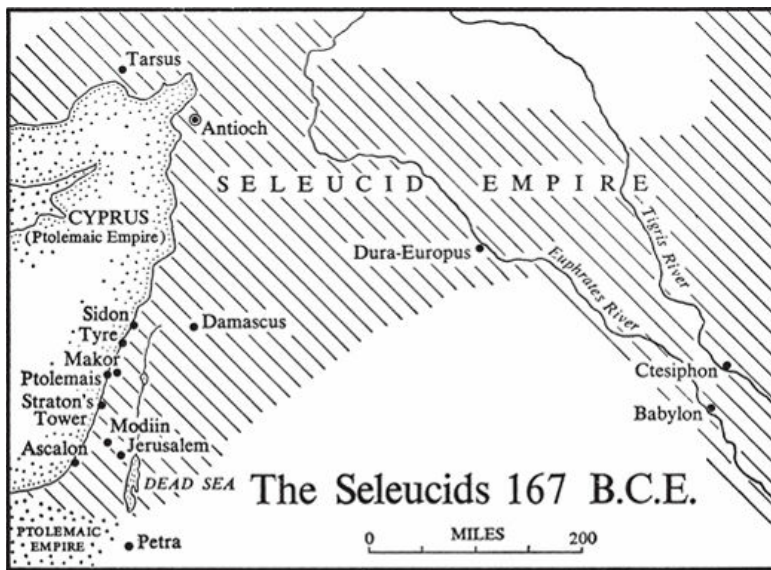


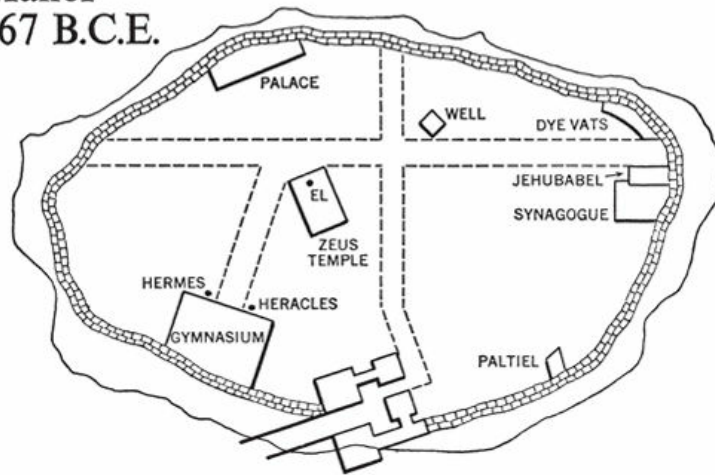
Michener, *The Source*, Chapter 10

This is a book with stories from different historical periods about life in a fictional town called "Makor" located NW of the Sea of Galilee. I liked this chapter because it described the culture clash between Jewish culture and Greek (Hellenistic) culture. It also has a savage description of a flogging. We'll see signs of the clash between these two cultures on our trip, and it also explains Jewish tensions during the intertestamental period and into the Gospels and Acts, like the conflict in Acts 6 between the widows or the reluctance to go to the Gentiles.

# Chapter 10 – In the Gymnasium



Makor  
167 B.C.E.



MANY TIMES IN THEIR LONG HISTORY THE JEWS WOULD BE threatened with extinction because of planned religious persecutions, but none of the later holocausts would start so gently and with such persuasiveness as the first in the series, launched in the year 171 B.C.E. by Antiochus IV, tyrant of the Seleucid empire.

In 605 B.C.E. the Hebrews of Makor had been hauled off to their Babylonian captivity, but some fifty years later, as the voice of Gomer had predicted, Cyrus of Persia had crushed Babylon in a war that lasted less than a week and the Jews of Makor were not only permitted but encouraged to return home, so long as they remained obedient to Persian rule. In 336, at the age of twenty, Alexander the Great ascended his throne and began his conquests, so that for the next seven hundred years everyone from Sparta to India experienced Greek culture and most spoke the Koine, a Greek dialect common to all countries; but the distances in the new empire were so vast, and so few citizens could have direct contact with Greece, that a kind of substitute Greek culture developed, the Hellenism born of men who loved the Greek ideals of beauty but who interpreted them in Egyptian or Persian or Syrian terms. It was this Hellenism that was to rule the known world for many centuries; but the empire was not destined to remain unified, for in the confusion following Alexander's death, the eastern portion was finally divided between two of his Macedonian generals. Ptolemy took Egypt, including Makor, as his northernmost outpost, while Seleucus took enormous holdings from Thrace to India, later to be known as the Seleucid empire, with its resplendent capital at Antioch, some two hundred and thirty miles north of Makor.

In 198, after a century of border warfare between the two Hellenistic empires, the Seleucids under Antiochus III finally humiliated the Egyptians, taking from them Israel as a prize of war, and Makor switched from being the northern outpost of Egypt to being a southern outpost of Seleucia. One of the first things the new ruler did was to promulgate a decree which gave much encouragement to the Jews of Makor: "Be it known that our majestic emperor advises his new Jewish subjects that they are now free to worship their god as they wish. They may build synagogues. Their priests may offer sacrifices—the only requirement being that they must in no way offend Zeus, whom all accept as the supreme deity of the Seleucids." Not only was the pronouncement generous; its enforcement was sympathetic. In the center of Makor, above the ancient site where the monolith of El lay

buried in rubble, a beautiful little temple was built, with six small Doric columns and a pediment showing goddesses at rest. It contained one small head of Zeus carved from Parian marble, and neither the temple nor the god was obtrusive. In another part of town, tucked in against the eastern wall, stood a synagogue equally unobtrusive but not equally beautiful. In fact, it was ugly—having been built of muddy-colored clay bricks and rough timbers—but for the first twenty-seven years of Seleucid rule those Jews who remained loyal to their synagogue lived easily with the bulk of the citizenry who adhered to Zeus and his temple. Each group followed Greek customs, used coins with Greek inscriptions and in their public life spoke the Koine. Though they had never seen Greece they referred to themselves as Greeks, so that in all respects Makor was a typical Hellenistic town.

In 171 Antiochus IV announced a small change in the religious life of his dominions, and if the Jews of Makor had enjoyed first-rate leadership they might have foreseen at that moment that trouble of great magnitude was upon them; but they were poorly led and the fact escaped them. The new rule was clear-cut: “Henceforth all citizens must acknowledge that the god Zeus has come to earth in the person of our divine emperor, Antiochus Epiphanes.” At first the idea seemed startling to the Jews, but they were assured by the town officials that the new ruling would affect them in no way. Some time later a gigantic head of the emperor was moved into the temple, the small head of Zeus having been placed to one side, and when the new god was at rest, all citizens were assembled in the square facing the temple, where an official read the law: “Those who enter the temple of Zeus must pay homage to our imperial leader, Antiochus Epiphanes, and accept him as Olympian Zeus appearing among us in mortal form.” The citizens, straining their necks to see the massive head, agreed that Antiochus looked like Zeus, with godlike curls and benign visage. “Jews who prefer to worship in their synagogue are not affected by this law,” the reader continued, “for our great emperor has no wish to offend any man so long as his deity is acknowledged.” As a matter of fact, when the Jews heard that they did not have to worship Antiochus a good many through natural curiosity wandered into the temple, where they stood bewildered before the heroic head, genuflecting before Antiochus the emperor and smiling to themselves at Antiochus the would-be god. They found the name Epiphanes to be especially arrogant—“God-Made-Manifest”—and they wondered how their Greek masters could delude themselves into believing such folly. They saw only an ordinary stone

statue of an ordinary man, and they could not visualize him as a god. They bowed, bit their lips to hide their contempt, and returned happily to their synagogue, where they were free to worship the true god YHWH without fear.

In 170 a law was announced requiring all citizens to present themselves four times a year to pay formal homage to Antiochus Epiphanes as the senior god of the Seleucids, and this did entail hardship on the Jews—but in an area that they could not have anticipated. The day chosen for these periodic submissions was Shabbat, when Jews preferred not to leave their homes, this being their day of prayer. They therefore directed their leaders to protest the law, but the Greek officials explained, “Our choice of Shabbat was in no way intended to offend the Jews. This day was chosen for the whole empire because it was acceptable to the most people.” When the Jews pointed out that it was certainly not acceptable to them, the Greeks replied, “Our empire contains only a few Jews, and it would be unreasonable for us to make our laws conform to their wishes. However, Antiochus himself has commissioned us to say that so long as he is emperor, nothing will be done to offend you in any way.” The Jews tried to protest that the Shabbat genuflection did just that, but the local Greeks made a notable concession: “Let us, for the sake of peace, agree upon this compromise. We Greeks will bow before Antiochus during the daylight hours, and on Shabbat evening, when your prayers have ended, you shall do likewise.” And in this honorable truce the Jews marched each quarter to the temple to pay proper homage to Antiochus the emperor; but in their hearts they ignored Epiphanes the presumptuous god.

In 169 the Jews were summoned to hear the next edict: “In order to halt the perpetuation of differences among the peoples of his great empire, Antiochus Epiphanes has decided that Jews shall no longer circumcise their male children.” This caused an immediate outcry from some Jews, but its force was lost because others saw the reasonableness of the Seleucid request. They argued, “The Greeks hold that the human body is a temple which must never be profaned or altered, so this is only a minor request which our emperor makes.” They were supported by others who argued, “Antiochus is right. Circumcision is an old-fashioned, barbaric rite whose only function is to make us look different from the Greeks.” But there were others who knew that the covenant which Abraham had made with YHWH regarding circumcision was binding through eternity, and these continued to circumcise their sons, but their protest was lost because of the indecision of the Jewish community;

however, word of their obstinacy reached the ears of Antiochus, the God-Made-Manifest, and he remembered.

In 168 the Greeks of Makor were required to promulgate an edict which was bound to cause trouble, and they put an extra force of men into military uniform before they announced it. Then, summoning all citizens to the temple of Zeus, onto whose portico the giant head of Antiochus had been moved, they directed the herald to read: "Throughout the empire it is ordered that from this day the worship of Antiochus Epiphanes shall be the one and official religion of all people." This disturbing news was greeted with an angry murmur—and not only from Jews—so that the herald quickly added, "But after a man has paid proper homage to Antiochus he shall be free to worship his old gods as his second and private religion. Thus Phoenicians may worship Melkart, Canaanites may worship Baal, and loyal Jews may go to their synagogue to worship ..." The herald hesitated, and Jews leaned forward to see if he was going to profane their deity, for following their return from Babylon they had adopted the convention that the god who had saved them was so powerful that his name must never be pronounced, nor did they write it, nor refer to it in talk among themselves. Their god was known simply by the sacred tetragrammaton YHWH, unpronounceable and unknowable. Now, in granting exception to the Jews, the herald avoided offending them. He did not announce that they were free to worship YHWH; he added simply, "Our loyal Jews are free to worship their peculiar god." But then he prepared to read that portion of the law which was certain to cause trouble, and he was gratified when he saw armed men moving into position to quell any riot. "Sacrifice to the new god Antiochus Epiphanes shall be made four times each year, both at the altar of Zeus here in the main temple, and in any other such temple or holy place as may exist within the town." Here he nodded gravely to the Phoenicians and the Jews. Then he swallowed and tensed his shoulders as if preparing for a blow. "And this sacrifice, which is to be repeated four times a year, shall consist of a perfect animal, brought alive to the altar, and this animal shall be a swine."

In 167 came the inevitable climax to any religious persecution. The instructions from the outrageous emperor were so brutal that the Greek officials of Makor were loath to read them, and the edict was handed to a common soldier, who caused the Jews to be marched to the public square, where they stood sullenly to hear what their punishment was to be. In

harsh, guttural tones the soldier shouted, "Jews of Makor, approach in single file and kiss the god of Asia," and the recalcitrant ones were moved inside the temple to the monstrous head of Antiochus, where they were made to stand on their toes to kiss the great stone neck below the protruding Adam's apple. Then, in the awesome silence of the holy place, the soldier rasped, "You Jews of Makor, having disobeyed the law of our emperor by continuing to circumcise your sons, and having offended our god by refusing to sacrifice swine in your synagogue, have surrendered any claim to mercy. Hear and obey! From this moment on, any Jew who refuses to accept Antiochus Epiphanes as the sole god, supplanting all others, including your god known as Yahweh"—the Jews shuddered—"any Jew who persists in following the law of your prophet called Moses, any Jew who circumcises his son, or any Jew who refuses to place his hand upon the sacrificial pig, shall be arrested and dragged before the temple of Zeus. There he shall be scourged with fifty blows, after which he shall be placed upon the ground so that his skin may be pulled away while he still lives.

Thereafter he shall be slain, his body cut apart and thrown to the dogs. Hear these penalties and obey." The astonished Jews were then herded back into the square where a large pig had been brought for sacrifice, and as it squealed and twisted in the sunlight they filed past and each placed his hand firmly on the forbidden beast. But there was one old Jew who had had enough of spineless leadership, and of his own will he refused to honor the emperor's pig. The Greek soldier started to manhandle him, but the captain of the guard intervened gently and said, "Old man, you have not obeyed our god Antiochus." The old Jew, his beard testifying to the years he had studied Moses, drew back in disgust, but again the captain warned him in a low persuasive voice, "Dear friend, it will go hard with you if you do not obey the law"; but again the old man refused, whereupon the captain had one of his men produce the lash—a club containing several dozen leather thongs. "They are tipped with lead," the captain explained, rustling the dreadful pieces. "Do you think you could stand up against such punishment?" The old man spit on the sanctified pig, and the soldiers quickly proceeded as they had been instructed, should such an emergency occur. They stripped the old man till he stood naked; they then tied him to a pillar, where ten swift blows of the lash tore at him terribly. The speeding lead tips caught at his face and ripped out one of his eyes. They tore away a corner of his mouth and laid bare the muscles of his neck. "Will you now acknowledge the pig?" asked the captain, and when the old man refused, the man with the

lash directed his blows lower on the body, where the lead tips tore away the old man's testicles and laid open his loins; and at the fortieth blow the humane intention of the captain became apparent: he hoped that the scourging alone would kill the old man that he might be spared the agony of being flayed, but the old Jew had within him some profound source of resistance and he survived the hailstorm of pellets, so that he was finally thrown to the ground, where he lay quivering as men with sharp knives came to cut away the mutilated skin. And when it seemed that he must surely be dead, he raised his head and called the permanent prayer of all Jews: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." And on the long, wailing pronunciation of the last word he died.

Among those who watched with anger this first of the afflictions were two men of dissimilar inheritance who were partly to blame for the tragedy. They had been born in Makor of families with ancient antecedents, and their friendship explained why the Jews had accepted one after another of the preliminary restrictions without comprehending what was occurring or what the end must be. The more important of these men was Governor Tarphon, the thirty-five-year-old gymnasiarch, a clean-shaven, handsome, red-haired athlete who affected the short dress of a Greek army officer. He was an attractive man, forthright and generous in his impulses and doubly appreciated as a public official because he had a beautiful wife who had been born in Greece and who added dignity to his public appearances and intelligence to his private entertainments. Tarphon had come from a middle-class Canaanite family, but he had enjoyed a spectacular leap to prominence with the arrival of the Seleucids, for they had recognized him as a child with potential and had sent him to Athens for his education. Upon his return he was made assistant to the governors of Ptolemais, as the ancient seaport of Accho was now called, and it had been he who had persuaded the governors to build a summer palace along the northwest wall of Makor, where cool breezes came from the wadis and where the afternoon sunsets were so entrancing. Tarphon had also shown his governors how to invest in olive groves, and as they prospered he prospered. Only a few Seleucid officials had seen Athens, and although all could speak the Koine, not many could speak the classical Attic which Tarphon had learned and in which he had read the principal authors. His Greek education, his Greek wife and his athletic prowess were bound to make him conspicuous, and when Antiochus Epiphanes came to dedicate the little temple to Zeus he said of Tarphon, "It is amazing to



find in this small town a young man who is not only Greek in speech and Greek in manner, but also Greek in spirit." Encouraged by these words Tarphon had proceeded with a venture which had brought him increased praise from the emperor: he organized a group of local citizens to put up the money for building along the southern wall of the town an impressive gymnasium with hot baths, statues, a small arena for games and stone seats for spectators. At the dedication Tarphon gave all credit to the local businessmen, pointing out, "It must be admitted that a small frontier town like Makor, only recently taken over from the Egyptians, can lay no claim to an outdoor stadium. Not even Ptolemais has one. But we do have a right to our own gymnasium. How could we be a Greek community without one? And you men are to be thanked." No one in Makor was surprised when Antiochus Epiphanes selected young Tarphon to be his next district governor, and although his duties took him to Ptolemais much of the time, he spent as many days as possible in Makor, the comfortable little town which his ancestors had helped to build. Each afternoon when he was in residence he would report to the gymnasium for exercise, a hot bath and some cool drinks with friends who enjoyed watching the younger men of Makor prepare for the regional games that were held in larger cities like Damascus and Antioch. Tarphon remained a fine athlete; in his student days at Athens he had represented the Seleucid empire in both running and wrestling, and in the latter sport he could still defeat most of the younger men in his district, while as a runner he was locally famous. Each year he donned athletic sandals, placed a small cloth about his loins and raced the eight miles from the main gate of Makor to the assembly in Ptolemais, inviting runners in the area to compete against him; and if he could no longer outrace the swiftest, he never finished poorly. It was partly due to the misguided efforts of this good man that the Jews of Makor had stumbled into the trap as they did, for he had in his heart a special fondness for them. For many centuries his family had worked with them, and some of his ancestors had actually followed the Hebrew religion, so when the first of the repressive laws arrived in Makor it was Tarphon who reasoned with the Jews, proposing the concessions that made the laws endurable. By force of his generous personality he diminished the initial impact of the restrictions and thus prevented them from having the effect they should have had. He and his wife Melissa were always ready to entertain Jews, to listen to their grievances, to help if papers or certificates were required. They liked to talk with young Jewish boys and

to get them started in their studies. They gave money to build a roof over the synagogue, and it had been Tarphon who contrived the evasion whereby Jews made their customary obeisance after sundown so as to avoid breaking Shabbat. Thus, unwittingly, he helped pull the teeth of Judaism, leaving it defenseless when the persecutions began in earnest. Then Tarphon could no longer protect his friends, and the tortures had to proceed. Unable to believe what was happening in his peaceful world, Tarphon had watched the first hideous flaying while hidden behind a pillar on the temple porch.

Now the inadequacy of the Jewish leadership began to exact its toll. Someone among them should have sounded a rallying cry, but no one did. Gone were the days when a patriarch like Zadok was willing to fight even with his god over matters of policy, risking his life and that of his clan in the process; now men avoided such dialogue. Nor was there among the Jews a Gershom with a seven-stringed lyre, speaking directly from his heart to the heart of his god; now men preferred evasion or the oblique reference. And certainly there was not in Makor any old gray woman like Gomer who was personally willing to confront the general of the Egyptians and the might of Nebuchadrezzar. Now there was only Jehubabel, a pudgy, bearded man of forty-five, who made his living from a string of dye vats and was therefore principally worried about getting enough purple dye from the cities to the north or red dye from Damascus. It was by default that Jehubabel had become leader of the Jewish community, for he was not a forceful man nor was he particularly religious. In fact, he had only two qualifications for the job into which he had been thrust: he lived next door to the synagogue and he was what was known as a man of wisdom; that is, he had read the great Jewish classics and had forgot them, but he remembered several score of pithy sayings accumulated by the Jews over the centuries when they were trying to protect their identity from absorption by either the Egyptians or the Babylonians. Jehubabel was a master of this commonplace knowledge, and as he moved from his dye vats to the synagogue he often stopped to converse with his Jewish neighbors, who comprised about one third of Makor's population. If they invited him to their homes he said, "Keep your foot from your neighbor's house lest he weary of you and so come to hate you." The aptness of the proverb and the ponderous manner in which he delivered it, his round face beaming as if light were upon his inner mind, convinced his friends that he was a wise man. When an acquaintance said something appropriate, Jehubabel might quote, " 'A word fitly spoken is

like apples of gold in pictures of silver.’ ” And when news reached him that his precious dyes had reached port in Ptolemais he often cried, “ ‘As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.’ ” In this pedestrian manner Jehubabel moved about his daily tasks, and if Antiochus had not appeared on the scene his store of familiar proverbs might have sufficed to guide him through an uneventful life. But against the brute force of the emperor, Jehubabel’s homely wisdom availed little and against the sophisticated Greek schooling of Governor Tarphon he was powerless.

His name Jehubabel summarized his history, “YHWH is in Babylon,” for the men of his family had borne that name since the days of captivity. When the time came for the Jews to return to Israel, a group formed under the leadership of the charismatic prophet Rimmon, then in his nineties, who led them from the canals of Babylon to the hilltop of Jerusalem—about which he had been preaching for fifty years—but when he delivered his people to that city, to everyone’s surprise he gathered his own family about him, including his son Jehubabel and his old wife Geula, and these he had led onward to Makor, where he re-established his line. The present Jehubabel was descended from these valiant people, and if the fat dyer had lost most of their fury, he had lost none of their dedication to YHWH. For him to kiss the stony neck of Antiochus Epiphanes was profanation, but when Governor Tarphon assured him that this was a minor requirement that could do no harm, Jehubabel told his Jews, “Rivers send forth mist so that the sun will take that offering and not dry them up.” And for the sake of peace he obeyed. For him to acknowledge Antiochus as a god was abhorrent, but when Tarphon argued as an old friend that the Jews could do this and at the same time worship YHWH in their synagogue, he did not see the essential conflict. And for him to caress the sacrificial pig was an abomination, yet he had complied because the governor had convinced him that to do so would save lives. He was willing to trust Tarphon, for he liked the red-headed Greek and had never known him to abuse their friendship; yet the tremendous differences that existed between Greek and Jew, between paganism and Judaism, seemed to have escaped him. He could see that Tarphon loved athletic contests and theater, while the Jews clung to a plainer life. He knew that at the palace there was avid discussion of books and plays of a profane nature, whereas the Jews in their homes lived simple and uncomplicated lives. Most of all, he could see that Greek life centered on the temple of Zeus, which no one took seriously, and on the gymnasium, which

everyone did, whereas the Jews clung to their plain old synagogue; but he did not appreciate the fact that these differences were fundamental. Therefore, when the final edicts came against which the Jews of any other age would have rebelled, Jehubabel was prepared to believe Tarphon when the governor reasoned, "I better than most men know Antiochus, for does not my preferment stem from him? He is vain but never stupid, and when he sees that his new laws are repugnant to the Jews he will climb down from his arrogant position. Believe me, Jehubabel, the only sensible tactic for you Jews is to humor him now, even to the extent of the pig, and then to make formal protests through me. You can be sure he'll rescind the laws."

So as a result of Jehubabel's fumbling acceptance of the pig, when Antiochus later struck at the very heart of Judaism with his persecution of Makor's three hundred and fifteen Jews, all but one accepted the new rules; but one old man who could see things for himself refused to do so, and as this stubborn martyr died he stared at Jehubabel with his one remaining eye, charging him with having betrayed his people, so that long after the old man's death Jehubabel would be haunted by his accusing, bloodstained face.

Governor Tarphon, after having watched the obscene execution—so alien to things truly Greek—left the porch of the temple and wandered slowly down the broad avenue that led to his gymnasium, at whose main doors stood two handsome statues of Heracles as a wrestler and Hermes as a long-distance runner. The gods were tall and white and naked, bespeaking the divinity that lay in any man who trained himself to physical perfection. It was Tarphon's custom, as he passed between the statues, to turn left to Heracles and flex his shoulder muscles as if he were wrestling with that god, then right to Hermes, testing his own leg muscles, which were still firm and resilient. But this day the gods seemed to accuse him, and he lowered his eyes, muttering, "I must advise Antiochus how wretchedly his laws were received."

Ashamed of what he had been required to witness, Tarphon entered the gymnasium, where he was greeted with the reassuring smell of men sweating at games and washing themselves clean with scented oil and steaming water, and he was about to undress and enter the games room at once, but he rejected that idea and turned toward a small room which he maintained in the spacious building; and when he did this he was brought before a towering white statue of Antiochus Epiphanes in his assumed role as discus champion.

The emperor had never been good at games, but it pleased his fancy to be depicted as one skilled in sports, so here he stood gigantic and naked, posing not only as the man who had supplanted Zeus but also as one who had defeated ordinary mortals in discus throwing. Tarphon had to recognize how unenforceable the new laws were, and he muttered, "This time Antiochus must retreat."

He went to his room, where he spent some time drafting in classical Greek a report which advised the emperor of how the old Jew had resisted the law to the point of death and of the probable effects on the community. Then, looking into the future with unusual clarity, he added a brief section in which he predicted that if the new laws against the Jews were rigidly enforced they might provoke an armed rebellion; but when he was finished with this unsolicited analysis he considered it presumptuous and pushed it away. Closing his eyes he tried to visualize what had frightened him, and he came remarkably close to seeing the revolution that was about to explode among the Jews, but he refused to come to grips with the problem; for although he sensed the terrible forces that had been ignited that day in Makor, he was not willing to trust his own judgment, and he could not decide whether or not to send the report. Seeking to compare his ideas with what others might think, he summoned one of the slaves who served the gymnasium and directed him to fetch the Jewish leader Jehubabel, and when the slave was gone he undressed and went into one of the smaller game rooms where for some weeks he had been coaching a group of Makor boys in wrestling, it being his intention to send them to a series of regional competitions later in the year; and in the wholesome conflict of the wrestling room he forgot that day's ugliness.

Naked, he walked among the equally naked young men, commenting upon their skill, and he came at last to the dark-haired youth Menelaus, who had unusual strength in his shoulders. He pulled aside the young man's opponent, saying, "Watch me for a moment," and he engaged Menelaus; and as soon as he had done so he felt the youth's power bearing down upon him, forcing his practiced knees almost to buckle, and he grunted, "Good lad, keep pushing," while he himself began to respond to the contest and the other wrestlers halted to watch their gymnasiarch fighting with Menelaus.

Had the young man sought preferment from Tarphon he would surely have allowed the gymnasiarch to win, but this was an even contest, and the powerful youngster ripped and

grabbed at Tarphon's trim body, trying to catch him off guard; while the older man, recalling many such conflicts in the past when he was a major competitor in Athens, tried to lead the eager youth into one trap or another. Once Tarphon felt he had the boy, and with a grab he reached for his right leg, but Menelaus deftly pivoted and not only escaped but put himself in position to grasp the gymnasiarch by the neck, almost jerking him off his feet. Then the older man's experience asserted itself, for having anticipated what might happen, he moved partly forward as if he were under the young man's power, and this caused Menelaus to throw all his weight into the fight, whereupon Tarphon skillfully tossed him into the crowd of watchers, where he stumbled and fell to his knees.

The athletes crowded about the red-haired governor, applauding him as if he were one of their own age, and some older toadies who had been watching the wrestlers began crying, "There are few in Seleucia who could defeat our gymnasiarch in wrestling." Upon this, Tarphon called young Menelaus to him and in a slow recapitulation which all could follow explained where the overeager young athlete had made his error. As Tarphon outlined the steps those in the steaming room could see the muscles of the two men stand out and could understand what must happen next in such and such a case. It was a beautiful exhibition, controlled and effective. "Demetrius!" Tarphon called. "Protect yourself!" And he threw his naked body at a tall young man less skilled than Menelaus had been, and they re-enacted the maneuver, but this time the younger man was no match for the governor and when he made his first error Tarphon spun him against the wall, whereupon Menelaus jumped into position, crying, "Gymnasiarch, protect yourself!" And he slammed at the older man with such vehemence that he forced Tarphon back and would have thrown him solidly, except that Tarphon began laughing and slapped his vigorous challenger on the shoulder.

"You win!" Tarphon conceded, but the watching sycophants said in loud voices, "Had our gymnasiarch really wanted to win, he would have thrown the boy easily." So that none could hear, Tarphon told his young opponent, "We know better. At the games in Ptolemais you will surely win easily. And you could win at Antioch, too." He paused as if about to say something of importance, but changed his mind.

It was a moment of rare fraternity, of sweating bodies tired to exhaustion, of muscles pulled almost beyond the point of resilience, and slaves appeared among the wrestlers with strigils which the men used to scrape away the dirt on their bodies before they went to the

baths, but as Governor Tarphon drew the rough-edged strigil across his bare thighs, relaxing in pleasure as the bronze metal scraped his tired leg, another slave came into the room to say, "Gymnasiarch, the Jew Jehubabel is here," and Tarphon said to Menelaus, "You'd better go to the baths before your father comes." The room emptied. The toadies went elsewhere to praise lesser men, and Governor Tarphon stood alone, completely naked, with not even a strigil in his hand. The door opened and out of the steamy heat loomed the incongruous bearded figure of Jehubabel, completely covered in a long unkempt robe. The two men stared at each other, epitomes of the struggle that had been joined that day: Tarphon the Greek, whose ancestors had built the walls around Makor making the town as it now was, a naked athlete who thought of his finely trained body as a temple; and Jehubabel the permanent Jew, to whom the grandeur of Greece was an unopened book and the naked body an insult to YHWH. Looking now at the undraped gymnasiarch Jehubabel recalled the saying current among his people: "Only a fool takes pleasure in the swiftness of a horse or the strength of a man's leg." Few Jews in Makor bothered with the gymnasium or its pagan rites.

Tarphon, aware of Jehubabel's abhorrence of nakedness, deferred to the older man by grabbing a robe left behind by one of the wrestlers and throwing it over his shoulders; but as soon as he had done so he was sorry, for the robe was both long—which made him look awkward, which he tried never to be—and smelly, which made him seem unclean, which he never was. But he had taken it and could not easily discard it, so he wrapped himself in it and led the way to his room.

No sooner, however, had Jehubabel left the nakedness of the wrestling room than he found himself facing the absurd statue of Antiochus Epiphanes as a discus thrower, and the towering expanse of white marble with the godlike head and the huge genitals appalled the Jew. He could not forget that today's execution and its savagery had been ordered by this fool who had decreed himself to be so represented, claiming to be both a god manifest and a naked discus thrower. The round-faced, pudgy Jew was disgusted, but he could not speak, for in the past he had picked up the suspicion that his friend Tarphon hoped some day to be represented in Makor by a similar statue, and he thought, turning his back on Antiochus and his glaring nudity: No one can understand a Greek.

Tarphon led him into the small room where on a table lay the report he had been writing, held in place by what Jehubabel considered a curious object: a life-size marble hand, broken off at the wrist and holding an instrument which the Jew had not seen before. "How was the statue broken?" he asked in the Koine.

Tarphon smiled indulgently. This was the kind of question one might expect from a Jew, for although he found the Jews of Makor industrious and well behaved, he also found them notoriously deficient in a sense of beauty. The Greeks had not been in Makor a dozen years before they began building the lovely temple to Zeus, but the Jews were still content with their squat and ugly synagogue. Greeks loved silk, the cool feel of marble, the smell of spices and the sound of lyric poetry being read at night, while the Jews remained a peasant people to whom beauty and luxury were equally abhorrent. With condescension Tarphon explained that no statue had been broken. "The artist carved the hand this way," he said, also in the Koine.

"Why would he do that?" Jehubabel asked.

"From little, much," Tarphon replied. When Jehubabel looked blank, he added, "By looking at the fragment you can imagine the whole statue."

"But if he wanted you to see the whole statue, why didn't he carve it?"

Tarphon was irritated but he was also amused. "In the spring haven't you ever tasted just one bite of a Damascus plum? It was so good that you could sense all the plums for that year?"

"I don't eat plums," Jehubabel said.

"But this carving? Doesn't it call to your mind the entire human body?"

The round-faced Jew drew back suspiciously to consider this preposterous theory, and he found that to him the broken wrist conveyed no such language. He saw a rather lifelike hand holding an object he had not seen before, and that was the end of the matter. "What's he holding?" he inquired.

Tarphon was taken aback. It had never occurred to him that a grown man would not recognize a strigil and he summoned his slave to fetch the one he had left in the wrestling room. When it arrived he passed it along to the Jew. "Can't you guess what it's for?"



Jehubabel studied the metal scraper for some moments but could not fathom its mystery. “It has a dull point, so it might be used for digging,” he reasoned. “But it also has a sharp edge, so it might be intended for cutting. I don’t know.”

“It’s for scraping your skin,” Tarphon explained. Jehubabel looked at him in astonishment and made the governor feel self-conscious. “After athletic contests,” he added lamely. In an attempt to demonstrate he reached for some part of the Jew’s anatomy, only to find that all of Jehubabel’s skin except for the backs of his hands and a small part of his face was covered—either by his robe or beard. There was a moment of embarrassment, during which it became obvious that Jehubabel did not intend to uncover any part of his body, so Tarphon switched to his own, throwing aside one end of the smelly robe and drawing the strigil over his exposed thigh. “It’s most refreshing,” he said, but the round-faced Jew looked at him as if the governor were going out of his mind.

Having drawn aside the borrowed robe Tarphon was reminded of its offensive smell, and while Jehubabel studied the sculpture he took off the robe completely, stretched out upon a bench and called for his slave to bring a container of heated oil, which the latter began applying to Tarphon’s body. Spreading the warm oil liberally over the gymnasiarch’s back, he massaged the muscles and with his thumbs worked the lotion into the pores, and as he did so the aromatic spices permeated the room, providing a good ending to the day’s exercise. “This oil is the only luxury I allow myself,” he explained to his friend. “They make it in Macedonia and I used it when I wrestled in Athens.”

“The smell of the rose and the taste of the grape do not abide till the morrow,” Jehubabel observed, and Tarphon winced. The only unpleasant aspect he had found in working with the Jewish leader was this constant barrage of pithy statements in which Jehubabel took refuge whenever intellectual problems were to be faced. The Jew was known in Makor as a learned man, but he never referred to the great books of Judaism; against the works of Plato and Aristotle he never quoted Jews of equal gravity. It was always some cryptic proverb gleaned from the fields or culled from the shearing sheds that was supposed to summarize the Jewish position. Some years ago, when Tarphon promised to protect the Jews against the law of Antiochus, Jehubabel had stated his reaction clearly: “A friend is a friend at all times, and brothers are born for adversity.” Next year, commenting upon the worsened laws, he had said, “Whom the gods love they chasten, even as a father corrects

the son in whom he delights.” In fact, for a man with the wide-ranging interests of Governor Tarphon, talking with Jehubabel for any length of time was apt to be a bore, and the Greek often wished that his colleague would forget his little gems of wisdom and for once face the reality at hand.

Why did he bother with Jehubabel? Because in the shifting Greek world of Ptolemais and Makor, the Jew was the one completely honest man with whom Tarphon had contact. He wanted nothing of the gymnasiarch, practiced no flattery, kept his word and worked hard for the betterment of the town. He paid his workers at the dye vats well, educated his children and assumed responsibility for the synagogue. Tarphon often told his wife Melissa, “If we had a dozen more like Jehubabel, governing this district would be a pleasure, but apparently only the Jews can produce such men.” Because Tarphon appreciated the rock-hard constancy of the man he was prepared to put up with his boring, almost niggardly, manner.

Now, from the rubbing bench, Tarphon said, “Tell me honestly, Jehubabel. The execution today. Was it the end of a difficult period or the beginning of real trouble?”

Jhubabel looked away from the naked body stretched out on the bench, belly up, for it offended him. Also, he could still see the accusing face of the martyred man staring at him as he shouted out the defiant prayer of the Jews, and he was driven to make a somewhat harsher reply than he would have otherwise done: “Once a river leaves its banks it does not return until the rains cease.”

“What do you mean by that?” Tarphon asked in some irritation.

“If these laws persist there could be serious results.”

“Could be, yes. But will there be?”

Jhubabel wanted to believe that what Tarphon had told him earlier would come to pass—that when Antiochus knew how the Jews felt about the new laws they would be rescinded; so he clung to that hope: “If Antiochus retreats a little I feel sure trouble can be avoided.” The slave washed Tarphon with a damp cloth, then brought clothes into which the gymnasiarch slipped, leaving most of his body still exposed. Moving to a chair beside the table he asked, “If trouble should become inevitable, what will cause it?”

“The swine we can forgive,” Jehubabel said reassuringly. “And we acknowledge Antiochus as ruler ... even as god over his own people. But there is one thing ...”

“That you’re afraid of?”

“Jews will continue to circumcise their sons.”

“No! No!” Tarphon protested. “On this matter I agree with Antiochus. The human body is too precious to be altered whimsically by any religion that comes along. Why do you suppose we outlawed the branding of slaves? And mutilation? And tattooing?” He brandished the marble hand with the strigil as if it were a pointer and demanded, “Tell me this. If your Jewish god, who is as perfect as you claim, made man, why should you try to improve on his handiwork?”

For once Jehubabel did not retreat to an aphorism. He said, “When the creator finished his perfect work he took Abraham aside and said, ‘I have made a perfect man. Now I need a perfect people. To prove to the world that you are my chosen people, you shall circumcise your sons.’ In doing so, we act not contrary to divine will, but in furtherance of it.”

Tarphon was surprised at the Jew’s clear statement, but he shrugged his shoulders. “The law is plain, Jehubabel. No more circumcision.” Then he added, “Please.”

The stocky dyer considered this appeal, the latest in a long series, and once more he conceded: “I don’t think any Jews would circumcise their sons without first discussing the problem with me.” Tarphon smiled. He knew that within the Jewish community it was only Jehubabel who performed the circumcisions, so if the law of Antiochus were to be broken it would be Jehubabel who would be responsible, but he did not embarrass his friend by admitting that he understood this fact. The long-robed Jew concluded, “So if the Jews ask me for advice I shall tell them that for a little longer ...”

Tarphon was relieved. This was all he needed, a little time, for he felt sure that with time he could alleviate the troubles. Taking the second sheet of his report from under the marble hand he tore it up and threw it in a basket. “I was about to send Antiochus words which he did not need to hear,” he said with a nervous laugh. Then as he led Jehubabel to the door of his room the two men saw looming above them the gigantic statue of Epiphanes, and Tarphon said, “I’m glad you understand, Jehubabel. Against his great force you weak Jews could not prevail. It is with reason we’ll soften his laws.”

Jehubabel preferred not to look at the indecent statue. Instead, he took refuge in a Jewish proverb whose application not even he understood: “The breath of the king withers the barley, but at the end of winter comes rain.”

Tarphon thought: He's truly a sententious bore, but without him we'd have trouble. Then, to help Jehubabel comprehend the situation, the gymnasiarch said with a certain enthusiasm, "Don't be misled by that statue. Would you be surprised if I said I thought it preposterous too? But I also know Antiochus the man. As he rules in Antioch. He moves among the common people of that enormous city in a way no tyrant would dare. At night he suddenly enters a drinking place and sings with the sailors. He acts in plays, or wanders unknown in the alleys to see how the poor live. He has one consuming desire. To be loved. And when at the games his people cheer him he becomes in fact a god and dispenses justice to all. Believe me, Jehubabel, when he hears that his laws have made you Jews unhappy ..."

"As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more," Jehubabel said, "but the righteous is an everlasting foundation." Tarphon shook his head, as if the middle part of the sentence had fallen out of the conversation, but in friendship he grasped the Jew's shoulder and said, "When Antiochus reads my letter, the law will be changed." And he accompanied his friend to the exit.

But as they left the gymnasiarch's room, from the other end of the building appeared a group of seven handsome young men—the athletes with whom Tarphon had been wrestling. They were lean, clear-eyed young fellows dressed in a uniform which the older men of Makor had provided them to wear on their trips to compete with other communities: broad-brimmed hats with low crowns, handsome fluttering capes of light blue fastened at the neck with silver clasps, and white flexible boots whose laces crisscrossed up to the knee. In these gay uniforms the seven athletes looked like seven statues of Hermes, poised for whatever commission Zeus might hand them, and as they clattered noisily past the looming statue of Epiphanes, Jehubabel saw that the tallest of the group was his own dark-haired son Benjamin; but he took no pride in this fact.

When the boys were gone Tarphon walked with his friend to the exit, saying, "Jhubabel, your son Menelaus will be the finest athlete Makor has ever produced."

" 'A wise son maketh a glad father: ' " Jehubabel quoted from Solomon, " 'but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.' Wrestling is foolishness. Discus throwing ..." He pointed over his shoulder to the statue of Epiphanes. "Foolishness."

“No!” Tarphon protested. “Days when such sayings were true are past. A boy today must have some wisdom, yes. But he must also know games, the social pleasantries. Nothing in excess. Great change is in the air, old friend, and you must change with it.”

But Jehubabel, haunted still by the face of the dead martyr, said, “Wisdom is still the only thing, if with wisdom you also get understanding.”

“I got my understanding from wrestling,” Tarphon replied, but this the Jew could not believe and he walked alone up the broad avenue leading to the temple of Zeus, where against his will he was drawn to look at the gigantic head of the man who posed as god, illuminated from below by an oil lamp which burned perpetually. “‘Vanity of vanities,’” he quoted from an ancient saying. Then he saw the spot where the old man had been flayed; it was still damp. For a few moments he prayed there and then turned east to walk down the main thoroughfare, whose numerous shops contained importations from all parts of the world: flashing ornaments made from the tin of Cornwall, silver beads from Spain and bright copper pots from Cyprus; there was gold from Nubia, marble from Paros and ebony from India. Some shops offered foods that a century before were unheard of in this town: sesame candies from Egypt, sharp cheeses from Athens, figs in honey from Crete, cinnamon from Africa and sweet pannag from Byzantium.

“‘All is vanity,’” Jehubabel quoted as he approached the synagogue under the east wall. The gaudy shops had never appealed to him; they were run only by foreigners, for the proud Jews of rural Israel were still incompetent in trading and the handling of money, inclining toward the more fundamental occupations like farming and dyeing, except that during the Babylonian captivity a few had acquired technical skills like goldsmithing, which their descendants still practiced. It was not these seductive shops which called forth Jehubabel’s reflection on vanity; it was his son Menelaus. The boy’s real name was Benjamin, but like many Jewish lads in Seleucia he had early acquired a Greek name by which he was generally known. Tall where his father was stocky, robust where his mother was slim, he had quickly won the attention of the Greeks, who had inducted him into their schools and their games, in both of which he excelled. Now, alienated from his Jewish parents, he spent most of his days in the gymnasium and many of his nights at the palace, where he was being initiated into Greek culture of the higher order. Like Gymnasiarch Tarphon, with whom he often wrestled, he was beginning to find his father’s homilies

tedious, and like Melissa, Tarphon's clever wife, he found the old-fashioned ways of the Jews difficult to take seriously. In the natural course of events, by the time Menelaus was thirty he would no longer be a Jew, for the empire of Antiochus Epiphanes needed young men of aptitude and it was probable that he would be invited to serve in areas where Jews were unknown. Inducements were being offered, not only to young Jews but to Persians and Parthians as well, to forgo their old inheritances and to become full-fledged Greeks, and as young Menelaus exercised with Tarphon and learned at first-hand the principles of Greek political life, or as he studied with Melissa and uncovered the richness of Greek intellectual life, he found himself increasingly tempted to surrender Jewish ways and to join the large number who had left the synagogue and had become in fact Hellenes.

A fool despises his father's teaching, Jehubabel brooded mournfully as he passed the empty synagogue on his way to his home, which stood next door, but at the entrance to the synagogue his sleeve was caught by a small man with protruding eyes who said, "Jhubabel, I must speak with you." It was Paltiel, a farmer with few sheep and a man from whom courage would hardly be expected, but now the scrawny fellow pulled at Jehubabel's sleeve and said the frightening words which made the revolution of the Jews unavoidable: "My son was born eight days ago."

Jhubabel trembled. In the gymnasium he had promised Tarphon that there would be no trouble, but now the fatal words were being said directly to him.

The fat dyer began to sweat and asked, "Paltiel, were you at the execution today?"

"I stood two cubits from the old man, and before he died he looked at me with one eye. He looked into my very heart, and I am determined."

Jhubabel thought: At how many others did the old man look today? To Paltiel he said, "Then you are committed?"

"Aren't you?" the little farmer asked. "The old man looked at you, also."

"You saw?"

"Jhubabel, he looked at us all."

The trembling dyer's whole inclination was to tell Paltiel to be gone, but the small man could not be dismissed, so Jehubabel said, "Wait here," and he walked dumbly to his home where his wife had supper waiting; but he went past her to an inner room, where he took from a chest a small cloth in which he kept a sharpened knife, and this knife he placed on

the floor, sitting before it and staring at it, wondering what to do. And after a while his wife came to call him to supper, but when she saw the knife she lost her appetite and sat on the floor beside him.

“It is a terrible thing you contemplate,” she said.

They remained silent for some minutes, staring at the knife, grasping for any solution to the problem of which they had become an unwilling part, and Jehubabel quoted evasively, “‘The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.’” To this impeccable statement his wife nodded, and he felt encouraged to add, “‘A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.’” She smiled wanly, as if to thank him for his confidence, but refrained from saying anything that might help guide him, so he added, “‘The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.’”

Having insulated themselves with these comforting saws, Jehubabel and his wife were about to dismiss the temptation and put away the knife when Jehubabel saw, looming out of the darkness, the monitoring eye of the dead man, and he cried, “A man already dead mustn’t tell us what to do.” His wife asked what he was saying, but a knocking came at the door and the urgent voice of Paltiel: “Jhubabel, we are waiting!”

In despair the spiritual leader of the Jews looked at his wife, then threw himself full length on the floor, crying, “Adonai, Adonai, what shall I do?” No instructions came from YHWH and he confided to his wife, “I don’t know what to do. Tarphon suspects my complicity. I saw him smiling at me. If his soldiers catch me in this act I shall be lashed to death.” He shuddered, for he could feel the lead-tipped thongs as they cut into his body.

Then came a rush of hope. He sat up and caught his wife’s hands. “Tarphon assured me that Antiochus was a sensible man. He sings and dances like any Greek. Wants people to love him. Now, when you see that great stone head in the temple you mustn’t think ...”

“Jhubabel!” came the ghostly voice of Paltiel, summoning him to inescapable reality.

And so in that inner room, Jehubabel, one of the first persons in world history to do so, had to face the mystery of the Jew: “Why does he seek out martyrdom? An insignificant man like Paltiel? Why does he combat the empire?” And Jehubabel felt it wrong that vital decisions should be forced by the eye of a dead martyr and the voice of a man willing to become one.

“Jehubabel!” came the demanding voice. “Must I, alone, sanctify my son? Tell me now if you are afraid.” And to the listening couple the voice outside had become the voice of Adonai.

Slowly, driven by forces which he did not comprehend but which would rule Judaism for the ensuing centuries, Jehubabel picked up the knife, wrapped it in its cloth and tucked it in his belt. “I must go,” he told his wife. “The old man is looking at me.” And she accompanied him to the door, where she gave him her blessing, for in his final agony the old man had looked at her, too.

The sweating, dumpy man and the scrawny little farmer hurried past the synagogue and down a dark alley which led toward the main gate, but halfway along that passageway they stopped to dodge quickly into a small house, occupied by Paltiel, and there four Jews were gathered with an eight-day-old baby boy who had been prepared for circumcision. As if it were a routine ritual Jehubabel asked, “Are we prepared to enter into the covenant of Abraham?” but when the assembled Jews gave their routine replies he looked at them with quivering eyes and asked passionately, “Neighbors, are we aware of what this means?” And upon interrogation he found that the old man had looked at each face in that room, handing on a commitment that would never die. Each man knew what was involved and was prepared for the consequences.

Jehubabel, trembling with the gravity of what he was doing, stood aside to utter a short prayer, after which he presented his sharp knife and circumcised the infant, who began to howl at the unaccustomed pain, but little Paltiel jammed a wine-soaked cloth into the child’s mouth and the crying ceased. “His name is Itzhak,” the farmer said, “for Itzhak was the son of Abraham who was offered as a sacrifice to ...” Here the father reached a difficult impasse. He was not allowed to speak the name YHWH; indeed, he did not know how the sacred name was pronounced, for it had been some centuries since the word had been spoken in Makor. But since any deity must be referred to in some manner the custom had grown up of calling YHWH by the arbitrary Hebrew word *Adonai*, which would later be translated into other languages as *Lord*. When the vowel indications for *Adonai* were added to the letters YHWH, a curious symbol developed which German scholars many centuries later would mistakenly read as Jehovah, a word that had never existed and that had never in any way been applied to the austere Hebrew deity. Thus the greatest of gods was called



YHWH, which had no pronunciation; he was known to ordinary Jews as Adonai, which was purely arbitrary; and he would conquer the world as Jehovah, a name which had never belonged to him or to anything else. Perhaps only this vague and contradictory nomenclature could indicate the wonder of the concept involved, or explain why a group of Jews in Makor were willing to risk being flayed alive because of their devotion to the god who had sustained them.

Paltiel, the man with few sheep, who was taking the greatest risk—for the Greeks could examine his son at any time and see proof of guilt—held his son aloft and said, “He is Itzhak, who was offered as a sacrifice to Adonai. But he lived. Tonight all of us offer our lives to Adonai, and may we also live.”

One by one the conspirators, aware that their lives were forfeit if the child Itzhak were inspected by Greek officials, slipped out of the house, but as Jehubabel picked his way back to the synagogue he heard boisterous voices coming along the main street and he thought it might be a group of soldiers who would question him, and he hid. But the noisy ones were the seven athletes in their blue capes returning from an evening at Tarphon’s palace, and they marched toward the synagogue to bid his son Benjamin good night. In the fraternity of athletes they brought him to his door, making him swear that he would be at the gymnasium early next day. An ordinary father seeing how welcome his son was among the boys whose fathers ran the town would have felt pride in his acceptance, but Jehubabel, watching from the shadows as his Greek son called farewell to his Greek friends, felt only shame that the boy should have drifted so far from the spirit that had driven Paltiel to the circumcision of his son.

His apprehension regarding Benjamin increased when Governor Tarphon traveled to Ptolemais, where work had accumulated regarding the seaport, leaving Melissa in the palace along the northern wall, for there Benjamin went in Tarphon’s absence, and it became clear to Jehubabel that an evil relationship had developed between his son and the gymnasiarch’s beautiful Greek wife. For several painful days Jehubabel lingered in narrow streets between the temple of Zeus and the palace, and from his hiding place spied upon the boy’s movements. What he saw convinced him that his blue-cloaked son was betraying his benefactor.

On the third night of watching, Jehubabel waited for some hours until Benjamin left the commodious house, his blue cloak over his arm as he headed for the gymnasium, but when the boy approached, Jehubabel stepped suddenly before him, saying in Aramaic, "You shall not go to the gymnasium. You shall come home with me."

"The others expect me," his son replied in the Koine.

"Your mother expects you," Jehubabel muttered under his breath, and he dragged his son toward the temple of Zeus and then eastward along the main street, whose opulent shops exemplified for him the temptations into which the Jews of Makor had fallen.

At their home Jehubabel sat the bewildered boy on a bench and summoned his mother. Together the two older Jews challenged their son with having betrayed Governor Tarphon, who had so often befriended the family. "There is the dog that bites his keeper's hand, and there is the young man who seduces the wife of his guardian," Jehubabel said sententiously, while his son continued to look perplexed.

"Can a man take the fire of adultery into his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" Jehubabel asked, but still his words made no impression on the boy.

"Her house is the way to hell, leading you down to chambers of death," the fat face with the beard mumbled, but Menelaus, his ear attuned to the subtleties of Greek thought, could not understand what his garrulous father was trying to say.

"Drink waters out of your own cistern and running waters out of your own well. Let them be yours only, and do not share them with strangers," the pudgy moralist intoned, and Menelaus grew fidgety, which annoyed his father.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: 'and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' We warned you that the lips of a strange woman drop sweetness like a honeycomb and her mouth is smoother than oil."

"Father, you're talking nonsense," Menelaus said, using the Koine.

Jhubabel was stunned. He had been offering his son the profoundest wisdom he knew and the boy mocked him. He felt that he had to make some powerful statement that would clear the young man's head and force him to see the grievous wrong of adultery, but instead all he could think of was the ancient summary of the Jews: "What son curses his father, his lamp shall be put out in darkness." To Jehubabel, trained in the ways of Judaism, the sentence had frightening implications, but to Menelaus it was words only.

“I didn’t curse you, Father. I said you were talking nonsense, and you are. Now what is it you’re trying to say?”

Jehubabel drew away from his insolent son. “I am warning you that adultery with the wife of Governor Tarphon ...”

Menelaus began laughing, easily and frankly. “Is that what’s frightened you?” he asked. Then, pointing with his hands, he said in broken phrases, “That I go ... Melissa’s house ... and Tarphon is in Ptolemais?” He laughed again and said, “Father, Governor Tarphon asked me to do this. Many of us go to Melissa’s. We sit and listen to her read.”

Jehubabel sat down heavily. “You do what?” he quavered.

“Or we talk.”

“About what?”

Menelaus was momentarily baffled. On this day Melissa had talked about a play in Athens, a philosopher from Antioch, and the day when a tame bear had chased her in Rhodes. “Well, we talk about many things.”

His son’s hesitancy satisfied Jehubabel, who could see Tarphon’s palace only as a pit into which his son had stumbled in his sexual debauchery. Ponderously he said, “Stolen waters are sweet, Benjamin, and the bread you eat in secret is pleasant, but death is there.” To Jehubabel it was tantamount to malediction, but to Menelaus it was quite irrelevant.

Once more the boy tried to explain: “We seven are like the sons of Tarphon, and Melissa cares for us. When we talk with her she tells us what to do.”

“You have entered the house of evil, and the servants have closed the doors,” Jehubabel said, and Menelaus looked at him in bewildered silence. The boy knew that he would not be able to explain to his father, so without speaking further the young athlete picked up a few articles of clothing and left. When Jehubabel asked where he was going, Menelaus said, “To the governor’s. Long ago he asked me to live with him, and now I shall do so.” And he was not seen again in the house by the synagogue.

When Tarphon returned from Ptolemais he was required to do two things which displeased him. On orders from Antiochus Epiphanes he announced that all Jewish households must be searched for male children, and if any under the age of six months was found to have been circumcised, that child’s parents would be flayed alive. When the order

was given he summoned Jehubabel to the gymnasium and said, "I trust you have not broken the law."

The bearded dyer looked at Tarphon in silence, for he was praying that the farmer Paltiel might somehow hide his son, but Tarphon interpreted the Jew's refusal to speak as animosity stemming from the fact that Menelaus had moved to the palace. "Believe me, Jehubabel, when your son is champion of the empire you'll thank me for taking over his training." But Jehubabel continued to pray, and Paltiel succeeded in hiding his son Itzhak among his sheep, and that day the Jews were spared.

When the soldiers reported to the gymnasium that no circumcisions had taken place, Jehubabel regained his composure; it was Tarphon who sat down heavily in a chair, and the Jew realized how eager the governor had been to find no guilt. "We want no further executions in this town," Tarphon said. Then he rose and clasped Jehubabel about the shoulder. "Thank you, old friend, for having spared us all."

When the pudgy, long-robed Jew left the gymnasium—the most unathletic-looking person who ever did so—Tarphon undressed and went to the wrestling room, where he asked Menelaus to fight against him, and as they moved about, grappling for holds, Tarphon had to explain the second bit of unpleasant business, but first he encouraged the young man by saying, after a vigorous sequence of thrusts and grabs, "In Ptolemais I met a group of wrestlers from Tyre. Claimed to be champions of the north."

Casually Menelaus asked, "You wrestle against them?"

"Yes."

Menelaus was breathing heavily. "Did you defeat them?"

"Easily."

Tarphon watched Menelaus carefully, and what he saw reassured him. A slight quiver came to the young man's lips and the governor knew what he was thinking: If Tarphon can defeat them, and I can defeat Tarphon, it means that I could be champion.

But Menelaus was cautious. Hesitating lest he offend his patron, he inquired, "Were they really champions?"

"They claimed to be. Said they were certain winners at Antioch."

Tarphon was pleased with what happened next. Menelaus smiled. It was the relaxed smile of a young man who senses victory ahead. It showed neither arrogance nor conceit,

but rather the anticipation of a contest in which there was reasonable chance for success. Men who had never played games would not have recognized this smile, but anyone who, like the gymnasiarch, had engaged in athletic contests most of his life would observe it with respect, because it was from such self-confidence that victory was built. At that moment Menelaus was very much a Greek and he said quietly, "I am eager to compete at Antioch."

"And I want to take you there," Tarphon answered. "But in Ptolemais I heard bad news to go with the good."

Menelaus stopped smiling. "What was it?" he asked, and again Tarphon was impressed with his sober willingness to face reality. He's an authentic Greek, Tarphon thought.

Slowly Tarphon tried to explain the ugly facts: "For a Jew to win at Antioch would be extremely popular. I know the emperor would like to see one of your people capture a major trophy. It would ... I mean it would prove that in the empire we do not discriminate against any man ... that we can all become good Greeks if we try. Now I'll grant there have been minor differences between Antiochus and the Jews ... take even your own father ..."

"What are you trying to say?"

Tarphon brushed the sweat from his forehead and continued, "I'm saying that we all want you to go to Antioch ... and to win."

"I also," Menelaus replied, preparing himself for bad news.

"But Antiochus has decreed that no contestant may stand naked before him who is circumcised. It would be offensive to the spirit of the games."

In the steamy room there was silence, and the two athletes were forced to look down at the visible proof of Menelaus' covenant with YHWH. In his first days in the gymnasium Menelaus had been conspicuous because of this sign, and other boys had taunted him, for he was the only Jew who came to the place, and he had fought alone; but with his later victories had come self-respect, and the other athletes now looked upon his circumcision with the impersonal interest they might have directed toward a boy who had lost a toe. To them Menelaus was three things: a Greek, a champion, a circumcised Jew—and the first two outweighed the last. But the Seleucid capital of Antioch had seen no Jewish athletes, and there the fact of circumcision would be scandalous as a profanation of the human temple. Menelaus understood all this even more clearly than Tarphon and it was he who suggested the solution: "In Ptolemais isn't there a doctor who can cover the sign?"

“There is, but it’s terribly painful.”

“If I were able to bear the pain?”

“Then it could be done.”

Cautiously Menelaus weighed the choices growing out of what the governor had just said, and he could not decide between them. Tarphon, appreciating the boy’s perplexities—for who would reject the essence of his inherited religion?—did not press him to speak at that moment. Instead, he found Menelaus a strigil and the two athletes sat on benches and scraped themselves, after which they went to the baths, where slaves immersed them in tepid water, then massaged them with scented oil and dipped them into very hot water, from which they came out exhausted and relaxed. This was the finest moment of the day, when the fruits of vigorous exercise were found in cleanliness and the expulsion of irrelevant worries. It might almost have been called “the Greek moment,” for it so perfectly epitomized the Greek ideal; and in this period of unusual mental clarity before he fell asleep on the padded benches, Menelaus faced up to the full implication of what he had been discussing with the gymnasiarch.

“Speak honestly to me, sir. Have I a chance to win at Antioch?”

“I tested all the strangers from Tyre, and none could damage you.”

“And if I win at Antioch, will Athens follow?”

“As day follows night,” Tarphon said. He liked the pragmatic sequence in which this young Jew faced problems. The operation which the doctor in Ptolemais had developed in order to erase the sign of circumcision was bitterly painful and must not be undertaken lightly. One misguided Jew from Jaffa had committed suicide because of the agony, which proved so much greater than he had anticipated. But if there was a chance for some great prize, that might justify pain. So Tarphon considered it honorable to give his young friend that straw’s weight of encouragement which men often require in order to reach a decision: “Menelaus, when a young man wrestles he is striving not only for the immediate laurel. When I was your age I fought like a warrior, but I also studied and the time came when the empire needed a governor, and I was chosen. But I had won the office long before. Some day I’ll be promoted, and this governorship will be vacant. Now, I know that Antiochus wants to appoint a Jew to some important position. To reconcile your people to his rule. That Jew could be you.”

Menelaus was sleepy. The exercise and the warm bath and the penetrating smell of the oil combined to overcome him, but before he lost consciousness he said, "When you race to Ptolemais next week I should like to be among your challengers."

"You shall be," Tarphon said.

On the morning of the annual race trumpeters summoned spectators to the main gate of Makor, where Governor Tarphon stood in military uniform, sword at his side, helmet on his head. About him clustered the seven athletes in their special uniforms, looking like gods, and beyond them stood four or five younger competitors who had not yet proved themselves sufficiently to have earned costumes but who hoped that in this eight-mile race to Ptolemais they might take the first steps toward such recognition. Beyond them stood the townspeople, including Canaanites and Jews, Phoenicians and Egyptians, all with their wives and daughters.

The runners now sat on doorsteps to unlace their formal shoes, replacing them with sandals that they tested by running a few steps, which made them look even more like gods as their blue capes moved in the morning breeze. When they were satisfied that their sandals fitted, trumpets blew and the men took off their head coverings, handing them to friends, who were thus honored. Each man tied a small white cloth about his forehead, after which the trumpets again sounded, whereupon the contestants took off all their clothing to stand naked in the sunlight. They were a handsome group, bronzed, muscular and marred by no disfiguring fat. They were probably as fine a body of men as the Greek empires could have provided that morning, and none excelled the figure of the gymnasiarch as he stood naked before his people—a man extremely well controlled and capable, somewhat past the age of competition but able to defeat most of the young fellows amongst whom he stood. As if they intended the general public to marvel at them, the athletes moved about for some moments, during which all could see that of the contestants only Menelaus was a Jew.

Then Governor Tarphon casually took a breechclout and wrapped it about his middle. The others followed suit, and soon all were ready for the race. The gymnasiarch signaled for the trumpets to sound once more, after which he addressed the runners in tones loud enough for the citizens to hear: "Any of you who fail to beat me into Ptolemais will get no wine in that city and no sweet oil for your baths when you return to Makor." The runners

laughed, and he moved among them, punching them on their strong shoulders and testing their firm belly muscles with his fist.

Melissa came forward, kissed her husband, then kissed Menelaus and another young man who lived at her house. To the rest she said, "If you do not defeat Tarphon this day he will prove unbearable. For my sake, please, do not let him win." Everyone laughed, and she gave the signal which started the race. Down the ramp the athletes went and onto the Damascus road, heading west toward Ptolemais, and as they ran it was easy to see from the long, rhythmic stride of the red-haired gymnasiarch that he would not be easily defeated this day.

Among the spectators who watched the beginning of the race was Jehubabel, who had to stand in shame among his silent Jews as they followed the abhorrent spectacle of a Jewish boy parading naked before the wide-eyed young women of the town as they stared with fascination at the peculiarity which marked him from the others. The more naked Menelaus had seemed, the more closely the other Jews had drawn their robes about them, as if to compensate for the young man's defection. And all felt sorry for Jehubabel.

In the days following the departure of the runners, the town soldiers, obedient to a plan laid down by Tarphon before he left, launched another search of Jewish homes to see if any were disobeying the laws of Antiochus Epiphanes, and without warning they descended on a group of widely scattered families, including the home of Paltiel the farmer, and there they discovered that his infant son had been circumcised. Grabbing both the child and his parents they hauled them to jail and sent a runner—an official messenger who ran alone bearing an ebony wand of authority—to Ptolemais with news for Governor Tarphon: "The Jew Paltiel has been caught flagrantly disobeying the law. In accordance with plans approved by you, he and his wife should be executed within two days. But do you wish the executions delayed until your return?" That afternoon the same messenger returned with the expected reply: "It is impossible for me to leave Ptolemais. Proceed as planned." The soldiers had accurately guessed that their governor, who had initiated the search, would want to be absent when the executions took place, and it was for this precise reason that the search had been carried out while he was away.

It was one of those days of incredible beauty that come to the Galilee toward the end of autumn, when the summer heat has ended and the winter rain has not yet started. The



earth stands refreshed with heavy dew and the olive trees rest from their burden of fruit. The vines are empty and the oxen are idle. In the sky not a cloud appears, not even haze from the sea, but cool breezes move casually across the landscape, bespeaking the cold weather that lies ahead. In all seasons of the year the Galilee is a masterpiece of nature, an area to make the heart glad that man is an animal who can love the earth as a deer loves the cool highlands or as the bee eater loves the fields over which he skims; but in autumn, when the seasons are about to change, it has a special beauty, and if great thoughts have sometimes come from this small region it is partly because this magnificence of the land—the magnificence that lies in familiar things rather than in great waterfalls or towering mountains—has always impressed itself upon the people who lived in the area. Never was the Galilee so lovely as in this fateful year when the empire of the Seleucids seemed so securely entrenched not only in the Galilee but in all of Israel, even to Jerusalem. It was as if nature herself were holding her breath to see what would happen in the conflict between the imperial might of Antiochus Epiphanes and the unarmed resolution of a few Jews.

That autumn, in Makor at least, it seemed obvious that Antiochus must win, for when the Jews of the town were assembled before the temple of Zeus they were a terrified lot. There the guards had erected two pillars and had provided two lashes fitted with lead-tipped thongs. In the hush of an exquisitely beautiful morning, the family of Paltiel was led forth: the little farmer with protruding eyes, his wife who could have moved unnoticed in any crowd, and their infant child. The swaddling clothes of the latter were ripped away and the child was held aloft by his feet to demonstrate that it had been circumcised in defiance of the law.

With hideous swiftness a sword flashed and the child was split in two.

Before the parents could express their anguish, they were stripped and tied to the poles, where they were lashed fifty times. The effect of a lead-tipped thong upon a man's body was terrible, striking fear into the hearts of all, but upon a woman's body the effect was overwhelming. Those required to watch lowered their heads.

The mutilated bodies were thrown to the ground, where knives cut away any remaining skin, and then the torsos were hacked apart and thrown on a heap of rubbish outside the town where dogs and jackals came to feed. But in the late afternoon of that perfect day, a

solitary soldier, who had broken some minor rule, appeared with a bucket and a broom to wash away any stains that might remain before the temple of Zeus, for the Greeks were a meticulous people to whom cleanliness and beauty were imperative.

That night the crushed Jews of Makor sent a few of their men to the synagogue, where they met in silence, merely to pray. Jehubabel, who should at that moment have stood forth as the spiritual leader of the community, was mute, caught in the grip of self-condemnation. He had permitted Paltiel to circumcise his son. Indeed, he had himself wielded the knife that completed the covenant, and it should have been he who stood at the lashing post, not Paltiel. He had allowed his own son to go over to the Greeks and had permitted him to stand naked in the sunlight like a young pagan who knew not YHWH. It had been Jehubabel's counsel that had persuaded the Jews to allow pigs to be sacrificed in this synagogue, defiling it forever, and the words he had spoken with Governor Tarphon, his friend, had come back to crush him. But even now, in this hour of humiliation, he was unable to call forth any vigorous statement that would enlist his Jews in a rebellion against their oppressors. When at last younger men asked what must be done, Jehubabel answered sententiously, "We must be prudent, for he that is slow to anger is stronger than the mighty, and he who controls his temper is more powerful than he who rules a city."

But his commonplaces received a bold challenge when toward midnight the next voluntary martyrs stepped forth: the baker Zattu and his wife Anat appeared with their infant son to repeat the terrible words: "Our son is eight days old."

"You were at the execution," Jehubabel mumbled.

"We were," they said.

"And you're willing to take this risk?"

"If we are not faithful to Adonai, we are nothing," the couple recited in a phrase they had memorized together.

Jhubabel looked about the synagogue. "Is there a spy among us?" he asked apprehensively, and each man knew that the life of the community lay in his hands, so the baker Zattu went to each and asked, "Have I your permission to circumcise my son?" and each man was required to acknowledge his own complicity in what the Jews were about to do.

Against his own better judgment Jehubabel went home to procure the small knife; and again his wife asked what was afoot and he brought her back to the synagogue with him, that she, too, might be a part of that solemn covenant; and finally all commonplace words were driven from his mouth and he announced simply, "What we are doing tonight puts us at war with the kingdoms of the Gentiles. There can be no turning back. We shall have to flee Makor, to live among the swamps like the beasts of the field. Do you wish me to proceed?"

There was a murmur of assent, but after his brave start Jehubabel lost courage. Turning to Zattu and Anat he asked pitifully, "Do you know what you're doing?"

Together they repeated their formula: "If we are not faithful to Adonai, we are nothing."

And then a transformation came over Jehubabel, and one not of his directing: At the first circumcision he had been forced by the martyr Paltiel to perform and had he been left alone he would have avoided that confrontation. But the moment had come when he must stand by himself before YHWH, without the protection of aphorisms or evasions. The leader of the Jews must now lead, and as he faced the congregation, not knowing what to say, he remembered those solemn words which YHWH himself had spoken to Abraham and he began to recite the oath which bound the Jews to their special destiny:

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee ...

This is my covenant, which ye shall keep ... Every man child among you shall be circumcised ...

And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations ...

And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant ...

And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin ... And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him."

So in a kind of martyr's defiance, ennobled by a force he did not understand, Jehubabel threw off his fear and performed the circumcision. The Jews had taken the step from which there could be no retreat.

[clip]

THE Ptolemais to which Gymnasiarch Tarphon led his runners in that gracious autumn of 167 B.C.E. bore no resemblance to the ancient Akka of the Egyptians or to the Accho of the Phoenicians. Those settlements had huddled inland upon a mound overlooking the Belus River, but Ptolemais, one of many cities throughout Asia Minor encouraged by the forward-looking Antiochus Epiphanes, stood boldly upon a peninsula jutting out into the sea, while the hinterland reached back to encompass the older site as well. Within an ambulating wall Ptolemais stood as one of the subtlest political inventions of man, a free Greek city-state with its own assembly, its right to mint its own coinage and its own particular system of government with elected officials subservient to Antioch and Antiochus only in matters of foreign policy and the higher reaches of religion. Along the waterfront it contained a noble theater built of marble, where the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides were seen and where the comedies of Aristophanes were offered to amuse the mob. Exquisite temples dotted the city, one to Antiochus Epiphanes but many to the local gods like Baal, and there were baths dedicated to Aphrodite. Factories produced glassware that would enchant all subsequent generations who loved beauty; silver from Asia and gold from Africa were worked into local jewelry that was famous as far away as Spain.

To explain in one instant the superiority of a true city-state, as compared to a town like Makor, which was ruled from Antioch, Tarphon took his runners to a bench-lined square where a tall, white-bearded Negro from Nubia stood majestically on a podium, arguing with any who cared to contest his intelligence. "He's a sophist," the gymnasiarch whispered to his athletes. "Listen."

Tarphon stepped forth from the crowd and said, "Sir, I hold the earth is flat."

"It must be round," the dark sophist replied, and in a series of brilliant and logical deductions the former slave, trained in Athens, proved to any sensible man that the earth must be round. He cited Aristotle, travelers to Arabia, the common sense of men who could see the ocean and the flight of birds. When he paused for breath, Tarphon whispered to Menelaus, "Tell him it's round." And Menelaus did so, whereupon the sophist cast his luminous eyes at the youth and said, "Hold now! How in reason could the earth be round?" And one by one he demolished his own former arguments, calling again upon Aristotle and

common sense to refute the idea that a thing so essential to life as the earth could be round, allowing men to fall off.

“Then it must stand on end,” a listener from Egypt suggested, and this proposition the sophist demolished with witty evidence until all had to confess that they were listening to a brilliant man whose white beard and black skin lent dignity to their city.

Ptolemais in those days contained some sixty thousand people, including businessmen from Rome, who sent secret reports back to their senate, and as the young athletes from Makor watched these rich and varied persons at their work they came to understand how precious Greek citizenship could be and what a treasure they would gain for themselves could they become citizens, too. Of the sixty thousand, only five thousand were citizens, some thirty thousand were slaves, and the remaining twenty-five thousand were residents possessing no rights of voting or claims to consideration by the city-state. Jews fell mostly into the latter category, but as Tarphon explained to Menelaus, “This is the essential reason why it’s prudent for you to visit the doctor. For if you win at Antioch, you will be made a full citizen of Ptolemais. Only citizens can compete in the Olympics at Greece.”

“Are you a citizen?” Menelaus asked.

“I won my citizenship in the wrestling arena,” Tarphon said with visible pride.

“I shall be a citizen of this city,” the youth vowed and he asked the gymnasiarch to lead him to the doctor.

In a side street, not far from the theater, an Egyptian doctor accepted the two strangers, listened as Tarphon explained, then said, “Gymnasiarch, now you shall go, for this must be a matter between the boy and me.” Tarphon nodded, gripped his protégé by the shoulder and whispered, “This is the path to citizenship,” and he was gone.

As soon as the door closed the Egyptian startled Menelaus by ripping aside a curtain to disclose the marble statue of an athlete, naked and powerful. Grabbing a knife the doctor took the statue’s penis in his left hand and pretended to slice it with four sharp, deep cuts, crying, “This is what we do.” He was watching not the statue but the patient and saw with satisfaction that although Menelaus flinched, and blood left his face, he did not look away but kept watching the marble penis so as to judge whether he could bear the pain. Satisfied that he could, he bit his lip and waited. “Under this pain,” the doctor explained, “a Jew older than you, from Jaffa, committed suicide.”

“He was not seeking the prize I seek,” Menelaus retorted, whereupon the Egyptian moved swiftly at him with the knife, seeking to terrify him, but the young Jew did not flinch.

“I think you are ready,” the doctor said, “and you may scream as much as you will, for it will exhaust the pain.” And he made ready a table upon which the young man would lie, and called three slaves to hold him.

When Tarphon received satisfactory reports from Makor stating that the disobedient Jewish family had been executed and that any uneasiness resulting therefrom had subsided, and when the Egyptian doctor assured him that Menelaus had been unusually courageous and would soon mend, he assembled the rest of his team and led them home, where they were received in triumph, but it was soon noticed that Menelaus, the Jew, was not among them, and this, coming so soon after the executions, caused comment which the gymnasiarch allayed by announcing that a great honor had come to Makor: “Our young champion Menelaus has been invited to the imperial games at Antioch.” When the crowd stopped cheering he added, “He’s training in Ptolemais, but he will soon be home.”

He took three of the young men to the palace, where Melissa had a feast prepared for them, and there he announced that the young man Nicanor, who had triumphed over him in the race to Ptolemais, would henceforth be permitted to wear the town’s uniform, and ceremoniously he handed the young Phoenician the coveted garb. Melissa kissed the youth and then Tarphon said that he was going to the gymnasium, where he asked his slave to fetch Jehubabel.

The meeting was unpleasant. Tarphon began by explaining to the Jewish leader that in the case of the Paltiel family his hands had been tied. During his absence in Ptolemais the orders had come from Antiochus Epiphanes, and since he had not been able to return to Makor in time ... Jehubabel looked at him with disgust, and this irritated Tarphon, who reminded him, “If I had been here I might have arrested you, too, for you must have been involved in this thing.” But Jehubabel, a timorous man in the beginning, was no longer to be frightened, and Tarphon, seeing this, tried to regain his friendship by other means, for the governor knew that if there was to be open enmity between them the control of Makor might become difficult. “Let’s forget Paltiel,” he suggested. “The important news is your son. He performed brilliantly. Wrestled with the best and defeated them all.” He pointed his

finger at the pudgy Jew as if he were prophesying: "One day that boy will stand in the victor's circle at Olympia."

Jehubabel looked at Tarphon as if the latter were an imbecile, and he began to say what folly it was for the leader of a people to take pride in standing naked before them, as if athletic ability had any bearing on integrity; but instead he launched into an attack on Tarphon's wife: "How can you presume to govern when you can't control your own wife?"

Tarphon was stunned. "What do you mean?"

"My son. Your wife." The round-faced Jew was scarcely intelligible, but Tarphon guessed that Jehubabel must have placed some ugly interpretation on a matter with which he was not acquainted.

"What has happened between your son and Melissa?" he asked.

"He's in your house. At the gate she kissed him while you were watching. Have you no shame?"

Governor Tarphon looked down at his folded hands. How could one explain anything civilized to the Jews? All during his years in Athens, Tarphon had moved from one principal home to the next, where beautiful women patronized promising young men and suffered no compromise in doing so. Sensible Greek matrons knew how to conduct themselves, and Tarphon had found that one of the finest rewards of his marriage was the spacious room in which his beautiful wife met with young men of varied accomplishments and encouraged them to further attainment; it was this interchange of philosophy and art and politics that sustained life, and Tarphon pitied the narrow-minded Jew who interpreted the process otherwise.

"You should guard your wife," Jehubabel warned. "Like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout is a fair woman without discretion."

"What are you trying to say?" Tarphon asked in some exasperation.

"A man whose wife is a whore, what peace can he know?"

"Get away from here!" Tarphon cried, rushing from his chair to push the dumpy Jew from his room. He had tried, the record would prove how desperately he had tried, to conciliate Jehubabel, but it was now obvious that there could be no fruitful discussion between them. When he had Jehubabel at the door he warned, "The law will be enforced. And when we find the next circumcised child, you too will die. For you shared in the guilt of Paltiel."

He shoved his guest through the door, but this placed Jehubabel under the statue of Antiochus, and with a courage new to him Jehubabel said scornfully, using the joke of the Jews, "Antiochus Epimanes," meaning the fool, after which he spit upon the discus thrower, crying, "This vanity will perish," and he left the gymnasium.

That evening Tarphon repeated the conversation for Melissa, and she was distressed that the Jew had made such a fool of himself. That he had misunderstood her actions she was willing to forgive, for Greek ways must seem strange to austere Jews, but she could not understand his failure to appreciate his own son. "In Menelaus he has the finest youth in Makor, but he seems determined to crush his spirit. Why can't he simply accept the wonderful thing the gods have given him? And not see him as a criminal?"

She became so agitated that she insisted upon talking with Jehubabel, there and then, but Tarphon refused to argue any further with the Jew; so exercising her freedom as a Greek woman she summoned two of her slaves, who bore small lamps into the street, and thus she made her way to the home of Jehubabel, surprising him by insisting upon coming inside and sitting like a familiar neighbor on one of the kitchen chairs.

"Jhubabel," she began in the Koine, "I am distressed at the enmity which has grown up between you and Menelaus."

The Jew thought: She has ensnared my son, and now she wishes to entrap me. But for what purpose?

"And I am even more distressed that you have opposed my husband. Truly, Tarphon is the best friend you Jews could have. He has tried to soften every law."

The Jew thought: Ah! There's some new edict which Tarphon is afraid to discuss with me face-to-face. He's sent his wife to trick me.

"My husband and Menelaus have both told me what you think of me. Believe me, Jehubabel, you are wrong. I have tried to help Tarphon bring Makor a good government and I have tried to show your son the greatness of our empire. But I am not important. Menelaus is. Don't you realize what a magnificent son you have? That he could one day be governor of this district?"

Jhubabel drew back from this tempting woman. Now he could understand why Benjamin had fallen victim to her allurements: she was graceful and desirable and it was appalling that such a woman should talk of empire and the education of young men.



“Unless you work with us,” she was saying, “we’ll have difficult times in Makor. Next week there’s to be another search. For the circumcised ones.”

Jehubabel heard no more of what she had to say. He could think only of the baker Zattu and his wife Anat. With them he had conspired to break the law and if they were apprehended it was certain that this time he too would be executed. It seemed to him that Melissa was speaking of the trivial manipulation of society—if the Jews behaved, a boy like Benjamin might one day become governor—while Jehubabel was being driven to consider the ultimate relationship of the chosen people with YHWH. In his moral arrogance he could not understand that Melissa was speaking of neither politics nor society but of something quite different: the hungry yearning felt by many Greeks for a stern moral structure to accompany their exquisite sense of artistic and philosophic beauty. “Don’t you suppose we’re ashamed of the flayings?” she asked. To his deaf ears she made an impassioned plea for harmony between Jew and Greek, but Jehubabel now saw the latter merely as an oppressor of savage malignity; she pleaded with him for a further temporizing with Antiochus IV and his aspiring plan to Hellenize the eastern world, but for the Jew there was only Epiphanes, the would-be god who slaughtered infant boys. She tried to depict the world that could result when present religious irrationalities were controlled, but he would not hear. She spoke of a Greece that was reaching out to encompass the world, but he thought of a Judaism that was retreating within itself, seeking to purify itself for the tests ahead. The time for dialogue between Hellenism and Judaism had passed; briefly there had been a chance that between intellectual Greeks and moralistic Jews some kind of fruitful alliance might be achieved, with the lyric insights of the former uniting with the rugged power of the latter to create some new and vital synthesis, but the Greeks had behaved so stupidly and the Jews so stubbornly that now the rupture was beyond repair. Two hundred years from this night, not far from this very spot, Hellenism still searching would discover a more pliable religion arising in Galilee, and that union of philosophical Greek and Christian Jew would provide a spark which would ignite the world. Unaware that this was to happen, Melissa went sadly home, satisfied that in her generation the attempt would accomplish nothing.

When she was gone Jehubabel did not hesitate. He sent his wife to summon the leaders of the Jewish community, including the baker Zattu, and when they were assembled in his

kitchen he said, "Next week there will be an inspection of all male babies." Zattu paled, but he had known that sooner or later this moment must come, so he was prepared for it, but he looked to the older men for guidance, and Jehubabel was ready. He said, "We must leave Makor."

"For where?" Zattu asked.

"The swamps. The mountains."

"Can we live there?" the baker asked.

"Can we live here?" Jehubabel countered.

There was earnest discussion of how the Jews might survive outside the town, and all were apprehensive until Jehubabel reminded them, "For centuries our people lived in that manner, and we can do so again."

"But we will be so few," Zattu argued, even though it was he who risked the sentence of death.

Then for the first time in his life Jehubabel became prophetic: "I believe that other Jews in other towns must realize that with the Greeks there can be no hope. I believe other Jews are holding discussions like this ... tonight ... now." He stood silent, and his listeners could visualize the perplexity with which their fellow Jews were facing the great persecution. And after midnight they agreed that at the first sign of the next general search, those in that room, and their families, would flee Makor to make their lives in any way they might among the swamps and the hills; and as each man left, Jehubabel inspected him and asked, "Is it a pledge?" And it was so pledged.

At the end of the week, when tension was high and no one knew where the next blow would fall, a welcome diversion came with the return from Ptolemais of Menelaus, accompanied by a team of wrestlers who had come by ship from Cyprus. Tarphon announced happily that he would sponsor a public exhibition between the Cypriots and the men of Makor, at which he would wrestle the second man of the Cyprus team. "Their champion will be met by our champion, Menelaus!" Proudly he placed his arm about the shoulder of his returning protégé, and the young athletes filed off to the gymnasium.

That afternoon the gymnasium was thrown open, and the stone seats of the exhibition hall quickly filled with townspeople. Jews were forced to attend, it having been found that otherwise they would refuse to participate in what they held to be pagan rites, so in the

frontrow, across from Melissa's box, sat Jehubabel, his arms folded stubbornly across his fat stomach, his eyes fixed on the sanded floor of the arena. To have to watch one's own son parade his nakedness was humiliating, but to attend on this particular day, when the fate of the Jewish community was in jeopardy, was abhorrent, and he would not try to hide his sense of insult.

Trumpets sounded, and from a door leading to the dressing rooms the six young men of Cyprus marched out, naked, tanned from their life aboard boats, and confident. They had come from a major island of the Ptolemaic empire to show a small provincial village on the outskirts of the Seleucid empire how men from a cosmopolitan center conducted themselves, and they paraded a certain appealing arrogance. Melissa, looking at their superb bodies, thought what a handsome lot they were, and how surprised at least the first two were going to be when they struck young Menelaus and her husband.

Another flurry of trumpets caused a different door to open, and from it marched the six local athletes, led by the red-haired gymnasiarch, manly and stalwart as he had been during his championship days in Athens. He was still a superb human being and the local audience applauded, but as the men lined up in the center of the arena a murmur began in the front rows, then climbed through the stone seats and at last erupted into cheering applause as the population saw the transformation that Menelaus had undergone. All evidence of his circumcision was gone, and since many knew how painful this operation was, cries of approval began to greet the young champion.

"Menelaus! You are one of us!"

An old man who had once been champion in Tyre shouted, "He is a Greek! He is a Greek!" And young women who saw with interest the transformation began to applaud and call the name, "Menelaus!"

At first Jehubabel had refused to look at the entrance of the athletes, but when he heard his son's name being shouted with approval he had to look up, and he saw his son standing not far from him, relaxed and marvelously handsome, his skin lightly rubbed with oil. At first Jehubabel could not understand why the people of Makor were applauding him, and then the baker Zattu, who might at any moment be flayed for having consecrated his son to YHWH, nudged Jehubabel and pointed to the result of the operation. The Jew's eyes rested with astonishment upon the visible proof of the boy's disgrace, and he was so appalled at

what Menelaus had done that he pressed his hands over his face, and as the crowd called the boy's name Jehubabel heard the words of YHWH himself saying as of old: "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant ..." and it seemed to him a commandment, and he leaped from his seat, grabbing the walking stick of a crippled Jew, and with this knotted club he struck his son with such force that the boy fell to the ground. With four crushing blows he beat his son about the head, shattering his skull. Then with a loud cry, "The pledge! The pledge!" he ran from the gymnasium and without halting dashed through the main gate, shouting, "The pledge! The pledge!"

As planned, he headed for the swamp, and by nightfall a few Jews had joined him. Some of the leaders had managed to flee the gymnasium. Lesser ones, hearing the battlecry, had lowered themselves over the town walls with ropes, and there were undoubtedly others who had escaped but who had not yet joined up with the fugitives. Jehubabel's wife had not received word in time, and she would be lashed to death, but Zattu, his wife Anat and their son had escaped.

They were a sorry lot, a handful of unarmed Jews hiding in a swamp without food and led by a man who had just murdered his son. They could hear the heavy splattering through mud of Greek soldiers trying to seek them out, and they could catch words of the Koine as the Greeks passed by, but at dusk the sounds halted and they were left alone. When they were satisfied that their persecutors had gone, Jehubabel assembled them in prayer, and without recourse to the tedious proverbs of his commonplace life, said, "Adonai, this day we place our lives in your hands. We are nothing. We are a miserable, lost group of Jews with no food and no weapons. But we are convinced we shall prevail against the madman who dares to call himself God-Made-Manifest. Adonai, show us what we must do."

And this prayer brought to the huddled Jews such an honest realization of their plight that no man spoke, but they clung each to the other, and in the silence of the swamp they heard anew the splashing and whispered, "The soldiers have come back," and Jehubabel prayed, "Adonai, if the Greeks capture us tonight, let us die in your arms."

The searchers came closer and might have passed on, except that the child of Zattu began to whimper, and this betrayed them, and the retreating sounds returned, bringing terror to the swamp, and in Hebrew a voice whispered, "Jehubabel! We know you are here."

Present yourself, for we have been in the swamp for six days. All over Israel, Jews have risen against the oppressor. In Jerusalem. In Modi'im. In Beth-Horon."

No one spoke. It could be a trap planned by the clever Greeks, but with a desperation he had never known before Jehubabel wanted to believe. He wanted to believe that his pitiful remnant was not alone in that swamp. And then the voice came again: "Jhubabel, we know you are here. If you are zealous for the law, if you stand by the covenant, come out with us, for we are not a rabble. We are an army, obedient to Judah the Maccabee."