

**Unity, Schism and Foreign Culture:
The War of Hyrcanus and Aristobulus and the Murder of Onias**

Vered Noam

1. Josephus, Ant. 14:19-28

[19] Because of these promises which were made to him, Aretas marched against Aristobulus with an army of fifty thousand horsemen and footsoldiers as well, and defeated him in battle. After his victory many deserted to Hyrcanus, and Aristobulus, being left alone, fled to Jerusalem. [20] Thereupon the Arab king took his whole army and attacked the temple, where he besieged Aristobulus; and the citizens, joining Hyrcanus' side, assisted him in the siege, while only the priests remained loyal to Aristobulus. [21] And so Aretas placed the camps of the Arabs and Jews next to one another, and pressed the siege vigorously. But as this action took place at the time of observing the festival of Unleavened Bread, which we call Phaska (τούτων δὲ γινομένων κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς τῶν ἀζύμων ἑορτῆς, ἣν πάσχα λέγομεν), the Jews of best repute left the country and fled to Egypt. [22] Now there was a certain Onias, who, being a righteous man and dear to God (δίκαιον ὄντα καὶ θεοφιλή), had once in a rainless period prayed to God to end the drought, and God had heard his prayer and sent rain; this man hid himself when he saw that the civil war continued to rage, but he was taken to the camp of the Jews and was asked to place a curse on Aristobulus and his fellow-rebels, just as he had, by his prayers, put an end to the rainless period. [23] But when in spite of his refusals and excuses he was forced to speak by the mob, he stood up in their midst and said, [24] "Oh God, king of the universe (ὦ θεὲ βασιλεῦ τῶν ὅλων), since these men standing by me are Thy people, and those who are besieged are Thy priests, I beseech you not to hearken to them against these men nor to bring to pass what these men ask Thee to do to those others." And when he had prayed in this manner the villains among the Jews who stood round him stoned him to death.

[25] But God straightaway punished them for this savagery, and exacted satisfaction for the murder of Onias in the following manner. While the priests and Aristobulus were being besieged, there happened to come round the festival called Phaska (τὴν ἑορτὴν ἐπιστῆναι τὴν καλουμένην φάσκα), at which it is our custom to offer numerous sacrifices to God. [26] But as Aristobulus and those with him lacked victims, they asked their countrymen to furnish them with these, and take as much money for the victims as they wished. And when these others demanded that they pay a thousand drachmas for each animal they wished to get, Aristobulus and the priests willingly accepted this price and gave them the money, which they let down from the walls by a rope (διὰ τῶν τειχῶν καθιμήσαντες). [27] Their countrymen, however, after receiving the money did not deliver the victims, but went to such lengths of villainy that they violated their pledges and acted impiously toward God by not furnishing the sacrificial victims to those who were in need of them (τοῖς δεομένοις). [28] But the priests, on suffering this breach of faith, prayed to God to exact satisfaction on their behalf from their countrymen; and He did not delay their punishment, but sent a mighty and violent wind to destroy the crops of the entire country, so that the people at that time had to pay eleven drachmas for a modius of wheat.

2. BabaQ. 7:7 They do not rear small cattle in the Land of Israel, but they do rear them in Syria and in the wastelands which are in the Land of Israel. They do not rear chickens in Jerusalem, on account of the Holy Things, nor do priests [rear chickens] anywhere in the Land of Israel, because of the [necessity to preserve] the cleanness [of heave offering and certain other foods which are handed over to the priests. **They do not rear pigs anywhere.**

Bavli BK 82b:

IT IS NOT RIGHT TO BREED PIGS IN ANY PLACE WHATEVER. Our Rabbis taught: When the members of the Hasmonean house were contending with one another...

3. Sota 9:14 In the war against Vespasian they decreed against the wearing of wreaths by bridegrooms and against the wedding drum. In the war against Titus they decreed against the wearing of wreaths by brides, And [they decreed] that a man should not teach Greek to his son. In the last war [Bar Kokhba's] they decreed that a bride should not go out in a palanquin inside the town.

Bavli Sota 49b:

AND THAT NOBODY SHOULD TEACH HIS SON GREEK. Our Rabbis taught: When the kings of the Hasmonean house fought one another

4. Menahot 10:2 The requirement of the omer is to bring it from [barley growing] nearby. [If] it [the crop] did not ripen near Jerusalem [in time for use on Nisan 16] [however,] they bring it from any place. It once happened that it was brought from Gaggot Gannot Serifin, and [the grain] for the two loaves [Lev. 23:17] from the valley of En Sokher

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| | <i>b. Menah.</i> 64b | מנחות סד ע"ב |
| | Our Rabbis taught: | תנו רבנן |
| 1 | When the Kings of the Hasmonean house besieged one another, Hyrcanus was outside and Aristobulus within [the city wall] | כשצרו מלכי בית חשמוניי זה על זה היה הורקנוס מבחוץ ואריסטובלוס מבפנים |
| 2 | Each day [those that were within] used to let down [to the other party] <i>denars</i> in a basket, and haul up [in return] animals for the daily offerings. | בכל יום ויום היו משלשלין להם דינרי' בקופה ומעלין להם תמידין |
| 3 | There was an old man there, who was learned in Greek wisdom. | היה שם זקן אחד שהיה מכיר בחכמת יוונית |
| 4 | [He said to them:] "As long as they carry on the Temple service they will never be delivered into your hands." | <אמ' להן: > כל זמן שעסוקין בעבודה אין נמסרין בידכם |
| 5 | On the morrow they let down <i>denars</i> in a basket and hauled up a pig. | למחר שילשלו להם דינרי' בקופה והעלו להן חזיר |
| 6 | When it reached halfway up the wall, it stuck its claws into the wall, | כיון שהגיע לחצי חומה נעץ ציפרניו בחומה |
| 7 | and the land of Israel was shaken over a distance of four hundred <i>parasangs</i> by four hundred <i>parasangs</i> . | ונזדעזעה ארץ ישר' ארבע מאות פרסה על ארבע מאות פרסה |
| 8 | At that time they declared, 'Cursed be the man who rears pigs and cursed be the man who teaches his son Greek wisdom!' | באותה שעה אמרו ארור אדם שיגדל חזירים וארור אדם שילמד את בנו חכמת יוונית |
| 9 | It was concerning this time [of siege] that we learnt: It once happened that the ' <i>Omer</i> was brought from Gaggoth Zerifin and the two loaves from the valley of Bet Soker. | על אותה שעה שנינו מעשה שבא העומר מגגות צריפין ושתי הלחם מבקעת בית סוכר |

5. Ta'an. 3:8 On account of every sort of public trouble (may it not happen) do they sound the shofar, except for an excess of rain. They said to Honi, the circle drawer, "Pray for rain". He said to them, "Go and take in the clay ovens used for Passover, so that they not soften [in the rain which is coming]. He prayed, but it did not rain. What did he do? He drew a circle and stood in the middle of it and said before Him, "Lord of the world! Your children have turned to me, for before you I am like a member of the family. I swear by your great name-I'm simply not moving from here until you take pity on your children"! It began to rain drop by drop. He said, "This is not what I wanted, but rain for filling up cisterns, pits, and caverns". It began to rain violently. He said, "This is not what I wanted, but rain of good will, blessing, and graciousness". Now it rained the right way, until Israelites had to flee from Jerusalem up to the Temple Mount because of the rain. Now they came and said to him, "Just as you prayed for it to rain, now pray for it to go away". He said to them, "Go, see whether the stone of the strayers is disappeared". Simeon b. Shatah said to him, "If you were not Honi, I should decree a ban of excommunication against you. But what am I going to do to you? For you importune before the Omnipresent, so he does what you want, like a son who importunes his father, so he does what he wants. "Concerning you Scripture says, Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her that bore you rejoice (Prov. 23:25).

על כל צרה שתבוא על הציבור מתריעים עליה חוץ מרוב גשמים. מעשה שאמרו לחוני המעגל. התפלל שירדו גשמים. אמ' להם. צאו והכניסו תנורי פסחים בשביל שלא ימקו. ו(ני)תפלל ולא ירדו גשמים. עג עוגה ועמד בתוכה ואמ'. רבונ(י) של עולם]. בניך שמו פניהם עלי שני כבן בית לפניך. נשבע אני בשמך הגדול שאיני זו מיכן על שתרחם על בניך. התחילו הגשמים מנטפים. אמ'. לא כך שאלתי אלא גשמי בורות שיחים ומערות. ירדו בזעף. אמ'. לא כך שאלתי אלא גשמי רצון ברכה ונדבה. ירדו כתיקנן עד שעלו ישרא' מירוש' להר-הבית מפני הגשמים. אמ' לו. כשם שהתפללתה עליהם שירדו כך היתפלל שילכו להם. אמ' להם. צאו וראו אם נימחת אבן [ה]טועים. שלח לו שמעון בן שטח. אמ' לו. צריך אתה ל(נ)ד[ות]. אבל מה אעשה ל(ו)ך [ו]אתה מתחטא לפני המקום כבן שהוא מתחטא לאביו ועושה לו רצונו. ועליך הכתוב אומ' "ישמח אביך ואמך ותגל יולדתך".

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| Josephus | Rabbinic Sources | |
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| Oh God, king of the universe (<i>Ant.</i> 14.24) | Lord of the world (<i>m. Ta'an.</i> 3:8; <i>b. Ta'an.</i> 23a) | רבונ(י) / רבוננו של עולם |
| since these men standing by me are Thy <i>people</i> , and those who are besieged are Thy priests | Your <i>children</i> have turned to me (<i>m. Ta'an.</i> 3:8; <i>b. Ta'an.</i> 23a) | בניך שמו פניהם עלי |
| I beseech you not to hearken to them against these men nor to bring to pass what these men ask Thee to do to those others | You have brought evil upon your children, and they could not endure it. You brought good upon your children, and they could not endure it. "But may it be pleasing to you..." (<i>y. Ta'an.</i> 3:4 [66d]; cf. <i>b. Ta'an.</i> 23a) | הבאתה רעה על בניך ולא יכלו לעמוד בה הבאתה טובה על בניך ולא יכלו לעמוד בה אלא יהי רצון מלפניך... |
| But God straightaway punished them for this savagery ... but sent a mighty and violent wind to destroy the crops of the entire country | Forthwith the wind blew, the clouds were scattered, the sun shone, and the earth dried out. (<i>y. Ta'an.</i> 3:4; <i>b. Ta'an.</i> 23a) | מיד נשבה הרוח ונתפזרו העבים וזרחה החמה ונתנגבה הארץ |

7. *Y. Ta'an.* 4:8 (68c) = *y. Ber.* 4:1 (7b)

- 1 'ובטל התמיד'.
- 2 ר' סימון בשם ר' יהושע בן לוי.
- 3 בימי מלכות יוון היו משלשלין להם שתי קופות שלזהב והיו מעלין שני כבשים.
- 4 פעם אחת שילשלו להם שתי קופות שלזהב והעלו להן שני גדיים.
- 5 באותה השעה האיר הקב"ה את עיניהם ומצאו שני טלאים בלישכת הטלאים.
- 6 על אותה השעה העיד ר' יהודה בן אבא על תמיד שלשחר שקרב בארבע שעות.
- 7 ואמ' ר' לוי.
- 8 אף בימי מלכות הרשעה הזאת היו משלשלין להן שתי קופות שלזהב והיו מעלין להן שני <כבשים>.
- 9 ובסוף שילשלו להם שתי קופות שלזהב והעלו להם שני חזירים.
- 10 לא הספיקו להגיע למחצית החומה עד שנ(א)[ע]ץ החזיר וקפץ מארץ-יש' ארבעים פרסה.
- 11 באותה השעה גרמו העוונות ובטל התמיד וחרב הבית.

1. *And the daily whole offering was canceled:*

2. R. Simon in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi:

3. "In the days of the Greek kingdom [when Jerusalem was besieged], they would let down two baskets containing gold, and the besiegers would send up two sheep [for the daily offering].

4. "One time they let down to them two baskets of gold, and they sent up to them two kid goats [which are not suitable for a daily offering].

5. "At that time the Holy One, blessed be he, opened their eyes and they found two lambs in the chamber of the lambs [which were suitable].

6. "It was in concerning this time that R. Judah b. Aba gave testimony concerning the daily whole offering brought in the morning, that it was offered at the fourth hour.

7. Said R. Levi,

8. "Also in the time of this evil kingdom [the Romans, presently ruling] they would let down to them two baskets of gold, and they would send up to them two <sheep>.

9. Finally they let down to them two baskets of gold, and they sent up to them two pigs.

10. "The basket had not gotten half way up the wall, before the pig shrieked and forty *parasangs* of the land of Israel shook [in an earthquake] .

11. "At that time the sins [of Israel] brought it about that the daily whole offering was cancelled, and the house [the Temple] was laid to waste."