

3 MAKKABEES

TO THE READER

EDITION OF THE GREEK TEXT

NETS has justly been described as the Göttingen Septuagint in English form, for this is true in two senses. Just as the Göttingen editor aims to recover the earliest form of the Greek through text critical means, NETS set itself the task of producing a translation of the text as it left the hands of its respective translator or author. Each book in the corpus is therefore based on the best available critical edition, which invariably means the Göttingen edition, where one is available. We may thus speak of an English Göttingen in this more literal sense as well.

For this translation, I have adhered as a rule to the fine edition of Robert Hanhart, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum IX.3: Maccabaeorum liber III* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), departing only twice. The text of 3 Makkabees is on the whole well preserved and presents few serious difficulties. Of the great uncials, it occurs only in Alexandrinus, but critical leverage is forthcoming from Codex Venetus and numerous cursive manuscripts of the Septuagint. Within the manuscript tradition there are significant variants but no major divergences. The book is extant in a Syriac and Armenian version, though it does not appear in the Vulgate. There are no references to 3 Makkabees in the extant Jewish sources, and what few quotations of the book that come down to us from antiquity are to be found almost exclusively in Christian writers of the East.

Both of my departures from Hanhart's edition derive from the so-called Lucianic text, which, admittedly, is somewhat less than reliable. The first is due primarily to literary considerations. Quite simply, I elected to restore 2.1 to the text, which ascribes to the high priest Simon the prayer before the temple in Jerusalem (2.2–20), notwithstanding the fact that from a text critical perspective the verse is most readily explained as an addition. For while present in the Lucianic text, it is absent in both Alexandrinus and Venetus, and there is no obvious parablepsis to account for the omission (although with this amount of text the problem might have had more to do with the location of the verse on the page). On the other hand, 2.1 is hardly incidental to the scene. Without it, a lengthy and significant act of petitionary prayer must be attributed to a turbulent crowd, whose swelling cry is at once "painful and incessant" (1.28). This, to my knowledge, is without precedent. Rather the scene demands that a representative figure step forward and address God on behalf of the people in their hour of need. Such is the case at 3 Makkabees 6.1, where Eleazaros, "a man well known among the priests of the country," prays for those gathered at the hippodrome as they face the elephants (6.2–15). The strong parallel drawn by the author between these two moments of national crisis and deliverance is fundamental to the dramatic structure of 3 Makkabees. So on literary grounds, there is considerable justification for including the reference to Simon at 2.1, his act of priestly intercession at the temple anticipating that of Eleazaros at the hippodrome. Yet, as I have indicated, the textual evidence would suggest that the verse is secondary. For this reason I decided to enclose 2.1 in square brackets, thereby indicating its questionable originality.

A rather different sort of problem arises at 5.31, where, in reference to the families of the king's "Friends" (i.e., his peers), the Lucianic text has Ptolemy say, ἔσκεύασα ἂν δαψιλῆ θοῖναν, "this abundant feast would I have prepared (for wild beasts)," over against Alexandrinus and Venetus, which read, ἔσκεύασαν δαψιλῆ θοῖναν, "this abundant feast would they have prepared (for wild beasts)." Hanhart follows the reading of the uncials, but in this instance it is the Lucianic text that likely attests to the original form of the Greek. For, whereas on Hanhart's reading it remains entirely unclear just what it was they would have prepared for the beasts (since there is no content for the θοῖναν or "feast"), the Lucianic text makes ready sense. Ptolemy is saying he would that *he* had prepared *them* (i.e., rather than the Jews) as a feast for wild beasts. It is also worth noting that the text forms an iambic line and is likely to be a poetic tag, a feature that is hardly secondary. Conversely, we would not expect the author of 3 Makkabees to have produced an incoherent text. The difference between the two readings, moreover, need be nothing more than a case of haplography or dittography. I thus follow both Emmett and Hadas in translating the Lucianic reading.

PROFILE OF THE GREEK

It is customary within an introduction to 3 Makkabees to decry the author's prose style or want thereof. I shall not entirely disappoint. At the same time, approbation must be given where it is due. The work was composed in Greek by a Jewish author steeped in his native tradition, yet one who had attained a high level of Greek literary education and who was undoubtedly a more than competent exponent of the classicizing style, which came into vogue in the late Hellenistic period. He draws upon a sizeable vocabulary, pressing into service rare and poetic words with great élan. He possesses a developed rhetorical skill. The texture and tone of his language very often suits the theme. But to a modern reader, at least, the result is hardly gratifying. The prose seems almost perversely bombastic at times, and while it must be conceded that it is no more so than that of others who indulged in the classicizing style, the fact remains that our author's efforts are somewhat labored. Or so it appears to this reader. How it was received by his intended audience is difficult to gauge, though I suspect they too found it florid.

As I have indicated, 3 Makkabees is clearly rooted in the Hebrew literary tradition, no doubt mediated to the author through its Greek translation. The two extended petitionary prayers of Simon (2.2–20) and Eleazaros (6.2–15) both echo the characteristic phrasing of Jewish scriptural translation. For the intended audience of 3 Makkabees, this would have marked the Greek of these prayers as a sacral language befitting the priestly role of the speakers. Such a technique underscores the literary competence of the author.

THE NETS TRANSLATION OF 3 MAKKABEES

NETS has two competing objectives: firstly, to give as faithful a translation of the Greek as is possible, not only in terms of its meaning, but in terms of its mode of expression as well; secondly, to create a tool in English for the synoptic study of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. The overall aim of the translation is to capture the constitutive character of the Greek text, the incipit of its reception history, as it were. This aim is neatly realized in the so-called interlinear paradigm, which conceptualizes the relationship between the Greek text and its parent as an essentially formal one. On the assumption of interlinearity, the NETS translator attempts to capture in English the formal linguistic relationship that typically obtains between the Septuagint and its Hebrew parent. This is achieved through the use of the NRSV as a base text.

Obviously, since 3 Makkabees is an original composition, the interlinear paradigm is not applicable here. Hence my translation does not use the NRSV as a base text. Yet the broader aim of NETS, that of representing the Greek in terms of its constitutive manner of expression, is one to which I have closely adhered. Every effort has been made to reflect the linguistic features of the Greek. While it is difficult to know what a contemporary reader would have made of our author's style, we can be confident that the effect was undoubtedly less than felicitous in places, and this have I attempted to carry over into the English. Where the Greek seems repetitious and awkwardly constructed, where it is overwrought and florid, where the author's penchant for rare words and overwrought periods results in obscurity, this has not been smoothed over. Conversely, elegant turns of phrase and persuasive rhetorical figures, where they occur, are given their full due.

The target audience of NETS is biblically well-educated, on the assumption that such readers will have an interest in traditions other than their own. Some may even have studied the biblical languages at one point or another. With this in mind, the present translation is also intended to be of use to those who are working through the Greek text and require a companion. I have endeavored throughout to reflect the grammatical structure of the Greek to the extent that this is possible without doing violence to the English. Hence the translation is more literal than it would be if it were aimed at a popular audience. Yet this feature may prove appealing to those with no Greek at all, as it captures a little of the strangeness of a text written in accordance with literary sensibilities so very different from our own.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Translation is not undertaken in a vacuum but in conversation with other readers. While my aim has been to provide a fresh translation of the Greek based squarely on the principles of NETS, I have by no means ignored the work of earlier translators. For 3 Makkabees, I have learned much from the judicious M. Hadas, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* (Dropsie College Edition, Jewish Apocryphal Literature; New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976 [1953]). And, like Hadas before me, I have benefited from C. W. Emmet's translation, in Charles, 115ff, published separately as *The Third Book of Maccabees* (Translations of Early Documents, Series II, Hellenistic-Jewish Texts; London: SPCK, 1918). My greatest debt of gratitude, however, is to Professor Albert Pietersma, my *Doktor Vater* and dear friend, who first introduced me to 3 Makkabees and has since proven my most trusted guide through the adventure of translating this fascinating text.

CAMERON BOYD-TAYLOR

1 Now when Philopator learned from those who had escaped that the region under his control had been taken by Antiochus, he mobilized all his forces, both infantry and cavalry, and taking along his sister Arsinoe, he set out as far as the region near Raphia, where Antiochus and his cohort were encamped. **2** But a certain Theodotus, intent on carrying out the plot, took along the best of the Ptolemaic soldiers^a previously assigned to him and crossed over to Ptolemy's tent by night in order to kill him single-handed and in this way put an end to the war. **3** But Ptolemy was taken out of harm's way by Dositheus, called the son of Drimylus, a Judean by race who later changed his customs and became estranged from his ancestral beliefs. He made some insignificant person lie in the tent, who, as it happened, received Ptolemy's punishment. **4** A fierce battle ensued and things began to fare considerably better for Antiochus, at which point Arsinoe let down her hair and began passing through the ranks, exhorting them with wailing and tears to come to the aid of both themselves, their children and their wives, boldly promising to give each of them two minas^b of gold should they be victorious. **5** So it turned out that their adversaries were decimated in close combat, and many captives were taken also. **6** Having prevailed against the plot, Ptolemy decided to go the round of the nearby cities and boost their morale. **7** By doing this, and by distributing gifts to their sacred precincts, he restored the confidence of his subjects.

8 As the Judeans had sent ahead members of their senate and elders to greet Ptolemy, to convey presents and to congratulate him on the turn of events, it turned out that he was all the more desirous of visiting them as soon as possible. **9** When he arrived in Hierosolyma, he sacrificed to the supreme God, bestowed favors and performed what was befitting that place. Directly upon entering the place he was struck by its beauty and excellence. **10** Admiring also the good order of the temple, he set his heart on entering the shrine. **11** He was told, however, that this would not be appropriate, since not even members of their own nation were permitted to enter, not even the priests, but only the high priest, the leader of all, and he but once a year. Nevertheless, he was not to be persuaded. **12** The law was read publicly, but not even then did he leave off insisting that he should enter, saying, "Even if those others are deprived of this honor, there is no need for me to be." **13** He then inquired as to why it was that when he entered every other sacred precinct no one present had hindered him, **14** whereupon someone rashly declared that it was wrong to place any significance in that. **15** "But this being the case," said he, "why shouldn't I enter either way, whether they want me to or not?"

16 At that the priests in all their vestments fell prostrate and began imploring the supreme God to come to their aid in the present circumstances

and divert the mad impulse of one so wickedly bent on seeing it through. As they filled the temple with a cry and with their tears, **17** those remaining in the city leapt up in a panic, uncertain as to what had happened. **18** Cloistered virgins in their chambers rushed out with their mothers, sprinkled their hair with ashes and began filling the streets with weeping and groaning. **19** Others who had just now dressed for their weddings abandoned the chambers appointed for the occasion, as well as the appropriate modesty, and made a mad dash through the city. **20** Newborn children were left here and there by their mothers and nurses, some at home, some in the streets, as the women began crowding together blindly in the all-surpassing temple.

21 Many and varied were the petitions of those who had gathered there over what was wickedly being plotted by Ptolemy. **22** Together with these people were the bolder of the citizens, those who were by no means content to see the king pressing his advantage and intent on carrying out his stated purpose. **23** Their cry to rush to arms and to die boldly on behalf of the ancestral law caused absolute turmoil in the place, and it was with some difficulty that they were turned back by the council and elders and assumed the same posture of supplication as the others. **24** The crowd, however, continued praying as before. **25** Meanwhile, the elders who were with the king persisted in their attempts to divert his arrogant mind from the plan he had conceived. **26** But he grew bold and dismissive and even now began making his approach, thinking to bring to a conclusion what he had foresworn to do. **27** When those around him saw these things, they joined together with us in calling upon the one possessing all might to come to our aid at this time and not to overlook such a lawless and arrogant act. **28** Beyond telling was the sound of the crowd's swelling cry, at once painful and incessant; **29** for it seemed that not only the people, but even the walls and the entire edifice rang out, inasmuch as everyone would have given their lives then and there rather than see the place profaned.

2 ^d[So then Simon the high priest, facing the shrine, bent his knee, calmly stretched out his hands and formulated a petition such as this,]^d

2 "Lord, Lord, king of the heavens and sovereign of all creation, holy among the holy ones, sole ruler, almighty, hearken unto us, who are being oppressed by a vile and unholy man, grown insolent with presumption and power. **3** For you, the creator of all things and the governor of all, are a just ruler, and you judge those whose deeds are marked by pride and arrogance. **4** You destroyed those who in the past worked iniquity, among whom were also giants, who trusted in their might and courage, bringing down upon them water immeasurable. **5** You consumed with fire and brimstone the Sodomites, who practiced arrogance and were distinguished among men for their wicked

^aOr arms ^bone mina = 100 drachmas ^cOr take that as a portent ^dOf uncertain originality; om = Ha.

deeds, making them an example for future generations. ⁶You made known your power when with many and diverse punishments you tried bold Pharaoh, when he had enslaved your people, holy Israel, at which time you made known your great might, ⁷and when Pharaoh pursued him^a with chariots and a horde of troops, you inundated them with the deep sea, but those trusting in you, who are the ruler of all creation, you brought to safety. ⁸Those also who witnessed works of your hand praised you as the almighty one. ⁹You, O King, when you created the boundless and immeasurable earth, you chose this city and consecrated this place for your name, though you lack nothing, and you distinguished it with your glorious manifestation, by establishing it for the glory of your great and honored name. ¹⁰Out of love for the house of Israel, you promised that if ever there be a crisis, and overwhelmed by distress we come to this place to beseech you, you will hearken to our prayer. ¹¹Certainly you are faithful and true. ¹²Often times when our fathers were oppressed, you aided them in their humiliation and delivered them from great evils. ¹³And now, behold, Holy King, on account of our many and great sins we are oppressed, subject to our enemies and rendered powerless. ¹⁴And in our downfall, this vile and presumptuous man makes it his business to insult the holy place dedicated on the earth to the name of your glory. ¹⁵Of course, your dwelling place is the highest heaven, beyond the reach of human beings. ¹⁶But when you resolved that your glory should be among your people Israel, you consecrated this place. ¹⁷Do not punish us by the impurity of these men nor call us to account by their profanation, lest the lawless should boast in their heart and rejoice in the arrogance of their speech, saying ¹⁸'We trampled down the house of consecration, just as the houses of the abominables are trampled down.' ¹⁹Expunge our sins; scatter our faults to the winds, and show your mercy at this hour. ²⁰Let your mercy soon surprise us, and put words of praise on the lips of those who are downcast and crushed, putting our souls at peace."

²¹ Just then God, who watches over all things, the primal one, holy among the holy, heeded their lawful entreaty and scourged him, who had become exceedingly puffed up with pride and presumption, ²²and shook him this way and that like a reed in the wind so that he lay helpless on the floor, quite unable to speak and paralyzed in his limbs, bound up, as it were, by a just judgment. ²³Seeing the swift correction which befell him, his friends and bodyguards grew frightened, and fearing for his life, they quickly dragged him off, utterly panic-stricken. ²⁴Yet when he pulled himself together afterwards, he was not at all regretful for having been rebuked but rather went off making bitter threats.

²⁵ When Ptolemy returned to Egypt, he only increased his acts of wickedness, through the influence of both his aforementioned drinking com-

panions and comrades, men divorced from everything just. ²⁶Not content merely with countless acts of lasciviousness, he reached such a degree of audacity that nasty rumours started in the rural districts. Many of the king's friends studied his purpose and set about following his wishes. ²⁷His intention being to cast blame on the nation publicly, he set up a stele on the tower at the court and inscribed the following: ²⁸"Those who do not make public offerings are not to enter their sacred places, but all Judeans are reduced to a menial status and subject to enrollment^b; those who protest will be carried off forcibly for execution; ²⁹those who are registered are also to be branded with the ivy-leaf emblem of Dionysus and assigned to their former status." ³⁰But lest he appear hateful to everyone, he wrote beneath, "If any of them should prefer to adopt the practices of those who have been initiated according to the rites, they will enjoy equal civic rights with the Alexandrians."

³¹ Of course, there were some who, while outwardly detesting the means of their advancement, the religion of the city, quite readily offered themselves so that they might share some of the great glory that would come from being associated with the king. ³²Most, however, prevailed with a noble spirit and did not separate from their religion. Trading their property in exchange for their lives, they fearlessly attempted to save themselves from the registration. ³³They remained hopeful of obtaining support and loathed those who were withdrawing from them; they judged them to be enemies of the nation and began to exclude them from their common social life and from the benefits it provided.

3 When the ungodly one heard these things, he became so enraged that not only was he angry at those in Alexandria, but even more violently opposed to those in the country and ordered for them to be gathered together in haste and their lives brought to a most violent end. ²While these orders were being put into effect, a malicious rumor was circulated against the Judean race by persons conspiring to do them harm, the pretext being that they would prevent others from doing what was lawful. ³The Judeans, for their part, maintained their good will and unswerving loyalty towards the royal house; ⁴at the same time, they continued to revere God and live in accordance with his law and so kept themselves apart with respect to their diet, on account of which they appeared hateful to some. ⁵Yet, by adorning their mutual affairs with the good conduct of the just, they were highly esteemed by all people. ⁶While the good conduct of the race was thus the talk of everyone, it was not taken into account whatsoever by the allophytes, ⁷who instead kept going on about the differences in doing obeisance^c and diet, claiming that these people felt they owed allegiance neither to the king nor to his powers but were hostile and vehemently opposed to affairs of

^ai.e. Israel ^bOr a census-tax ^cPossibly worship

state; so it was no ordinary blame they attached to them.⁸The Greeks in the city, who had suffered no wrong, began seeing unexpected trouble among the people and unforeseen stampedes happening, and while they were unable to offer assistance, for the situation was tyrannical, they nevertheless offered encouragement. Although they felt bad for the Judeans, they thought that things would change for the better;⁹ for such a community, faultless in every respect, would hardly be shown disregard.¹⁰Even now, neighbors, friends and co-workers were quietly drawing some aside, assuring them that they would support them and do the utmost to help them.

11 Ptolemy prided himself in his present success, heedless of the might of the supreme God; rather, he went on assuming that he would persist in the same plan and wrote this letter against the Judeans:

12 "King Ptolemy Philopator extends greetings to his generals and soldiers in Egypt and its districts and bids them well.¹³We ourselves are well, as are the affairs of state.¹⁴Our recent expedition into Asia, of which you yourselves are aware, having been brought to its expected conclusion by the deliberate alliance of the gods,¹⁵we thought it right to foster the nations inhabiting Coele-Syria and Phoenicia not by force of spear but with clemency and much beneficence and to show them kindness gladly.¹⁶We allotted generous revenues to the temples of the various cities and were impelled also to go up to Hierosolyma and honor the temple of a people who are sinful and never refrain from folly.¹⁷While they made a show of welcoming our visit, they were in fact insincere, and when we expressed our desire to enter their shrine and honor it with beautiful and extraordinary votive offerings,¹⁸they, harboring an age old conceit, barred us from the entrance, and it was only on account of the beneficence that we show towards all people that they were spared the full force of our temper.¹⁹They have made evident their enmity towards us. Unique amongst the nations in their haughtiness towards their kings and benefactors, they bear nothing gracefully.²⁰We for our part accommodated their folly and, when we crossed over into Egypt with victory, met all the nations with beneficence; as was befitting, so we did.²¹Amongst these, we publicly declared an amnesty toward their fellow nationals, and on account of their alliance with us, as well as the innumerable matters that have so generously been entrusted to them over the years, we even ventured to consent to a change in their condition, which would have entitled them to Alexandrian citizenship and made them partakers of the customary sacred rites.²²But they took things the wrong way and with their native malice rejected a good thing. Inclined as they always have been towards what is base,²³they not only turned down the priceless offer of citizenship but continue to express loathing, as much by their silence as by what they say, towards the few among them who are genuinely disposed towards us, looking at every turn to hasten the ruin of our af-

fairs through their most shameful way of living.²⁴Wherefore, since we are well convinced by the evidence that these people are in every way ill-disposed towards us, and taking precaution, lest at some later date, with trouble suddenly upon us, we find these ungodly traitors and barbarians at our backs as enemies,²⁵we have ordered that directly upon the publication of this letter, those living amongst us, together with their wives and children, are to be conveyed to us with cruel and harsh treatment, bound hand and foot in iron chains, for the irremediable and ignoble slaughter befitting malcontents.²⁶For when these people have been punished once and for all, we believe that our affairs will in time become entirely stable and well ordered.²⁷But whosoever shelters any of the Judeans, from the old to the young, even infants, will be executed with degrading torments, along with their entire household.²⁸As for those who are willing to inform, they will receive the property of the one incurring the punishment, as well as a thousand drachmas from the royal treasury, and they will be honored with the crown of freedom.²⁹Any place where a Judean is discovered being sheltered in any way, however, is without exception to become untrodden and scorched; it will become altogether worthless to every mortal creature for all time."³⁰The original of the letter was written in this manner.

4 Everywhere this ordinance reached, public feasting was organized for the nations with shouts of joy, as their inveterate hatred, long felt, was now openly displayed.²Yet among the Judeans there was indescribable grief and a mournful outburst of tears, their hearts altogether inflamed from groaning, as they bewailed the unforeseen destruction suddenly decreed for them.³What province or city, what place at all inhabited or which streets were not filled with lamentation and weeping for them? ⁴One and all they were being sent off by the generals of each city in such a severe and merciless spirit that even some of their enemies found compassion for the extraordinary punishments before their eyes and, reflecting on life's uncertain conclusion, began to weep over their miserable expulsion.⁵For a multitude of old men covered in gray hair were being led off, shamefully pressing into service for the swift march the torpor of feet already twisted from old age at the start of the violent upheaval.⁶Young women who had just now entered the bridal chamber for the partnership of married life soon exchanged their joy for mourning and mingled ashes into hair still wet with unguent, and as they were lead away unveiled, it was a dirge rather than a wedding-song they started up one and all, savaged by the barbarous cruelties of a foreign nation;⁷bound in full public view, they were dragged forcibly as far as the boat for embarkation.⁸Their spouses wrapped nooses instead of garlands around their necks, although in their youth and prime of life, and spent the remaining days of their marriage feast not in banqueting and youthful

amusement but rather in mourning, seeing the grave already lying before them. ⁹They were driven on board like beasts constrained with iron bonds, some being fastened at the neck to the yokes of the boats and others secured by their feet in unbreakable fetters; ¹⁰moreover, with solid planking fixed above, they were in total darkness and so received the treatment befitting traitors throughout the entire voyage.

¹¹ They were brought to the place known as Schedia, and with the voyage now concluded, as had been ordained by the king, he ordered them to encamp in the hippodrome before the city, which was immense in circumference and well situated for making them an example to all those returning to the city as well as to those of them going abroad to the country so that they could neither communicate with his forces nor in any way claim the protection of the city walls. ¹²And when this happened, upon hearing that the same people leaving the city secretly lamented the shameful misery of their brothers, ¹³he became furious and ordered that they be treated in exactly the same way as the others, in no way whatsoever being spared the punishment meted out to those ¹⁴and that the whole race be registered by name, not for the exhausting manual labor briefly described above, but so that, having suffered the tortures which had been ordered, they might finally be destroyed in the space of a single day. ¹⁵Their registration thus proceeded in bitter haste and eager diligence from sunrise to sunset, yet was still incomplete when it ended forty days later.

¹⁶ The king, meanwhile, continued to be exceedingly joyful and went ahead organizing drinking parties in the presence of his idols, with a mind led far astray from the truth and a vile mouth, which praised that which is deaf and unable to speak or to assist itself, while uttering improprieties to the supreme God. ¹⁷Yet after the previously mentioned space of time, the scribes reported to the king that they could no longer carry on with the registration of the Judeans owing to their immense number; ¹⁸the majority were indeed still in the country, some still in their homes, others further afield, so it was impossible for all the generals in Egypt. ¹⁹At this he began to threaten them obstinately that they had been bribed to devise the escape, but it so happened that he himself became plainly convinced on the matter, ²⁰when they proved to him that both the papyrus and writing reeds, which they had been using, had been spent. ²¹This, however, was the work of the invincible providence of the one who was aiding the Judeans from heaven.

5 Then the king, filled with violent anger and fury and altogether intractable, summoned Hermon, the person charged with the care of the elephants, ²and ordered him for the next day to give all the elephants, five-hundred in number, copious handfuls of frankincense and abundant un-

mixed wine to drink and, once they had been driven wild by the copious supply of drink, to lead them in for the Judeans to meet their fate. ³When he had issued these orders, he turned to feasting, bringing together those amongst his friends and the army who were especially hostile towards the Judeans. ⁴Meanwhile Hermon, the elephantarch, began faithfully carrying out what had been commanded. ⁵That evening the officiants who were assigned to them came out and began binding the hands of the afflicted and through the night took further precautions for their security, believing that the race would meet its final destruction once and for all. ⁶But the Judeans, who to the nations seemed to be bereft of all defense on account of the constraint of their chains that confined them on every side, ⁷all called out with an irrepressible cry and with tears to the Almighty Lord, Ruler of every power, their merciful God and Father, beseeching him ⁸to overturn the ungodly plot against them and with a glorious manifestation to rescue them from the fate that lay ready before them. ⁹And so their entreaty continued to ascend fervently to the sky.

¹⁰ Hermon, having given the merciless elephants their drink so that they were filled with an abundant supply of wine and glutted with frankincense, presented himself at court early in the morning to inform the king concerning these things. ¹¹But he^a sent upon the king a portion of sleep, that good creature which from time immemorial has been bestowed night and day by the one who gives freely to all, whomsoever he wishes, ¹²and through the action of the master, he was overcome by a pleasant and deep slumber and thus disappointed in his wicked purpose and entirely cheated of his unbending calculation. ¹³The Judeans, having escaped the appointed hour, began praising their holy God and were once again entreating the one who is easily reconciled to show arrogant nations the might of his all powerful hand. ¹⁴It was now approaching the middle of the tenth hour, and the person who was in charge of the invitations, seeing that the invited guests had assembled, approached the king and gave him a nudge. ¹⁵With some difficulty he woke him up and informed him that the hour of the banquet was already slipping by, explaining the situation to him. ¹⁶Once he had given the matter some thought, the king turned to drinking and ordered those who had come for the banquet to recline opposite him. ¹⁷When this had been done, he began urging them, as they gave themselves over to feasting, to spend the present part of the banquet in merriment by celebrating all the more. ¹⁸After the party had been going for some time, the king summoned Hermon and with angry threats began questioning him as to why the Judeans had been permitted to survive a further day. ¹⁹But when he reported that the order had been carried out to the letter overnight, and his friends corroborated this, ²⁰the king, with a savagery worse than that of

^ai.e. God

Phalaris, said that while they had today's sleep to be thankful for, "tonight without further delay prepare the elephants in the same manner for the destruction of the lawless Judeans."²¹ After the king had spoken, all those who were present at once readily consented with joy, whereupon each returned to his own house.²² They did not, however, spend the duration of the night sleeping, so much as in devising every sort of mockery for those who appeared to be in such distress.

²³ The cock had just crowed at dawn, when Hermon, having fully armed the beasts, began whipping them up in the great colonnade.²⁴ Crowds of people in the city had gathered for the most pitiful spectacle, eagerly awaiting the morning.²⁵ The Judeans, for their part, were at that very moment drawing their last breath; stretching their hands towards the sky, they began entreating the supreme God with tearful supplication and mournful songs to hasten to their aid once more.²⁶ The rays of the sun were not yet scattered abroad, and the king was still receiving his friends, when Hermon arrived and began summoning them for the departure, indicating that the king's desire was in readiness.²⁷ Yet when he received the news and was dumbfounded by the unauthorized departure, possessed as he was by total ignorance, he began inquiring as to what was the business upon which this had been executed for him in such haste.²⁸ This was the working of God who is master of all things, for he had made the king forgetful as to the purpose of his former schemes.²⁹ Hermon and all his friends began to point out that the beasts and the forces were ready, "O king, in accordance with your express intention."³⁰ But he was filled with violent anger at what was said, for by divine providence his whole impression of these things had been scattered, and with a threatening glare, he said,³¹ "How ever many of your parents or young children had been present, this abundant feast would I^a have prepared for wild beasts instead of the blameless Judeans, who have demonstrated complete and steadfast loyalty to my parents and myself.³² And yet, but for the affection of a common upbringing and familiarity, you would have been deprived of life instead of them."³³ So Hermon suffered an unexpected and dangerous threat and wore his humiliation both in his eyes and face.³⁴ One by one the king's friends began sullenly slipping out, and they released those who had gathered, each to his own affairs.³⁵ When the Judeans heard what the king had said, they began praising the manifest God, Lord, King of kings, since they had obtained also this aid from him.

³⁶ The king assembled the entire drinking-party along the same lines and began encouraging them to make merry.³⁷ He summoned Hermon with threats and said, "How many times do I have to give you the selfsame orders, you wretch?³⁸ Arm the elephants even now for tomorrow's extermination of the Judeans."³⁹ But his Kinsmen, who were reclining together with him at table,

wondering at his unstable mind, began to reproach him thus,⁴⁰ "O king, how long will you go on testing us unreasonably, like idiots, ordering us now for a third time to obliterate them and then in turn canceling your decrees on this business once again?⁴¹ As a result the city is in an uproar with expectation and is already swarming with gangs and frequently in danger of being looted."⁴² Whereupon the king, who was in every respect a Phalaris and filled with madness, regarding as nothing the changes of heart taking place within him towards the visitation of the Judeans, swore a bootless oath that he would dispatch them to Hades without delay, tormented by the knees and feet of the beasts,⁴³ and thereupon march against Judea and swiftly level it with fire and spear, and that their shrine, "forbidden to us," would quickly topple over in the fire and be rendered destitute of those performing sacrifices there for all time.⁴⁴ Then the Friends and Kinsmen went on their way overjoyed and faithfully set about posting the forces to those parts of the city most advantageous for keeping guard.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the elephantarch, having brought the beasts, frightfully decked out in their gear, close to a state of madness, so to speak, with most fragrant drinks of wine mixed with frankincense,⁴⁶ entered the court at about dawn, by which time the city had already filled up with innumerable crowds at the hippodrome, and began rousing the king to the matter at hand.⁴⁷ He, in turn, upon filling his ungodly mind full of violent rage, fiercely set out with the beasts, wishing to view with the very pupils of his eyes and an invulnerable heart the painful and miserable ruin of those mentioned beforehand.⁴⁸ As the elephants and the armed force accompanying them were going out around the gate, the Judeans both saw the dust of the passing throng and heard the roaring crowd⁴⁹ and, believing this to be their last moment of life, the end of their wretched suspense, gave themselves over to lamentation and wailing and began kissing one another, embracing their relatives, falling upon their necks, parents their children, mothers their daughters and yet others holding newborn infants to the breast as they drew their last milk.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, when they considered all the help from heaven that had fallen to their share in the past, they threw themselves prostrate with one accord, parted their newborn from the breasts⁵¹ and called out to the ruler of every power with an exceedingly loud cry, entreating him to show them mercy by making an appearance, they who stood even now at the gates of Hades.

6 Now a certain Eleazaros, a man well known among the priests of the country, who had already reached old age and been adorned with every virtue throughout his life, restrained the elders around him from calling upon the holy God and said the following prayer:

² "O king, dread sovereign, most high, almighty God, who govern all creation with compassion,

^athey = Ha.

³look upon the seed of Abraam, upon the children of sanctified Iakob, the people of your sanctified inheritance, strangers in a strange land, who, O Father, are perishing unjustly. ⁴When Pharao, former ruler of this Egypt, was waxing with chariots, conceited in his lawless impudence and boasting tongue, you destroyed him, drowned at sea together with his proud army, and showed forth the light of your mercy on the race of Israel. ⁵When Sennacherim, dread king of the Assyrians, gloried in his countless powers and, having already seized control over the entire land by the spear, was poised also to march against your holy city, speaking fiercely with boasting and insolence, you broke him, O Sovereign, displaying your might to many nations. ⁶When the three companions in Babylonia willingly gave their lives to the fire so as not to serve vain things, you sprinkled the scorching furnace and rescued them unharmed, even so far as a hair, and sent the flame upon all their enemies. ⁷When Daniel, through envious slander, was thrown to the lions below the earth as food for wild beasts, you brought him up to the light unscathed, ⁸and when Ionas wasted away in the belly of the sea monster raised in the depths, you looked to him, O Father, and revealed him to all his relations unscathed. ⁹And now, you who hate insolence, abounding in mercy, Protector of the universe, swiftly manifest yourself to those of the race of Israel, who are now suffering outrages at the hands of detestable and lawless nations. ¹⁰Even if our life has become entangled in impieties during our exile, rescue us, O Master, from the clutches of our enemies, and then destroy us by the fate you choose. ¹¹Do not let the vainglorious praise their vanities upon the destruction of your beloved, by saying, 'Their God did not rescue them.' ¹²But you who possess all might and all sovereignty, eternal one, look now, and show mercy on us, who are being removed from life in the manner of traitors due to the senseless arrogance of the lawless. ¹³Today let nations cower before your invincible power, O honored one, you who have the power to bring the race of Iakob to safety. ¹⁴The entire multitude of newborns and their parents are entreating you with tears. ¹⁵Let it be shown to all nations that you are with us, Lord, and that you have not turned your face away from us, but as you said, 'Not even when they were in the land of their enemies did I despise them'; thus make it so, O Lord."

¹⁶Just as Eleazaros was bringing his prayer to an end, the king went by the hippodrome together with the beasts and all the pride of the force. ¹⁷At the sight of this, the Judeans cried out loudly to heaven so that even the nearby valleys resounded, causing frenzied terror throughout the entire army. ¹⁸Then the most glorious, Almighty and true God showed forth his holy face and opened the heavenly gates from which descended two glorious angels, terrible to behold, who were apparent to all except to the Judeans, ¹⁹and they withstood the force of the opponents and filled them with confusion and dread and bound them fast with shackles. ²⁰And even the body of the king was ashudder,

and forgetfulness overcame his indignant impudence. ²¹Then the beasts turned upon the armed forces accompanying them and began trampling and destroying them.

²²The king's anger now turned to pity and tears for what had been devised by him earlier. ²³For when he heard the cry and perceived them all lying prostrate for destruction, he wept and began threatening his friends angrily, saying, ²⁴"You are guilty of treason and have exceeded tyrants in cruelty, and now you are attempting to deprive even me, your benefactor, of both sovereignty and life, by secretly forming designs unbeneficial to the kingdom. ²⁵Who was it that drove from their homes those who faithfully maintain our frontier fortresses and gathered every one of them together here? ²⁶Who was it that so lawlessly surrounded with outrages those who from the beginning have exceeded all nations in their goodwill towards us and have frequently taken the gravest human dangers upon themselves? ²⁷Loosen, undo unjust fetters, and send them off to their homes in peace, begging their pardon for what has been done before. ²⁸Set free the sons of the Almighty, heavenly, living god, who from our parents' time until now has been providing uninterrupted and illustrious stability to our affairs." ²⁹That then is what he said, and they were released instantly and began blessing the holy savior God, having just escaped death.

³⁰Thereupon the king withdrew to the city, summoned the overseer of revenues and ordered him to supply the Judeans with both wines and all else requisite for seven days of feasting, having decided that they would joyfully celebrate a festival of deliverance in the very place in which they had expected to meet destruction. ³¹Then those who were once objects of contempt and next to Hades, or rather at it, united for a feast of deliverance rather than one of bitter and mournful doom, and filled with joy they apportioned to parties of revelers the place that had been prepared for their destruction and burial. ³²They left off the sad strain of their dirges and took up an ancestral song, praising the savior and wonder-working God, and having dispelled all wailing and lamentation, they began organizing dances as a sign of peaceful joy. ³³The king likewise assembled a substantial drinking party on account of these things and was offering thanks to heaven ceaselessly and profusely for the unexpected deliverance that had befallen him. ³⁴Those who just before had assumed that the Judeans would be destroyed and become carrion, and who had registered them with joy, groaned, as they themselves were now clothed in shame, their fiery courage ignobly extinguished. ³⁵The Judeans, as we said before, had organized the aforementioned dancing and feasting and were celebrating with cheerful acknowledgements and melodies. ³⁶They laid down for themselves a general rule concerning these matters for the entire duration of their residence as aliens throughout their generations, and they resolved to celebrate the aforementioned days in merriment, not for the sake of drink and gluttony, but for the deliverance that had

come to them through God. ³⁷Then they entreated the king, asking leave to go about their own business. ³⁸Now they had registered them from the twenty-fifth of Pachon until the fourth of Epiphi, over a period of forty days, and had appointed their destruction from the fifth to the seventh of Epiphi, over a period of three days, ³⁹at which time also the ruler of all, gloriously manifesting his mercy, rescued them all together and unscathed. ⁴⁰They were being entertained sumptuously in every respect by the king and continued feasting until the fortieth day, on which also they petitioned for their release. ⁴¹The king granted this to them and very generously wrote on their behalf to the generals in each city the following letter, which possesses ardor:

7 " King Ptolemy Philopator extends greetings to his generals in Egypt and to all those who have been appointed to office and bids them well.

² "We ourselves are well, as are our children, for the supreme God is directing our affairs just as we would have it. ³Some of our friends malevolently persuaded us with their incessant pestering to gather our Judean subjects together in a body and to have them punished in accordance with the extraordinary sanctions against rebels, ⁴urging that since they bear enmity toward all the nations, our government would never be stable until this was accomplished. ⁵They brought them down cruelly bound as slaves, or rather as traitors, and, without any preliminary investigation and inquiry, attempted to destroy them, having fastened to themselves a cruelty more savage than the law of the Scythians. ⁶But for this we on our part violently threatened them, in accordance with the clemency we bear towards all people, scarcely granting them their lives and knowing assuredly that the heavenly God protects the Judeans, as a father always comes to the aid of his sons, ⁷and having taken into consideration the firm good will of a friend, which they have displayed towards us and our forebears, we have justly acquitted them of every charge whatsoever, ⁸and we have instructed all of them to return each to their own home in every place, with no one hurting them without exception, nor to reproach them for what has happened contrary to reason. ⁹For know that, should we devise any evil against these people or offend them at all, it will be no mere mortal but the one who is sovereign over every power, God most high, that we shall have forever set inescapably against us in everything to avenge the deed. Farewell."

¹⁰ Upon receiving this letter, they did not hurry straightaway to set about their departure but

made a petition to the king, that those from the race of the Judeans who had freely disobeyed the holy God and God's law should obtain their deserved punishment through them, ¹¹insisting that those who had disobeyed the divine ordinances for the sake of their belly would never be favorably disposed towards the affairs of the king. ¹²He in turn acknowledged that they were speaking the truth, consented and granted them complete license to destroy openly those who had disobeyed God's law throughout the whole of his dominion, without any express royal authorization or oversight. ¹³They then applauded him as was fitting; their priests and the entire multitude cried out the Hallelouia with joy, and they departed ¹⁴and thus set about punishing every defiled fellow national who fell in their path and slaying them as an example to all. ¹⁵On that day they slew more than three hundred men, a day which they also celebrated as one of merriment, seeing that they had overpowered the profane with joy. ¹⁶Then those who had held fast to God unto death, having received the complete reward of deliverance, shifted their quarters from the city, wreathed with every kind of fragrant flower, and with gladness and a shout they continued giving thanks to the God of their fathers, the eternal savior of Israel, with words of praise and hymns in every kind of melody.

¹⁷ Now when they arrived at Ptolemais—called "rose-bearing" on account of the characteristic feature of the place—where the fleet waited for them for seven days, according to their common plan, ¹⁸there they held a celebration of deliverance, the king having stoutly supplied them with everything for their transit, until each arrived at his own home. ¹⁹They landed peacefully with the appropriate acknowledgements, and there too they likewise resolved to celebrate also these days in merriment for the duration of their residence as aliens, ²⁰and having dedicated these days and consecrated them for prayer on a stele by the place of the banquet, they went on their way, unharmed, free and overjoyed, being preserved over land and sea and river by command of the king, each to his own home, ²¹and among their enemies they possessed a greater dominance than before, both honored and feared, and were abused of their belongings by no one. ²²Everyone recovered all of their property in accordance with the registration so that those who held anything returned it to them with great fear, for the supreme God had performed mighty works entirely for their deliverance. ²³Blessed be the rescuer of Israel for all time! Amen.

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