

Dedication:

My friend Shaul and I never agree, and end up arguing almost every day. We sit sipping tea and munching feta cheese on whole wheat bread at a stone table.

in this beautiful valley, the Tsofim Valley in Jerusalem, full of pine trees, rocky limestone slopes, burial caves and ritual baths used by our ancestors at the time of the second temple. Only the crows were party to our dialectical altercations

The book you are now reading is the fruit of these discussions. Without Shaul's pedantic questions this book could never have been written.

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Part One: The world before (Historical & Theological context)

The Edict of Antiochus

“You Monotheists won’t need this anymore.” All old Isaiah the synagogue sexton’s tearful pleas were of no avail. The Seleucid soldiers ripped the precious bronze plaque from the wall, throwing it to the ground like a piece of junk. The troops guffawed with laughter, " Orders

straight from the king, old Jew.” The tablet was the most prized possession of the Antioch Jewish Community. It bore witness to the founder’s promise to the Jews of Antioch. “For loyalty to the emperor, I Seleucus Nicator, declare the Jews citizens in the cities which I have built in Asia, and in the lower Syria, and in the metropolis itself, and give them privileges equal to those of the Macedonians and Greeks.”

It was to be expected: Antiochus IV considered himself god manifest, and

"bringer of victory". Currency depicted him with the radiant crown of the sun god, and the features of Zeus. He demanded sanctification of himself as Theos Epiphanus. He was consumed by self-glorification. His building projects in the city of Antioch and Athens are evidence of his obsession with promoting Greek culture and his own divine status. He built the Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens. In Jerusalem, he built the Akra, a fortified citadel in the city of David to control the Jewish temple, and a gymnasium, a key symbol of Hellenic culture. He built a new city quarter called Epiphanes; projects there included a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus, a bouleuterion and an aqueduct (where the

architect Cossutius' name was found inscribed)

He would not allow the existence of a nation who propagated a one-unitary god, besides himself.

Antiochus Epiphanes becomes king

Menelaus's appointment was the work of the new King of the Seleucid Empire. At that time more than 10000 Jews were living in Antioch and holding key positions in the governance of the city.

The ruler changed the policy of tolerance.

He had grown up in Athens, the heart of Paganism. A passionate admirer of

classical things, he wouldn't allow the gods to be trampled on by a silly idea of one god.

Jews are invited to settle in Antioch

Alexander the Great's policy of encouraging different religions in the lands he had conquered ensured peace and harmony, which endured for 200 years.

Following the conqueror's death in 323 BCE, Seleucus I took control of the empire's eastern territories. His realm—stretching from the Mediterranean to the

frontier of India—became known as the Seleucid Empire. He established his capital at Antioch, on the beautiful Orontes River, which he named in honor of his father, Antiochus.

Jews retired from the army received generous pensions and land in the new main city. Seleucus I Nicator's reaffirmation of the founder's policy of tolerance for all religions and equal rights for all citizens attracted more Monotheists, and the metropolis grew.

The kings following Seleucus were titled Antiochus. All reaffirmed the system of

equality for all inhabitants; Antiochus III reinforced the community, settling 2000 Jewish families in the region to help secure his dominions.

Judah ben Haim becomes the teacher for Antioch Jews

“Jews cannot live in a place where there is no Torah teacher. Where there is no Torah there is no bread, and without bread there is no Torah”, the aphorism was pronounced by the visitors from Antioch in search of a scholar who would be a teacher for their community.

“Judah ben Haim was the perfect choice.

He combined the qualities of a Torah scholar and a student of Greek language and literature. He’d be happy, serving the Jewish community and being surrounded by Greek culture.

“The contingent from the Syrian city allayed his concerns for friction between Polytheists and Monotheists.

“Relationships were so good” they said “that pagans attended synagogue services and Jews celebrated festivals of the pagan gods. The Jews of Antioch were respected. Every day the community leaders

received applications from Idolaters to convert to Judaism. It was also popular to join as members, without converting.” These people were known as believers.

“The king consults with us; we are honored citizens of the realm.”

At just twenty years old, Judah ben Haim had already earned a reputation as a determined opponent of Hellenism, despite his interest in Greek civilization.

The Jews of Antioch were very rich; he might even discover a bride whose father will support him in luxury while he continued his various studies.

Many pupils will flock to you, thirsting for Torah as a deer pants for water. You will need to establish an academy and appoint capable teachers to assist you. This is an office of great honor. As head of the institution, you will confer with the town's elders on the education of its youth, and they will be grateful for your counsel. Moreover, you will be able to guide the Jews of Antioch—and indeed, of the wider world—through times of crisis. For now, our people enjoy the favor of their Gentile neighbors, yet I sense darker days ahead. I do not believe monotheism and polytheism can long coexist

peacefully; one faith must eventually
eclipse the other. I am certain ours will
prevail—but the struggle will be fierce.

Judah marries Shifra, and she has two children

“Look, here come the wagons carrying the
new teacher from Jerusalem.” The
serious-minded, assertive daughter of the
head of the Jewish community of Antioch
looked over the tables in the guest room
of the magnificent synagogue of Antioch
to make sure that no delicacy was missing
from the mouth-watering treats that she

and her friends had prepared for the welcoming celebration.

Her father had already told her about his good looks, but she was more excited about his wisdom.

Shifra wasn't beautiful; in fact, she was plain, and her father had given up the idea of her marrying. The man who she married would acquire a substantial dowry. Candidates presented themselves, but the lady turned them down one after another.

"Judah managed only a momentary impression of girl. She was was tall, her

hair was hidden beneath a crimson shawl,
her black robes streaming behind her as
she swept from one side of the hall to the
other, consumed by her final tasks. The
very speed of her movements made the
cloth seem to float, lending her an
ethereal, angelic quality.

The teacher, thinking, as he descended
from the wagon, of the passage in the
Torah about Abraham's steward coming
to Mesopotamia, Abraham's birthplace to
find a wife for Isaac, his master's son, the
rushing figure stopped and stared at him.

It was as if the sun had entered and all
was shining.

The ancient sign which the servant had
received, Rebekah drawing water to
quench the traveler's thirst, repeated
itself.

His mind had wrestled with the problems
of setting up the educational institute.
The sight of the stalwart shape made
everything seem simple.

The Antiochian Jews were progressive
people and expected innovative ideas
from the young teacher from Jerusalem;

without words, Shifra had sent him a message: a Torah academy for women.

The wedding took place. Under the bridal canopy, Judah lifted the pearly-white diaphanous mantilla, uncovering the shining countenance of his betrothed.

Song burst out among the guests: “In the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom.” Shifra, on her head a wreath of flowers, eyes glistening, fixed on the face of her handsome spouse, as he intoned the words “Behold, by this

ring, thou art hallowed unto me according to the law of Moses and Israel.” From the document in his hands, he read the binding promise: “I will cherish, honor, support, and maintain you in accordance with the custom of Jewish husbands who hold dear honor, support and maintain their wives faithfully “

“What happened to your beautiful figure?” Judah exclaimed in amusement, to his wife. “All you think about are your pupils; now, all of a sudden you’re concerned about my figure. Don’t you know that you caused the bulge in my

belly? You have done what God commanded you: 'be fruitful and multiply. This has been growing in me for three months; soon a child will be born, then everyone will argue who she or he looks like."

"How much more can I endure the screams?" Judah exasperated, asked the stout, overbearing midwife. "Go to your school; the girl's mother and I will handle everything here." "Are you mad? I can't leave that poor screaming creature and carry on as if nothing is happening."

“It’s a boy.” Finally, the exclamation emanated from the sweaty woman who had taken the baby out of the mother in an easy birth. “My child, my very own child, thank you Lord, thank you.”

Rocking the pink bundle of tiny humanity, too and fro, as she held her son close to her breast,

“And his name in Israel shall be called Yohanan ben Judah.” Declared the mohel (circumciser). “Lehaim, to life,” the celebrating guests toasted the newborn.

Blessed are You, Lord. our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His

commandments and commanded us concerning circumcision.” “May it be your will, O Lord, that this infant grow into manhood and become a leader of his people, Israel.” Everyone intoned the blessing welcoming the child into the fold

Torah education for girls is introduced.

“A woman’s task in life doesn’t end in being a wife and a mother,” Shifre announced her oft-repeated motto. She soon returned to her occupation of teaching the word of god to the feminine sex. “That woman is going to raise a

generation of women who will
revolutionise Judaism. You mark my
words, warned the wagon driver,
watching the lively teacher on her way to
the school for young ladies while he
waited for a fare.

Yohanan was beginning to crawl when
Shifra found herself pregnant again. To
her great joy, she gave birth to a girl,
whom she called Miriam, well aware that
this was the name of Moses' rebellious
sister. Her deeds would prove how much
she resembled her namesake.

Jason is born in Athens

Jason came into the world in the autumn
of the 151st Olympiad, in a modest priest's
house perched on the slopes of the
Areopagus. The midwives washed him in
olive oil and laid him on a limestone slab,
and his father, Apollodorus, barely
glanced at him. He was too busy
embracing a wild-haired boy who had
arrived breathless from the Piraeus—
Antiochus, a Seleucid prince in exile,
hiding from his brother's assassins.

That embrace was the first thing Jason
ever knew. Even as an infant, he felt the
heat.

While other Athenian boys learned
Homer, Jason imbibed the oath to rid the
world of monotheism.

Apollodorus and Antiochus were
inseparable. They wrestled in the
palestrae, debated philosophers, and
drank deep into the nights, sketching
maps of the East on wax tablets. "One
day," Antiochus whispered, tracing a
finger along the coast of Judea, "I will be
king. And you, my brother, will be the
priest of my temple. We will drown their
invisible god in the blood of bulls and the
smoke of our own altars." We will build

temples so beautiful that their stubborn deity will weep, and their people will forget His name."

Jason grew up listening to that kind of talk.

When Jason turned sixteen, the summons finally came. Antiochus had seized the throne of the Seleucid Empire.

A royal trireme waited in Piraeus, its sails emblazoned with the sunburst of the House of Seleucus. Apollodorus danced through their house, tossing scrolls and statues into crates. "We are going home,

Jason! Not to my abode—to ours! The city
we built in our dreams!"

The journey was no exile's flight; it was a
triumph. Apollodorus stood at the prow
for days, salt spray flecking his beard,
pointing at the distant shores of
Phoenicia, Cilicia, and Syria. "See those
hills?" he shouted over the wind. "Ten
years, Jason! Ten years, and every shrine
to that pale, jealous ghost of theirs will be
replaced with shining marble. We will
dance in their Temple, my son. We will
make their priests kneel to Zeus!"

Jason believed it. He had to. His father's joy was infectious, absolute, and terrifying.

When they entered Antioch, the city was a cacophony of hammers and chanting. Half-finished colonnades stretched toward a blazing sun. The Orontes River churned with barges of Egyptian granite and Phoenician cedar. At the center of it all rose the skeletal ribs of the new sanctuary of Zeus—a monument to Apollodorus's future priesthood.

**The decision to wipe out
monotheism.**

Ensconced in his palace in view of the temple of Apollo, in the gardens of Daphne, Antiochus ordered his boyhood friend to come before him, for a consultation. They embraced, then got down to the matter at hand, namely the danger facing the kingdom from the growing population of believers in the one god. “The unity of the kingdom,” declared the king, “rests on a framework made up of gods. Monotheism will topple this structure. My power to appoint gods comes from polytheism. The people worship gods that I choose; they obey me because I am the supreme god.

Antiochus pointed out, "I would cease to be a god if Monotheism triumphs, and chaos would reign. Without gods to support it, the world would end. "

"But", retorted Apollodorus, "How does one make an invisible deity disappear?"

"We will convert their shrine in Jerusalem into a temple of Zeus," the Monarch explained.

We will prohibit the worship of God, and make observing His laws a criminal offense, punishable by death." According to this decree, worship of God would be prohibited, and refusal to make offerings

to Dionysus would be punishable by death. This was a surprise. The Seleucid army would henceforth be in charge of Jerusalem, and the new high priest, Menelaus, would supervise sacrifices to Dionysus in the temple. Jerusalem would be known as Antiochia, in honor of Antiochus Epiphanes. He became known as Epimachus, meaning Antiochus the crazy.

“I will let them choose; bow down to Zeus or die.”

"Many Monotheists have become Hellenists already; one of them, a rich

Jew, who's had his eye on the high
priesthood of the temple for a long time,
has come forward; his name is Jason, a
scion of the Samaritans, who are jews but
not regarded as such by the Jews."

"Once an altar for sacrifices to Zeus has
been installed in the temple, and Jason
performs pig sacrifices, our soldiers will
go from town to town enforcing the new
laws. We will begin in Modiin, a city on
the way to Jerusalem, where my spies
have informed me that the population is
monotheistic."

“This will be an example to the rest of the nation.” “Modiin, that's the place. I will remove the one-god believers; others will follow in discarding the absurd idea.”

Greek soldiers can penetrate the region easily, by means of good roads; they will march along Via Maris, until they reach an eastern branch through Modiin to the hill country and the main road to Jerusalem and Samaria. “The towns to the West, on the Mediterranean coast, Joppa, Ashdod, Ashkelon, are populated by Greeks who will support my endeavors.”

Part Two: The meeting (Love story)

Love affair between Jason and
Miriam

Antioch rejoiced; the incipient priest was to be installed. Greek troops in plumed brown berets, carrying massive, dusky leather-covered shields and scary weapons glinting in the brightness, escorted the dignitaries as a guard of honor.

Citizens lined the grand chereia that Antiochus had laid out specially for the

occasion. Squads in blue and red tunics with swords drawn kept order, or else the mass would have swamped the heroic entourage. The chief attraction was the sixteen-year-old offspring of the cleric. The women swooned at the sight of the handsome youth, destined for training in the Seleucid army.

One of the onlookers was Miriam, the young daughter of Judah ben Haim, the teacher of the Jews of Antioch, who had come from Judea. As the VIP's paraded past, the glowing countenance of the scion of the priesthood caught her eye.

She gasped, and her heart skipped a beat.

A feeling of guilt overcame her as she recollected the words her father had taught her to recite on witnessing an idol worshipper: "Let your wrath fall on the ones who don't acknowledge you.", and "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." The sight of the junior cleric caused her to forget the declaration.

"Boys will be boys." the spectators said to one another, as the new priest's son broke away from the royal procession. "He's seen a pretty girl and he's off to win her heart." they exclaimed with envy for the

fair maiden, who yet remained unknown to them. How could the citizens of Antioch understand the curiosity that the heterogeneous culture of their fair city had aroused in a boy who had grown up in the pure idolatrous Greek city, isolated from novel beliefs and customs.

Far-off sing-song sounds floated through the air, drawing him like a magnet away from the elegant colonnaded boulevard, crowded with polytheists, into the narrow alleyways of the Jewish neighborhood.

The youth's dark golden brown hair
braided into a wreath around his head,
marking Jason as a member of the priestly
order of Zeus, someone whose future lay
in serving his nation in the temple or the
battlefield. The many hairless and short
haired individuals shuffling to and fro,
buying and haggling in the market,
moved aside with bowed heads and
allowed him to pass.

Bamboo baskets, some filled with
pomegranates, others with spices, grains,
and unidentifiable aromatic products,

were stacked along the pedestrian
walkway.

Antioch sits by the Orontes River, its
banks thick with reeds. Further on, where
it passes outside the city walls, groves of
date palms, fig and olive trees, and vines
can be seen. Beyond, stretching out to the
foothills of Mt. Silpius, there are wheat
and barley fields.

The odour of fresh fish assaults Jason's
sensitive olfactory glands as he pushes
through the human mass.

Suddenly, a thud of a dull object strikes
his shoulder. A look of anger scorched his

face; “Who had dared to affront his sacred person?” Not easily put off, he ran in the direction from which the offence had come. All he saw was a grey tunic flapping around a pair of skinny legs scampering away. He soon came to an open courtyard, bounded by an elegant structure, with a blue-painted wooden Star of David on the gabled entrance.

There she sat, on a low wall, as if nothing had happened, eating the sweet red seeds, a maiden with dark, fierce curls and eyes the color of amber. She was just a child, but she looked at him with a knowing,

unflinching gaze that made the back of his neck prickle. She was not merely beautiful. She burned.

The love-struck girl had followed him, unseen. Grabbing a bright scarlet pomegranate from a fruit seller's basket, she had thrown it at him. "Are you one of them?" she asked, tilting her head. "The Greeks who want to tear down our house?"

Jason opened his mouth to sneer—to recite his father's catechism of hatred—but nothing came out. Before he could answer, she closed her eyes, her lips

moving in quiet, practiced rhythm, her
voice soft but unbreakable:

"Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai
Echad."

She widened her eyes and looked at him
again. "Hear, O Israel," she translated, not
as a lesson, but as a challenge. "The Lord is
our God. The Lord is One. Twice a day, I
say it. My father says it. My grandfather
said it. We have said it for a thousand
years. How many generations will it take
for your gods to shut us up?"

Though rumors of this oft-repeated
mantra were widespread, this was the

first time he had ever heard it stated so openly. Little did he suspect that he would one day become its greatest antagonist. For now, however, he took the statement as a personal insult—both to himself and to his beloved Zeus. He made a mental note: once he grew up and commanded a squad of Syrian fighters, this detestable adversary would be the first to feel the brunt of his anger. He already imagined beating that foolish monotheistic belief out of her.

The black eyes of the chanting vixen bored into his mind. That was the face of

Miriam. “What intense feeling caused her to be ready to die for the one god?” He asked himself.

Meeting a non-Jewish boy was nothing new for a girl who grew up in Antioch, a modern city where Jews and Gentiles mixed freely. She’d often walked past the gymnasium and always reminded herself to say the words “pour out thy wrath on the idol worshipers who don’t know your name”, as her father Judah had taught her. He was a heathen that explained everything, as did the face she pulled at the thought of him.

“Polytheism and Monotheism are two opposite concepts; a person couldn’t follow the one without damning the other,” was the way she thought. Nevertheless, other considerations outweighed the obligation to swear at the Pagan. The youth was so handsome that her girlish heart missed a beat and she gasped for breath.

She offered him the juicy fruit. He took it, his fingers trembling. Her fire had not convinced him—not yet. He was still his father's son, a loyal Greek who would one day draw his sword for Zeus and Antioch.

But something in him, something he could not name, had been kindled. He pocketed the pomegranate and walked away, vowing to forget her.

He never did.

Confrontation.

Remarking on Miriams's appearance wasn't common practice with her older brother. He hardly ever took the trouble to greet her. She sat separated from the men's prayer hall with Shifra in the women's gallery, overlooking the men's prayer area. A curtain prevented the men

from seeing the women, but the women could peek through openings in the curtain and they took full advantage of this opportunity, it was even encouraged. A mother would ask her daughter, from time to time, after she'd reached the age of twelve, which was considered marriageable age, whether any young man had caught her eye.

It didn't seem that Miriam had her eye on any of the boys in the synagogue. The only interest that she displayed was in studying Torah. She attended the Torah classes for girls conducted by her mother

and would listen clandestinely when the men discussed Torah matters.

Jason made no secret of his encounter with the Jewish girl. He acquired a certain renown among his school friends. He didn't stop the rumors among them that he would be bedding the Jewish wench one of these days. Seven years of good luck fell upon a non-Jewish boy who had sex with a Jewish virgin.

Apollodorus was amused at Jason's sudden interest in Jewish prayer customs. He knew quite well what Jason had in mind. Each Sabbath would find the youth

among other Polytheists sitting in the back row of the synagogue, listening intently to the service, but his mind was on the pretty Jewess who'd given him the pomegranate.

“Can she see me from her perch in the women’s gallery?” He asked himself as his blood flowed faster and his heart beat harder.

Two Sabbaths passed and there was no sign that Miriam had noticed him or thought about him.

On the third Sabbath, while he walked disconsolately through an arbor, Miram

peeked out from behind a Pine tree. She dashed away, but the glimpse of her made his heart miss a beat. The chase through the trees left him thinking that he had imagined seeing her. This scene was repeated the next Sabbath and this time he grabbed her by the arm; “Let go of me, you beast.” she screamed.

Their meetings continued. She declared her love for him but they both knew that soon their paths would separate. Miriam had no intention of giving up her belief in the one god and Jason, was headed for an important position in the Seleucid army.

Tearfully they parted. Eight long years
would pass until they met again.

Part Three: The Maccabean revolt

The desecration of the temple.

Menelaus marched a bristling black boar
into the Holy of Holies. The animal
squealed as the priests slaughtered it
upon the altar of incense, its blood
pooling where the showbread once
rested. The stench of burning pork rose to
the heavens, a deliberate, gloating insult
to the deity of Israel.

The sanctuary in Jerusalem—the very heart of monotheism — was now his.

The Hellenist priest erected a gymnasium just outside the shrine. Jewish youths, eager status-seekers, gathered there for naked athletics—a scandal that horrified the pious ones.

Apollodorus becomes priest of Zeus.

His first step was to bring his childhood friend from the ancient Hellenic metropolis to serve as a cleric in the

temple of Zeus Olympios, the supreme deity of the world, with whom he identified; he and his son were firm supporters of the sovereign's plan to ban Monotheism.

The king was paranoid; he had visions of all the Greeks converting to Judaism, imagining his country overrun by Jews like an army of ants devouring a bowl of date syrup.

Antioch, the city he adored and dreamed of making the epitome of Greek culture, appeared in his nightmares as a Jewish shrine filled with the sound of haunting

hymns chanted by choruses of Syrians
who had forsaken the gods.

He felt the kingdom tottering under his
feet. He would secure it by eradicating the
belief in one god, a form of faith that, in
his opinion, brought dissension and
disunity to his domains.

Judea was the source of Monotheism. The
only country of his suzerainty where
religion was restricted to the worship of
one god; their holy book prohibited
idolatry. Only non-believers who
refrained from worshipping graven

images were treated as righteous Gentiles and were tolerated.

167 BCE Erection of a temple to Zeus in Modiin

Dionysus, the god of ecstasy, wine, and madness, came trundling into Modiin, with great pomp and ceremony, wobbling from side to side on the floor of a sturdy oak wagon, pulled by ten lowing oxen. The statue looked like it was made of marble, holding a thyrsus in its hand. Its youthful nudity was an insult to the modest piety of the citizens of Modin.

Hundreds of cheering Greek pagans lined the way to the centre of the town.

He was erected in the main square, a grotesque, grinning idol, its marble phallus jutting obscenely toward the sky.

The Jews felt his stony gaze looking down on them whenever they passed through the square. It became a custom to spit each time a person walked past the monstrosity.

Menelaus's Greek officers commanded every Jew in the village to bow and offer incense. Antiochus had come personally

to supervise the implementation of his decree.

Antiochus had issued an order that the Jews of this hill town bow down to the statue of Dionysus. Most Jews refused and were arrested, including Hannah, a widow with seven sons.

After being tortured, the prisoners were returned to the altar and again ordered to bow down to the idol. When they refused, the commander of the garrison drew his sword. Hanna stood with her back straight, her shorn head held high, her seven boys clustered around her like lion

cubs. The Greek commander sneered.

"Bow, old woman, or watch your sons die."

Hannah looked past him, past the idol,
past the sky itself. She opened her lips,
and in a voice that carried across the
hushed square, she recited:

"Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai
Echad."

One by one, her sons took up the chant.
The youngest, barely eight, clutched his
mother's tunic. The eldest, a young man
of twenty, stepped forward and spat at the
statue.

Jason asked himself, sitting on his
glorious warhorse, on a nearby hill
overloading the execution square; “Is this
what I trained for all those years? To
watch defenseless children being
slaughtered like sheep? I made my choice,
now my duty is to carry out the orders of
my king.”

Each time he raised his hand the captain
of the guard brought his vicious sword
down and a head rolled. The mother
watched and sobbed, the crowd of Jews
loyal to their one god stood in grim
silence. Children were executed for not

bowing down to the statue. Jason heard the words “the lord is our god”, intoned with pride before a child died. They offered each son a final chance: Bow, and live. Each son recited the Shema instead.

Jason turned his horse and rode away slowly bent like an old man. This war wasn’t easy as his father had promised. There wouldn’t be laurel leaf wreaths or other accolades, assuming he’d manage to return to Antioch alive.

"My sons have already entered the world to come. I will not lag."

Jason didn't wait to see her die. His shoulders hunched, a man carrying a weight he did not yet understand.

The square fell silent. Even the Greek soldiers looked away, unnerved.

Then, from the edge of the crowd, a voice roared like thunder:

"Whoever is for the Lord, follow me!"

Mattathias, the aging priest, wrenched a sword from a stunned soldier's belt. He surged forward—the blade found the Greek commander's throat. Blood sprayed across the base of the Dionysus idol. With

a guttural roar, Mattathias drove his
sandal into the statue's face, shattering its
marble nose. In the same breath, his five
sons burst from the crowd, axes and
cleavers in hand, and tore into the
garrison with a frenzy born of decades of
pent-up rage

Unseen, tucked behind the pillars of a
nearby synagogue, Miriam watched.

Miriam looked at the figure standing on
the hill above Modiin, wearing the purple
cloak of a Greek general. Was she
imagining or did he have a look of grief on
his face.

Miriam's eyes locked onto his across the square. For a fleeting moment, she saw the boy who had taken a pomegranate from her hand in Antioch—the boy who had trembled when she spoke of the One God.

Jason gave no order to pursue the fleeing Mattathias. He simply rode back toward Jerusalem. Miriam watched him go, and she prayed to God to forgive him.

The Maccabean rebellion breaks out

Across the rocky hills of Judea and
Samaria, the faithful fled. They hid in
caves, emerging only to whisper prayers
and circumcise their sons in secret.

Among them was Mattathias, the grey-
bearded priest of the Hasmonean line, his
five sons—Judah, Simon, Elazar, Jonathan,
and John—gathering sharpened sickles
and rusty swords. "Wait," Mattathias told
them. "Wait for the moment God gives
us."

Jews who joined Mattathias trained to be warriors. They became experts with bows and arrows. Fast on their feet, they carried no heavy armor and employed hit-and-run guerrilla tactics.

Jason is sent to quell the rebellion.

They did not form phalanxes or wait for dawn. They descended from the Samarian hills like wolves—silent, ragged, and starving for vengeance. Judah Maccabee, the Lion of Judea, struck at midnight, at noon, in the choking dust of the wadi. He burned supply wagons, ambushed

stragglers, and vanished into the caves
before the Greek cavalry could form ranks.

His father had said "The little skirmish in
Judea will be a good training ground for
you. All you need to do is to wave your
sword in front of those Jews and they'll
come to Zeus. We will smash their
superstition and your name will be
remembered as the Polytheist who
brought an end to Monotheism." Jason
had believed his father's words. now he
thought differently. Fulfilling his promise
to the king was no simple matter. The

Seleucids had underestimated the Jewish determination.

Nothing had prepared Jason for this kind of warfare. He was trained in the gymnasium—order, discipline, the beauty of a locked shield-wall. But Judah's men fought with sickles and slings, their eyes blazing with the memory of Hannah's sons. They chanted the Shema as they charged, and Jason began to doubt the pagan gods

Apollonius, the commander of the Seleucid army at the Samaritan garrison,

secured the vital North-South road, giving him control of the whole of Samaria.

One by one, the Greek garrisons fell.

Emmaus. Beth-Horon. The very hills seemed to swallow the king's soldiers.

Judah faced Apollonius in single combat and, after killing him, appropriated his sword, which he used in all his battles until his death. The glory that Judah acquired from this victory filled the Pious ones with courage, and the confidence of the Greeks was shaken. Thousands rallied around Judah's banner, calling for the liberation of Jerusalem.

The second Maccabean war.

Conquering Jerusalem meant that the Maccabees would have to control the road. Antiochus realized that more was required than a local army, like Apollonius's, to quell the rebellion. Seron and his well-trained army of 6000 were sure to put an end to the rebellion.

Seron's army marched from Syria and Phoenicia, down the Via Maris toward Judea. The Phoenician contingent met the main force at Megiddo. The ground shook beneath their feet—and beneath the hooves of cavalry never before seen in

Judea, meant to boost morale, to strike fear.

They kept to the Via Maris, passing the fortress of Aphek, until they reached Lydda, where they turned eastward to enter the mountains of Judea. As with Apollonius, Seron also aimed to reach the main North-South road, which was level and easy to move along, bringing him to Jerusalem.

The only way forward was through Bet Horon's narrow pass, a Jewish stronghold. That's where Judah waited. Seron's numbers and cavalry meant

nothing in that defile. His outnumbered men held the high ground. He'd ambush them there.

Jason is captured

Jason led a counter-charge near the pass of Beth-Horon, his cavalry thundering down the slope—and rode straight into a trap.

The ground opened beneath them. Pits lined with sharpened stakes. Horses screamed and toppled. Jason flew from his saddle, his shoulder cracking against a rock, his helmet rolling into the dust.

When he looked up, a young Hasmonean

warrior stood over him—Elazar, the fierce-
eyed brother of Judah—his sword
dripping, his face streaked with ash

They threw Jason into a limestone cave,
his wrists bound with coarse rope, his
purple cloak stripped away. He shivered
in the damp cold, listening to the distant
echoes of Maccabean prayers—men who
had just slaughtered his comrades now
thanking their invisible God for victory.

He discovered a feeling of admiration.

These Jews had nothing—no empire, no
gold, no beautiful statues—and yet their

God had broken the might of Antiochus
Epiphanes.

Who is this God? Jason wondered, his
teeth chattering. What kind of God loves
His people so fiercely that He fights for
them with stones and slings.

The third war against the Greeks.

By 164 BCE, the Jews had vanquished the
Greeks in two battles, against Apollonius
at the Levonah ascent and against Seron
at Bet Horon. The northern section of the
road to Jerusalem was in their hands.
Now Judah set about conquering the

southern section from Hebron to
Jerusalem. The fortress city of Bet Zur
guarded the main road South of
Jerusalem

Judah positioned his army in Bet Zur. The
spies informed him: "Syria is in a financial
crisis; Antiochus has departed from
Antioch with a large part of his army for
his eastern domains, which had been
backward in paying tribute. Lysias
governed the country instead of
Antiochus." The aristocrats grumbled at
the news of defeats in Judea. "Victory at

Bet Zur will end the war,” they consoled themselves. Lysias laid siege to the town.

“We must hold firm,” said Judah. Victory here will open the road to Jerusalem.”

Jews who had never laid eyes on Jerusalem were ready to die for her sake.

Miriam, like her comrades, had left Antioch to aid the Maccabees. The humble, diligent pupil in her father's school was a distant memory now. She smiled incredulously at the thought of her old infatuation with that young Greek.

"He's probably one of those soldiers fighting against us now. It would be

amusing to meet him, sword raised in my face. He might get a chance to kill me for my insolence—the snobbish pig—but could she kill the man she loved?." She fingered the short dagger at her belt. Just yesterday, that little blade had pierced the heart of one of them. She remembered the smirk on her face as the filthy pagan blood spurted out, pooling thickly in the dust around him.

Suddenly a gruff voice called her name; it was her brother Yohanan."I know what you're dreaming; snap out of it, I have a Greek for your hungry blade, but don't use

it unless I order you to. This one is an important general, who's made a lot of trouble for us. Judah wants him alive, do you hear me? No killing yet." Miriam nodded with a look of grim obedience.

Returning the poniard to its scabbard, the Jewish Amazon examined the pagan Hercules, bound and held between two Maccabean warriors. "Lift up your head Greek. Show a gentle Jewish maiden your filthy countenance.

He had been stripped of his general's tunic, and had lost his haughty heathen appearance." Slowly the head rose until

the blue Greek eyes were on a level with hers. “Jason.” She gasped, “my beloved Jason, “what have they done to your? My dream come true. My god, it is you.” “Yes, Miriam, it is me,” Jason mumbled. The scene she had dreamed crumbled like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which had been completed and overturned.

The aristocrat at whom she’d aimed a pomegranate eight years ago, to show her detestation of idolatry, had returned.

She was older now—twenty, her fierce curls tangled with dust, her amber eyes burning with a fire he had not forgotten.

She wore a faded maroon tunic of a rebel,
a short dagger at her belt.

"Miriam—" he rasped, his voice cracked
with thirst. "Give the scum some water,
Judah wants to talk to him." He looked
into her amber eyes, as he had done when
she, then only a little rascal, derided his
gods, without fear of his position as the
son of a priest of those gods. "I came here
to destroy your people. To make them
bow to Zeus. And I have seen... I have
seen..."

"You have seen the One God," she scoffed.
"A typical Greek lie to save his skin.", But

she couldn't stop her voice from trembling. "And, I suppose that He has seen you. Don't tell me; He loves you, Jason." She wanted to say his name in a mocking tone, but it came out gently and with longing.

Miriam brings Jason before Judah the Maccabee

Accompanied by the soldiers guarding him, Miriam brought her prisoner before Judah Maccabee.

The Lion sat on a rough-hewn stone, his brothers gathered around him—Simon the wise, Jonathan the swift, Elazar the fierce,

John the steadfast. Torches flickered
against the cave walls. Judah studied
Jason with a mocking look of contempt.

"Your father built a temple to Zeus in
Antioch," Judah said. "You offered pig
flesh in the House of the Lord. Why
should I not kill you where you kneel?"

Jason opened his mouth to offer a clever
Greek argument—to bargain, to plead, to
threaten. But no words came. Instead, a
strange, terrifying heat rose in his chest.
He thought of Hannah and her sons,
dying with the Shema on their lips. He
thought of the Maccabees charging into

certain death, singing praises to a God they could not see. He thought of the hollow idols of his own childhood—the pretty marble statues that had never answered a single prayer.

And for the first time in his life, Jason regretted his life, He would become a builder; he would become a Jew.

"You are righteous and worship a true God; I am a sinner and wish to repent," Jason whispered, his voice breaking. He bowed his head to the dust, his forehead pressing against the cold earth. "I have seen the power of the One. I have seen

Him fight for you. I have seen His name
spoken in the face of death. And I... I
renounce the idols. I renounce Zeus. I
renounce my father's gods. Hear, O Israel,
the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.
Shema Israel..."

His voice cracked. Tears streaked the
grime on his face.

"Could this be true? Was this Greek going
to become a Jew? She thought in
amazement.

Judah Maccabee watched him in silence,
then slowly nodded. "Let him live. Let
him learn. His confession is what we

fought for, and idolatry will vanish from the face of the earth. Go and study the Torah, the word of God."

Miriam placed a hand on his trembling shoulder. For a fleeting moment, she saw the boy she had loved—the boy who had taken the pomegranate. She rejoiced in the thought of her and him being united in monotheism.

Weeks passed. Jason rose from the dust, a convert. He studied the Torah with a fevered intensity, memorizing the laws, the genealogies, the prophecies. He soaked himself in the mikvah. He ate

unleavened bread and bitter herbs. He stood beside Miriam at the Sabbath candles, and she watched him with a mixture of wonder and tenderness.

He had changed. Truly, deeply, he had changed.

Jason discovers Monotheism

In the academy of Modiin, attended by Yohanan, Miriam' brother, he had seen men in simple, black, sometimes even tattered clothes pouring over manuscripts and discussing Jewish laws.

The thought came to him, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the Gentiles became Jews? Little did he realize that he would achieve this goal, difficult as it may seem.

The one God cared for the Jews because they were loyal to him. It made sense that he would protect the nation faithful to him.” He reasoned to himself.

“He only protected other nations as a reward for something good that they had done to his nation, as it was written in the Bible, “I will bless those that bless you, and I will curse those that curse you.”

The temple is re-dedicated.

The siege dragged on. Lysias could taste surrender— a messenger arrived: “The king is dead”, they announced. Lysias, as acting monarch, was needed in Antioch to crush a rebellion by Philip, Antiochus’ nephew. “The Jewish rebellion was purely a religious matter.” He said to himself. They never had any intention of breaking away from Seleucid Suzerainty; they weren’t rebelling to establish an independent political entity. Their only objective was to attain religious freedom. “Let these Jews have their temple,” he said, turning to Lucius, his Roman

lieutenant, “We don’t need this religious war. Order the men to get ready to march, let their invisible god damn them, we are off”

The dawn broke to silence from the Greek camp. “Judah, it is as you said it would be; the Greeks are gone, we have won, blessed be the name of the Lord,” cried Ellazar, the sage, forever at the commander’s side.

The Jews purified and rededicated the Temple. Their voices, lifted in dance and praise, resounded from the fortress of Bet Tzur, summoning the people to gather.

Only a day earlier, the nation's future had

seemed hopeless; but the Lord had intervened—like a flame lighting up the darkness. The army advanced behind a banner emblazoned with the Star of David, trailing a long procession of men, women, elders. "Onward to the city of God and His holy Temple!" cried the multitude.

Immediately everyone got to work; cleaning the temple, polishing the bowls and the lavers. The priests re-dedicated the holy altar, and rekindled the seven-branched candelabra. "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our god, the Lord is one." The

proclamation rang out loud and clear once again. Judah announced a feast known as the dedication (Hanukkah); the Jews continue to celebrate it to this day.

Greek visitors to the temple were welcomed and asserted, “The one god is mightier than all our gods.”

Judah the Maccabee king of Judea

In 161 BC, Judah designated himself king and high priest in one. Nicanor, the top general in the region, marched to suppress the rise of a Jewish state. Judas defeated him at the Battle of Adasa.

After killing Nicene, Judas sent envoys to Rome to negotiate a treaty of alliance. The Romans wrote to Demetrius, demanding he stop oppressing the Jews or face war.

Disregarding the warning, Demetrius sent Bacchides (his most trusted governor of the region east of the Euphrates) with a massive army in 160 BC with specific orders: not just to defeat Judas, but to destroy the rebellion entirely, kill its leadership, and install a pro-Greek government.

The Romans didn't do as they had promised Judas's envoys. The Syrian

general had trapped Judas at the Battle of Elasa, killed him, and re-established Seleucid domination.

Jonathan took over the leadership of the new, embattled state.

Part Four: The Return (Antioch and the birth of the Jasonists)

**Jason and Miriam return to
Antioch.**

The son of Apollodorus had left the city a few months previously, at the head of a

smartly attired pagan army, marching off
to crush the Jewish rebellion. Banners
flying, drums beating, battalion after
battalion, the fighting force of the
Seleucids marched past cheering
onlookers,

Now a trickle of bedraggled survivors
crept home to nurse their wounds and
their pride.

Jason returned to Antioch a changed man.
Jason, with Miriam by his side, walked
through the Daphne Gate of Antioch, his
head covered with the black knitted
skullcap of a Jew, white-fringed tzitzit

brushing his sandals. The Jews of Antioch—a thriving community of merchants and scribes—sang for joy; the once-adored hero of the pagans, now a proselyte, had returned. They knew who he was: the son of Apollodorus, the priest who had built the Temple of Zeus, the general who had tried to crush their brothers in Judea.

"Brothers," he proclaimed in the synagogue, "I have seen the One God! I have seen Him fight for the Maccabees! I have knelt in the dust and recited the

Shema! The God of Israel lives—He is my
God, and I will worship Him only."

Jason and Miriam are married.

"With this ring I wed thee. Be thou
sanctified unto me according to the law of
Moses and Israel." Jason, no longer the
novitiate of idol worshippers, no longer a
Greek soldier out to destroy monotheism,
but a fully fledged Jew, a black beard of
wiry hair jutted out from his chin, a kippa
on his head, he pronounced the words
that bound him and Miriam.

The ceremony took place in the square
where their love story had begun with a

pomegranate. Like the fruit full of seeds
so their life would be full of good deeds. A
new chapter had begun in the life of Jason
and Miriam and a new chapter in the
history of mankind.

Jason the Jewish convert.

The news of the Maccabean victory
spread, and idolaters declared: “The
Jewish God has vanquished Zeus; he is
the true god, the Greek gods aren’t gods,
they’re useless.”

Jason’s father, hoping to stay close to his
son, despite his conversion to Judaism,
thought to himself: “I will continue being

a priest of Zeus and occasionally I'll attend the synagogue, as many of my followers do."

"That is your prerogative father, but your idea isn't good for me." Jason told his father.

"Miriam will only have me if I am a Torah-observing Jew. I have been circumcised and consume only food permitted by the holy Torah. Sabbath is the Lord's day."

"I will marry Miriam, and she will bring me Jewish offspring."

“You mean that we won’t be able to break bread together and you won’t come to bow down to Dionysus with me.” The thought of separating himself from his beloved son was intolerable. Apollodorus wept.

“No, father, we will meet; you don’t have to become a Jew, I will not eat at your table, but you will eat at mine,” said Jason.

The end of Zeus worship in Antioch.

Apollodorus had once hoped the uprising would fail—that fleeing Jews would swell his congregation. He was sure that his son

wouldn't be able to resist the music of the temple of Zeus. He remembered how charmed the boy had been by a sweet singer of Zeus and Dionysian chants. Her voice had made her famous throughout the Empire, and he brought her from Egypt to be the star performer at the temple of Zeus."She will bring my child back to me." He said to himself.

But the Maccabees won. One God reclaimed Jerusalem's Temple. In Antioch, not a single Jew had converted. Greek soldiers followed their general and, like him, converted to Judaism.

Polytheism's hour was fading. Within a century, Judaism would surge across the world—and turn fiercely against all the graven images. Apollodorus didn't mourn; his son had rejected Zeus for the sake of the One God of the Jews.

Jason was honored in the synagogue. On the Sabbath, he read the Torah portion aloud in the face of the whole congregation. “And to think that this man was a general in the pagan army fighting the Jews,” The congregants whispered to each other.

Miriam sat in the women's gallery,
dressed in a purple gown, admired by all
the ladies. "She's the general's wife; they
say that she was the one who captured
him and kept guard over him, threatening
with her dagger if he made any attempt to
escape. That's the way to get your man, I
tell you," babbled the local
scandalmonger, proud of her information.
She was about to pass on the most prized
bit of information when the head of the
synagogue banged on the pedestal in
front of him and shot a fierce look at the
chattering women.

Jason and Miriam return to Jerusalem

Jason had promised Judah that he would return to Judea whenever he was needed.

The death of Judah at the hand of Bacchides came as a blow to the young man. Now he would use his skill as a Seleucid general to fight on the side of the Jews.

“I know Jonathan”, he said to himself, “he won’t rest until he has avenged the death of his brother.”

News arrived from Jonathan; he was preparing for a battle against Bacchides.

“You would be useful to me at this time.”

Jason laid down the letter and looked toward Miriam. The doctor had informed the young couple, “You had better prepare yourselves for a new addition to your family.”

“Don’t worry, Jason.” Shifra, his mother-in-law, calmed his nerves. “The midwife and I will take care of Miriam; you go ahead, join Jonathan; he needs you, and later your wife will join you in Jerusalem. The nation will be rid of Bacchides, and times will be more propitious for us all.”

Jonathan makes a pact with Alexander Balas.

The long road from Antioch finally released him. Below the Zion Gate, in the Hinnom Valley, his escort of armored horsemen clattered into the royal stables, their horses stamping in the dusk. Jason slid from his saddle and pressed his forehead to the earth—a son of Zeus's priesthood, now kneeling in humble awe before the God of Israel, whispering fervent thanks for his safe passage. He looked up, the white marble glinting in the setting sun. was the magnificent

Maccabean palace being built on the
precipice of the North Western edge of
Mt. Zion. Jonathan was turning the holy
city, famous for its humble virginal
beauty, into an ostentatious monstrosity.
He was trying to copy the heathen kings.
He called himself Basilius, the Greek word
for king.

When the great timber gates groaned
open to admit him to the upper city,
Jonathan's royal guards marched him to
the courtyard of the palace. I must see the
king immediately; we must find a way to
rid ourselves of the idolaters and their

stranglehold on religious matters in the temple.”

From the balcony of the palace in the Upper City, on Mount Zion, he gazed in wonder at the Temple on Mount Moriah.

At the break of day, as the sun rose over the Mount of Anointing (Mt Olives), and shone on the gold-topped roof of the holy of holies, he watched the altar's thin curling spiral of white smoke ascend, twisting and turning, straining to reach heaven itself.

The holiness seeped into him—” How tragic”, he said to himself; “my

countrymen in Antioch deny themselves this feeling of holiness because of their adherence to the worship of Zeus.” He wished there was a way to bring them all to Judaism. The idea thrilled him for a moment, but it soon passed out of his mind, remaining only in his subconscious.

Jason wasn’t idle in Jerusalem; he was either at the academy studying Torah or in the field training Jewish troops for the next confrontation with the Seleucids.

Jason was announced at the entrance of the throne room. Kneeling before

Jonathan he imparted the information, which, in his innocence, thought was new to the king. “Alexander Balas, an upstart who claims to be the son of Antiochus Epiphanes, has usurped the throne from Demetrius. You've heard of him, I presume?” Jason announced to Jonathan. “I have,” admitted Jonathan, without revealing that he had already made a pact to support Ballas. “He's all the rage of the aristocracy. He persuaded Ptolemy to give him his daughter, Cleopatra, in a marriage which will be held at Ptolemais.” Jonathan couldn't hide information from Jason, and admitted: “Yes I know and

have been invited.” “You didn't accept, did you?” Jason asked, astounded. “Had the Maccabean warrior gone over to the side of a trickster.” He asked himself.

“Demetrius already appointed me, after my victory over Bacchides, now Ballas supported my claim.

Now Jason understood the luxury he'd encountered in Jonathan's palace.

Miriam gave birth to a son, whom she left in the care of her mother in Antioch, to be at Jason's side.

Miriam met her husband at the entrance to The academy, located in the chamber of polished stones (lishkat hagazit), where the Sanhedrin also held its deliberations. Here she heard about the many people of all nations visiting the temple.

The importance of the idea of one god.

“Jason!” Miriam pointed to the line of visitors waiting to enter the courtyard of the Gentiles. “Don’t you think it’s surprising that so many Gentiles come to see the temple, and look how they are welcomed? The priests have started

conducting guided tours for visitors from all over the world.”

“Yes,” said Jason. “This is the result of the Maccabean victory; people realize that the might of the one god can save them more effectively than Zeus and all the pagan gods from their aches and pains. They would do well to convert to Judaism.”

“They would,” said Miriam. “But they’re afraid of the king who has ordered everyone to worship the idols.

Judaism won’t accept people who don’t believe that God is the only god.”

“Yes, that is true,” said Jason. Idolaters won’t become Jews. They want a god who appoints a representative on earth, like Dionysus, a son of Zeus with a mortal mother, Semele, a princess of Thebes.”

Judaism has many laws, but only one that defines a person as a Jew and a monotheist. This law distinguishes monotheism from polytheism:

The Torah commands believers to recite this law twice a day: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.’” Jason smiled, feeling somewhat ashamed, remembering the time when, as a young

idolater, he'd fallen in love with a little vixen monotheist in Antioch. Now he was a loyal follower of the one god. Her cry of "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" had been an insult; now it was an honor to be counted among the believers in the one god.

Antiochus's objection to Monotheism was fundamental; it undermined his position as a god. When Demetrius had taken over the monarchy he cancelled these laws, He didn't see any harm in the Jews worshipping their god.

The questions facing the Jewish state were dire; a famine had broken out, and Bacchiides held the sons of Jewish leaders of Jerusalem hostage in the Hakra.

Jason and Jonathan decided to build a moat around the Hakra; this would cut off their supply route and force them to surrender the fortress. Bacchides, a true follower of Antiochus's policy of war against Monotheism, decided: "Back to Judea, I'll put an end to this Maccabean upstart the way I did with his brother."

The battle was won before the sun dipped below the Moabite hills. Bacchides, his

phalanx gutted and his cavalry drowned
in the Jordan's spring flood, sent a herald
across the marshy flats. Jonathan
received him with blood still caked on his
knuckles, and when the terms were read
aloud, Jason felt the breath leave his
chest.

Jonathan is appointed high priest.

In exchange for the Seleucid garrison
keeping the Akra, Jonathan, son of
Mattathias, is hereby recognized as High
Priest of the Jewish nation. The warriors
cheered. Jonathan grinned like a
conqueror. But Jason saw only the
abomination. The Law of Moses reserved

the priesthood for the sons of Aaron, the house of Zadok—a lineage pure since Solomon's Temple. Jonathan was a soldier, not a priest; a Hasmonean, not a Zadokite. The same corruption that had put Hellenizing impostors in the Temple was now being perpetrated by Judah's own brother, wrapped in the stolen robes of holiness. The new Seleucid king, Alexander Balas, confirmed the deal with Jonathan; He had sold the Jewish religion to the idolaters, The pious ones had been cheated; they had joined the Maccabees to eliminate heathenism from temple worship. Now with Jonathan's

agreement, the Seleucid monarch was back in control. Appointing Jonathan High Priest was an idolatrous act. The high priesthood wasn't gained by money or appointment, but by heritage. This defeated the original aim of the rebellion, to reinstate the rightful heir to the high priesthood. There could only be one rightful heir, namely a descendant of Zadok.

Jonathan had turned the rebellion from a war for religious freedom into a war of independence for a kingdom ruled over by the Hasmoneans. Like a typical Greek

king, he named himself Basileus. He became an idol and an intermediary to reach god. This was no longer monotheism but polytheism.

He became the founder of a royal dynasty in the style of the tyrannical rulers, who considered themselves gods and built palaces; this luxury was meant to show that the man who lived there was a god.

Following Jonathan's treacherous act, he threw his support behind the Pharisees, who had sacrificed their blood in the Maccabean wars to purge idolatry and uphold the ancestral tradition—

approaching God directly and with humility, rather than through graven images or mortal kings who claimed divinity.

Jason joined the Pious ones, who formed a group known as the Pharisees (the breakaways) to fight the Hellenistic trends among the Maccabees. The Jews were no longer united, and the rift grew until civil war broke out two generations after Jonathan.

The Hasmonean kingdom, established by Jonathan and continued by Simon,

pursued the Pharisees and eventually put thousands of them flee death.

Jason and Miriam flee to Antioch

He and Miriam fled to Antioch. There they would practice Judaism, worshipping God and not a king who purported to represent him.

“The Sanhedrin has become a rubber stamp in Jonathan’s hands. Objecting to his wishes ends in death. “Go with my blessing, ” said the head of the Sanhedrin who remained on the side of the Pharisees
“Take care of your son. He will grow into

full Jewish manhood in that Gentile land.

But it won't be Gentile for long. You will

bring Monotheism to the Polytheists.

Antioch will become the center of the one
god.

Jason had come to Jerusalem in the days

of Judah when hope for Judaism shone

brightly on the horizon. He had witnessed

the city in its holiness. Jerusalem had

become his home. The holiness had filled

their spirits and brought them happiness.

“We will return one day and the one god

will be honoured in Jerusalem and in all

the world. Antioch is only the beginning
of the new era of the one god.”

He saw the coming schism: Pharisees
rising against Sadducees, brother
slaughtering brother, and ultimately the
eagles of Rome descending on the carcass
of a divided Judea.

I’m ready, Jason.” That night—though the
sky had barely softened to gray—they
moved through the alleyways, their
footfalls swallowed by the pre-dawn
gloom, toward Jerusalem’s Western Gate.
Miriam had planned for speed: light
packs, swift strides. The narrow road

ahead would snake through the Judean hills, skirt Modiin, and descend to the coastal plain. There, the Via Maris would sweep them north to Damascus, and beyond it, Antioch.

Miriam's brother who had also joined the Pharisees, bade them farewell, under the cavernous arches of the gate.

"We cannot save Judea from itself, we will carry the One God to the nations. No more war, only Monotheism for everybody."

Jason left Jerusalem at dawn, a convert fleeing the very rebellion he had come to quell carrying the Torah in his heart and

the weight of his people's coming tragedy
upon his shoulders.

Life of a Jew in Antioch.

Miriam was no one's subordinate—she
was born to command. Her tall frame,
sharp aquiline nose, flawless coiffure, and
sinewy fingers all suggested a woman
poised for control: a grip waiting to steady
whatever teetered

The thought of returning to the place
where she and Jason had grown up and
fallen in love, warmed her heart. As a
team they would preach Monotheism to
the idol worshippers. Devoted to Jason,

she shared his dream, and believed in him. She was doing something so important it would change the course of history.

The gilded rooftops of Antioch gleamed across the Orontes valley as Jason and Miriam crested the final hill. Miriam clutched his arm—she had not seen her childhood home in years. They were returning to a city of idols, carrying only scrolls and a shattered faith in the Hasmonean cause.

They secured a modest residence in Kerataion; the synagogue was also

located in this neighborhood. The merchants' cry to Apollo and Tyche could be heard from nearby Straight Street. That first evening, they invited their neighbour—a Syrian cloth-merchant named Demetrius, who had known Jason in his youth as the son of the Zeus-priest. Demetrius arrived with wine and curiosity, astonished to see the once-devout Hellenist wrapped in a prayer shawl.

"You used to pour libations to the Thunderer," Demetrius said, gesturing to Jason's tzitzit. "Now you whisper to an

invisible god in a language I cannot parse.

Have you gone mad in the Judean hills?"

Jason set down his cup. "I have gone sane,

Demetrius. I spent my youth bowing to

statues carved by men's hands—Zeus,

Athena, Apollo,

Demetrius laughed, but it was a troubled

laugh. "And yet your Jews are divided. I

hear your Maccabees fight among

themselves. Your new high priest is a

soldier, not a Zadokite. If your God is just,

why does He suffer His own priests to be

usurped?"

Demetrius fell silent, swirling his wine.

The elders of the synagogue. thinking that Jonathan had murdered Jason in the purge against the Pharisees, had wrapped themselves in sackcloth, poured ashes on their heads and mourned. They cried, “Our beloved Jason is probably dead.”

Jason found them sitting in the dark, on the cold synagogue stone floor. “Rouse yourselves my brothers, remove your mourning, rejoice. The Lord is with us. It might take time, but Judaism will survive and become stronger than ever. I didn’t leave Zeus just to find a fool who wants to change Judaism into Polytheism.

Jason returned to the Jewish plateia—the crowded, fragrant quarter tucked between the colonnaded chereia and the Orontes wharves—a delegation arrived at his modest apartment. Miriam opened the door to find a cluster of elders, their tzitzit swaying in the evening breeze, hands raised in praise of god.

“Praised be God, He has protected Jason, He has returned the pious convert to us.”

“Tell us what is on your mind. God has surely saved for a purpose.

Jason answered them: “We have been aware for many years that Zeus-

worshippers are interested in joining our congregation. The Maccabean victory has brought more God-fearers to our place of worship. We must show them how to join us." bring the idolaters to the belief in one god.

"Jason of Antioch," Elazar said, "You are our hero, the messenger of Judaism to the nations."

Jason bowed his head, overcome. He had prepared himself for suspicion—after all, he was born a priest of Zeus. But Elazar took his hands and kissed

Jason addressed the congregation in the study-house, a modest limestone building behind the main synagogue, its walls lined with niches for scrolls, All gathered there, merchants, dyers, shipwrights, and scribes—all who had followed the news from Judea with trembling hearts. They knew of Judah's victories and Jonathan's cunning.

“The Seleucid garrison keeps the Akra. In return, Jonathan, son of Mattathias—a warrior of the tribe of Judah, a righteous man in battle—now calls himself High Priest. He is no Levite. He is not even of

Aaron's house. The lives of the men of the Sanhedrin are in danger for opposing the Hasmoneans.”

A collective groan passed through the room. One elder clutched his beard and wept. Elazar struck the table with his palm—a sharp crack that silenced them all.

“This is what we feared,” Elazar declared.

“The Maccabees delivered us from the Hellenizers. Now they have become Hellenists. Judah’s brother, Jonathan has let the Maccabees down badly.

Monotheism will depart from the holy

land and take root in the lands where
Jews live in the Diaspora.

Jason a prophet to the Gentiles.

Miriam entered then, carrying a tray of
flatbreads and spiced wine, her eyes red
with tears of relief. The elders rose to
greet her. They blessed her with the
ancient words: "May the Lord make you
like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah."

Part Five: The Climax (The smashing of the idol and its aftermath

Jason smashes the statue of Zeus.

“I am Jonah” the thought struck Jason, like a bolt of lightning. Jonah was sent to the Gentiles. “I won’t try to escape from the task that God has given me. I have come from the land where one god has vanquished the many gods. His might convinced me to leave the worship of Zeus or any of the other gods created by

man, and to follow the god who is above all the others. The Jews discovered him thousands of years ago and he has given them victory. Now it's the turn of the Gentiles to discover him and accept him as their saviour as the Jews have done”

He could hear the distant chants of the Temple of Zeus, the raucous laughter from the theatre district, the jingle of Syrian temple-prostitutes' anklets.

“The people of Antioch, worshipping the idols, are my people. I will show them the way and they will listen to me.”

Jason stood on the steps of the temple of Zeus, holding a hammer. He was not only Jona, sent to the gentiles, he was Abraham revealing the one god. Smashing the idols wasn't an act of anger, but of joy of bringing truth to the misguided. The thought excited him so much that blood coursed through his veins, turning his face as red as a tomato. He shouted with glee: "Watch how a marble statue, who you call a god, comes tumbling down in pieces. He can't even defend himself from my hammer." Jason wasn't tall enough to reach Zeus's head. He banged the instrument of destruction

against the statue's knee. Chips of white marble flew into the air. The onlookers gasped. "Zeus is going to send lightning down from heaven. You'll see, you fool. His anger will consume us all."

"What's this commotion here?" The voice of the captain of the city guard boomed out over the crowd. "The priest's son has gone mad." they all cried, "The idiot's smashing Zeus. Zeus is going to send a thunderbolt unless we punish this destroyer." "Grab him, tie him up before he does more damage." The order was given to the cohort.

“No,” cried Miriam. “Smashing the statue of the false god is the right thing to do.. The true god detests idols. Zeus is an idol.”

“No.” wailed the horde of worshippers, “Zeus engenders offspring who are also gods. The one god can’t even impregnate women. Zeus has seven wives, and look at the heroes and the gods that they have given birth to; Athena, Apollo, Heracles and many more. The one god can’t make thunder and lightning, or rain and wind. The gods that Zeus brings into the world do all these things and more. If the one

god is so powerful, let him make other gods.”

“Don’t you see? The only way to find the truth is to throw away the lie. The two can’t live side by side. Either you believe the truth or the lie. Either you have one god or you have many gods. Truth never dies. Lies are born and die every day. With truth there can’t be war, with lies there is always war. Lies fight against each other. Humans can’t create truth. It exists because it is the truth. You can make as many lies as you want, as many gods as

you want. Truth needs to be revealed, lies are openly visible.

There is one truth; there are many lies.

Zeus is a lie—and every lie breeds more lies. Jason has found the truth and cast the rest aside.

It takes a brave man to shatter a lie. Jason was courageous. So can you be. So can all of us. You are all heroes if you choose to follow the truth.

A king who appoints a god is a fraud—for he appoints himself, fashioning a divinity to crush you. But a king who bows to the one God will never oppress you. That is

why kings hate the one God: they cannot command Him. They will try to stop every person who walks in the truth, because they know that truth renders you unbreakable.

Follow the truth, and smash the idols.

Those who kill you and subjugate you are not heroes—they are slaves to the lie.

Truth does not subjugate. It liberates. You did not come to this truth by force; you came of your own free will."

Some of the crowd still persisted in claiming that the gods were real, and shouted, "Don't listen to that woman;

she's a witch. She is lying. This man Jason has been to Judea and has brought back some mad idea that Zeus isn't god."

Miriam, covered in black from top to toe, stood beside her husband. "Hold on to him, arrest him." clamored the rabble.

"Release him, he has come to save us from the tyranny of the king." pleaded the rest.

The crowd swelled as the debate raged on.

Jason's supporters closed ranks around him, but the mob answered with rocks, sticks, and swords—beating the defenders back. One man crumpled, blood gushing from a gash in his skull. For an instant,

Jason stood exposed.

The captain of the guard lunged, his blade arching toward Jason's neck. The blow landed with brutal force—a near-severing.

Jason is resurrected

Miriam threw herself across Jason's body, “No, don't die Jason,” her shrieks brought dumfounded silence. “Let me die with you.” she pleaded as she fell, covering the bleeding prostrate figure, to prevent further damage. “Get off your filthy husband, he's finished.” the soldiers ordered and dragged her away, “Do what

you want with her. She and her husband are traitors.”

Suddenly the white clad figure of Apollodorus stepped forward, arms raised to heaven, tears streaming down his face. “My son, my beloved son. Look what has happened because you departed from your beloved Zeus. Where is the God of the Jews who you trusted?” He would have continued his lament but a weird groaning sound stopped him.” Jason isn’t there.” The soldiers searched everywhere, Miriam called “Jason my beloved where are you?” the clouds turned black, a streak

of lightning flashed out of heaven and the rumbling of thunder filled the air.

Jason had vanished. Chaos erupted. The crowd wailed in despair; “The god of the Jews has come to punish us for killing Jason.”

She pointed her finger at them. “You did this. You murdered Jason, and now God is going to take vengeance on you.” Then the weather changed; the black clouds changed to snowy white, the azure of the heavens appeared and the sun shone directly on the spot where Jason had lain.

Rumours began to fly, fast and furious;
Some people threw rotten tomatoes at
Miriam, “You’re talking nonsense. We
didn’t kill him. Listen to this witness.”
“Yes” said he witness. There was a group
of Jews listening to Jason.” another
witness said “I saw a Jew carrying a knife,
like ones the Jewish slaughterers use.”
Another witness laughed and boasted. “I
saw a Jew stab him before the soldier
drew his sword.” The argument went on
back and forth, until finally, Jason’s father
solved the mystery, and his solution was
widely accepted. He got the corroboration
of the people of Antioch and the support

of the believers in Zeus by a simple conclusion: “Jason is the offspring of the one god. Like Zeus he also has many sons. Jason is the son of the one god. The one god took his son to be with him.”

This made sense to the polytheists. They cheered and sang out, “He lives, Jason, the son of the one god is alive. All who believe in the son will go to heaven and live there forever like Jason.”

Once more Apollodorus stepped forward. This time he was smiling, as he declared; “I, the priest of Zeus, bring you a joyful message from the jewish God. Jason is His

son and He returned him to his place in heaven. Now I also believe in the one god because He has a son, just like Zeus. In good time His son will come again. Those who believe in the son believe in the one God. Those who don't believe in the son must be punished until they believe.”

I believe in God's son therefore I am a Jew. Now follow me we will go to the Jewish house of worship, because that's where we belong. The rabbi will welcome us fellow Jews.”

The Jasonists go to the Synagogue.

The Jasonists didn't go raucously like a mob, to the synagogue. They were penitents, sinners, begging for forgiveness. Barefooted, dressed in white burial shrouds, the customary attire for attending synagogue worship on the holiest day of the year Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, they trickled, one at a time, humbly into the sanctuary. They had chosen the moment when all the congregants faced the holy ark with bowed heads, seeking soundlessly, only lips moving, God's mercy. Only a swishing

noise of prayer shawls as their bodies
swayed backwards and forwards in
concentrated supplication could be heard.

The rabbi, sensing movement behind
him, turned around slowly to see who had
dared to disturb the holy moment. His
jaw dropped, shocked to see Apollodorus
at the head of a long line of Zeus
followers.”What was the meaning of
this?” It wasn’t unusual to see one or two
Zeus followers in the synagogue, but so
many of them and the priest leading
them.....

Mumbling could be heard as more congregants witnessed the strange phenomenon. Some could be heard saying look how the Lord has opened the hearts of the non-believers. Others were heard to grumble that the “goim” (non-Jews) had come to mock them on their most holy day.

The moment of the silent prayer ended. The rabbi demanded silence as he addressed the gathering of Polytheists. “Dear friends, I rejoice in your curiosity about our customs, but it looks to me that

you didn't come here out of curiosity. Am
I right?"

Apollodorus looked the rabbi in the eye,
then his look drifted over the Jewish
worshippers. His voice trembling:
“honorable rabbi, we have come to
confess that we are Jews. We sinned
worshipping the stone gods. We reject
Zeus and all the idols. The one God has
revealed Himself to us through His son
Jason. You saw with your own eyes that
Jason died in the fracas in front of Zeus's
temple. Now the One God has revealed to
us that Jason is with Him in heaven.

Jason is the son of the one God. All who
believe this believe in the one god.

Praised be the one God, we have become
Jews and want to join your holy
congregation.”,

The Jasonists, however, weren't made
welcome. Their expectations were
shattered. The congregation was silent.
The rabble explained patiently: “You have
been misled my friends, by someone who
told you that Jason is the son of God. “You
are my Son; today I have begotten you,”
and other similar verses, the Nation of
Israel is God's son. All human beings are

God's sons. To attribute a physical fatherhood to God, I'm sorry to tell you, is idolatry."

With one voice the Polytheists declared, "You are lying, misinterpreting God's holy word. You are trying to keep God to yourselves. You don't want anyone else to have Him. He is our god and he will protect us and be angry with you for rejecting his son."

Apollodorus called one of the Polytheists to step forward: "You Theopholus, the

honest, tell the rabbi what you saw, how Jason died.”

“Well, said Theopholus, I happened to be standing next to Jason when the soldier's sword struck his neck and he fell. But he wasn't dead, he was trying to get up, when suddenly someone steps out of the crowd, with a dagger and stabs Jason in the heart. It was horrible the blood spurted like a fountain. That's the thing that killed our beloved Jason. Nobody saw the murderer but I know a Jew when I see one. He had that greedy look on his face.”

“You killed the son of God. God raised him up from the dead and now you reject him and call us idolators.”

“Get out, out of the sacred house of God. I’ve told you your mistake and you are becoming violent towards us. Get out, you idol worshippers.” Shouted the rabbi.

“We will go, but you will have to follow the true way of God or else we will show you how God punishes those who reject His son.”

Part six: Epilogue(the tragedy of history

Persecution of the Jews begins.

The Jasonists did what had never been done since the belief in one god began, they embarked on a campaign to force Polytheists to believe in the one God, through Jason His son. They were employing tactics invented by Antiochus Epiphanus to convert Jews to belief in Zeus and Dionysus, The big difference was that they claimed to be killing and torturing and destroying shrines and idols, in the name of the one God. This very act proves that they were the followers of idolatry. The one god never

used force to convert pagans to belief in
him.

