

“The Story of Hanukkah”

1 Maccabees 4:6–59

At daybreak Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men, but they did not have armor and swords such as they desired. And they saw the camp of the Gentiles, strong and fortified, with cavalry round about it; and these men were trained in war. But Judas said to the men who were with him, **“Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. Remember how our fathers were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. And now let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us and remember his covenant with our fathers and crush this army before us today. Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel.”**

When the foreigners looked up and saw them coming against them, they went forth from their camp to battle. Then the men with Judas blew their trumpets and engaged in battle. The Gentiles were crushed and fled into the plain, and all those in the rear fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, and to the plains of Idumea, and to Azotus and Jamnia; and three thousand of them fell.

Then Judas and his force turned back from pursuing them, and he said to the people, “Do not be greedy for plunder, for there is a battle before us; Gorgias and his force are near us in the hills. But stand now against our enemies and fight them, and afterward seize the plunder boldly.”

Just as Judas was finishing this speech, a detach-

ment appeared, coming out of the hills. They saw that their army had been put to flight, and that the Jews were burning the camp, for the smoke that was seen showed what had happened. When they perceived this they were greatly frightened, and when they also saw the army of Judas drawn up in the plain for battle, they all fled into the land of the Philistines.

Then Judas returned to plunder the camp, and they seized much gold and silver, and cloth dyed blue and sea purple, and great riches. On their return they sang the hymn “Praises to Heaven, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever” [Psalm 118]. Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day.

Those of the foreigners who escaped went and reported to Lysias all that had happened. When he heard it, he was perplexed and discouraged, for things had not happened to Israel as he had intended, nor had they turned out as the king had commanded him.

But the next year [165 BC] he mustered sixty thousand picked infantrymen and five thousand cavalry to subdue them. They came into Idumea and encamped at Beth-Zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men.

When he saw that the army was strong, he prayed, saying, **“Blessed art thou, O Savior of Israel, who didst crush the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of thy servant David, and didst give the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan, the son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor.** So do thou hem in this army by the hand of thy people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. Strike them down with the sword of those who love thee, and let all who know thy name praise thee

with hymns.”

Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action. And when Lysias saw the rout of his troops and observed the boldness which inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he departed to Antioch and enlisted mercenaries, to invade Judah again with an even larger army.

Then said Judas and his brothers, “Behold, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.” So all the army assembled and they went up to Mount Zion. And they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins.

Then they rent their clothes, and mourned with great lamentation, and sprinkled themselves with ashes. They fell face down on the ground, and sounded the signal on the trumpets, and cried out to Heaven. Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place.

They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs,

and built a new altar like the former one.

They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. **They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple.**

They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken. Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Kislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year [Seleucid Era; 15 December 165], they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering which they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals.

All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and furnished them with doors. There was very great gladness among the people, and the reproach of the Gentiles was removed.

Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev.