



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel
160

Box
57

Folder
671

Lights are going on all over the world, 1942.

612
LIGHTS ARE GOING ON ALL OVER THE WORLD

A Chanukah Sermon



By

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, December 6, 1942

Sometimes very small battles determine great events. In the Battle of Marathon, 490 C.E. the Greeks, less than 10,000 were engaged in that battle, and it is that battle with one or two others on the same scale that saved the new and vigorous civilization which was developing in Greece from being submerged in Europe. This battle was fought on a very small scale. The battle of Badr, 624 of the Common Era, where Mohammed defeated the men from Mecca -- in this war, only sixty-three people were killed on both sides -- yet that victory paved the way for the triumph of Islam in the Old World. It gave a new turn to world history. Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, on October 17, 1777, really did not involve many troops, yet this was the turning point in the American Revolution because the belief gained force in Europe that the American Revolutionists might win the war. Benjamin Franklin was able to negotiate treaties of alliance with France, and the aid of France, as you know, was indispensable to the winning of the Revolution. So that all the new ideas, all the revolutionary ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence which changed the course of human history in the last one hundred fifty years are in a way traceable to that victory won at Saratoga. And that was also on a small scale. It is very often the great divide -- where sometimes a slight crack in the ground determines whether that little stream shall flow Eastward to the Atlantic, or Westward to the Pacific.

And it is so with the victories of the Maccabees. Back in 165 B.C.E., the battles of the Maccabees belonged to the same category -- very few people, very few soldiers involved, and it was fought by ^arelatively obscure people against the mighty empires -- yet it was one of the decisive battles of history. Had they lost, Judaism would have been lost and destroyed. The Christian world, Christianity would never have arisen for Christianity was an off-shoot of Judaism and developed 200 years later. Mohammendanism too, as such, might never have appeared. So that that victory of the Maccabees which we are

celebrating this morning commemorates one of the decisive moments not merely in Jewish history but in world history. For Antiochus the Illustrious was out to destroy not so much the Jews, the people, but Judaism as a religion.

That was not just another political war fought to gain territory. The Jews in those days no longer possessed political independence. It had not possessed it before that time. The Jews had been ruled by the Greeks or the Romans ever since the fifteenth century. Antiochus had no grievance against the Jews except for the fact that they would not surrender their religion and insisted upon retaining their national culture. Antiochus was out to consolidate his empire. Looming in the distance was the growing power of the Roman Empire. To protect himself, to strengthen himself, he attempted to coordinate, to consolidate his empire. He was a believer in what has come to mean in our day, Gleichschaltung, totalitarianism. He believed in totalitarianism as most tyrants do. He had no trouble imposing that on all his people. All the nations fell in line because all the people in his kingdom were pagan, idolatrous. It didn't matter very much to them as regards their religion or their national culture, for that matter. The Jews alone in that world in the Old World were not pagan, heathen. They were monotheistic.

They had a spiritual and moral culture which was radically different from the spiritual and moral culture around them. For centuries this people had been taught and molded by their teachers, prophets, sages, scribes who had given them ^a distinctive religious civilization. They had the Torah. The ancestors of the Jews had resisted the heathen gods and pagan ways of life for hundreds of years prior to that time. They resisted them in the days of Isaiah and Micah.

Politically, the Maccabees were a subjected people. They possessed certain religious autonomy up to that time. But they were politically, subjected

to the Emperor, to the Grecco-Syrian world. But spiritually, they regarded themselves as the leaders of mankind, the teachers of mankind, and they would not permit themselves to be swallowed up into the Levantine melting pot.

They had a peculiar national destiny. So they alone resisted the coordination program, I say alone. Not all the Jews, however. Among the Jews, too, were defeatists and appeasers. Some of them hankered after the attractive brilliance of the pagan world. There were many Hellenizers who said: Why not go along? Why should we be different. Let us do as our neighboring peoples do -- I say, not all the Jews. A sufficient number of them, perhaps a minority resisted the tyrants who used the same system as always -- force, compulsory force of a people. Antiochus issued edicts one after another prohibiting worship in Temples, prohibiting the observances in Temples.

Now how did this small faithful Jewish band, representing such a small band of people -- how did they actually resist it? They resisted it with the spirit and with their soul which are stronger than steel. What did Mattathias have when he struck down the apostate Jew and the King's messenger and raised the standard of revolt? What was it he had? He had nothing more than courage and faith. He had no army, no fortress. He had nothing but faith and courage -- but these have always proved most powerful allies against seemingly insuperable odds. He had no more and no less than the British had after Dunkirk. Their armies were broken, defeated, their weapons gone. The British had nothing except faith and courage.

The Greeks met the might of the Italians and Nazis -- a little people. They, too, had nothing. They knew that. Yet they had faith and courage.

I read to you from the great chapter of the Maccabees when Judah was asked "How can we but few in number even dream of fighting these vast forces?", he answered to them: "To the God of Heaven, it is all one to serve with one or many." They had faith, and something which goes with faith -- faithfulness,

loyalty ^{to} great truths, great traditions, great memories. I refer again to the same passage when Mattathias said to his sons: Remember Abraham, when God commanded him to place his son, his only son on the altar to be offered as a sacrifice, he remained steadfast and son was saved. -- examples of Phineas -- David.

Mattathias told his bedraggled followers, remember our past, our glorious past. Remember the past greatness of your people. They were brave and valiant and powerful people who had in the past encountered mighty enemies without flinching. Mattathias, too, had nothing to offer to his followers -- nothing but blood and tears -- heroic memories and a great cause worth fighting and dying for, their ancient glorious faith, their gracious land, the survival of their nation.

And aroused and inspired, these bedraggled few fought as our text said, like lions, for such men, with such a cause, always do, whether they are fighting at Emmaus, Beth Horon, or at Bataan, Wake Island, Guadalcanal, El Allamein or Stalingrad, or as the Chinese.

The spirit, undefeated and indefeasible spirit sooner or later musters the physical strength and strategy requisite for winning. Victory is won. And in the darkened world these men of courage are enabled to kindle lights. The defiled sanctuaries of mankind are cleaned. Altars are raised anew and rededicated to the God of Freedom and of Free men. That is the law of history. Without this law Mattathias could not have won.

This happened again our day -- a year ago. These neo-pagans of our day the totalitarians of our day attacked our country at Pearl Harbor. It was infamous and distrous. Only this morning were we able to read the full account of that tragedy. It seems that our entire fleet was broken and battered by this ghastly attack. Pearl Harbor was just the first of a series of tragic disasters for us and for our Allies. The hordes of the heathen swept over and conquered

island after island and country after country. They were ^a/seemingly invincible foe. What helped us? A year ago too, the Nazis were at the gates of Moscow. They were licking their chops over their conquest. Never was the fortunes of free nations of the world at such low ebb. The lights were going out all over the world. We were celebrating, last year, our Chanukah in that darkened year. But like the Maccabees of old, our country and our Allies had faith, courage, and through the night and storm and darkness that faith and courage sustained, comforted, and steeled the hearts of our people and of other peoples.

Free men screwed their courage to the sticking place. They held on. They remembered what they were fighting for. They remembered their past, that they were a small people endangered in the past and they remembered their tradition. They remembered too that death is not evil -- but a shameful death. So, through the long, hard, desperate months since Bataan, we have been building, fighting, working harder, mustering our forces. A few months later, though the war is far from being over, we are beating back the enemy, beating him back in the Pacific, smiting him in Africa, draining him white in Russia.

The enemy is on the defensive. We are on the up. Our strength is waxing. Theirs is waning. Our hope and confidence have returned to us. The lights are going on all over the world. Even in the conquered lands, lights have begun to go on. France, which seemed to be spirutally, morally broken, which seemed to be by way of selling its soul collaborating with the enemy of mankind -- France, encouraged, took her proud Navy and blasted it to bits, sank it to the bottom of the sea rather than surrender it to the hands of the enemy. It is a torch that was kindled in the souls of France and the world.

Twelve months since Pearl Harbor, we have the courage now to think and plan for the days after victory for the new world. Democracy is no longer on the defensive, no longer checked. It is on the march to new frontiers and to new horizons.

Democracy is confident now because it can lick tyranny in that domain where tyranny is supreme in the ways of war. Democratic peoples, by their spirit and their democracy are able to organize, to turn upon their foe, smite and defeat him on his own ground and with his own weapons. For democracy, in the last analysis, is far more resourceful, far more inventive, certainly it has far more staying power than tyranny and dictatorship ever had. That is the lesson, my good friends, we could learn from Pearl Harbor and from the Maccabees.....

Our hope is that we will take that same high faith and courage and patriotism into peacetime when new tasks will face us. We should at all times remember that the great President of the United States admonished us to remember in the darkest economic distress, ten years ago -- President Roosevelt told his people in those days when our factories were closing down, millions were unemployed, banks were going bankrupt -- the President of the United States rallied his people and admonished them that "all we need fear is fear itself."

That is all a democratic people need fear -- fear itself, fear of the future, lack of confidence itself, fear of experimentation, fear of trying new things, fear of tomorrow. These are the only things we need fear. Faith, courage -- peace time and war time -- pass on to a newer and better world as the Maccabees did. The Maccabees made possible a whole new civilization to mankind. America and her brave Allies today, and more especially in the days after the war, may make it possible for the whole of mankind to progress on to a newer and better world.

1) Sometimes very small battles determine great events. ① Marathon. 490 B.C. Athenians 10,000. - ^{new X's from} ~~Marathon~~ ^{Marathon} civilization ~~submerged~~ preserve Europ. culture for 2000 years in that area.
② Badr - 624 A.D. Muhammad ag. Mecca. July 63 men killed on both sides. Paved way for triumph of Islam. (3) Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, Oct 17-1777, did not involve many troops on either side. Turning point of the Am. Rev. - Belief gained for in Europe that Am. rev. might win - Franklin able to negotiate treaties of alliance with France - whose aid proved indispensable to winning the war - All the new - made possible by that small military engagement. ^{obscure people}

2) Battles of massacres 168-165 - same category. ^{Not many} Had they lost - Judaism would have been destroyed. Christianity would never have arisen. For it was an offshoot of J. 200 yrs. later. With, too, may never have appeared.

A great decisive moment in world history For Antiochus was out to destroy not so much the Jews as Judaism. - not just another pol. war ^{I lost} ^{any} Had no grievance ag. J. - Egypt would not surrender their religion + destruction nat. culture. He wanted to consolidate his Empire - Conduct a believer in Totalitarianism - All pagan people fell in line - all polyth - all idolaters

Jews alone - more than 600 - superior sp. moral
culture - ^{For centuries} 600 yrs. before - prophets had taught &
molded them. They had a 501x - Their ancestors
had resisted the heathen gods & pagan ways of
in days of Amos & Isaiah. 500 yrs. before -
The. pol. a subject people they regarded as a sp
~~teacher~~ ^{teacher} ~~land~~ ^{land} -

They would not be swallowed up in a Levantine
melting pot. They had a mission & a destiny
they alone resisted ^(EXACT APPEARS - DEPARTS - Pagan world) Antiochus resisted -
Hellenize by force - compulsory fusion - Death

3/ How did this small ^{section 9 small} nation resist the vast might -
with their spirit & their soul which are stronger > Steel.
What did Matt. have when he struck down the apostate
Jew and the King's messengers and raised the standard of
revolt?
Nothing but Faith and Courage! ~~There~~ But these
have always proved most powerful allies against
improbable odds and overwhelming violence.
That's what the British had ~~after~~ and that all at they
had after Bunker - their armies beaten, ~~and~~
their weapons gone, and their cities full of ~~defences~~
before the air attacks, the army -
That's what the Greek had - when the Hb. ~~forces~~ & Jer.
Nazis invaded their fair land -

That's what the Moslems had - Faith & Courage - (Judah)⁽³⁾
"With God it is all on to help it"

4. Faith & Faithfulness - Loyalty to great Smith - Franklin
(Mott) Abraham - Phineas - David - unwavering devotion

5. Mott. told his few, bedraggled, hunted followers - to remember
your past - past greatness of your people - virtue, have
undefeated people - a people that can endure
without flinching - that can see souls + not to become
He, too, had nothing to offer them - Blood, Tears, Sweat
Heroic memories Cause with prayer & day for
→ their ancient glorious faith - their sacred land - the
Survival of their nation

~~The fight~~
And, aroused and inspired, they forgot all lives
as such men, with such a cause, always do -
whether at Emmaus - Beth Horon - or at
Platan Walle Island Gundacoral El Albany or Stirling
- Draga Michailovich - Chinese -
The Spirit soon musters the physical powers
needed - the numbers, the weapons, the strategy

And victory is won - And in the darkened world
lights go on again. The Defiled sanctuaries
& manhood are cleared. Altars are raised

are + dedicated to the God of Freedom and
of Free men. (4)

6/ 6 years ago - the Axis attacked U.S. at Pearl Harbor -
It was an infamous + desecration attack - battle ships
It was the first of a series of tragic disasters for
us and the Allies -

The herds of the brother swift war + conquered
was city after city, island after island,
country after country - war, throughout, the 16
The Nazis were at the gates, Germany (18 miles)
they were the fortunes, the free values at
lower etc.

"The lights were going out all over the world."

7/ On 11/11 0 years ago, an celebrated in
that darkened world.

But our country + our allies had a cause
and a faith and a courage - and then the
night and the storm and the darkness, they stood
and comforted and stood the hearts of men.

Free men screwed their courage to the
sticking - place - They remembered - past -
mistakes unmounted - Treachery - Great Lie

Not death is Evil - but a shameful death
To-day - Beating - back in Europe - turning them
in Africa - driving them White - Kosovo

Strength waning - then coming -
Hope - confidence returned

"lights are coming on again all over the world"
among civilized - France

8/. Dare to think & plan now for new world after war
after war, after victory -

Democracy no longer on the Retreat -

on the march! - to new frontiers & new

Horizons

Dem. is confident now. It can lick the Trauma
even in T's own special field of warfare war!
It is more dynamic, more resourceful, more
inventive and has far more staying power.

9/. Take same high courage and patriotism into
peace-time tasks -

"All we need fear is fear itself - 1933 - Roosevelt
Press on - to newer & better world -