The AL HANISIM prayer

At the end of the year 167 b.c.e approximately in December, by order of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, King of Syria and so ruler of the Jews, the Temple on Zion was desecrated and given over to the uses of idolatry. At the same time the law of Moses was rescinded by a decree of the King. Observance of the commandments of the Torah, such as circumcision and the sanctification of Sabbath and New Moon, was made a capital offense. In addition, the Jews were required to worship the gods of the gentiles. Altars were erected to these gods in every locality, and the populace was commanded to offer sacrifice to new deities. It was the pig, precisely the animal regarded by the Jews as unclean, the most acceptable offering to these gods…. never before and never thereafter was the spiritual existence of Israel so imperiled.
From the book: *"From Ezra to the last Maccabees"*, by Elias Bickerman. p. 93.
Antiochus pillaged the Temple, attacked Jerusalem. More than 40,000 Jews who resisted the new laws (aka "Hasidim") were killed by the Syrian-Greek army. Thousands of Jewish women and children were taken into slavery.
During the eight days of Hanuka we recite the prayer 'al hanisim, ('for the miracles') in the *'amida* (=main daily prayer) and in *birkat hamazon* (= prayer of gratitude after a full meal). In *'al hanisim* we mention *malkhut yavan harish'a*, the cruel Greek-Seleucid Empire and their decrees to abolish our Tora. In this prayer we thank HaShem for the wonders and miracles He performed to our ancestors, preventing them from falling into the hands of the enemy. Bearing in mind that the defeated Seleucid army was one of the most sophisticated and well organized armies in antiquity, while the Jews did not practice war and never excelled in the art of warfare.

We also hint to the fact that the pious Jews who were willing to sacrifice their lives to uphold the Tora, lead by Yehuda Maccabee, were victorious in the struggle against those Jews who were willing to assimilate and reform Judaism. This is what Bickerman describes as the most dangerous threat for "the

spiritual existence of Israel", the civil war. Many Jews, especially the aristocracy and those in positions of power, were very eager to reform the "old laws of Moshe" and integrate themselves into the new universal culture, the Hellenic civilization. Tempted by these new winds, many Jews saw no problem in intermarriage or in adopting the worshiping of other gods, side by side with the God of Israel (=syncretism, like celebrating Hanukka and Christmas together). In the prayer 'al hanisim we call these apostate Jews *resha'im* and *zedim*, wicked and sinners. We thank HaShem for His help in this struggle, because we are are mindful that it was, and it is, much more difficult to fight against our own, than to fight against the enemy.

THE PRAYER 'AL HANISIM

"In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Tora and violate the decrees of Your will. But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Tora. You made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and effected a great deliverance and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day. Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Hanuka to give thanks and praise to Your great Name."