

YUVAL CHAIKIN

**THE DEPOSED KING
WHO WROTE THE
BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES**



The Deterioration of the Status of the Priests in Judaism

Explanation of the cover image:

King Antiochus IV, who deposed the high priest in Jerusalem, declared that he was a god and demanded that everyone around him treat him as such

Table of Contents

Preface	4
The Sons of Simeon-II (“the Righteous”)	7
The Words of Onias-III	15
Some comments to the words of Onias-III:	40
Simeon the Righteous' last resting place	41
The fulfilling of Onias-III's prophecy	44
The Hasmoneans	48
The beginning of Judaism	55
The Oral Torah	55
The status of the priests in Rabbinic Judaism	67
Epilogue	70

Preface

From the opening of the book of Ecclesiastes "*The words of Qoheleth the son of David king in Jerusalem*" it is accepted among Bible readers that the book was written by King Solomon son of King David. However, there is no extra-biblical evidence of the existence at any time of King Solomon, so it is difficult to accept that he was the one who wrote Ecclesiastes. "*I, Qoheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem*". A king is appointed for life. Kingship is terminated only through death or deposition. According to the biblical text Solomon was neither deposed nor did he resign. From the word "*was*" in past tense it can be understood that Ecclesiastes was written by the king of Jerusalem after he was deposed. The Bible tells about several kings of Jerusalem who were ousted from their post by a foreign conqueror: Jehoahaz son of Josiah who was taken to Egypt by Pharaoh Neku, Jehoyachin son of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah son of Josiah were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. However, while those three kings were active at a time of war, siege and poverty, the author of Ecclesiastes speaks about riches and prosperity that Jerusalem attained in his time: "*I built me houses, I planted me vineyards, I made me gardens and parks and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit. I made me pools of water to water the wood springing up with trees. I acquired men-servants and maid-servants and had servants born in my house. Also I had great possessions of herds and flocks above all that were before me in Jerusalem. I*

gathered me also silver and gold and treasure such as kings and the provinces have as their own. I got me men-singers and women-singers and the delights of the sons of men and so on and so forth. So I did great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem" (Ecclesiastes, Ch. 2). Then who is, therefore, that king of Israel in Jerusalem who was dethroned and found enough time to write about the glorious days of Jerusalem as well as to inlay them with words of wisdom?

The title "**King**" is given to the person of highest authority. There were times in which the high priest in the temple of Jerusalem matched this description. According to the title he had given to himself ("*I, Qoheleth*", [*The Gatherer*]), his role was to gather the people. The correct candidate for this role is the High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple. During the time of the Second Temple the position of high priest was bestowed for life. The last in this chain is Simeon-II ("the Righteous") who died in service; his successor, Onias-III, was deposed from the priesthood (by Antiochus-IV, "Epiphanes" who is mentioned as the prime cause that led to adding Hanukkah to the Jewish festivals) and is therefore the most fitting to be *the deposed gatherer*. The book of Ecclesiastes reveals more historical clues, such as "*Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning, since he emerged from the House of Syrians to be king, but in his kingship*

he, too, is bound to lose" (Chapter 12, verses 13-14). Onias-III went to Syria to discuss the status of the Jerusalem Temple with Antiochus. Antiochus found in it an opportunity to demand ransom for the most important person in Jerusalem. Onias-III's brother traveled to Syria with the requested ransom, but Antiochus preferred to see the huge sum of money as a bribe intended for another purpose; he continued to hold Onias-III in Syria and appointed his younger brother as the High Priest in Jerusalem. All translations and commentaries relate to "*the House of Syrians*" as a typo and refer to it as "*the prison*" [*beit ha**a**surim* – בית הַסוּרִים]. However, according to historical records, Onias-III's younger brother was accepted by Antiochus in Syria, received the prestigious nomination ("*emerged from the House of Syrians to be king*"), but shortly after that he, too, was ousted and was forced to flee to a far away country ("*but in his kingship he, too, is bound to lose*").

Already in his good days in Jerusalem, Onias-III received an invitation from King *Ptolemy* to build a temple in Egypt to the god Ra that would resemble the temple in Jerusalem. Ptolemy had promised him protection from the king of Syria; with this promise he traveled to Syria to confront Antiochus; he was captured in Syria and Ptolemy did not keep his word. About that Ecclesiastes says: "*When you make a vow unto God, do not defer to pay it; for He has no pleasure in those who worship the god of death Ausir; pay that which you vow.*"

Better not to vow than vow and not pay. Let not your mouth bring your flesh into guilt and do not say to the messenger that it has been an error; why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of thy hands" (Chapter V, verses 3-5).

In Jerusalem the Hasmoneans took control of the temple and decided not to return the priesthood to the descendants of Simeon the Righteous. Onias-III was forced to accept the invitation of King Ptolemy and imposed on his son, Onias-IV, to carry out this deed; but he warned him not to make the mistake of himself adopting the belief in the Sun-God. Most of the book of Ecclesiastes is dedicated to that warning. "*℞*" is the name of the Sun-God, but the word "*℞*" in Hebrew means "*bad*" or "*evil*"; and indeed, all references to the sun (except one) have a bad connotation. In contrast, all the references to Heaven throughout the entire book (except one) have a good connotation.

Although Onias opposed the Hellenistic mindset of unification of faiths, in order to encourage his son, Onias IV, who was open to this mindset, he found himself committing to unification of faiths. However, he warned his son not to abandon the correct belief in God.

The Sons of Simeon-II ("the Righteous")

The Bible uses the words "*Nassi*" ("*Nassu*" in Egyptian) and "*melekh*" to define a supreme leader – *a king*. As opposed to the biblical *nassi*, who deals only with secular matters, the biblical *melekh* also deals

with religious affairs. For instance, *the melekh* determines the state religion and appoints priests of his preference. The root of the word "*melekh*" (*m.l.k*) is close to the root of the Hebrew word for law, "*halakha*" (*h.l.k*), and it follows that "*melekh*" means "*introducer of the law*". The title "*melekh*" in the Bible is also given to high priests (see "*Melkhizadok melekh (king) of Salem priest of God the Most High*", Gen. 14, 18; *Araunah the Jebusite, who sold David the piece of land destined for the temple, is also titled "melekh" [the piece of land is presented as a threshing-floor, but from the description it is clear that it had been used as a temple before the transaction took place and therefore its owner was a priest], 11 Samuel, 24, 22-23*).

Simeon the Righteous, the last priest who knew Ezra the Scribe, was a high priest. Folk legends ascribe to him magical abilities – hence his nickname "*The Righteous*". In his time, following a regulation within the corrupt priestly measures, the high priesthood was inherited from father to son and was granted for life. Simeon's successor was *Onias-III (Honio the Third)*. There was a dispute between Onias and his brother Jeshua. Onias was conservative and he tried to block the merger of the ritual of God with the rituals of other gods (syncretism), a component of the Hellenistic approach, while his brother sided with modernism, enlightenment and cooperation with the ruling culture. The Land of Canaan, of which Judea was a part, was located between two superpowers – Syria in

the North and Egypt in the South – that often fought with each other. The leaders of the Jewish population were often forced to manoeuvre between the two sides, to pledge loyalty and pay taxes to this side or the other. In the times of Onias-III a new king ascended the throne in Syria. His name was *Antiochus-IV*, but he demanded that everyone call him "*Epiphanes*", claiming to be the revelation and the representative upon earth of Zeus the head of gods. He wished to introduce, among others, a yearly calendar based on the phases of the moon. This in itself does not make a significant difference, but he used his godly pretensions to impose the lunar calendar also upon the religious rituals, to which the priests of the temple in Jerusalem were opposed because for many years up to that moment the ritual in the temple in Jerusalem was based upon the solar calendar. This demand, as well as other petty demands, forced Onias to travel to Antiochus in Syria to negotiate terms of cooperation. *Ptolemy*, king of Egypt, promised Onias his support, a promise he trusted but eventually was not kept. Epiphanes locked him up with various pretexts, aiming to squeeze a huge sum of money from the temple. Jeshua, who substituted for his absent brother, agreed to pay the ransom. He travelled personally to Syria with the ransom and gained Antiochus' high esteem, who on that occasion appointed him high priest in Jerusalem instead of his brother. Onias realised that the peace, so essential for the work in the temple and retention of unity within the Jewish people, has ended. He saw Jerusalem becoming

Hellenistic and forecast severe changes in the city. He understood that staying in Jerusalem is not going to help him or anyone else and agreed to his brother's nomination in order to keep peace in Jerusalem. Although the temple was destroyed *de facto* only some two hundred and fifty years later, in his eyes it was already destroyed in his own time. He vacated his seat in Jerusalem in favour of his brother who was more adaptive towards the new mindset. The king of Egypt invited him to establish a temple in his country for a religion that united the belief in God with the belief in the Sun-God. Onias did not want to accept this invitation, because he had learned not to trust Ptolemy and because he was opposed to the Hellenistic mode of merging beliefs; but in his current condition he was unable to refuse. His son, *Onias-IV*, was in fact inclined to accept the invitation, which also included a promise of a match with the beautiful daughter of the high priest of one of the most important temples of Egypt. He took upon himself to establish a temple for the Sun-God in Egypt, despite his father's opposition who tried to dissuade him from doing so but was forced to cooperate with him.

An offence to a priest is a direct offence to the God he represents, which means that the God is no longer a living God. But even after the death of the God the people are still looking for a preacher and the priest still needs a flock to herd. Exhausted, depressed and frustrated Onias found himself establishing, against his will, a unified cult of God and the Sun-God. The ways of the creator are

mysterious, and the priest who was so opposed to idolatry took upon himself to lead a community of idolaters. He fought in two battlefields: the first, to unite believers of various gods under one god, and choosing the Sun-God was an easy choice because the only worship he knew was based on times that were determined by the sun. The second was to inherit to his sons the awareness that even this *chosen* God is not the *true* god. In the ears of his heir, Onias-IV, he expressed his discontent to the merging of rituals and his concern that his progeny, unable to tell the difference, will opt to worship the wrong god. The son wrote down his father's words, but for reasons of political correctness he dropped the specific names of people and gods and referred to them only by subtle hints. For example, the sun is mentioned many times in connection to evil, but the hidden meaning is the Sun-God whose name is "Ra" – a Hebrew word which means "evil", while heaven is mentioned in good contexts and is connected to God.

The following table compares each of the verses 4 to 10 in the 2nd chapter of Ecclesiastes, the biography of Onias-III:

Ecclesiastes	Onias-III
<i>I built me houses, I planted me vineyards</i>	I built schools and appointed excellent teachers
<i>I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of</i>	I taught living wisdom to learners in all walks of the

Ecclesiastes	Onias-III
<i>all kinds of fruit</i>	community
<i>I made me pools of water, to water the wood springing up with trees</i>	I produced many scholars
<i>I acquired men-servants and maid-servants, and had servants born in my house</i>	And not only Judeans, but people from other nations came.
<i>also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in Jerusalem</i>	I brought more worshippers to the temple than did the priests who preceded me in Jerusalem
<i>I gathered me also silver and gold, and merits of kings and countries</i>	Sages from all over the world came to buy wisdom in the temple of Jerusalem
<i>I got me governors and governesses, and the delights of human in one field as well as in many fields</i>	I gave glory to the temple and its surroundings
<i>So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem</i>	I fortified the walls of Jerusalem and strengthened its status more than ever before my

Ecclesiastes	Onias-III
	time
<i>also my wisdom assisted me</i>	I did everything skilfully and diligently
<i>And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them</i>	I was always open to learn every innovation
<i>I withheld not my heart from any joy,</i>	I never withheld my heart from holy practice. I worshipped God with integrity and served faithfully all who came in my gates

The words were said in Hebrew, as Onias opposed Hellenism, but were put in writing in the prevailing language of that time – *Greek*.

With the passing years, the papyrus wore out and shred into small pieces. While gluing the pieces together, the order of many sentences was disrupted and some of the words were erased. After his father's death, the son went over the text and translated it back into Hebrew, because he found that the words fit *inclusion in the Holy Scriptures*. The absence of some of the words and changing the order of some sentences, as well as incorrect translation of some words, resulted in an inarticulate, perplexed composition in Hebrew (e.g., the conjunction "*and*" in Greek is "*kai*" and in the reverse translation it became "*ki*", which is commonly used in describing

causes or reasons. "*Ksil*" is the Hebrew name for the star constellation *Orion, the Hunter* which was worshipped in Egypt as one of the important gods *Ausir, god of afterlife, but during the Hellenistic era was also identified with the god of fertility*. The word "*ksil*" is widely mentioned, in his words, in derision, and because of its resemblance to the word "*sakhal*" [*fool*], it became synonymous in the Hebrew language. Verses that were taken from the present version of the text and became idioms were not written as such originally; for example, "*Cast your bread on the surface of the water because most days you will find it*" was written originally "*When you cast your bread [livelihood] upon the sea, hoping to retrieve it after many days, you spread your investment into seven or eight parts, for you do not know what calamity shall fall upon earth*" (similar to "*do not put all your eggs in one basket*").

Since the distinction between the sun and the heaven is blurred, it is not easy to see that Onias is rising against idolatry and defending the good belief. Therefore, the words might be interpreted as if the acts of God lack reason and justice or a sharp self-criticism toward the wickedness of man. In spite of that, they were included in the closed codex of the Bible, mainly because they were written on a special parchment which carried the seal of the priests of the house of *Zadok* and are known today as *the book (or scroll) of Ecclesiastes*.

Following is a possible version of the original words in a correct order with no omissions:

The Words of Onias-III

*The Lord has sworn and will not repent:
Thou art a priest forever,
upon My word My king Zadok
(Psalms, CX, 4).*

Belief in idols is futile, said the high priest, futile beliefs are all useless and a waste of time. There is no profit for man in all his labour wherein he labours under the Sun-God. One generation passes, and another generation comes and humankind never learns. Wisdom to the gods is attributed to simple cyclical motions. Such is the sun disc that is worshipped in Egypt, which rises and sets daily in steady cycles from East to West and yearly from North to South; or the wind which mariners worship in seaways among the islands of Greece, that blows to and fro aimlessly; or the rivers that are admired in Syria, that go to the sea and never fill it; or life that leads to death and death is never satisfied, like countless phenomena on the face of Earth that are worshipped and admired in every

country, only because the human vocabulary has not enough words to describe them, and the eye is unable to see all, and the ear shall not understand. But only what has been spoken in heaven is what shall occur on earth, and only that which has been decided above is what shall be done below. And in worshipping the "greatest of them all", the Sun-God, there is neither innovation nor good news. If someone thinks that he found something new - such have already occurred from time immemorial. Human memory is short. And like the first generations, the last that are still to come shall remember nothing nor learn a lesson.

I was the high priest, a king, an omnipotent autocrat, in Jerusalem and in the entire land of Israel. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out wisely all things that are done under the divine heaven. I found out that worshipping Ra the Sun-God is an evil pursuit that the Lord gave to mankind to dwell on (the Hebrew word "ra" means evil). I gave my word to the king of Egypt to erect a temple in his land in which people shall worship the Sun-God, and in return he promised me support and protection. I saw all the deeds done under the Sun-God, and behold, they are all empty words, crooked beyond repair with numerous defects, that those who seek to realise them shall chase the wind. I spoke with my own heart, saying: I have increased great wisdom, more so than all those who ruled before me over Jerusalem and my heart has had great experience of wisdom

and knowledge. And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know rationalism and folly [Greek philosophy and hedonism], and I perceived that this also was herding the wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow ["It is but sorrow to be wise when wisdom profits not", says Tiresias to Oedipus in Sophocles' 428 BC play].

I said in my heart [namely, silently so that none shall hear] "Come now I will offer libation with mirth and see but pleasance and, behold, this too is useless. I said that laughter [art of comedy] is praised and that mirth [sense of humour] is a virtue. I searched in my heart how to accept the offerings of the gentiles, blending my flesh with wine, and at the same time to act wisely as a priest for the Jews, to hold on to folly until I see the best way in which human beings can worship the Divine Presence during their entire short life. I did great things and widened the horizons of Jerusalem. I added to all that was before me. In my days the splendour of Jerusalem reached its peak. I built schools and appointed excellent teachers. I taught living wisdom to learners in all walks of the community. I produced many scholars. And not only Jews, but people from other nations came, more than any before me in Jerusalem. I brought more worshipers to the temple than the priests who preceded me. Sages from all over the world came to buy wisdom in the temple of

Jerusalem. I gave glory to the temple and its surroundings. I fortified the walls of Jerusalem and strengthened its status more than ever before my time. I did everything skilfully and diligently. I was always open to learn every innovation and I never withheld my heart from the joy of learning; I found joy in whatever I did and this was my reward.

And after having been deprived of my status I directed myself with all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do, and offered these also to the king of Egypt; and behold, all are but empty words and herding the wind, and there is no profit in the kingdom under the Sun-God. And I turned to see if there is wisdom in the temples of Egypt, and found only debauchery and folly; and this is also what the man who comes to be the king [the high priest] after me would find. There is no room under one roof for both the Divine Presence and idols. And I realised that there is advantage in fearing the Divine Presence over the worship of idols, like the advantage of light over darkness. However, the wise man who fears the Divine Presence and his eyes are in his head and the fool who worships idols and walks in the dark – I know that all share one fate. Then said I in my heart that the fate of the idolaters can also be mine, and there is no further value to my wisdom if I dwell with fools. And I also understand that wisdom in the ears of fools is lacking content and the fool shall never walk wisely in the

path of the wise man, and in the passage of generations the faith of the wise man shall be forgotten and his seed will convert to worship one of the idols. And I loathe this idolatry and I detest the work done under the Sun-God whose name is Ra [evil], and all is but empty promises, deceit and fantasy. And I fear for the fate of my entire work that I perform under the Sun-God which I shall bestow upon my succeeding priest. For who knows? Will he know how to maintain the fear of the Divine Presence within the ritual clutter or shall he make his flock stray to idolatry inside the temple which I erected under the Sun-God, and thus my entire work shall be wasted and my wisdom shall be discarded like an empty shell. And I turned my heart to despair for all the toil I had laboured in the shadow of the Sun-God, for this too is devoid of meaning and only conceals a great wrong. For what has a priest left from all his labour and the striving of his heart wherein he labours for the Sun-God; for all his days are pain and his occupation is a vexation. Even at night, when the sun is hidden, his heart takes no rest; and, yeah, this also is futile and time wasting. Such a priest finds no pleasure even in eating and drinking and his soul would certainly not find enjoyment in his work. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God, for who shall eat and who shall feel but me, that I myself have lived in both worlds. To a favoured priest the God gives a flock of people who come to him in wisdom and in the happiness of knowledge. And to the sinner He

offers hard labour to gather and convene the people to fulfil the obligation to come before the God – this too is useless and herding the wind.

To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

The priest of the god of fertility tells the time to be born and the time to die.

The priest of the god of forests tells the time to plant and the time to uproot that which is planted.

The priest of the god of medicine tells the time to kill and the time to heal.

The priest of the god of masonry tells the time to break down and the time to build up.

The priest of the god of the wine tells the time to weep and the time to laugh.

The priestesses of the muses tell when to mourn and when to dance.

The priest of the god of commerce tells when to scatter gems and when to gather gems.

The priestess of the goddess of love tells when to embrace and when to refrain from embracing.

The priest of the god of property tells when to keep and when to cast away.

The priest of the god of crafts tells when to rend and when to sew.

The priest of the god of wisdom tells when to keep silent and when to speak.

The priest of the god of revenge tells when to love and when to hate.

The priest to the Sun-God tells the time for war and the time for peace.

But only the priest of the god of the Divine Presence alone knows the right time for every thing and every purpose, while all the other gods, of whom only a few of those mentioned above, are subservient to Him.

What advantage does the worshipper of God have in his labour? I have seen the good pursuit which God has given mankind to dwell on. He did everything well-timed, perfectly and wonderfully. He has also placed the world in their heart and they find no fault in any of God's deeds from beginning to end. I know that they are all aimed at making man happy and thus direct him to do only good in his life. And also, that whatever man eats and drinks and being content with his lot – is all God's endowment. I know that whatever God does shall be forever perfect; nothing can be added to it and nothing can

be taken from it, and that God also planted in the heart of man the fear of Him – and this is appropriate. That which is has already been and what is to be is already now and God knows everything. I have also seen iniquity under the Sun-God Ra; there is wickedness in the place of justice and in the place of righteousness there is evil. I say in my heart [only to myself, not aloud]: only God will judge justly the righteous and the wicked, because only He knows everything in its time and every act performed in His name. I say in my heart about those who declare themselves as being sons of gods, I see that they and the beasts are all alike and that the case of Antiochus is the case of the beast; they share this attribute: as the one dies, so dies the other and all share one spirit; so that man has no supremacy over the beast, and that any such thought is but absolute heresy. All go unto one place. All are of dust and all return to dust. Who can tell for certain that the spirit of man is the one that goes upward to heaven and the spirit of the beast is the one that goes downward into the earth? And from this I also deduce that there is nothing better for man than to rejoice in his work during his life, as this is his portion and there is no one who can lead him to see what shall be his lot after his death.

And I return and see all the oppression done in the name of the Sun-God, and behold the eyes of the oppressed are full of tears. They

have no saviour from the powerful hand of their oppressors and find no comfort in idolatry. And I praise the dead priests who are gone - the dynasty of priests up to Simeon the Righteous who worked only for the Lord of the Divine Presence - unlike us, the still living, who are forced to work for Ra [bad], and better still, more than both [the living and the dead], I praise the one who has not yet been born, who in his time will not see the atrocities done in the name of Ra [bad] the transitory Sun-God. And I see that all labour and all skill derive from man's jealousy of his neighbour, and therefore this is Ra [word game: Sun-God and evil] from its foundation and there is no benefit in it but chasing the wind. The fool who worships idols does nothing but eating the flesh of his own body. Better a handful of peace in working for the Divine Presence, than both hands full of labour and herding the wind. And I return to see that all is meaningless under the Sun-God. There is only one God who dwells in the heaven and no other. Not even a son or a brother has He. There is neither end to all his labour, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. And for whom then do I labour and deprive my soul of pleasure – this too is wasting time for evil [Ra, Sun-God] and a bad pursuit it is. But, nevertheless, the two [unification of the belief in the God of Heaven and the Sun-God] are better than the one, as they benefit in their labour. If they fall, the one will lift up the other; but the one who falls has not another to lift him up. [I fell in (taken into) the Assyrian captivity and my

brother filled in for me]. *Also, if two lie together, they give warmth to each other but how can one get warmth alone? The eternal flame will not be extinguished in the temple of the Divine Presence. And if one prevails over them, the two shall resist him; and the three-ply thread [dynasty of the priests of the house of Zadok] shall not be easily broken. Better a humble but wise youth than a king [high priest] who is old and foolish, who has forgotten to be cautious [as happened in the Syrian kingdom where I, the old high priest, was arrested], and from the house of the Syrians the youth came to rule* [the exact quote from the Hebrew text is "**the house of the Syrians**". However, all translations and interpretations refer to that as a typo and put "**prison**" instead. And, indeed, Onias-III was kept in prison in Syria]. *But already at the beginning of his new rule he was impoverished* [Antiochus dismissed Onias and appointed his young brother, Jeshua-Jason, as high priest in Jerusalem, but after a short while he *dismissed* him too {"although in his kingdom he was born poor" (Ecclesiastes, 4, 14)} and replaced him with an even more extreme idolater]. *I see all worshippers of the Sun-God with the second youth who replaced him. The crowd increased so vastly, more than the crowds before them, and yet they that come after shall not rejoice in him, as Jerusalem too is filled with idolatry, corruption and striving after wind. Observe your appointed times to go to the house of God. But when you approach to hear the sacrifices given by*

the worshippers of Ausir [also fools] who do not know any labour but worshipping the Sun-God Ra [evil], do not blunder like them [says Onias-III to his son Onias-IV who is about to become a high priest himself]

Do not rush in with your mouth and your heart shall not be hasty in uttering a word before God. Because God is in heaven and you dwell only upon earth [indeed you are a priest, but still only a mortal], Therefore, be thrifty with your words. As a vision of God comes in many deeds and the sound of an idol comes with much verbosity, and there is no use for fools [who worship the god of death Ausir]. When you make a vow unto God, do not defer to pay it [I was late to pay my vow to the king of Egypt, and therefore turmoil broke in Jerusalem]. Pay what you vow. Better not to vow than vow and not pay [The king of Egypt promised me defence and support, and with his promise in my possession I travelled to Syria. But he did not keep his promise and I was arrested and an upheaval broke out in Jerusalem. Had he not first promised, no harm would have been done]. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin and do not apologise for your error before God's messenger after the fact. Why should God be annoyed at your voice and destroy the work of your hand because of too many vain words; so fear God with plenitude of wisdom.

If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent robbery of justice and righteousness in the state, do not handle the matter. For you are a priest and your business is with God, higher than the highest, and you should rise above them. Managing the land is in the hands of the king whose business is at the earthly level. He, who loves silver [e.g., Antiochus], his craving for silver shall only increase, and even if his mammon increases he will never be satisfied but will only cause harm [e.g., the massacre in Jerusalem]. As good increases, so do its consumers; and what is left to its holder is only the sight of his eyes to enjoy. Sweet is the sleep of the labourer, whether he eats little or much; but the satiety of the rich will not permit him to sleep. There is a grievous evil which I have seen under Ra the Sun-God; I have seen riches that are kept by its owner to cause him trouble; if the son that I have begotten will stray and work for the Sun-God, then those riches shall perish and I shall be left empty-handed. As naked as he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he go back as he came; he shall get nothing for his labour to carry away. And this also is a grievous evil, that as he came, so shall he go; and no profit has he for labouring for the wind. All his days he eats in poverty, and has much vexation, sickness, and wrath. Behold that which I have seen: it is good and beautiful to eat and drink and enjoy in all man's labour under the heaven ["sun", in the Biblical text – the only time where “Sun” is used for “Heaven”] all

the days of his life which God has given him, for this is his share. And also, every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat thereof and enjoy his share and rejoice in this labour of his – this is the gift from God. The days of his life are numbered, and he should return to God when his heart is full of joy.

There is evil which I see under Ra [evil] Sun-God and it greatly afflicts man: a man to whom God gives riches, wealth and honour, so that he wants nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eats the fruits of his handiwork; this is a loss and a malady of Ra [Sun-God and evil] it is. If a man begets one hundred offspring and lives many years and as many his years are, his soul has always enough to keep him happy but he has no burial, I say that a miscarriage is preferable. For, he comes with nothing and goes in deprivation and thus his name is covered with deprived light. Neither has he seen the Sun-God nor has he known gratification from it. And if he lived his years a thousand times over and seen no benefit, all go the same way. All the labour of man is for his mouth, and the soul is still not sated. For what is the wise man who fears God better than the fool who worships idols? With what can the one who lacks knowledge challenge the believers? Saying that the sight of the eyes is better than the insight of the heart is also foolishness and herding the

wind. That which has already been was given a name and its attribute is known; and no one can argue with that which is stronger than him. A man has no advantage in verbosity, but only a show of much stupidity. For, who knows what is good for a man in his life if he passes his days in the worship of false idols; he who pretends to know what is to become of a man after living under the Sun-God, shall turn his life into a shadow.

*A good name on the day of death is better than wealth on the day of birth. Do your utmost during your lifetime so that you may be favourably remembered after your end, as the name is attributed to all humans when they are gone and the living shall keep it in their heart. Therefore, it is better to go to a place of grief than to a place of celebration. Austerity is better than frivolity, as severe countenance improves one's heart. The heart of wise men is in a house of sadness and the heart of fools [worshippers of Ausir] is in a house of jubilation. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the laud of fools; for the sound of **istras** [Greek: small, unimportant coins] in the **large jar** [In Hebrew "large jar" is "sirr" which is a word game on Ausir, as in the Aramaic epigram: "a small coin in a big jar makes a loud noise"] is like the laughter of the fool who puts his trust in Ausir [the god of*

afterlife, a descendant of Ra], and this too is a carrier of evil. He who praises a wise man robs him, for bribery mutilates his heart. Better is the end of a speech than its beginning; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not let your spirit be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of the foolish idolaters. Do not say how come the old days were better than the present ones, for this question does not ensue from a belief in the goodness of God. The rewarding wisdom [the belief in the hidden God] is better than worshipping the visible Sun-God, for when the sun is shaded the silver stops shining; and this is the advantage in the knowledge of wisdom [the belief in the hidden God] as it is always alive with its owner. Observe and keep the deeds of God, for no one can repair what is made crooked. In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity observe and learn; God had balanced the one with the other, to ensure that man should find no fault with Him. I have seen all this in the days of my idolatry. There is a righteous person who perishes in his righteousness and a wicked one who lives long in his wickedness. Do not be over-righteous pretending to be pious; why should you degrade yourself; do not be wicked and a fool; why would you die prematurely. It is good that you take hold of the one and not withdraw your hand also from the other [keep both faiths]; for he who fears God can pass all unharmed. Fear of the one God is a stronghold to the wise man, more than the greatest ten idols of the

city, and there is not even one righteous human upon earth who does only good and never sins. Take not heed unto all words that are spoken, not even your servant's who curses you behind your back; for oftentimes, as you know in your own heart, you yourself have cursed others. All this I have experienced on the way to wisdom. I say, let me be wise and the evil way will draw away from me. That which has occurred is far and deep, too deep for anyone to find. I turned about, and applied my heart to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things, and to know wickedness to be folly, and foolishness to be madness. And I find the priestess of the goddess of love ["woman", meaning sacred prostitute who was promised as a match to Onias-IV] bitter than death, whose heart is but snares and nets, and her hands are in shackles. He who pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be captured by her. Behold, this I have found, said the high priest, I have searched one by one for whom my soul desires and found not a single person. I found thousand prostitutes, and not one true wife among them. But in the labour of God I immediately find what I desire, while idolaters seek in many searches and find not.

There is none like the wise man [the believer in God] who knows the meaning of this: Wisdom welcomes a man's countenance and aggression abhors it. I am regarded authority since my status as

king is retained by the vow of God ["God has sworn and will not repent: You are a priest forever, upon My word My king Zadok" (Psalms, 110, 4)]. *Do not be in haste to depart from Him; do not hold on to the word of Ra* [evil]. *For whatever God wishes shall be done; the word of the king rules and no one shall tell Him what to do. He who keeps commandments [of God] does not know the word of Ra* [evil] *and the heart of a wise man* [fearer of God] *knows time and justice; for there is time and there is reason* [justice] *for every desire and man's distress is vast, for he does not know what is about to happen; and when it does happen, there is no one to tell him why. As man cannot control the wind and confine it, so does man have no control over the day of his death; and as war is inevitable, so no wickedness shall save its owner from punishment. I have seen all this and noted every deed done under the Sun-God, when man had power over another to hurt him. And I have also seen wicked men coming from burying* [of their victims] *and from a consecrated place* [euphemism for a place of impurity, one with no purification] *they set forth and become prevalent in the city* [of Jerusalem]. *All whoever do so, this also is wrong. Not being punished for their wrongdoing, evil shall soon return; it is therefore that the human heart is full of the desire to do evil. He who has sinned offers hundreds to Ra* [pays bribery to evil] *who forgives him. But - and this I also know - for one who fears God, fearing Him is good enough. And the wicked shall not*

fare well and his days shall be numbered, like the shadow that does not fear God but the Sun-God. There is evil done upon earth that touch some righteous people deserved by the wicked, and there are some wicked people who receive what is due to the righteous [the problem of "the righteous suffer and the wicked thrive"]. I say that questioning this fact is wrong too. I recommend happiness, for there is nothing better for man under the heaven than to eat and drink and be happy; but under the Sun-God, instead of eating and drinking and being happy, he will complain about his labour the entire days of his life given to him by God, and also at night he would see no sleep. I devoted my heart to know wisdom and see what is done upon earth, and I see that all is God's doing. But man cannot find what is done under the Sun-God, for man will search hard to find, but find he will not. And even if the wise man would seek to know, he cannot find.

And all this I have taken to my heart and have understood all this: the righteous and the wise men and their subjects are in the hands of God, but man cannot tell whether for love or for hate. Everything is still open before them, all chances are before everyone; there are equal chances for the righteous as for the wicked, for the good and for the pure as for the impure and for him who offers sacrifices and for the one who does not offer, for the good as for the sinner, for

the one who vows as to the one who is afraid to vow. This is Ra [evil] with all that is done under the Sun-God because although everyone has the same fate, the human heart is filled with [the belief in] Ra and during their lifetime they hold in their heart false beliefs about what will become of them after they pass on to the dead. And he who chooses God has confidence during all the days of his life. For the live [believes in God] dog is better off than the dead lion [loyal to Sun-God]. For the living [the believers] accept their impending death, and the dead [the infidels, who believe in the afterlife] know nothing and have no benefit, for their memory is forgotten. All their emotions, their love, hate and jealousy have been lost and are not part of the world in all that is done under the Sun-God. You, the believer in God, go eat your bread happily and drink your wine with a good heart, for God has already forgiven your deeds. At all times you should wear white clothes, as befits a high priest, and let your head lack no oil, like Aaron our forefather [orders or recommends to his son Onias-IV]. If life with the sacred prostitute that you love [Onias-IV was promised a match with the beautiful daughter of a high priest] seems to you a reward for all the days of your labour to idols under the Sun-God, then your entire labour to the idols is a waste of your life, and your work which you have done under the Sun-God is in vain. Whatsoever your hand can find to do against the enslavement to the Goddess of Love, you should do; for there is no

*doing or thinking or knowledge or wisdom in the hole in the ground
whither you go.*

*I see again under the heaven ["sun" in the Biblical text, might have
been a typo] that the race is not to the swift, nor is the battle to the
strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the sensible,
nor yet God's grace to those who know Him; for when the time
comes, the same mishap meets them all. And man does not know his
time [of death], like fish that are caught in the net to their detriment,
or birds that are suddenly caught in a trap that has been set for
them by human hunters to harm them. I also saw this wisdom under
Ra [evil], which is very personal to me: there was a small city
[Jerusalem] and weak men within it; and there came a great king
[evil Antiochus] to fight against it. He besieged it and built great
turrets around it; and in the city there was a man who was poor
[humble] and wise [I, Onias-III], and he with his wisdom saved the
city; yet no man remembered that poor man. And I say that wisdom
is better than strength, but humans ridicule the wisdom of the
humble and do not listen to his words. Wise men [who fear God]
listen to words that are spoken softly; those who believe in Ausir and
other idols listen only to shouting. Wisdom is better than tools of
war, and the one who deviates from it will lose a lot of advantage.*

*A fetid rot fly [abundant mainly near dead corpses] ferments purified oil [and causes it to rot]. Wisdom is dearer than honour, but a small amount of foolishness is enough to degrade it. A wise man's heart helps him [at his right hand] and the heart of the believer in Ausir fails him [at his left]. Thus, when an Ausir believer walks by the way, his heart fails him and all can see that he is a fool [a pun in Hebrew: Ausir is named **Ksil** (Orion, the Hunter constellation) and **Sakhal** means fool].*

If the belief in Ra prevails in your community, do not leave your position. For when you give it up great sinners will take your place. There is another evil that I have seen under Ra the Sun-God as a blunder of the ruling god who placed the fool in high places while he downgraded the rich. I have seen slaves on horses while nobles walk the ground like slaves. Accident lurks in every action and has nothing to do with God: one digs a hole and trips over it; one breaks through a wall and is stung by a snake; a carrier of stones is injured under their weight; a woodcutter risks his life.

If the steel knife becomes blunt, it is taken to the grindstone, sharpened and its power restored. The tool's advantage is in the wisdom that is invested in it. If the snake does not hiss before biting, he who knows this language has no advantage. Words from the mouth of the wise are graceful, and the fool is harmed by his own lips. His words of mouth begin with foolishness and end with

harmful carelessness. The fool is full of empty words. A man cannot know what is to be and no one can tell him what is to become of him after he is gone. Worshipping with the fools would only weary him and he shall not find the correct way. Woe to you, nation, that your god is weak and your priests take their wages before performing their duty. Blessed be you, nation, whose god is strong and your priests are worthy of their remuneration – proving strength and not disgrace. Due to laziness the ceiling falls in; and with weak hands the house leaks. Showbread becomes a joke and the libation wine delights the believers, and bribery solves all.

Even when you are alone in bed do not curse a king and in your bedrooms do not curse the affluent [like "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of thy people", Exodus, 22, 27]. For, a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter [speak well of all gods and show respect to all, and do not quote my criticism of them in my words. For instance, instead of saying "Sun-God" say simply "the sun"].

Following are a parable and its meaning.

The parable:

When you cast your bread [livelihood] upon the sea, hoping to retrieve it after many days, you spread your investment into seven or eight parts, for you do not know what calamity shall befall upon earth [like don't put all your eggs in one basket]. If the clouds be full

of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls far away in the south, or far away in the north, in the place it falls there shall it remain. You must take risks:

And the meaning:

As a priest you serve believers of many faiths. You should serve them all, no matter what your personal belief is. And if one of the beliefs is found to be false, then there are other beliefs that the believer may choose from.

He who observes the wind shall not sow; and he who regards the clouds shall not reap. As you do not know the way of the wind or what is growing in the womb of the pregnant woman, so do you not know the action of God who makes everything. Therefore, sow your seed in the morning and in the evening withhold not your hand from another investment; for you know not which shall prosper, whether this or that. And if they are both good, the light of God is sweet to the eyes and it might seem right in ones eyes to thank the Sun-God as well. If one fears God for many years, he shall rejoice in them all. And he should remember the many days of dearth when all he had was Ra [evil]. If as a young man you rejoice in the beliefs of your childhood and your heart cheers you up in your adolescence and you walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, know that all these will be taken into account by the judging God. But

today remove vexation from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for in your childhood and youth you did not know the way of the good faith. And it is sufficient that you remember your creator in the days of your adolescence before the days of evil come with years when you say "I do not have interest in them" until the sun [Ra] and the light [the Hebrew word for light is "Or" which is a synonym of "Horus"] and the moon and the stars [all the idols of Egypt] will shine again and the clouds will scatter after the rain.

And a day shall come [old age] in which the guards of the house will tremble [the hands will shiver] and the brave men will deform [the legs will weaken] and the grinders cease [the teeth do not bite] because they are few, and the eyes darken in their sockets and doors in the market close [loss of the sense of smell], when the sound of the grinder [heart beat] is low, and one shall awake to the voice of a bird [hearing voices that are not real], and all the maidens of music shall be lowered [hearing weakens], he shall be afraid to rise and hathoresses [women from the temple of Hathor] shall support him on his way; and the power to persist shall be lessened [a play upon words in Hebrew: "the almond (power to persist) shall blossom / be cursed"] and the burden on the back will become heavy and appetite will decline, for the man is going to his eternal home and the lamenters walk around in the market [all signs indicating near death]

until the silver cord is cut off and the golden bowl is shattered and the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel falls, shattered, into the pit [picturesque description of death, but also symbolising the collapse of the entire Egyptian pantheon] *and the dust shall return to the earth as it was* [God's words to man: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return", Genesis, 3, 19] *and the spirit shall return to God* [penitence], *for He is the one who gave it. Onias-III shows the weakening of his body and predicts his imminent death. It is known that he was murdered with a slow-working poison. Beware of vanity beliefs, said the high priest, for vanity is lurking everywhere.*

And in addition to being wise, the high priest also taught the people knowledge and listened and pondered over and set many proverbs. The high priest tried to find words that are useful and wrote down words of integrity and truth. They are, wise, harsh words that were collected and saved and bound in pages, presented to all by one shepherd. And moreover, my son, be vigilant: make many books and never cease writing, and make as little chitchats as possible, for chatter increases fatigue of the flesh.

To sum up all that has been said: fear God and keep His commandment, for this is the purpose of man and his destination. For God shall bring every deed into judgment upon any hidden thing [dead], whether good or bad.

Some comments to the words of Onias-III:

"The two are better than the one, as they benefit in their labour. If they fall, the one will lift up the other; but the one who falls has not another to lift him up. Also, if two lie together, they give warmth to each other but how can one get warmth alone? And if one prevails over them, the two shall resist him; and the three-ply thread shall not be easily broken": Beyond his personal biography, Onias hints in favor of holding more than one faith - the belief in God of Heaven with the belief in the Sun God.

His great occupation with the *question* of death points to the fact that he feared for his life. And, indeed, he had to *flee* several times, and there is evidence that he was put to death by the order of an official from the close circle of Antiochus. Thus he was relieved from his promise to *build* the temple for the Sun-God in Egypt. His son, Onias-IV, materialised his father's promise and erected the Onias *temple* in Heliopolis Egypt. He noted down his father's delirious words into a book scroll. He was careful to hide his father's identity but gave him a name that pointed to his central role in the community, *Qahalath [or Qoheleth, head of the community]*, the name which was given to the entire book [*Qoheleth, Ecclesiastes*]. Many vague utterances that seem to have affinity to faith, might in fact point at episodes from his life – presenting these as a cynical

settling of accounts or merely presenting a secular biography. The composition itself is controversial and might seem to hold a tangible danger to observing the faith. The distinction that he makes between God and idols, between Heaven and the Sun-God, is blurred, and browsing through the text might cause people to give up faith and distant themselves from religion too. But, despite of all that, since it did enter the sealed corpus of the Holy Scriptures, we can deduce that this composition was acknowledged as sanctified. A possible identification mark is the writing material - the parchment, which bore the special seal of the priests of the house of *Zadok*.

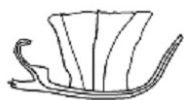
Onias-III orders his *progeny* to write many books. The book of *Proverbs* was written following the *book* of Ecclesiastes. The common vocabulary of the two is voluminous, but Proverbs was originally written in Hebrew and not as a confused translation and therefore it is readable, clear and well constructed. One can perceive in *Proverbs* interpretations and answers to *Ecclesiastes*. For instance, it contains a respectful attitude towards women – a compensation for the harsh words used against them in Ecclesiastes.

Other books that were written by the successors of Onias-III were *not included in the Hebrew Bible*, but some of them were included in translations of the Bible. *Other* writings were kept in ancient libraries and many parts have also been discovered in our time.

Simeon the Righteous' last resting place

Onias' brother, Jeshua, who became the high priest in Jerusalem under the sponsorship of Antiochus, was more open to the *elements* of the Hellenistic culture and showed a wide understanding to the needs of his *Syrian* patron with whom he cooperated in many fields. Antiochus granted him a respectful Greek name, Jason, after an admired mythological hero. Jeshua-Jason managed to maintain peace and tranquillity in the land for several years, but the precedence of giving the Hellenist king a foothold in the temple was soon revealed as a beginning of an avalanche. The foreign ruler intervened rudely in the priesthood agenda, expelled Jason and appointed in his place a high priest who was *not from the progeny of Zadok*, his kinship to the priesthood family being only through his mother. The seed of the priests from the house of Zadok was cast away from the temple in Jerusalem forever, but Onias-IV managed to put his hand on some wealth of the Jerusalem priests with which he erected in Egypt a magnificent temple where the sons of Zadok served some two hundred and fifty more years.

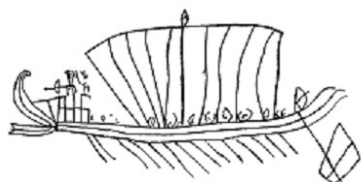
Antiochus' appetite for *mammon* knew no bounds. He demanded increasing funding from the priests of the temple; and in order to validate it, as *well* as to express his own godliness (*Epiphanes – "who has seen the face of the god"*), he accompanied it with a great massacre of the Jerusalem residents who were loyal to God. This time Jerusalem did not have "*a man poor and wise*" to save it.



Onias III, Syria



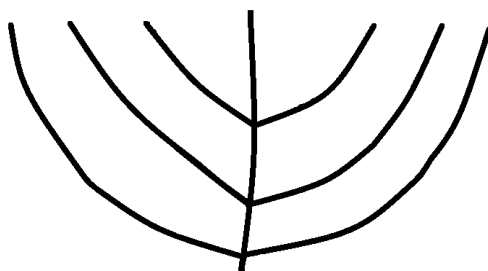
Jeshua-Jason, Sparta



Onias IV, Egypt

Jeshua-Jason was murdered in a foreign country and was brought to final rest in a stately grave in the necropolis of Jerusalem.

On the wall of his grave, next to the seven-branch candelabrum which was the emblem of the priests who served in the temple, *three* ships are portrayed.



The ship in the middle is the one in which Jeshua-Jason's bones were returned home after having been murdered in a foreign country; the ship on the top is the one in which the bones of his brother Onias-III were returned; and the third ship is the one that brought back from Egypt the bones of Onias-III's son, Onias-IV, who was also born in Jerusalem.

The exiled Jerusalemite priests died in poverty and deprivation, and their bones were brought from abroad in inferior, small ships. Onias-IV, however, was the high priest of a thriving temple in Egypt, and his remains were conveyed in a large and luxurious ship.

There are also verses of lamentation written there – "*high lamentation*" – telling, among others, that he outdid his brother Onias-III. There, there is also a verse in Greek – "*Live many years and rejoice all your life*" – which appears in Ecclesiastes (11, 8). The grave was discovered during digging foundations of a building in the Rehaviya neighbourhood in Jerusalem in the mid 1950's and is named "*Jason's Tomb*".

One of the northern neighbourhoods in Jerusalem is named "*Simeon the Righteous*" since according to a folk belief Simeon the Righteous was buried in a cave in that neighbourhood. Examination of that cave revealed that it had been hewn some six hundred years after the death of the priest and therefore it cannot be his grave. Since Jason's tomb in Rehaviya is a family grave it is very likely that it is also the last resting place of Jason's father, Simeon the Righteous.

The fulfilling of Onias-III's prophecy

The foreign ruler's intervening in the order of the temple was harmful to the wholeness of the Jewish people and its unique heritage. The conservative Jewish community developed an increasing resistance that grew enormously after the massacre. Although it was obvious that Antiochus' belief in his own godliness was none but transitory madness, they fiercely attacked the new high priest appointed by Antiochus. They criticised him as *Hellenised* who, in order to accept this highly regarded position, involving a handsome income, pledged

to pay large taxes to the treasury of the king – "*pay bribe*", in their words.

A cleric from the periphery, Matthias Hasmonean, took upon himself the holy war to restore Judea's independence. The scripture says that like Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest in his time, who killed an Israelite who worshiped a foreign idol, or Elijah the prophet who slaughtered hundreds of worshipers of the idol Baal, so Matthias also killed with his own hands a Jew who took part in the ceremony of expressing allegiance to the Hellenistic ruler and accepting his divinity. This act guaranteed his seed, like the seed of Phinehas before him, a permanent position in the temple. But in order to fulfil this promise, a severe brotherly war had to be ignited, during which regular armies from neighbouring countries intervened and the priests' hands were filled with a lot of human blood.

The sons of Matthias took upon themselves the management of the war and the purification of the Temple, and in the process they took upon themselves the right to serve in the priesthood in the Holy of Holies, became high priests and also established a presidency and a royal house for Judah. As was already the case for long periods in the past, as told in the Bible, even during the Hasmonean dynasty, the leaders came to know that idolatry is good for business. After all, those who come to pay respect to God bring more money into the treasury of the temple and the treasury of the king if they also pay respect to other idols. Two generations after Matthias, the spirit of

Hellenistic paganism returned to blow in the nation, and it became clear that the Hasmonean rebellion was not directed against Hellenism at all, but had a different purpose.

Jeshua-Jason gathered around him a community of believers in another land instead of the one he left in the desecrated temple in Jerusalem. Already while serving in the temple, he made connections with the state of Sparta, and when he was removed from his office, he went to his Spartan friends, established a temple among them and brought a large local population closer to Judaism. These learned to believe that they were the sons of Abraham and as brothers to the Jews sought to extend help to the Hasmoneans in their war against Antiochus. However, their offer was rejected, because the Hasmoneans had already set their eyes on the crown of the great priesthood and did not want to return to the seed of Simeon the righteous. In one way or another, the Hasmoneans managed to present themselves as the seed of Zadok the priest, integrated into the work of the temple, took control of it and produced great priests from them. They became addicted to the sweet taste of the showbread, and instead of returning the priesthood to the seed of Simeon the righteous, they took control of it themselves and began to pass it down by inheritance within their family. And not only that, but because the family relationship between the king and the high priest was so great, it sometimes happened that the king was also the high priest himself, which opened a wide door for corruption. Against the

background of this corruption, the Pharisee movement that went against the authority of the priests became very strong - in contrast to the Sadducee movement that accepted the Hasmoneans as descendants of the House of Zadok. Even when the Hasmoneans were removed from the monarchy, the high priesthood was not restored to the sons of Simeon the Righteous, and the rift in the nation deepened.

Onias-III's attempts to dissuade his seed from worshipping the Sun God were of no avail. From the Temple built by the priests of the House of Zadok in Egypt, a cult that merged the tradition of the priests of Jerusalem with the Egyptian tradition came out and was widespread in the world. During the priesthood and reign of the House of Hasmoneans, the priests of this new cult tried to return to Jerusalem but were rejected and persecuted. Their attempts to return did not stop even after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which caused the patience of the Roman governor to run out. He ordered the destruction of the Onias Temple in Egypt and the slaughter of all its priests. Many of their manuscripts reached the Great Library in Alexandria, but all were lost in several major fire incidents, mainly at the end of the fourth century AD. Few manuscripts were found in other places such as the Cairo Genizah, the Sinai desert and also in Ethiopia. Recently, many of their writings were found that were preserved in good condition in the Judean desert, and from them we can learn a lot about the worship practiced

in the temple in Jerusalem before it was captured and defiled by the Hasmoneans.

The event that most symbolizes the loss of Judea's independence, the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, took place in close proximity to the destruction of the Onias' Temple and the elimination in Egypt of the last of the priests from the descendants of Simeon the righteous of the House of Zadok.

The Hasmoneans

The regulation of Ezra the Scribe did not help to cleanse the Jewish community of aliens. After all, small Judea has never been but a protectorate of one or another superpower. It was impossible to enthrone a Jewish king in it and there was no strong independent political authority that had the power to carry out national purges. Following the defeat of the Persians at the hands of Alexander the Great, the Hellenistic culture penetrated Judea, which brought in its wake opulence, grandeur and splendour, and many Jews were drawn to it. The Hellenistic culture also brought back to the land the old polytheism reinforced with new demigods. Since time immemorial there has been a dispute between the different priestly houses regarding the diversity of gods. This was the case during the era of the First temple, when the priests of Jerusalem advocated diversity while the priests of Anathoth were against it, as was the case during the days of the tolerant Ezra and zealous Nehemiah. When, as a result of excessive tolerance, the Jewish self-identity begins to erode,

the fanatics gain strength and restore the tradition or create a new tradition that distinguishes those who follow it as Jews. The priests in the periphery watched from afar what was happening in the Temple but were not practically involved in it. Therefore, they were freed from the constraints of internal politics and when need arose it was easy for them to intervene and make changes.

In the shortest days of the year (in winter in the northern hemisphere of the earth) the Jews celebrate a particularly happy holiday called *Hanukkah – the festival of inauguration*. On each evening of the days of this holiday, they light candles in an increasing number, and bless: "*These candles we light for the salvation and the miracles and the wonders and the battles that you did for our ancestors in those days at this time by the hands of your holy priests*".

It is the only Jewish holiday in which the priests are blessed and presented as holy. The priests responsible for the salvation, miracles and wonders associated with this holiday are members of the Hasmonean family who were responsible, among other things, for a terrible massacre among the Jewish people (perpetrated by Alexander Jannaeus who simultaneously wore two hats - king and priest), and this after they usurped the high priesthood from the Zadok family. The Hasmoneans had good reason to rejoice. The high priesthood fell into their hands, and they established it as a holiday for the entire people. Why was it necessary for the Hasmoneans to establish a holiday of praise and thanksgiving for themselves?

According to *prophet Ezekiel*, the only family whose sons deserve to serve as high priests is the Zadok family. This instruction appears at least four times in the book of Ezekiel (chapter 40, verse 46; chapter 43, verse 19; chapter 44, verse 15; chapter 48, verse 11). This rule, which according to the Bible was practiced for hundreds of years during the First Temple period, was established as a binding rule back in the days of the return to Zion, and was carefully preserved until the period of the priesthood of the sons of Simeon the righteous - his sons Onias-III and Jeshua.

The intervention of the king of Syria Antiochus Epiphanes in the order of the temple, including the appointment to the high priesthood of one who was not of the Zadok race, led to the ignition of the Hasmonean rebellion during which the temple was conquered and cleansed of pagan Hellenistic religious symbols.

However, after the Hasmoneans took control of the Temple, they did not return the high priesthood to the sons of Zadok but took it for themselves only.

Hanukkah, then, is the *holiday of the robbery*, and to this day the Jews blindly obey the instructions of the robbers to light candles in honour of the "*holy priests*" through whom God brought the miracle to the Jewish people. What miracle? It is the miracle of taking the high priesthood out of the hands of the only worthy family, and transferring it to the hands of a foreign priestly family from a distant village. The Hasmoneans ruled Judea for many decades and brainwashed their

subjects. Apart from Hanukkah, there is no Jewish holiday in which God's holy priests are glorified and exalted. The phenomenon of lavishing praise on the ruling family is typical to tyrannical regimes, such as can be found even today.

The stain of robbery still adhered to the Hasmonean house, and they tried to present themselves as a family of worthy priests related to the House of Zadok. No reliable documentation has ever been found to confirm this, and as part of the effort to strengthen the people's trust, a large bribe was paid. The people were divided into parties. One party was close to the ruling power and its members were in the highest economic echelon. In exchange for the benefits embodied in closeness to the centre, they took upon themselves to believe without question that the House of Hasmoneans refers to the House of Zadok. Because of this they earned the mocking nickname "*Sadducees*" by their rivals the "*Pharisees*".

Christmas, too, is not free from criticism. The common origin of Hanukkah and Christmas is the pagan festival of lights which is celebrated at the beginning of the lengthening of the days just after the shortest day of the year. In the books of the New Testament it is said that Jesus was born when King Herod conducted a *census* in which all the inhabitants of the land of Judea were required to come to Jerusalem. The appropriate time to conduct such a census is during *one of the pilgrimages*, since that is when all the inhabitants of

the country arrive in Jerusalem in order to fulfil the commandment of the pilgrimage. The two major pilgrimage holidays, Passover and tabernacles, take place in the spring and in the fall and not in the middle of winter; and hence it is likely that the original Gospel story was aimed at one of them. Some theologians make calculations based on certain details in the story and confidently point to tabernacles, and thus it turns out that Jesus the Messiah was born in one pilgrimage and died and resurrected in another.

Constantine, the Roman emperor who lived in the fourth century AD, worshiped the Persian god of light Mithras. According to an ancient tradition, this god (like many gods in several mythologies) was born on the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, from which the days begin to lengthen. Eventually Constantine decided to rule the Christian religion throughout the empire. But he did not completely abandon the worship of the god Mithras; and thus it was established for generations that *Jesus was born on the Feast of Lights*. Light is God's first creation and it appears already on the first day of the creation of the world (*Book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 4*) and "*sons of light*" appear at least four times in the books of the New Testament (the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 16, Verse 8; the Gospel according to John, chapter 12, verse 36; the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 5; the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 8), and it is only natural in the eyes of the pagans

that the son of God will be born on the festival of light, and like the Jews, the Christians also celebrate the wrong holiday.

Hanukkah is the longest holiday among the Jewish holidays. It lasts eight days, even longer than the Passover and Tabernacle rituals (only connecting with Shemini Atzeret {Eighth day of assembly}, which is observed one day after Tabernacles, puts it on the same length). Maybe it wasn't supposed to last this long. However, because Judaism, under the influence of Hellenism, moved to a calendar based on the moon, the coordination between the holidays was lost, and thus this holiday was lengthened to ensure that it also contained the particular date of the original Feast of Lights. In most years it does work, *and Christmas falls on or near Hanukkah*.

Attributing the reason for the excessive length of the holiday on the "*Miracle of the cruse of Oil*" is but one of many means of brainwashing (for example, Hasmoneans = Hasmans = eight oils = eight days of oil).

Matthias died shortly after starting the rebellion. Four of his five sons were killed in wars or murdered not long after him. The remaining son, Simeon, declared himself president (supreme ruler), high priest and commander of the army. The People's Council agreed to the appointment of this trio, since the wars were not yet over and the Hasmoneans were accepted by the people as good commanders and successful statesmen. The rule of the Hasmoneans lasted for

over a century, during which it was never offered to the descendants of Zadok to return to the Temple in Jerusalem. In the meantime, the descendants of Zadok established their status in Egypt, built a new temple in the city of Heliopolis and for hundreds of years served a large and peaceful Jewish community there.

During the rule of the Hasmoneans, the country knew many wars. The land of Judea, formerly the land of Israel or the land of Canaan, is not rich in natural resources and is a difficult land to live in. However, it lies on a narrow strip on the road leading between the northeastern superpower Syria and the southwestern superpower Egypt, and for that reason is sought after by all parties. Because of its unfortunate location, it has always been a scene of battles. Each superpower appropriated it for itself as a buffer zone for defense, a base for attack, or both. The inhabitants of the country were often forced to swear allegiance to one side and suffer heavy punishments from the other. This was also the case during the Hasmonean days. The main achievements of the Hasmoneans, generations after the rebellion, stemmed not from their valor but from the many political alliances they made and broke alternately with the rulers of the neighboring countries while taking advantage of frequent weaknesses that resulted from internal struggles.

It was the hero of all, Judas Maccabeus, who made an alliance with the rising Roman kingdom, an alliance that over the years relegated Judea to the status of a Roman commission colony with a complete

loss of its independence, to be enslaved by the evil kingdom and eventually destroyed.

The beginning of Judaism

The Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah lived side by side for hundreds of years. In Israel, among other religions, the religion of the prophets was practiced; and in Judah, the religion of the priests was mainly practiced. In the days of King Hezekiah, following the mass immigration of Israelis to Jerusalem, the population of the city faced the danger of a religious war. When the Assyrian Empire threatens from the outside, Hezekiah could not allow a civil war. He merged the two religions into one religion and gave the Israeli religious leaders, who had recently come, a status equal to that of the temple priests. To this day, Judaism is an impossible fusion of two completely different religions, the religion of the priests and the religion of the prophets, and it is absolutely clear that as such it cannot survive and develop.

The Oral Torah

In the entire Hebrew Bible, particularly in the Torah, there is no mention of life after death. Although Elijah and Elisha bring the dead back to life, these events are considered miracles. The raising of the prophet Samuel from the dead is also a single event that does not repeat itself. The scriptures of Christianity and Islam present life after death as an undisputed fact, and modern Judaism also recognizes it.

Belief in life after death gives the believer comfort and hope, but religion makes another use of it. It uses life after death to manipulate the believers for its purposes. In the afterlife there is reward for the righteous and punishment for sinners, and experienced religious preachers know how to provide plenty of vivid descriptions for these reward and punishment expected of man. Preachers of certain religions know how to convert the expected punishment for a person in his afterlife into a payment to the religious institutions in his current life. They are also the ones who define what is grace and what is sin, and accordingly also the reward and punishment, and they usually manage to find an abundance of real or imagined sins in every person.

But that is not how things are in the Bible. From the story of Eden, we learn that man differs from God only in that he does not live forever (*because he did not eat from the tree of life: "man was one of him to know good and evil, and now lest he put forth his hand and took also from the tree of life and ate and lived forever", Book of Genesis, chapter 3', verse 22*).

The Hebrew Bible does not recognize the eternity of human life and does not describe any form of life after death. The reward and punishment expected of a person after his or her death do not pertain to his body or soul, but to the well-being of his descendants (*"I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of*

them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments”)
Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, Verses 4 -5; Deuteronomy, chapter 5, verses 8-9).

Furthermore, these rewards and punishments are not necessarily given directly from God's hands. Although the Hebrew Bible presents them as God's reckoning, but from knowing the reality, it is easy to see that most of them are nothing more than a natural course of affairs. In the last five commandments out of the ten, there is no requirement for sacred ritualism, but rather a recommendation for a way of life that contributes to mutual security, from which well-being and strength naturally flow.

The commandments are simple: you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness and you shall not covet. They constitute a recommendation for proper social morality, and adherence to them guarantees well-being, victory over enemies and various harms and superiority over the surrounding nations. Deviation from them leads to the opposite. In many cases, the observance of the commandments goes against the personal goals of the individual, and the importance of being absolutely meticulous in observing them is not self-evident. Therefore it is necessary to anchor them to a higher reality. The role of the anchor is taken by the first four commandments, which concern ritual servitude to God, and the fifth commandment (honoring father and

mother), which concerns the transmission of tradition from generation to generation. Descriptions of reward and punishment for keeping the commandments or breaking them appear in several places in the Torah, for example, *the entire chapter 28 of the book of Deuteronomy*. In addition to the presentation that may be taken for granted of the power of a people who maintain high social morals, there are also promises of miraculous intervention such as rain in its time or disasters. But nowhere is there a guarantee of the continuity of human life after death.

Hellenism, as a culture that encourages a variety of opinions, brought, in addition to the pagan religion, also a new style of thinking - critical logical thinking. No more decisions based on the muffled mutterings of some drugged prophetess, but judgment based on an orderly and well-constructed system of simple rules that make sense. No more surrendering to the whims of a corrupt priest, but a fixed and uniform logic for all things. It is simpler to conduct life when there is one law for all matters instead of many laws for each and every matter. The majority of the people in Judah adopted the style of simple critical thinking, and promoted the rules of logical deduction to the first place among the decision-making factors.

A syllogism is a structure of sayings that includes general claims about the course of the world, factual assertions about private cases and a conclusion that follows from them. A syllogism is valid if the general claims in it are acceptable (for example, those that apply the

general law to private cases). If the argument is valid and the factual assertions in it are true, then the conclusion of the argument is also true. For example, the following syllogism system:

Establishing a fact: The Law of Moses is true;

Claim: There are no internal contradictions in the true law;

Conclusion: Every verse in the Law of Moses is true.

Claim: A book in which true verses are quoted is a book of truth;

Fact: In the Book of Psalms, statements from the Law of Moses are cited;

Conclusion: The Book of Psalms is a book of truth.

Establishing a fact: every verse in the book of Psalms is true;

Claim: Any two verses of truth joined together is also a verse of truth;

Verse: "I will not die because I will live and tell of his deeds"
(Chapter 118, verse 17);

Verse: "The dead shall not praise him" (chapter 115, verse 17);

Conclusion: A believer in God has life after death and an unbeliever does not;

Another conclusion: after death there is punishment for sinners and reward for the righteous.

And many other conclusions which are not written in the Torah but are considered to derive from it.

The conclusion that there is life after death was received as resounding good news. Although this is not explicitly written in the Torah, it is accepted from it. The conclusions obtained from the Torah, even though they are not written in it, are given the name "*Oral Torah*".

Officially, the priests and their supporters could not accept the oral Torah. They gave the advocates of the Oral Torah the derogatory name "Pharisees", that is, those who depart from the straight Torah path.

However, in the era of logical thinking, their rejection of the Oral Torah was interpreted as a rejection of the laws of logic that were universally accepted or, even worse, an admission that the Torah of Moses is not a book of truth.

The priests stopped providing plausible solutions. In addition to this, their power, which since time immemorial has been devoid of logical foundation and was anchored only in blind faith in what is written in ancient books, have now begun to be perceived as corruption. By the nature of the world and man, the scourge of corruption did not skip over the priests even before, but now the Pharisees had a tool to strike them.

The Hasmoneans started their way as the heralds of purification, but after they united the monarchy with the sacred service - and even before that - corruption spread in the temple and in all the priests who served in it. The ideas of the Pharisees began to be published even

before the Hasmoneans came to power, but the incentive for their transformation into a mass movement was received with the increase of protest against the corruption among the priests in the Hasmonean period. In futuristic terms they can be seen as "*reformators*". The derogatory nickname "*Pharisees*" was given to them when they were still a small movement. In an attempt to turn the insult into praise, their supporters called them "*Torah interpreters*" in contrast to the priests' supporters who did not agree to accept any interpretation. But among themselves the Pharisees came up with the name "*Israel*", and this is the name they use until today.

Over the generations, the Torah of Moses was compiled and rewritten continuously by human clerks within the walls of the Temple. It goes without saying that this allowed the priests to distort the Torah for their momentary needs in order to strengthen their power and status. As such, the Torah of Moses cannot be a book of truth, and therefore there is no basis for the revolutionary assertions of the Oral Torah that is relied upon. But admitting this would diminish the status of the priests, eliminate the importance of the Temple and scatter the Jewish people everywhere. And so, although they did not want to accept the oral Torah, the priests reluctantly approved it by silence.

Be that as it may, a growing public of the people showed disappointment with the priests, and the status of the Temple gradually decreased. Since it could not raise funds as in its good

days, the importance of the Temple also decreased in the eyes of the foreign conqueror who did not bother to prevent its destruction (or perhaps even initiated it) in a great bloodbath, and many valuable writings caught fire and were lost forever.

eventually, the Pharisees survived and prospered. There is room to see the Oral Torah as the key to survival. On the one hand, in contrast to the written Torah, it has a logic that corresponds to the dictates of the in-depth mode of thinking of the Western, Hellenistic culture. On the other hand, it adheres to the biblical text and sanctifies it even more than the sanctification by the priests of the temple, since without it the oral Torah loses its basis.

The belief in the afterlife and resurrection has a strong survivility power. The written Torah does not provide such a promise. The other books of the Bible, even if we hint at such a possibility, do not explicitly guarantee this. The Oral Torah, in the tortuous way of interpretation and requirement, comes to the conclusion that there is life after death, although this conclusion is not based on evidence.

Christians have such a belief recorded in their basic scriptures.

These were written at a time when significant chapters of the Oral Torah were written, but contrary to it they bring direct evidence that a man was resurrected from the dead and even ascended to heaven. Muslims also have such a belief which is described in a high level of detail in their holy literature.

While the believers of the other two take the afterlife for granted, the Jew has to wriggle quite a bit with the Oral Torah, study it well and spend many years of his life practicing it. This heavy task causes a decrease in the survival power of Judaism compared to that of other religions. However, even though it makes survival more difficult, this heavily occupation leads to the fact that only those with the ability to learn and memorize adhere to Judaism (and perhaps this explains the high proportion of Jews among the educated in the world compared to the proportion of Jews in the general population).

Onias-IV, the son of Onias-III, did not bother with trifles. He went to Egypt and was received there with all the respect due to God's servants. He found there many believers, an army of priests and more than enough money to build a magnificent temple like the one his father left in Jerusalem. In retrospect, it turned out that the dismissal was beneficial to them. The seed of Onias settled in Egypt and gained great power.

The foreign ruler believed (out of what some interpreted as insanity) that he was a god and the representative of the head of the gods on earth, and he made the temple in Jerusalem his own.

He deposed priests and appointed others under them as he saw fit and massacred the inhabitants of the city. The Jews woke up to understand the magnitude of the disgrace, and rebelled against him time after time. The Hasmonean family united many people for a great revolt during which they managed to depose the priests

appointed by the mad ruler and cleanse the temple in Jerusalem of the foreign elements that had been introduced into it.

By law and by justice, but mainly by the halachic aspect as the prophet's explicit words (four times in the book of Ezekiel), the Jews should have asked the seed of Simeon the righteous to return and fill their place in the temple. However, in Judea the spirit of Hellenism prevailed and many of the Jews did not understand the full significance of the importance of Aaron's seed to the holy service. The names of Onias-III and Jeshua were forgotten in Jerusalem, and other priests took over the sacred service.

The superiority of the wisdom of the Hasmonean priests of Jerusalem over the wisdom of the priests of the Onias temple is expressed, among other things, by the fact that they learned to recognize the importance of the moon. They knew its effect on the water bodies, on the man's mind and being a decisive factor in calculating the success of matchmaking. The recognition of the importance of the moon came from the religions that prevailed in the East. While the economy of Egypt was founded on the river phases whose sources are influenced by the equatorial climate and maintain stability in cycles coordinated with the sun, the economy of Canaan was based on the local weather where the influence of the moon is relatively more pronounced.

The priests of Onias temple were under Egyptian influence and did not appreciate the importance of the moon. The temple that was built

in Egypt was similar to the temple in Jerusalem, but differed from it in one important principle - the worship of the sun. For example, the menorah in Onias temple was not like the one in the temple in Jerusalem, which was made of reeds shaped like the crescent of new moon, but was round like a ball. It did not stand on the floor but was suspended from the ceiling, as it was in the Temple of Solomon and as it was before in the ancient temples of Egypt.

From the beginning, the priests, sons of Aaron, were not Israelites or Jews. They were members of the priestly seed whose origin is very ancient and which was firmly established in many countries. Like the *Levite* priests, the *Aaronic* priests also made a covenant with the Hebrew people in its various incarnations, and many of them who faithfully served the Jewish people, integrated into its life and became a part of it. However, during the Hasmonean period, corrupt priests who were not of the seed of Aaron (and certainly not of the seed of Zadok) entered the temple and therefore were not worthy to serve in the sanctuary.

As priests know well, no belief, religious or otherwise, reflects the true reality. The main role of the priests is not to present a true description of the structure of the world or its history, but rather to consolidate the congregation of their believers into one strong nation that lives in peace with itself and can be manipulated. For this purpose, if necessary, they also rewrite the ancient scriptures and adapt them to the needs of the moment. They know many religions

and can serve any religious faith that is requested faithfully and efficiently. The Pharisees in their various incarnations believe that humans will be resurrected after their death. The priests denied this completely because they adhered to the Holy Scriptures compiled by Ezra the scribe word by word and did not find any such promise in them. The Pharisees, advocating the concept that the Holy Scriptures contain *hidden clues* that must be interpreted and deciphered, find more than enough "*proofs*" for the resurrection of the dead or another way of life after death.

Who destroyed the temple? The historian Flavius testifies that Titus asked his soldiers not to damage the magnificent temple building which he saw from the vantage points on the Mount of Scopus ridge and the Mount of Olives to the east; However, one single torch, which was thrown into the temple, ignited a fire in it that caused its destruction. Flavius says that it was one of the soldiers who accidentally threw the torch. Flavius' slanders say that he was careful not to portray his Roman hosts in a negative light and therefore underestimated the part Titus took in the destruction. However, even if he had not been under this constraint, it is likely that he would not have told the story differently. Even before Titus' forces breached the wall of Jerusalem, it was already a concoction of murder and destruction. A single torch cannot cause much damage unless the temple was already flooded with flammable materials in preparation for its burning. There were priests who feared that the conqueror

would defile the Temple and they preferred that it be burned and does not fall in its entirety into the hands of the enemy. The suspicion that it was the priests of the temple who destroyed the second temple on purpose is strengthened in light of the fact that the destruction was scheduled for exactly the same date that the first temple was destroyed.

The status of the priests in Rabbinic Judaism

While Messianic Judaism (Christianity) adhered to priests and their rituals, Pharisaic Judaism strove to curtail the authority of the priests, and was very successful in doing so. Messianic Judaism and Pharisaic Judaism each developed in their own direction and became separate religions. Messianic Judaism has developed into the largest religion in the world and it is no longer included in any Jewish sect in any matter. Despite its numerical inferiority, Pharisaic Judaism also prospered and reached the present day. The secret of its prosperity lies in maintaining its affinity with the priests despite narrowing their steps. The common man will always strive to worship the holy, the tamer and the invisible, and in order to attract him to keep the law one should not avoid attaching the law to the holy work. Despite the lack of respect that the Pharisees used for the priests, they did not seek to abolish the priesthood, but quite the opposite. They interpreted the Torah in order to adhere to it and not in order to distant themselves from it. They adhered to the commandments of the Torah, and in none of the interpretations they gave to it was there

a reason to abolish the priesthood. And because the priests were able to firmly establish their position and anchor it in the Torah over many generations, the Pharisees attached a weighty importance to their existence. However, to exclude what is vested in the priests by virtue of the commandments of the Torah, the Pharisees worked to expropriate from their hands any authority or trace of authority that does not originate in the Torah. Even before the destruction of the temple, the priests lost much of their authority, and after the destruction they had no authority at all. However, those of the priests who were content with little and remained loyal to the Jewish people were able to preserve their honorable status as the pillar of religious worship, and it remains intact to this very day and is the central core of the Jewish religion and the factor that binds the Jews to the nation. And as long as the Jewish people respect their priests, they will survive despite all the persecutions that have been and will be. The claim that the Jews "*run*" the world is often heard. Most of the time, this claim is associated with hatred of Jews. It cannot be ignored because, after all, the proportion of Jews in the administrative population is indeed immeasurably greater than their proportion in the general population. It is also impossible to ignore the claim that there is a global Jewish connection, because it is known that Jews support each other; For example, since the establishment of the Jewish state, the state of Israel, the vast majority of world Jewry supports it.

The relative superiority of the Jews and Judaism is often presented as corruption. This is not the place to discuss the definition of corruption and the justification of this claim. However, it seems that there are only few members of the nations who are able to create better ties of mutual support than the Jews know how to create, and not many members of the nations are gifted with a higher intelligence than the Jews. Mutual support and high intelligence contribute to a well-being of life, and often those *who do not know the "secret"* tend to interpret the success of the Jews as corruption and attribute it to an international conspiracy as well.

The original Jewish religion revolved around priests. The people came to the temples out of love and the priests did not force the religion on them. They only served the public and cooperated with various parties. For example, the priests of Solomon's Temple lived in peace with the priests of the other temples and shrines in Jerusalem. The priests of Anathoth, being zealous for the worship of the one God, were not allowed to serve in the temple. Those who impose religion on the people are the secular rulers and leaders. In the days of the First Temple, it was the kings of Judah who decided on the religious lifestyle of the people, whether it was the worship of only one god - as did Josiah, or to many idols - as other kings did. At the beginning of the Second Temple, when there was no king in Judah, it was public leaders that did not serve as priests who decided on the religious lifestyle of the people according to the way they

interpreted it to be correct. The outstanding example is the couple Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra was a priest and endeared the Torah to the people in pleasant ways while Nehemiah, who was not a priest but the ruler appointed by the king, imposed the Torah on the people.

Epilogue

Onias-III's warnings to his seed from worshipping the Sun-God were of no avail.

Temple religions are characterised by giving respect to the priests as they mediate between the believers and their gods. There is a hierarchy of respect starting from God through the priests to the common people, and all ranks are considered as created in God's image. The respect to the priests embodies respect to man in general. The religions of prophets are characterised by striving for justice between people and they do not include respect to priests, and man is not created in God's image. Judaism combines the characteristics of both, religion of priests and religion of prophets, and embodies both striving for justice between people and respect for human dignity.

Christianity is not a paradoxical religion as Judaism. Although it is loaded with plenty of myths and saints, it does not suffer from the internal conflict between the religion of morality promoted by prophets and the religion of ceremonies promoted by priests. There is ample evidence that Christianity originated in Judaism, but in its

simple idolatrous format Christianity succeeded in easily endearing itself on people all over the world, and the number of its followers is a hundred times larger than that of Judaism (the Islamic religion, too, has a similar number of followers and the cause for it is also its simplicity, but due to the opposite reason).

In spite of its small size, less than a quarter percent of the human population, Judaism is located very high close to the top of world intellect. The most prominent example of this is the rate of Jews among the Nobel Prize laureates in science – some thirty percent – more than a hundred times larger than their rate in the general population. There is a tendency to think that Judaism brings about wisdom, but high intellect is also found among many non-Jews whose origin is in Jewish families. Therefore, perhaps the reason of this phenomenon is the other way around, namely, not Judaism is the condition to high intellect but high intellect is attracted to Judaism. As for its being a paradoxical religion, Judaism attracts people of high intellect who seek worthy challenges. People of high intellect, if they seek a religious faith, would prefer Judaism over other religions.

"I Qoheleth was a king over Israel in Jerusalem and I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven" (Ecclesiastes Ch. 1). The book of Ecclesiastes embodies among its chapters the aspiration to search for the truth, even at the possible cost of disbelief in God. Although

the core of Judaism is the belief in God, belonging to it does not entail a restraint to be a believer. The term "*secular Jew*", which sounds as an oxymoron, has a real existence, unlike "*secular Christian*" or "*secular Moslem*". One side of Judaism imposes religion on science, but the other side promotes scientific research and the aspiration to repairing the world. The attitude of the world to Judaism, too, has two faces: On the one hand, the world knows how to appreciate the achievements of science and make use of them; on the other hand, being a minority, Jews are the first to become victims at times when the world enters a tailspin of violence: "*a little city and few men within it and there came a great king against it and besieged it and built great bulwarks against it; now there was found in it a man poor and wise and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man*" (*Ecclesiastes, Ch. 9*). The great king is Antiochus and the poor man is Onias-III, the deposed king who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.