jewish practices of Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision, than they were about the commandment to abstain from eating pig.

B. PERSECUTION & ASSIMILATION

One of the major themes throughout *Ma'aseh Hanukkah*, *Nusach Bet* and the other Hanukkah *midrashim* is the cycle of persecution and assimilation. Time and time again in Israel's history, a power rose over Israel and imposed harsh decrees against their

⁶⁵ See I Maccabees 1:63, II Maccabees 6:18-31, and II Maccabees 7:1-42.

way of life. The Jews were prohibited from doing what their religion required and they were forced to do what was offensive and foreign to them. Many Jews would submit to these foreign powers, willingly or unwillingly accepting the outside culture and its way of life, rejecting Jewish law and tradition. The rabbis had to counter the trend of assimilation with the texts that they were writing; they had to give hope to Jews who could see no end to their suffering. Thus, the rabbis would draw parallels between past periods of difficulty and the present one to show that the Jews would emerge intact, protected by God, while their enemies would be punished or even destroyed.

The main goal of the Greeks was not to harm the Jews, but instead to assimilate them culturally. First, they abolished every Jewish particularism, such as Shabbat and circumcision. It was not these specific acts of observance that offended Antiochus, rather he was angered by the rebellion against his royal commands, demonstrated by the Jews' unwillingness to give up their particularism.⁶⁶ Thus, the king forced the Jews to eat Greek foods, to worship their gods, to wear their clothes, and to blend into their culture. This was the basis for Hellenistic power and control.⁶⁷ In MH2, Section 3, Nicanor asks Yochanan, "Are you willing to approach the altar and sacrifice the sin offering and sacrifice the fat and blood of this pig, and wear the clothes of the kingdom which the king himself wore and ride on the chariot of the viceroy?" Nicanor offers Yochanan the chance to leave his people and join the Greeks. And in Section 7, before the Greek forces attack the Jews who have chosen to hide in the cave for Shabbat, they offer the Jews one last chance: "Now please come and please turn to obedience of the king and save your

⁶⁶ Elias Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees : Studies on the Origin and Meaning of the Maccabean Revolt*, Horst R. Moehring, trans. (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1979), pp. 85, 89.

⁶⁷ For further information on Judaism during the Hellenistic period, see Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), and Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

souls from death.” There were many Jews during the Hellenistic period who did choose this path, but not the Jews who exemplified the “proper” behavior in these rabbinic texts.

One indicator of assimilation is intermarriage. When a people marries its neighbors, it is a sign that the group is losing some of its distinctiveness and is willing to take on the practices of its neighbors. According to *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* (MH) and *Midrash L'Hanukkah* (ML), the Greeks decreed that a Jewish bride should sleep with the local Greek leader before marrying her Jewish husband. In ML, Hannah came up with the plan to trick her attacker. She would dress as a bride and make her way to the governor's palace, her brothers carrying the bridal canopy. Although the governor would think she had chosen to marry him instead of her groom, her brothers would kill him when they came into his presence. The Hasmoneans and their followers resisted the invitations of their enemies to join them, hoping that in the end they would be rewarded.

The rape of the Hasmonean daughter, as it is recounted in MH2, is attributed to Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai. He lived during the period of persecution under Roman rule, and he demonstrated distrust for the gentile enemies of the Jews in all ages. Although the story is unattributed in the other Hanukkah *midrashim*, the redactor of MH2 chose to include Shimon ben Yohai's name to set up parallels among the Greeks in the narrative, the Romans during his time, and the persecutions that took place during the time of the text's composition.

Another way that the redactor evoked these parallels, other than by including attributions to contemporary rabbis, was to use biblical verses that refer to struggles in Israel's past. In MH2 Section 4, the redactor creates an implicit comparison between the Greeks and the Assyrians. In II Kings 19:14-19, King Hezekiah prayed to God to deliver

him from the hands of Sennacherib, King of Assyria. In MH2, Yochanan uses the same words, but he substitutes the name of Antiochus for the name of Sennacherib. Sennacherib was a powerful king, and he tried to convince the Israelites not to listen to Hezekiah, who demanded loyalty to God, but instead to follow his ways. Sennacherib also blasphemed against the God of Israel and claimed that he would capture Jerusalem. Nonetheless, in II Kings 19:7, God promises Hezekiah, "I will put a spirit in him; he will hear a rumor and return to his land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his land." And, in fact, II Kings 19:35 ends, "That night, an angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp, and the following morning they were all dead corpses." King Sennacherib was killed as well. Just as in II Kings, God hears the prayer of Yochanan, and in his very first battle, Yochanan and his men kill over 7,000 of the Greek soldiers. In the same way that God helped the Israelites to defeat their enemy and kill the king back then, so God would do the same in the case of the Greeks.

In MH2 Section 11, the redactor draws a parallel between the Greeks and another of Israel's enemies, the Babylonians who destroyed the first Temple in Jerusalem. Since the Greeks seized the Temple, defiling it with their sacrifices and making breaches in the wall, the threat to the Temple resonates with the past threat and action of the Babylonians. In Ezra 1, King Cyrus of Persia invites the exiled Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. The redactor recalls this event in MH2, not with a biblical quote, but with a passing reference to it: "At that time, Israel was looking to the mountains of the East, [thinking that] perhaps Persian idolaters will come to them to help them." Sophisticated readers would recognize the reference and understand the underlying sentiment: the Jews were fortunate once, but they could not wait for another

nation to come to their rescue again. Taking the initiative, Mattathias becomes angry, leading the Hasmoneans to rise up and fight for themselves. This model of self-reliance is one that the redactor underscores for his readers as well; if they are suffering from persecution by another powerful nation, they must not give in, but must defend themselves.

Rabbinic literature frequently draws comparisons between Israel's enemies. In fact the *arba'ah malchuyot*, or the Four Kingdoms that subjugated Israel, are often mentioned as a group in talmudic and midrashic literature. In Genesis Rabbah 2:4, which comments upon the creation of the world, the rabbis allude to the four kingdoms that rose over Israel:

Rabbi Simeon b. Lakish applied the passage to the Powers. 'Now the earth was *Tohu* (unformed)' symbolizes Babylonia.... 'And *Bohu* (void)' symbolizes Media (Persia).... 'And darkness' symbolizes Greece, which darkened the eyes of Israel with its decrees, ordering Israel, 'Write on the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the God of Israel.'⁶⁸ 'Upon the face of the deep'—this wicked State (Edom/Rome).⁶⁹

The midrash takes verses from the account of creation and likens each of Israel's enemies to a physical condition that existed before the world was formed. Babylonia and Persia were chaos and destruction. Greece symbolized darkness, for its rulers attempted to destroy Judaism. Rome was like the great deep, for just as it had no end, neither did the depths of Rome's evil.

Similarly, Exodus Rabbah 23:11 says that "all the songs ever recited [by Israel] are designated by the feminine form, as if to imply: Just as a woman conceives and gives birth again and again, so troubles ever recur upon them. That is why they recited their

⁶⁸ The decree to "write on the horn of an ox," which in ML is "cut the horns of your oxen," was meant as a public declaration of one's renunciation of Judaism.

⁶⁹ *Midrash Rabbah: Bereshit*, Joshua Eli Grossman, ed. Vilna Folio Edition, Vol. 1. New York, 1953.

songs in the feminine form. Hence have Babylon and Media, Greece and Edom subjected Israel." A similar passage in the *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael*, Tractate *Shirata*, makes more explicit this cycle of suffering and deliverance: "The designation for each one of the songs of the past is a feminine noun. For, just as a female gives birth, so all the deliverances of the past had after them subjugations. But the salvation which is to be will not be followed by a subjugation. For this reason, it is designated by a masculine noun."⁷⁰ Unlike the Exodus Rabbah text, this one embodies a hope for the ultimate redemption that will end this cycle.

Jewish history operates on a cycle: a period of persecution is followed by a period of autonomy; a period of exile is followed by a period of living peacefully in Israel; the Temple is built, destroyed, rebuilt, and destroyed once again. And through it all, the Jewish people endures. By using the paradigm of the *arba'ah malchuyot*, by setting up parallels with past events, the redactor of MH2 infuses the text with the sense of hope that Israel will again prevail.⁷¹

C. MARTYRDOM

Another theme that plays a large role in *Ma'aseh Hanukkah*, *Nusach Bet* (MH2) and in the other Hanukkah *midrashim* is martyrdom. These texts promote the idea that it is better to die as a faithful Jew at the hands of the enemy than to renounce Judaism. MH2 Section 6 begins with the statement that "many of the children of Israel in those days gave their lives for the sake of the honor of God, Blessed be He, and they did not

⁷⁰ *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, Tractate *Shirata*. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, ed. Vol. 2. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933).

⁷¹ For more examples of *arba'ah malchuyot*, see Genesis Rabbah 16:4, Exodus Rabbah 31:7, and BT Megillah 11a.

abandon the covenant of their fathers.” The first example of this is the martyrdom of the wall, which is followed immediately in the next section by the martyrdom of the cave. The redactor juxtaposes the two martyrdoms in order to demonstrate the willingness of the Jews to die for their beliefs.

Other Hanukkah *midrashim* place even more emphasis on martyrdom. In *Megillat Antiochus* (MA) 33, a man circumcises his son; as a result, he, his wife, and his child are all hanged. Afterwards, MA includes the account of the martyrdom of the wall. MA 36 ends with the statement that “many Israelites of that period did the same, refusing to renounce the covenant of their fathers.” In addition, there is a story of martyrdom based on I Maccabees 7 in BT *Gittin* 57b and *Lamentations Rabbah* 1.16:50. In the midrashic accounts, each of a woman’s seven sons is commanded to serve an idol; each of them refuses, and each is killed. When the mother is spared, she—in a variation of the martyrdom of the wall—climbs the wall and throws herself from it, proud that none of her sons abandoned Judaism. All of these stories serve to reinforce the importance of the commandments. It was better to die than to give up God’s *mitzvot*, especially those named in the stories, like Shabbat, circumcision, and the prohibition against idolatry (the three that are mentioned in *Exodus Rabbah* 15:6). While these two stories were important enough to the redactor of MH2 to be included, the redactor also chose to leave out other martyrdom stories, like the story of the man who circumcises his son in MA 33. Therefore, MH2 emphasizes the value of self-defense and the aggressive approach of the Hasmoneans over the passive resistance of the martyrs.

D. THE ROLE OF GOD

All of the Hanukkah texts depict God as a critical actor in the events of the Hasmonean revolt. Nonetheless, the extent to which God is involved in the action of the narrative varies from text to text. The Books of Maccabees devote many chapters to the military struggles of the Hasmoneans; the armies often pray to God, asking that God be with them as they face their enemies. For example, in I Maccabees 10:30-33, Judah prays to God when faced with a strong enemy:

Blessed are You, O Savior of Israel, who crushed the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of your servant David, and gave the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan, son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor. Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. Strike them down with the sword of those who love You.

In the very next verse, Judah's army prevails, implying that God heard his prayer and helped Judah and his troops attain victory.

There are similar prayers and depictions of God's involvement in battle in *Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet* (MH2). For example, in Section 4, Yochanan prays to God, first to thank and praise God and then to recall some of God's past actions against the enemies of Israel. Finally, Yochanan asks God to strengthen him so that he may defeat his enemy. Immediately afterward, consistent with the pattern in I Maccabees 10, Yochanan kills Nicanor, proving that God heeded his prayer. In Section 11, Mattathias expresses his faith in "the Holy One, who will do miracles and wonders for us." Mattathias and his sons then fast and pray to God, after which they rise up and kill many of their enemies.

These sections of MH2 are similar to the corresponding sections in *Megillat Antiochus* (MA), which also presents a God who hears the prayers of Israel and protects them, inflicting punishment on their enemies. Nonetheless, there are some subtle differences between MH2 and MA, which highlight the MH2 author's portrayal of God's enduring presence throughout the Hasmoneans' military campaign. First, Section 5 of MH2 relates that when Bagris and his army laid siege on Jerusalem, "they made God above bitter and they made Him angry with their altars and their gods." This line demonstrates that the God of MH2 is more deeply involved in human affairs than is the God of MA. Additionally, in Section 9, in relating the second occasion on which Bagris attacks Jerusalem, MH2 claims that Bagris "began to insult the cohorts of the Living God and the King of the world." The narrator claims to know when God is angry and insulted; this is evidence that God is intimately present throughout the events of MH2.

Other parts of MH2 contain even more explicit descriptions of God's involvement in events. Sections 10 and 12, attributed to Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani, appear together as one piece in ML and portray God's direct involvement even more clearly. In Section 10, Bagris recounts some of God's miracles that saved Israel in the past, taunting Israel with his confidence that God would not be able to respond in such a way to his army's present threat. The Israelites pray to God, using the words of biblical verses that describe God's action to aid the Jews in similar situations. Once the battle begins, in Section 12, God appoints 70 angels to fight on behalf of the Hasmoneans. Thus, "when the Greeks shot their arrows [and drew] swords, the angels came and pressed them into the hearts of the Greeks. Their own swords pierced their hearts and their bows were broken, and the Hasmoneans saw the miracles and they said 'the Eternal will fight for us.'" This section

was not taken from MA; instead, it was taken from a source that became part of ML, a text in which God plays an extremely active role. The redactor of MH2 was not satisfied by the depiction in MA of God's implicit presence during the military struggles of the Hasmoneans. Therefore, he made God's involvement even more explicit by including the section attributed to Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani.

In *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* (MH), the Greeks impose on the Jews a different set of decrees than those in MH2 and MA. The Jews could not have locks on their doors; they could not eat certain types of food and they had to cut the horns of their livestock; women could not ritually immerse themselves; and a bride could not sleep with her husband until she had slept with a Greek official. Miraculously, God intervened, so that the Jews could live normally, without transgressing these decrees. God sent the Jews clean animals to eat, and he opened a spring in each home so that the women could immerse themselves and the couples could fulfill their obligation to procreate. MH ends with the comment that "God gave them great salvation....All Israel won in Antioch, so does God save us in these days." This line suggests that there were certain rules and decrees that the Jews were forced to live under even while the text was being redacted, but it sent a message of hope, that God could overcome these decrees too and save those who were faithful to God's path.

The degree to which God is involved in the "miracle" that was the Hasmoneans' military victory over the Greeks reveals much about the author's and redactor's agendas. Maccabees portrays a God who is relatively passive; while God hears the Jews' prayers, there is little indication that God directly causes the Hasmoneans' military victories. The role of God in MA is consistent with that in Maccabees. Both texts set out to glorify the

House of the Hasmoneans. By contrast, the redactor of MH2 added sections that portray God as intimately involved in the military victory. It is God's angels who attack the Greeks and allow the meager Jewish army to prevail. Here, God is the direct cause of the military victory. Apart from the military victory, the redactor of MH presents an even more involved God, who enters the homes of individual Jewish families to save them from their enemy's decrees. The redactor of MH2 adopts some of the perspective of MH, attributing the Hanukkah "miracles" more to God than to the Hasmonean rebels.

Another "miracle" is often cited as the reason for Hanukkah, sometimes—as in the Babylonian Talmud—to the virtual exclusion of the military tale.⁷² The texts' treatment of the story likewise reveals the redactor's perspective on God's involvement in history. Almost all of the *midrashim* on Hanukkah contain at least a version of the miracle of the cruse of oil. This miracle is not described in I or II Maccabees, though it is quite common in rabbinic literature on Hanukkah. MA 69 and MH2 Section 14 relate this story in very similar narratives. The texts attribute the miracle to God's placing a blessing upon the oil. In his introduction to the Hanukkah *midrashim* in *Ozar Midrashim*, J.D. Eisenstein sets forth a theory about the establishment of this story:

The rabbis who lived during the time of the Greeks and Romans did not want to arouse their jealousy by celebrating the victory of the Jews over them, and therefore they held up the Hanukkah miracle of the cruse of pure oil that was found in the Temple after the Hasmoneans purified it. They downplayed the victory of strength and might of the Maccabees, only hinting at it in the blessing "*Al ha-nissim*."⁷³

⁷² By talmudic times, the rabbis, in line with a Pharasaic worldview, were more apt to focus on the Divine miracles than on the Hasmoneans' might, since they were a priestly family descended from the Saducees. Lurie even suggests that the rabbis wanted to forget the name and deeds of the Hasmoneans. Thus, they explained Hanukkah through miracles, and not with victories on the battlefield. Lurie, "*Megillat Ta'anit u'beit Hashmonai B'aspeclaria shel M'soret Ha-halakhah V'ha-aggadah*," p. 19.

⁷³ J.D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Midrashim*, p. 185. "*Al Ha-Nissim*" is a prayer that is inserted into the eighteenth benediction of the *Amidah* and the second benediction of the *Birkat Ha-mazon* during Hanukkah and Purim. In it, Jews thank God "for the miracles, the redemption, and the triumphant victories, and liberation

Versions of the story are recounted in BT *Shabbat* 21b, Rambam's *Mishneh Torah Hilchot Hanukkah* Chapter 3, MA and other minor *midrashim*. *Shabbat* 21b relates:

When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they contaminated all of the oil that was in the Sanctuary, and when the royal Hasmonean House gained the upper hand and vanquished them they searched and found only one flask of oil that was lying with the seal of the High Priest. It contained only enough to kindle for one day. But a miracle was done with it, and they kindled it for eight days. In the following year, they established and made them festival days with Hallel and Thanksgiving.

In MH2, the Jews took the festival of Hanukkah upon themselves, but in MA it was the Hasmoneans who instituted the festival. In *Midrash L'Hanukkah* (ML), a text emphasizing God's direct involvement in these events, the story about the miracle of the oil appears twice. After the first version of the story, ML makes the radical claim that God instituted the festival of Hanukkah: "So God established for them eight days of Hanukkah, that had not been a festival until now." This was the author's attempt to address the problem that Hanukkah was not instituted by God in the Bible.

MH2 ends with a prayer, unlike any of the other related *midrashim*. The content of the prayer confirms that the author believed in God's ultimate responsibility for the victorious outcome and for the miracle of oil. The form of the prayer suggests that the text was used for liturgical purposes. Section 14 ends with the words: "Blessed is the One who fought our fight and the One who took revenge for us and who paid retribution to all the enemies of our souls. Blessed is the God who saves!" In the end, despite the

which You have brought on our fathers in days of old at this season." It continues with a description of the events "in the days of Mattathias." Macy Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993), p. 17.

might of the Hasmoneans, it is God who receives the credit for the positive outcome of the struggle with the Greeks.

E. ADDITIONAL THEMES & MOTIFS

One literary motif that runs through many of the Hanukkah texts, is the unlikely Jewish warrior who tricks the enemy king or leader and then kills him. This occurs in MH2 Section 4 and in MA 23 when Yochanan convinces Nicanor that he would obey Nicanor's commands only if they were alone together, so that his fellow Jews would not see him violating the *mitzvot*. Once Nicanor sends all of his officials out of the chamber, Yochanan promptly kills him. Similarly, in *Midrash L'Hanukkah* (ML), Hannah's brothers trick the Greek governor into believing that he would marry their sister whose clothes he tore on her wedding day. Acting as if they were bringing his bride to him, the Hasmonean sons entered the governor's home and killed him instead. ML also includes the story of Judith who tricks the king into falling asleep in her presence, after which she cuts off his head. In the latter two cases, it was the woman who came up with the plan.

The motif of the brave soldier outwitting the Greek leader is one of the themes of Hanukkah that has endured up to the present. The well-known story about Judah Maccabee's unlikely defeat of his powerful enemy is only one Hanukkah story that follows this pattern. It is the few in number and the unlikely ones who, with God's help, prevail over the strong and mighty. This is a reflection of the Jewish community's perception of itself: they are the weaker power who uses wits—and God's help—to survive amidst challenge and hardship.

Throughout MH2, there are specific numbers and expressions that communicate the meaning of either "a great many" or "a meager few." These phrases, which often describe the size of an army or the number of soldiers killed in a battle, were not meant as an accurate description, rather they serve to emphasize the unlikely nature of the Hasmonean victory, a tiny force facing an enormous enemy. For example, Sections 1 and 5 describe Antiochus' army as "a great force with many soldiers." Section 9 explains that Bagris came with soldiers from every province, "thousands and ten thousands." His army was described there as "immeasurable and uncountable." In Section 10, Rabbi Yitzhak bar Nahmani explains that Bagris' troops numbered 1,080 myriads (about 10,000 soldiers); this is not intended as an accurate count, but instead it is an expression that captures the uncountable forces he led to battle.

The expression "*hereg rav*," which literally means "great death," is also used to communicate just how many people were killed in several sections of MH2. For example, at the beginning of the text, in Section 1, it was Nicanor, leading Antiochus' forces, who "besieged [Jerusalem] with shouts of oppression and insults to abuse the army of God, and he killed '*hereg rav*,' a great many people there." However, there were casualties on both sides; Section 8 relates that the sons of Mattathias "fought against the people and they killed '*hereg rav*,' a great many—immeasurable and uncountable." Section 4 even reports that 7,772 were killed by Yochanan and his followers in one battle. Once again, this number is likely not an accurate death-toll, rather it is sufficiently large to emphasize the nature of the event. Finally, in Section 9, Bagris warns the king not to fight against the "few in number," as he referred to the Hasmoneans. While one

would expect this to be a description that favored the majority, it only served as a reminder of the great power of the Hasmonean forces despite their small number.

In addition to themes and literary motifs, there are a few words and phrases that are repeated throughout MH2 that further contribute to the meaning of the text as a whole. For example, the Hebrew root "נ.ק.ד" meaning "avenge" or "revenge" appears in six sections of MH2. The word is found in Sections 1 and 5, when Antiochus wants to take revenge on the rebellious Jews who disregard his commands. It is also used by the Jews in sections 3 and 4, for they want to take revenge on the king who is persecuting them. In Section 14, God is the subject of the verb: "Blessed is the One who fought our fight and the One who took revenge for us and who paid retribution to all the enemies of our souls." The verb is used equally by both Yochanan and Antiochus, but its final appearance in Section 14 provides the answer to the question, "Who will prevail?" for God takes vengeance on those who persecute His chosen people.

The word "miracle" does not appear until the latter part of the midrash; in MH2 Section 11, Mattathias proclaims his trust in "the Holy One, Blessed be God, who will do miracles and wonders for us." In the very next section, in which God directs the angels to fight against the Greeks, "the Hasmoneans saw the miracles and said, 'The Eternal will fight for us.'" Finally, Section 14 describes the "miracle of the cruse." The majority of the text focuses on the military victory of the Hasmoneans, without calling it a "miracle." There is undoubtedly the sense that God was partially responsible for their victories, answering the prayers of Yochanan. Indeed, in Section 4 Yochanan asks God to "strengthen my hand," and God does "strengthen" him. Nonetheless, God does not fight for him, and it is not explicit then that there were miracles happening for the

Hasmoneans. It is likely that Sections 12 and 14 were added from other sources whose authors were concerned with emphasizing God's role in the Hanukkah story. MH2 would be a very different text without the influence of this perspective. Indeed, it is the mix of styles and influences, themes and motifs that makes MH2 such a rich midrash that seeks to explain the origins of the festival of Hanukkah.

CONCLUSION

Numerous minor *midrashim*, varying in length and subject matter, have survived into the modern period; many such works are collected in J.D. Eisenstein's *Ozar Midrashim* and Adolf Jellinek's *Bet ha-Midrash*.⁷⁴ Some of these texts have not yet been the focus of critical scholarship, even though they contain a rich mixture of styles, techniques, and underlying purposes that could enhance the study of midrashic literature in general. These texts represent a microcosm of the wide range of characteristics found in midrashic literature. The goal of this thesis was to understand one such text, *Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet* (MH2). Translating the text and generating a commentary analyzing its narrative material, literary techniques, and thematic content, revealed much about midrashic literature on Hanukkah, as well as some insights into the time in which the text was redacted. While many specific issues have been explored in the thesis, a few points stand out as fundamental to understanding this text.

A. MIDRASH AS RESPONSE TO HISTORY

Why did the redactor of MH2 need to modify an earlier text, *Megillat Antiochus* (MA), which accomplished its liturgical purpose well? And why, ten centuries later, were the events of the Hasmonean struggle so compelling for the MH2 redactor? The likely answer is that the redactor, too, experienced persecution and, like his ancestors before him, was confronting the pressure of assimilation. By taking the story of a much earlier time and adding to it, he could express the struggle of his own time, and inspire his contemporaries to remain strong and faithful despite the pressures to assimilate.

⁷⁴Jellinek, Adolf. *Bet Ha-Midrash*. Vol. 1, 6. (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938).

The rabbis understood Jewish history as a cycle of destruction and redemption, persecution and salvation. Painful periods of persecution had occurred and recurred in the past, and the rabbis of the redactor's time believed that their current oppression would end through Divine intervention. They even looked ahead to an ultimate salvation when the faithful would be rewarded. This hope for redemption is apparent in MH2: It draws on biblical texts, such as from Jeremiah, that recall the Babylonian exile, the first great period of destruction and persecution in Jewish history. And it alludes to King Cyrus, the symbol of their salvation from that destruction. MH2 is set during the Hellenistic period, a time of terrible persecution for the Jews, in which the Jews once again are redeemed—by God's Divine will and deeds of the Hasmonean warriors. MH2 references rabbis, such as Shimon ben Yochai, who lived during the Roman period and destruction of the Second Temple. The Jews were sent into exile for many centuries; they endured persecution and anti-Jewish polemic under Christian rule, which persisted throughout the Middle Ages. During the 5th century, the Babylonian Talmud—with its collections of Jewish law and narrative material—was created. Much of the material in MH2 that coincides with texts in the Talmud or in the commentary to *Megillat Ta'anit* came into being during this period.

MH2 was redacted during the 10th and 11th centuries; this dating is based on the fact that it incorporates traditions and styles found in late *midrashim*, including Exodus Rabbah and *Pesikta Rabbati*, as well as material from the commentary to *Megillat Ta'anit*. Even more compelling is the fact that MH2 is directly based on *Megillat Antiochus*, which was probably composed in 8th century as a response to the Karaites,

who rejected the festival.⁷⁵ MA was known to Saadia Gaon in the tenth century; which is therefore the latest possible dating of MA. Thus, in the following period, a redactor wove together all of these sources with some historical markers and messages to create MH2.

For example, during the Gaonic period, when MH2 was redacted, the Jews were living under Moslem rule. Despite the Jews' special category as a "people of the Book," which entitled them to some protection under Moslem rule, they were still persecuted and prevented from living according to their own ways.⁷⁶ According to the 9th century Pact of Omar, which governed the actions of Jews and Christians living under Moslem rule, the Jews paid a heavy head tax in return for protection, and they were forbidden from holding government office. In addition, they were not permitted to build or repair synagogues or to display any religious symbols, and they could not engage in prayer in the presence of a Moslem. They were also not allowed to ride on saddles, for that would result in a Jew being physically higher than the Moslems on the street.⁷⁷ Based on this evidence, the paradigm of persecution and redemption was still compelling for those who redacted MH2 during the Gaonic period.

MH2's focus on persecution, assimilation, and redemption is not only expressed in the biblical and historical references, but also pervades the content of the midrash. The repeated triad of commandments—Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and circumcision—emphasizes the importance of the *mitzvah* system. Keeping the commandments, above all these three, was crucial to maintaining one's Jewishness. The rabbis—exemplified by the author of the midrash and its redactor—understood these *mitzvot* to be the core of the

⁷⁵ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 331.

⁷⁶ H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed. *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) p. 405.

⁷⁷ "Pact of Omar," in *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book: 315-1791*, Jacob Rader Marcus, ed. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1990), pp. 13-14.

covenant between God and Israel. Concerned that their people would assimilate, the rabbis found it necessary to delineate when one had crossed the line into no longer being a Jew. While they hoped that the Jews would not abandon Jewish law and culture, the exclusive emphasis on these three *mitzvot* represented the immutable boundary between Jew and non-Jew.

The redactor of MH2 also glorifies martyrdom as a response to the Jews' persecution by their enemies. By including the examples of pious Jews who gave their lives rather than submit to the foreign rule, the text articulates the critical importance of maintaining Jewish law under all circumstances. The actions of the Jews who died fighting during the Moslem conquest, rather than accept Mohammed as the final messenger of God and convert to Islam, confirm the fact that martyrdom was acceptable in Jewish consciousness. Similarly, in the 11th century, during the Crusades, many Jews gave their lives *al kiddush hashem*, "in sanctification of God's name," rather than convert to Christianity.

Why should one stick to God's path, in life or in death? This was the ultimate message of MH2: One who keeps the *mitzvot*, who stays true to God's path, will eventually be protected, rewarded, and redeemed. The redactor presents historical and biblical examples proving that God has done so in the past. Moreover, the redactor's characters express the faith and hope that God will do the same in the future. The text's author wanted to inspire his desperate readers with the knowledge that their suffering was not in vain, that they were right to hold onto Judaism, and that soon God would redeem them.

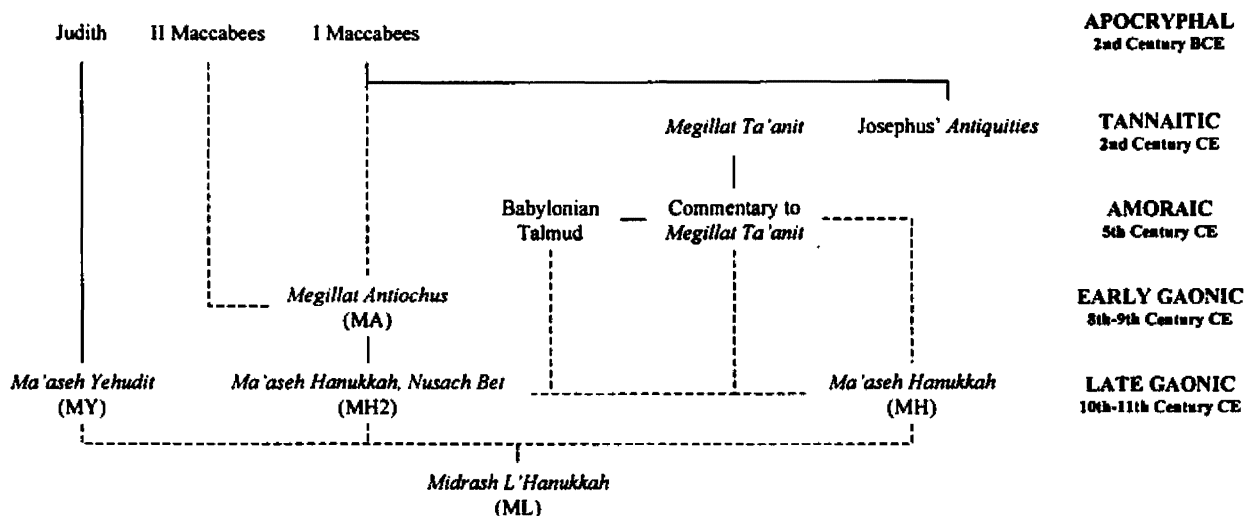
B. THE REDACTIONAL HISTORY OF THE HANUKKAH MIDRASHIM

The degree to which one midrashic text shares style and content with another facilitates the establishment of a theory about the genesis of the minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah. In trying to position aggadic *midrashim* in time, Moshe David Herr explains, one cannot merely date a text by noting the historical allusions therein and assuming that it was composed immediately after that period. Rather, he writes, "A more reliable method for determining priority and lateness among Midrashim is the relationship between the various Midrashim—the use one makes of another—as well as their relationship to other sources."⁷⁸ This exploration of the minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah employs the same methodological approach to ascertain the evolution of these texts.

The chart below demonstrates the historical and literary relationship between the various texts. Solid lines indicate direct relationships (i.e., descendant text or close narrative correlation), whereas indirect relationships (i.e., shared material from a probable common source) are indicated by dashed lines. The time periods noted on the right side of the chart reflect scholars' best attempts to place the materials within a historical context.

⁷⁸ Moshe David Herr, "Midrash," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 11 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1971), p. 1508.

Evolution of Hanukkah Midrashim



Based on its use and language, *Megillat Antiochus* was the earliest of these texts. The text appeared first in Western Aramaic, and according to Strack and Stemberger, it was extremely popular during the Middle Ages; it was read in the synagogue during Hanukkah.⁷⁹ Saadia Gaon, who lived during the 10th century, knew the Scroll and wrote a commentary to it.⁸⁰ While some scholars date it as early as 2nd to 5th centuries, most agree that it is from the 8th or 9th century, and its language is an imitation of the earlier Aramaic of *Targum Onkelos*.⁸¹ MH2's redactor used MA as a base and added other elements to it, while trying to retain the source text's structure and flow.

According to several scholars, MH2, *Ma'aseh Hanukkah* (MH) and *Ma'aseh Yehudit* (MY) were probably redacted in the 10th or 11th centuries, though it is difficult to know which among them was the earliest.⁸² There were several traditions about Hanukkah known in Jewish circles by this time, and, unlike the Books of Maccabees,

⁷⁹ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 331.

⁸⁰ Atlas and Perlmann, "Saadia on the Scroll of the Hasmoneans," p. 1.

⁸¹ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 331.

⁸² Kern-Ulmer, "The Midrashim for Hanukkah," p. 169. Moshe David Herr, "Midrashim, Smaller," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 16. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1971), pp. 1515-1518.

which recounted the Hasmoneans' military campaigns in detail, the midrashic traditions focused more on God's role in its history. Some of this material about God's role in the Hanukkah story—which became the focus of the later midrashic compilation *Midrash L'Hanukkah* (ML)—found its way into MH2. Based on their textual and thematic similarities, MY and MH2 were redacted at about the same time, and their redactors most likely even used some common sources. ML is the latest, an anthology of many traditions on Hanukkah. It flows neither chronologically nor thematically, and it contains more than one version of the same stories. These features suggest that its redactor simply wanted to anthologize all of the different sources on Hanukkah, bringing them together into one text.

C. LESSONS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF THE HANUKKAH MIDRASHIM

An in-depth analysis of MH2 and the other minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah provides significant insight into midrashic writing and the rabbis who engaged in the genre. First, the rabbis incorporated biblical quotes throughout the midrash, most often without identifying them. They would simply weave verses into the narrative, as when the Hasmoneans were identified as “swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.” The Bible held so much authority for the rabbis that they used it persistently to add weight and support to their ideas. The redactor's choice of which books of the Bible to draw from was so deliberate that the verses, taken together, send an important message. For example, in MH2, the redactor's heavy reliance on Exodus underscores his primary message that redemption is possible.

The midrashists drew upon biblical and rabbinic texts, quoting them verbatim at times, while at other times making minor changes so that they would fit into the context. The appropriation of Hezekiah's prayer for Yochanan in MH2 Section 4 is a prime example. Although the redactor substituted the name of Antiochus into the text, it brought with it the context of the Book of Kings, in which the Israelites defeated the Assyrian army. In other cases, the redactor completely inverts the biblical verse, or its context, in order to bring a measure of irony to the text, as when Antiochus uses God's words from Jeremiah to declare his intention to destroy the Jewish people (Section 5).

Despite the historical setting of the text, the rabbinic midrashists demonstrated little concern for historical accuracy. When reading midrash, it is crucial to recognize that the recording of history for its own sake is a modern concept. MH2 is a text created to look like an historical account, and indeed it does. Nevertheless, according to most historians, the information conveyed in the narrative has no historical basis. The "facts" in MH2 come directly from MA, and there is no indication of the MA author's source for those "facts." The narrative bears little resemblance to the account in I Maccabees, which scholars consider to be the most reliable source for information surrounding the Hasmonean revolt.⁸³ Yerushalmi points out that, for modern people living in the West, "it is often hard to grasp the fact that a concern with history, let alone the writing of history, is not an innate endowment of human civilization."⁸⁴ If the rabbis were not writing history for history's sake, then they must have had another agenda in creating midrash. They believed that the future would follow the patterns of the past that had

⁸³ Philip Goodman, *The Hanukkah Anthology* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1992), p. 80.

⁸⁴ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 6.

already been revealed in Torah; their goal was to help their followers confront the present with the knowledge and values that they had already learned from past experience.

D. FUTURE EXPLORATIONS

Close textual analysis of the minor *midrashim* on Hanukkah reveals the process by which midrashic texts evolve. While the redactor may have begun with a core of material, he drew also upon many different texts, oral traditions, outside events, and the wisdom of his own time. The rabbis did not produce historiography, "an actual recording of historical events,"⁸⁵ but the texts that they produced reflect substantial information about the time in which they lived. Daniel Boyarin goes so far as to suggest that "the aggada is the most significant kind of historiography,... not because it represents a true subjective communion with the past on the part of geniuses, but because it manifests the past as it was represented by the culture in which the aggada was produced."⁸⁶

Although this project was limited in scope, further study in a number of specific areas would reveal additional knowledge about the rabbis, the period in which they wrote, and the texts they created. First, it would be beneficial to do a more thorough study of the biblical texts that are used in the midrash. One could explore where in rabbinic literature those same verses are used, as well as examine the greater messages that those verses support in other texts. This would help to understand the psyche of the redactor, as well as imbue the midrash with a deeper message expressed in other texts.

It would also be valuable to compare MH2 to midrashic texts of the same period that are not from the Hanukkah genre. This would place the midrash in a wider context

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, p. 15.

of midrashic literature, helping to determine what is characteristic of the genre and where MH2 departs from the norm. Additionally, while it was useful to compare MH2 with other late *midrashim* on Hanukkah, as well as to earlier rabbinic texts, it would have been equally interesting to compare MH2 with later texts as well. Indeed, today, much of the diversity of Hanukkah stories present in the 10th century has disappeared to the extent that there are no popular traditions that portray a Hasmonean hero other than Judah Maccabee. Given this result, it would be productive to explore whether there are any other medieval Jewish texts that drew upon and continued to circulate the traditions in MH2, or whether MH2 was the end of creative writings about Hanukkah.

There are a number of literary theories that provide tools for the study of narrative texts. Theorists on narratology explore characters, images, spectacles, and events that are used to tell a story. Equipped with this methodology, one would be able to better understand the midrashic story-teller and the techniques he used to communicate his story.⁸⁷ In applying this methodology, an exploration of parallel texts from the same period would add to the understanding of this Jewish literary genre. Indeed, Jewish culture and literature were significantly influenced by the milieu in which they existed.

For example, Islamic culture of the 10th and 11th centuries affected the Jewish art and literature of the period.⁸⁸ In discussing the narrative settings of Islamic epic literature, M.C. Lyons explains that war was a common setting, because the Moslem culture valued strength and courage; nonetheless, the resulting victory always comes from God. He adds that practicality and accuracy were not important, so that often the

⁸⁷ See Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

⁸⁸ H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed. *A History of the Jewish People*, p. 439.

number of troops reported was extremely inflated.⁸⁹ This description of God's role in the victory and of the inflated numbers applies well to MH2. Like the rabbis, "truth" in the Islamic narrative was simply not a priority, for "where an original kernel of fact existed, it has long since been covered by successive layers of fiction, but the narrators must still maintain their claim to be taken seriously."⁹⁰ This explanation could equally justify the MH2 redactor's choice to maintain the text's historical focus on the Hasmonean rebellion, even though his comment was not made in relation to that event.

Another scholar, John Renard, writing about the Islamic hero-figure describes the traits of the folk-hero. The four characteristics he identifies could apply to the hero of MH2, Yochanan. According to Renard, the folk hero is often the humble person who comes from the bottom to overtake the powerful enemy; he articulates the aspirations of the masses; he is anti-establishment or a threat to the status-quo; and he survives in written versions of oral tradition or in works written especially to tell the story.⁹¹ Renard goes on to discuss the importance of martyrdom in the genre of Islamic Hero literature; he explains that martyrs are warriors fighting for their cause and that "death is victory, both in itself and its immediate consequences, and in the fact that it leaves to the cowardly perpetrator only the bitterest dregs of indefensible aggression and atrocity."⁹² By his definition, ordinary people, such as the woman from the martyrdom of the wall or the Jews from the martyrdom of the cave, are elevated to the status of warriors—and warriors who prevail.

⁸⁹ M.C. Lyons, *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and Oral Story-Telling*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 54, 57.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁹¹ John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), p. 43.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 204.

While these general comparisons with the genre of Medieval Islamic literature are helpful, it would be even more interesting to compare specific Islamic texts with MH2 and other similar rabbinic texts. The same might be done with Christian literature from the period of the Crusades. This exploration would lead to a more nuanced understanding of the similarities and differences between the genres, and it would certainly shed light on other aspects of MH2 that have not been addressed in this study.

E. LESSONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Over a thousand years ago, the rabbis mastered the technique of incorporating earlier texts into their work. This technique is popular for writers and artists today. Contemporary artists often refer to an earlier work in painting or sculpture, musicians use and build upon the tune of an older composition, and writers include quotes or references to earlier writers. In each case, the artist assumes that their audience will be able to apply an understanding of the earlier work to the new one. For example, in a short story by Jorge Luis Borges called "Pierre Menard: Author of *The Quixote*," Menard produces an exact replication of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, though he considers it a completely new work of art.⁹³ Using this extreme example, Borges challenges the notion that a literary work embodies only the meaning of the original author. According to Allen B. Ruch, "The *Don Quixote* of Cervantes means something different to the *Don Quixote* of the later Menard, even though the text is identical: times have changed; language has changed; readers have changed."⁹⁴ What Borges presents as a revolutionary idea in the

⁹³ Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, James E. Irby, trans. (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1964), pp.36-44.

⁹⁴ Allen B. Ruch, "Jorge Luis Borges at 100: A Lecture by Carlos Fuentes," New York: 92nd Street Y, October 18, 1999.

20th century, the rabbis knew long ago: old traditions can be extremely powerful in new contexts. Ironically, this is understood to be post-modernist theory. Modern theorists could learn much from studying the rabbis' application of this technique.

Despite its publication in two collections of minor *midrashim*, MH2 is virtually unknown among modern Jews. Nonetheless, it is a text that can provide important insights for Jews living in the 21st century. For one, reading MH2 today reminds one how powerful spontaneous prayer can be. The characters in the midrash prayed to God, and they had faith in God's ability to save them. Literature that expresses the needs and hopes of the Jewish people resonates during this uncertain period when terrorism threatens those living in Israel, as well as freedom-loving individuals throughout the rest of the world.

Despite the lack of immediate threat of persecution, like their ancestors, today's Jews face an intense threat of assimilation. Indeed, it is precisely because Jews have been welcomed and accepted into the secular culture that assimilation and intermarriage are so attractive. Jewish immigrants to the United States wanted to adopt the culture and customs of the mainstream society, they wanted to be full members of their communities, and at the turn of the 21st century, that goal has been realized. Nevertheless, Jewish organizations are concerned that the future will reveal that Jewish assimilation has occurred to such an extent that there will remain no distinct Jewish people.

Much as the redactors of MH2 did, Jewish leaders today are trying to set boundaries to mark who is a Jew and who is not. Under the threat of a diverse and open society, it becomes more and more difficult to retain a distinct cultural identity. Cultural assimilation and intermarriage characterize the condition of Jewish life in the United

States. Interestingly, the same three markers that the rabbis of MH2 emphasized—Shabbat, circumcision, and Rosh Hodesh—are the top markers of Jewishness today. The minimum standards of Jewishness today, according to Jewish sociologists, include entering one's son into the covenant between God and Israel, observing Shabbat in some way (even if only occasionally), and celebrating the Jewish holidays, at the very least Hanukkah and Passover.⁹⁵ The rabbis then and now recognize that performing ritual acts, which embody Jewish memory, and passing them to the next generation are the means by which Jews retain their connection to their history. Perhaps reading MH2 as Jews light their Hanukkah candles, just as Jews retell the story of another persecution and salvation at the Passover seder, would remind them that Jews need to guard carefully their heritage and resist assimilation, through communal and home ritual observance and religious education. Finally, during this difficult period in history, it would not hurt for Jews to look ahead with the faith and conviction that the Hasmoneans demonstrated in MH2. God has saved us in the past, and God will redeem our world in the future: "Blessed is the God who saves!"

⁹⁵ *National Jewish Population Survey*, Council of Jewish Federations, 1990.

APPENDIX

ABBREVIATIONS

BCE	–	Before the Common Era
BT	–	Babylonian Talmud
CE	–	Common Era
MA	–	<i>Megillat Antiochus</i>
MH	–	<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah</i>
MH2	–	<i>Ma'aseh Hanukkah, Nusach Bet</i>
ML	–	<i>Midrash L'Hanukkah</i>
MY	–	<i>Ma'aseh Yehudit</i>

MEGILLAT ANTIOCHUS (MA)

אוצר מדרשים (אייזנשטיין) עמוד קפה

(א') ויהי בימי אנטיוכס מלך יון מלך גדול וחזק היה ותקף בממשלתו וכל המלכים ישמעו לו:
 (ב') הוא כבש מדינות רבות ומלכים חזקים והחריב טירותם והיכליהם שרף באש ואנשיהם
 בבית האסורים אסר: (ג') מימי אלכסנדרוס המלך לא קם מלך כמוהו בכל עבר הנהר: (ד')
 הוא בנה מדינה גדולה על חוף הים להיות לו לבית מלכות ויקרא לה מדינת אנטיוכיא על
 שמו: (ה') וגם בגריס משנהו בנה מדינה אחרת כנגדה ויקרא לה בגריס על שמו וכן שמוותן עד
 היום הזה: (ו') בשנת עשרים ושלש שנים למלוכה היא שנת מאתים ושלש עשרה לבנין בית
 אלהים שם פניו לעלות לירושלים: (ז') ויען ויאמר לשריו הלא ידעתם כי יש עם היהודים אשר
 בירושלם בינינו: (ח') לאלהינו אינם מקריבים ודתנו אינם עושים ודתי המלך עוזבים לעשות
 דתם: (ט') וגם הם מיחלים ליום שברון המלכים והשלטונים אומרים מתי ימלוך עלינו מלכנו
 ונשלוט בים וביבשה וכל העולם יתן בידנו: (י') אין כבוד למלכות להניח אלה על פני האדמה:
 (יא') עתה באו ונעלה עליהם ונבטל מהם את הברית אשר כרת להם אלהיהם שבת ראש
 חדש ומילה. ויטב הדבר בעיני שריו ובעיני כל חילו: (יב') באותה שעה קם אנטיוכס וישלח
 את נקנור משנהו בחיל גדול ועם רב ויבא לעיר יהודה לירושלם: (יג') ויהרג בה הרג רב ויבן
 במה בבית המקדש במקום אשר אמר אלהי ישראל לעבדיו הנביאים שם אשכנ שכינתי
 לעולם. במקום ההוא שחטו החזיר ויביאו את דמו לעזרת הקדש. (יד') ובהיות זה כאשר שמע
 יוחנן בן מתתיה כהן גדול כי נעשה זה המעשה, וימלא קצף וחמה וזיז פניו נשתנה ויועץ בלבו
 מה שיכול לעשות על זה: (טו') אז יוחנן בן מתתיה עשה לו חרב שתי זרתות ארכה וזרת רחבה
 תחת בגדיו עטופה: (טז') ויבא לירושלים ויעמד בשער המלך ויקרא לשוערים ויאמר להם אני
 יוחנן בן מתתיה באתי לבוא לפני נקנור: (יז') ואז באו השוערים והשומרים ויאמרו לו הכהן
 הגדול מהיהודים עומד בפתח ויען נקנור ויאמר להם בא יבא: (יח') אז הובא יוחנן לפני נקנור
 ויען נקנור ויאמר ליוחנן אתה הוא אחד מן המורדים אשר מרדו במלך ואינם רוצים בשלוש
 מלכותו: (יט') ויען יוחנן לפני נקנור ויאמר אדני עתה הנני באתי לפניך אשר תרצה אעשה: (כ')
 ויען נקנור ויאמר ליוחנן אם כרצוני אתה עושה קח חזיר ושחטוהו על הבמה ותלבש בגדי
 מלכות ותרכב על סוס המלך וכאחד מאוהבי המלך תהיה: (כא') וכאשר שמע יוחנן השיבו
 דבר אדני אני ירא מבני ישראל פן ישמעו כי עשיתי כן ויסקלוני באבנים: (כב') עתה יצא כל
 איש מלפניך פן יודיעום. אז הוציא נקנור מלפניו כל איש: (כג') בעת ההיא נשא יוחנן בן
 מתתיה עינו לאלהי שמים ותקן תפלתו לפני אלהיו. ויאמר אלהי ואלהי אבותי אברהם יצחק
 ויעקב אל נא תתנני ביד הערל הזה כי אם יהרגני ילך וישתבח בבית דגון אלהיו ויאמר אלהי
 נתנו בידו: (כד') באותה שעה פסע עליו שלש פסיעות ויתקע החרב בלבו וישלך אותו חלל
 בעזרת הקדש לפני אלהי השמים: (כה') ענה יוחנן ויאמר אלהי לא תשים עלי חטא כי הרגתי
 עתה בקדש כן תתן את כל העמים אשר באו עמו להצר ליהודה ולירושלם: (כו') אז יצא יוחנן
 בן מתתיה ביום ההוא וילחם בעמים ויהרג בהם הרג רב: (כז') מספר ההרגים אשר הרג ביום
 ההוא שבע מאות אלף ושנים ושבועים אלף אשר היו הורגים אלה לאלה: (כח') בשובו בנה
 עמוד ויקרא על שמו ממית החזקים: (כט') ויהי כאשר שמע אנטיוכס המלך כי נהרג משנהו
 נקנור ויצר לו למאד וישלח להביא לו את בגריס הרשע המטעה את עמו: (ל') ויען אנטיוכס
 ויאמר לבגריס הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת אשר עשו לי בני ישראל הרגו חילי ויבזו מחנותי
 ושרי: (לא') עתה על ממונכם אתם חוסים גם בתיכם לכם הם. באו ונעלה עליהם ונבטל מהם
 הברית אשר כרת להם אלהי השמים שבת ר"ח ומילה: (לב') אז בגריס הרשע וכל מחנותיו בא
 לירושלים ויהרג בהם הרג רב ויגזור בה גזרה גמורה על שבת ראש חדש ומילה: (לג') בהיות
 זה כאשר היה דבר המלך נחפז מצאו איש אשר מל בנו ויביאו האיש ואשתו ויתלו אותם כנגד
 הילד: (לד') וגם אשה אשר ילדה בן אחרי מות בעלה ותמל אותו לשמנה ימים. ותעל על חומת
 ירושלים ובנה המהול בידה: (לה') ותען ותאמר לך אומרים בגריס הרשע אתם חושבים לבטל
 מאתנו הברית אשר כרת עמנו. ברית אבותינו לא נבטל ממנו ושבת ראש חדש ומילה מבני
 בנינו לא יוסרו: (לו') ותפיל בנה לארץ ותפול אחריו וימותו שניהם כאחד ורבים מבני ישראל
 היו אשר עושים כן בימים ההם ולא שנו ברית אבותם: (לז') בזמן ההוא אמרו בני ישראל אלה
 לאלה באו ונלך ונשובת במערה פן נחלל את יום השבת וילשינו אותם לפני בגריס: (לח') אז
 בגריס הרשע שלח אנשים חלוצים ויבואו וישבו על פי המערה ויאמרו אליהם יהודים צאו

אלינו אכלו מלחמנו ושתו מייננו ומעשינו תהיו עושים: (ל"ט) ויענו בני ישראל ויאמרו אלה
 לאלה זוכרים אנחנו אשר צונו ה' על הר סיני ששת ימים תעבוד וביום השביעי תשבות עתה
 טוב לנו אשר נמות במערה מאשר נחלל את יום השבת: (מ') בהיות זה כאשר לא יצאו אליהם
 היהודים ויביאו עצים ושרפו על פי המערה וימותו כאלף איש ואשה: (מ"א) אחרי כן יצאו
 חמשה בני מתתיה יוחנן וארבעה אחיו וילחמו בעמים ויהרגו בהם הרג רב ויגרשום לאיי הים
 כי בטחו בד' אלהי השמים: (מ"ב) אז בגרים הרשע נכנס בספינה אחת וינס אל אנטיוכיא אל
 המלך ועמו אנשים פליטי חרב: (מ"ג) ויען בגרים ויאמר לאנטיוכס המלך אתה המלך שמת
 צווי לבטל מן היהודים שבת ראש חדש ומילה מרמה גדולה מרד בזה (מ"ד) אשר אם ילכו כל
 העמים והאומות וכל הלשונויות לא יוכלו לחמשת בני מתתיהו אשר מאריות הם חזקים
 ומנשרים הם קלים ומדובים הם ממהרים: (מ"ה) עתה המלך עצתי תיטב עליך ולא תלחם
 באנשים מעט כי אם תלחם בהם ותבוש בעיני כל המלכים: (מ"ו) לכן כתוב ושלח ספרים בכל
 מדינות מלכותך ויבאו שרי החילים ולא ישאר מהם אחד וגם פילים מלובשים שריונים יהיו
 בהם: (מ"ז) ויטב הדבר בעיני אנטיוכס המלך וישלח ספרים בכל מדינות מלכותו ויבאו שרי
 עם ועם ומלכות ממלכות ופילים מלובשים שריונים עמהם באו: (מ"ח) שנית קם בגרים הרשע
 ויבא לירושלים בקע החומה וינתק המבוא וישבר במקדש שלש עשרה פרצות וגם מן האבנים
 שבר עד אשר היו כעפר. ויחשב בלבו ויאמר הפעם הזאת לא יוכלו לי כי רב חילי ועוז ידי
 ואלהי השמים לא חשב כן: (מ"ט) וכשמוע חמשה בני מתתיה קמו ויבאו למצפה גלעד אשר
 היה שם פליטה לבית ישראל בימי שמואל הנביא: (נ') צום גזרו וישבו על האפר לבקש רחמים
 מלפני אלהי השמים: (נ"א) אז נפל בלבם עצה טובה יהודה הבכור השני שמעון השלישי יוחנן
 הרביעי יונתן החמישי אלעזר: (נ"ב) ויברך אותם אביהם וכן אמר יהודה בני אודה ממך
 כיהודה בן יעקב אשר היה נמשל כאריה: (נ"ג) שמעון בני אודה ממך כשמעון בן יעקב אשר
 הרג יושבי שכם: (נ"ד) יוחנן בני אודה ממך כאבנר בן נר שר צבא ישראל. יונתן בני אודה ממך
 כיונתן בן שאול אשר הרג עם פלשתים: (נ"ה) אלעזר בני אודה ממך כפנחס בן אלעזר אשר
 קנא לאלהיו והציל את בני ישראל: (נ"ו) על זה יצאו חמשה בני מתתיה ביום הזה וילחמו
 בעמים ויהרגו בהם הרג רב ויהרג מהם יהודה: (נ"ז) באותה שעה כאשר ראו בני מתתיה כי
 נהרג יהודה שבו ויבאו אל אביהם: (נ"ח) ויאמר להם למה שבתם ויענו ויאמרו על אשר נהרג
 אחינו אשר היה חשוב ככלנו: (נ"ט) ויען מתתיה אביהם ויאמר אני אצא עמכם ואלחם בעמים
 פן יאבדו בית ישראל ואתם נבהלתם על אחיכם: (ס') ויצא מתתיה ביום ההוא עם בניו וילחמו
 בעמים: (ס"א) ואלהי השמים נתן כל גבורי העמים בידם ויהרגו בהם הרג רב כל אחי חרב
 וכל משכי קשת שרי החיל והסגנים לא נותר בהם שריד וינוסו שאר העמים למדינות הים:
 (ס"ב) ואלעזר היה מתעסק להמית את הפילים ויטבע בפרש הפילים וכאשר שבו בקשוהו
 ולא מצאוהו, ואח"כ מצאוהו אשר טבע בפרש הפילים: (ס"ג) וישמחו בני ישראל כי נתנו
 בידיהם שונאיהם. מהם שרפו באש ומהם דקרו בחרב ומהם תלו על העץ: (ס"ד) ובגרים
 הרשע המטעה את עמו שרפו אותו בית ישראל באש: (ס"ה) ואז המלך אנטיוכס כאשר שמע
 אשר נהרגו בגרים הרשע וכל שרי החיל אשר עמו נכנס בספינה וינס למדינת הים. והי כל
 מקום אשר היה בא שמה מורדים בו וקורין אותו הבורח: (ס"ו) אחרי כן באו בני חשמונאי
 לבית המקדש ויבנו את השערים הנשברים ויסגרו הפרצות ויטהרו את העזרה מן ההרוגים
 ומן הטומאות: (ס"ז) ויבקשו שמן זית וזך להדליק המנורה ולא מצאו כי אם צלוחית אחת אשר
 היתה חתומה בטבעת כהן גדול וידעו כי היתה טהורה. והיה בה כשיעור הדלקת יום אחד:
 (ס"ח) ואלהי השמים אשר שכן שמו שם נתן ברכה והדליקו ממנה שמונה ימים: (ס"ט) על כן
 קימו בני חשמונאי קיום וחזקו איסור ובני ישראל עמם כאחד לעשות שמונה ימים האלה ימי
 משתה ושמחה כימי מועדים הכתובים בתורה: (ע') ולהדליק בהם נרות להודיע אשר עשה
 להם אלהי השמים נצוחים. ולכן אסור לספוד בהם ולא לגזור בהם) צום ותענית זולתי אשר
 מקובל עליו לפני זה ויתפלל לפני אלהיו: (ע"א) אך חשמונאי ובניו ואחיהם לא גזרו בהם
 לבטל עבודת מלאכה במקדש. ומן העת ההיא לא היה שם למלכות יון: (ע"ב) ויקבלו המלכות
 בני חשמונאי ובני בניהם מהעת הזאת עד חרבן בית האלהים מאתים ושש שנים: (ע"ג) על כן
 בני ישראל מהיום ההוא בכל גלותם שומרים הימים האלה. ויקראו להם ימי משתה ושמחה
 מחמשה ועשרים לחדש כסלו שמנה ימים: (ע"ד) מן העת ההיא ועד העולם לא יסורו מהם
 אשר היו עושין בבית מקדשם הכהנים והלויים וחכמיהם אשר קימו עליהם ועל בני בניהם עד
 עולם. האל אשר עשה עמהם נס ופלא הוא יעשה עמנו נסים ונפלאות ויקיים בנו מקרא
 שכתוב כימי צאתך מארץ מצרים אראנו נפלאות, אמן

Ma'aseh Hanukkah (MH)

אוצר מדרשים (אייזנשטיין) עמוד קפה

כתיב (ירמיה נ') כה אמר ה' צבאות עשוקים בני יהודה ובני ישראל וגו' וכתוב גואלם חזק ה' צבאות שמו ריב יריב את ריבם למען הרגיע את הארץ והרגיו ליושבי בבל. אמרו בימי היונים נתחייב מקרא זה שהערימו סוד על ישראל אמרו בואו ונחדש עליהם גזירות עד שיבעטו באלהיהם ויאמינו בע"ז שלנו. עמדו וגזרו כל בן ישראל שעושה לו בריח או מסגור לפתחו ידקר בחרב, וכל כך למה כדי שלא יהיה לישראל כבוד ולא רשות (צניעות), שכל בית שאין לו דלת אין לו כבוד ולא צניעות וכל הרוצה ליכנס נכנס בין ביום ובין בלילה. כיון שראו ישראל כך עמדו ובטלו כל דלתות בתיהם ולא היו יכולין לא לאכול ולא לשתות ולא לשמש מטותיהם, בשביל גנבין ולסטיין ופריצי יונים, ולא רואין שינה בעיניהם לא יום ולא לילה, ונתקיים עליהם מקרא שכתוב ופחדת לילה ויומם (דברים כ"ח). אמרו לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע כמה אנו יכולים לסבול! אמר להם בעון מזוהה, אלא אעפ"כ רווחה תמצא בגזירה זו. והיו ישראל שרויין בלא דלתות, ואין להן דבר מעביר רעות האשה מעל בעלה כדלת שנאמר לך עמי בא בחדרים וגו' (ישעיה כ"ו), ועמדו בגזירה זו שלש שנים, כיון שראו יונים שעמדו ישראל בגזירה ולא נכשל אחד מהם בשום דבר רע, עמדו וגזרו עליהם גזירה אחרת, והעבירו קולי: כל אדם מישראל שיש לו שור או שה יחקק על קרניו שאין לו חלק באלהי ישראל, וכל כך למה כדי שלא יאכלו ישראל בשר ולא חלב ולא גבינה, ולא יהיה להם חרישה. אמרו יודעים אנו שאין יכולין לעמוד בגזירה זו. כיון ששמעו ישראל כך נצטערו צער גדול אמרו ח"ו שנכפור באלהינו, עמדו ומכרו בהמתן בין טהורה בין טמאה, והיו ישראל מהלכין ברגלים, ועליהם נתקיים ראיתי עבדים על סוסים וגו'. אמר להם הקב"ה בעון שמנעתם עצמכם מעלות בשלש רגלים לירושלם ולהקריב קרבנות וליתן מתנות כהונה, לכן נתקיים עליכם שורך טבוח לעיניך, אלא אעפ"כ רווחה תמצא בגזירה זו, והיו הצביים והאיילים וכל מיני עופות טהורים באים ונכנסים לבתיהם של ישראל, לפי שהיו בלא דלתות ובאין ישראל ותופסין אותן ושוחטין ואוכלין בשר ונותנין שבח להקב"ה ואמרו ברוך הוא שהפך עצת אויבנו לטובה, שאילו היו דלתות לבתים היאך היתה כל צידה נכנסת אצלנו. השיבם הקב"ה אתם חסותם על כבודי ולא כפרתם בי אף אני זמנתי לכם צידה, וכיון שראו היונים שעמדו ישראל בגזירה זו, עמדו וגזרו כל מי שאשתו הולכת לטבילה ידקר בחרב וכל הרואה אותה הרי היא לו לאשה ובניה לעבדים, כיון שראו ישראל כך מנעו עצמם מלשמש, וכיון ששמעו יונים כך אמרו הואיל ואין ישראל משמשין מטותיהם אנו נזקקין להן, כיון שראו ישראל כך חזרו על נשיהן בלא טבילה בעל כרחן, אמרו רבש"ע בעל כרחינו שלא בטובותינו, שאין האשה רוצה לישב תחת בעלה בלא עונתה. אמר להם הקב"ה הואיל ועשיתם בלא כוונה אני אטהר אתכם ופתח לכל אחד ואחד מהן מעיין בתוך ביתו, והיו נשיהם טובלות בתוך בתיהם ונתקיים עליהם מקרא זה ושבתם מים בששון ממעיני הישועה, ונתקיים עליהם עוד מקרא זה אם רחץ ה' את צואת בנות ציון. כיון שראו יונים שאין ישראל מרגישיין בגזירותיהם עמדו וגזרו עליהם גזירה מרה ועכורה, שלא תכנס כלה בלילה הראשון מחופתה אלא אצל ההגמון שבמקום ההוא. כיון ששמעו ישראל כך רפו דיהם ותשש כחם ונמנעו מלארס, והיו בנות ישראל בוגרות ומזקינות כשהן בתולות, ונתקיים עליהם בתולותיה נוגות והיא מר לה (איכה א'), והיו יונים מתעללות בבתולות ישראל, ונהגו בדבר הזה שלש שנים ושמונה חדשים, עד שבא מעשה של בת מתתיהו כהן גדול שנשאת לבן חשמונאי ואלעזר היה שמו, כיון שהגיע יום שמחתה הושיבוהו באפריון, וכשהגיע זמן הסעודה נתקבצו כל גדולי ישראל לכבוד מתתיהו ובן חשמונאי שלא היו באותו הדור גדולים מהם, וכשישבו לסעוד עמדה חנה בת מתתיהו מעל אפריון וספקה כפיה זו על זו וקרעה פורפירון שלה ועמדה לפני כל ישראל כשהיא מגולה ולפני אביה ואמה וחוננתה. כיון שראו אחיה כך נתביישו ונתנו פניהם בקרקע וקראו בגדיהם, ועמדו עליה להרגה, אמרה להם שמעוני אחיי ודודי, ומה אם בשביל שעמדתי לפני צדיקים ערומה בלי שום עבירה הרי אתם מתקנאים בי, ואין אתם מתקנאים למסרני ביד ערל להתעלול בי! הלא יש לכם ללמוד משמעון ולוי אחי דינה שלא היו אלא שנים וקנאו לאחותם והרגו כרך כשכם ומסרו נפשם על ייחוד של מקום ועזרם ה' ולא הכלימם, ואתם חמשה אחים יהודה יוחנן יונתן שמעון ואלעזר, ופרחי כהונה יותר ממאתים בחור, שימו בטחונכם על המקום והוא

יעזור אתכם שטאמר כי אין מעצור לה' להושיע וגו' (שמואל א' י"ד). ופתחה פיה בבכיה ואמרה רבש"ע אם לא תחוס עלינו חוס על קדושת שמך הגדול שנקרא עלינו ונקום היום נקמתנו. באותה שעה נתקנאו אחיה ואמרו בואו ונטול עצה מה נעשה, נטלו עצה זה מזה ואמרו בואו ונקח אחותינו ונליכנה אצל המלך הגדול ונאמר לו אחותנו בת כהן גדול ואין בכל ישראל גדול מאבינו, וראינו שלא תלין אחותינו עם ההגמון, אלא עם המלך שהוא גדול כמותינו, ונכנסנו עליו ונהרגו ונצא, ונתחיל אח"כ בעבדיו ובשריו, והשם יעזרנו וישגבנו, נטלו עצה וכו' ועשה להם הקב"ה תשועה גדולה, ושמעו בת קול מבית קדש הקדשים: כל ישראל נצחו טליא באנטוכיא, כן יעשה המקום ישועה בימינו אלה.

MA'ASEH YEHUDIT (MY)

אוצר מדרשים (אייזנשטיין) עמוד רג

ויהי בימי אליפורני מלך יון מלך גדול וחזק, והוא כבש מדינות רבות ומלכים חזקים והחריב טירותם והיכליהם שרף באש, בשנת עשר שנים למלכותו שם פניו לעלות ולכבוש ירושלם עיר הקדש, ויקבץ ק"ך אלפים שולפי חרב וצ"ב אלף בעלי חצים, ויאמר המלך אליהם הנה עם בני ישראל אשר בירושלם משונים בדתיהם ואת דתי המלך אינם עושים, הוות בקרבה ולא ימיש מרחובה תוך ומרמה, עתה קומו ונקומה עליה למלחמה ולא יזכר שם ישראל עוד. ויען מלך אחד אשר היה כבוש תחת ידו במלחמה ויאמר לו, חדל לך המלך מאלהי עולם אלהי ישראל אלהי האלהים, ה' גבור מלחמה מושל גבורתו עולם, עיניו בגוים ותצפינה הסודרים להלחם עם עמו ונחלתו לא ימוט, ולא עוד אלא שכל אר"ה נקראו נכרים וישראל הם עם קרובו, ומי יגש ויערב לבו להלחם עמם! לך התבונן במלכים הראשונים שעברו, על שפשטו ידיהם בישראל מה עלתה בהם, כמו פרעה וסנחריב ויתר המלכים, נבול תבול אתה וכל העם אשר ברגליך, ולא תוכל להלחם בישראל אשר מנשרים קלו ומארויות גברו, הלא המה הגבורים אשר מעולם אנשי שם. ויהי כשמוע אליפורני המלך את דברי המלך ההוא ויקצוף המלך מאד וחמתו בערה בו לאמר מי הוא זה ואיזה הוא אשר מלאו לבו לאמר כי עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממני ואשר כח בהם לעמוד בפני חיילי הרבים כחול הים, ומי בכל אלהי הארצות אשר הצילו את ארצם מידי כי יציל ה' את ירושלם מידו, ויחר אפו מאד ויצו לייסר את המלך ההוא בשפטים גדולים כי דיבר סרה על עוצם חיילותיו לאמר כי לא יעצרו כח בפני עם בני ישראל, ויצו המלך לאנשי הצבא לאסרו בנחשתים ולהוליכו אל מחנה העברים לירושלם באף ובחמה ובקצף גדול, לאמר ככה יעשה לאיש על אשר דיבר טוב על ישראל, קום לך אתם והיה באבדי את ישראל תפול גם אתה כמוהם כנפול בני עולה. ויקחו אותו עבדיו וביאו אותו למחנה ישראל פתח שערי ירושלם, וישבו אל אדונייהם. והמלך בא ברחובות ירושלם אסור בכבלי ברזל וימצא שם שרי צבאות ישראל עזיהו בן מיכה וכרמי, ויתמחו איש אל אחיו וישאלו את פיו ויספר להם את כל אשר קרהו על כי דיבר טוב על ה' ועל ישראל עמו, ואשר צוה המלך למסור אותו ביד ישראל, להמיתו כהריק חרבו בישראל, ואשר אמר ארדוף אשיג אריק חרבי תורישמו ידו, וחירף מערכות אלהים לאמר מי בכל אלהי הארצות אשר הציל את ארצו מידי כי יציל ה' את ירושלם. ויהי כשמעם שרי ישראל את דברי המלך רעדה אחזתם שם חיל כיולדה, ויבואו אל מקדש ה' אלהי ישראל וישתחוו לה' בבכי ובצעקה גדולה ומרה לאמר, ה' אלהי ישראל יושב הכרובים אתה הוא האלהים לבדך לכל ממלכות הארץ אתה עשית את השמים ואת הארץ הטה ה' אונך ושמע פקח עיניך וראה ושמע דברי אליפורני אשר חירף מערכות אלהים חיים ומלך עולם, אמנם ה' החריבו מלכי אשור (יון) את הגוים ואת ארצם ונתנו את אלהיהם באש כי לא אלהים המה כי מעשה ידי אדם עץ ואבן ויאבדם, ועתה ה' אלהינו הושיענו נא מידו, שפוך חמתך על הגוים אשר לא ידעוך ועל הממלכות אשר בשמך לא קראו כי לא תעזוב הבוטחים בשמך וכי תשפיל הגבר הבוטח באדם ובגבורת הסוס יבטח. ויהי ככלותם את תפלתם לפני ה' נחמו את המלך ההוא וידברו על לבו לאמר ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו אשר הודעת את שמו ואת גבורתו יהיה מגן עזרך והוא יראך את מפלת האויב הרע הזה בנקום ה' אלהינו נקם נקמת בני ישראל, ויהי ה' עמך ואתנו תשב כטוב בעיניך, ויבא עוזיהו ויקבלו בביתו ויעש לו משתה גדול, ואח"כ נתקבצו העם ויתפללו כל הלילה וישאלו עזר מאת ה'.

ויהי ממחרת היום ההוא צוה אליפורני לעלות למלחמה עליהם, והעם הרגליים אנשי חיל שהיו ק"ך אלפים איש והפרשים י"ב אלפים נתקבצו יחדיו בכח גדול וביד חזקה נגד בני ישראל. וכאשר ראו בני ישראל את הריבויים ישבו על הארץ ויעלו עפר על ראשם ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה' להושיעם מיד אויביהם, ויקחו את כלי זינם וישינו בדרכים הצרים אשר בהם נתיב החר וישמרו אותו יומם ולילה. ואליפורני בלכתו סביב ההר מצא סילוני המים אשר חוץ לעיר ויצו לנתוש ולנתוץ ולהאביד ולהרוס אותם. ויבואו חיילי הצבא אל המלך לאמר לו כי בני ישראל אינם בוטחים לא בחנית ולא בחיצים ולא בקשת אפס ההרים הרמים וכל הגבעות מחזיקים אותם. ואתה למען תוכל להם בלי מערכת מלחמה שום תשים שומרים על מקורי

המים לבלתי יוכלו להעלות מים מהם, ותמית אותם בצמא מבלי חרב, ואז ימסרו לך את העיר מפני הצמא ויטב הדבר בעיני המלך ולפני כל שלישי וישם שרי מאות על מקורי המים מסביב, ויהי כעשרים יום אחרי שימו משמרה זאת נתמעטו המים מהבורות ומהפלגים לכל יושבי ירושלם ויצמא העם למים, ויתאספו בני ישראל אל עוזיהו, כל האנשים והנשים בחורים ונערים יחד כולם פה אחד לאמר ישפוט אלהים בינינו ובינך כי הרעות לנו ומאנת להענות מפני המלך ועל כן ימסור אלהים אותנו בידיהם ואין עוזר ונפלנו לעיניהם מרוב הצמאון, ועתה נמסור עצמנו בלב שלם אל המלך, הלא טוב לנו לעבוד לה' והיינו עבדים לאליפורני ממותנו בצמא ומהיותנו דראון לכל בשר בראותנו בנינו ובנותינו מתים לפנינו. מעידים אנחנו היום את השמים ואת הארץ ואת אלהי אבותינו הפוקד עלינו כפי עונותינו כי תמסור תיכף ומיד את העיר ביד המלך ונמות מהרה לפי חרב. ויהי כשמעם את צעקת בני ישראל כל שרי צבאות ישראל צעקו צעקה גדולה ומרה ויבכו בכי גדול תוך ההיכל ויצעקו אל ה' קול אחד לאמר, חטאנו עם אבותינו העוית והרשענו, אלהים אל דמי לך אל תחרש ואל תשקוט אל, כי הנה אויבך יהמיון ומשנאיך נשאו ראש על עמך יערימו סוד ויתיעצו על צפונך, אמרו לכו ונכחידם מגוי ולא יזכר שם ישראל עוד, אשר אמרו נרשה לנו את נאות אלהים, כי נועצו לב יחדיו עלך ברית יכרותו. אנא האל אב הרחמן חמול על עמך ועל נחלתך ואל תמסור בני בריתך ביד העמים אשר לא ידעוך, למה יאמרו הגוים איה אלהיהם, וברוב גאוןך תהרוס קמך. עשה להם כמדון כסיסרא כיבין בנחל קישון נשמדו בעין דאר היו דומן לאדמה שיתמו נדיבמו כעורב וכזאב וכזבח וכצלמונע כל נסיכמו. וכאשר כלו הצעקות והבכי קם עוזיהו ועינו זולגות דמעות ויאמר אליהם חזקו ויאמץ לבבכם אחי ונקוה חסד מה' עוד חמשה ימים אם לא יושיע ה' לנו נעשה כאשר דברתם.

ויהי כשמוע את הדברים האלה יהודית האלמנה בת בארי והיא היתה יראת ה' מאד, ותעש לה יהודית בעלית ביתה חדר מיוחד להתפלל בו ותשב שם עם נערותיה, והיא היתה מענה בצום נפשה כל ימי חייה, והיתה יפת תואר מאד, ותהי יהודית נושאת חן בעיני כל רואיה. וכאשר שמעה כי דבר עוזיהו למסור את העיר אחר חמשה ימים שלחה לקרוא את הכהנים ועוזיהו וכרמי ויבואו אליה ותאמר אליהם יהודית מה זה הדבר אשר חשב עוזיהו לעשות למסור את העיר ביד האויב, אם לא תבוא ישועתנו תוך חמשה ימים, ומי אתם כי נסיתם את ה'! לא זו הדרך לקבל חסד המקום ב"ה רק להעיר חרון אף ה', האפס לנצח חסדו כי שמתם גבול לחסדיו ולרחמיו לשום לכם יום כפי בחירתכם, חלילה לסור מאחרי ה', כי חסדי ה' לא תמו ולא כלו רחמיו, טוב ויחיל דומם לתשועת ה' כי לא יזנח לעולם ה', כי אם הוגה וריחם כרוב חסדיו, רגע ידבר על גוי ועל ממלכה וניחם על הרעה. ועתה לכו ונשובה אל ה' כי ארך אפים הוא ונשאלה ממנו סליחה וכפרה על זה העון בבכי ובצום ואל אלהינו כי ירבה לסלוח, כי עת צרה היא ליעקב וממנה יושע וכאשר נבהלה נפשינו מפני זדונם כן נגילה ונשמחה בישועתו, כי לא הרשענו כאבותינו אשר עזבוה ויקטרו לאלהים אחרים וע"כ נמסרו לחרב ולשבי ולחרפה ולכלימה ביד שונאיהם, ואנחנו לא נדע אל אחר זולתי אלהינו אשר אין עוד מלבדו, והוא ידרוש דמינו מיד קמינו למען כבוד שמו. ועתה אחי אתם הכהנים לה' ונפש כל עמו ישראל תלויות בכם ואתם חזקו ויאמץ לבבכם ולב כל ישראל לאמר אליהם כי אבותינו הובאו בנסיון לנסות אותם אם באמת אהבו את ה' אלהיהם ואתם תאמרו אליהם כי אברהם אבינו עמד בנסיונו של מקום וה' אהבו, וכן יצחק ויעקב ושאר האבות נמצאו נאמנים לפני ה' ביסורין, וכל מי שלא עמד בנסיון ביראת ה' והתלוננו לפני ה' נגפו לפני המשחית וימותו במכת הנחשים, ועתה התבוננו וראו כי כאשר ייסר איש את בנו ה' אלהינו מייסרנו ולמות לא נתנו בעבור שמו הגדול והנורא.

ויאמרו אליה עוזיהו והכהנים: צדק כל אמרי פיך אין בהם נפתל ועקש, אשר נואלנו ואשר חטאנו לשום גבול לישועת ה' ולכן העתירי בעדינו כי ישרה את ויראת ה' את. ותאמר להם יהודית אנכי אתפלל לפני ה' בעדכם, וגם אתה העתירו אל ה' בעדי להקים את עצתי אשר חשבתי לעשות לנקום נקמת בני ישראל מאת היונים. ולכן לעת ערב תעמדו בשערי העיר ואצא אני ושפחתי עמי בלילה ואתם אל תחקרו ממני אנה אני באה, אפס כי תמיד תהיה תחיתכם בפיכם לה' אלהי ישראל לפקוד את עמו בעבור כבוד שמו. ויאמר אליה עוזיהו לכי לשלום ואלהי ישראל יתן את שאלתך אשר שאלת מעמו, ויהי ה' עמך לנקום אותנו מאויבינו אמן. ויהודית נכנסה בחדרה ותלבש שק ואפר ותעל עפר על ראשה ותשתחוה לה' ותשפוך

וכרוע מעלליהם, ואבוא ואגיד לך כי תעבור בכל חוצות ירושלם ויהיו כל עדת בני ישראל כצאן אשר אין להם רועה ולא יחרץ כלב לשונו נגדך, כי כל זה נאמר לי במראות האלהים ולמען חרות אף ה' עליהם שולחתי להגיד לך כל זה. וייטב הדבר בעיני המלך ובעיני עבדיו ויראו האנשים ויתמהו בראותם חכמתה כי רבה ויאמרו איש אל רעהו, אין אשה משכלת כזאת בכל הארץ ביופי בתן ובשכל, ויאמר לה המלך הטיב אלהים עמך אשר שלחך לפני למען תמסור את עמך בידינו, ובעבור דברך הטובים אם כה יעשה לי אלהיך ואלהי, את תהיה ראשונה במלכות, והי שמעך בכל הארץ. ויצו המלך להביא אותה בבית נכותו, ויצו להאכילה מעל שולחנו, ותאמר לו יהודית לא תוכל אמתך לאכול מאשר צוית לתת לי פן יקראני אסון, אבל אוכל מאשר הבאתי עמי, ויאמר אליה המלך ואם יחסר לך אשר הבאת עמך מה נעשה לך? ותאמר יהודית חי נפשך אדוני שלא יחסר לי מזה עד אשר יקים ה' את דברי אשר חשבתי לעשות. ותשאל עוד בעת בואה אל האוהל רשות לצאת בלילה ובעת עלות עמוד השחר חוץ מן המחנה להתפלל לפני ה' אלהים. ותצא בכל לילה ולילה מחוץ למחנה לטבול את גופה תוך ברכת המים ובעלותה מלטבול שפכה את נפשה בבכי ואנקה לפני ה' אלהי ישראל לישר את דרכה בישועת עמה; ובאה אל האוהל בטהרתה ותאכל בסעודת הערב.

ויהי ביום השלישי ויעש המלך משתה גדול לכל שריו ועבדיו, ויאמר אל סריסו שומר הפלגשים לאמר לך נא ראה אם תוכל לפתות ולרצות את יהודית הזאת שאבוא אליה, ואז בא הסריס אל יהודית ויאמר לה אל תבושי ואל תכלמי לבוא אל אדוני ואולי ייטב לך לאכול ולשתות עמו? ותאמר לו יהודית מי אנכי אשר אמנע מאדוני כל אשר ייטב לו וכל הישר בעיניו אעשה, כי כל אשר יחפוץ אדוני המלך הוא טוב לי כל ימי. ותקח יהודית ותלבש בגדי תפארתה ותבא ותעמוד לפניו, ויהי כראות המלך את יפיה תיכף הוכה ונחלה מאהבתו אותה ויאמר לה המלך אכלי לחמך בשמחה ושתי בלב טוב יינך כי מצאת חן בעיני. ותאמר לו יהודית אשתה אדוני כי שמח לבי ויגל כבודי היום שמחה רבה מכל ימי חיי, ותשב ותאכל ותפתח את נאד החלב ותשת וגם את המלך השקתה וישמח המלך עמה מאד וישתה יין הרבה מאד מאשר שתה כל ימי חייו.

ויהי אחרי כן הלכו כל עבדי המלך איש איש אל מקומו, ויסגור סריס המלך את דלתי האהל אשר שם יהודית עם המלך וילך לו, ויהודית לבדה באהל ואליפורני המלך במטותו ישן כמות, ותאמר יהודית אל אמתה לעמוד בחוץ לשמור לפני האהל ותעמוד יהודית לפני המטה ותתפלל בדמעות רק שפתיה נעות וקולה לא ישמע, וכה אמרה בתפלתה: חזקני ה' אלהי ישראל ואנקמה את נקמת עבדיך ישראל, לחזק בריחי שערי ירושלם עיר מקדשך, סמכני כאמרתך ואל תבישני משברי בחוץ עוֹזִיךְ. וככלותה להתפלל קרבה אל העמוד אשר בראש מטותו ושלפה חרבו של אליפורני עצמו אשר היה תלוי בעמוד, ובשלפה את החרב תפשה אותו בשערי ראשו ותאמר חזקני נא האלהים והכתה פעמים על צוארו וחכתה את ראשו, ותשלח את אמתה ותקח את כלי מלחמתו אשר היו תלויים בעמודים והכתה את כל גופו מכף רגל ועד ראש אין בו מתוס פצע וחבורה ומכה טריה, ותתן את ראש אליפורני ביד שפחתה לשום אותו באמתחתה, ותצאנה שתיהן יחדיו כמנהגן להתפלל ותעבורנה את כל המחנות ואין פוצה פה ומצפצף עליהן כי כן צוה עליהן המלך, ובסובבן את העמק באו בשערי העיר ותאמר יהודית לשומרי החומות מרחוק בקול ששון ובקול שמחה פתחו שערים כי עמנו אל אשר עשה הישועה הגדולה הזאת בישראל.

ויהי כאשר שמעו אנשי העיר את קולה ויקראו את כהני ה' ויאספו כלם מגדול ועד קטן, ויצאו לקראתה בשמחה ובשירים ובהלל ובתודות לה', והדליקו נרות בכל חוצות ירושלם ובחצריהם ובטירותם ויעטרו כלם בבגדים חמודים וכלי יקר אבנים טובות ומרגליות לכבוד ולתפארת, ויביאו את יהודית אל תוך העיר בשמחה גדולה, כי חשבו לבלתי ראות פניה עוד, ויסובבה כל ישראל סביב, ותעל יהודית במקום גבוה ותחס את כל העם, ויהס העם ויעמדו ולא ענו עוד. אז ענתה יהודית בקולה קול עז לאמר: הללי ירושלם את ה' הללי אלהיך ציון כי חזק בריחי שערך ובירך בניך בקרבך; הללו את ה' אלהינו, הללוהו בגבורותיו הללוהו כרוב גדלו, אשר לא עזב חסדו משפחתו וימכור ה' בידי אשה את שוטאנו ועוכר ישראל בלילה הזה. ותוציא מאמתחתה את ראש האויב צורר היהודים אליפורני הרשע. ועתה אחי חי ה' כי שמרני מלאך

ה' בצאתי מכאן ובישבי שמה ובשובי הנה כי לא נטמאתי והביאתי ה' אלהיכם בשמחה ובישועה והמליט נפשי בישועתכם, הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו. וכל ישראל השתחוה לה' אפים ארצה ויאמרו אליה ברוך ה' אשר בידו השפיל אויביו המחרף והמגדף מערכות אלהים, כל גוים סבבנו בשם ה' כי אמילם דחה דחיתנו לנפול וה' עזרנו כי לא בזה ולא שיקץ ענות עני ולא הסתיר פניו ממנו, ובשוענו אליו שמע אלינו. ועזוהו נשיא ישראל אמר אליה ברוכה את לאל עליון מכל הנשים באוהל תבורך, ברוך ה' אשר ברא את השמים ואת הארץ ואשר הצליח את דרכיך להביא ראש מלך אויביו צורר היהודים, והגדיל היום את שמך ולא ימוש זכר תהלתך מפי כל האנשים אשר יזכרו את חסדי ה' לעולם, כי לא חמלת על נפשך בעת צרה ויגון עמך, ויענו כל העם אמן ואמן. ויקראו אל המלך אשר היה עומד בבית עזוהו אשר דיבר טוב על ישראל, ותאמר לו יהודית ה' אלהי ישראל אשר הודעת את שמו ואת גבורתו ואמרת כי הוא יקום נקמתנו מאויביו, הנה הוא יתברך שבר ראש כל הרשעים בלילה הזה בידך, ולמען תדע כי כן הוא הנה זה ראש אליפורני אשר בזזנו ובעזות לבו מאס את אלהי ישראל, וישטוס אותך להרגך לאמר כאשר נכה עם ישראל תפול ביניהם וחרבי יעבור בך. וכאשר ראה המלך החסיד החזק את ראש אליפורני ויפול על פניו ארצה ויאמר כן יאבדו כל אויביך ה', ויפול על רגלי יהודית וישתחוה לה ויאמר אליה ברוכה את מאלהיך בכל אהלי יעקב, כי כל גוי עם ועם אשר ישמע את שמעך יהללו לך ויברכו את שם ה' אלהי ישראל.

ותאמר יהודית אל כל העם: שמעו נא לי אחי ועמי ותלו את הראש הזה על ראש חומותינו, והיה כאשר יזרח השמש ולקחתם כל אחד מכם את כלי אינו ותצאו בתרועת מלחמה, ואל תדרו למטה אפס כי תקעתם ותריעו, וכאשר ישמעו את קול תרועת המלחמה ילכו אל שרי חילם לעוררו למלחמה, ובבוא השרים באהל אליפורני ימצאו אותו מתגולל בדמו, תפול עליהם אימתה ופחד, וכראותכם אותם בורחים רדפו מהר אחריהם בחזק כי ה' יתן אותם תחת רגליכם. ויעשו כן בני ישראל וכאשר האיר היום תלו על ראש החומות את ראש האויב הצורר, ויקח כל איש ואיש כלי מלחמתו בידו, ויצאו ויתקעו ויריעו תרועה גדולה, וכאשר ראו כן שומרי החומות באו באהל מלכם אליפורני והשמיעו קול גדול בפתח האהל להעירו, וכאשר באו השרים השלישים אמרו לסריסים לא עת התמחמה לנו ועוררו את המלך כי יצאו העכברים מחוריהן ופיתו אותנו למלחמה, אז דחק ונכנס סריס המלך שומר הפלגשים באהל אליפורני ויעמוד לפני קלעי מטתו ויספוק את כפיו אולי ישן הוא ויקץ, כי חשב כי עודנו ישן עם יהודית, וכאשר לא הרגיש דבר קרב אל המטה ויסר את הקלעים וירא גוף אליפורני מושלך ארצה ומתגולל בדמו וראשו אינו, ויצעק צעקה גדולה בבכי ויקרע את בגדיו ויבא באהל יהודית ולא מצאה, ויצא החוצה אל העם ויאמר אליהם אשה אחת עבריה עשתה חרעה הגדולה הזאת, והנה אדונינו המלך מת ומושלך על הארץ ומתגולל בדמו וראשו אינו. וכאשר שמעו כן שרי החיל קרעו כולם את בגדיהם ונפלה עליהם אימה חשכה גדולה ותהי צעקה גדולה ומרה במחנותם, וכאשר שמעו כל החיל כי נהרג גבורם יצאה מהם כל עצה ויברחו כולם מפני הפחד והיראה, ובברחם מפני העכברים הרודפים אחריהם חמושים עזבו כל רכושם ויניסו במשעול הכרמים ובנתיבות ההרים. וכאשר ראו כן בני ישראל ירדו מן ההרים וירדפו אחריהם בתרועת חצוצרות ובקול שופר חזק מאד, והיו מכים את כל הנמצאים מכה גדולה מכת חרב, וירדפום עד חחרמה, ויתר העם ירדו אל מחנה האויב וישללו את כל שללם, שלל הרבה מאד אין מספר, בצאן ובקר ובסוס ובכל מטלטלי אהליהם, וכולם נתעשרו משלליהם מקטן ועד גדול, ובזמן שלשים יום לא נשלם שללם אשר שללו בני ישראל, רק כל עושר אליפורני וכל רכושו ניתן ליהודית, זהב וכסף ומרגליות ואבני יקר אשר לו, הכל ניתן לה מאת העם. ואז המלך אשר בבית עזוהו שדבר טוב על ישראל, בראותו הנס אשר עשה ה' אלהי ישראל עזב מעבוד האלילים והאמין בה' וימול את בשר ערלתו ויבא לחסות תחת כנפי השכינה, הוא וכל ילדי ביתו עד היום הזה. וכל עדת ישראל ששים ושמונים עם יהודית, ותצאנה כל הנשים אחריה בתופים ובמחולות היו אומרות הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו, את יהודית אם בישראל, את תהלת ירושלם, את שמחת ישראל, את כבוד עמינו כי עשית בכח חזק ואמץ לבך ויד ה' היתה עמך לחזק אותך, ומבורכת תהיה לעולם, ויען כל העם אמן ואמן. וזקנים עם נערים ישמחו ויעלצו במצלתים ובנבלים. ותשר יהודית את השירה הזאת לה' ותאמר: הללו את ה' בתוף שירו לה' במחול, שירו לה' שיר חדש הודו וקראו בשמו, ה' איש מלחמה ה' שמו, ה' אלהים גדול אתה ונורא בכח ואין דומה לך, כל הבריות יעבדוך ויודוך ה' כל מעשיך, כי אמרת ותהי ושלחת את רוחך ונברא, ההרים והיסודות ירעשו וכדונג

נמסו מלפני גבורתך, ימינך ה' נאדרי בכח ימינך ה' תרעץ אויב, מי כמוך באלים ה' מי כמוך
נאדר בקדש נורא תהלות עושה פלא.

ויהי אחר התשועה הגדולה הזאת, כאשר נטהרו כל איש ישראל, העלו עולות כלם, עולות
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MIDRASH L'HANUKKAH (ML)

אוצר מדרשים (אייזנשטיין) עמוד קפה

ישתבח שמו של הקב"ה שהוא לבדו דר במרום ושוכן על שלש מאות ותשעים רקיעים, ובכל רקיע יש שם כסא כבוד עליו ובכל אחד ואחד יש לו משרתים שרפים ואופנים וכרובים וגלגלים. ואל תתמה בדבר זה שהרי מלך בשר ודם שיש לו כמה מקומות יש לו בתים ועליות ותחתונים, כ"ש הקב"ה שהעולם שלו וכן השמים בנים משלש מאות ותשעים רקיעים. ובזמן שבית המקדש היה קיים והיו ישראל עושים רצונו של מקום היה הקב"ה יושב על ערבות של רקיע שביעי מרוב אהבה לישראל. ולאחר שחטאו ישראל עלה למעלה למעלה עד ג' מאות ותשעים רקיעים שנאמר אלך ואשובה אל מקומי.

דרש מרי בר מר, מאי דכתיב כי נר מצוה ותורה אור, תלה הכתוב המצוה בנר, מה נר זה אינו עומד לאדם אלא לשעה אף המצוה אינה מגינה אלא לשעה, והתורה תלה באור, מה אור זה, מאיר לעולם אף תורה מאירה בעוה"ז ובעוה"ב שנאמר בהתהלךך תנחה אותך בעוה"ז ובשכבך תשמור עליך בעוה"ב. אמר רבא דרחים רבנן הוי ליה בנין רבנן, דמוקיר רבנן הוי ליה חתנותא רבנן, דדחיל מרבנן הוא גופיה הוי צורבא מרבנן, ואי לאו בר הכי הוא משתמעון מילי כצורבא מרבנן. אמר רב הונא הרגיל בנר חנוכה הויין ליה בנים תלמידי חכמים, הזהיר במזוזה זוכה לדירה נאה, הזהיר בקידוש היום זוכה וממלא גרבי יין.

תנו רבנן, בימי מלכות יון הרשעה גזרו על ישראל שכל מי שיש לו בריח בתוך ביתו יחזקק עליו שאין לשונאי ישראל חלק ונחלה באלהי ישראל, מיד הלכו ישראל ועקרו בריחים שבבתיהם. ועוד גזרו שכל מי שיש לו שור יכתוב על קרנו שאין לשונאי ישראל חלק באלהי ישראל, הלכו ישראל ומכרו שוריהם. ועוד גזרו עליהם שיהיו בועלין נשיהן נדות הלכו ישראל ופרשו מנשיהן. ועוד גזרו שכל מי שנטשא אשה תבעל להגמון תחלה ואח"כ תחזור לבעלה. ונהגו בדבר הזה שלש שנים ושמונה חדשים עד שנשאת בתו של יוחנן כ"ג, כיון שרצו להוליכה אצל אותו ההגמון פרעה ראשה וקרעה בגדיה ועמדה ערומה בפני העם, מיד נתמלא יהודה ואחיו חימה עליה ואמרו הוציאוה לשריפה ואל יתגלה דבר זה למלכות מפני סכנת נפשות, שהענין פניה להיות ערומה בפני כל העם הזה. אז אמרה לו היאך אתבזה לפני אחי ורעי ולא אתבזה בעיני ערל וטמא שאתם רוצים למעול בי ולהולך אותי לשכב אצלו. כיון ששמע יהודה וחביריו כך נועצו יחדיו להרוג ההגמון, מיד הלבישו הנערה בלבוש מלכות ועשו חופה של הדס מבית חשמונאי עד ביתו של הגמון ובאין כל בעלי נבל ונכור ובעלי זמר והיו מזמרים ומרקדים עד שבאו לבית ההגמון. כיון ששמע ההגמון כך אמר לשריו ועבדיו ראו אותם שהם מגדולי ישראל מזרע אהרן הכהן כמה הם שמחים לעשות רצוני ראויים הם לכבוד גדול, וצוה להוציא חוץ שריו ועבדיו ונכנס יהודה וחביריו עם אחותו אצל ההגמון וחתכו ראשו ובזזו כל אשר לו. והרגו שריו ועבדיו ודרסו היונים עד גמירא חוץ מעיקר המלכות. וישראל שהיו בעיר היו ברית וברעד בשביל אותם בחורי ישראל. יצאה בת קול ואמרה נצחו טליא דאזלו למעבד קרבא באנטוכיא וחזרו אותו בחורים וסגרו השערים ועשו תשובה ועסקו בתורה ובגמילות חסדים. כיון ששמע מלך יונים שהרגו ישראל הגמון שלו קבץ כל עמו ובא לפני ירושלם והביא אותה במצור, ונפחדו מאד היהודים, והיתה שם אשה אלמנה יהודית שמה ולקחה שפחתה והלכה אצל שערי ירושלם ואמרה הניחו אותי לצאת שמא יעשה המקום נס על ידי, ופתחו לה ויצאה, והלכה לפני המלך, ויאמר לה מה תבקשי, ואמרה אדוני! בת גדולים מישראל אנכי ואחי נביאים ושמעתי שהיו מתנבאים שמחר תפול ירושלם בידך, כיון ששמע כך שמח שמחה גדולה. והיה לו אחד מחכמי שהיה רואה וחזוה בכוכבים והיה אומר רואה אני שישראל חוזרים בתשובה ואי אתה יכול להם, חזור למקומך, ונתמלא המלך חמה עליו וצוה לחטפו, ואסרו ידיו ורגליו לתלות אותו על העץ אצל ירושלם ויאמר המלך מחר כשתפול ירושלם בידנו נהרג אותה. והיה המלך מאמין לאותה יהודית ויאהב אותה ויאמר לה רצונך שתנשאי לי? ואמרה לו אדוני המלך איני ראויה אפילו לאחד מעבדיך, ואמנם כיון שלבך נוטה לזה תעביר כרוז בכל המחנה שכל מי שיראה שתי נשים הולכות אצל המעייין אל יפגעו בהן לפי שצריכה אני לילך לשם לרחוץ עצמי ולטבול. מיד העבירו הכרוז ועשתה כך, ועשה המלך משתה גדול ושתו ונשכרו, ואח"כ הלכו כל אחד ואחד לאוהליו והמלך ישב בחיקה וישן, והלכה אותה יהודית ונטלה סייף שלו וחתכה ראשו ופשטה סדין עליו, והלכה עם ראשו של

מלך אצל שערי ירושלים ואמרה פתחו לי השערים שכבר עשה הקב"ה נס על ידי, אמרו לה לא דיך שזנית וקלקלת אלא שבאת בעלילה עמנו, מיד הראה להם ראשו של מלך, כיון שראוהו פתחו השערים ויצאו והרימו קול שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד. כיון ששמעו יונים כך אמרו למחרת באים עלינו, והלכו למלך ומצאוהו בלא ראש ונפל עליהם אימה ופחד וברחו כלם, וירדפו ישראל אחריהם והרגו מהם כמה וכמה. כן יעשה הקב"ה נקמה בשונאינו מהרה ויחיש לנו ישועה ככתוב ובא לציון גואל.

דור הולך ודור בא והארץ לעולם עומדת, והכתיב והארץ כבגד תבלה! אלא אלו ישראל שנקראו ארץ שנאמר כי תהיו אתם ארץ חפץ. דור הולך ודור בא אלו אר"ה שבכל דור ודור יועצים על ישראל לאבדם והקב"ה מצילנו מידם שנאמר עמו אנכי בצרה אחלצוה ואכבדהו. א"ר אלעזר בא וראה כמה חביבים ישראל לפני המקום שלעולם מקדים להם רפואה למכה שנאמר כרפאי לישראל. בא יון הרשעה וגזרו וחשכו עיניהם של ישראל ואמרו שכל מי שמזכיר שמו של הקב"ה ידקר בחרב, והרבה מישראל נהפכו למינות, והיה שם משומד אחד בליעל תתני בן פחת שמו, שהיה יועץ עצות רעות על ישראל ואמר שכל זמן שיקריבו קרבן של שחר ושל בין הערבים אינם נופלים בידכם, עמדו ובטלוהו, וחזר עוד אותו בליעל ואמר אלהיהם שונא זימה, אם תוכלו להכשילם בזנות תמשלו עליהם, עמדו וגזרו שכל מי שיכתוב כתובה לאשתו יקרעו אצבעותיו. חזר ואמר מצוה אחת יש להם שאם לא יעשו אותה יאבדו מן העולם וזו הדלקת נר בבית המקדש, שנאמר להעלות נר תמיד וכתוב עליו תן חלק לשבעה וגם לשמונה, תן חלק לשבעה שכל מי שיש לו חלק בשבע נרות שהן מאירות תמיד בביהמ"ק וגם לשמונה ימי החג אין בריה יכולה להם, עמדו וטמאו כל השמנים שבביהמ"ק ולא נשתייר כ"א פך שמן שלא היו יודעים שהיה מונח תחת המזבח ונעשה נס והדליקו מאותו פך קטן שמונה ימים, ועמד הקב"ה וקבע להם שמונה ימי חנוכה שלא היה מועד עד עכשיו. אמר הקב"ה חשבתם לעקור שבעת הנרות ושמונה ימי החג הנני מביא עליכם שמונה ימים ושבעה בני חשמונאי שמאבדים אתכם מן העולם. אתם אמרתם שכל מי שיזכיר שמי ידקר בחרב, אני קובע הלל לשמי שמונה ימי חנוכה, ועליהם אמר דוד למנצח על השמינית.

חרבם תבוא בלבם וקשתותם תשברנה, אמר רשב"י אלו יונים שעשו מלחמה עם חשמונאי ובניו, ובשעה שנכנסו להיכל הלך יוני אחד ולקח ספר תורה והביא חנה בת יוחנן כ"ג שלא היה כיפיה בעולם והיתה נישאת לאלעזר בן חשמונאי, ורצה אותו יוני לבוא עליה בפני בעלה ואביה, אמר יוחנן כ"ג למתתיהו אני ושלשה בני ואתה ושבעה בניך הרי י"ב כנגד י"ב שבטים, מובטח אני שהקב"ה עושה נס על ידינו. מיד הרים אלעזר הסייף והרג אותו היוני ואמר עזרי מעם ה' עושה שמים וארץ. א"ר יצחק ששים רבוא אלף גייסות הוו וכל אחד מהם היה לו אלף איש תחתיו שבאו עם גליסקס הרשע להלחם עם בית חשמונאי, והיה אומר אותו הרשע מה לנו לירוא? הם שנים עשר כנגד חיל גדול! שמא תאמר אלהיהם יוציא כוכבים ממסילות ויעשה מלחמה עמנו ושודדים אותנו כדרך שעשה עם סיסרא, הרינו סכין עצמנו בדם חזיר ובש"ז של סוס שאין נוגעים אותנו. ואם תאמרו יביא מבול, כבר נשבע בשמו הגדול שלא יביא מבול לעולם. אם תאמרו ישלח נחשים ועקרבים ודובים כדרך שעשה בכותיים הרי אנו רוכבין על פילים שאין חיות נוגעות בהם. והיו ישראל עומדים בתפלה ואמרו רבש"ע גלוי וידוע לפניך שלא עמדנו להלחם כנגדם אלא בעבור שמך הגדול שלא יתבזה בגוים, ואם אינך עושה נס על ידינו יאמרו אין לו עצה, וכתוב בך גדול העצה ורב העלילה. מיד נתגלגלו רחמיו של הקב"ה ואמר שתוקו בניי, התיצבו וראו נקמת ה' אשר יעשה בגוים, והביא כל השרים (שרי מעלה) של שבעים אומות ואמר להם כל אחד מכם יהרוג את שלו מן החיל של אותו רשע, ואם ינוס אחד מהם הרי נפשו תחת נפשו, שנאמר ביום ההוא יפקוד ה' על צבא המרום במרום וגו'. מיד ירדו לארץ וכל יוני שהיה חץ על קשתו לזרוק בישראל היה המלאך מחזירו ונועץ בלבן, שנאמר קשת גבורים חתים וגם חרבם תבוא בלבם. והיו בני חשמונאי רואין זה את זה ואמרו ה' ילחם לכם ואתם תחרישון. תניא שלש שנים לא היה אדם יכול לעבור שם מפני ריחם, ושבע שנים זרעו ישראל שדותיהם וכרמיהם בלא זבל מדם שלהם, ועשרים ושלוש שנים הסיקו ישראל מרומחיהם וקשתם, ועליהם אמר הכתוב שם רשעים ירקב, ועל בית חשמונאי וכיוצא בהם זכר צדיק לברכה. וחזרו לביתם לשלום, ולא מצאו שמן טהור אלא פך קטנה שהיה בשיתין המזבח ולא היה שמן אלא כדי להדליק לילה אחד ונעשה נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים, ולפיכך קבעו שמונת ימי חנוכה. תם מדרש לחנוכה.

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