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Mattathias' Other Son: The Story of the Maccabean Revolt (A Novel)

Ameliah E. Given
Western Kentucky University, Ameliah.Given395@topper.wku.edu

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MATTATHIAS’ OTHER SON: THE STORY OF THE MACCABEAN REVOLT
(A NOVEL)

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Bachelor of Arts with
Honors Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By
Ameliah E. Given

*****

Western Kentucky University
2013

CE/T Committee: Dr. Joseph L. Trafton, Advisor
Dr. Molly A. McCaffrey
Dr. Nathan A. Phelps

Approved by:

Advisor
Department of Philosophy and Religion
ABSTRACT

In Jewish primary and secondary literature regarding the Maccabean Revolt, Judas, the son of the man who began the revolt, is depicted as a warrior of epic proportions. Despite a Seleucid king’s attempt to squelch out Jewish practices, Judas propelled the people to religious freedom through his military strategy and might. After his untimely death in battle, his younger brother Jonathan finally succeeded in gaining political freedom for the Jewish people. Throughout his lifetime, Jonathan’s feats of valor rivaled, if not surpassed those of his brother Judas. Despite this, Jonathan’s story and life are not given the attention they deserve. My purpose, then, is to tell the story of the Maccabean Revolt from Jonathan’s perspective in the format of a historical novel. Since Jonathan was most likely very young when the Revolt began, I have attempted to show how the revolt functioned as a catalyst for Jonathan’s initiation into adulthood. Using the best-known sources, this novel seeks to maintain historical accuracy while telling the story of Jonathan, the Jewish people’s unsung hero.

Keywords: Historical Fiction, Judaism, Seleucid Empire, Maccabean Revolt, Bildungsroman, Sibling Rivalry
To David Jonathan, for your ability to believe in me even when I could not.

“This is my beloved, and this is my friend” Songs of Songs 5:16

To my mother Elizabeth, for supporting me in this endeavor, even when it seemed impossible to accomplish.

“Strength and dignity are her clothing . . . Her children rise up, and call her blessed.”
Proverbs 31: 26, 28

To the Jewish people, especially those who, throughout history, have suffered indignity, maltreatment, or death for the sake of your heritage. Words cannot express the admiration you deserve for refusing to let your candle to be extinguished.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been completed without the excellent help of my readers. Dr. Trafton, thank you for encouraging me in this project and for sharing my passion for these characters. Furthermore, even outside of this project, thank you for exhibiting the level of academia I should constantly strive to reach. Dr. McCaffrey, thank you for your patience with me and for contributing your expertise to my drafts. As someone who has so little experience with creative writing, I have so appreciated your assistance in making this project not laughable. Dr. Phelps, thank you for taking an interest in my thesis and for lending your valuable input.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Honors College for allowing me the opportunity to create this project. Writing a book has always been a dream that I believed would never come to fruition.

My family and friends deserve such a great appreciation for their patience, understanding, and willingness to listen while I jabbered over my ideas for this. David and Joseph, thank you for reading through my initial drafts and offering such valuable feedback. Erica and Heather, thank you for your enthusiasm and support. To my parents (both sets), thank you for your support; you will never know how much it assisted in pushing me to persevere. To Michele LeNoir, thank you for your faith in my abilities, and for providing me with a captive audience (literally). To my students, thank you for putting up with Ms. Given’s little project as you broaden your own writing horizons.
Most importantly, the Lord receives the most amount of credit for bringing this work into being. On so many occasions, it was not my own strength that got me through the writing process. May people who read this come to a greater understanding of the sanctity and beauty of Your Scriptures. *Soli Deo Gloria.*
VITA

March 1, 1991 .......................... Born — Bowling Green, Kentucky

May 2009 .............................. Barren River Homeschool Association, Bowling Green, Kentucky

2009-2013 ............................. Majored in English for Secondary Teachers at Western Kentucky University

2012 ................................. Presented Thesis at Kentucky Honors Roundtable Conference

2013 ................................. Best Major: English for Secondary Teachers

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English for Secondary Teachers
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Hasmonean Family Tree

All names in bold are factual; all names in italics are fictional. The asterisk (*) denotes a family member joined by marriage. The ages are from left to right, oldest to youngest.
INTRODUCTION

I will never forget the lecture in my New Testament class one hot September morning. It was my very first semester of college. My professor Dr. Trafton was introducing Judaism up to the point of Christ’s appearance and had just discussed how a Seleucid king had taken control of Judea. This new king was forcing a unified religion. One lowly priest rose up and stabbed the Seleucid guards who had entered his tiny town and compelled the Jews to make pagan sacrifices. With his one act of bravery, the priest began a revolt that would bring the Jews religious and political liberty.

I was enchanted. I had read the Old Testament and the New Testament several times, but, being Protestant, was completely unfamiliar with Apocryphal literature. Regardless of whether it was the powerful way the story was told or whether it was the first time hearing this very Biblical-sounding story, my interest was piqued. This tale of rebellion in the face of persecution had my attention.

The spring of my sophomore year, I took two classes that led me to choose this project for my CE/T: Second Temple Judaism and Introduction to Creative Writing. My Creative Writing class was especially challenging for me. I have always been an avid reader, but never a writer. The thought of my classmates and professor seeing my thoughts on paper terrified me. However, as I sat in class and began drafting short
pieces, I realized that I would perhaps be willing to give creative writing a serious try, should the right story choose me to tell it.

A tale selected me that very semester. In my Second Temple Judaism class, we read a great deal of primary sources from the period. When we read *1 Maccabees*, I again heard the story about the priest and his family standing up to the king. But now, it was even more vivid, even more compelling, even more captivating of my attention. After the priest died, his son Judas led the men involved in the revolt. Judas was undeniably strong, capable, and heroic. But he also had a younger brother, named Jonathan, who directed the movement after Judas died in battle.

Where it appeared that Judas had used his brawn to obtain victories, Jonathan used his brain. And, under his leadership, the Jews finally gained their liberty. Jonathan was the youngest of his five brothers, yet he was chosen to be the leader. The writer of *1 Maccabees* lauded Judas, but was mostly silent about Jonathan’s feats. What was the story within this story?

My choice to compose a historical novel posed a myriad of considerations to be resolved before and throughout the drafting process. One critical issue was historical accuracy. As a child, I had spent many a content weekend reading Ann Rinaldi’s and Elizabeth George Speare’s novels for young adults. But I had nearly given up reading historical fiction as an adult because, unless I had a great deal of knowledge about the novel’s topic, I never knew if the author was actually telling the true story or was using my willing suspension of disbelief to lead me astray.

Take, for example, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, a wonderfully crafted novel by Julia Alvarez set in the Dominican Republic under the dictatorship of Trujillo. It was so
closely relatable to the story I myself was trying to create: a narrative about underdogs rising up against an oppressive government attempting to use intimidation and violence in order to squeeze any personal liberties out of the peoples. Just as my story traces acts of defiance led by a family, so does *Butterflies* as it reveals the four Mirabel sisters’ attempts against the dictatorship. The book had my attention all throughout—I turned page after page, spellbound by the narrative and the bravery of the sisters. And, I will even admit that I cried at the powerful conclusion.

But then I read the author’s postscript. She discussed her perspective on the story and why the subject was important to her. In regard to her creation of the story, she stated,

> Though I had researched the facts of the regime, and events pertaining to Trujillo’s thirty-one-year despotism, I sometimes took liberties—by changing dates, by reconstructing events, and by collapsing characters or incidents. For I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by the imagination. A novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart.

(Alvarez 324)

As a reader, I felt cheated. I wanted to see how the heroic Mirabel sisters had dealt with the actual reality of the regime. Filling in blanks where history is silent is acceptable. But, when history screams out what happened, to change the story for the author’s own separate purpose lacks integrity. If a tale will be told, it should be told properly.
This responsibility on the part of writers to add their own perspective to a story that already has a foundation is, indeed, quite a challenge. A standard fiction writer is like a young, budding artist who has a giant blank canvas, along with a full assortment of colors and tools that may be used to create a painting. The beauty of the piece is in its freshness, its originality.

A historical fiction writer, on the other hand, is more like a wizened old artisan who has found a rusting, dusty clock that is broken in several places. On its own, the clock is limp, lifeless, and forgotten. The artisan must collect parts that will fit in just the right way for the antique to work correctly. But just collecting parts will not do the trick. So the craftsman even has to create a few custom parts to make it tick. His whole task is focused upon what already exists: the clock. A writer of fiction is a creator, but a writer of historical fiction is a resuscitator.

Telling the story with this sort of integrity was one of the most arduous challenges. Firstly, I utilized primary sources. Josephus and 1 Maccabees proved to be most helpful in my search for accuracy. Secondly, I searched through secondary sources to learn about customs, social norms, geography, and everyday life for the Jews of the period (for a listing of these texts, see the Bibliography). Thirdly, I asked experts in the field any remaining questions that I would not have discovered in my research. After the historical and religious aspects of the work were in place, addressing the creative writing and literary aspects of the project still remained.

Creative writing was no easy task. As has already been mentioned, my experience with fiction writing was minimal, at best. In fact, when I first began drafting the story, I did not even have a style of my own. My interest in literature was most excited by writers
of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Austen, Brontë (both Charlotte and Anne), Tolstoy, and Dickens were some of my favorite authors. This posed particular problems to me: I saw nothing wrong with a sprawling style of narrative that stretched for seven, eight, or even nine hundred pages; and, even if I wrote for eight hours a day, every day for the rest of my life, I would still come nowhere close to these authors’ mastery over words. As a writer, I felt absolutely inept.

In developing my own voice (a voice which had only been silent because I had not given it the chance to speak), I discovered that the purpose of this project was not to emphasize my creative writing abilities (or lack thereof). Rather, the purpose of the story and project was merely to put Jonathan’s account on paper and to let him speak through my voice. Creative writing was simply a mode where I could record in ink what the men who gave their lives for the Revolt had already written with their blood.

While this is my perspective, I do not take my duties lightly in regard to telling this story. Though I do disagree with the stance Julia Alvarez took about history in novels, I do greatly admire the way she brought characters to life in her work. She gave them struggles, flaws, and weaknesses that made these heroines seem real. Because the characters were so realistic, their heroism was even more honorable.

Rather than simply using what the primary sources told me about my characters, I tried this same approach as Alvarez. I extracted what the ancient texts said in regard to the figures in Mattathias’ family, analyzed it, and created my characters from this. Nothing has been created for my own whims as a writer; rather, I used the sources I had to splice the fact with the fiction.
A clear example of this is the way in which I constructed the character of Eleazar. His nickname, “Avaran,” could be interpreted to mean “pale,” though the text does not offer a concrete meaning. I took this knowledge and compared it to what I knew about Eleazar’s untimely, unconventional death. Despite the fact that *1 Maccabees* describes the battle and Eleazar’s actions in the most glowing terms, it does not appear likely that a trained warrior—even one unfamiliar with elephant warfare—would act in so foolhardy a manner on the field as he did. I used all the above information to reason that perhaps Eleazar had been plagued by chronic illness (the source of his nickname) and knew that he was about to die from it. In battle, then, he was not thinking clearly; he simply wanted to die as a hero rather than as an invalid. His emotions clouded his judgment during the fray, eventually leading to his death.

Aside from simply fleshing out the characters, the novel’s literary elements demanded a great deal of my attention during the initial drafting process. As I became increasingly familiar with the actors in my story, I realized just how well many of the characters matched figures from the Old Testament. Jonathan and Judas were like Jacob and Esau all over again; Mattathias was like Phinehas; and Antiochus Epiphanes was like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and every other foreign king imposing his pagan laws on God’s chosen people. The story, in and of itself, fits in snugly with everything in the Old Testament canon.

In order to give the story a more Biblical aura, I took full advantage of opportunities where I might be able to juxtapose my story with Biblical stories. For example, in Part II, Chapter III., Jonathan faces a choice as to whether to send his love interest’s husband to sure death in the front lines of battle. Furthermore, Judas’ actions
when he is dancing at the Temple rededication is strikingly similar to David dancing in the streets as the Ark of the Covenant is returned to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6; 1 Samuel 15). Readers familiar with either of these stories will see how the two brothers reveal their character in these situations. On a side note, all Biblical quotations have been taken from the Jewish Publication Society’s translation of the Old Testament (see Bibliography for citation information).

Another way for me to compare my story with other pieces of Jewish literature was to actually use snippets of texts. Nearly every chapter begins with a verse from the Old Testament or a portion of a piece of Holocaust literature. All of these quotes were chosen deliberately to prepare the reader’s mind for what the chapter would contain. This concept was borrowed from John Fowles, who utilizes it in his historical novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. As I read the aforementioned novel, I realized the time he had spent in finding the perfect text to place at the beginning of his chapters. The quotes he utilized made me trust his storytelling abilities; I knew he was aware of precisely what he wished to say. By using this model myself, I hope that my readers will see the beautiful continuity and fluidity in Jewish literature, both ancient and modern.

One of the purposes of the CE/T is to bring the student to an academic level that he or she has never reached before. Crafting a novel that utilizes four academic disciplines has certainly forced me to reach my academic peak thus far. Another purpose of the CE/T is for the student to challenge himself or herself. Since I began my college career with a fear of letting others see any of my creative writing, I thought it only appropriate that I conquer this fear by the end of my college career. Lastly, a capstone project should be created around a topic of interest to the student. I have a passion to tell
Jonathan’s story; I have a need to tell Jonathan’s story. The sacrifices and effort of Jonathan and his family testifies to the resiliency of the human spirit. Their story is too important to remain hidden in the shadows; I had to draw it out.

Sources

After these things the word of HaShem came unto Abram in a vision, saying: ‘Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, thy reward shall be exceeding great’. . . And He brought him forth abroad, and said: ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to count them’; and He said unto him: ‘So shall thy seed be.’

—Genesis 15: 1, 5

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE HaShem OUR GOD, THE HaShem IS ONE.

And thou shalt love HaShem thy G-d with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates.

—Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

Therefore Thou art great, O HaShem G-d; for there is none like Thee, neither is there any G-d beside Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like Thy people, like Israel, a nation one in the earth, whom G-d went to redeem unto Himself for a people, and to make Him a name, and to do for Thy land great things and tremendous, even for you, in driving out from before Thy people, whom Thou didst redeem to Thee out of Egypt, the nations and their gods? And Thou didst establish to Thyself Thy people Israel to be a people unto Thee forever; and Thou, HaShem, becamest their G-d.

—2 Samuel 7: 22-24
Part I

Chapter I

Jerusalem, 177 B.C.E.

You are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: the Lord your God chose you from among all other peoples on the earth to be His treasured people.

—Deuteronomy 14: 2

Jonathan could tell from the other side of the room that Judas’ mind was not concentrating on the Torah. Judas quickly glanced down at the scroll each time the scribe’s severe eyes, squinting out from under graying eyebrows, rested upon him. As soon as the teacher shifted his gaze to another pupil, Judas glanced out the door opening toward the bustling city streets, intent on watching every passerby. A blind beggar asking for alms while he sat against the shaded stone walls of an opposite building kept Judas’ attention only when the movement in the streets stilled, while the slim boy in front of Jonathan droned on, nearing the end of his passage.

Jonathan cleared his throat in preparation for his turn to read aloud. The sound must have diverted Judas from his thoughts, for he looked over at his younger brother. Jonathan frowned at Judas, trying his best to imitate their father’s disapproving glance, though he was only eleven years old. The side of the older boy’s mouth twitched into a
mischievous and amused smile—Judas seemed not to care in the least if Jonathan condemned his lack of studiousness. As soon as Jonathan heard the boy seated in front of him finish, he began the next portion of the passage. His still boyish voice reiterated the story of Esau selling his birthright for lentil pottage, a tale that all of the pupils had heard dozens of times. The lessons in the small classroom continued in much the same way they had a hundred years earlier as the morning sun rose higher over Jerusalem.

* * *

When the end of the lesson finally came, Jonathan had to run till the dust covered his sandals and crept up his thin legs so he could catch up with his older brother.

“Judas,” he panted, grabbing his brother’s tunic. “Why did you leave so quickly? Mother will not allow our brothers to eat all of the food. She will save us plenty.”

“I’m not worried about the food, little brother. I just had to get out of that room, or I would have fallen asleep. I didn’t want to receive another beating,” Judas grimaced, probably remembering the last time he had been punished for not sufficiently paying attention. “Besides, John said that he would be returning from Josiah’s wedding feast, and I want to walk with him back into the city.”

Jonathan’s brown eyes widened. “Mother would never approve of you going outside of the city by yourself—you know how she worries!”

“That’s why she doesn’t need to know.” Judas ruffled Jonathan’s hair with his long fingers. “I will be alone only while I’m waiting for him. Once I’m with him, it will all be fine.”
Jonathan wrinkled his forehead in thought. After a moment, he said slowly, “But . . . the Torah says to honor your father and mother. You know that she would be angry with you for doing this.”

Judas scoffed, the sound causing his recently developed Adam’s apple to move slightly. He gripped the smaller boy’s shoulders with his large hands and shook him.

“Jonathan, you are only a child. It is not even close to being time for you to start your duties as a priest. Stop trying to act like Mother by worrying and stop trying to act like Father by constantly reminding me of the Torah.”

Judas released Jonathan and turned to walk away.

“Life should be enjoyed, little brother. Try it some time!” he called over his burly shoulder as he disappeared into the crowd.

Though Judas was already a head taller than the women walking along the street, the bright sun glaring down upon the dusty ground quickly caused the younger boy to lose sight of him. Muttering under his breath, Jonathan began walking in the other direction toward home, his sandaled feet kicking a stray pebble with fervor as he went. While he weaved among the wide streets of the marketplace, he thought of possible excuses to tell his mother that would explain why Judas was not with him.

He was nearly at the end of the marketplace when a noise caught his attention. When he looked up, he saw three guards raising their voices at an old man. Jonathan was used to seeing guards in Jerusalem; after all, it was not unusual for the Seleucids to keep a small number of soldiers in the city. Occasionally, troops would pass through Jerusalem as they patrolled the provinces of the empire.
The guards were facing the old man, their backs turned to Jonathan. It was difficult to see past them, but it seemed that the old man was a merchant. Vats used to store wine or oil were near him.

One of the taller guards growled out, “We’re not paying that much for this. It’s not even decent enough to give to cattle. You Jews can’t even make wine without ruining it.”

The old man touched his beard nervously. “But, sirs, it’s some of the best wine in Jerusalem.”

“It’s the worst I’ve ever tasted. You should give it to us at no cost.”

The merchant started fumbling for words, and the guards moved closer towards him. Jonathan glanced around. Was there no one to stop them? A few other merchants were closing up their shops, but none of them seemed to be paying attention to anything but packing up their wares. When he glanced down the other side of the street, he did not see any other people coming. There was no one to help.

Jonathan bit his lip. What should he do? The soldiers might hurt the merchant if he did not do what they wanted. Jonathan tried to take a step forward, wondering what he should say to the guards. Should he create a distraction, pretend that the guards were desperately needed to handle a problem somewhere else in the city? No, Jonathan knew that he would not even be able to speak if all three of them were staring down at him, watching him with disdain.

He could strike one of them and run away; they might come after him and the old man could escape. But the thought of the soldiers chasing him made his heart beat so
loudly he expected everyone in the street to turn and look at him. He drew in quick, deep
breaths. He tried to turn and run away, but was too paralyzed with fear to move.

The old man was whimpering now. “Please, I need money to provide for my
family. My wife is very sick.”

The shortest soldier slapped him. Jonathan winced at the sound, but still remained
in his place. One of the soldiers laughed, started lifting one of the smaller vats, and
began to walk away. Suddenly, someone rushed past Jonathan, going towards the
soldiers. The person who had flown by Jonathan was a person with a staff that struck
hard against the soldier with the vat. The guard dropped to the ground, causing the vat to
roll. The old man nearly tripped on it as he ducked into a nearby alley. The container
landed close to Jonathan’s feet. He glanced at it for only a second before turning his
attention back to the fight.

Though the shadow who had just appeared moved quickly, Jonathan discovered
that it was a man, no more than thirty years old. The stranger shoved his staff at one of
the soldier’s stomachs. The guard fell to the ground, gasping for breath. The third soldier
was pulling his sword out, but before he could, the young man had swung his staff up and
struck diagonally, where the guard’s neck and shoulder met. Jonathan heard a loud crack.
He cringed.

The first soldier who had been hit, the one who had been holding the vat, had
recovered. He had pulled out his sword and was creeping up behind the man. Jonathan
tried to yell out in warning, but his voice did not come. The soldier grabbed the man’s
shoulder and stabbed him in the back. The man fell to his knees instantly and leaned
forward, the sword still sticking out of his body.
Jonathan turned then and ran. He dashed past the houses and the buildings, which became nothing more than blurs. He ducked in between people in the streets, knocking things they were carrying from their hands. He did not stop until he reached the alley, which ended in the courtyard containing his family’s house. Out of the seven houses there, each at least two stories high, the one belonging to Jonathan’s family was nestled in the middle, the fourth from the left.

Breathing heavily, he slowed down to a trot. As soon as he got into the house, his mother would know something was wrong. But he could not tell her. He could not force himself to picture it all over again. A sick feeling had already crept into the pit of his stomach as soon as he had seen the man die. That sickness might work in Jonathan’s favor.

He walked past the doorway of his house. His mother, Ruhamah, was inside, deftly preparing dinner. Nearby were jars and shelves containing flour, oil, and wine. Jonathan’s two sisters were sitting together on a bench against the long wall—the older one was weaving palm leaves together to make a new mat for the floor and giving the younger girl instructions as she did so. The smaller girl, only seven, was hunched over with her elbows on her knees, her head resting in her hands. Leah, the girl weaving, glanced up when Jonathan’s shadow blocked the light coming into the room.

“What’s wrong with you?” Leah asked.

“Nothing. I’m just feeling a little sick.” Jonathan placed his hand over his stomach.

His mother put down the dough she was kneading and turned.
“What’s wrong?” She immediately came over to him and cupped his face in her floury hand. “Do you think it was something you ate?” Her eyes searched his face, and she pursed her lips in worry. The wrinkles around her mouth appeared. “You look very pale.”

“I’m sure I’ll be fine in a minute.”

She continued to inspect her son for a moment and then directed him to sit in the doorway so that he could catch any breezes that came. After giving him a cup of wine, she went back to kneading the dough. Every so often, she glimpsed back at his direction.

Jonathan was content to sit there, not directly in the room with his family, but close enough to hear all they said and watch all they did. He was grateful for a distraction from his thoughts. Any time he thought about what he had just witnessed, the nausea churned angrily in his stomach. He focused very intently on everything the women said and watched very closely every movement his neighbors made outside in the courtyard.

Soon, he saw his brother John approaching. He had been to visit their family in another town and had been gone for over seven days.

John smiled and greeted Jonathan as he approached. As he passed through the doorway, he tussled Jonathan’s hair. Then, John’s smile faded.

“Are you all right, little brother?”

Ruhamah’s voice spoke out. “He’s not feeling well.”

“Oh? What’s wrong?”

Jonathan was about to speak, but his mother answered for him.

“Something he ate, we think. I’m sure he’ll feel better in a little while.” She smiled at Jonathan. He tried to smile back.
The younger girl, Michal, leapt off of the bench and ran towards John. She jumped up and down in front of him. Laughing, he picked her up and swung her around until she giggled and screeched to be put down. Jonathan felt too dizzy to watch until Michal was back on the ground.

“Well, Michal, did you have any men come by seeking Father’s permission to become your betrothed?” John grinned. She just shook her head and kept giggling.

“No, but I did,” Leah tossed her head.

Jonathan rolled his eyes. Would he have to hear his sister brag about this again?

John looked at Ruhamah. “What? She’s not yet thirteen!”

Ruhamah just smiled. “No need to worry — the arrangements have not been completed yet. Besides, the young man who will be getting my beautiful little blessing”—she looked fondly at her daughter—“is Samuel the scribe’s son, Josiah. He is not yet fifteen; there will be at least three years before we must let Leah go.” She rubbed her hands, a cloud of flour drifting off of them. Then she turned to the girls. “We need water drawn for the meal tonight. Take that vessel and go to the cistern.”

Leah complied with a sigh. Michal, on the other hand, begged her sister to let her hold the clay vessel, and Leah handed it to her carefully. The girls brushed past Jonathan to the courtyard. He sighed and closed his eyes. He saw again the killing in the streets. Quickly, he opened them and tried to concentrate on his mother and John instead. The sickness grew even stronger.

Ruhamah began gathering clay bowls and cups from off the hollowed-out shelves in the plastered wall. “Have a seat, John,” she said. “How was the wedding feast?”
John sat on the bench formerly occupied by his two sisters and began fingering the little mat they had been working on so industriously before he came in.

As he played with the mat, he spoke.

“It was fine. Hezekiah and Hannah told me to send you and Father their love and regards.”

“And how did they seem?”

“They seemed fine.”

Ruhamah turned from the shelves to lean her back against the cool wall and face her son.

“It seems that Hezekiah would not have had a good harvest last year, especially after that long dry season. Were they able to provide a nice feast?”

“We all ate comfortably. As far as I know, there was nothing lacking,” he replied.

Ruhamah turned back to the dinner preparations and asked what sort of foods were at the feast, which important guests had attended, and what sort of clothing the bride wore.

Jonathan listened intently as John spoke. Soon, the two girls returned with the water and listened, too. The sickness was finally starting to dissipate. Jonathan was so caught up in his brother’s words that he was able to push what he had seen further and further from his mind.

A while later, Jonathan saw his father, Mattathias, approaching. His shoulders were so broad and bulky, Jonathan had always thought he looked like he should have been a soldier, though he came from the tribe of priests. His father scrutinized Jonathan as he advanced to the house.
“What’s wrong, son?”

“What’s wrong, son?” Jonathan tried to smile, though he knew it would come out weakly.

Ruhamah repeated what she had said to John. Mattathias entered the room, wrapped an arm around his wife’s waist, and hugged her. She smiled and looked up at him.

“How were your Temple duties today?”

He released her and sighed before he answered. “It baffles me how these new priests appear to have so little respect for the Torah and the Temple. They have been trained properly, and they know the commandments as well as the oldest priests, but they do not have any heart for what they are doing.”

Jonathan watched them all as Mattathias moved toward the bench and sat down next to John. Michal, who had been on the other side of John, went straight to Mattathias and climbed into his lap. She wrapped her arms around his neck and nuzzled her head into its crook. Ruhamah took the vessel from the girls and emptied some of the water into a separate container, then added wine to the new container and started mixing the two liquids together. She carefully combined the wine with the proper amount of water to mix the wine the way the men in her family preferred.

Jonathan drew comfort from his family; even after all he had seen that day, nothing had changed in this home. Maybe it had all been a dream. Nothing like that could happen while everything was so quiet here.

John continued the discussion with his father. “It was not like that at all the last time I served in the Temple.”
“Well, with Onias’ illness, it seems that all everyone does is whisper about who will become the next high priest. After all, his infant son cannot become the next priest! Many of the priests are concerned about the politics behind the priesthood, particularly the younger ones. Only the older priests like myself care about the honor of tending to the Temple, while the younger priests care more about the honor of simply being a priest.”

Michal squirmed off her father’s lap and rubbed her cheek. Mattathias’s beard must have scratched her when he was speaking. Jonathan remembered that feeling well from when he was much younger and would sit on his father’s lap as he discussed the Torah with friends. His little sister moved to the other side of the kitchen.

Jonathan watched, amused, as she tried to sneak a fig out of the basket near her mother’s side without getting caught. His mother must have seen her out of the corner of her eye—Jonathan laughed when Michal’s hand received a gentle swat.

“Just wait, little one. Everything is ready. Here, help me take some of these dishes upstairs.”

Michal carefully picked up the container of wine and started for the stairs. Leah grabbed a basket of fruit and sauntered after her sister. Jonathan started to follow her. He was going to fetch his brother Eleazar, who, like most days, would be lying ill in his bed. Jonathan had only made it to the second step when he heard his brother Simon’s voice say, with a high degree of urgency, Mattathias’s name.

Jonathan turned around to see Simon coming up to his father. Mattathias was ghastly pale, and his voice was low. John, Ruhamah, and Mattathias had all gathered around Simon.

“There’s been an incident today. A man’s been killed.”
Ruhamah gasped and cupped a hand over her mouth. Jonathan pressed his body against the staircase wall to remain hidden in the shadows.


Simon continued. “In one of the marketplaces. An old man, a merchant of wine, said that some guards were harassing him. Out of nowhere a man came and attacked the guards. He injured all of them, but then one of the soldiers stabbed and killed him.”

“Do you know the man who attacked the guards?” This time, John had asked the question.

“No one recognized him. He had a staff with him; he was probably a traveler who was coming in from a village.”

Ruhamah began to cry. “His poor family,” she said.

Mattathias drew his arms around her. He looked at his sons.

“No not say anything about this to your younger brothers and sisters; there is no need to scare them. I’m afraid that this might just be the beginning. Foreigners having control over us has never boded well for our people. Keep your eyes open. If things get worse, we should prepare ourselves to leave Jerusalem.”

Jonathan quietly climbed the rest of the stairs, his face wet with tears. If only he could be like most of his brothers and sisters, who, in their ignorance, were free from the fear that was now coursing through his body.

Dinner was nearly over, and the moon was just starting to ascend over the rooftops in Jerusalem. Conversation was nearly nonexistent, except for when Mattathias tried to cheerfully tell his younger sons and daughters more about his Temple duties for
the day. Jonathan had been surprised when he saw Judas appear as everyone was settling in for the meal. His timing had been impeccable. Now, Jonathan watched his brother. Judas avoided eye contact with his mother all through the meal, and tried as hard as he could to not draw attention to himself. Jonathan noticed that he even refrained from eating his usual portions of food, which was always more than half of the contents in the serving bowl he shared with Jonathan. Apparently, the food was not worth his little brother making a complaint about. Jonathan wondered when Judas had gotten home but did not ask. From Judas’ lack of seriousness, Jonathan doubted that he knew anything about what had happened that day.

After Leah and Michal had cleared the dishes away, Ruhamah left the rooftop. She returned in a moment, carrying an elliptical baked clay lamp with an unlit wick poking out from a hole in the top. She set the lamp on the top of a pedestal next to her husband, and then quickly sat down on a cushion near him. John, Simon, Eleazar, Judas, Leah, and Jonathan all found places near Mattathias. Michal waited until Jonathan sat down close to Mattathias and then snuggled next to him. Jonathan glanced down at his little sister and wrapped his arm around her protectively.

He smiled ruefully to himself as she leaned against him. How different from each other they already were. Would Michal be able to remain innocent for long, or would coming events become so terrible they would steal her childhood, too? Michal was watching her father. Jonathan glanced up, too, grateful that at least their nightly tradition of reading the Torah remained unchanged. Mattathias carefully handled the parchment scroll for quite some time, searching for the correct spot, before he began to read in Hebrew:
“And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a
Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the
children of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the tent of meeting. And when
Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from the
midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. And he went after the man of
Israel into the chamber, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the
woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those
that died by the plague were twenty and four thousand. And HaShem spoke unto Moses,
saying: ‘Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath
away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake among them, so
that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. Wherefore say: Behold, I give
unto him My covenant of peace; and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the
covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his G-d, and made
atonement for the children of Israel.’”

As Mattathias continued, Jonathan looked to the west and saw the sun gradually
slipping, then disappearing, behind the wall of the city. A handful of stars had begun to
show in the evening sky. Out of the corner of his eye, he could dimly make out blurs of
light. He turned his head to look closer and soon saw lamps being lit across the rooftops
all over the city, flickering and blinking, then firmly and quietly illuminating the face of
each family’s bearded patriarch. Across the whole city, families were joining together to
read the instructions of G-d. A soft, droning hum began, then grew louder and steadier—
the sounds of each deep voice reading the Torah in Hebrew blended together into a
guttural melody.
Part I

Chapter II

Modein, 167 B.C.E.

The Lord has acted like a foe, He has laid waste Israel, laid waste her citadels, destroyed her strongholds. He has increased within Fair Judah mourning and moaning. He has stripped His Booth like a garden, He has destroyed His Tabernacle.

—Lamentations 2:5-6

Tensions mounted to an insurmountable high when the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes IV took control of Judea and began forcing Greek influence upon the people in Jerusalem. The Jews became a divided people, some choosing to become Hellenists out of fear or for political gain, others remaining staunchly loyal to Jewish ideals and values. Matthathias, realizing his family was no longer safe even under the shadow of the great Temple, moved them to a small town thirty kilometers west of Jerusalem. Still, even in the sleepy town of Modein, gloomy news continuously arrived from the major city. Every evening, Matthathias prayed for his family and his people, and every morning he woke up with his prayer unanswered. Some nights, his wife woke up in an empty bed. Her mind jumping to the worst conclusions, she would frantically search the house for him.
She always found him on the rooftop, looking out towards Jerusalem. His eyes were strained, as if they were trained on a dust storm that was gathered on the horizon and inevitably coming towards them.

It was dusk. Jonathan was walking back from the synagogue, hardly paying attention to where he was going. He kicked at the ground in anger, unable to stop thinking about the disagreement he had just had with Judas over a point in the Torah. Never in the eighteen years he had lived with Judas had he been quite so frustrated with his brother’s lack of seriousness. As he passed the cistern where the women gathered to draw water for their families, he heard a man’s deep voice, raised and plaintive. Jonathan glanced sharply at him. The “man” was, in fact, hardly more than a child. His body was wiry and openly visible, as his garments were ripped and torn.

The man-child was blubbering. Jonathan could only catch a few words of what he was trying to say. It seemed that the women around the man were just as confused and surprised as Jonathan. None of them moved or said anything, as if they were unsure of how to deal with the unusual stranger who had suddenly appeared in their listless little town. Out of the women who had been interrupted from gathering water, Jonathan saw Hadassah. He stopped short. His heart began beating furiously. Just as he had felt since the first time he had seen her, he was unsure of how to act. Taller than the other women, she was gracefully balancing a clay urn against her hip. When her eyes turned from staring at the stranger to look at him, Jonathan moved towards her quickly.

“What is happening?”
“I . . . I have no idea. I was speaking to Martha when this man appeared and started babbling. None of us have ever seen him before.”

Her large brown eyes were even larger than usual, and there was a slight wrinkle of concern in her forehead.

“I’ll speak to him,” Jonathan murmured and quickly approached the man. "What’s wrong?” Jonathan spoke as calmly and politely as he could, despite the fact that his body tensed in preparation to stop the madman should he try to harm him or the women.

“Jerusalem…how can you not know?” The man was incredulous.

“Know of what?”

The man’s bloodshot eyes stared at Jonathan, wide and glassy. He was panting and barely able to spit out the words: “All the death . . . blood . . . children being brutally killed . . .”

Jonathan heard a small gasp behind him. He turned to see Hadassah with a shocked, horrified expression on her flawless face.

He moved quickly towards the man and grabbed under his elbow to lead him away. The man must have either been too surprised or weary to protest because he did not struggle against Jonathan.

“Where are you taking me?” the stranger asked Jonathan after they had traveled several hundred feet.

“I apologize, sir. This is a small town. Those young women live in sheltered households with very protective fathers. I didn’t want them to be frightened. I am taking you to my family’s house. My father is an important man in the town. He will be
interested to hear what you have to say. My mother is famed for her hospitality; you will rest very comfortably under our roof tonight.”

Jonathan was barely able to explain to his parents the reason why the man had been brought to their house, as the man’s cries had crescendoed into heaving wails loud enough to drown out Jonathan’s words. Matthathias’ comforting voice along with Ruhamah’s motherly pats and shushing finally quieted the man enough that he could join them for dinner. Jonathan noticed that the stranger kept asking for refills on his wine. He also noticed that, though Matthathias would certainly have interceded had Jonathan or his brothers been too greedy over wine, that night Mattathias watched the man and remained quiet. After an unusually silent dinner, occasionally and very awkwardly interrupted by the stranger’s sniffles, Matthathias asked Jonathan to lead the man up to the roof.

“I will join you shortly, sir,” Matthathias said calmly to the stranger. He paused for a moment and then added, “I hope we can discuss the troubles afflicting our people in the beloved city.”

The stranger nodded his head solemnly. As he led the way towards the staircase, Jonathan heard his father hoarsely whispering to Ruhamah, “Under no condition come or let our daughters come to the roof. I fear the worst in what he says, and I would hate for one of my girls to hear anything . . . upsetting.”

Jonathan heard no reply from Ruhamah. As he continued up the stairs, followed by a silent shadow, he imagined that his mother had probably just nodded her head. Then he smiled ruefully to himself as he realized that she had probably looked up at Matthathias with eyes full of disappointment. She might have even pouted her bottom lip
out a little to show her displeasure. He could not truly blame her—since the family had moved to Modein, the most exhilarating news she might get in any given week would be that a neighbor’s donkey had died from old age.

On the rooftop, Jonathan motioned the stranger towards a broad mat on the floor and then sat down opposite him. As Jonathan shifted his body into a more comfortable position on his own mat, he scrutinized the man. The stranger seemed to have forgotten that Jonathan was even there. He was watching the sky, which was brightened by thousands of stars in intervals when the clouds cleared. His forehead was furrowed as if by worry and deep grief. Jonathan noticed another expression on the stranger’s face as well: angry confusion. It was as if, in his thoughts, he were interrogating the sky and expecting an answer. Jonathan chuckled softly, not out of amusement, but in confusion at the strangeness of the man seated in front of him.

At Jonathan’s laugh, the man eyes shifted from the stars to Jonathan. The stranger was looking squarely at him. Those eyes were piercing. They looked at Jonathan almost with pity, as an adult looks at a child who has only tasted the sweetness of innocence and none of the bitterness of experience. Embarrassed and afraid that he had made the stranger uncomfortable with his laugh, Jonathan awkwardly fumbled for conversation. As he was the only person there with the man, he attempted to be a gracious host.

“I’m afraid I do not even know your name, sir.”

“Perhaps I never gave it. I am Joseph of the tribe of Judah. Yours?”

“Jonathan. From the tribe of Levi.”

“Jonathan, thank you for providing me with a night’s lodging here. It is greatly appreciated.”
“You are quite welcome.”

The banter ended. Jonathan pretended to look out at the other houses and the wilderness embracing the town. In Modein, it was rare to hear any noises after sunset, except the bellowing of animals that did not understand that disrupting the townspeople’s sleep was rude. He missed Jerusalem, where he could occasionally hear snippets of conversations from the many families whose houses surrounded his own. Jonathan glanced at the house where Hadassah lived and speculated about what she was doing during that moment.

The sound of Mattathias coming up the stairs interrupted his thoughts. He was carrying a lamp that illuminated his lined face. Eleazer, Judas, John, and Simon followed behind him, talking amongst themselves. Jonathan let out a sigh and then quickly glanced at Joseph to see if he had heard it. But Joseph was watching the brothers; his face gradually became gloomy. He did not have long with his thoughts, however. Mattathias walked straight towards him, put a hand on his shoulder, and thanked him for gracing their humble house with his presence. After learning Joseph’s name and telling him that he would be welcome to stay as long as necessary, he signaled for his sons to sit down. When he himself was seated and had placed the lamp nearby, he earnestly looked at Joseph.

“Forgive me, but we live in such a small town, and word does not spread quickly these darkening days. Please, tell me, what is happening in Jerusalem?”

Joseph sighed and took a deep breath to begin.
Part I

Chapter III

Modein, 167 B.C.E.

Alas, to our very great grief, we now know all. I spoke to an eyewitness who escaped. He told me everything…Horror, horror! Man, shed thy clothes, cover thy head with ashes, run in the streets and dance in thy madness…Creator of the universe, help us!

—Rabbi Jacob Schulmann, in a letter to the Jews in Lodz (Poland, 1942 A.D.)

“I have seen sights that you would never believe,” Joseph began. “Our people are suffering more than I would have ever thought possible. But, as terrible as the penalty on the faithful, there are worse things: some of the Jews are forgetting that they have been chosen. They have turned their backs on our traditions, our laws, our people, and our . . .”

His voice choked with a sob. Jonathan noticed that Eleazar’s whole body was leaning forward, as if he did not want to miss even a breath of what Joseph had to say.

The guest continued.

“That tyrant Epiphanes has tried to make the entire city Greek. A gymnasium has been built in the city. His soldiers go there for exercise and fellowship, and certain of our own men took to going there as well. Of course, everyone knew they belonged to our
people as soon as they took off their tunics, so many of them have tried to hide their identities as Jews. They were ashamed to testify to the covenant of our father Abraham! In fact, they seem to get along well with the soldiers, the very men who are tormenting their fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers.

“Yes, and the faithful are tormented; these are such brutal times. I have heard of soldiers walking into schools and killing the children in the middle of their recitations. I have been told of old men being tortured for refusing to stop performing our customs. I have seen mothers murdered for following our law of circumcising their infant sons, and those sons thrown against walls or tossed into flames by the soldiers. The smoke from their bodies rises into the night sky. Priest—” Joseph grabbed Mattathias’s hand and moved closer to him. Jonathan’s body grew taut, but the calm expression on his father’s face prevented him from pushing Joseph away. The guest continued: “The fragrant offerings you have made in the Temple never had pungency like this sickening sacrifice. How can that smell reach the heavens without causing offense to G-d. Before our last Sabbath, all of us had speculated that it could not get any worse, but we were wrong. The king built an altar upon the Temple altar and offered the flesh of a pig upon it. No priest is allowed to purify the altar, so it will remain there, desolate and defiled.”

Joseph groaned and shook his head.

“Stories like I just described happen daily in our city. Perhaps I should tell you my own. I have lived in the city all of my life. Both my parents died when I was young, only ten. I was taken in as a servant to a wealthy family that devoutly followed the Torah. The father was a merchant, and the mother was a beautiful, noble woman. They had
seven children, but several of them died in their youth. They were left with five sons. I grew up with the sons and was treated kindly by them all.”

Joseph finally released Mattathias’ hand and sat back on his mat. He glanced at some unknown object past all of the brothers. Though Joseph was now wistful instead of agitated, the tension in Jonathan’s body remained. None of the rest of his brothers appeared to be concerned about the man’s good senses. Did none of them doubt this man’s story? How could he possibly be telling the truth? Such things could not be occurring in Jerusalem. Surely G-d would not allow it. Yet, Judas, Eleazar, John, Simon, and Mattathias were all listening intently, even nodding along with what the man said. They did believe him. Sickness crept into Jonathan’s stomach. What if the man were telling the truth?

Jonathan forced himself to listen to what Joseph was saying: “The oldest son and I were the same age. His name was Eli, but we became so inseparable, the family took to calling us ‘David and Jonathan.’ The years passed swiftly and happily. My friend was to be married soon, and the family business was thriving more than ever. The father had just left for Egypt to sell his wares when changes began to take place in Jerusalem.

“Every day, we would hear of new terrors and atrocities, far worse than the stories that had reached our ears in earlier months. One day, the soldiers began rounding up the entire neighborhood. We could hear them making their way towards us, inevitably, but there was nothing we could do. One of the brothers, Isaiah, wanted to fight, but Mother told them to not cause more trouble for the rest of our people. So, though we fought inwardly, we did not actually fight with the soldiers, even while they handled us like we were cattle.”
“We were taken to a part of the city that was unfamiliar to me, to a building I had never before seen. There were several hundred of us, all huddled together into one large chamber. Children were crying and the old women were wailing. Every now and then, soldiers and a short, plain man dressed in fine clothing would come into the darkening room where we were held captive. The man must have been a commander of some sort, for he would bark orders to his men in a language I could not understand, and the men would collect a group of our people and leave. After about an hour, they would come back for more. This happened again and again, all throughout the night and into the next day.

“My throat was on fire. I had not had anything to drink since we had been taken. My stomach was screaming for food, but we were not given any. Waste collected in the corners of the room; we had nowhere else to go. The stench made some of the women, and even a few of the men, faint. The soldiers took joy in commenting upon what animals we were whenever they came into the room, yet they would have been the same if they were in our circumstances.

“Once, when the short, stocky man was inspecting who to take next, my mistress caught his eye—as I probably told you, she was a very beautiful woman. When he realized that the five young men and boys around her were all her sons, he was intrigued. He muttered something in his language. His men grabbed all six of them and dragged them away. I guess I looked so different from the rest of them, they didn’t know that I was with them. I was left behind.

“There were not many more of us left in the room now. Children, who had been relentlessly crying for hours, had stopped as soon as the soldiers came. Once they were
gone their wails began again. Perhaps the one guard who remained did not feel he was
doing his duty, so he started taunting and threatening us all. A man in the back said
something. I couldn’t hear what was said, but I suppose the guard found it disrespectful.
He started shoving a path for himself towards the back. I realized that I might have a
chance to find my family—if I was going to die anyway, I wanted to be with them. I
moved as stealthily as possible towards the door. The guard still was not looking at me,
so I slipped out.

“The hallway I found myself in was quite dark. I waited in the blackness for a
moment to try to adjust my eyes. While I waited, I started to hear yelling and screaming. I
stumbled around towards the noises and found a sliver of light. There was a door and
behind it, someone was being tortured. I opened the heavy door just enough to place one
eye in the opening.”

Just then, Joseph put his head in his hands and stopped speaking. Jonathan
watched the flame of the lamp flickering as it illuminated both Joseph’s and Matthathias’
faces. Matthathias stroked his beard, just as Jonathan noticed he always did when trying
to understand the most difficult passages of the Torah. Yet, his eyes did not appear as
they normally did during those times. There was an expression of anger—vibrant, yet
also controlled. Even when Jonathan had disobeyed as a little boy, he could never recall
his father’s face looking as it looked that night. But Jonathan’s thoughts were interrupted
when Joseph began again.

“I can never forget the sights I saw in that room. They will haunt me until I have
breathed my last. The screams I had heard—those had been made by my best friend. His
hands and feet had been cut off, and the guards were roughly cutting at his scalp. My
friend’s blood was running down the arms of the guards and had created a small pool on
the floor. Although he would cry out occasionally, he was mostly quiet by then. The look
on his mother and brothers’ faces was ghastly. When the guards had finished with his
scalp, the commander barked something to them and they shoved a plate of something in
front of my friend; I believe it was pork. They yelled at him in their barbaric language,
then looked in the corner expectantly and motioned. Out of the shadows of the corner
came a young man. He was dressed in the Greek style, but he had the face of one of our
people. His face was drawn and pale as he went towards my friend and asked in Aramaic,
‘My commander wishes to know if you will eat now to avoid further . . . pain.’

“My friend,” Joseph said with a helpless laugh, “my friend spit at the guards’
faces. Although he was barely able to speak, he told them that he would never defy the
commandments given to his fathers. When the translator, the one who was a Jew,
translated my friend’s words into the barbaric language, the commander was infuriated.
His face became bright red and his eyes bulged, making him even more hideous than
usual. He yelled out some orders, and the guards once again moved towards my friend
with knives still wet with blood. My friend had only a second to yell out to his mother
and brothers, ‘Be strong!’ before they cut out his tongue. The guards began stoking a fire
in the corner of the room. While this was being done, I could see that my friend was
starting to fade. He had lost so much blood. When the guards came to carry him to the
fire, I knew that he was already dead. They released him from his chains and tossed his
body in the fire. They asked the mother and her sons if any of them would eat of the
swine, with that traitor interpreting for them. When my family refused, they began
torturing the sons one after the other. I fainted when they began torturing the youngest. He was not yet twelve.

“I woke up to the guards speaking in raised voices. I suppose they were fighting about something, maybe even where to put the corpses. I saw a pile of bodies, but was unable to determine to whom they had belonged. I still do not know whether my mistress was killed or not. Knowing that the guards would soon be coming back into the hallway, I started to run as quietly as possible. The sun had risen, which let a little light into the corridor. With that light, I was able to eventually find my way out of the building. I fled Jerusalem without going back to what used to be my home. As soon as I was outside the city gate, I heaved again and again. Once I was done, I began to run, not caring which direction I went. This is the first town I came to. The soldiers will probably be here soon. I had heard of our people being persecuted in Egypt and Babylon, but those things happened centuries ago.” His shoulders soon began to shake. “I never thought it could happen again to us now.” Joseph once again put his head in his hands, but Jonathan could still hear his muffled sobs.

Jonathan glanced over at Judas, who at that moment looked as if he could easily strangle someone. His older brother kept clenching and then relaxing his fists, showing the definition of his forearm’s muscles. Next, Jonathan glanced at John. He was cursing quietly under his breath; his words could only be heard in breaks between Joseph’s sobs. Jonathan shook his head and looked at Eleazar. His pale, gaunt face still showed traces of his most recent illness, his hollowed eyes blankly watching Joseph.

Jonathan then looked at Simon. He was staring at the floor, and Jonathan wondered if he, like John, was distracted. When Simon looked up at the sound of one of
Joseph’s sobs, Jonathan saw that his jaw was tight. No, he was just as angry as Judas, if not as obvious about it. After seeing the reactions of his brothers, Jonathan meekly looked at his father. The lamplight illuminated ominous shadows on Mattathias’ face. The facial expression that had so startled Jonathan had not left; rather, it had increased in its intensity. His lips had tightened, and, like Simon, his jaw was taut. The look in his eyes was indescribable. So Jonathan was astounded when, in the midst of his father’s emotions, the law of hospitality prevailed over all.

“Thank you, my friend, for telling us your story. I do not doubt that was difficult for you to share. Please, stay as long as necessary with us. You will always be welcome in my household.”

Joseph glanced up at his host with a face wet from tears. “I appreciate your hospitality, Mattathias, but I will be leaving in the morning. I must tell my story to the other towns and villages. Our people must know what is happening. I admit, though, that I am an unwilling prophet—I wish my eyes were not witnesses to all that has happened in Jerusalem.”

When Joseph finished speaking, Mattathias nodded solemnly. Sensing that his guest was exhausted, he led him to where he would sleep for the night. All of his sons remained fixed in their spots, mute and grave. When Mattathias returned, no one spoke. Jonathan saw Judas glance up at their father and then nudge Simon to also look at Mattathias. Jonathan realized he was not the only brother to have never seen all the deep emotion still clearly written on Mattathias’ face. Mattathias turned his back to his sons; he was facing the moon, though both it and the stars were almost completely veiled by the clouds. He began to moan and then weep. Soon, his weeping turned to wailing. He
began to babble. At first, his cries were incoherent, but as they continued, the babbling was shaped into words. Jonathan was barely able to hear.

“Why was I given life,” his father cried, “if it were just so that I would see all of this? Now our glorious Temple has been raped, gutted, and defiled by foreigners. All its honor and sanctity has been taken. Look at Jerusalem! Soldiers are killing our children in the streets. No regard is given for any of our traditions. Out of all the Gentiles, who hasn’t desecrated her yet? If this is what we must bear witness to, why should we live any longer?”

Suddenly, Jonathan heard the sound of cloth fibers ripping. He stared amazed at his father, who had just torn a long opening in his tunic. As Jonathan watched his father to see what would happen next, he noticed that the hairs on Mattathias’ chest had turned white. The sound of clothes being ripped was repeated to Jonathan’s right. He turned to see that Simon had followed their father’s lead. One by one, the men started to tear their tunics. Numbly, Jonathan strained to tear his own. The wailing began again, with Mattathias leading the lamentations. A few neighbors called out to Mattathias to see what was wrong. Some were angry at the outburst that woke them in the middle of the night. They came up to the rooftops to confront him for interrupting their children’s rest. When Mattathias told them about what was happening to their people in Jerusalem, the looks of anger on the patriarchs’ faces turned instantly to terror.

More and more people came to the rooftops, and the din of worried voices grew louder and louder. Ruhamah must have realized that her husband’s command about not coming to the roof had become void, for soon her graying head appeared next to Judas’s, and she immediately began to ask him questions. Michal came to the rooftop soon after
her mother. Her beautiful face stared out at all that was happening with calm as she listened silently to the conversation between her mother and brother. Leah also came from her nearby house, dragging her husband Josiah behind her. As word continued to spread, it seemed to Jonathan that the whole town was a spark that had kindled into a blaze.

Jonathan could hear an old farmer shouting over the rooftops to ask Mattathias if he knew what had happened to their daughter, her husband, and their little ones, all of whom lived in the city. Mattathias shook his head sadly and answered that he was not sure of the fate of anyone from Modein. Jonathan almost scoffed over how ludicrous it was for the farmer to think Mattathias would know anything about a particular family’s fate in such a vast city. His jaw tightened, though, when an aged widow also called out to his father. She barely had enough means to live, except for what she received from charity and her only child, a strapping young man who had gone to find a job in bustling Jerusalem. She asked the priest, with a mixture of hope and panic, if he knew about her son. Mattathias patiently repeated what he had told the farmer, and added how much he regretted that he could not have been of more assistance. The poor woman thanked him for his help and ambled back into her little house. She would probably spend the rest of the night praying for the safety of her beloved son.

The panicked voices all around the town continued to rise in volume. Many of the women were concerned for their families in Jerusalem, and many of the men were afraid that the soldiers would come to Modein and harm their families. Jonathan could overhear Judas speaking in quiet, yet assertive tones to John. He must have finished talking to Ruhamah and Michal because he was now discussing how the men of the city could arm
themselves. He was adamant that the townsmen should be prepared to fight, rather than to let the soldiers take complete control if they came to Modein. John responded that, at this time of the year, there would not be enough of a harvest to keep all of the people fed for long should the soldiers siege the town. Mattathias overheard part of the conversation between his two sons and frowned.

“Let us not worry about this now. This is the time to think of our kinsmen who are already suffering, not to be concerned over our own fates. Should we be in a situation like our people in Jerusalem, G-d will provide the answer as to how we should handle it. As for now, raise up your voices in prayer for our people in the city.”

Mattathias again began a wailing prayer, and his sons and neighbors took up their own songs of sorrow—a funeral dirge for Jerusalem. Jonathan raised up his voice with all the rest. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Joseph standing on the rooftop. He was amazed that the man had been able to sleep, even for only the few minutes that had passed, with all the noise around him. He must have been wholly exhausted. He still only looked half-awake.

Joseph, seeing that Jonathan had been staring at him, glanced back. His face had a look of almost satisfaction upon it—he was not bearing the burden of suffering for Jerusalem’s people alone anymore. His task as a prophet of warning was complete, at least in Modein, and he would now be free to move to other towns. He, too, began the wailing prayer, and the people of Modein transformed into a unified chorus of mourning. Just then, strong wind came from the northwest. Jonathan noticed that the light from the lamp Mattathias had brought from the house earlier began to sway crazily. The small, bending light reflected Mattathias’ sorrowful face in a way that made his familiar features
look grotesque. Jonathan watched, horrified, as the wind grew stronger and, finally, snuffed the light out.
Part I

Chapter IV

Modein, 167 B.C.E.

NOW, THEREFORE, REVERE THE LORD AND SERVE HIM WITH UNDIVIDED LOYALTY . . . OR, IF YOU ARE LOATH TO SERVE THE LORD CHOOSE THIS DAY WHICH ONES YOU ARE GOING TO SERVE—THE GODS THAT YOUR FOREFATHERS SERVED BEYOND THE EUPHRATES, OR THOSE OF AMORITES IN WHOMES LAND YOU ARE SETTLED; BUT I AND MY HOUSEHOLD WILL SERVE THE LORD.

—JOSHUA 24: 15

It was not long before they came, not even a fortnight. The townspeople saw them from almost two kilometers away, marching with determination like an army of angry black ants. Mattathias’ sons, as well as other men, stood as sentinels upon the rooftops, calling out what they could make out about the soldiers. At that distance, they could not distinguish the soldiers’ armor, weapons, height, or appearance. This unawareness caused even more dread, as the images of the mysterious men exaggerated themselves in the townspeople’s minds to be the most fearsome army on earth. The sentinels called out that the soldiers had progressed to about a kilometer away. Women clutched their husbands’ arms and held their children closely, dreading the storm of terror that would soon overwhelm them. Men lifted their voices in prayer over their families, begging for
protection. Young women sobbed uncontrollably, terrified that their virtue would be stolen from them that day.

Eventually, one of the townsmen called up to the sentinel.

“What do you see? How much closer are they?”

“They’re about…well, they’re still about a half a kilometer away. They don’t seem to be moving any closer. I think . . . it looks like they’re making camp!”

Jonathan watched as his father and the older men in the city flocked together in a little circle to discuss this strange omen. Stroking their white beards and wagging their white heads, they all contributed their opinion of what it might mean.

Mattathias spoke first. “It is sunset, after all. The soldiers will probably not want to enter a town at night if they’ve marched for over twenty kilometers that day.”

The oldest man in the village wagged a finger at the rest. “But could they not have camped farther back and then taken the town the next day?”

“They are camping in plain view,” A wizened carpenter said. “They must be doing so to intimidate us.”

Hezekiah, a shepherd, narrowed his eyes and said, “But they are also making themselves vulnerable—did they not consider that we could attack them as they sleep, exhausted from their long march?”

“There are not enough men in the town to attack,” the carpenter replied, “and most of us are farmers without weapons. What if the soldiers are going to rally themselves at night and attack us while we are sleeping?”
The men conferred for several minutes without any definite conclusions. Finally, Mattathias removed himself from the group and yelled out to the villagers of Modein, who began to gather in a circle around him:

“The elders have decided it would be best for us to return to our homes for the evening. We will post several watchmen throughout the night to keep an eye on the soldiers’ camp. They will alert the rest of the town if the soldiers proceed any further tonight. For now, go to your homes and rest. G-d will protect us this night.”

The circle of people scattered as the villagers walked to their homes, still frightened. While Jonathan watched them leave, he heard one woman saying to her husband that waiting for what would happen was even worse than the soldiers coming upon them suddenly. He glanced at Hadassah, who was clutching at her mother and sobbing without restraint. Her mother grabbed her by the arms and looked her in the face. She said something, but Jonathan could not hear what it was. The look on the mother’s face was rather harsh. Hadassah nodded her head slowly; her mother turned from her and began walking, leaving Hadassah behind. The girl’s shoulders drooped and she began to follow her mother.

Almost before he knew what he was doing, Jonathan started towards her. Now was not the time for convention; this poor girl was frightened out of her mind over what was coming, and she was certainly garnering no sympathy from her mother. If they were going to die tomorrow, he would not die without showing her how he felt.

He was close enough to grab her when he felt his own arm grabbed with a strong grip and the deep voice of Judas rumbling in his ear, “Come with me.”
Jonathan would have tried to free himself from his brother’s grasp, but his brother’s tone carried too much resolve; it was as cold and hard as the head of a hammer. He glanced back at where Hadassah had been, only to find that she had disappeared into her house. Sighing, he followed his brother. All of the young men were gathered together on the outskirts of the village.

They were out of earshot of the houses, yet in the dim light Jonathan could still see a glow of fire in the soldiers’ camp. John, Simon, Eleazar, and several of Jonathan’s friends were all there. Jonathan noticed that many of the men looked just as frightened as the women had, some looked fiercely determined, and some had almost amused expressions on their faces, an interesting combination of both fear and bravery. Judas spoke.

“I will not sit idly by to watch these soldiers do whatever they want to our village. We are called to protect our women and children. If these soldiers harm them, we will be suffering anyway. If these soldiers try to force us to abandon our commandments, we would be sinning by not fighting. Now, I know that we do not have many actual weapons, but at least we have a few . . . How many of you have something you can use in a fight?”

A few men grunted, but most remained silent.

“Well, I suppose we’ll have to make do with what we can. If we must, we’ll just have to use our fists and surprise them.” Judas clenched one of fists and grinned. “My father says we wait to see what happens, and I agree. But I say we prepare for the worst; we conceal weapons in our tunics. If the soldiers are peaceable, we will not act, but at the first act of violence on their part, we strike.”
Most of the men raised their voices in assent and lauded Judas for his wisdom of foresight. Jonathan remained silent. Even if there were only twenty soldiers, they would be highly trained for battle. They would have protective armor and effective weaponry. What harm could farmers and men who had never even swung a sword possibly cause them? Yet, Jonathan bit his lower lip. What did he himself know of self-defense? His hands had been trained to handle the parchment scrolls of the Torah, not to kill a man in cold blood on the battlefield. Soon, the group dispersed. Some of them were patting each other on the back and boasting of what feats they could accomplish together the next day, obviously feeling a sense of camaraderie. Jonathan trudged back to the house, leaving the rest of his brothers behind.

When Jonathan was back in the room he shared with Judas, he prayed over what would happen to him, his family, the people of Modein, and his whole race. He lay down and closed his eyes. As much as he tried to push all thoughts away, sleep still evaded him. Judas came into the room not long afterwards. As he stretched his body down on his own mat, he started to whisper.

“Baby brother!”

Jonathan did not provide a response.

“Jonathan! Are you still awake?”

Jonathan mumbled to show that he was half-asleep and did not want to talk, but Judas continued.

“Do you think that the plan will work? You seem to know what Father thinks better than I do—do you think he’ll be angry that I’m going against what he wanted?”
Jonathan said nothing.

Judas spoke again. “Maybe he won’t be angry.” He paused before continuing, “Do you have a blade or anything to hide in your tunic? I only have one for myself. Perhaps you could get one tomorrow. Or just use your hands if you have to.”

Jonathan remained silent and motionless, but he gritted his teeth. Would it really have mattered what he thought of Judas’ plan, whether or not it would work? Even if Judas’ plan did work, it could bring horrific reprisals upon the people in the village and perhaps people in other villages, as well. Yet, Judas would be a hero if he cut any number of soldiers down, especially if he could do so in a way that showcased his bravery and strength. Well, Judas had asked if Jonathan thought his plan would work, and for once Jonathan was going to tell him. He opened his mouth to put Judas back in his place when he heard the sound of his brother’s metrical breathing, soon followed by a steady snore. Jonathan exhaled. Judas’ snoring and his own swirling thoughts kept him awake for too long after that.

Not long after sunrise, the Seleucid soldiers marched into town in perfect rhythm, their sandaled feet stirring up dust in the streets and their presence rousing terror in the townspeople’s hearts. From where he stood in front of his house, Jonathan counted barely more than a score of them all together—twenty ordinary infantry and an official. They gathered into the very center of the small town, and the official began shouting in Aramaic for all to hear:

“Villagers of Modein! You are to gather to this spot immediately! Those who refuse to come will be killed as an example to others.”
When he finished yelling, the official turned to say something to the infantry commander. The official was a man of medium-height but was quite rotund. Jonathan wondered if the man had not yet learned self-control over the delicacies that would have been served in the tyrant’s house; perhaps this meant the man had only been promoted to his position fairly recently. He was sweating profusely in the hot sun. Every few minutes, he would push the long silk sleeve off of his arm in order to wipe sweat from his damp forehead. As Jonathan analyzed the ridiculous man, he realized that the official had spoken Aramaic without an unfamiliar accent, which made him question if the man might actually be a Jew. He started to feel nauseated.

The townspeople hurried out of their houses to comply with the announcement. The resignation on their faces made Jonathan’s nausea increase. Mattathias came out of the house and stood next to Jonathan. He looked stonily determined, without the slightest trace of fear. Jonathan vicariously drew courage from this and walked alongside his father towards the town center. John, Eleazar, Simon, all of their wives and children, Ruhamah, Michal, and Judas, Leah, Josiah, and their children were all behind them. It did not take long for Judas to maneuver his way to Mattathias’ other side, and the three men standing abreast led the rest.

Jonathan noticed that Leah looked unusually tired; her eyes had large purple circles under them, aging her considerably. Her hand was not clutching her husband’s arm. This surprised Jonathan—if Josiah were anywhere near her, Leah had to be touching him in some way; their affection often embarrassed Jonathan. Jonathan glanced at Josiah; his eyes were directed straight ahead, and he looked as if he were in a daze. Even more surprising to Jonathan was seeing how serene the rest of his family appeared to be.
Although his stomach kept tightening, he followed alongside his father’s rapid pace until they were facing the soldiers gathered in the town square.

Mattathias’ family was one of the last to appear. The entire town was present, yet in the midst of the two hundred or so collected, there was hardly a sound, except for the official’s forcibly friendly banter with one of the soldiers, who appeared annoyed. Finally, the soldier snapped something at the diplomat in another language. The diplomat’s obligatory smile faded, and he turned to the crowd.

“It seems that most of you are here. A few of our men will glance around to make certain that no one is feeling stubborn today.”

Five of the soldiers disappeared into the crowd. Jonathan watched their tall spears, higher than all the townsmen’s heads, appear at the end of the throng and separate in different directions throughout the town. Soon, they heard throaty screams. One by one, the soldiers returned. The last soldier to return was dragging Ezekiel, an old potter who lived near the outskirts of the village. He had been born deaf. The look on the official’s face was positively malicious. Jonathan felt as if he were going to vomit. He could not stifle the groan that came from his throat. Mattathias stepped forward to the front of the crowd.

“This man is deaf. He could not possibly have heard the orders from you, and the townspeople were probably in such a rush to follow orders that no one remembered to let him know. He is a good man, sir, and would never have insulted . . . Your Excellency.”

Mattathias said the man’s title through clenched teeth. Even though he felt as if he were about to be sick, Jonathan could not help but notice how absurd it was of his father to have called the official by that particular name—it appeared to him that the only
excellent trait the man possessed was an appetite. The official’s eyes decreased into slits as he glared at Mattathias.

“As distressing as this man’s case may be, it is irrelevant how the circumstances occurred that caused him to disobey orders. The only important thing is that he did, in fact, disobey. Besides, if we let him go free, what sort of precedent would that set for all of you provincial simpletons?”

With a quick and careless wave of his hand, his fat fingers glistening with jewelry, the official motioned to a soldier next to him. The soldier approached the old man and roughly pushed him to the ground. Mattathias took one step forward, toward the soldiers and Ezekiel. Two soldiers went quickly towards him and prevented him from interfering with Ezekiel’s punishment. Out of the corner of his eye, Jonathan saw Judas’ hand stealthily reaching into his tunic. Quickly, Jonathan grasped Judas’ arm and mouthed, “Not yet.” Though he received a glare from Judas, he maintained his grip.

The soldier in front of Ezekiel drew out a short sword with metal so smooth it glinted in the morning sun. He flipped it in his hand and then winked at a young woman in the front of the crowd. Rather than appearing pleased by his preposterous display, she buried her face in her father’s tunic. The soldier shook his head and grinned, then drew his burly arm back to strike. Ezekiel, whose face had been turned upward to the soldier with a look of terror and shock, glanced at the crowd. His face changed to a look of absolutely baffled wonder. The metal flashed in the sunlight as it sliced through the air.

And then it was over.

Ezekiel fell to the dusty ground, his neck twisted in an unnatural position with his head facing the masses. His eyes were still open, and the look with which he had met
death was forever frozen. Jonathan shuddered and drew his arms around himself to get warm again. Most of the villagers had gasped as the blade struck, but their noise then faded into a deathly silence.

No one moved. Jonathan glanced at the soldiers to see what would happen next. The official stood with his arms at his side. Why was he not directing his soldiers about what to do now? Jonathan watched for the official to make his move. The official was scanning the crowd, his lip curling into a satisfied smirk. He was enjoying this. Hot anger surged through Jonathan’s entire body. The official said something quietly to Ezekiel’s killer, turning his face so that the crowd would not read his lips. The soldier made a sign to his cohorts, and half of them disappeared while the other half continued to keep guard over the crowd. After what felt like ages, the official turned toward the throng and spoke.

“Now will everyone be willing to comply?” He scanned the crowd for a moment. After a moment of silence, he nodded his head once and continued. “Let me speak to you all as a fellow Jew. Our lord and ruler has been extending progress and cultivation to Jerusalem for several years. It is his magnanimity that has stirred him to spread advancement throughout all of Judea, and those of you here in Modein are privileged enough to be some of the first to taste it. How long have we kept the same traditions, while all the other cultures around us have grown in their knowledge, their culture? Will we continue to sacrifice the wisdom of intelligence for the sake of old customs that have lost all meaning in their endless cycle of repetition?”

Behind him, Jonathan heard the faint sound of something grating. He strained his neck to look past all of those gathered. The soldiers were stacking up broad rocks in a circular pattern, a formation that was currently almost knee high. Did the soldiers bring
the rocks themselves? Jonathan knew of nowhere around the town where rocks such as those could be found. He knit his eyebrows together in confusion and turned back to the official, who was still droning on about the positive changes he would bring to the small village.

“Our great king, Antiochus Epiphanes, is continuing the glorious tradition begun by the remarkable general Alexander. We, my brothers and sisters, will be remembered forever afterwards as being those pioneers who solidified the beginning of a new, wonderful era—a golden age of progress.”

As he spoke, his hands began waving in the air. While he discussed the “golden age of progress,” he cupped his hand toward himself, as if he were literally ushering in the new era. When he realized that all of the village’s eyes were fastened on him, he started walking toward the crowd, his hands still motioning to drive his points into the people’s hearts. The crowd separated to let him pass, and as he brushed by, the smell of the man reached Jonathan’s nostrils—body odor intermingled with perfumes. The man continued walking until he had reached the soldiers at the back of the crowd, now putting the finishing touches on the formation they had assembled. Jonathan finally understood that the stones were in the shape of an altar.

The crowd had pivoted to see the man; Jonathan glanced around to see what other people were thinking as they perceived the altar. Most simply looked confused, although many were obviously afraid. Jonathan glanced at Judas. His jaw was set tight, and his eyes were sizing up the soldiers; was he trying to determine how many men he could single-handedly kill? The thought of Judas stirring up trouble made Jonathan’s stomach turn even more. Suddenly, Jonathan heard a squeal. His eyes directed toward the sound,
and he saw a soldier dragging along a pig. Yes, they must have brought the animal and the stones for the altar when they came; no one living in the village would possess one of those creatures. The official smiled conspiratorially at the soldier. The soldier must have timed the pig’s entrance perfectly for what would come next. The official’s eyes began scanning the crowd.

“Is there a man who is a leader in this town?”

Many frantic eyes turned to Mattathias, though he did not volunteer any information until the official also looked at him, curling his lips into a smirk.

“I might have known. And what is it you have done to earn the respect of this village?”

“I do not claim to be a respected man here. I am simply a priest.”

“Ah! A priest! Perfect! Come forward, priest,” the official smiled genuinely.

Mattathias stepped forward until he was alongside those in the front of the crowd, but remained there.

The official glanced at him threateningly. As if a wave had washed over him, his face immediately changed to earnestness when he turned to address the crowd once more.

“In order for a rebirth of progress to be made, we must put to death our old superstitions, for that is all some of our rules are. How can we move forward if our ignorance is constantly pulling us back? What I ask of you today is simple: show our beneficent ruler that you support his quest for improvement by sacrificing this pig. The swine symbolizes the superstitions of our people; offer it as a sacrifice to show that henceforth, our actions will be dictated by reason and not irrational beliefs that have passed to us from our forefathers. All of your people in Jerusalem have already taken this
important step. Priest, as a man expert in religious matters, the king could have need of you; it would be a great honor to be known by name to him, which I could certainly arrange . . .”

No response came from Mattathias. The official pursed his lips, as if he were disappointed that his offer had not been given the proper esteem. His face hardened, and he watched Mattathias expectantly. After a period of silence, the official spoke. “Then do your duty.”

The soldier in charge of the pig took a knife out of his belt, either to kill the pig or to convince Mattathias. Silence reigned over the village. Jonathan trembled when he heard his father’s words:

“I will not.”

“What did you say?”

Mattathias planted his feet in a wide stance and looked squarely at the official. He spoke with an unwavering voice, raised so that the whole crowd could hear.

“I said ‘I will not.’ Even if those in Jerusalem and other parts of Judea have chosen to follow the king’s decree, I, my sons, and my family will not forsake the covenant handed down to us from our fathers. No, we will not turn aside, either to the right or the left.”

The official’s eyes bulged, and his mouth gaped. As soon as his surprise subsided, he glared at Mattathias. It seemed as if he were thinking through how to properly punish the stubborn priest. Behind him, Jonathan heard a voice call out: “I will do it.” The words were followed by a woman’s shriek. As if in a dream, he saw Josiah moving past him towards the altar. Leah would not loosen the grip she had upon his right arm, though she
was practically being dragged behind him. When he neared the front of the crowd, Josiah turned angrily to her.

“Let me go!” he said, as he swiftly shook the arm she was clinging to.

Leah released his arm, sobbing uncontrollably. Ruhamah pushed her way towards her daughter and wrapped her arms around the frail frame without saying a word.

The official smiled at the young man who was now standing before him. He nodded his head towards the soldier restraining the pig. Josiah took the cue and went to the soldier, who let go of the pig. Josiah picked up the pig, which was squealing with fright and placed him on the altar. The soldier was stretching out the knife to offer it to Josiah. Jonathan turned his neck to look at Mattathias. As soon as he saw his father’s face, he knew what Mattathias would do.
Part I

Chapter V

Modein, 167 B.C.E.

With the swift agility of an adder, Mattathias rushed towards Josiah and the altar. Jonathan saw him snatch the knife from the soldier. The soldier’s reaction was not quick enough to stop him; Mattathias claimed the knife without a fight. Grasping Josiah’s shoulder and spinning him around, so that he was now facing his son-in-law, Mattathias hissed something loudly and then struck Josiah. Jonathan saw Josiah’s mouth open in shocked pain. Even before Josiah had slumped down, Mattathias turned with the knife on the soldier. Josiah was on the ground now, and Jonathan distinguished two red streams of blood flowing from his tunic. Mattathias and the soldier were grappling when Judas’ voice shouted, “Now!” Jonathan’s brother, as well as several other men that had been at Judas’ meeting the night before flew past him.

Mattathias had overcome the soldier and grabbed the sword from the sheath hanging on the soldier’s belt. He made his way towards the official, who fell to his knees and began to blubber for mercy. Mattathias used the broad side of the sword to strike the official in the head, stunning him. He watched the unconscious official for a few moments and then turned to fight more of the soldiers. The soldiers must have recovered from their initial surprise quickly, as their weapons were drawn when Judas and his
comrades approached them. In the group of fighting villagers, Jonathan saw John and Simon. His mother came from Leah’s side to Jonathan and Eleazar. With each hand, she grabbed the wrists of her sons.

“Look at you two just standing here! Go out there and help your father and brothers! Do you want them to get killed?”

Annoyed at her interference, Jonathan shook her off and moved along the front edge of the crowd toward the fighting. Throughout the ensuing chaos, he saw one soldier circling Simon, ready to strike the unarmed man. Simon was trying to duck the blows of the soldier while looking for a position to knock the sword from the soldier’s hand. As Jonathan walked briskly towards them, he unfastened the woven belt around his tunic and held it loosely in his hands. Stealthily, he came up behind the soldier, who seemed to be enjoying his advantage over the unarmed rustic far too much. When the right moment came, Jonathan quickly threw the belt around the soldier’s neck, twisted it, and pulled back tightly. The soldier’s weight began to lean against Jonathan, one hand grasping at the cloth around his neck while the other hand still held the sword.

“Get the sword!” Jonathan yelled to Simon.

Simon kicked the soldier in the stomach. While the soldier was still reacting, Simon knocked the sword out of his hand and grabbed it from the ground. He adjusted the weapon in his hand for a moment and turned to take on other soldiers while Jonathan strangled the soldier. As Simon turned, Jonathan screamed at him:

“No, no! Finish him now!”

Simon turned back and stabbed the soldier in the stomach twice. The soldier stopped struggling. When the soldier was on the ground, Jonathan knelt down and
fumbled in the soldier’s belt for his short knife. Finding it, he unsheathed it and turned to go, but not without one last look at the soldier’s colorless face. Even though he was startled by its numbed expression, he glanced at the scene around him to determine where to go next. Most of the fighting seemed to be done already. Many of the men in the town had joined the fight; a few of them were even using rocks from the makeshift altar as weapons. By sheer manpower, the villagers were able to overcome the majority of the soldiers—there were now only about four of them still alive. One was going after Judas, who was helping his friend Reuben with a particularly large adversary. Jonathan, gripping his knife, ran toward the soldier.

Once behind him, Jonathan angled his knife and struck the soldier’s lower back, under the armor. The man curved his body unnaturally and turned to face Jonathan. Fear crept into Jonathan as the soldier’s eyes glared at him. What defense would Jonathan’s short knife be for a sword? All Jonathan could do was duck the soldier’s blows until Reuben relieved him. Reuben was clearly not as skilled with his sword as the soldier, but between Reuben’s sword and Jonathan’s knife, the two men were able to finally kill the already-injured soldier.

Reuben turned to walk away, and Jonathan tried to follow behind, but was stopped by a hand grabbing his wrist. He looked back to see the dying soldier. The soldier was bleeding heavily, and blood was beginning to bubble from his mouth onto his thick, dark beard. He opened up his armor to expose his chest, and then said something to Jonathan in a foreign language. Jonathan could not determine what exactly had been said, but from the soldier’s body language, he was able to ascertain the general idea—Don’t let me suffer into death; end it now. Jonathan nodded and drew the knife. He placed one
hand on the man’s shoulder and stabbed into the soldier’s heart with his dominant hand. The soldier was finished, his glazed eyes still staring up at Jonathan, who closed the dead eyelids over them and stared at the corpse for a moment. Then, he slowly stood up and looked around.

Only one soldier remained, an obstinate man who was losing badly to John. When John killed him, Jonathan sighed in relief. He noticed that only a portion of the crowd was left. Some of the villagers who had fought were asking Mattathias what should be done with the corpses, and Mattathias answered that he was not quite sure. His walked as in a daze, but he would not stop smiling; Jonathan wondered if he were surprised to have actually survived the skirmish. The women began running to their husbands, brothers, and sons to ascertain if they had injuries and to hold them, sobbing in relief that they could wrap their arms around warm, living bodies.

Jonathan glanced at the aftermath of the skirmish. Out of the twenty-something corpses strewn along the perimeter of the fighting, his eyes burned when he saw Josiah’s body draped lifelessly across the makeshift altar. He fought the urge to check and make certain that all of his blood brothers had survived. Instead, he walked on weak legs toward the unconscious body. His arms clasped Josiah’s frame and gingerly dragged it away from the altar. When he was about a dozen feet from the place where Josiah was killed, he laid his brother-in-law on the ground.

Then, he felt a trembling hand on his shoulder. Leah. Her sobs had subsided; she was quiet as she slid under her husband and set his lolling head on her fragile shoulder, her arm wrapping around his middle. Jonathan grimaced at the sight of her arms covered in the blood of Josiah’s wounds. But she did not seem to even notice. She rocked him
forwards and back with eyes closed, one hand coming up to gently run its fingers through his hair. She kissed his ears, whispering in them as if he could still hear her.

Jonathan reached out to comfort her. When her eyes caught his hand, she cast a glare at him. Jonathan understood. If he were to comfort her, that must mean she would be in need of comfort. The only way she would need consoling would be if Josiah were dead. He shook his head and began to look for his brothers. His attention was again arrested by the sound of rocks scraping against each other. Instinctively, he looked toward the altar and saw Mattathias and Judas grabbing its rocks and pushing them on the ground. Jonathan was relieved to see that John and Eleazar were also engaged in the task. Scanning the area, he saw Simon striding towards them. All his brothers were still alive.

When Jonathan saw the fervor of his father, he felt a surge of anger. Was his zeal for what was right really worth killing his son-in-law? Subjecting the men in the village to the possibility of death in battle and the civilians to reprisals from Antiochus’ men in the future? Instantly, Jonathan’s anger was replaced by a wave of regret, and he murmured a prayer for forgiveness under his breath. He moved towards the altar and joined his brothers and father in finishing their destructive work. When the altar was reduced to a disheveled heap of stones on the ground, he wiped his hands, which were stained red. He had not realized that Josiah’s blood had gotten on them when he was moving his body.

Oblivious, Judas, done with his share dismantling the altar, slapped him on the back.

“How many kills did you have today? Two, three? Not bad for my baby brother.” Judas grinned and tousled Jonathan’s hair with his rough, calloused hands.
Jonathan merely cringed at Judas’ inappropriate timing. He saw something in his peripheral vision. It was the official, crawling away slowly. Was he trying to escape undetected, or was he too injured to move at a faster pace?

Jonathan began to move towards him, but stopped when he saw one of the villagers already marching to the official, a blood-drenched sword in his hand. It was a carpenter named Korah. When he reached the official inching among the carcasses of his soldiers, he placed the sword directly under his throat.

“Turn around,” Korah growled.

The official pivoted so that he was on his back. Korah placed his large, sandal-clad foot on the official’s heaving chest and kept it there firmly. The official started babbling: “What about mercy? Can you not extend mercy to one of your own people?”

Korah stood there. He did not say a word, and his foot did not move from its place on the official’s body.

After a few more moments, the official’s tone changed. “How dare you defy our king, our glorious king. When he hears of this, he will send thousands of troops to kill you all. What made you think that your pathetic attempt to defy our king could succeed?”

Korah muttered something under his breath, but still did not move. Eventually, the official grew quiet.

“What shall I do with this breathing flab in front of me?”

Jonathan’s father, who was conferring with one of the men, turned sharply when he heard his name called. He hurried over to Korah.

“So he is still alive.”
“Indeed.” Korah scowled at the official. “I say we give him a good beating and then send him back to Jerusalem so he can tell that idiotic king what happens when he interferes with our people.”

“If we send him back, that will be all the sooner more soldiers will return to wreak havoc. No, it would be best to kill him and let those in Jerusalem find out only when they have started to miss these men. This way, they would probably only send a scout first, which should give us more time to decide on what’s to be done.”

“Very well,” Korah grinned and held his sword high above his head. In a flash, Mattathias pushed Korah in the chest, which caused the man to stumble back a few steps. While the carpenter was still recovering from the priest’s surprising assertiveness, Mattathias took the sword from his own belt and cleanly swept the official’s head from his shoulders. The official’s body went limp immediately. Korah looked shocked.

“What was that for? Why did you not let me kill him?”

Mattathias answered calmly and deliberately: “Because I think you would have enjoyed it too much.”

Korah started to protest, but Mattathias held up his hand for silence and continued: “Never toy with a man before you kill him. You should never enjoy killing.”

Korah looked injured, and even Jonathan felt a sting of embarrassment for him to be chastised in front of all the other men. To put an end to the moment of tension, he cut between the two men and asked his father what should be done next.

“Hold on a moment,” his father replied.

The men who had fought were still milling around, and even those who had hidden in their homes had come out when the cries of the battle had subsided. Mattathias
moved to stand by the crumbled altar. The pig that was to be a sacrifice was lying lifelessly near the altar, a bloodied mess. Apparently, someone had killed it during the skirmish; it had multiple stab wounds. Mattathias raised his voice, and the people listened to hear what their new leader would say.

“People of Modein! Today, G-d has done great things for us! We have seen here that G-d will provide for us if we stay faithful to the commandments. We have seen the provision that comes from following His authority, rather than a man’s. But we are only just beginning to free our people from the chains of persecution. We will have to forfeit some of our comforts for the sake of this cause. Men, all of you who are prepared to fight, come out to the caves with me. We will increase our numbers and take back our lands. Now, let everyone who is zealous for the Torah and the covenant of our people come out to me!”

The men in the town let out a wild shout of approval at his words. Mattathias quickly gave orders for the men to collect weapons and pack food. He then gathered a few men to discuss what should be done with the civilians in the town should more soldiers come in a few days.

Jonathan walked back to his house, bewildered. Leave Modein? What would happen to his mother? Leah, Michal? Hadassah? What would happen to him? His father and his brothers? They had no tactical training and no experience in battle besides the brief skirmish they had just experienced, where the mere number of men in the village delivered their victory. They would return to Modein when? A few months, a few years, or never? Jonathan could never go against a decision his father had made, and his heart nearly ached with pride at the notion that his father refused to abandon the Torah. But,
unlike his father and brothers, he was not sure he was willing to die for the sake of preserving it.

For a brief moment, Jonathan thought of running past the edge of Modein and past any nearby towns. He could hide in a village far away and adjust to a life there. He was a fast learner. He could learn a trade, settle in, and never tell anyone he was the son of the priest in Modein who had stirred up the anger of the entire Seleucid army. Why should he die for the sake of a cause that would surely crumble under the weight of the enemy’s power?

After all, he was not a soldier, and he was not a killer. What had happened to the life he had planned? A life studying the Torah, a life with a wife and children? While these thoughts were running through his head, he reached his house. Even before he entered, he could hear the sound of Ruhamah clucking to Michal about which types of food should be packed for the men. He stopped suddenly.

His family. He could not make the chances of his father and brothers dying greater by removing his help, though it would not be much. To join them, though he did not feel the same amount of fervor as they, was right. He cursed under his breath and walked in the house to bid goodbye to the women and the life he had planned for himself.
Part II

Chapter I

Judean Countryside, 167 B.C.E.

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT HOLY. SIX DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR, AND DO ALL THY WORK; BUT THE SEVENTH DAY IS A SABBATH UNTO HAShEM THY G-D, IN IT THOU SHALT NOT DO ANY MANNER OF WORK, THOU, NOR THY SON, NOR THY DAUGHTER, NOR THY MAN-SERVANT, NOR THY MAID-SERVANT, NOR THY CATTLE, NOR THY STRANGER THAT IS WITHIN THY GATES; FOR IN SIX DAYS HAshEM MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH, THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IN THEM IS, AND RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY; WHEREFORE HAshEM BLESSED THE SABBATH DAY, AND HALLOWED IT. —EXODUS 10: 8-11

Mattathias, his sons, and several men from the village left that very evening for caves in the country’s hillsides. Many of them were dazed now that they had time to contemplate the risk they had taken by disobeying the king’s decrees. A few were worry-struck that even though their families had been safely deposited to other surrounding villages, they might be harmed by Seleucid soldiers. A still smaller number were anxiously eager to stir up other Jews to join the revolt. More than one argument had broken out about what should next be done before Mattathias finally determined a compromise: four of the men would leave the caves as scouts, one in each direction.
Once these men brought back word of what was happening, the rest would act in the best course. And so the men restlessly waited.

News came back that the soldiers were not returning. The next day, Mattathias and the men moved back to the village. But one night after Jonathan had gone to bed, less than two weeks since the Jews’ homecoming, the soldiers had returned to Modein. They asked who had killed their comrades, but none of the villagers would tell. The soldiers pounded on the door of Mattathias’ house, interrupting the evening’s reading from the Torah. When he answered, Leah stepped out from behind one of the soldiers.

“There!” she shrieked. “That’s the one who started it all!”

She pointed her forefinger directly at Mattathias. The finger was wet with blood, and Jonathan instinctively knew that it was Josiah’s blood. The blood spread until it covered not only her finger, but also her hand, then her forearm, and then up to her elbow.

The soldiers dragged Mattathias out of the house. Jonathan followed but was unable to lift his arms to stop the soldiers. It was nighttime, and, except for a few torches, shadows dominated the darkness. One figure holding a torch approached, and Jonathan saw that it was the official who had tried to make Mattathias offer the sacrifice. A soldier lifted a sword to execute Mattathias swiftly, but Leah held up a hand to intercede. Jonathan felt relief pouring over him that his sister was finally showing her loyalty.

A malignant grin stretched her mouth out, and she cried, “No, no, let’s do it our way, since Father is so determined to follow our commandments. The punishment for murder is stoning, and my father’s punishment for killing Josiah should be no exception.”
The official laughed and shouted, “Splendid! Men, gather the very stones from the altar this priest so disrespectfully tore down.”

Jonathan tried to stop watching, but his head would not turn away from his father. The soldiers had pulled Mattathias toward the site of the former altar and began stoning him. As the blows hit their mark, he knelt and then collapsed on the ground, blood beginning to trickle from his head. When he could tell that his father was dead, Jonathan cried out in agony. All the soldiers turned to look at him then, as if they had not seen him before. The official turned, too, and suddenly, all the rest of Jonathan’s family was there.

“The Lord punishes the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation,” the official said. “All of the priest’s family shall die.”

“No!” Judas cried out, and tried to fight off the soldiers that were grabbing him. Jonathan felt strong arms around his own, but was unable to slip out of the grasp of whomever was holding him. His mother, Michal, and other brothers were also grabbed. Other soldiers began gathering the rocks that had killed Mattathias, some of them stained with blood, and reconstructed the altar.

“Eleazar! You shall go first!” The official cried out, and Jonathan watched in horror as his brother was lifted to the altar. He was stabbed quickly, and his body was tossed to the side.

“Judas, it’s your turn. Did you think your strength could save you?” Although it took a good four soldiers to boost Judas’ writhing brother on the altar, he too was killed as soon as he was upon it.
Jonathan heard his mother and Michal scream out as he found himself being lifted onto the altar. Leah stood by the soldiers, silent and reserved. The official came towards Jonathan.

“Did you think you could escape your family’s fate, Jonathan? You were born into this, born to live your life for the sake of those who will not remember you, who will have never heard your name. Did you think you could do something great? Something significant? Parents will teach children about you, but the children will forget. They will not remember it to pass on to their own. Even if you could save your people, peace would last no longer than a wind passing over the desert.”

Jonathan saw a multitude of people approaching. Most seemed to be Jews, but there were other people as well, people who looked strange and fierce. One looked particularly ferocious—a soldier in a uniform the color of blood. In his hand was a crown, and an eagle was perched on his shoulder, cocking his head to the side at a Jew who approached the soldier. Prostrating himself at the soldier’s feet, the Jew opened his mouth to speak. Jonathan sat up on the altar in surprise when he saw how all that came out of the Jew’s mouth was flowing honey. The soldier smiled and handed the crown to the Jew. The Jew placed the crown on his own head. He stood up, but when his height was even with the soldier’s, the soldier frowned and motioned to the bird. Spreading his wings wide, the eagle began attacking the Jew, pecking at his face and eyes. The Jew covered his head and ducked on the ground. His crown had tumbled off of his head, and the soldier picked it up. The eagle flew above the Jew’s head and circled around like a vulture that has found a carcass. Jonathan shuddered and looked away. He saw small
children drawing near, glancing at him with a lack of recognition and lisping, “Who are you?”

“I’m Jonathan.”

“Who?”

“Jonathan, son of Mattathias, priest of the Temple.”

“Who?”

Jonathan tried in vain to tell them who he was, but stopped when he saw how many people were pressing in upon him. As the multitude got closer and closer to Jonathan, approaching the altar, he felt pressure all around him. His head started tingling with panic. They were getting yet closer, and the suffocation was unbearable. Was this death?

Jonathan woke with a start and breathed deeply, again and again. He gulped in the cool air of the cave as if he could not get enough, drinking it in as if he had been without it for days. After he wiped his forehead with his sleeve, he lay for some time. What could his dream have meant? His heart finally stopped pounding, the return to its normal rate only making Jonathan all the more aware of a painful throbbing at his temples. He rose to a sitting position and placed his hands on his head. After a moment, he got up and went to find his father at the front of the cave.

Mattathias was speaking with Judas and Simon.

“No,” Matathias said firmly. “We should wait several more days. Have patience!”

Jonathan stood next to him and cleared his throat. When Mattathias glanced at him, he said, “Father, I must speak with you.”
Judas glanced at Jonathan with a puzzled look. Mattathias also looked surprised, but he conceded. Jonathan led him away from the other men to a small opening. From their position, they were able to look out through a lip of the cave at the rain falling on the wilderness. Jonathan sat down and looked up expectantly for Mattathias to do the same. His father sat down slowly, as if his joints were stiff from having been sedentary for the last several weeks.

“What is it, Jonathan? You have seemed rather somber these last few days, and you appear pale now. Are you feeling well?”

Due to the ringing in his ears, Jonathan did not even hear Mattathias. His heart pounded. He had never doubted his father and certainly never asked him to account for any actions. Yet this was too serious and substantial not to address, not to receive answers about.

“Father, why did you kill Josiah?” Jonathan asked. “Maybe he was just trying to protect his family, so that they would not be killed. In a way, he was protecting all of us; if he had not tried to appease the official, wouldn’t the official have ordered that our whole family be killed because of your disobedience?”

Mattathias exhaled very slowly and then was quiet for a while. Finally, he said, “So you think I acted wrongly in killing your brother-in-law. You think he was trying to sacrifice out of good intentions only. And that’s exactly what Leah had thought were his reasons, based on what he told her the night before his death. True, he might have been trying to protect her and their children. But is it not just as possible that he was only concerned about saving himself? The fact is that we were put under pressure, and he
submitted to men rather than to the Law. No matter how good his intentions might have been, he still sinned.

“I will speak with you as I spoke with Leah before we left the village. Have you too forgotten the story of Uzzah, the story of when our ark was finally recovered from the Philistines? When the ark was on the cart and the oxen stumbled, Uzzah reached out to steady it. He was trying to stabilize the ark, but his life was still taken as punishment for his actions because he defied the commandments.”

Jonathan sat quietly, inspecting his hands while his father spoke. When there was a pause, he gave voice to a thought that had been gnawing at his mind.

“So . . . what would you have done had I been the one who stepped forward to sacrifice?”

Mattathias sighed deeply. There was a long pause, and then he turned to look at Jonathan squarely. Tears stood in Mattathias’s eyes, and when he started to speak, his voice cracked. “My son, do not forget what the Torah says: ‘If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, that is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying: Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; of the gods of the peoples that are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him, but thou shalt surely kill him; thy hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to draw thee away from HaShem thy G-d, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out
of the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is in the midst of thee.’ I love you dearly, my son, but my loyalty lies with G-d above all others, just as I hope it is the same with you.”

Mattathias’ name was called out by one of the men, and he stood to leave. Before he walked away, he awkwardly patted Jonathan on the back. Jonathan remained alone in his spot for several minutes, watching rain falling steadily upon the ground outside the cave and picturing what he would be doing that moment in Modein had the revolt not started.

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Jonathan’s contemplations were soon interrupted by loud cries. He jumped up from his seat and half-ran, half-walked to where most of the men normally gathered. At the mouth of the cave a whole crowd of people stood, nearly one hundred men, women, and children huddled together and shivering with wide eyes. Mattathias spoke briefly with a man who appeared to be a leader among them and then directed his men about where to put the newcomers and how to distribute food. As the crowd was given orders, Jonathan stepped forward to lead them back into the further parts of the cave. He grabbed a torch from Reuben and held it high above his head as he led the group.

When they arrived at their temporary dwelling, he turned back to look at them. The torch’s light shone on the shadows of their faces, making them look even more frantic. Jonathan perused the crowd, and his heart stopped when he saw a—Was that Hadassah? He peered more closely in the semi-darkness. No, it was not. The woman who looked like Hadassah had seen him examining her, and now was looking at Jonathan with a puzzled expression. Jonathan moved towards her and tried to think of something to say.
“What brought all of you?”

“We barely escaped from the cave we were hiding in.”

“You were hiding in other caves?”

“Yes. The soldiers laid siege and killed many of our people. We are the only ones who managed to escape.”

“There are others who fought against the soldiers?”

“We did not fight. That’s why many were killed.”

Jonathan wanted to ask more, but it was clear to him that the young woman was exhausted. He handed the torch to one of the men in the small group and mumbled to the girl about coming to find him if they needed anything. Then he stumbled through the darkness to find the mouth of the cave.

Now that most of the women, children, and elderly men were led further into the cave, the only ones who remained in the opening were the younger men. They were in earnest conversation with those from Modein. Jonathan walked to the edge of the group and strained his ears to hear what was being said.

A man, one of the newcomers, was speaking. “When we heard what you had done, most of our village decided to flee for the hills surrounding our town before the soldiers came. We have several caves near our village, and stayed in them for many days when others from nearby towns found and joined us. We had been in the caves for about two weeks when the soldiers from Jerusalem found the largest cave. For three days, they tried to convince us to come out and join them, but no one did. And then their tone changed. They began to threaten us, and, just before the Sabbath, they said that they were
going to attack us the very next day. We told them we could not fight them, as that was our Sabbath. They said they would take our women and children and kill all the men.”

Jonathan watched his father throughout the man’s story. Except for one twitch at his mouth when the speaker mentioned being assaulted on the Sabbath, Mattathias remained stony and stolid.

“That night was terrible. We continued our traditions beginning the Sabbath, knowing it would be the last time we would do so. We woke with the knowledge that we would never see a sunrise again. Early in the morning, before the soldiers came, one of the men took out our weapons and decided he would kill himself, rather than being killed by the enemy. We tried to advise him against it, but he would not listen. The women and children wailed to have his dead body in the cave. There was no quiet resolve before we were attacked. Only panic.”

The man’s voice broke. He inhaled slowly and then began his story again.

“Then the soldiers climbed into the main cave and fought us with swords and fire. As they were dying, many of our people screamed out their innocence. The fire killed my beautiful wife and one-year-old son, my father, mother, and all of my brothers and sisters. Most died as my family had: by suffocation. I covered my mouth with a cloth, but I doubt that is what kept me alive. No, I know I am alive to fight for the sake of my family and all of those I saw burned by the coldness of Antiochus’ heart.

“Very few of those in the large cave survived. I estimate about one thousand dead. The soldiers were not aware of the smaller caves adjacent to ours; most of those here are from those caves. We crept out of the caves as quietly as we could the night after the soldiers left. I’m not sure how news even got to them that we had been in the caves in the
first place, but since they had discovered that, they could have learned of the rest of us. So we had to leave. We met your scout in the wilderness, and he led us back to you. Our G-d is merciful to have brought us together. Now we can unite our men to fight against them.”

Many of the men grunted in assent, but Mattathias had tears rolling down his cheeks.

“A thousand killed?” he asked sorrowfully.

“Yes,” the newcomer answered. “And there will be more deaths yet if we do not rise up against this madness. We need an organized army.”

“We need far more than that,” said Mattathias. “We will need the hand of G-d upon us.”

“And we need the wisdom of a strong man to lead us. Mattathias,” the stranger said, putting his hand on Mattathias’s shoulder, “the stories we had heard of you gave us the courage to resist the king’s demands, even if that meant death to our people. Though our ancestors have been enslaved by other peoples, you have shown us that we do not have to be—not if we fight. You have the hand of G-d upon you. Why should you not lead?”

Mattathias looked taken aback. The men waited quietly; Jonathan noticed that not one of them raised their voice in protest. After a moment, Mattathias spoke.

“I do not feel worthy of the position being offered to me, but I do know that if G-d had not wanted us to fight for His own sake, He surely would have let the soldiers who came to Modein strike down my sons and myself. However, I will say this: our people who were killed in the caves died with honor, following the Law. But now the
soldiers might think we absolutely will not fight on the Sabbath. If this is so, we will all be killed in months, and our wives and children will be taken, either to death or slavery.”

Mattathias clenched his fists and shifted his gaze across the lines of men surrounding him.

“If this commandment is not broken, then the commandment about worshipping our G-d, and our G-d only, might be broken by all of our descendents who will find themselves in Antiochus’ rule. But if we temporarily bend this one commandment regarding the Sabbath, we may save all the commandments given to us by our G-d in the end.”

When he stopped, the men around him shouted their approval, and Mattathias looked at the group uneasily. Jonathan himself was surprised by the endorsement of the men. The newly appointed warriors began a chant: “Fight for our commandments, fight for our people, fight for our G-d.” The chant grew so loud that Jonathan began to wonder why they even bothered to hide in the cave, as it seemed that even the ground outside shook with vibrations.
Part II

Chapter II

Judean Countryside, 166 B.C.E.

I AM GOING THE WAY OF ALL THE EARTH. THEREFORE, BE STRONG; SHOW YOURSELF A MAN. OBSERVE THE CHARGE OF ADONAI YOUR GOD TO GO IN HIS WAYS AND KEEP HIS REGULATIONS, MITZVOT, RULINGS AND INSTRUCTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE TORAH OF MOSHE; SO THAT YOU WILL SUCCEED IN ALL YOU DO AND WHEREVER YOU GO.

—KING DAVID TO HIS SON, 1 KINGS 2: 2-3

And so they reared an army and began their fight in the countryside. They took back villages that had conformed to Antiochus’ Hellenization program. Sons who had been previously forbidden were circumcised, idols were smashed, and those traitorous Jews who had turned their backs on the commandments of their fathers were killed. The efforts grew until news of the resistance traveled all throughout Judea, stirring up the hearts of the people to believe that, for once, history would not be repeated. Mattathias’ and his sons’ fame grew, and they were widely regarded as heroes likened to those of old. Their names were frequently heard in the same sentences that spoke of Moses, David, and Phinehas.
Yet they were also given new names, names symbolic of their strengths and characters. Judas was called “Maccabeus,” for his strength was as unbreakable as a hammer’s. John was called “Gadi,” for, unlike most of the men, he had never been injured in the skirmishes against the villagers. Simon was called “Thassi,” for the quickness of his temper. Eleazar was called “Avaran,” for the paleness of his skin, a reflection of his sickly nature. And Jonathan, was called “Apphus,” for many of the men looked upon him favorably because of his youth and inexperience. They sought to train him and prepare him for battle. Although the strength of his sons increased, Mattathias’s own strength decreased. And shortly after the men had overtaken the village of Pharathan, Mattathias began to exhibit strange symptoms.

Jonathan stared at the fire, too thoughtful to hear much from the men conversing around him. He drew his cloak more tightly about him and poked at the flames with a stick. Once he’d sufficiently stirred them, he tossed the stick into the embers. He propped his elbows up on his knees and laid his head in his hands. After several minutes of thought, he heard his name called and felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Judas. Jonathan glanced up unfeelingly. Judas raised his eyebrows.

“Have you been crying, baby brother?”

“Of course not. The fire bothered my eyes.”


“What did he say?”
“He has no idea what could be wrong with Father. I want to go back into that village and find a man of medicine to come and examine him. I mean, Reuben hasn’t had much training.”

“Are you crazy? After what we did there? For all we know, we might have killed some of the family members of the man ‘trying’ to help us. I wouldn’t trust any sort of medicine he gave.”

Judas shrugged. “True. I just hate feeling so helpless. Surely there’s something we can do.”

“Did Reuben sound hopeful?”

Judas shook his head. “No, he didn’t.”

Jonathan paused a moment and then said, “Perhaps we should gather John, Eleazar, and Simon. We need to make some decisions in case things get worse.”

Although both Simon and Eleazar thought it would be best for Mattathias to remain at the camp while the men continued marching in the countryside, John and Judas agreed with Jonathan’s suggestion to take Mattathias back to Modein. Jonathan pointed out that Mattathias would be more comfortable in his own home than in a temporary camp, and if it were possible for her to return from the village where she had been staying, Ruhamah would certainly wish to take care of her husband.

After a long debate, they finally made the decision to move their father. The journey would take a few days, as they would have to travel more slowly than usual for Mattathias’ sake. Judas proposed that the whole group of soldiers should travel with them and then could progress past Modein to take on villages in the opposite direction.
Jonathan thought the area they were presently in was still too volatile for their troops to
clear out, but the other brothers were confident that the work already done there was
sufficient. It was decided that they should embark for Modein at dawn.

All during the journey, Jonathan avoided nearness to the cart that held his father.
As soon as his father’s health began to deteriorate, so too had his appearance. His eyes
were dull and glassy; they had completely lost the spark that was so characteristic of
Mattathias, which, until now, Jonathan had taken for granted. Mattathias’ lack of appetite
had affected his weight, too. His once strong build was becoming frail, his muscles
atrophying into skin pulled tautly over bone. Jonathan was continuously shocked by how
quickly these changes were occurring in his father. Every day, he seemed less like
himself. By the third night of the journey, Jonathan began losing hope that his father
would soon return to his usual self. He began bracing himself for what would come, but
still could not force himself to be anywhere near Mattathias.

That night, the air was still; it hung flatly around Jonathan and the men as they
trudged on. The humidity had picked up, despite the fact that the sun was lazily,
yawningly slipping behind the earth. Jonathan watched as Simon stealthily moved from
his place by his father’s cart to where Judas stood at the front of the march. He whispered
something to his brother, and Judas nodded. Judas then cried out in a loud voice for the
men to stop. They would make camp for the night.

Jonathan expected the men to grumble. After all, they were only five kilometers
away from Modein. Should they continue to progress, they would easily make it into
town by later evening. That is, if the oxen leading Mattathias’ cart were not forced to move so slowly. Jonathan felt his stomach drop. The men were being quiet out of respect for their leader who was so close to death. For Simon to have stopped them a mere five kilometers from the village must mean that Mattathias was deathly weak, too weak to make the rest of the journey.

Jonathan could feel his back prickling as sweat rose to the surface of his skin. Panic began washing over him rapidly. He had not been near his father for a full three days. By the end of the night, he could be dead. Even being near Mattathias in his weakened state would be preferable to being near a corpse. Had Mattathias thought Jonathan had abandoned him? Jonathan’s thoughts swirled as he tried to justify his actions. Of course he had not avoided his father; he had simply not wanted his father to notice the expression of shock and disappointment on his face each time he saw his father’s appearance drastically changing. No, it was actually out of consideration for his father that Jonathan had stayed away. Or so he told himself.

Jonathan quickly volunteered to gather some brush and any stray branches for the soldiers’ fires in the sparsely forested landscape. He bounded away from the rest of the men as swiftly as his shaking legs would allow him. Feeling alone for the first time in months, he found himself running much farther than necessary to gather brushwood. He breathed the evening air in quick gulps, as if he could not get enough of the delicious substance. It took him a while to realize that the air had seemed so meager to him only because he was sobbing without restraint, close to the point of choking. He forced himself to breathe evenly. Even after he was finally able to control his sobs, the tears did not stop.
Jonathan did not know what to do. He wanted to return to camp without anyone knowing how he had felt. Although he was accustomed to seeing people who had tasted grief in torn clothes, the thought of the other soldiers seeing him in such a state of weakness was unbearable. So he yelled. He yelled at the sky and at the ground. His fists clenched tightly. His voice held long, bitter notes for a time until they cracked from the strain. In the distance, he heard a wolf or a hyena crying out, perhaps in response to his own wild calls. He laughed then, laughed at how he experienced no fear at the wild animal lurking near him, but rather, a sense of brotherhood with it. In his abandonment of systematic language, Jonathan felt as if he could express himself more freely. Like an animal.

Jonathan frowned. Or like a very young child.

What was he doing? His father was dying, and he was singing with a wolf. Jonathan turned and sprinted back towards the camp with purpose. He squinted at the ground—the more easily he could determine the best path for his feet to take, the faster he would get back to his father and brothers.

His throat felt as if it were on fire. As he stopped at a small stream close to the camp to drink and to wash, he could see the lights and shadows of the camp. He sprinted towards them. Mattathias had been transferred from the cart to a tent. Jonathan could see one silhouette moving about inside and one lying motionlessly upon the ground. The moving shape neared the tent’s flap and opened it. It was Eleazar. When he came out, his eyes met Jonathan’s, and he waved at him.

Eleazar’s eyes were tired as he said, “Jonathan, it’s your turn.”

“What do you mean, ‘my turn’?”
Eleazar looked at Jonathan evenly. “Father wants to speak with you.”

Jonathan noticed that Eleazar looked even paler than usual. He started to open his mouth and ask his older brother a question, but quickly clamped it shut—he already knew the answer. Eleazar placed his hand on Jonathan’s shoulder for a moment, and then turned to walk toward the fire that Simon and John were sitting by.

So soon? He had come running back as quickly as possible to make things right with his father, not to bid him goodbye. Surely this would not be his last living night. Jonathan walked with leaden feet to the tent and gingerly opened the flap. A torch was set up close to where his father lay. Mattathias had grown even smaller since the last time Jonathan had seen him. His father’s face was drawn and pinched, but his eyes brightened a shade when he saw Jonathan.

“Come here, my son.” Even though his voice was hoarse, it had not lost its quality of richness. Jonathan knelt down before him, grateful to provide his trembling legs with the support of the ground. He grabbed his father’s hand and kissed it. His eyes were too blurred to see well. When he blinked, he was able to tell that even his father’s hand, once so strong and capable, was withered and shaky. He fought hard to keep a sob from traveling farther than his throat.

“My father,” he murmured.

“I have not seen you much recently, Jonathan.”

Jonathan could not speak. He felt his face burning, and his eyes would not leave the sight of his father’s hand. That hand reached to pat him gently.
“It’s all right, my son. I understand. I, too, wish that your last memories with me would be of the me I used to be. But, remember that the body is simply the covering of the heart. I am the same man I always was, though I do not look it.”

Jonathan nodded, then stared back at his father. At this closeness to Mattathias, he realized that his eyes had not lost the earnestness they always expressed. The dying man’s hand grasped his son’s. The grip was weaker than it used to be, yet was still determined.

“I am leaving soon. Though I am not leaving you with money and riches, I am still bestowing upon you an inheritance of honor and position. I have begun this war for our commandments, our traditions, and our freedom, but it is up to you and your brothers now to continue it. You were born in a time of death and sorrow for our people, but you were also born in the right time. I know you, my son. I know you always wanted a life where you could quietly study the Torah and perform your priestly duties. I know that your warm heart would have blessed a wife and children. If we succeed, there is still a chance for you to have the life you wanted. But if we lose, that chance for happiness will be squelched by bondage or death. Remember that. You were not blessed with all of your abilities so that you could avoid the battle’s fray. I have watched you since boyhood. Although you are the youngest, Jonathan, and you do not see it yet in yourself, you are a leader. A time may come where you must lead. What should you do to prepare yourself should that day come? What sort of man must you become?”

Jonathan tried to listen to the rest of what his father was saying, but he felt pounding in his ears. Him? A leader? Impossible! How many times had he felt crippled by fear when he saw a Seleucid soldier? How often did he direct one of their men to
brothers or father when he was approached with questions? He started to feel dizzy. Even so, he looked back at his father, determined to hear the rest of his words.

“…such a time as this. Now, go and bring all of your brothers back in here. I would like to speak to all of you.”

“Of course, Father.” Jonathan kissed Mattathias’ hand again and stood up. The dizziness made his head swim, but he walked to the tent’s flap and opened it. In a few minutes, he and the rest of his brothers were in their father’s presence.

“My sons, a difficult time is before you. Be steadfast in the commandments and in the covenant of our forefathers. The time may come when any or all of you must give your lives for these things, but do not fear. You will be blessed for your faithfulness to G-d in life and death. Remember the stories of our ancestors and the examples they have given of loyalty to the Torah and courage in dangerous times. Just as they remained faithful and are honored for it now, so should you remain faithful, in order that your children and your children’s children might honor you.”

Mattathias paused for a moment as a coughing fit overtook him. Jonathan did not dare to look at his brother’s faces. He was afraid that if he did, he would burst into sobs. After a moment, Mattathias continued.

“When Abraham was tested in the ultimate way, was not his faithfulness reckoned to him as righteousness? Was not Joseph tried in a foreign land, yet still maintained the commandments? Never forget our ancestor Phinehas, who in his zeal for the Lord received an everlasting priesthood. Joshua became a judge over all of the people because he followed the Torah when others would not. And Caleb, because he believed in G-d’s promises, was given an inheritance in the land. Because David was merciful, he inherited
the kingdom’s throne forever. Elijah never tasted death, but was taken up into heaven because of his obedience to the commandments. And think of others who were saved from harm because of their belief—Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were delivered from the flames, and Daniel from the mouths of hungry lions.”

Mattathias stopped for a moment, closed his eyes, and breathed deeply. Not one of the brothers made a sound. When their father opened his eyes, took a breath, and began again.

“Always strive to live in harmony with one another. Never forget that you are all fighting together for the same goal: freedom. Do not let an opportunity present itself that will cause you to squabble amongst yourselves. No power or prestige is worth severing your blood ties. I am proud of you all and have confidence in what each of you can do. Work together, and G-d will bring you to success. It was clear even as a child, Simon, that G-d has made you like Solomon, wise in counsel and sound in prudence. Sons, take heed to the gift your brother Simon has been given and listen to his guidance. Judas, in battle, you are blessed with the strength and wisdom of David. After I am gone, lead the endeavor we began. Trust in G-d to deliver you from the enemy. Take me back to Modein and bury me there. Let your sisters know that they are dear to my heart, but most of all, tell your mother I loved her more than my own life—”

A racking cough overtook Mattathias just then and stopped him from saying more.

He inhaled deeply and lifted his body slightly. John put his hand behind his father’s head as support. When Mattathias spoke again, it was with a wheezing effort.

_HaShem bless thee, and keep thee;_
HaShem make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

HaShem lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

His body sunk back down. With closed eyes, he murmured, “My sons, stay here with me until the end . . .”

With all of the sons surrounding him, Mattathias breathed his last. Judas was the first of his brothers to tear his clothes and lead the lament. Following Jewish custom, Judas and Simon decided that the men should take Mattathias’ corpse the remaining five kilometers of the journey that night to Modein in order to bury him quickly. Without being asked, one of the soldiers ran up ahead to the village where Ruhamah, Leah and her children, and Michal were hiding. He delivered the disheartening news and sent for the family to meet the funeral procession coming into Modein. It seemed to Jonathan that he had only been marching for a few minutes when they reached the village late, late in the night. His mother’s weeping was heard before they entered Modein, and Jonathan was surprised to see that many others besides his family came to mourn the loss of Judea’s leader. Mattathias’ body was washed in spices and wrapped in cloth before he was entombed. Jonathan felt as if he would never sleep again when he turned from his father’s grave, but his body was too exhausted to give heed to his emotions. He awoke to a new day dawning.
In the morning David wrote a letter to Yo’av and sent it with Uriyah. In the letter he wrote, “Put Uriyah on the front lines of the fiercest fighting; then pull back from him, so that he will be wounded and killed.”

—2 Samuel 11:14-15

Taking up his father’s mantle with relish, Judas continued in his father’s work of purifying the countryside. Finally threatened, Antiochus Epiphanes sent the commander Apollonius and a reinforcement of soldiers. Several small victories for the Jews against the Seleucids encouraged many to join the ranks of the zealous, until Judas’ numbers grew into the hundreds. About two months after his father’s death, Judas heard news that Antiochus Epiphanes had sent his general Apollonius on the hunt for him and his men. Rather than allowing his soldiers to be chased, he led his men under cover of night toward their hunters. After three days of nocturnal living, one of Judas’ messengers returned with news of finding Apollonius’ camp little more than a kilometer away.
Judas’ wide mouth grimaced, his white teeth contrasting sharply against his dark beard. He dismissed the messenger and yelled for his men’s attention. All eyes were turned towards him.

“Men, I have heard news. The coward Apollonius has just set up camp a mere kilometer away. Our admirable messenger observed that they have been on the march today. Since we are so rested from last night’s trek, we have quite the advantage. For now, we wait. As soon as we have cover of night, we will strike!”

The familiar feeling of nausea Jonathan developed at the thought of killing returned. Jonathan ran to find the messenger. He discovered him taking a long drink from an animal skin. Although he tried to wait patiently for the messenger to finish, as soon as the skin left his lips, Jonathan spoke. “Caleb, how long were you able to observe the enemy camp?”

“Several minutes. I had to determine what they would be doing next.”

“Long enough to estimate how many soldiers there were?”

“Yes. By a rough count, I would say there were all together . . . one hundred?”

Jonathan sighed with relief, patted Caleb on the back, and thanked him. One hundred men should not be too difficult to defeat.

Jonathan then ran back to his gear. They had gathered about two hundred and fifty men to their cause. With their greater numbers and well-rested bodies, the Jews should fare well. The feeling of fear slowly faded, but the nausea remained, especially when Jonathan thought about the grisly sights he would see that night.
The men were poised on the hill. Like Jonathan, all were turned toward Judas, who himself was intently watching the camp below. He raised his arm slowly and paused. Then, his hand quickly sliced the air and returned to his side. Jonathan and the men around him took off on a dead run down the hill to the camp. He was one of the first to reach a sentry on the border. As Jonathan came near him, he pulled out his sword and struck. The man stumbled back. Jonathan was not sure whether or not the man had been killed, but he nevertheless continued running towards the camp.

A battle cry was sounded—a fierce, guttural yell. Jonathan lifted his voice to scream even as he lifted the flap of a nearby tent and adjusted his grip upon his sword. In the darkness of the night, he could barely distinguish the outlines of the men lying on the ground. His sword struck deftly, with finality. Some of the soldiers had bolted up when they heard Jonathan’s scream, but they were not nearly fast enough to defend themselves. After they had been stabbed, they slouched back into a supine position. Jonathan counted five dead around him. There were no more in the tent—he was the only man living. A desire to peer at the faces of the men he had just slain crept over him. As he began to lean toward the body of the first man he had killed, a sharp cry for help jolted his senses. He quickly left the tent and ran towards the direction of the cry.

It was Caleb, the messenger. He, too, had entered a tent, but the other Jews who had entered with him had been killed, leaving Caleb to fight three men by himself. When Jonathan came into the tent, he was facing the back of the soldier to Caleb’s right. Jonathan immediately noticed that there was no glimmer of armor on the soldier’s back,
as he must have taken it off to sleep. A rushed thrust into the soldier’s back dispatched him quickly.

The soldier next to him must have heard the groan from his comrade, because he turned to face Jonathan. Apparently, he had been sleeping with a short sword, for he was already armed. Jonathan grappled with his opponent; their swords scraped against each other awkwardly in the darkness. The deep shadows made it so difficult for Jonathan to distinguish his opponent that, in a few moments, he was disarmed. He tried to grab some dirt from the ground and fling it in the soldier’s face. Rather than the soldier being stunned, he simply laughed at Jonathan’s attempt to distract him. Jonathan set his jaw. His foot came up in a pointed kick to the soldier’s groin. The soldier yelped and doubled over, dropping the small sword in his hand. It hit against something with a clatter. With fumbling movements, the soldier moved to retrieve it. As he knelt down, Jonathan came towards him from behind, firmly clasped his head, and twisted it. The soldier immediately slumped. Jonathan pivoted to size up Caleb’s opponent, but found that he was already lying on the ground, bleeding profusely. Caleb was moving to leave the tent.

Jonathan grabbed his sword off of the ground and then called out to him.

Caleb turned sharply at Jonathan’s voice.

“Don’t leave him there bleeding to death. Have some heart and kill him now.”

Caleb scoffed. “Why should I?”

“If you were wounded, would you want to die slowly and painfully? Stop letting him suffer.”

“Why? Can’t you tell this man isn’t a Seleucid? He’s one of us; a traitor!”

“It doesn’t matter. He’s still a man. Finish him.”
Without pursuing the matter further, Jonathan walked past Caleb and exited the tent. Screams, groans of pain, and the sound of metal scraping against itself invaded Jonathan’s ears immediately. A man reeled by, blood flowing down his face from an empty eye socket. In the dim light from the moon and stars, Jonathan was barely able to make out the shadow of his brother John in combat with another soldier. Jonathan began to make his way towards him, but kept coming across more opponents. By the time he killed them all, John had moved somewhere else. Jonathan tried to find another Jew who might need assistance, but it appeared that the skirmish was already at its end.

He calculated that there were probably only about ten soldiers left in the camp, but they seemed to be well outnumbered by Judas’ group. In the darkness around the camp, Jonathan distinguished the outline of at least a score of unfamiliar men running into the wilderness. He was unable to contain a laugh at how their opponents must not be too formidable an army, for the soldiers to have bolted from their beds and run. As there seemed to be nothing more for him to do at the moment, he began to search for Judas. He found his brother gripping a large sword and gracefully moving it in the moonlight, inspecting the reflection off of the metal.

“What’s this, Judas?”

Judas glanced from the sword to his brother.

“It’s the sword of the general, Apollonius. I found him asleep with this nearby. It looked like such a wonderfully well-made sword, I figured I would test it on him.”

“You killed him with his own sword?”

“A lovely bit of irony, don’t you think?” Judas said, smiling ruefully.
“Wasn’t it a bit careless to use an untested weapon on the one opponent who we most needed to destroy in the whole camp?”

“There were others with me. Should Apollonius have woken, he would have still been taken care of.” With a snap of his wrist, Judas lightly tossed the sword to his other hand.

“It is beautiful, isn’t it? Excellent craftsmanship; I’ve never seen a weapon so well-made before.”

“Are you planning on keeping it?” Jonathan asked.

“Why not?” Judas responded, still staring at the sword.

“Well, perhaps we should consider taking more than just the sword. Have you already sent the men looking for supplies and other weapons?”

“No, I haven’t. Why don’t you head up that project?”

Jonathan was about to ask him a question, but kept his mouth closed after noticing how distracted his brother seemed. Outside of the late general’s tent, Judas’ men were beginning to congregate to see what should be done next. Jonathan approached them and assigned them into groups to look for specific objects. He, John, Caleb, and another man started off to look for extra armor. From the corner of his eye, Jonathan saw Eleazar quietly join the back of the group.

Caleb began jovially asking each of the men how many they had killed in the attack. One man said that he had ended nine lives, and John claimed he had taken eleven. Jonathan started to calculate his own kills. Caleb’s original estimate of about one hundred Seleucids in the camp was a gross underestimate. There must have been at least two hundred and fifty enemy soldiers. It was just as well. If he had known they were so
outnumbered, his fear would most likely have affected his fighting. The silence around him broke when one of the men asked Eleazar how many he had killed.

Fumbling over his words, Jonathan told Caleb and the other unknown man to fetch a fine set of armor he had seen. Only he, John, and Eleazar remained. Eleazar quietly thanked Jonathan, and Jonathan noticed the sad smile that John gave his brother. Jonathan changed the conversation, and the three of them continued searching for spoils. Jonathan knew that Eleazar’s last sickness had left him far too weak. His brother had been hiding in the shadows during the fight.

A few months respite followed the skirmish against Apollonius. However, stability was shaken when the Syrian general Seron got it into his head to put an end to the rebellion. Ruhamah, her daughters, and the other women from Modein had to evacuate Beth-Horon, the village where they had been staying since the revolt began, when they heard rumors that Seron and his men were about to invade. Beth-Horon, less than ten miles from Modein, was soon taken. Judas and his men had just come to Modein when they saw a group of people briskly approaching the village.

“My boys!” Ruhamah squawked, breaking into a run. “My boys!”

“My mother!” Judas grabbed her and held her close. Her excited reaction had caused the cloth covering her head to start slipping from her forehead. Jonathan was surprised to see how much grey had crept into her hair. But his thoughts were interrupted when he felt her short arms around his waist.
“My little lamb! Are your older brothers keeping an eye out for you?” she asked, looking reproachfully at her other sons before glancing up at Jonathan. She studied him as if she were analyzing a stranger’s face.

“My goodness, how you’ve changed!” She squeezed his bicep. “What’s this? You’ve got muscles now?”

Jonathan grinned, embarrassed, especially since he saw Hadassah approaching behind his sister Michal.

“Michal!” he called out and moved past his mother, who was still fussing over him. Michal did not look up immediately, though she was less than ten steps away from Jonathan. Instead, her attentions were upon Hadassah.

Michal was speaking to Hadassah with a slight tone of censure. “Let’s get you lying down. I would hate for something to happen to the baby because of our journey. You were practically running, Hadassah.”

Hadassah spoke quietly. “I’m sure it will be all right, Michal. Like its father, I have no doubt the baby is very strong.” She blushed slightly.

Jonathan froze. Baby? Father? His face felt as if it were on fire, and there was a prickle of sweat on his back. Inconveniently, Michal must have finally noticed him standing there, for she turned at that moment to greet him. Jonathan was not aware what he said to her or what she said to him. But Hadassah watched him intently. When Michal finished speaking, Hadassah spoke.

“It’s so nice to see you again, Jonathan. I have almost forgotten that you and your brothers are men of flesh and blood, the stories I hear tell about all of you are so legendary. What accomplishments you have made for our people!”
Jonathan felt himself beaming. He glanced quickly over her tall frame and saw her swollen belly protruding even through the loose tunic.

“Thank you, Hadassah. I greatly appreciate your kindness. From what I overheard Michal saying to you, it sounds like congratulations are in order?”

She turned crimson. “Yes, my husband and I are expecting our first child in about a month.”

Husband. Jonathan knew as soon as Michal mentioned the pregnancy that she was married, so why did it still feel like a knife twisting in his stomach when Hadassah’s words confirmed it? Although the muscles in his mouth felt like they would crack for him to do so, Jonathan forced them into a smile.

“So you were recently married? A double congratulation to you, then! Is he a man from Modein?”

“No, Beth-Horon.” She glanced at Jonathan quickly, and then mumbled, “A farmer. As soon as his crops were planted this spring, he was planning on joining your ranks. The time never came, since we were just invaded.”

Her tone was slightly defensive. That defensiveness was enough to spur Jonathan into biting his tongue so he would not say something regrettable. While he was out defending the integrity of their laws and the safety of the people, another man had wooed Hadassah? Married and impregnated her? A man whose occupation had conveniently kept him from joining the fighting, from risking his life? A man who had sacrificed nothing for honor or decency was being rewarded, and with the most beautiful treasure a man could be given? If Jonathan had flouted his family’s zealousness and not joined the
revolt, would Hadassah be expecting his child? Would he be the man she spoke so quickly to defend?

“Well, perhaps he could join us now, as we’re just about to return to Beth-Horon to flush out the enemy.”

He did not try to hide his disdain as he spoke, but he wished that he had when he saw her reaction. Her eyes grew wide, and her lips trembled. Jonathan felt anger, anger that Hadassah was so concerned for this coward of a man who would only face one skirmish when he had faced so many. Yet her fear swept over him more strongly. Unable to stop himself, he grabbed her hand.

“Don’t worry, little one. We’ve been protected in our work so far. I have full confidence G-d will continue to protect us until we have finished.”

Eager to get away, Jonathan quietly instructed Michal to take care of the now very flustered Hadassah.

“What’s her husband’s name?” he whispered to his sister.

“Benjamin, son of Hezekiah.”

“How long have they been married?”

“Ten months already.”

Without saying another word, Jonathan left his sister and Hadassah. Ten months. Ten months ago, he still had his father. Ten months ago, they were traveling throughout the countryside, converting villagers from law-breakers to law-followers. She had already been married when they returned to Modein for his father’s burial? Jonathan could not recall seeing her then. He vaguely remembered wondering why she had not been present.

“Jonathan!” It was Simon coming towards him, flushed and excited.
“What is it?”

“That Syrian general has his troops encamped at Beth-Horon even as we speak. Apparently, he’s got a lot of our own people fighting with him. Judas wants us to leave immediately to go after him.” Simon flung his arm out to indicate where Judas was.

“He’s rallying the people now.” Jonathan looked in the direction Simon was pointing and saw Judas speaking to a crowd of about one hundred and fifty men. Jonathan approached. Many of the men were those he did not recognize. They were gathered closely around him. From the edge of the crowd, Jonathan could barely hear Judas say:

“He is probably in the fields around Beth-Horon now. If we hurry, we should be able to meet them before they get much further. We must protect our women and children. We cannot let them proceed farther and come to Modein. The enemy has already been here once.”

Jonathan noted an edge of bitterness in Judas’ voice. Many of the unrecognized men were not equipped with weapons or any form of armor. Perhaps these were men who had come from Beth-Horon? Judas was already marching away from Modein, followed by a line of troops. Jonathan started to follow quickly, but not without a glance back at the village. He could see Hadassah’s silhouette embracing a man much taller than her. The man started to back away from her, but she grabbed him again. After what seemed like an eternity, the man freed himself and jogged to the back of the ranks. Jonathan took a moment to mark his face and then took off in a run to join Judas at the front of the line.

Jonathan touched Judas’s shoulder to get his attention. “Judas, what are you doing? You took off before any of the men had a chance to rest. And have you forgotten that we have been fasting today?”
Judas’ jaw was tight. “Trust me, I haven’t forgotten that we are fasting. And we don’t have time to rest. We must stop them now before they get any farther.”

“Do you know how many men we’re going to be meeting?”

“Enough to outnumber us, I’m sure.” Judas had lowered his voice when he began speaking, but now he lowered it even more. Over the sound of all the men, it was difficult for Jonathan to hear. He leaned closer to Judas. “Jonathan, I’m going to need your help. Several of these men from Beth-Horon probably have no experience fighting, and most have nothing to fight with. What they need is hope and organization. I’ll be speaking with all the men right before they fight, but while I’m doing that, could you arrange the ranks for battle?”

“Of course.”

“Good. You can balance out the skilled with those who have less experience. Just remember: we can’t lose all of our best fighters in the front, but we also can’t send all unarmed men to the front, either; but, you know what you’re doing. Thank you, baby brother.”

“Judas.”

Judas looked at him. “Yes?”

“Stop calling me ‘baby brother.’”

Judas smiled as if he were humoring a child. “All right. Thanks, brother.”

Jonathan said no more, and the brothers led the army in silence until they were in sight of the enemy camp. Even though there was quite a distance between the two armies, Jonathan could still tell they would be far outnumbered. He sucked in his breath. Judas glanced at him.
“Do not show fear.”

Jonathan had never heard Judas sound so commanding. He nodded and waited for what would happen next. Judas held up his arm to stop the men and turned to face them. As he started to give instructions, several men in the middle began talking amongst themselves.

Judas approached them and asked with an arched eyebrow, “Something the matter, gentlemen?”

Flustered, one of the men muttered, “Sir, there are far too many men out there. It’s impossible for us to win.”

One of his companions piped in, “And we’ve been fasting today. Should we be punished for our piety?”

Judas nodded his head silently at Jonathan, who took his cue to begin mentally sizing up the men. He grabbed John, Simon, and Eleazar, and placed them in separate areas. Then, he went through the men and quietly began directing them toward the brother whose rank they would join. As he counted off, he heard snippets of Judas’ conversation.

“Small numbers do not make us weak. Have you forgotten our people’s history? Are we not the chosen people who have been brought forth out of the land of pagans to become a mighty nation? In times past, have we not won victories despite small numbers—in fact, possibly because of it? There is no better way for us to illustrate to other nations that we belong to G-d and have Him on our side. Besides, men, we have such a heritage of fighters who used both their strength and their faith to conquer the enemy.”
Even from a distance, Jonathan could make out Benjamin’s form. He grimaced. Though he kept categorizing the men, his mind began racing. This man had probably never fought before. In fact, from what Hadassah had said, it sounded as if he had attempted to avoid it at all costs. If he were put in the front, he would surely not survive. Besides, putting him in the front would not be outrageous; after all, Judas had said there must be a mixture of both experienced and inexperienced men in the front and in the back.

Jonathan immediately saw himself returning to Hadassah with the tragic news of her husband’s death. She would need comfort and solace. And he would be so gentle with her. Of course she could not remain a widow and try to raise a baby without a husband. There could be a quick wedding, and when the fighting was over, he could return to the village and enjoy a long life with her. It was not as if he had nothing to offer. Surely his family would be one of the most prominent in all of Judea by that time. Jonathan took a deep breath to think when Judas’ voice wafted into his hearing.

“Think of King David. When still a young boy, he faced a giant and succeeded through the G-d’s help. And what of David’s mighty men? Look at Abishai, the slayer of three hundred men. Consider the other mighty men, such as Shammah, Uriah the Hittite, and Tzelek.”

Jonathan stopped still. Uriah. Uriah the Hittite. He remembered another story about Uriah the Hittite, one that involved King David, a story about jealousy and judgment. Before he could stop himself, he shuddered.

What had he almost done? He could not deprive a man of life for the sake of his own happiness. He had wanted to protect Hadassah, to show her that she would be safe
and protected. But how could she feel safe when resting in the arms of a murderer? How could he raise a child as his own, knowing that he had killed its father? How could he raise a child upon the commandments of the Torah, knowing that he himself had broken them?

His mind was made up. He walked towards Benjamin. As he neared him and got a closer look at his face, his realized that he had been wrong. His was not the face of a man who was afraid of death, of the pain of dying. Maybe he had only stayed in Beth-Horon because he could not stand to leave Hadassah and his unborn child. Even Jonathan could understand being so torn between duty to country and duty to family. He was right in front of his competitor now. He looked at Benjamin steadily.

“Are you Hadassah’s husband? Hadassah from the village of Modein?”

“Yes, I am. Which rank do you want me to join?”

“How long have you been married?”

“About eleven months.”

“Have you forgotten that men who have not even been married a year are not supposed fight? Go, return to Modein.”

“But —”

Jonathan interrupted him. “Benjamin, go back home to your wife. Before the revolt, Hadassah and I were old friends. I will not have her becoming a widow today.”

Awkwardly, Jonathan patted his shoulder. “Go.”

Benjamin nodded. “Thank you. I will not forget this.”

Jonathan tried to smile. Under his breath, he muttered, “Neither will I.”
He returned to organizing the men nearby into their ranks as Benjamin began to walk back in the direction of Modein. Jonathan kept counting off men. He saw Benjamin striding away out of the corner of his eye and tried to squelch the thought invading his mind that he wished he were the one returning home to Hadassah. Most of the men were organized by then. Was Judas finally nearing the end of his speech?

“And let us not forget how we began this revolt. Let us not forget what they have done to us! I will always remember the night a man from Jerusalem stumbled into our house. He had seen first-hand the horrors that were happening and the terrors our people were going through. He was a servant in a house with six sons, and all six of those sons, who were like brothers to him, were tortured unto death because they would not defy the living G-d. Do we not owe it to people such as these to fight with all that is in us?”

The men cheered. Jonathan thoughts were interrupted from Hadassah. Did Judas say six brothers had been killed? Had there not been five? He shook his head. No time to worry about it now. He ignored the rest of what Judas said and began preparing his mind for the fight.

—EZRA 3: 10-13

THE WORDS OF NEHEMIAH THE SON OF HACALIAH. NOW IT CAME TO PASS IN THE MONTH CHISLEV, IN THE TWENTIETH YEAR, AS I WAS IN SHUSHAN THE CASTLE, THAT HANANI, ONE

——NEHEMIAH 1: 1-3

IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM, LET MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER CUNNING. LET MY TONGUE CLEAVE TO THE ROOF OF MY MOUTH, IF I REMEMBER THEE NOT; IF I SET NOT JERUSALEM ABOVE MY CHIEFEST JOY.

——PSALM 137: 5-6

The Beth-Horon battle against Seron ended in triumph. Though the Jews continuously fought larger numbers of better-trained men, a pattern of victory was established that was to become unbroken. Perhaps the Seleucids would argue this was because their attention was directed to other territories in addition to Judea. To the Jews, though, all of the victories clearly proved that G-d was on their side and was blessing their endeavors to keep Judea clean from foreign influences.

The fighting continued; battles were found and won, the calluses on the rebels’ feet grew harder from the long marches across the Judean countryside. After one particularly vigorous victory at Bethsur, the men gathered around the camp’s fire, exhausted and famished.
Jonathan laughed heartily with the men until nature required him to leave their company and go outside the camp. As he walked, he spotted something dark on the ground near one of the tents. This did not surprise him—he had seen several men choosing to relieve themselves right outside where they slept at night, rather than in the wilderness. As he returned, he saw a familiar figure in the shadows, seated upon the ground near a tent at the camp’s outskirts.

“Judas?”

His older brother lifted his head. “Is that you, Jonathan?”

“It is. Are you all right?”

“Fine.” Judas rubbed at one of his kneecaps. “My old wound causes me trouble every time we fight.”

Jonathan nodded and looked at the scar that traversed almost the whole length of Jonathan’s forearm.

“But surely your injury is not enough to bring you out here? You did nothing more than wince when you first got it!”

Judas was silent for a minute before he responded.

“What have we done, Jonathan?”

Jonathan’s forehead furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“We’ve been fighting for several years now, and our people are still not free.”

“What do you expect? We’ve come into this with everything against us. We’re not armed like they are, and our only ideas of strategy come from what we’ve read about in the Torah and Prophets.”
“I don’t just mean our freedom from the king.” Judas sighed. “Within the first month of our defiance, we allowed ourselves to fight on the Sabbath so we would not be killed. We had good reason, and if we had not done so, we would all be dead by now, our women and children in chains. True, we’ve protected our families from foreign influence, but wasn’t the whole purpose of this revolt so that our people could continue observing the law and worshipping G-d? What have we done to ensure that? Our men are faltering in their obedience—in the past two days, I’ve seen three different men breaking the commandments of cleanliness.”

“I’ve noticed several things myself. But, how could we do anything more than just fighting? We’ve done well to just stay alive. Just because we have not gained our freedom yet doesn’t mean we haven’t already accomplished great things.”

Judas was silent. “Jonathan, what were we trained to do?”

“Well, in the last few years, we’ve trained ourselves to fight.”

“But what about before then? What were we trained to do then?”

“Be priests and serve in the Temple.”

“And have we done that?”

“Well, we never had much of a chance before our people started being threatened by the king. We left Jerusalem when we were just children.”

“Exactly. But now, there should not be many soldiers left there. Why should we not go back there and sacrifice at the Temple? Who knows better than us that we should honor G-d there?”
Jonathan thought for a moment. Compared to other times in the last two years, the present was relatively peaceful. They were neither hiding from the enemy, nor marching after the enemy.

“What do you suggest we do?”

“Take a break from fighting. G-d has blessed our endeavors thus far; I see no reason why He would remove favor when we are reestablishing worship in His city.”

Jonathan laughed. “Can you stand to take a break from fighting? You learned to use your fists before you ever learned to use your legs and feet. What’s gotten into you?”

Judas did not return Jonathan’s smile. “I only believe we should honor G-d . . . and Father’s memory.”

“What do you think Father wouldn’t have approved of all we’ve accomplished since his death?”

“He wanted us to be more than simply warriors. Do you remember how, when we were little boys, he would always say, ‘Why should my boys not be like David, who was both a soldier and a poet?’”

What point was Judas trying to make?

“And?”

“Even though David achieved much for the kingdom through warfare, he also spent much of his time composing psalms of worship. Don’t you remember how Father made us memorize some of those psalms long before we ever heard stories about David on the battlefield?”

Jonathan sighed.

“What are you trying to say, Judas?”
“Just that if we’re going to be like King David . . . if, someday, children grow up hearing stories about us, I don’t want to just be known as just a warrior.” He paused a moment, then smiled. “Father wanted us to be men of worship, not just men of war.”

Jonathan’s mouth twitched at Judas’ self-satisfaction over the expression he’d composed. He would probably make it a chant for all the men to recite when they were marching or preparing for battle. A sense of uneasiness rose up within Jonathan. This Judas, looking out at the starlit sky and arranging sayings, was nothing like the Judas who Jonathan had known since birth. That Judas would never choose a period of rest over the fray of battle. And yet, he was now looking at Jonathan expectantly, waiting for affirmation. Maybe he had changed.

“You’re right, brother. We should go to Jerusalem.”

The lines in Judas’ forehead relaxed, and he flashed the smile that had rallied his men’s spirits so many times before.

“I’ll go speak to the men. We’ll leave first thing in the morning. Won’t it be nice to go back home?”

Judas rose and turned back to the camp. With pursed lips, Jonathan remained where he was in order to hear the speech he knew his brother would give. He listened to the shuffling of feet as the men followed Judas’ command to gather around him. Jonathan could not help but snort when Judas said:

“Men! You have done an excellent job in our fighting as of late. So excellent, in fact, that I think we must now turn our attention back to our holy city. We must be men of worship, as well as men of war . . .”
Jonathan trudged along next to a line soldiers, shuffling one foot after the other. The moon had risen hours before, but Judas was insistent that the men make it to Jerusalem that very night. As they approached the hills near the city, Jonathan strained his eyes, hoping to make out the lines of Jerusalem’s walls. The clouds above were swaying in front of the moon, making it impossible to see. After several minutes, the sky cleared and Jonathan could trace the silhouette of the wall and towers.

Home. He had left as a boy. He was returning as a man. Suddenly, his childhood bombarded his mind. After a visit with family members in a nearby village, Mattathias and Jonathan were returned to Jerusalem. Though it was late afternoon, the sun had not yet faded into the horizon; it was at just the right location to blind his eyes while he walked, standing close to his father and grasping his hand. Bathed in the warm, bright light of the late afternoon, he had kept his eyes upon the ground until he heard his father call out, “Look up, son. You must see this.”

When Jonathan raised his eyes to follow his father’s instructions, he gasped. The sun was reflecting off the city’s structures so they shone like the fine jewels adorning Solomon’s bride as she walked, boldly and proudly, towards her groom. To the small boy, it looked like the walls of the city stretched to eternity. Jerusalem, his Jerusalem: a living, breathing testament to G-d’s protection over His people.

Mattathias’ voice sounded again in Jonathan’s ear. “Look at the Temple.” Jonathan glanced up at the Mount. Out of all the buildings, the Temple was the brightest of all. A warm feeling swept through Jonathan’s body, from his toes to his fingertips. It
was the same feeling that washed over him when he heard his father reading from the Torah every night on the rooftop, as Mattathias’ voice blended in with the voices of other fathers reading to their families all across the city. It was the same feeling that overtook him when he walked into the house and saw his mother preparing unleavened bread to celebrate Passover, and he knew that, that very evening, he would again hear the story of his ancient forefathers and mothers coming from Egypt through G-d’s provision.

It was the same feeling that swept over him when Mattathias spoke with him and his brother about what their Temple duties would be like, especially when he had to rebuke Judas for not giving his full attention on the instructions and advice. It was the same feeling that had crept over him when, standing next to his mother to help her with some menial chore, she had ameliorated the task’s dullness by telling him the story of King David’s bravery and honor when he caught Saul unawares in the cave at En-Gedi.

And now, his eyes soaking in the dazzling sight of the city, the realization of the honor, privilege, pride, and burden of being a child of the covenant overtook him so strongly that he staggered, ever so slightly. The sunlight bathing both he and the Temple had filled the inside of his body so fully it seemed it had to shoot back out of his fingertips and toes. Afraid that he would burst, he squeezed his father’s hand even more tightly. Surely, no other boy was so blessed as he, to see the Temple like this, to serve in it when he became a man, to live in such a glorious city, to be a child of the covenant.

Only a few weeks before Mattathias and Jonathan had left for their brief journey, Judas had begun teasing him about how, if something struck Jonathan as being unique, he would say that he would remember something forever, even if were simply a lesson in school or a clever joke that had been told. Jonathan would make the statement about
remembering whatever it happened to be at least once a day. After Judas, his brothers also joined in harassing him. Even his parents had chuckled when, one night, after Ruhamah had prepared a particularly delicious dinner, Jonathan claimed he would never forget how good it tasted. Jonathan resolved to avoid his brother’s laughter by no longer saying those words, although in his heart, he knew that he would never forget the things he claimed would remain in his mind. But, in that moment, standing in front of the Temple and city, he could not refrain from speaking.

Barely louder than a whisper, he murmured, “I will never forget this.”

He immediately cringed, regretting that he had spoken. Like Judas, would his father laugh at him for what he had said? Immediately, Jonathan felt Mattathias’ strong arm pull him into an embrace. Though half of Jonathan’s hearing was lost because his left ear was buried in his father’s arm, he still heard his father say, “I know you won’t, son.”

Jonathan shivered from a cold breeze and crossed his arms tightly over his chest. The soldiers’ pace seemed to have quickened now that they were closer to the city. Jonathan fought his fatigue by forcing his legs to move until he was at the front of the ranks with Judas.

“What are we going to do once we’re in the city? Do you think many soldiers are occupying it?”

“We’ll slip in quietly. I doubt there are many, or any, soldiers left. Why would the old king leave all his soldiers here when, because of us, he’s been forced to direct his attentions to the other parts of Judea?” Judas grinned at his words.

Jonathan did not smile back. “Perhaps we should go to the Temple first?”
“An excellent idea, brother.” Judas firmly slapped Jonathan on the back.

Jonathan continued walking next to his brother but did not say another word.

The soldiers did enter the sleeping city quietly. Nevertheless, a few groggy faces still appeared in the doorways as the soldiers walked by. Many residents ducked right back into their houses—some scowled, several beamed while they watched, and a few began yelling in exultation and falling in step behind the soldiers. Jonathan left the front and went to the back ranks to ask the townspeople about the city’s occupation. He listened to their words without looking at their faces; instead, his eyes searched around the corners and down the main streets for signs of Seleucid soldiers on duty, either alert or asleep. None were in sight.

The residents said that soldiers still remained in the citadel. When the man Jonathan was speaking to was asked if he could guess how many soldiers, he was unsure. One of his neighbors was a wine merchant who often sold his goods to the soldiers. He would know. The man said he would go fetch the neighbor and return with an answer.

Jonathan continued walking with the soldiers in the back. They were approaching the Temple Mount. By now, those in the front were probably close enough to see the gates.

Jonathan stared around at his surroundings. He had often walked down this very street on the way to his school. Just as the city wall had appeared less imposing from a distance, everything looked much smaller to him than he had remembered. How much smaller would the Temple look than it had when he was a child?

As these thoughts washed over him, Jonathan fought to prevent his restless legs from running to the front. What was its condition? Was it mostly the same as when they had left Jerusalem, or had the pagans completely defiled it? How could the Jews in the
city stand living there if they could no longer offer sacrifices to their G-d? How long did they have to stare at the Temple, day after day, without seeing any sacred smoke rising to the heavens?

The man returned, breathlessly. The merchant had claimed there were no more than two hundred soldiers in the citadel. Jonathan thanked him repeatedly. He no longer fought to control his legs. He had to tell Judas. The old tyrant had apparently lost concern about controlling the city, becoming far too comfortable with his reign over Judea. They would have an easy victory that night, and the city of David would once again belong to the Jews.

Before Jonathan reached the front of the ranks, he stopped when he heard a strange sound, starting out as a low murmur and rising into a wail that pierced his ears. It was the lament of deep voices howling in unison. Jonathan ran again, picking up full speed. It had been so long since he had made the trip to the Temple that he had forgotten how short the pathway was. He halted when he saw his brothers and many of the men congregated in the Court of the Gentiles outside of the Temple. Jonathan pushed through them; they moved easily in their daze of grief. Soon he was in right in front of the Soreg Fence, the place where no one who was not a child of the covenant could enter. As he looked at the building of the courts, he understood why the men were wailing: how still, how silent, how desolate it looked!

The wind blew Jonathan’s tunic, and Jonathan felt as if it were the very breath of G-d, stirring for the first time in years.

He walked up the steps of the Chail toward the Court of the Women, his legs as limp and malleable as fresh dough. He was inside the Court now. Something brushed his
ankle. At his next step, something tickled his shin and calf. With a start, his eyes shot downward. Was it an animal? No; whatever it was that touched him did not move. He peered at the dark ground and bent to get a closer look. A plant? Too tall to be a weed — it was a small bush. A gangly, hideous bush. Jonathan snatched its base and plucked it out with such force that his shoulder popped loudly and his arm pulled behind him unnaturally. He crushed it in his hand and moved forward. After about five steps, something brushed his ankle once more.

The bush had compatriots. Some were scrubby, some were prickly; all were monumental proof of the Temple’s desolation. Jonathan flew into a frenzy. He threw himself onto the hard, cold stone and began yanking them out. His hands grew numb within a few short moments. It was not much longer before he began grabbing at mere air: his eyes too veiled by tears to see what he was pulling.

How long had the Temple been this forlorn? How long had it been abandoned by its own people? Jonathan’s fervor in the revolt had solidified three years ago, when the messenger Joseph had first described Antiochus Epiphanes’ desecration of the Temple by offering his sacrifices there. For the first time, he had murdered with enjoyment when he joined his brothers on the battlefield. But that sense of fury, though it had been the strongest he had ever felt, was a lamb compared to the lion of his rage now. For the Temple to be defiled by a pagan was one thing. Antiochus had persecuted the people of G-d and offered sacrifices in His Temple because he was nothing more than a fool. But for the people to desert the care and keeping of the Temple was another matter entirely.

Jonathan had heard stories from men who had travelled from even the edges of Judea to join their cause, stories about the ways their neighbors and townspeople had
turned their back on Torah, choosing instead to live like the Greeks. Jerusalem, so long
under the control of the Seleucids, was sure to be the most Hellenized. The Jerusalemites
would certainly have reason to be fearful, since they lived beneath the very shadow of
Epiphanes’ power. But with so few soldiers left in the city, surely the people could have
clandestinely kept up the Temple’s beauty without being caught.

Voices sounded nearby. Simon, John, Eleazar, and a passel of soldiers were
coming towards him. Without delay, Jonathan scrubbed his wet eyes with his hands,
burning from the dust. He stood up and turned toward the newcomers.

“What happened?” Simon asked, his eyes on Jonathan’s knees.

Jonathan glanced down. The portion of his tunic covering his knees had two
uneven circles of blood upon it. He shrugged. “There are bushes. Bushes growing in the
Temple. They needed to be plucked.”

Simon’s head tilted to the side, but he did not say another word. Eleazar snatched
one of the executed bushes and examined it closely, as if trying to determine if it were
real. John’s face was unreadable. He began lumbering around the stone ground, stopping
often to slowly pull the plants out. A deep grunt came from Judas’ throat as he continued
walking farther into the Temple. Jonathan sat back upon his heels, causing his tunic to
wrap tightly against his knees. He bit his lip to keep himself from gasping. The pain had
finally reached him.

“Have you been here the whole time?” John said, breaking the silence. He was
looking at Jonathan.

“What do you mean ‘the whole time’?” Jonathan asked.
“We’ve been looking around . . . here.” John broke off in a whisper, as if he were afraid to even call the Temple by its name. Had he, too, thought that its deteriorated state had lessened its magnificence?

“And?” Jonathan sat up straighter. Had he been so inconsolable that he did not even notice his brothers inspecting the Temple?

“The gates have been burned. Did you see that as you came in?” John asked.

Jonathan shook his head. “There were so many soldiers around, I just got past them and into here. What else have they done?”

John licked his lips and cleared his throat. He was putting off whatever he was going to say. “The priests’ chambers are ruined. Their sacred vestments are strewn all across the rooms.”

Jonathan nodded his head. There was something more, something else he did not want to say. He sucked in his breath and asked, “What else was found?”

“The altar.” John paused. “We found a rotting pig’s body upon it.”

Jonathan clenched his fists so tightly that his fingernails shoved in the flesh of his palms. But that would not suffice. Slowly, he began to sob, like a child who has lost its parents, like a man who has lost his wife in the midst of delivering their child, like a soldier who has lost his comrade in battle.

Only a few minutes had passed when Jonathan heard Judas from a distance. “Men, follow me!” Judas’ voice rang with urgency. “We will rid this city of these pagans once and for all! To the Citadel!”
Judas’ battle cry cut the night air sharply, but then was muffled by the sound of the soldiers’ yells and the stamping of hundreds of feet. Jonathan’s brothers dashed after them, and soon the sound of all the men joining the fray made the whole city rumble.

Jonathan rose slowly, picturing himself with the men. How refreshing it would be to see Seleucid blood upon his sword. Then, he envisioned himself leaving the Citadel, finding the families that had ingratiated themselves to the Seleucids for power, authority, or money. He would drag them into the streets and kill them in front of their neighbors. They should no longer live after having turned their back upon their people. He stopped and closed his eyes. For a moment, he allowed himself to revel in his triumph.

The breeze blew again, softly and intermittently. Jonathan opened his eyes when a scent filled his nostrils. A pungent, profane smell. Something rotting. Was it the corpse that had been on the altar? Though the breezes were cooling the night air, a wave of heat poured over Jonathan. As angry as Judas had sounded when he led the men, he would have the Citadel cleared out of Seleucids in a few short moments. And this Temple could not remain as it was.

Jonathan remained in the Court of the Women and continued to tug at the small bushes growing defiantly through the stones.

The citadel was indeed cleared quickly. Before dawn of the following morning, Judas gathered the troops together and set them to work cleaning out all the courts of the Temple. Men were sent into the city to recruit those Jews who still remained faithful to the cause. Tasks were distributed: women began weaving new veils, artisans created new vessels and candlesticks, and those few priests left in Jerusalem were assigned with
cleaning the sanctuary and removing the contaminated stones that had been sprayed with unholy blood. As for the altar of burnt offering, the men, after much deliberation, thought it best to tear it down and build a new one in its stead.

Simon led the venture to remove the old stones from the Temple and place them on the nearby hill; Jonathan led the task of hauling almost perfectly shaped rocks to the Temple for the new altar, reminiscing about the day when his father tore down the altar built in Modein by the Seleucid soldiers.

Day by day, the Temple’s appearance improved. The work crawled until one of the old priests mentioned to Judas that, according to his calculations, it soon would be exactly three years from the day when Epiphanes desolated the Temple. From that moment on, the soldiers, the priests, and the Jerusalemites began work earlier in the mornings and finished later at night. And then finally, the day before the three-year mark arrived.

Jonathan woke from a troubled sleep. Though the sun had not yet risen, he rose quietly, tiptoed around the other men sleeping in the small room, and slipped away from the house. His host, an olive oil merchant, had lost his wife several years back, and both of their daughters had married and moved away years before. The old man’s broad face had lit up when he had offered lodging to the sons of the great Mattathias, but after two months of staying in the cramped quarters, Jonathan’s legs had an itch to be on the move again.

He stretched them now with long strides across the dusty streets and drank in the musty scent caused by the tightness of the residential area. He wrapped his tunic more
tightly around himself to counter the morning’s chill and meandered towards the Temple’s large shape, which stood so much higher than the tallest buildings in the city.

As a child, he had walked these very streets with his father whenever Mattathias had business in the Temple. Jonathan had always been the only one of his brothers to ask to accompany him. After about the third walk to the Temple with his father, Mattathias would not leave for minor duties without asking his son if he would like to tag along.

Once, when Mattathias’ two-week turn to serve at the Temple arrived, Jonathan had asked to sit outside in the Court of the Gentiles and watch the happenings outside. He had been foolish enough to ask in front of Judas, who, when he heard, immediately echoed Jonathan’s request. The two tiny boys trailed the broad-shouldered man through the streets leading to the Temple. Mattathias had left them at the Court with the admonishment that they represented their family and their tribe and then had disappeared into the priest’s chambers. Judas had gone back home long before the midday sun had risen, saying that he was too hungry and hot to stay.

Jonathan had remained long after, watching the various people flock to the Temple and smiling shyly when his parent’s friends recognized him. He had stared at the Temple and its courts, thinking that, if he only looked hard enough, he would be able to see, through the walls, what duties his father was performing. In the late afternoon, Ruhamah had sent Simon to fetch him home to dinner, afraid that Mattathias had not packed anything for Jonathan to eat during the day. Jonathan had left reluctantly, though his stomach had been grumbling for hours.

Now, he stood in the bare Court of the Gentiles admiring the cleanliness of the stones and the stateliness of the Temple area. It was quiet, as it had been the night they
had returned to Jerusalem, but this quietness was proper: it was the gentle quietness before a throng of people milled in and out of it for the entire day.

Just then, Judas’ voice sounded in his ear. “I’m glad you’re up already. I wanted to get your thoughts on the order of things tomorrow.”

Jonathan jumped when he heard his brother, but once he recovered, the two men stood side by side, both with arms crossed over their chests.

Judas began a discussion regarding the order of the ceremonies. Jonathan nodded his head and grunted occasionally. His ears perked up, though, when he heard his brother say: “When I offer the sacrifice, I think we should have a line of men posted like messengers, so they can send the news out to the waiting people almost the moment it happens. Can you imagine what it will be like? All of Jerusalem will rumble with the people’s cheers!”

Jonathan’s head snapped toward his brother. He appeared to be quite serious; he was not teasing. “You’re as mad as Nebuchadnezzar!” Jonathan said. “Why would you be the one offering the sacrifices? You haven’t been anointed or . . . or purified or anything!”

Judas’ face hardened. “Well, I don’t see why I should be any less worthy to do it than someone else. We are Levites, and I’ve had a great deal of training to be a priest. I’m as good as anyone else.”

“You haven’t completed your training, which I should mention, you had as a child, and you haven’t gone through the seven-day process of purification. There are plenty of people who are more suited for this than you.”
Judas scoffed. The two men stood in angry silence. After a moment, Judas spoke again, enunciating each word. “Sometimes, we have to make exceptions for exceptional circumstances. Just like we did when we decided to fight on the Sabbath.”

Jonathan felt as if he were going to burst out of his tunic. “We only made that decision because we would have died if we hadn’t, and our people would still be enslaved to that fool who calls himself a king! No one will die if you don’t offer the sacrifice. There are still plenty of priests who are Father’s age and remember how to perform the services. You don’t even know how to do it properly!”

“I could ask them how.”

“Why should you learn when they already know? What gives you the right?”

Judas’ face contorted with anger. “I have plenty of right! I am the one who has led these people out of their bondage from ‘that fool who calls himself a king,’” Judas spat Jonathan’s words back at him, “and I am the one who brought the soldiers back to Jerusalem. And I am the one who has led the Temple’s purification!”

Jonathan’s jaws clenched so tightly he thought his teeth would break. “So John, Simon, Eleazar, and I haven’t done anything at all? It’s only been you who has accomplished all of this? We haven’t risked our lives on the battlefield, and we haven’t sweat in the sun while helping purify the Temple?”

“I’m not saying you haven’t. I’m saying that I’ve led it. I had to do the thinking behind it as well as the work.”

Jonathan bit his tongue to prevent himself from mentioning how probably over half of Antiochus’ troops had been fighting on other frontiers. That, not Judas’ strategic
genius, had contributed to so many of the Jews’ victories thus far. Instead of explaining this, he nodded his head and said, “Who do you think that you are? King David?”

There was silence. Jonathan smiled to himself, thinking that finally Judas’ self-importance would be squashed. He could feel his brother watching him, so he turned to face him, eyebrows raised in expectation.

“I’m better than David.”

Jonathan couldn’t speak. Judas, who seemed to be intent on proving his point, continued.

“He was a shepherd. I come from a line of priests. He went against a giant and succeeded. I’ve gone against armies and succeeded. The way he acted over Saul illustrated to everyone his weakness. If Father had not killed Josiah when he went to offer the sacrifice, I would have. No misguided sense of family loyalty would prevent me from doing what’s right.”

“No, but your pride would.”

Judas glared at him.

Jonathan kept his gaze on his brother, refusing to blink. “You should at least ask our brothers what they think, especially Simon. Remember that Father respected his wisdom. He would be honest with you. If Simon, Eleazar, and John think you should be the one to make the sacrifice, I will not give you more grief.”

Jonathan turned abruptly, and Judas called out to him. Jonathan did not stop his march back to the merchant’s house. If Judas would not listen to the reason of one of his little brothers, surely he would listen to the reason of several of his older brothers.
After exhausting nearly every argument possible, Jonathan’s other brothers convinced Judas that it would not be right for him to be the one making the sacrifice. One of Mattathias’ old friends, a man who had been a priest long before Epiphanes had taken over Judea, was asked by Simon to be the one who offered the sacrifice. When the day of the dedication arrived, Jonathan stood stolidly during the ceremony. A tinge of shame heated up his whole body when he saw Judas’ face scrunch up with disgust as the priest walked through the crowd to perform the ritual. The people filling up the Court of the Women stood in complete silence once the priest walked past them into the Court of Israel and then into the Court of Priests. After it was finished, Judas began cheering, and the throng soon joined, their voices lifting up to Heaven. One of the other priests read the Torah to the people. As he stood on the Court’s stones, Jonathan could barely resist shifting from one foot to the other after his legs and hips had stiffened. Jonathan’s mind was far from the Torah. When it was done, Jonathan was actually grateful to Judas for turning the crowd’s attention to something else besides the commandments.

By that time, it was evening, and the moon was just beginning to rise. Many of the people ran to their houses to grab lamps. When they came back to the courtyard, they placed the lamps around its edges. Jonathan watched these proceedings as he walked around the square, trying to make the feeling return to his legs and feet. As he looked back at the Court of the Women, he could see the four golden lamps, each lit with their four lights, brightening even the corners of the vast chamber. Light from the small lamps of the people reflected off the faces of all those around him, brightening the dull skin of the old and revealing the gleam of excitement in the eyes of the children.
Jonathan studied them, unable to move his eyes away. All of these people had been beaten down, but, though they were bruised and battered, they’d had the will to rise up. They had been told they could no longer worship their G-d, and yet they had just performed a holy sacrifice; the smoke from its remains was wafting into the evening sky like steam from a simmering, well-seasoned stew. They had been told to abandon their laws about food, yet Jonathan watched as women brought provisions enough for a feast that would follow every commandment and ordinance they had kept for hundreds of years. They had been forced to abandon their homes and live in caves, yet now they were in the heart of Jerusalem, worshipping at the center of their heritage. Though there were still enemies pressing in on all sides, at that moment, that sliver of time, they were free.

He heard women’s laughter. Looking around, he saw Judas. He had slipped his tunic from off of his soldiers, so that the upper half of it was draped limply over his belt, leaving his chest, shoulders, and arms bare. He was dancing wildly, the lamplight catching the glints of sweat upon his body.

“Dance with me!” Judas beckoned to the crowd. “Let us rejoice in this moment, in our freedom!”

Several people joined in immediately. Judas lithely moved so that he was next to a very pretty young woman, who was standing off to the side. He smiled at her, grabbed her hands, and continued to dance. Shyly, she started moving her feet and arms. Children squealed with delight as they jumped, twirled, and sometimes tumbled near them. Jonathan watched it all from a distance, glad that he was too far away to be sucked into the dusty whirl of bodies. He stared at Judas and, in his heart, he despised him.
Part III

Chapter I

Modein, 163 B.C.E.

So teach us to number our days, that we may get us a heart of wisdom.

—Psalm 90:12

Although hope spread through Judea like a wildfire after the Temple was rededicated, it was soon dampened by the efforts of surrounding areas. Threatened by the possibility of the Jews’ political freedom, the Gentiles pressed in firmly. The Jewish army diligently fought back, which succeeded in staving the foreigners off for a time. After seizing and burning the city of Jazer, they returned to their homes on a temporary leave. The men waited tensely, ready to spring into action when the time should come.

The end was drawing near to Jonathan’s second week in Modein after several intensive months of fighting in the countryside. For the first time in what felt like years, his body was rested. After sleeping in until midmorning, he crept away from the sounds of the voices beneath him and walked to the rooftop. He was surprised at how much he treasured those few minutes of solitude and contemplation. Jonathan smiled at the sounds of the quietly bustling village street below. He avoided thinking about how abandoned
the village was whenever the men went out fighting, with the women and children sent to surrounding villages for safety.

As he studied the bustling village life occurring underneath him, he saw a young woman walking past with a child toddling by her tunic. Could that be Hadassah? No, she was far too short and plump to be Hadassah. Still, the stranger reminded him of younger days; he would purposely walk by the cistern during times he knew Hadassah would be there, hoping to catch a glimpse of her laughing with her friends or gracefully drawing water. His eyes drifted toward the cistern then. Women were still gathered around it, visiting and clucking at each other. It was obvious that some of the smaller girls were still very young; they would have been too young to have drawn water years ago when Jonathan sought excuses to pass by the cistern, in the hopes of seeing Hadassah. Even from the distance, some of the women had familiar faces. Many of them were wives and mothers by then, and a few of them had grown stout from their own cooking.

While Jonathan was lost in his musings, he glimpsed a man running down the main street of the town. This, too, reminded him of days gone past and filled him with dread. The newcomer’s gait and carriage reminded Jonathan of the man who had come from Jerusalem so long ago, the man who had first exposed Jonathan to the horrors occurring to their people. Instinctively, Jonathan bolted from the rooftop and crashed down the sets of stairs. When he got outside, he grabbed the stranger’s arm.

“What is it? What news have you brought?”

“Are you Judas Maccabeus?”

“No, I’m Jonathan, his brother. You can tell me the message.”

“I’m sorry, but I would prefer to give it directly to Judas.”
Jonathan clenched his jaw in annoyance.

“Very well. He is probably in the house.” Jonathan started to turn back when he saw Judas coming to meet them. There was a look of surprise on his face, no doubt caused by the sight of the young stranger.

“What is happening here?”

“Ah!” Jonathan said. “Here is my esteemed, illustrious brother. Judas, this man wishes an audience with your gallant self.”

Judas, oblivious to his brother’s sarcasm, asked the messenger several questions. The messenger studied Judas’ face with awe. He seemed to be trying to speak, but every time he opened his mouth, he kept jumbling his words. Jonathan examined him closely now that the initial shock of seeing a stranger in Modein was over. The messenger was only a youth, no more than thirteen. He had mentioned that he came from Dathema—quite a journey for one so young. The poor boy had probably spent the entire trip planning how he would deliver his vastly important message to a man whose name was echoed off of the tongues of countless people all across Judea. And Jonathan had mocked him. Immediately regretful at his bad manners, he quietly leaned against the wall of the house to listen to the messenger.

His words were still not clear. Ruhamah had also come out of the house, but Jonathan noticed that she had immediately gone back inside at the site of the messenger. She returned a minute later with wine. Judas looked over at Ruhamah and then gently suggested that the boy hand over the parchment in his hand, so that he could read it while the boy took a drink. The boy gratefully handed him the letter and accepted the wine from Ruhamah with a shy smile.
Judas’ eyes scanned the letter, and he began to read aloud:

“The Gentiles all around have conspired against us. We have fled to a stronghold, but they are planning to attack us here soon, as well. A man named Timothy is commander of their forces. Please, come and rescue us, for many have already died . . . ”

Jonathan noticed men from the village leading two strangers in disheveled, torn clothing towards them. More messengers? The villagers pointed to Judas, who must have been too busy to notice the newcomers, as he continued reading.

“. . . all of those who lived in Tob have already been killed. Timothy’s men have taken their wives, children, and things. About one thousand died there.”

The boy messenger was beginning to sob, and Jonathan awkwardly tried to pat him for comfort, but Ruhamah swatted his hand away and enveloped the boy in a smothering hug. One of the newly arrived messengers coughed politely, which made Judas sharply turn to face him.

“You are Judas Maccabeus?” the older-looking messenger asked.

“I am.”

“I see that you have already received some bad news today—” the messenger looked sympathetically at the boy, “but I’m afraid I must add to it. We have just come from Galilee. Gentiles from Ptolemais, Tyre, Sidon, and Galilee itself have risen up against our people. They are destroying more and more of us daily.”

His voice had a tinge of bitterness. For just a moment, Judas’ face revealed a look of panic, but it quickly cleared. He instructed Ruhamah to give all three of the messengers food and drink. Then, he turned and told them that he would meet with them
soon—he would gather a council to discuss what should be done. When the only men left were he and Jonathan, Jonathan was instructed to collect a few men from Modein who could run to surrounding towns and bring soldiers back.

Jonathan lost no time in gathering men to be sent in four directions and then trotted back to the house. All of the brothers were inside, as well as Reuben and other commanders who had followed their family since the beginning of the revolt. Judas was speaking adamantly, apparently in disagreement against John, whose face was red with exasperation.

“No,” Judas said. “There’s just far too much territory to cover. We must split up! It is not as if we are going to meet them on a battlefield. We just have to invade villages. As soon we can get a few hundred men together, we must be off. I say we break into two groups. Where’s Jonathan?”

Jonathan stepped away from the doorway and came more fully into the room.

“I’m here.”

“Good. I’ll need your quick thinking with me. You and I will go to Gilead.” He paused and looked at the remaining three brothers. “Simon, gather a force of men together of your choosing and go to Galilee.”

John scowled. Jonathan guessed his thoughts: Judas was punishing him for speaking up. Eleazar looked resigned as usual, but quietly asked where both he and John were to go.

After barely a second of thought, Judas said lightly, “John, why don’t you go along with Simon?”
He glanced at Eleazar, and then added, “Perhaps you should stay home this time, little brother. You don’t seem to have fully recovered from your last sickness.”

Jonathan noticed Eleazar glancing at the men around the room who were not relations. They were all reacting awkwardly, apparently pretending to have not heard. Some were suddenly fascinated by something about their hands, others were interested in the objects around the room, and still others began trivial conversations with their neighbors. Eleazar seemed to realize that their reactions proved they had, in fact, heard. His face turned a bright shade of crimson.

Jonathan quickly piped in: “I’m sure he is more than capable to go on this campaign, Judas. There is no reason for him to stay here.”

Eleazar hung his head, obviously embarrassed, but he did not say a word. Judas simply shrugged his shoulders, and said that Eleazar could do whatever he wished. Jonathan realized he had probably not even noticed how mortified his sickly brother was by his comment. Simon quickly changed the discussion by asking Judas about who should defend Judea while they were gone. Both Joseph, the eldest son of Zacharias, and Azarias practically jumped from their places to volunteer.

Jonathan noticed Simon watching Judas intently, as if he were hoping to catch his eye. When Judas did glance in his direction, Simon subtly shook his head. He didn’t want Joseph and Azarias to lead. Either Judas ignored or did not understand him, because he agreed that they should defend the area from the enemy. Simon spoke up to add that their job for the moment was merely to protect Judea and not to provoke the Gentiles in any way. Joseph looked slightly offended, but Azarias agreed. Jonathan could not help but
remember how they always tried to gain positions of leadership over the other soldiers, even if that meant ingratiating themselves to Judas or his brothers.

All the men gathered in the room had to wait until the rest of the soldiers returned to Modein before they could leave. Judas continued giving instructions about what should be done, but Jonathan managed to slip out of the room. He crept up the steps leading to the roof, his brother’s voice trailing behind him. Outside on the rooftop, the bustle on the streets caused by the recent news was a welcome relief from the discussion downstairs. How long would they be gone this time? Six months? A year? Having stability for only two weeks was not enough. Jonathan breathed in and out deeply, slowly allowing his muscles to relax, and tried to force himself to not think about anything related to battle tactics, soldier organization, or food rationing.

Judas and Jonathan led a group of about eight thousand men into Gilead. Like an inevitable drought, Judas and his men swept over the countryside and reclaimed the villages of Bozrah, Dathaema, Maapha, Chaspho, Maked, and Bosor from the Seleucid forces. After setting up a base at Raphon, Judas sent spies to the enemy camp.

Jonathan squinted to make out the figures in the distance coming from the east. After a moment, the small figures took the shape of Yoram and Ezekiel, the two men who had been sent to spy on the enemy’s camp. As soon he recognized them, Jonathan took off in a sprint to Judas’ tent. When he got there, he found Judas and the commanders Reuben, Elihu, and Joshua seated on the floor. The commanders were speaking in hushed tones, their voices worried and desperate. Judas stroked his beard and nodded his head.
slowly at their words. Jonathan stopped short, surprised by how much Judas favored Mattathias when his face was serious. While Jonathan was musing, one of the commanders stopped talking. Then Jonathan glanced around to see all of the commanders watching him expectantly.

Jonathan nodded in acknowledgement and turned to his brother.

“Judas, Yoram and Ezekiel are returning to the camp.”

Within a few seconds’ time, Judas had sprung up and bounded out of the tent. Jonathan quickly followed him and tried to catch up. The two brothers reached the edge of the camp right as Yoram was approaching it.

Judas slapped him on the back. “Glad to have you—” he grinned at Ezekiel, “—both of you back. What news do you have for us?”

Yoram was slightly breathless. “It was just as you suspected, sir: the enemy camp is right across the stream. However, there are far more soldiers than we anticipated. There are certainly as many of them as there are of us, if not more. I got as close to the camp as I could. It looks like there are Arabs with them, and they could have hired other foreigners, too—I couldn’t see much of their faces. All the men seem to be ready for battle. They must know we are close.”

The messenger paused as if to take a breath before continuing, but Judas turned from him to face Jonathan.

“Go and alert the commanders. Tell them to begin preparing the men. We will attack as soon as the men are armed.”

“Do you think the men are ready?”
“They’re ready enough. We don’t have much time. Go!” Judas abruptly turned back to the two men and began asking detailed questions. Jonathan ran to his brother’s tent as quickly as he could. Even though the run stretched his legs, they still felt restless, as if they were impatient for battle. As he approached the tent, he forced his legs to slow down enough to stop. He tore back the flap and alerted the commanders. Before making sure they had understood him, he began weaving through the camp, yelling out orders as he went. Most of the soldiers had been napping or speaking with companions, but they all sprang up as soon as they heard Jonathan’s voice.

The news that they would soon fight spread through the camp like leprosy, unstoppable and inevitably altering. Knowing that all the men would be aware of the upcoming attack within a matter of minutes, Jonathan sought out Eleazar’s tent. He found his brother sitting on the ground, motionless. Was he praying? Jonathan was not sure. Eleazar must have heard Jonathan enter because his head turned to acknowledge the newcomer.

“What’s happening? I can hear the men rushing around like the walls of Jericho are falling down.”

“General Timothy’s camp is right across the stream. Judas has ordered all the men to arm themselves immediately. We will attack as soon as everyone is ready.”

Eleazar stood up slowly and began moving about the tent, gathering his few things. Jonathan could not help but notice how his brother’s hand shook when he reached for his sword on the ground. He weighed in his mind whether or not to say anything for a moment. Finally, he spoke up.

“You don’t have to fight today. You are still too ill.”
Eleazar’s head pivoted toward Jonathan. He laughed helplessly. “When am I not? It isn’t going to stop, brother.”

“It might. For all we know, you could be better very soon, maybe even in a few days.” No more words came to him, and even the ones he had spoken seemed unnaturally optimistic. After a moment, he added, “There will always be battles. Why not save your strength for later? Rest to give yourself a chance to get well. Then you can fight.”

Eleazar’s eyes shifted from Jonathan to the ground. For several minutes, silence reigned in the tent. Then, Eleazar nodded his head slowly and looked back up. “Maybe you’re right. But I will fight again.”

“Of course you will. No one doubts your courage.”

Eleazar sighed. “Only my strength.”

Jonathan shook his head. “No one doubts that, either.” He knew and he knew Eleazar knew he was lying, but the lie was what his brother needed to hear. “Everyone gets sick. Just look at how many of our men have been injured and had to go home.”

“But they were injured from fighting. From doing what they should, as men.”

“Don’t think that you haven’t done your part. You’ve contributed a great deal. You just need a rest, and then you’ll be back on your feet again.”

Eleazar nodded his head once and, with obvious effort, put the sword back in its place. Jonathan heard a horn being blown. He rushed out of the tent without a goodbye to his brother. Once outside, he joined the stampede of men running towards the edge of the camp. As the wave of soldiers neared the stream, Judas stood in front of the army. He gathered the commanders and spoke with them briefly. Then, the group dispersed, and the commanders stationed themselves at various points along the lines of soldiers. They
began yelling out instructions for the battle. The men were to leave the camp as it was; they would come back for their gear later. Jonathan could not help but think of Eleazar, sitting alone amidst all the leftover belongings. When the commanders were finished, Judas let out his signature rallying cry and began splashing through the stream toward the enemy. The men surged after him.

Although the men kept a steady pace as they ran, Jonathan pitched ahead, eager to meet his opponents head-on. The warm water rose past his ankles, his calves, and then his thighs. At the middle of the stream, it reached his hips, slowing his stride. Even so, Jonathan tried to tread through the water as quickly as he could. After he reached the other side, he could see a horizontal line of men standing at attention. A man at his right fell: he must have tripped. Water from the man’s fall splashed in Jonathan’s eyes, making the line of enemies in the distance a blur.

The bank was under his feet now. With a yell, he pressed forward into the fray. His right arm jabbed its sword into the first target it found. His left arm, supporting a shield, pushed the nameless soldiers back, knocking them off of their feet. He had been fighting for a while, long enough to kill at least a dozen men, when an angry-looking Arab appeared at his right side. Jonathan’s sword was still inside the body of a soldier and was proving difficult to dislodge. Seeing that the Arab was getting closer and had definite intentions for him, he left the sword in the falling corpse and switched the shield to his right arm. But he was too late. The Arab struck at him. A crack rang in his ears. The sight of the men blurred, just as it had when water had gotten in his eyes, but now the men were moving from side to side, as well. He tried to keep steady, but his legs felt weightless. They could surely not support his body. And they didn’t. As he fell, he saw
the Arab’s face contorting in pain, and he fell towards Jonathan. Then, all Jonathan saw was darkness . . .

Jonathan heard his name being called. He blinked a dozen times before his burning eyes were able to open. When his vision cleared, he started. A face with unblinking, lifeless eyes was staring back at him. There was a corpse lying right next to him; a portion of the dead man’s arm was heavily draped across Jonathan’s torso. Jonathan threw the arm off of himself and lay quietly for a moment. Then, he pivoted his head to look around. If there was a corpse lying near him, what else was in this place? Wounded bodies were lying everywhere around him. He was in a cemetery.

“What happened?”

He instinctively tensed again when he heard a noise in these strange surroundings, but relaxed when he recognized the voice. Reuben.

“You were struck.” Reuben said. “I came up behind the man and killed him, but I was not able to protect you entirely. Hence, that very handsome lump now rising on your forehead.”

Reuben’s forefinger pointed right above Jonathan’s eyes. Jonathan gingerly lifted up his fingertips to the spot and groaned when he felt a massive bulge. He could not resist wincing at both the pain and the size. After lifting himself up to a sitting position, he glanced around. The battle was over. Bodies were strewn all over the ground and weapons were scattered randomly.
Jonathan looked back at the corpse he had seen when he first woke up. The poor fool had died from a wound in his chest. Jonathan could not help but shudder. No matter how many times he fought, he would never grow accustomed to the post-battle carnage. He impatiently asked Reuben where everyone else had gone.

“Many of the Seleucid cowards fled. We think they’ve run to Carnaim; all of our soldiers have gone after them. They left right before you woke up. I came to see if you were all right. After I killed the one who got you, there were too many men to fight, so I was not able to determine how you were. I was afraid you hadn’t made it. Do you think you can walk?”

Jonathan nodded, but stopped immediately when he realized how even that small amount of movement was painful. Reuben offered his hand. Jonathan took it, grateful that Reuben’s strong grip was enough to compensate for his own weakness. Once he stood up, the ground started swaying. Reuben put his hands under Jonathan’s armpits and steadied him.

“Are you all right?”

“I will be.”

“Should I take you back to the camp?”

“No, take me to Carnaim. I have not been much of a help today; let me make it up to our men now.”

“You won’t be much of a help in this condition.”

Jonathan pretended to have not heard him. Instead, he scanned the area nearby for his sword. Once he recognized it, still wedged in a body, he began moving towards it. He pulled at the hilt, but the sword would not budge. The effort made Jonathan dizzy. He
took a breath and planted his sandaled foot against the now-stiff body. After two pulls, he was finally able to extricate the bloodied sword. Jonathan shuddered as he ripped a strip of the corpse’s tunic. He tried as quickly as possible to wipe the sword clean with the fabric. When he had grabbed his shield, he turned expectantly to Reuben.

“Ready?”

“Do you need my cloak? You’re shivering.”

“I’ll be fine. Let’s go.”

Reuben nodded and turned. Although Jonathan felt as if he could barely walk, he willed his legs to navigate through the mass graveyard. As they trudged, Jonathan sighed, and forced himself to look at the horizon they were walking toward. He struck up a conversation with Reuben, hoping that concentrating on what his friend had to say would distract him from the pervading dizziness.

After awhile, spots began to form in front of Jonathan’s eyes and his head started pounding. Reuben had only begun to answer one of Jonathan’s questions when a roar in Jonathan’s ears prevented him from hearing any more. The spots expanded, until a black screen filled all of his sight.

He woke up much the same way that he had the last time, only with Reuben’s face before him instead of a corpse’s.

“Was I out again?”

“Yeah, but not for long. Still, you should turn back. It’s probably only a short trip back to camp, and I don’t see signs of Carnaim anywhere in front of us. It’s probably quite a distance.”
Jonathan grunted. He hated the thought of not fighting, but what help could he possibly be to anyone when he was in such a condition? He stood up with effort. He waved off Reuben, who had again offered his hand. His sword was greatly weighing him down, and even his shield seemed to be much heavier than usual. Reuben offered to go back to the camp with him, but Jonathan replied that the soldiers at Carnaim would need his help. They bid goodbye, and Jonathan turned back toward where the battle had been fought.

It was nearly dark. Despite his weakness, Jonathan picked up his pace, determined to get past the site of annihilation while he still had enough light to avoid tripping over bodies. When he again came to the edge of the dead, he contemplated running after Reuben to Carnaim. Even if he would not be of any help, he would be near the living. The bodies were already beginning to reek from their hour of exposure to the sun.

The stars and the rising moon provided just enough light for him to see where to place his feet. Jonathan tried to avoid seeing the gaping wounds and twisted forms around him, but found that he could not resist looking at them. A lump caught in his throat when he recognized the body an acquaintance. The man, Saul, had been with them since the battle at Beth-Horon. Occasionally, on long marches, they had spoken together. Although the man’s personality had been nothing like Jonathan’s, their interests had been similar. Saul had even invited Jonathan to come to his humble house when all the fighting was over. His wife had given birth to a son a few weeks before Saul joined them, and he had beamed with pride whenever he spoke of the boy. He seemed to enjoy embarrassing Jonathan, too, whenever he teased that his beautiful wife had an equally charming, unmarried younger sister.
Jonathan turned from Saul’s lifeless body and continued on. As he passed through clusters of dead enemies, he found himself wondering about their lives, as well. Did they have wives and children they were eager to return to? What had their occupations been before they become soldiers? What would their lives have been like had the revolt not started? He could almost hear Judas’ voice echoing in his ears with words that had been spoken dozens of times: “Don’t think, Jonathan. Just fight.”

But what else was he supposed to do? Though he was unaware of the names of the men who had fallen all around him, they were not nameless. They had been young, strong, virile. They had thought they were invincible, just as Jonathan had felt before he woke up to an already finished battle. A cold sweat broke out. What if he had not woken up after the battle? What if he had become one of the bodies lying on the field? Jonathan quickened his pace. He thought of his father, who had died with a look of peace upon his face, so different from the contorted expressions on the faces of those he was now passing. Would his life end as his father’s, quietly and easily? Or would it end as the lives of these corpses had ended, facing excruciating pain before the release into death? He was almost at the end of the cemetary, close to the stream. As soon as he got near the stream’s edge, he kneeled down and drank with relish, eager to dissipate the bitter, ashy taste of mortality.


The Jewish forces overtook the Seleucid soldiers in the town of Carnaim, killing many with the sword and burning down a temple where the rest had been hiding. The men returned victoriously back to camp. Though they were exhausted from hours of fighting and trekking through the wilderness, the men celebrated their conquest when they had returned. Now that Gilead had been cleared of the enemy, Judas decided to
bring Jews from area villages back to Judea proper. The group of soldiers began gathering their people from various towns, their numbers growing larger and larger.

Jonathan was not in the least bit tired, after growing accustomed to long marches in the army, but he noticed that the elderly and the children were lagging behind. A small girl, no more than four, was pulling at her mother’s tunic and begging to be picked up. Her mother shook her head dully; she was already holding infant twins. The little girl began to bawl. Jonathan moved from his place and scooped her up. The girl’s crying stopped immediately. When Jonathan looked at her little face so close to his, he could tell that her tear-filled eyes were full of fear.

“Momma?” the little girl looked at her mother, as if inquiring who the stranger holding her was.

“You’re all right, little one,” her mother assured her, then smiled and thanked Jonathan. She introduced herself and said that her husband had joined the revolt about ten months earlier.

“I have not seen him in the forces here, though,” she added quietly.

“Well, my brother Simon led a campaign into Galilee. It is quite possible that your husband is in that troop.”

The woman’s face brightened, making her haggard features surprisingly pretty. Jonathan felt a tinge of bitterness. Is this what this revolt had done? Taken husbands away from their wives, leading them on to death or at the very least, the loss of their prime years? Even if the men do survive the fighting, will they go home to wives whose beauty has been stolen by the difficulties of raising children alone?
The girl was gingerly running her finger along the edge of the shield Jonathan had strapped on his back. She looked up at Jonathan with eyes wide.

“Are you a soldier?” she asked, her little mouth apparently unable to form the “r” sound.

“Yes, I am.”

“Have you ever killed anyone?”

Jonathan’s forefinger tapped the tip of her nose. “You ask a lot of questions for someone so young.”

The little girl’s mother must have heard the edge in his voice, because she chided her daughter about talking too much. She heeded her mother and grew silent. Although the village of Alema was getting closer, it was still about three kilometers away. The girl’s head nodded forward a few times. Jonathan smiled, reminded of his nieces and nephews. Gently, he cupped his hand around her head and laid it on his shoulder. Jonathan soon heard rhythmic breathing. He smiled to himself.

One of the commanders yelled out for the civilians to start making camp in the immediate area—only a few of the soldiers would enter the town. The little girl had been woken by the commander’s shout. She began to fuss. When Jonathan set her down so that he could enter the village, her cries and sniffs grew louder. Jonathan heard her mother shushing her as he walked away. The town was as quiet as death. Judas began asking loudly if anyone was near, yet it still took awhile for a head to appear from a window and doorway. The man who came to meet them apologized for the delay: the townspeople had feared that Timothy’s forces had come back.

“Come back?” Judas inquired. “When did they come the first time?”
“A few weeks ago,” the man answered, “they raided everything and killed many of our people.”

“More soldiers, eh?” a shaggy, unkempt man appeared, but Jonathan did not from where. “And what are you going to do this time? Kill me, too? Do it!” A dirty hand pulled his tunic away from his neck, exposing his throat.

“Calm down, Nehemiah,” the man from the village said. “These aren’t the enemy. They are our own.”

“What would one of ours be doing in this accursed place?”

Judas stepped forward, radiating self-assurance and poise.

“We’re going to take you back to Judea.”

The younger man seemed confused. “Why would you want to do that?”

Judas answered solemnly. “Because we need to unite our people. My brothers and I have been fighting for years to protect our customs and Torah from foreign influence. Our people may be small in number, but if we are united, we will be strong. Besides, we cannot protect people in these areas—it is too far. We left for Gilead two months ago, as soon as we heard the news that Timothy and his men were wreaking havoc in the countryside. Your village might have been spared his force’s cruelty had we not had such a distance to travel. Come back with us, so that you may be protected.”

The first man was silent, as if thinking. Apparently displeased, the older man scoffed. “And who do you think you are? Moses? Joshua? Our deliverer? Our messiah?”

Judas seemed taken aback. Jonathan watched him with interest. As far as he had seen, never, since the revolt had begun, had Judas been treated with anything but
reverence and adoration. In fact, Jonathan could not recount any time in his entire life when Judas had been mocked.

The young man interceded. “Please pardon Nehemiah’s rudeness. His whole family was killed before his very eyes during the raid. Although he lost children and grandchildren, too, he has been wailing about his wife ever since. Even my parents had not been born before he and his wife were wed. When he’s not talking about his wife, he’s been speaking nonsense. We all think he’s lost his mind.

“Not all of us in this village are as inhospitable as he. Wait, please: I will call the people of our village out to the streets so you may speak to them. Please join my family at our house tonight as our guests.” He paused for a moment and then added, “I do not believe I know your name yet.”

He looked at Judas expectantly.

“I am called Judas Maccabeus.”

The man’s mouth gaped open.

“The Judas Maccabeus? The one we’ve heard about for years now?”

Judas laughed, obviously delighted. “Yes, the Judas Maccabeus. This is my brother Jonathan, and one of my other brothers, Eleazar, is outside the village with the others.”

The man smiled politely at Jonathan, but turned almost immediately back to Judas. He began to inform Judas that he would gather the people to him immediately, but he started to stammer a little. Jonathan stared at him, unable to believe that this man was affected so ridiculously from an encounter with the hero of the people. He glimpsed back
at his brother, who seemed to be basking in the man’s clumsy worship. Enough, Jonathan thought as he turned and abruptly walked away.

By the next morning, the villagers of Alema were packed up, ready to begin their journey. As the sun rose, the people set out in a multitude, but not before Judas gave one of his famous speeches. Jonathan could barely keep himself from mocking his brother; it was terribly unoriginal, only slightly different from the speech he always gave right before battles. *Do not forget the heroes of old, and do not forget why we are in this war against the Gentiles.* Jonathan glanced over at Eleazar. When his brother’s eye fell on him, he rolled his own. Eleazar shrugged and shook his head as if to say, “I know, I know, but what can we do?”

Jonathan tried to drown out Judas’ words, but could not resist listening when his older brother came to the part in his well-rehearsed speech that always annoyed him the most.

“. . . I will never forget the day when a man stumbled into my father’s household from Jerusalem. The man had seen terrible things happening in our glorious city. He had been one of eight sons. He had to watch as all seven of his brothers were tortured and killed because they would not defy our commandments. And look at yourselves! Look at what the Gentiles have done to you all! Plundered your village, killed your family members! The night that the man from Jerusalem told us his story, I promised him that I would not let such atrocities continue, that I would not go down to Sheol without a fight! We must stand against them! We must show them that we will not allow them to take our traditions from us. Are you with me?”
The crowd roared in response, but Jonathan shook his head in disbelief. If Judas had to persuade an audience to join the cause, did honesty no longer matter? He looked around at the people so enraptured by his brother’s words, and his promises of victory being only a hand’s breadth away. Anger started to bubble in Jonathan’s stomach. He needed a distraction, something productive to do. Judas was wasting all of their time.

He searched the advancing crowd until he found the little girl and her mother from the day before. When he offered to carry her again, the mother gladly accepted. She looked even more exhausted by then. The little girl chattered with Jonathan unceasingly, her conversation refreshingly random. Her matter-of-fact manner of speaking about the occurrences in her little world reminded Jonathan of Michal when she had been a small girl. After a while, Jonathan quit listening, his mind lost in contemplation about what his mother and sisters were doing at the moment.

About midmorning, Jonathan saw Judas making his way towards him through the trudging throng. Jonathan was surprised at the irritation he felt upon seeing his brother come near. Judas smiled gallantly at the mother nearby, who reciprocated the expression wearily. Jonathan’s young charge stopped talking and stared wide-eyed at his brother, apparently entranced. Judas turned from smiling at her mother to smile at her. He asked her name. Too shy to answer, she buried her head in the crook of Jonathan’s neck. Judas laughed and asked Jonathan if he had a moment. He nodded and set the girl down. Unlike the day before, she did not cry, but continued to intently watch Judas.

The two men gathered a little distance between themselves and the rest of the crowd, but kept up with the crowd’s steady pace. Judas broke the silence. “Do you think I could be the deliverer?”
Jonathan could not keep the annoyance out of his voice. “Judas, were you thinking about what that old man said yesterday? The man who had lost his mind?”

“I know, I know, he was crazy. But what if he was right about that one point? Even mad men occasionally have moments of truth.”

Jonathan let forth a light laugh to cover his frustration. “That does not mean his moment of truth came when he was speaking about you. Really, brother, do you actually think you are our savior?”

“I don’t know. I have moments where I do not think it could be possible, but at other times . . . I mean, look at what I have done for our people!”

Jonathan clenched his fists. “No, look at what we have done. All of us.”

Judas laughed. “Yes, all of us. But even you must admit my job leading in battles and making decisions has not been lacking.”

“Who did Father tell us to heed when he was dying? As I recall, it was Simon whose wisdom we were to follow, not yours. And he would have made more decisions, too, if you’d given him the chance. But of course, that would have interfered with all the plans you made on your own.”

“And why should I not have the right to make decisions? Did you see the way that villager responded when he found out who I was yesterday? Awe. Respect. I did not see him in such reverence over you.”

Judas’ voice had been gradually rising. Jonathan heard tittering. He glanced at the crowd and saw several of the people had stopped; they were watching them and whispering. But he did not care. He would not allow his brother to humiliate him, especially in front of people that he had just lied to.
Jonathan shot out, “Of course not. Because I don’t ingratiate myself to the people like you do. You will say whatever they want to hear. Like today with your little speech. Since you don’t seem to remember, let me remind you that it was five brothers who were killed, not seven. And the man who told us was not one of the brothers. He said he was like a brother to them. Did you even know that man’s name?”

“I believe it was Joshua. And does it matter if I get a few of the facts wrong? It’s not as impressive to tell them that five were killed as it is to tell them that seven were.”

“What does it matter? Several men were killed. If even one man had been killed, it would have still mattered. And his name was Joseph, not Joshua, although I would have thought that you’d at least know the name of a man who you supposedly made a promise to avenge. Considering I never even heard the two of you exchange words, I’m surprised that you made such a vow to him.”

“Well, maybe I didn’t actually say it, but when I heard his story, I swore to myself that I would give my life for the people. All that matters is that we rally the people and provide the hope that they need.”

Jonathan heard silence. The people must have stopped talking about them. Even so, Jonathan could see out of the corner of his eye that they were still there. He could not prevent himself from yelling. “At the cost of the truth? The only reason you told the story the way that you did was to make yourself out to be a noble hero. Just admit it! Sometimes I wonder if . . .” His voice trailed off when he stopped himself from saying more.

“You wonder if what?”

“Nothing. Forget it.”
“Tell me. Say it to my face.” The line of Judas’ jaw was taut under his skin.

Jonathan glanced at the people. He fought to not scream out his words, but managed to control himself. He did not want the crowd to hear him as he said, “Sometimes I wonder if you even care about our people, or if you just want to fight so that you’ll be remembered as a hero.”

Jonathan saw a fist flying at his face. His head reeled. Darkness covered his sight. He was on the ground. When he opened his eyes, he saw Judas leaning over him. Something wet was traveling from his nose into his mouth. The back of his hand instinctively brushed it away. Blood. A buzzing sound began, like a nest of sleeping hornets had been disturbed. He glanced at the people in the distance. A crowd had stopped walking and was clumped together, watching the two brothers. Jonathan would not lay here as if he had been defeated. With effort, he stood back up to face his brother, who said, “Don’t ever talk like that to me again. You forget your place. I have given my life to continue Father’s cause, so that I may honor his memory and his dying wishes.”

Jonathan tried to keep his voice calm and steady. “But we all have, Judas. The sacrifice has not been yours alone. We have all given up many things for this. The reason I did not take stock in anything that old man said was because I do not see how the rest of us have given any less than you. All of us who have fought against the Gentiles are saviors of the people.”

Judas’ scowl relaxed slightly. His eyes still looked troubled, but were no longer angry. Jonathan wondered if his words had sunk in. A soldier from the front called out for Judas, who continued to stare at his younger brother for a moment before briskly walking away.
A random woman started hurrying towards Jonathan, probably to see if he was all right. But Jonathan wanted no sympathy.

“Go back,” he half-growled, half-yelled as he waved her away. He could not be seen right now, so he began storming in the opposite direction. At the slow pace the people were travelling, he could easily find them later.
Part III

Chapter III

Beth-Zechariah, 162 B.C.E.

The darkness enveloped us. All I could hear was the violin, and it was as if Judiek’s soul had become his bow. He was playing his life. His whole being was gliding over the strings. His unfulfilled hopes. His charred past, his extinguished future. He played that which he would never play again… Even today, when I hear that particular piece by Beethoven, my eyes close and out of the darkness emerges the pale and melancholy face of my Polish comrade bidding farewell to an audience of dying men. —Eli Wiesel, Night

Judas led the multitude of Jews across the River Jordan safely, and Simon’s men met success in Galilee. Joseph and Azarias, however, acted against Judas’ instructions, resulting in a tragic loss of two thousand soldiers’ lives. When the army was again reorganized, they fought the Philistines and the descendents of Esau in the south. The blessing of these successes paled in comparison to the excellent news that shortly thereafter reached Judas and his men: Antiochus Epiphanes had died from an illness. The Seleucid Empire’s need to reorganize afforded the Jews a brief respite from battle. When the new king, Antiochus’ young son Eupator, heard about the actions of Judas in
Judea, he sent more soldiers to stop him. These men, together with mercenary soldiers, cavalrymen, and war elephants, formed a formidable army that once more entered Judea. At Beth-zur, the Seleucids attacked. When Judas heard of this, he brought his men to Beth-zachariah.

Jonathan’s dreams were interrupted by a rumbling sound. Thinking the camp was under attack, he jolted up, but was surprised to not hear another sound. As quietly as he could in the veiled darkness, his hands searched the nearby area for his sword. Another rumbling sound struck, but, in a more alert state, Jonathan ascertained that it was the sound of a racking cough. When his eyes finally adjusted to the darkness, they distinguished the sight of Eleazar’s silhouette, doubled over, rocking silently. Yet another cough reverberated in the small tent, but Jonathan could tell that it was muffled, probably against Eleazar’s tunic.

“Eleazar? Are you all right?”

“Fine. Go back to sleep.”

“I couldn’t possibly, not with that terrible sound.” Jonathan slid over to his brother. “When did—?” He lowered his voice to a whisper when a nearby man rustled. “When did this start?”

“Tonight.” Eleazar said. “I woke up to it. It’s never been—” His sentence was interrupted by another cough, this one even more violent than the others. When he had finished, he was shaking. Now several of the men rustled and turned over. One man put his hands over his ears.

“We need to get you to Reuben. He might be able to help you.”
Eleazar shook his head. “What’s the use?” His face was deathly white, his eyes earnest. “Jonathan, I think this is it.”

A shiver began at Jonathan’s scalp and ran down his spine. “Of course it’s not. You’ve had times like this before, and you’ve always gotten better.” After a silence, he said, “If you stay here during the battle tomorrow, you’ll help your chances.”

“NO!”

Jonathan nearly jumped. His brother’s face had turned towards him sharply, and even in the shaded moonlight, Jonathan could see his brother’s eyes staring fiercely, almost maniacally, back at him. For a moment, he favored a madman. The exertion must have strained his lungs, because another cough overtook him. When the fit passed, Eleazar spoke again; a little more softly, yet still with a tinge of bitterness.

“Sorry. I can’t hide away forever, though. I’m a soldier, not an invalid.”

“You were never given the choice to be a soldier—it was thrust upon you.”

“What of it? So was my sickness, but I am still tied to it.”

“But—”

“I know what you’re trying to say, little brother.” Eleazar said. “But it doesn’t help. Giving up on fighting lets the sickness inside of me win. I need the rush of battle to feel alive, even if it could also mean dying.”

Jonathan sighed and looked down at his hands. It made sense. Eleazar was still a good soldier, regardless of the weakness his illness had given to him. He looked up at his brother to agree with him, but stopped short. A viscous trail of dark liquid was crawling down the side of Eleazar’s mouth towards his jaw line. Eleazar must not have noticed it
until the look of horror on his younger brother’s face appeared, for only then did his hand search his chin. Then, he drew his hand back.

Jonathan tried to speak. “Is that . . . blood?”

Eleazar nodded slowly, still staring at his hand. Then, in a desperately careless way, he wiped his hand on his tunic, and sniffed. “It’s nothing. It’s happened before.”

“No, it hasn’t. Promise me you won’t fight tomorrow.” Jonathan despised how pleading his voice sounded, like a little boy’s.

Eleazar ignored him, continuing to get rid of the blood on his chin. When no trace of it was left, he said softly, “Jonathan, go back to bed.”

Jonathan did not say another word. Why continue speaking when it was useless? He crawled back through the darkness to where he had been lying. Positioning himself on the side, he closed his eyes and tried to ignore the muffled coughs behind him. When he finally fell asleep, he dreamt that he was swimming in a sea of dark, sticky blood. He tried to beg for help, but the salty substance kept invading his mouth, traveling down his throat and blocking his ability to speak. The next morning, he woke exhausted.

The men had been grouped into divisions and began marching forward as Judas directed. While the soldiers’ feet struck the dusty ground in unison, Jonathan’s thoughts strayed to Eleazar. He had seen his older brother when the men were packing up the camp. In the disorder of leaving for the battle, though, Jonathan had lost sight of him. Was he in the rear? Jonathan turned his head to the back, but there were far too many men for him to distinguish Eleazar’s pale face among all the others. Sighing, he quickly prayed that his brother would have the wisdom not to take part in the fight.
They were approaching a gradually slanting hill. Jonathan took a deep breath before he began the climb. He watched the ground intently as he marched, careful to avoid pockmarks or indentations in the earth that would cause a misstep. As he neared the crest of the hill, he heard men’s voices shouting and a deep rumble. His stomach began to churn when he heard another, unfamiliar sound. It sounded like a trumpet, whose call ended with a wild, untamed, almost desperate ring. Never before in his battles with the Seleucids had Jonathan heard that sort of trumpet used. He glanced at Judas; his forehead was furrowed in concern and confusion. Jonathan did not dare glance back at the men. They should not see their leaders in a state of near panic.

By the time he reached the crest, his back felt damp against his armor. He glanced down from the hill to see a wide plain. On the other side were mountains. The plain was filling up with men and horses streaming from a narrow pass that cleanly divided two of the hills. Jonathan was taken aback by how massive some of the horses were.

He squinted. Were they really horses? There were certainly many horses on the field, but these other enormous creatures seemed to be a different animal entirely. What were they? They seemed to be the size of nearly two men. Their fur seemed to be of a brownish grey color, but not much could be seen, due to the armor the animals were wearing. On their backs were small towers; it looked as if there were movements inside the towers. Were those men? The beasts were spread out, with many foot soldiers and horsemen in between them. There had to have been at least twenty-five of them on the field already, with still more coming out of the mountain pass.

They had long, curved white objects coming from their mouths. Was this an attached part of the armor, a spear of sorts? Jonathan tried to squint still harder. It almost
looked as if the animal had three legs in the front — two stout ones on the left and right sides, and a long, thin one in the middle, directly under its chest. No, the “leg” was actually attached to the animal’s face. Then he heard that bizarre trumpet sound again. It seemed to be coming from one of the animals! Another beast near the one who had called out answered. A third animal, this one still in the pass, also joined in the song. The noise it made echoed in the narrow mountain walls, ominously haunting the plains like the cries of an animal about to be sacrifice in the Temple.

Jonathan once more looked at Judas. Did he know what these tremendous beasts were? From the look on his face, it was obvious he did not. Jonathan approached him.

“What are we to do? There are far more soldiers here than we had anticipated.” He lowered his voice before he continued, “and I have no idea how we are supposed to kill those beasts.”

Judas’ jaw was tight. “We will just have to do as we have done before. We have had good reason for getting this far.”

Just then, here was a hand on Jonathan’s arm. It was an older soldier he had never seen before, whose beard was beginning to grey.

“The men around me were all wondering what those large animals on the plains were. I guess most of you have probably never heard of them? My uncle was a merchant who traveled to many places. As a boy, he told me stories about those animals. They are called elephants. They have leathery skin instead of fur, but it is not too tough to withstand a sword. Be careful to not get under them; they are heavy enough to crush a man in an instant.”
Jonathan thanked the man profusely and asked him to remain for a moment. After Judas shouted general instructions to the men, Jonathan had the old soldier share his information with his compatriots. Jonathan cast a glance back at the plain. All of the Seleucid army had exited the pass; they were now a blinding multitude of golden shields arranged into phalanxes. They began to chant. The harsh, guttural sounds of their language disgusted Jonathan. Once Judas signaled, Jonathan raced down the hill towards them.

While Jonathan and a long string of his men were approaching the soldiers, a wave of arrows covered the air above them. Jonathan raised his spear to protect his head and continued running. Out of the corner of his eyes, he could see men being flung to the ground. As he approached the ranks, he zeroed in on the face of one of the soldiers. This would be the first kill. The man’s eyes widened as Jonathan approached; Jonathan did not check to see if they widened more when he thrust his sword into the man’s side, vulnerable due to his lack of armor. One.

Holding his shield directly in front of his torso, he pushed deeper into the ranks. Simultaneously, his sword stabbed diagonally to the right. Two. Three. One soldier stepped towards Jonathan, swinging his sword wildly. He seemed to be just a boy. Was this his first battle? Jonathan inhaled and detached the soldier’s head cleanly off of his shoulders. If the boy must be killed, at least he was given a quick death with no suffering. Four. Continuing on, Jonathan’s kills reached the tens, then the twenties. He had learned many battles ago that counting how many he had killed helped him focus on the progress he was making and kept the dead’s faces from haunting him as he fought.
He had just counted to thirty-five when he felt pain tearing through his right calf. Pivoting instantly to the opposite direction, he saw a burly soldier near him. Jonathan’s back had been to the soldier’s right side; had the Seleucid unintentionally nicked Jonathan’s leg as his sword swung at another soldier? At any rate, if the soldier had been attacking one of Jonathan’s men, he had succeeded. The Jewish soldier fell to the ground with a solid thud. Jonathan quickly punctured the enemy’s torso and moved farther into the fray. Thirty-six.

The number of living men on the field was quickly dwindling, and Jonathan’s count had climbed to the eighties. Though his body yearned for a long drink and rest, he ignored his desires and fought all the harder. He could see large objects looming nearby. Glancing over, he caught sight of one of the mysterious beasts that the Seleucids had brought to the battle. It seemed massive, and the armor it wore seemed unusually elaborate. As Jonathan started towards it, he tried to watch its movements. Where would it be most vulnerable? Meanwhile, Seleucid soldiers continuously interrupted his calculations. Nevertheless, as he killed off his eighty-fifth, eighty-sixth, and eighty-seventh soldier, he determined that quick slits into the beast’s legs would be the quickest way to make it ineffective, even if it would not be immediately killed.

As he got closer to the elephant, he nearly stopped short when he saw Eleazar fighting like a madman against the soldiers. Although there were a few other Jews in combat alongside him, it seemed that Eleazar was killing far more than his companions.

“Eleazar!” Jonathan tried to yell over the constant clanking of weapons around them, but his brother did not appear to have heard him.
Jonathan tried to get nearer to his brother. He had never seen Eleazar so determined in battle before. Jonathan could not believe that in his sickness, his brother was able to fight with so much fervor. Every time Jonathan got a little closer to Eleazar, it seemed that more passels of soldiers interfered. Finally, Jonathan had a chance to steal a glance towards where his brother had been, but he was no longer there. His eyes briskly sweeping across the field, Jonathan sought his brother’s familiar frame. He eventually found him. His heart began thudding wildly in his chest when he realized what was happening: Eleazar was trying to take down the elephant.

Eleazar’s thin body was darting among the soldiers until it was close to the beast. Jonathan saw a glint of silver as Eleazar’s arm extended so that it was level with his chest; his sword struck the elephant upward into its belly. The animal cried out frantically, its shriek louder than the wails of Modein’s village when they had first heard about Jerusalem’s desecration. It started swaying crazily from side to side; the armor on its back seemed to be loosening. Jonathan stood dumbly watching his brother. He wanted to run to him, but he knew Eleazar was too far away to be helped.

Eleazar was running away from the elephant, but there was no clear path for him. All of the men near the now enraged animal were trying to rush from its fury. The elephant’s massive feet were rising up and crushing down, its long nose rising up in the air as it howled. Several of the men were not fast enough to get out of the way in time. As they were pounded to the earth, their screams and shrieks added to the pandemonium. The elephant was next to Eleazar now, its shoulders even with his head. It was getting closer and closer to Eleazar, who was trapped by the frantic, clamoring bodies of men trying to escape the animal’s anger. There was nowhere for him to go.
The beast rocked back and forth. The last soldier who had been on its back was shaken off, shifting the saddle as he fell so that it hung limply off the animal’s side. Though some of the men near the elephant had moved, Jonathan realized that there was no chance for Eleazar to reach a safe distance. The animal began toppling over the spot where Eleazar and a dozen other soldiers were helplessly stuck.

“No!” Jonathan wailed as the elephant fell.

He took off in a full sprint to reach his brother, oblivious to the battle around him. When he reached the elephant’s carcass, he found Eleazar lying on his stomach, his entire body from the chest downward pinned. His head was bleeding profusely; it had probably been struck by some other soldier’s armor in the fall. Although Eleazar’s eyes were still open, his breathing was shallow.

“Eleazar, can you hear me?” Jonathan demanded as he bent over his brother.

Eleazar’s eyes rolled up towards him, but he seemed to have no recognition of Jonathan. What should he do? He glanced at the elephant. There was no way to move the massive carcass off of Eleazar’s body. Unable to think further, Jonathan used both hands to grab at the only one of his brother’s arms that was free. He began pulling. His brother grunted faintly, and Jonathan stopped. Was he hurting him even more? The suddenly, Jonathan felt a blow to the back of his shoulder. He was being attacked.

Turning quickly, he barely had enough time to dodge the sword swinging at his neck. He had dropped his sword when he was trying to rescue Eleazar. Ducking several more times, he relied on his reflexes to stay alive until another Jew began attacking the assailant. As soon as the soldier turned slightly, Jonathan snatched his sword back up. He struck the soldier from the back, with quick slashes where the soldier’s arms connected to
his shoulders. The man yelled, no longer able to lift his sword. Jonathan’s fellow soldier finished the Seleucid off with relative ease.

Jonathan checked to ensure that there were no longer any enemies nearby and then kneeled down over his brother.

“Eleazar?” he called.

This time, his brother’s eyes did not look up at him. Instead, they gazed ahead, glassy and unblinking. Jonathan faintly remembered Modein, and a man being killed right before the revolt began. That man had a similar look on his face after death. Death? No. Not possible. He squatted next to Eleazar, and continued to speak to him while he checked to see if his brother’s body rose and fell with breath. Eleazar was motionless. Jonathan placed his hand on Eleazar’s back gingerly. No, his eyes had not been lying to him; Eleazar was not moving at all.

Even as Jonathan began to sob, he tried to determine what needed to be done. Should he try to get Eleazar’s body out so that he might have a proper burial? Pulling the body and carrying it to a safe location would mean he could not fight. He was one of the best-trained fighters in the army, due to his youth, strength, and experience. His men needed him. Would it not be a detriment for his men to see him flouting his responsibilities as a soldier? Putting forth so much effort over one body when so many others had died?

Jonathan glanced around. Through blurred vision, he saw many of his men running in one direction, away from the ranks of Seleucids.

“Retreat!” he heard several men calling out as they ran.
Retreat? How could he leave Eleazar’s body? As his fellow soldiers ran, Jonathan saw the Seleucid troops advancing further. If he stayed to lift Eleazar’s body and carry it, he would surely meet his end at the tip of an arrow or sword. Clenching his fists, he began running in the same direction as the men. When he settled into his stride, his once-tired legs suddenly felt tense and restless. He picked up his pace to a full sprint; he needed to leave this place, to get away from it as soon as he could. Eleazar’s death had been for nothing—he gave his life for a battle that was not even won.

The men were retreating towards Jerusalem. When Jonathan finally reached the place where the men were to camp for the night, he sought his brothers. After asking several men where his brother might be, he eventually found Judas, who was in a grove of trees away from the camp. When Jonathan approached him, his older brother looked up sulkily.

“I’m sure those barbarians are celebrating right now.”

Jonathan’s anger returned. “Stop brooding. There are more important things to worry about.”

Judas bristled. “Like what? We just lost several hundred, if not a thousand, of our men. They have far more troops and arms than we do, and our men’s morale will probably drop after the disaster today!”

Jonathan knew this was his way of pouting. Judas could not stand it if someone did not feel the full extent of his problems, regardless of how minor they might be.

Jonathan tried to keep his voice even: “In ‘the disaster of the battle today,’ our brother died.”
Judas sat up immediately, his mouth wide open. “Which one?”

“Eleazar.”

Judas’ mouth clamped shut. “How did it happen?”

“Last night, he was coughing up blood. Normally, he knows his strengths and weaknesses well and won’t fight when he knows he can’t. But, when I advised him not to fight today, he wouldn’t hear it. I think he knew he was dying and wanted to fight one last battle so he could die as a warrior. You should have seen him, Judas. I never thought he would have been able to fight so hard. I don’t know, something about the way that he acted out there made me think that he almost wanted to die. He was too reckless, not like the Eleazar we know.

“There was an elephant in overly elaborate armor. Maybe Eleazar thought the king or the commander was in it. He seemed determined to kill it. When I saw he was going after the elephant, I considered going after him, but I was too far away. Eleazer stabbed it in the stomach and tried to get away. There were too many men around it. Eleazar couldn’t get out. It pinned half of his body. I went over to him, and I think he was still alive then. I tried to pull him out, but I was attacked. When I looked back at him, he was already gone.”

Jonathan’s throat felt tight. If he continued speaking, he would begin to cry. So he stopped talking. After a moment, he looked at his brother. Judas sat there dumbly, a look of shock frozen upon his grimy face.

“We must honor him, Judas. He was more of a soldier today than all the rest of us. Because he did not fear it, he was willing to defy death in the way he fought. He took risks that I would not have dared.”
“You’re right. If all of us had fought like he did today, maybe we would not have needed to retreat.”

Perhaps because of how hopeless the situation seemed, Jonathan wanted to laugh. It was ridiculous to think they could have won, regardless of how hard they had fought. They had been terrifically outnumbered. But he was no longer angered by the fact that they had retreated. It would not have mattered if they had even won the battle. It would not have even mattered if Eleazar had survived the battle. If Eleazar had not fought today, the chances were great that he would have died in his tent that very night. Things were as they were. Jonathan was simply grateful that Eleazar had at least been able to die as a soldier and as a fighter.

“Let him be always be remembered as a hero,” he murmured to himself.
Part III

Chapter IV

Elasa, 161 B.C.E.

THY BEAUTY, O ISRAEL, UPON THY HIGH PLACES IS SLAIN! HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN!
HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN, AND THE WEAPONS OF WAR PERISHED!

—2 SAMUEL 1: 19, 27

After a night of intermittent sleep, Jonathan awoke suddenly. He sprang from the hard, cold ground and moved as quickly as he could, but could not make it to the edge of camp before he began retching. It took a great amount of sporadic heaving before his stomach finally felt emptied. When his gagging subsided and the silence of early morning returned, he heard shuffling nearby. One of the soldiers pivoted his body away from Jonathan and lifted the upper edge of his tunic so that it concealed his mouth and nose.

Jonathan knelt down, uprooted a handful of grass, and wiped his mouth. He began ambling back to his sleeping area. The sun was barely high enough for him to see the path to take among the lines of soldiers. When he returned, he straightened out his cloak, which had become terrifically mangled. After carefully placing one half of the cloak on the ground, he lay upon it and wrapped the other half around himself. He stretched out his
legs and tried to forget about the acrid, metallic taste that remained in his mouth and throat, but could not.

The sun was rising higher, though it was still not high enough for the rest of the men to wake. Jonathan stretched his arms behind his head and observed a few wisps of a cloud travelling aimlessly across the broad sky. As he watched, it felt as if a small mound of rocks appeared and then stolidly remained in his stomach. But he would surely not become ill again. How could he? There was nothing left to come up.

The small amount of clouds that were drifting in the sky were wispy, like the curls he used to watch rising from the Temple when he was a small boy. It would be a fine, clear day. But the uneasiness would not leave. The rocks in his stomach sat even more heavily, and the taste in his mouth was not diminishing. He knew he would not fall back to sleep before he would have to wake up for the day with the rest of the troops. He gave up on trying to go back to sleep and began to pray.

When the messenger came back with word that Bacchides’ forces were much closer than had been expected, the news spread throughout the camp quickly. But the fact that Bacchides greatly outnumbered the Jews in numbers nearly caused pandemonium. As Jonathan rushed across the camp to find Judas, he caught snippets of the troops’ conversations.

“Did you hear how many horsemen he had?”

“I heard he had about fifteen thousand!”

“Really? I heard there were more than twenty thousand.”

“They’ve got elephants, too!”
Jonathan glanced sharply at the man who had last spoken, and when their eyes met, the soldier lowered his eyes. Jonathan opened his mouth to speak, but then clamped it shut and continued walking. The bitter taste in his mouth, which had lessened after wine and breakfast, returned. A large group of men were standing near Judas’ tent. Their voices were raised, and they shouted over each other to be heard. Jonathan began squeezing through the crowd. About halfway through the swarm, the men must have recognized him: his name began to be called by several of them. They were still shouting, but now they were shouting questions to him. And they seemed to be angry. When Jonathan had reached the edge of the crowd, he turned to face the men and held up his arm for quiet.

The shouting turned into a clamor and then silence.

Jonathan tried to keep his voice even. “What is it?”

The men quietly looked at each other and then at Jonathan.

One of the men stepped forward.

“Sir, Bacchides has twenty thousand men coming to meet us in battle, and we have only three thousand men who can fight. We cannot win, and most of us will not live. Why should we fight today? If the enemy does not know we are here, we can turn back, build up our forces, and fight when we have a chance to win.”

“How far away are Bacchides’ forces?”

“So far away that by the time they came across our camp we would be far out of reach.”

Jonathan nodded slowly. Why weren’t the men addressing these issues with their leader? Was Judas in the tent?
“Where is the general? What has he said?”

“In his tent. He intends for us to fight.”

“I will speak to him.” Jonathan turned from the men and began to walk towards the tent.

“Sir?”

Jonathan half-turned and glanced in the direction of the voice. It was not one of the men who had spoken; it was a young man who could not be more than sixteen.

“When they heard the news, many of the men in my division left, some with just the clothes on their backs. We are not so cowardly as they, but we do know that we will surely die if we fight today.” He paused, as if he were unsure whether to continue speaking. Another soldier did not allow him the chance to decide and he piped in.

“Lead us back, and when we have more soldiers, we will follow you into battle. Your brother cannot expect us to follow him if he is willing for all of us to die. We have seen your capabilities. Become our general.”

Jonathan’s heart pounded fiercely. Why should they fight today? There was no chance of victory, and the few men they did have would be slaughtered. And Jonathan himself would probably die. After all of the years and the sacrifices put into winning freedom from the Seleucids, they should not be taking these kinds of risks. These men needed leadership. Real leadership. He would not fool himself, though: these men were leaving, whether he went with them or not. And if Jonathan went into Judas’ tent, he would come back out to a drastically diminished army.

A man in the group coughed, bringing Jonathan back to the present. How long had these men been waiting for him to say something? He wished he were as wise as
Solomon, so that he could say something compelling enough to make the men stay.

Instead, he cleared his throat.

“I will speak with Judas.”

He was already walking towards the tent when one man responded.

“May G-d be with you.”

Jonathan nodded and kept walking.

The brightness of the morning left dark spots in front of his eyes as he entered the dim tent. Jonathan stood still until his vision cleared and he could finally see his brother. Judas was seated with his sword in his lap, the sword he had taken from Apollonius after one of their first victories. He was fingering the lines and grooves of the sword’s hilt. He must have been unaware that Jonathan had entered, as he did not move or look up at him. Jonathan cleared his throat to announce himself.

“It’s a beautiful sword, isn’t it?” Judas said, continuing to look at his lap. He wrapped his rough, scarred fingers around the hilt.

“Indeed, but we have far more important things to disc—”

“A sword fit for a king or a great leader of men. Would you like to hold it?”

Why was he bothering with inconsequential things when a massive army was coming towards them?

“No. Really, Judas, we should be—”

“Just hold it for a minute. I want to see how you look with it.”

Jonathan shook his head, but did not say a word. Judas kept his head down and did not press the matter. Instead, he just shrugged his broad shoulders. When he finally looked back up at him, Judas’ eyes were cold.
“I heard the men speaking out there with you.”

Jonathan’s heart beat quickly.

“Did you?” The tent was suddenly very warm. Had he heard what the men had wanted?

“So, they wanted you as their leader, did they?”

He had heard.

Judas continued, his tone mocking. “They wanted to be rescued from me, a general who must be mad to lead such small numbers against so many enemies. They want your judgment and guidance to tell them when to fight, when it would finally be safe to meet the enemy.”

The fear churning in Jonathan’s stomach when Judas first began speaking had dissipated. The edge in Judas’ voice made Jonathan decide he would answer evenly; they would waste time if they did not get the dilemma resolved now. “They did. No one would fight this battle unless they had a death wish.

“The Seleucids will think we are weak if we retreat.”

“When we gather more forces to meet them, they will change their mind.”

“G-d has protected us in the past; He will do so again.”

“G-d does not protect outright stupidity.”

Judas’ jaw tightened. His eyes searched the tent, as if he would find a retort somewhere near him. Then, gazing past Jonathan, he said, “These men who are thinking about leaving will regret it when we win.”

“So now we get to the root of it.” Jonathan was unaware he had spoken out loud until his brother looked at him.
“What are you talking about?”

Jonathan planted his feet. “You know what I’m talking about. If you win this battle, you think it will prove that you’re the deliverer.”

Apollonius’ sword clanked hollowly on the ground as Judas jumped up.

“I never said such a thing!”

“You don’t have to. Your actions say it for you. I refuse to risk my life for your overdeveloped sense of pride.”

Jonathan started to leave the tent.

“Are you going to take the men?”

Jonathan faced Judas again. “I’m not going to betray you, brother. But I’m not going to die for your mistakes, either.”

The sun’s brightness was almost too much for Jonathan after the shade of the tent. Shielding his eyes from it, he walked past the group of soldiers. The men called out to him, asking what would happen, but Jonathan just continued walking until he was at the furthest edge of the camp. He sat on the ground far enough away to make out what was happening. Plucking a nearby twig and twisting it against itself, he squinted at the soldiers.

Men were rushing back and forth, packing up gear and strapping on weapons. A line of them were still leaving the camp in the direction of the hills, and Jonathan wondered if these deserters were the same men who had spoken to him. He watched as the men packed up and marched away. The area that had been the camp had grown quiet, only a few pieces of undeterminable things scattered around the grounds.
Jonathan forgot about time. The shadows from the sun travelled upon the ground. A strong breeze tugged at Jonathan’s tunic and beard. It brought with it the sounds of clanking weapons and battle cries. He covered his ears to block out the sounds, though he could not block out remembering the fear that always inundated him when going into battle against an enemy stronger and better equipped than they. But this battle would be far worse for the troops than any he had faced himself.

He crunched the twig in his hands and tossed it aside. How dare Judas risk all of the men’s lives like this? For a moment, a very brief moment, Jonathan wished Judas would fall in battle. It would be unfair for him to live when he was responsible for the death of so many. Immediately, guilt gnawed at Jonathan’s stomach. But why did Judas have to be so self-glorifying? Mattathias would surely have been ashamed to see what his son had become. None of his other children had turned out so badly.

Jonathan sat up with a start. John. Simon. Had they gone into the battle with Judas? They would not have deserted their brother, even if they disagreed with him. Jonathan had not remembered seeing them amongst all the men in the camp, but surely they must have gone with Judas and the soldiers. Jonathan jumped up. He could not let them die in battle. One more man added to the fray would not do much, but it might do a little.

Sprinting, he passed through the camp, quickly looking for a weapon among the objects strewn on the ground. Foolish. Of course the soldiers would need all the weapons they had. He continued running. Maybe he could find one if he encountered a corpse in the field. He forced himself to stop and catch his breath when he heard the rumble of battle. He could not be breathless when he began fighting. *Rest for a second, be strong*
for the battle, he told himself. Rest, be strong. Rest—no, he could not force himself to stay still. He had to help his brothers.

He nearly stopped when he saw the Seleucid army. Their breadth was massive next to the Jewish army. Like a sea overtaking a stream. The thin line of Jews seemed to be holding them off well. The fight had moved inward, leaving a long line of dead bodies on the edge of the field. Perfect for finding a weapon. Jonathan ran over them as accurately as possible, but still stepped on a few. A voice grunted when Jonathan stepped on a body. Jonathan winced in sympathy for the injured man, but did not stop. After scouring the gory group with his eyes, he finally found a sword that seemed to be acceptable. He pried it from the corpse’s hands. Good weight. He swung it once, twice. It seemed to be made of strong metal. Jonathan dashed into the battle.

It was not hard to find a gap among his men to plug up with his body and sword. After killing no more than two men, he heard one of his men call out the name “Judas.” He tried to look around to see if it was his brother that had been called every time there was not a Seleucid running at him. Finally, he saw Judas’ tall body close by, fending off a particularly angry soldier. He gritted his teeth and kept fighting.

It was not long before the Seleucids began closing in on them. Jonathan found himself right next to Judas. He fought even harder so that he could clear more space between the two of them. He was cutting himself a path to move farther away when he heard a loud grunt. He knew instinctively it was his brother.

Spinning around so quickly that he almost lost his footing, he saw Judas standing, feet apart, his mouth agape. His hands were over his stomach. Blood was rushing out between his fingers. A Seleucid with a bloody sword was standing across from him. The
enemy was grinning. Both of his hands were holding the hilt of the sword high into the air, and the blade was coming down slowly, very slowly towards Judas. He was taunting Judas. Jonathan ran at the man with his sword, knocking him off of his feet and onto the ground. The soldier did not even have time enough to raise his sword in defense before Jonathan struck at his throat.

He extracted the sword and looked back at where his brother had been standing. Judas had fallen to the ground. Jonathan crawled over to him. He lay down next to him and sprawled out his body to look as if he had been injured or killed in the battle. Jonathan glanced at his brother’s stomach; his hands were still covering the wound. He lifted Judas’ head to face him. Judas’ eyes seemed to brighten a bit, as if he recognized his brother, but, even then, they were more dull than usual.

“I’m here,” Jonathan tried to smile at him. Why had he ever wished that Judas would be killed?

“It’s bad, isn’t it?” his brother said.

“Maybe not. If we can get you to camp quickly, you might be all right.”

Judas laughed and then choked a little. “With all this going on? I’m not going back to camp.”

Jonathan could only grimace in reply.

“Are you in a lot of pain?”

“I can’t breathe.”

Jonathan tried to lift Judas up a little, but he groaned so much that Jonathan stopped. He lay back down on the ground and looked again at Judas’ wound. The movement had caused fresh blood to ooze between Judas’ fingers. Nausea began
churning in Jonathan’s stomach. He lay there, unsure of what to do, when suddenly his brother spoke.

“Jonathan, forgive me.”

Jonathan looked sharply at his brother, careful not to sit up and draw attention. Judas’ brown eyes had gotten even duller, but they were earnest. They reminded Jonathan of their father’s, especially after his sickness. “Don’t waste your breath.” Jonathan said.

“There’s nothing to forgive.”

“But—”

Jonathan shushed him. Neither of them said anything. The din of battle droned on above them.

After a moment, Judas whispered. His breathing was shallow, and each word seemed burdensome to speak. “Jonathan?”

“I’m here.”

Jonathan crept closer to him, positioning himself so that his ear was next to Judas’ mouth.

“Finish this.”

The battle? Jonathan glanced at Judas’ eyes. Fervor shone from them. He meant the revolt.

Jonathan clenched his jaw. If their leader was dead, the Jewish people might stop fighting. But that was not what his brother needed to hear. He leaned in close to Judas’ ear and said, “Our people will be free.”
The lines in Judas’ forehead relaxed. He closed his eyes and nodded his head slowly. Jonathan watched Judas’ chest, trying to measure how deep his breaths were. His breathing got more and more shallow.

And then it stopped.

Jonathan let out a long sigh. He lay there for a moment, staring at his brother, marking his face so that he would never forget it. Tears blurred his vision just once. He wiped them away with the back of his hand. No more tears followed them. His whole body felt limp, too loose to strike with the quickness necessary in battle. He allowed himself to wait a few more moments. Then, he felt around the ground near his body for his sword. Pulling it to himself, he carefully got up.

He marked where Judas’ body was, one corpse in a sea of many. The men would come back to collect it after battle for proper burial; he would be mourned by the Jewish people. The rest of the men would not be treated so kindly; women might shed tears for them, but their bones would probably rot in the sun.

Jonathan walked towards the battle. As he neared it, he forced himself to pick up speed and run into the fray.
Part III

Chapter V

Modein, 160 B.C.E.

The Jews had to flee from battle, they were so overcome by the enemy. Simon and Jonathan made a dangerous trek into the Seleucid camp to arrange a treaty allowing them to obtain Judas’ body. When they had procured it, they took it back to Modein for burial. His body was placed next to his father, Mattahias, and his brother Eleazar. The nation lamented his death for months. Evildoers took advantage of the respite and began stirring up trouble in various parts of Judea. Bacchides, the Seleucid general, put faithless men in charge; these men persecuted and killed many of those who had assisted Judas and his brothers in their task. Without their leader, the Jewish people stopped fighting. A famine swept over the land, gobbling up the fertility of the fields.

After a meager dinner at home, Jonathan took a lamp up to the rooftop, leaving behind the laughter and chatter of Ruhamah, Leah, and her children. He set the lamp down and stood near the edge of the roof. He tightened his belt, hoping that the pressure against his stomach would make him feel full. When he was done, he clasped his hands behind his back. Most of those in Modein had already settled in for the evening. The moon must have begun rising when Jonathan was inside. It shyly made its way from the
horizon upward. He glanced at the stars freckling the sky. How many times had he tried to count them as a child? He contemplated doing so now, but knew it was impossible. There were far too many. How surprising that they were hidden during the day, overloaded by the brightness of the sun, yet appeared again each night, unscathed and resilient.

All of a sudden, something was pulling Jonathan’s tunic. He looked down to see Miriam, Leah’s youngest daughter, her huge eyes fixed on him.

“Uncle Jonathan, what are you doing?”

“Watching the sky. Have you ever tried to count the stars?”

She giggled. “There are too many!”

“You’re too young to give up so easily. Here, I’ll help you.”

He scooped her up and shifted her over to his other side so that he could use one of his hands to point. They had only counted seven stars before Miriam’s older brother and sister joined them. Ruhamah and Leah appeared shortly thereafter. Ruhamah had grown quieter since the death of her husband and two sons, her vivacity replaced by gentleness. Leah had been quiet for a long time and had only recently begun to brighten when a farmer from a nearby village had begun to take an interest in her. They were to be married soon.

The women arranged the cushions on the ground for Jonathan and the children to sit. Jonathan pulled out the parchment scroll, the very one his father used to read from.

“What are we reading tonight?” Miriam asked.

“One of my favorite stories.” Jonathan carefully found his place and began to read:
“And HaShem said unto Samuel: ‘How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill thy horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite; for I have provided Me a king among his sons.’ And Samuel said: ‘How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me.’ And HaShem said: ‘Take a heifer with thee, and say: I am come to sacrifice to HaShem. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will tell thee what thou shalt do; and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee.’ And Samuel did that which HaShem spoke, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said: ‘Comest thou peaceably?’ And he said: ‘Peaceably; I am come to sacrifice unto HaShem; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.’ And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he beheld Eliab, and said: ‘Surely HaShem’s anointed is before Him.’ But HaShem said unto Samuel: ‘Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him; for it is not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but HaShem looketh on the heart.’”

Jonathan glanced at the children to see if they were attentive. All three of them had their heads rested on their hands, their elbows propped on their knees. He continued.

He had not gotten much further when he heard a rumble. Jonathan had been waiting for so long for the famine to end. Would it finally be over? At nearly the same time, they all looked at the sky. There were no clouds, either drifting or swirling. The only other rumble Jonathan heard like that was . . . he jumped up and ran to the edge of the roof, scouring the borders of the village with his eyes. Indeed, not far away, a dark
cloud roamed over the ground. It was a group of men. Seleucids? Jews? Jews who sided with the Seleucids?

“Hide on the stairs,” Jonathan barked to his mother, Leah, and the children.

Almost as soon as they had disappeared from the rooftop, lamps began to shine in several of the houses. Men appeared in the doorframes.

“John! Simon!”

Jonathan yelled out from the rooftop, cupping his mouth with his hands.

Both of their heads came from nearby houses.

“What is it?” Simon yelled up to him.

“There are men coming to Modein.”

Simon disappeared. When he came back, he was equipped with weapons of various kinds. Jonathan kept his eyes peeled on the dark cloud. It was getting closer.

Several of the men must have heard Jonathan and Simon’s exchange, because they, too, came out into the streets with swords and shields. Women brought the lamps to the doorframe, but none of them came into the street. Jonathan almost told them to go inside and snuff them out, but bit his tongue. Why cause panic?

The cloud was nearly to the edge of the town. The men were hidden in alleyways and in the shadows of the buildings, ready. Jonathan squinted as much as he could to see the men approaching. There was no glint of armor or weapons in the moonlight. They were not Seleucids. They were either their own or Jews who sided with the enemy. At any rate, they were not fully armed.

The strangers had stopped at the first building. One of the men from Modein stood in front of them, and Jonathan could hear the murmur of conversation. The men
spoke for several minutes. Then, the villager began walking down the street. Where was he going? He came closer and closer to the houses nearby. Finally, he stopped right in front of Mattathias’ house and called up to Jonathan.

“These men are looking for you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, I made sure they weren’t traitors. I recognized several of them from before . . . from our last battle.”

The man dropped his head. The battle no one wanted to speak of because it caused the death of Judas. Jonathan ran past the women and children in the stairs and out into the street. The townspeople had apparently realized there was no need for fear; they had relit the lamps. With the streets so illuminated, Jonathan could clearly see the faces of the strangers.

Many of them were recognizable. Zechariah had been with the men since the beginning battle. Isaac had joined them in Jerusalem. Reuben was one of the strongest fighters Jonathan had ever seen in battle. They smiled at him. So did many of the others.

Zechariah walked towards Jonathan and embraced him. After returning the gesture, Jonathan asked, “Were you looking for me?”

“Yes, we have come from many villages and cities. Many of us here,” the man gestured back to the men, “have fought with you and your brothers. Since your brother’s death, no one has led us, and the enemy has been undoing everything that has been done. We need someone to lead us, someone proven in battle, zealous for honor and the commandments of our peoples. Now, therefore, we have chosen you today to take Judas’
place as our ruler and leader, to fight our battle. Jonathan, son of Mattathias, will you lead us from this day forth?"

Jonathan felt as if he would stagger back with the weight of what the men were asking of him, but he stood his ground. All of his life, there was an image he dreamed about as his future: he was performing his duties as a priest in the Temple. He had walked past the altars containing the animal sacrifices, and the scent of their smoking bodies filled his lungs. He imagined the closeness he would feel to G-d.—the same scent that wafted into G-d’s senses was filling his own. Jonathan the priest cleaned off the bloody knives that had been used on the animals. As he cleaned off the blood in the pungent room, he was doing what he was created to do: as a priest, as a Levite, as a Jew.

The image of his future began to quiver, undulate, and evolve. No longer was he in the Temple. He was on a field after a fray, cleaning his sword from the blood of his enemies, the corpses of both Jews and the Seleucids surrounding him. Messengers came to him, telling him the name of yet another village the Seleucids were terrorizing. He gathered the men together and, without rest from the battle, they moved forward to protect their people from the tyranny of the enemy. As his feet beat out the rhythm of another journey, he was doing what he was created to do: as his father’s son, as a man living during those dark times, as a Jew.

Silence reigned in the streets of Modein for a moment. Then, Jonathan opened his mouth to speak.
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