

Jason discovers Monotheism

Introduction

A squadron of Seleucid soldiers, on the orders of Antiochus IV, frog-marched into the synagogue at Antioch. "Remove the bronze plaques," shouts the captain of the guard. These tablets were inscribed with the words of the city's founder, Seleucus Nicator, two hundred years previously: "As a reward for loyalty to the emperor, in battles for the establishment of our domains, I hereby grant the Jews the right to citizenship of our city and to worship god and to practice their religion." Antiochus IV, sovereign of the Seleucids, defaulted on the founder's promise. Henceforth, citizenship would only be granted to those who had retracted Judaism and sworn belief in the gods.

Had it not been for his fixation on purging the world of monotheism, Antiochus IV would have gone down in history for his brilliance —the ideas that elevated Antioch to "a point of luxury and magnificence that rivalled Alexandria and Rome." But these things were nothing compared to his urge to be as powerful as the deity. Monotheism threatened to shatter this dream. It had to be eradicated. Eliminating the belief in one god was more important than anything. The presence in the world of a single deity to the exclusion of others, meant that his godly status was in

danger of crumbling to nothingness, and his laws would not be obeyed. The existence of the state depended on him being recognised by his subjects as divine. All his efforts to convince his subjects that he was a god would be in vain while a nation existed that propagated the one-god belief. Antiochus was the first Seleucid king to use divine epithets on coins, "manifest god", and "bringer of victory". He minted currency depicting himself with the radiant crown of the sun god, and the features of Zeus. He demanded worship of himself as Theos Epiphanus. His obsession had brought him to be remembered as the abomination of desolation.

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 sun, 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 Jason, the sixteen-year-old son of the cleric. The

women swooned at the sight of the handsome youth, destined for training in the Seleucid army. Maidens had to be revived.

One of the onlookers was Miriam, the twelve-year-old daughter of Jose ben Yoezer, 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 young god caused her to forget the declaration.

Unnoticed, the new priest's son broke away from the royal procession. 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 gold-trimmed red toga, the sign of a novice priest, his short-cropped hair, and the pointed Greek sword hanging from his belt identified him as an aristocrat. The long-haired and bearded 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 girl 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 red 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 expanded 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 Greeks had to maintain an appearance of tolerance for now; the hour for more extreme methods of persuasion would come.

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 Jose 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.

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 the belief in one god—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.

Antiochus Epiphanes becomes king

Menelaus's appointment was the work of the new King of the Seleucid Empire, he who considered himself a god. By the time he took over the monarchy, 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 Greek things, he wouldn't allow the gods to be trampled on by a silly idea of one God.

Until his ascent to the throne, no idols were erected in the holy land, in consideration of the Jewish opposition to graven images,

Apollodorus becomes priest of Zeus.

His first step was to bring his childhood friend from Athens 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 monotheism, a form of religion 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.

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.

Antioch was destined to be the centre of Judaism for another 700 years, until its destruction at the hands of fanatic Christians in the 4th century.

The kings following Seleucus were named 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.

Jose ben Yoezer settles in Antioch

“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”, Jose pronounced the aphorism, in reply to the visitor's account of the luxury enjoyed by the believers in one god in the boom town.

The leaders of the congregation had travelled to Jerusalem to report on the condition of the diaspora, the first to be established since the return of the Babylonian exile.

“Nobody, not a scholar, will be willing to leave the holy precinct of monotheism to dwell in a place of idolatry?” Joseph bar Katros, the incense maker, declaimed in his usual sceptical manner, as they sat overlooking the temple.

“The contingent from the Syrian city allayed their fears; relationships were so good 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. This was an acceptable practice, not looked at as something unusual; these people were known as believers.

Antioch is a place where the king consults with us; we are honoured citizens of the realm. In fact, many heathens attend our religious gatherings and observe the laws of Sabbath and kosher food. Please don't besmirch our town.”

“This is just the thing for my star pupil.” Hillel the renowned teacher said to himself.

At just twenty years old, Jose ben Yoezer had already earned a reputation as a master of both the Torah and the oral law. Chosen as one of the seventy scholars sent to Alexandria, he lent his hand to

rendering the sacred writings into Greek. The resulting translation quickly found wide favor; its spread throughout the Diaspora sustained Jewish learning among those whose native tongue was Greek—a crucial development, given that Aramaic had previously reigned as the common language, with its own Targums enjoying popularity for years. In this new form, the Jewish holy book could now stand shoulder to shoulder with the mythic epics of Hellas and the dialogues of Plato and Aristotle.

“What do you think about it, Jose? You’re a single fellow and will gain a lot from more contact with fellow religionists outside the Holy Land. The Jews of Antioch are very rich, and you might discover a bride whose father will support you in luxury while you study Torah.

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. Nevertheless, your name will be inscribed among the great leaders of our nation for generations to come.

Jose 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 the wisdom that had made him famous throughout the Diaspora. 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.

"The maiden was not easily seen. Jose managed only a momentary impression—a tall creature whose 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 servant 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 everything shone..

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

His mind had wrestled with the problems of setting up the academy. The sight of the stalwart figure 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, Jose lifted the pearly-white diaphanous mantilla, uncovering the shining countenance of his bride. 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 cherish, honor, support and maintain their wives faithfully “

“What happened to your beautiful figure?” Jose 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. ’ As our Torah says, ‘join to your wife and become one’, the one 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?” Jose, 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 Jose.” Declared the mohel (circumciser). “Lehaim, Lehaim,” the celebrating guests toasted the newborn.”Blessed are You, L- rd 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 child 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 called out her oft-repeated motto. She soon returned to her occupation of teaching Torah to girls. “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 girls, 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 was born 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 young man 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 of it, the desperate clasp of two young Athenians who had sworn an oath in the groves of the Academy: One God is a tyrant. One God is a disease. And the people who worship Him—the Jews—must be unmade.

While other Athenian boys learned Homer, Jason learned that oath. Apollodorus and Antiochus were inseparable. They wrestled in the palaestra, debated philosophers, and drank deep into the nights, sketching maps of the East on wax tablets. "One day," Antiochus would whisper, 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." Apollodorus would laugh—a bright, reckless sound—and clasp his friend's shoulder. "We will build temples so beautiful that their stubborn god will weep, and their people will forget His name."

Jason grew up listening to that laughter. It was the music of his childhood.

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 home—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 Temple 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 was 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 also renamed Jerusalem Antioch. 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 monotheists.”

"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."

167 BCE Erection of a temple to Zeus in Modiin

Dionysus, the god of ecstasy, wine, and madness, came trundling into Modi'in, with great pomp and ceremony, wobbling from side to side on the floor of a sturdy oak wagon, pulled by ten lowing oxen. His handsome white marble countenance was crowned with gold. 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. The last time a graven image stood in Judea was 400 years earlier in the days of the idol-worshipping king Menashe. Then God punished the

nation with the destruction of His own holy place in Jerusalem and the exile of the citizens to Babylon. 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. He chose Modiin, a town in the hill country on the main road to Jerusalem, where few Greeks lived.

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.

The mother watched as her seven children were executed for not bowing down to the statue..The executioners did their work with clinical efficiency. They severed limbs, scorched flesh, and peeled skin. They offered each son a final chance: Bow, and live. Each son recited the Shema instead. One by one, they died—until only Hannah remained, her eyes dry, her face as hard as flint.

The Greek commander, growing desperate for a submission he could not force, pleaded with her. "Bow. Save yourself."

She cradled the head of her youngest son, still warm in her lap, and smiled—not with madness, but with absolute, unshakable certainty. "My sons have already entered the world to come. I will not lag."

They killed her last.

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.

She had come to Modiin to deliver supplies to the rebels. Now, she pressed her palm against her mouth, stifling a sob. She had known Hannah—had studied Torah beside her. She had braided the hair of the youngest son. And now their blood soaked the dust of the square.

But it was not the blood that broke her.

It was the figure standing on the hill above Modiin, wearing the purple cloak of a Greek general, his face pale and twisted with something that looked almost like grief.

He had come to witness his king's victory. Instead, he had witnessed the Shema spoken seven times from the lips of martyrs. Miriam's eyes locked onto his across the smoke-filled 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.

Then Jason turned away. He gave no order to pursue the fleeing Mattathias. He simply mounted his horse and rode back toward Jerusalem, his shoulders hunched, a man carrying a weight he did not yet understand.

Miriam watched him go, and for the first time in her life, she prayed not for mercy—but for justice.

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, Eleazar, 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 clapped him on the shoulder back in Antioch. "You are the hammer, my son. We will smash their superstition from the inside." Jason nodded. He had to believe it. He had sworn an oath to the king.

Jason, now a general in the Seleucid army, had never known such 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 heard that prayer not as a whisper of piety, but as a war cry.

Apollonius, the commander of the Seleucid army at the Samarian 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.

Many stories of Judah's heroism were told, even that he was as great as David and killed Apollonius the way David had killed the giant Goliath.

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.

"Get up," Eleazar growled. "The Lion wants to see the Greek who thinks he owns our God."

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 had never felt so utterly undone.

Athenian philosophy had taught him that the gods were distant, amused, indifferent. But this—this ferocity, this unshakable certainty—was something else entirely. It terrified him. And in that terror, he felt something he had never allowed himself to feel: 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 second Maccabean war.

Conquering Jerusalem meant that he'd 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—Eleazar, the fierce-eyed brother of Judah—his sword dripping, his face streaked with ash

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, which guarded the main road South of Jerusalem, had been inhabited by Jews since the days of Joshua.

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 I won't make it easy." 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 poinard to its scabbard, the Jewish Amazon examined the pagan Hercules, bound and held between two Maccabean warriors. He wore the short red tunic of high rank. “Lift up your head Greek. Show a gentle Jewish maiden your haughty heathen countenance.” Slowly the head rose until the blue Greek eyes were on a level with hers. “What have we here? 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-two, 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. She turned away, clenching her fists until the knuckles showed white..

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 rebellion subsided. 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, and mothers clutching infants. Two thousand years had passed since the forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—had trod this very path to Jerusalem. "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."

It looked as if the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled: "My house shall be a house of worship for all the nations."

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, Eleazar 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 and discovered a new path.

The universe, he realised, existed because of the believers in the one god; Each Jew killed was a step toward the world's demise. He had been a destroyer of the world, little by little. 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 stone. "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 Yisrael..."

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

Jewish Monotheism meant that there was only one God; there were no other Gods. When the Bible says “there is none like unto Thee, among the gods,” it means that the others, called gods, are illusions.

In the academy of Modiin, attended by his friend Yohanan, 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.

Other nations had come into existence and later disappeared while the Jews have been in existence since Abraham recognised Monotheism, 2000 years ago. The one God cared for them 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.” It was a deal; as long as they worshipped only him, he protected them.”

“Nations thrived or declined according to how good or bad they were to his nation.”

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.

Miriam's father was called to return to Jerusalem, to take up the post of Nasi, president of the newly constituted Sanhedrin.

After killing Nicanor, 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,

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 goose-stepped 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 Golden 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 as a Torah-observing Jew. 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."

"The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts those who are weighed down. The LORD loves the godly," they chanted the words of the Psalmist.

The news of the Maccabean victory spread. Synagogues throughout the Greek empire became the new places of worship for Greeks who were convinced that the God of the Jews was the true god. Copies of the new Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuaginta, were in demand.

Everyone wanted to learn about the god who had vanquished Zeus, a god who protected his nation.

Jason and Miriam are married.

“With this ring I thee do wed. 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." Jose had explained what this implied: "As a Jew entering the temple of Zeus, you would be contravening the law prohibiting the making of graven images, as the Torah says, 'thou shalt have no other gods besides me'.

"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. Hellenism was rapidly becoming an outdated belief. Apollodorus cherished the hope that Greek soldiers would return to Judea to renew their efforts to bring the Jews to worship Zeus. The converse happened: 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 only a month ago 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 do his duty as a Jew and 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 Balast.

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 through the bandit-ridden passes. 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 beside him, leading him through the winding alleys to the courtyard of Jose, his father-in-law and the

aging head of the Sanhedrin. They clasped forearms in a tight embrace. But before pleasantries could linger, Jason spoke urgently of his wife Miriam and their daughter—safe for now, under Seleucid protection in Antioch—though his eyes betrayed that he had darker tidings yet to share about the change of regimes in Antioch.."

They are well, my father, and are in a hurry to join us in Jerusalem. First we need to attend to the dangers facing the kingdom. 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 Jose's house in the Upper City, on Mount Zion—the elite suburb of Jerusalem- he gazed in wonder at the Temple on Mount Moriah.

At the break of day, as the sun rose over the Mount of Anointing (Olivet to the Gentiles), 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.

Jason felt the one God's existence much more tangibly than he ever felt Zeus, yet God was invisible, not represented by a statue as Zeus was.

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 were 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 Balast, 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 Ballastr. “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 Ballast 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 go to be at Jason's side.

The academy was located in the chamber of polished stones (lishkat hagazit), where the Sanhedrin also held its deliberations. This building was built into the north wall of the temple, half inside and half outside, with doors providing access to the temple and to the outside.

Miriam, being a woman, wasn't permitted inside and waited at this entrance each day to hear the wonderful things her husband had learned.

The importance of the idea of one god.

"Jason!" one day, 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. He has ordained that anyone who declares the one god to be the only god is put to death for committing treason. Judaism won’t accept people who don’t believe that God is the only god.”

“Yes, that is true,” said Jason. “I’ve learned that Judaism has 613 laws, but none of them are a condition of being Jewish, except the law to believe that God is one and has no representative on earth, unlike Demetrius or Antiochus or any of the kings.”

God isn’t appointed by a human being, and no human being is an appointee of God. They despise monotheism and favor polytheism. Polytheism allows them to appoint gods, and they usually appoint themselves as gods.”

“Now I understand why idolaters won’t become Jews.” Jason’s eyes sparkled with revelation. “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.

One can appreciate the seriousness with which this law is regarded by the rabbinical injunction: “If one is forced, with the threat of death, to bow down to an idol, one should choose death. This injunction doesn’t apply to any other law in the Torah.

Antiochus’s acceptance of this belief wasn’t merely a whim or because he disliked Jews. They were loyal subjects of his kingdom, fought wars to give him victory over Ptolemy, were hard working and helped beautify his domains. Jews also had no objection to Zeus and Dionysus. They weren’t idolaters but they participated in the festivals of the gods.

Antiochus’s objection to Monotheism was fundamental; it undermined his position as a god. He passed a law; Anyone declaring belief in the one god was committing treason and faced the death penalty.” When Demetrius had taken over the monarchy he cancelled these laws, He didn’t see any harm in the Jews worshipping their god. He wouldn’t be

happy to see Jews proselytising among his compatriots, but Jews, at this time didn't proselytize. A time for missionarising would come but that was late. Its practice led to the dominance of monotheism and the end of Polytheism

Judah the Maccabee had often sat with his brothers, Simon, Jonathan, John, and Elazar, on this same balcony overlooking the temple, discussing tactics with Jose in preparation for the Greeks' continued onslaught. Now Jason and Jonathan sat here. The questions facing them were dire; a famine had broken out, and Bacchiides held the sons of Jewish leaders of Jerusalem hostage in the Hakra.

The tactic they decided on was 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 white 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; Jason knew no other word for this. 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.

Jason had rejoiced at converting to Judaism. But things had changed: Following Jonathan's treaonous act, he transferred his support to the Pharisees, who had shed their blood in the Maccabean battles to banish idolatry, to maintain the Jewish tradition of approaching God directly, with humility, not through the intermediary of an idol.or a king who made himself god.

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 to death.

Jonathan's appointment of the high priesthood put an end to everything they had fought for. The Maccabees had abandoned the cause of monotheism for the corrupt influences of Polytheism..

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

Jose's eyes filled with tears. "The Sanhedrin has become a rubber stamp in Jonathan's hands. Objecting to his wishes ends in death. Go with my blessing, 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 centre of the one god."

Jason looked into his father-in-law's eyes. He 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 and Jason's home. The holiness had filled their spirits and brought them happiness. "Father, 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. That night, Jason slipped from Jonathan's camp without a word. He found the Perushim in their hidden study-houses, men who still taught that the priesthood must be purified or the Land would vomit them out. He knelt among them, but he knew his path lay farther still. Before the cock crowed, he and Miriam departed for Antioch: "We cannot save Judea from itself, we will carry the One God to the nations. No more war, only Monotheism for everybody.." He left Jerusalem at dawn, a convert fleeing the very rebellion he had come to counsel, carrying the Torah in his heart and the weight of his people's coming tragedy upon his shoulders.

Life of a Jew in Antioch.

The elders of the synagogue came to the gate of Antioch to welcome Jason's return. They too were disappointed in Jonathan and supported the Pharisees.

They wrapped themselves in sackcloth, poured ashes on their heads and mourned. This was not what the Maccabees had fought for. "Joining

the Pharisees, Jason has made himself an enemy of the corrupt regime.

"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. We will fight forever, to keep false images, who claim to represent God, out of Judaism."

"The people walking in darkness

have seen a great light;

on those living in the land of deep darkness

a light has dawned."

The congregants of the Antioch synagogue recited Isaiah's words. 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 Jose's son-in-law, He has returned Jason to us —the convert from the Zeus-priesthood.”

“Tell us what is on your mind. What task has God allocated for you in our fair city?” asked the elders. 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, his voice cracking with age but ringing with authority. "You fled the abomination. You walked away from the sword when it was wrapped in the ephod. That is not cowardice. That is holiness."

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 them, a gesture reserved for Torah scholars.

"Come," the old Pharisee said. "The beit midrash awaits you."

The study-house of the Antiochene Pharisees was a modest limestone building behind the main synagogue, its walls lined with niches for scrolls, its air thick with the smell of old parchment and olive oil. That evening, nearly forty men gathered—merchants, dyers, shipwrights, and scribes—all of whom had followed the news from Judea with trembling hearts. They knew of Judah's victories and Jonathan's cunning. But they also knew of the Zadokite line, and the Law that reserved the priesthood for the sons of Aaron alone.

Elazar gestured for Jason to stand before them.

"Tell us," a young scribe called out, "did Jonathan truly wear the ephod? Did he offer incense, though his hands had held the sword against our brothers?"

Jason steadied himself against the reading lectern. "He did. I watched Bacchides' herald read the terms. 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. And the Sanhedrin... my father-in-law, Jose, sat in silence, for fear of the Hasmonean swords."

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 Hellenisers. Judah's brother, Jonathan has let the Maccabees down badly. The rebellion wasn't about setting up a king over the nation. It was about bringing

back holiness to the temple, expelling corrupt high priests, appointed by idolatrous rulers. Jonathan has brought disaster on the Jewish People.

The Pharisees were right to break away from the Maccabees. You did the right thing to join them. Your return to Antioch is the first step in reviving Judaism. Monotheism will depart from the holy land and take root in the lands where Jews live in the Diaspora. This is the fulfilment of God's plan in the book of Deuteronomy:

“The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you.”

The Pharisees in Jerusalem are resisting. They will gather the am ha'aretz—the faithful common people—and they will refuse to accept sacrifices from a usurper's hands. In the holy land they are surrounded by spears. Here, in Antioch, we can speak freely. And we will speak."

"You have come to us with a convert's heart, Jason. You were born into the house of Zeus, yet you fled the idols. Others will follow you. We welcome you—not as a stranger, but as a brother who has been purified

by fire. Your wife Miriam, daughter of Jose, is among us. Her family's name is honored here. You will teach in this beit midrash. You will bring your questions and your doubts, and we will wrestle with them together, as Jacob wrestled with the angel."---

Miriam entered then, carrying a tray of flatbreads and spiced wine, her eyes red with tears of relief. The elders rose to greet her—the daughter of Jose, the granddaughter of the Zadokite line through her mother—and they blessed her with the ancient words: "May the Lord make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah."

Jason watched his wife embrace Elazar, and for the first time since leaving Jerusalem, he felt his shoulders loosen. This was not the battlefield where men settled arguments with iron. This was the beit midrash, where arguments were settled with kal v'chomer and gezerah shavah—with logic and scripture and the sweat of holy debate.

"Your mission to the Greeks," Elazar said later, as the wine was passed around, "we have heard of it. Demetrius the cloth-merchant speaks already of the scroll you lent him. We do not encourage every Gentile to

take the full yoke of the Torah—the Ger Toshav is enough for many—but we do encourage the light to spread. The prophets said the nations would come to Jerusalem to learn the Law. But if the Gentiles cannot come to Jerusalem, then perhaps the Law must come to them, carried by faithful men who have fled the sword."

He placed a scroll in Jason's hands—the Book of Isaiah, open to chapter 42:

"I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations."

"This is your charge now," Elazar said softly. "You could not save Judea from itself. But you can carry the flame to the very heart of the empire. The Pharisees of Antioch stand with you. We will provide you with scrolls, with a meeting room, with food for your table. And when Demetrius returns with his questions, we will be here to help you answer—not with swords, but with the Word."

That night, as the lamps burned low and the elders departed with blessings on their lips, Jason and Miriam sat alone in the quiet study-house. 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. But here, in this small stone room, the flickering light illuminated only Hebrew letters—the letters of the covenant, written on parchment, waiting to be read aloud to any Gentile who would listen.

Miriam took his hand.

"Your father poured libations to Zeus on that acropolis," she said, gesturing toward the distant lights. "You will stand in that same city and proclaim the Shema. The Pharisees here will protect us. They will teach us. And we—we will plant a garden in this desert of idols."

Jason pressed his forehead to hers.

"Then let us begin," he said. "Tomorrow, I will find Demetrius. And the day after, I will find another. And another. Until Antioch knows that the

One God has not abandoned His people—even when His people have abandoned themselves."

Outside, the moon rose over the Seleucid capital, gilding the pagan temples in silver. But in the Jewish quarter, a small lamp burned late into the night—the light of a man who had lost his country but found his calling, embraced by a community that honored the Pharisees' ancient cry: Tradition is the fence around the Law, and the Law is the fence around the Holy One.