

# Chanukah Learnathon – The Megillah of Chanukah

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BEIT MIDRASH  
זכרון דוב

But Chanukah doesn't have a megillah!

## 1. Talmud Bavli Yoma 29a (Davidson Edition translation)

א"ר אסי למה נמשלה אסתר לשחר לומר לך מה שחר סוף כל הלילה אף אסתר סוף כל הנסים

Rabbi Asi said: Why was Esther likened to the dawn? It is to tell you: Just as the dawn is the conclusion of the entire night, so too, Esther was the conclusion of all miracles performed for the entire Jewish people.

והא איכא חנוכה ניתנה לכתוב קא אמרינן

The Gemara asks: But isn't there the miracle of Hanukkah, which was performed many years later? The Gemara answers: It is true that additional miracles were performed after the miracle of Purim; however, it is with regard to miracles for which permission was granted to write them in the Bible that we are saying that the miracle of Purim was the last one.

## 2. Wikipedia, Megillat Antiochus

Megillat Antiochus (Hebrew: מגילת אנטיוכוס - "The Scroll of Antiochus"; also "Megillat Ha-Hashmonaim", "Megillat Hanukkah", or "Megillat Yevanit") recounts the story of Hanukkah and the history of the victory of the Maccabees (or Hasmoneans) over the Seleucid Empire.

Who wrote the 'Chanukah Megillah'?

## 3. Rabbi Sa'adyah Ga'on, Sefer Hagaluy (cited by Minhagei Yisrael 5, page 103)

וכמו שכתבו בני חשמונאי, יהודה ושמעון ויוחנן ויונתן ואלעזר בני מתתיהו, ספר במה שעבר עליהם, הדומה לספר דניאל בלשון כשדים...just as the sons of Hasmoneans, Yehudah, Shim'on, Yochanan, Yonatan, and El'azar the sons of Matityahu a book of what happened to them, similar to the Book of Daniel in the language of Chaldeans.

## 4. Rabbi Shimon Kayara, Halachot Gedolot, Section 75 (Ginzberg translation)

זקני בית שמאי וזקני בית הלל הם כתבו מגלת בית חשמונאי ועד עכשיו לא עלה לדורות עד שיעמוד כהן לאורים ותומים

The oldest of the pupils of Shammai and Hillel wrote 'Megillat Bet Hashmonai.' But up to the present time nothing is known of the Megillah; and this state of incognizance will last until the priest shall appear with the Urim and Thummim

## 5. Rabbi Louis Ginzberg, Scroll of Antiochus (1906 Jewish Encyclopedia)

But the much-discussed "Scroll of the House of the Hasmoneans," which, it is alleged, the "Halakot Gedolot" quotes (middle of the eighth century), is purely imaginary; for not only does the manuscript read in this passage, "Megillat Ta'anit" ("Halakot Gedolot," ed. Hildesheimer, p. 615), but, even if the expression, "Megillat bet Hashmonai," of the printed text be adopted, the passage would then bear the very opposite meaning to the one that has been deduced from it...

...This view also nullifies all speculation that the Talmud and the Midrashim drew upon a "Book of the Hasmoneans." At any rate, it may be asserted that the Megillat Antiochus was written at a time when even the vaguest recollection of the Maccabees had disappeared. An additional proof of the same fact is furnished by the language and subject-matter of the work itself...

The determination of the exact date of the Scroll is more difficult. If the above-mentioned passage in the "Halakot Gedolot" really refers to a "Book of the Hasmoneans," the only possible period could have been from the middle of the eighth to the middle of the ninth century; for, as has been said, the "Halakot Gedolot" does not presuppose a book that existed contemporaneously with itself.

But did people actually read this?

**6. Rabbi Isaiah of Trani, Tosfot Ri”d to Talmud Bavli Sukkah 44b**

וכן נמי מקום שנוהגין מגלת אנטיוכוס בחנוכה אין ראוי לברך עליה מפני שאין שורש חובה כלל

And also in a place that they have the custom to read the Scroll of Antiochus on Chanukah, it is not fitting to make a blessing over it, for it has no ‘rooted’ obligation at all.

**7. Siddur Otzar Hatefillot, Book 2, Page 46 (cited and translated by [biureihatefillah.org](http://biureihatefillah.org), Volume 9:12)**

מגילה יובית היא מגלת אנטיוכוס – בסידור מנהג כפא וקצת קהלות קרא טוב כתוב נוהגין לקרות מגלת אנטיוכוס בשבת במנחה אחר קדיש תתקבל, משום פרסומי ניסא. ואומר כל ישראל ואחר כך קורין את המגילה

A Greek Megilah that is also identified as Megilas Antiochus-In the Siddur that follow Minhag Corfu and other surrounding communities it is written that it was customary to read Megilas Antiochus on Shabbos Chanukah at Mincha after the prayer leader recited Kaddish Tiskabel. This custom was founded on the requirement to publicize the miracles that occurred that precipitated the Chanukah holiday. It was further their custom to open with the paragraph that begins: All of Israel has a part in the Next World, etc. and then they would continue by reading the Megilah.

**8. Rabbi Yichya Tzalach, Eitz Chaim commentary to Yemenite Liturgy, 1:163:1 (cited by Minhagei Yisrael 5, page 110)**

ויש שקורין מגלת אנטיוכוס בשבת אחר ההפטרה. ואין חוב, רק למצוה בעלמא לפרסם הנס בישראל.

And there are those who read the Scroll of Antiochus on Shabbat after the Haftarah. And there is no obligation [to do so], it is just a ‘mitzvah’, to publicize the miracle within the Jewish people.

**Summary of points found in Minhagei Yisrael 5, Chapter 6 (authored by Natan Fried)**

- Differs from other accounts in its historical details
  - Yehudah the Maccabi is killed at the beginning of the battle with the Greek army
  - The ‘miracle of the jug of oil’ is a central reason for the celebration of this holiday
- Originally composed in Aramaic
  - Some suggest this was because it was intended as a history book rather than a religious text
  - Others note that if the purpose of this text was to publicize the miracles of Chanukah, the vernacular would be preferred to Hebrew
  - The author suggests that this was to circumvent the potential halachic problems with reading it publicly on Shabbat (this is further supported by his observation that all of those communities who read it in its Hebrew translation read it at Mincha on Shabbat, whereas those who read it in Aramaic had no problems reading it at Shacharit)
- Was extremely popular and integrated, to the point that Rabbi Nissim of Kairouan (the teacher of Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi) grouped it together with Megillat Esther and other parts of Tanach, as did many printed Bibles hundreds of years later
- Due to popularity, it was translated to Arabic by Rav Sa’adyah Ga’on, and later on to Hebrew
- Its many versions were later split into verses
- Many versions were vowelized and assigned cantillation notes for proper reading in the synagogue
- At some point, it was even assigned a blessing before and after it (similar to Megillat Esther)!
- Despite its lack of roots in the Ashkenazi community, many Hassidim now read this sometime during Chanukah, and some non-Hassidic Ashkenazi individuals have begun to read it on the nights of Chanukah as well.
- It is not widespread in non-Ashkenazi communities, despite stronger tradition