

בשורה *Besorah!*



Judah, the Lion, or The Lion of Judah?

As we've written in previous issues of *Besorah*, most of the Chanukah traditions known and observed today grew up long after the actual historical events took place. In fact, it seems the story of the Maccabees was pretty much ignored for a few hundred years, perhaps because of the failed revolts that followed (against Rome in 70 AD and Bar Kochba another 60 years later) and the reluctance of religious leaders to encourage further uprisings. Josephus' account follows very closely that of 1 Maccabees, except that he omits what seems to be a messianic prophecy: 'wherefore they pulled it down [the defiled altar], and laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them' (1 Macc 4:45,46).

Because of these verses, some began to expect 'a prophet like Moses' to arrive. Perhaps this is why, when Jesus walked in the Temple during the Feast of Dedication (Heb: Chanukah, John 10:22), the Judeans implored Him to reveal whether He was the Messiah. But mixing nationalism with messianic

fervour can be toxic and, in the opinions of some, Josephus was trying to prevent political uprising against Rome in his day, so left this out. As we know from the Gospels, Jesus also navigated people's thoughts away from political messianic hopes of freedom from Roman occupation and oppression.

It wasn't until the Talmud was codified in 500 AD that we find the inserted myth that one day's supply of sanctified oil lasted for 8 days. This seems to have been promoted in order to direct the people's focus toward God, as no divine intervention is mentioned in 1 Maccabees. So throughout the long Diaspora that followed, the emphasis when celebrating Chanukah has been on eating things fried in oil, the spinning of the dreidle (a Great Miracle Happened There) and the lighting of a menorah that has 9 candles instead of 7.

Fast-forward, however, and we find that the Zionist movement 'reclaimed' the story of the Hasmoneans, placing the emphasis back on the tale's heroic nationalism. Particularly after the Holocaust, Zionism looked for episodes of Jewish history that would create



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the image of the 'new Jew' who takes his fate in his own hands. Chanukah became a national holiday, celebrating battling the forces of evil. The Maccabees became part of a series of legends that were adapted to the Zionist ideal, along with the tales of the Bar-Kokhba revolt and the fall of Masada. The fighters of the so-called '1948 generation' saw themselves as the 'great-grandchildren of the Maccabees.' David Shimoni, a leading poet of the Yishuv, wrote: '1948 lights another menorah... I see the great-grandchildren of the Maccabees... They are fighting, the grandsons of the Hasmoneans, a war of heroism and holiness... the Maccabees of 1948.'

Similar to the British custom of wearing a poppy flower, an announcement was made in Israel, in 1955, declaring that elementary school children would be asked to wear the red Dam HaMaccabim (Blood of the Maccabees) flower. That same year, it was decided that the flower would be an official symbol of Israel's Memorial Day. The flower's name is derived from a legend saying that in every spot where it grows, a drop of blood has been spilled on the earth. Since 2019, the non-profit organization Dam HaMaccabim has been distributing pins with the Red Everlasting Flower throughout Israel.

Judah the Maccabee, through his courage and military form, is described as being, 'like a lion in his deeds' and, 'like a lion's cub roaring for prey' (1 Macc 3:4), in allusion to the Messianic prophecy found in Gen 49:9 which says, 'Judah is like a lion's whelp'. This prophecy in Genesis declares that the future Ruler will come from the tribe of Judah. Often, Chanukah menorahs are designed with lions on them. At a casual glance, some may assume that these lions symbolise the tribe of Judah. However, they actually represent Judah, the Maccabee! But the Maccabees were descendents of Aaron, so the Messiah cannot be Maccabean.

In Revelation 5:5, Jesus is referred to as the 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah'. So how do we understand the metaphor of a lion and what is the message in this title? First, let's look at the tribe of Judah: Judah was the fourth son born to Jacob (Gen. 29:30) but he inherited the rule after his three older brothers disqualified themselves by gross misconduct (Simeon and Levi broke their father's covenant and slaughtered an entire people - Gen. 34 - while Reuben committed a sort of incest with his father's concubine - I Chron. 5:1,2).

Later, when all the older brothers wanted to kill their younger brother Joseph out of jealousy, Judah intervened in order to try and save Joseph's life (Genesis 37:26). Some years later, a famine led to the dilemma of whether or not to send Benjamin to Egypt (at Joseph's demand). Judah offered himself to Jacob as Benjamin's substitute, declaring that he would bear the guilt forever if anything happened to Benjamin. When Benjamin was brought to Egypt and stood before Joseph (though they didn't recognise him), it was Judah who interceded with Joseph – not only for the life

of Benjamin, but also for the life of his father, Jacob, saying, 'his [Jacob's] life is bound up in the lad's life [Benjamin].' (Gen. 44:30 - 34)

Before he died, Jacob prophesied over his sons (Genesis 49). This is the first time we find the use of the word 'Lion' in the Bible and it directly refers to Judah. He is first described as a 'lion's whelp', but the subsequent words for lion in the passage progress in age and dominion, implying the passage of time and the increase in authority.

The prophecy reads: 'Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be' (Gen. 49: 9, 10).

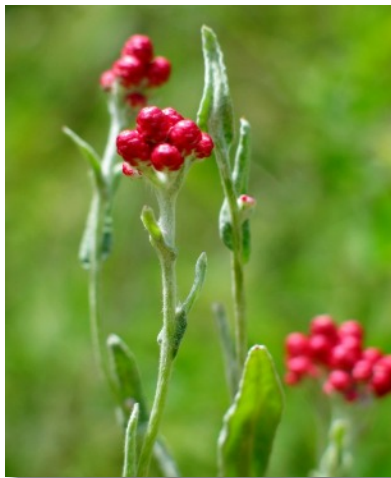


Chanukah menorah with Judah as Lion.

Throughout the Bible, the Lion represents strength, authority, justice/judgement and even punishment. In the well-known story of Daniel, the political leaders assigned the lion's den as punishment for all who challenged their authority by praying to 'another' god. However, as Daniel was innocent before God and did not deserve judgement, God stopped the mouth of the lions (Daniel 6: 7, 22). Jerusalem is also named 'Ariel' – Lion of God – which God has chosen as a spiritual seat of justice and judgement as well as the criterion by which God will judge all nations (Zechariah 2:8; 12:2,3; Isaiah 29:1,2,7).

So what is the lesson of this combination of Lion and Judah? In Judah, we see One who would come – from that tribe - to save His nation by laying down His life on their behalf. Then, in the fullness of time, He would also come in authority as King, to judge the nations and deal with God's enemies: those who come against Ariel – Jerusalem. Jacob's prophecy says that Judah's brothers will praise him, that all Jacob's children will bow before him and that his hand will also be on the neck of his enemies.

Zechariah tells us that, 'in that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn' (Zech. 12: 8-10).



Dam HaMaccabim

As mentioned above, Revelation 5 records an amazing scene in heaven and refers to Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. True to the symbolism, this Lion is simultaneously a Lamb that was slain and whose blood has redeemed people from every kindred, tribe and nation. Yeshua, laid down His life and is therefore declared worthy to open the scroll and to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, blessing and worship!

Sadly, Jewish nationalism looks to its own military strength for 'salvation'. Uzi – the name of the famous machine gun – means 'my strength'. Ha Tikvah' (Israel's national anthem, meaning 'The Hope'), essentially expresses that the 2,000-year hope of Jewish people is the Land, rather than God. Dam HaMaccabim represents the blood of those fallen in war. (Ironically, the Arabic name for that little flower is 'Dam al-Massiah' - means 'Blood of the Messiah'!) But Deut. 32:43 reads, 'Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.' Literally, this verse says that God will avenge and 'atone for (כפר) His land and His People'!

Jesus – Yeshua – came from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:3) to lay down His life and shed His blood for His brethren and all who put their trust in Him. He is coming back as a mature 'lion' to rule, reign and execute justice and judgement, redeem His Land and His People! The only hope for the Jewish people

is not the Judah-the-lion motif, but the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!

May we each know something of a personal cleansing and re-Dedication as we give voice to our heart's desire, and prayer to God, that Israel may be saved. God bless and keep you, Chrissy Rodgers

Painting on front page:

'The Lion of the Tribe of Judah' by Leigh Telli.