

## What Are the Maccabean Insurgents Fighting For? The Theological Meaning of νόμιμων in 1 Macc 3:21

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**ABSTRACT:** In the discussed verse 1 Macc 3:21, there are two main motivations for the struggle of Judah Maccabee and his compatriots against the Seleucid army of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The text combines the struggle for the physical existence of Jews with the defence of native customs established on the foundations of the Mosaic Law. There is a clear indissolubility of life and faith in the Jewish consciousness. One cannot survive without one's own religious tradition, which is the basis of national identity. This article aims to explore the meaning of the Greek adjective νόμιμος, -η, -ον, appearing in the analysed verse of the the book, as substantive (τὸ) νόμιμον, "custom" especially in the plural τὰ νόμιμα, "customs, usages, norms." This term will be presented from a theological and historical perspective in search of an answer to the question about its content and implied meaning in the speech of Judah to his countrymen before the beginning of the battle of Beth-Choron. This content will be both the justification of the struggle undertaken and its importance in the history of Israel in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**KEYWORDS:** Old Testament, Septuagint, First Book of Maccabees, Mosaic Law, Judah Maccabee

The main goal of Judah Maccabee's insurgent campaign is to fight for both his family's life and Israel's religious independence. As a rule, every attacked person has to contend with the danger of losing even their life if they resist the enemy. However, even though the struggle for survival is undoubtedly a priority, it is worth emphasizing the connection of this struggle with the protection of native customs, which was accentuated by Judah as clearly as the effort to save his countrymen. By setting both goals at the same level, he wants to clearly indicate the unity of and the interdependence between the struggle for life and the struggle for native customs, built for centuries on the Mosaic Law. In this way, he wants to emphasize the indissolubility of life and faith in the Jewish consciousness. Jews are either to live only as Jews or perish. It is impossible for them to vegetate having betrayed their own tradition, which makes Israel unique among the nations of the world.

This article aims to explore the theological sense of the Greek substantive (τὸ) νόμιμον, which is – next to survival – the main goal of numerous battles of the Maccabean insurgents. Therefore, the discussion will remain solely on biblical grounds, and because of the length limitations imposed on articles, it will not extend the issue to its historical background,

which has already been explored in many scientific publications.<sup>1</sup> After a brief discussion of its general functioning in the Septuagint, a more detailed theological and historical presentation of νόμιμος will follow. It is about answering the question: what content may be included in this term which was used by Judah in the context of the battles with the pagan army of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. At the same time, this content will constitute the justification of the struggle undertaken and its importance in the history of the chosen people in the middle of the second century BC. The theological depth of the presented noun will be shown by the broad context of the Greek texts of the Old Testament in which it appears.

Despite the clear development of research on the Septuagint,<sup>2</sup> there is still much to be explored on strictly exegetical grounds with regard to the Hebrew books.<sup>3</sup> In turn, in research on both Books of Maccabees, historical orientation predominates and the theological analysis of the books seems to be lagging behind.<sup>4</sup> There are also many articles referring to specific passages of individual inspired works, but there is still a lack of those that treat their text as a canonical part of the Sacred Scripture, including those that try to gain better insight into the theological meaning of individual Greek terms. Suffice it to say that in the existing compilations of books and articles on the Books of Maccabees, the issue of terminology is rarely mentioned.<sup>5</sup> The proposed discussion attempts to fill this gap at least to some extent and perhaps it will appear in time to make a modest contribution to the presentation of the noun νόμιμος in the recently created *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint*.<sup>6</sup>

1 Among several works on this subject, it is worth mentioning *Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered* (JSJSup 107; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2006) by Louis H. Feldman, *Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture. Essays on the Jewish Encounter with Hellenism and Roman Rule* (JSJSup 100; Leiden: Brill 2005) by John J. Collins or *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (trans. J. Bowden) (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 1989) by Martin Hengel and Christoph Marksches.

2 In extensive research on the Greek Bible, mention should be made of, for example, the activities of The International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies (IOSCS) and the Journal of Septuagint and Cognate Studies (JSCS) published by it. An important event are also the annual meetings of scientists dealing with the relevant issues, resulting in the publication by the Society of Biblical Literature of conference proceedings containing papers, reports and reviews of the most important papers. Undoubtedly, two Hungarian exegetes are worth mentioning here: Geza G. Xeravitz and Jozsef Zsengeller.

3 E. Bons, "The 'Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint' (HTLS)," E. Bons – R. Hunziker-Rodewald – J. Joosten, *Biblical Lexicology. Hebrew and Greek. Semantics – Exegesis – Translation* (BZAW 443; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2015) 357–358.

4 J. Nawrot, *Pierwsza Księga Machabejska. Rozdziały 1,1–6,16* (NKB.ST 14/1; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2016) 27–28; J. Nawrot, *Pierwsza Księga Machabejska. Rozdziały 6,17–16,24* (NKB.ST 14/2; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2020) 1109. Seleucid Research Bibliography from 1870–2021 was prepared by Rolf Strootman from Utrecht University, [https://www.academia.edu/33683483/Seleucid\\_Bibliography\\_1870\\_2021](https://www.academia.edu/33683483/Seleucid_Bibliography_1870_2021) [access: 9.08.2022].

5 Strootman has also compiled a comprehensive bibliography on the First Book of Maccabees. It can be viewed at [https://www.academia.edu/38916054/Maccabean\\_Bibliography](https://www.academia.edu/38916054/Maccabean_Bibliography) [access: 9.08.2022].

6 E. Bons (ed.), *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020) I–II.

## 1. The Meaning of νόμιμος in the Septuagint

The adjective νόμιμος, -η, -ον, is translated by the dictionaries of classical Greek as “that which is lawful, habits, “conformable to custom, customary”.<sup>7</sup>

Franco Montanari provides the following meanings of the adjective: “conforming to usage, customary, in accordance with the law, legal, legitimate, concerning the law.” In an adjectival sense in relation to persons, it is used to refer to those who are “conforming to customs or to laws, just.” As a substantive, νόμιμον, first means “custom” and as a plural, it means “usages, customs, norms, laws.”<sup>8</sup> So it can be seen that the ancient Greeks used this term both in relation to the prevailing and accepted customs in social life and more strictly to the procedure founded on the statutory law.

Customs, socially accepted norms of behaviour, moral patterns, conventions, norms, rites and rituals often become the source of statutory rights which are a codified consequence of the rules of behaviour generally accepted in communities, provided that they are considered to be fair.<sup>9</sup> Their importance and validity include their ancient functioning, rationality and pragmatism, continuity of duration, peaceful use by the community, the certainty of sound reason and understanding, compliance with public order and laws, and ethics.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the situation is different with Judaism for which it was not the custom that was the source of the law, but it was the law that was the source of the custom. This is because, in the beginning, God established His law, which he announced to the Israelites in Sinai through Moses, commanding all members of the community of believers to obey it.<sup>11</sup> The essence of the necessity to be faithful to God’s law, however, is not only a fear of the possible retaliation by angry God<sup>12</sup> but this necessity is also rooted in other motivations, as can be seen in this passage from Rabbi Ze’ev Greenwald’s *Shaarei Halachah*: “By observing the *mitzvos* and abstaining from the prohibitions of the Torah, we are obeying God’s will, as fulfilling our Divinely ordained task and purpose in life. Every Jew should strive for higher spiritual achievements by studying the Torah and observing his *mitzvos*. Our daily *mitzvos* and prayers deepen our faith and instill in us the awareness that we stand before God.”<sup>13</sup> Such encouragement has its justification in the biblical records, linking the imperative of faithfulness to the law with the action of God consisting in freeing His

7 Z. Abramowiczówna (ed.), *Słownik grecko-polski* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1958) III, 213; H.G. Liddell – R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon 1940) 1179; A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire grec-français*, 26 ed. (Paris: Hachette 1963) 1331; J.G. Schneider, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch beyrn Lesen der griechischen profanen Scribenten zu Gebrauchen* (Leipzig: Hahn 1819) II, 159.

8 F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, 3 ed. (Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2013) 1405.

9 D.J. Bederman, *Custom as a Source of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010) 27–41.

10 H. Thirlway, *The Sources of International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014) 53–92.

11 Lev 22:31; Deut 1:18; 4:1–2,5; 5:32–6:3; 8:1; 30:16, etc.

12 Lev 26:14–39; Deut 8:19–20; 11:17; 28:15–68; 30:18; 2 Chr 36:16–17.

13 Z. Greenwald, *Shaarei Halachah. A Summary of Laws for Jewish Living* (Jerusalem – New York: Feldheim 2000) 3.

people in the past. The text of Exod 19:4–6, a classic in this matter, contains two essential elements that justify the call to fidelity:

- a) recollection of the blessings of the past (v. 4);<sup>14</sup>
- b) promise of a special relationship to God among all nations (v. 5b–6).<sup>15</sup>

It is impossible not to notice the freedom that God gives to His people. His demand to obey the law does not use force and does not deprive man of freedom, but makes him face a choice that is, on the one hand, motivated historically (v. 4), and on the other hand, future-oriented (v. 5b–6). This is in direct contradiction to the demand of the earthly ruler that Jews give up their own customs in 1 Macc 1:41–42. Undoubtedly, this was what the Maccabean insurgents, supported by other groups of Jews faithful to the law, were aware of (1 Macc 2:42).<sup>16</sup>

Νόμμος in the Septuagint is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew words: הַקְּדָשׁ, הַקְּדָשׁ and תְּוֹרָה, which are *termini technici* for law statutes, decrees, orders or edicts, therefore strictly legal nouns.<sup>17</sup> Thus, νόμος as a custom is based on pre-established provisions of law, the only source of which is the God of Israel, who appeared in Sinai.<sup>18</sup>

In most of the texts of the Septuagint, this noun refers to Israeli cultic laws such as the celebration of specific feasts,<sup>19</sup> sacrifices,<sup>20</sup> rites and rituals<sup>21</sup> and temple service.<sup>22</sup> In the wisdom tradition, it takes the connotation of instructions on how to live, consistent with the law,<sup>23</sup> and in the prophetic one – principles separating the Israelites from pagan cults<sup>24</sup> and generally understood duties that should be followed.<sup>25</sup> It can be said that all these senses fit well with the justification for the struggle of the Maccabean insurgents against the pagan invaders. However, it is necessary to prioritize those that concern the customs related to the broadly understood glory of God through the ceremonies performed in the temple. This is evidenced by the goal of the fight that was closest to the insurgents, which was to cleanse the temple and restore the cult in accordance with the law (1 Macc 4:35–56),

14 Deut 7:18; 29:2–3; Judg 6:13; Ps 77:11; 78:42–51; 105:5, 26–36; 135:8–10; 136:10–15; Isa 51:10; 63:11–15.

15 Janusz Lemański (*Księga Wyjścia* [NKB.ST2; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2009] 405–407) rightly notes that these verses are not about the exclusivity of Israel, but a unique place in the family of nations belonging to God due to the founding of their nation by Him.

16 Whether they were actually Hasidim is doubtful, despite the entry in the verse: Ασδαίων, D.R. Schwartz, “Hasidim in I Maccabees 2:42?,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994) 17–18.

17 W. Gutbrod, “νόμος,” *TDNT* IV, 1089. These terms also appear in the prophetic writings, which will be mentioned later in this article. Interestingly, the very important noun מְשֻׁבָּם, belonging to the legal family, is nowhere rendered by νόμος in the Septuagint. However, this problem cannot be dealt with in this analysis.

18 Takamitsu Muraoka (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* [Louvain – Paris – Walpole, MA: Peeters 2009] 475–476) lists three main areas of functioning of the analyzed noun in the Septuagint: (1) individual statute prescribing man’s conduct, (2) customary and (3) conforming to the law.

19 Exod 12:14, 17; Lev 23:41.

20 Exod 29:28; Lev 3:16; 6:10; 7:34–35; 10:13–15; 23:14; 24:9; Num 18:8, 11, 19;

21 Exod 12:24; 27:21; 28:43; 30:21; Lev 10:9, 11; 16:29, 31, 34; 23:21, 31; 24:3; Num 10:8; 19:10, 21.

22 Num 18:23.

23 Prov 3:1.

24 Hos 8:12. As rules functioning in pagan communities, cf. Mic 7:11; Jer 10:3.

25 Ezek 18:19; 43:11; 44:5, 24.

the membership of the Maccabean family in the priestly caste, and probably the Sadducean roots of the author of the book, emphasizing above all matters related to the house of God and fidelity to the Mosaic Law.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Νόμιμα in 1 Macc 3:21

In the speech of Judah Maccabee to his companions before the battle of Beth-Choron, Judah mentions the most important goal of the battles fought by Jewish patriots against the power of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the entire Seleucid empire. In 1 Macc 3:21, this goal was presented as the struggle for ψυχή, “life”<sup>27</sup> and νόμιμα, understood as customs founded on the Mosaic Law.<sup>28</sup> Both concepts find their central place in the speech of the leader of the uprising:

ἡμεῖς δὲ πολεμοῦμεν περὶ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν καὶ τῶν νομίμων ἡμῶν  
*We fight for our lives and our laws.*

The quoted part of Judah’s speech before the battle in the defensive war with the Seleucid invaders belongs to the narrower context of v. 18–22, the words of encouragement addressed to comrades in the field who have run out of spirit to fight against the enemy (v. 17). The literary structure of Judah’s speech can be divided as follows:

- a) personal confession of Judah’s faith in God’s help (v. 18–19),<sup>29</sup>
- b) characteristics of the stance and purpose of the struggle of the Seleucid army (v. 20),<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Nawrot, *Pierwsza Księga Machabejska. Rozdziały 1, 1–6, 17, 143–144.*

<sup>27</sup> Ψυχή belongs to the so-called stereotypical way of translating the Hebrew text by the authors of the Septuagint in relation to the term נַפְשׁ in the Hebrew Bible, which was most often rendered by this particular Greek noun. Both terms fit together almost perfectly in all the richness and breadth of their meanings, among which “life” occupies an important place, M. Harl, “La langue de la Septante,” *La bible grecque des Septante. Du judaïsme hellénistique au christianisme ancien* (eds. M. Harl – G. Dorival – O. Munnich) (Initiation au christianisme ancien; Paris: Cerf 1988) 249–250.

<sup>28</sup> An interesting translation of νόμιμα as “religion” – without justifying this interpretation – was proposed by John R. Bartlett (*The First and Second Books of the Maccabees* [CBC; Cambridge: University Press 1973] 47), suggesting that true and deep Jewish religiosity does not function outside the law and its specific regulations. This interpretation by the exegete is also advocated in 1:42, but not in 3:29 and 6:59, although they also apply to Jewish legislation.

<sup>29</sup> However, this is synonymous with the fact that they have to do their best. Lack of bravery and proper strategy as well as the quietist treatment of aid from heaven will make it canceled by God, B. Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus. The Jewish Struggle Against the Seleucids* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press 2002) 215.

<sup>30</sup> All commentators of the book agree that the fight was fought not only against the invading army but also against the Jewish dissenters belonging to the richer classes of society and supporters of the Hellenisation of the whole country. The hagiographer mentions this fact in 1:43. Certainly, they included a part of the leading priestly caste, whose detailed analysis of activities aimed at Hellenizing Jewish society was included in, among others, Edouard Will and Claude Orrieux (*Judaïsme-hellénisme. Essai sur le judaïsme judéen à l’époque hellénistique* [Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy 1991] 113–136). Undoubtedly, Mattathias and his priestly line, who did not have a decisive influence on the decision-making policies of the temple establishment, faced a sharp

- c) the goal of the Maccabean insurgents (v. 21),
- d) re-confession of Judah's faith and exhortation to abandon fear (v. 22).

The description of the battle belongs to the type of stories combining human effort with faith in God's intervention and represents the category of the so-called holy war, incorporating this belief in human action on the battlefield. Wars of this type are determined by God's will expressed either as actions carried out exclusively by Him (e.g. Exod 14:14) or as His help in a battle, which is precisely the case of 1 Macc.<sup>31</sup> Confession of faith in God's cooperation in a battle is made even before it begins, which fits perfectly into the tradition of holy wars conducted by faithful David.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, argumentation of Judah about the wickedness of the enemy's actions (v. 20) and the noble purpose of the insurgents' fight (v. 21) strengthen the arguments in favour of the fight in his speech. It is also worth mentioning that the enemies fight for gain and satisfaction of their greed, while the insurgents fight for survival. It is obvious that the initiation of the military phase of Jewish resistance against the pagan invaders was not purely religious. It is impossible not to notice several other reasons accompanying Judah's religious struggle: the fiscal oppression of the inhabitants, the seizure of property of the supporters of the uprising by the Greek colonisers and their Jewish collaborators living in the Jerusalem Acre, the enslavement of women and children treated as the spoils of war,<sup>33</sup> and, finally, depriving priests of the possibility of exercising worship in the temple after its desecration.<sup>34</sup> The above motivations may conveniently fit the contextual understanding of ψυχή in this verse. In such conditions, the expectation of help from heaven becomes obvious. The immediate context of v. 20–21 thus juxtaposes defensive and offensive struggle, and right and wrong reasons for the campaigns carried out.<sup>35</sup> Historians point to the extremely widespread and strong influence of anti-Judaic and anti-Jewish superstitions among both ancient thinkers and the common people. They undoubtedly influenced the decision of Antiochus IV to completely exterminate the Jews

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conflict with that group. This conflict was expressed in the fundamental question of fidelity to the law and the limits of compromises with pagan invaders in accordance with the dictates of Exod 23:32–33; Deut 7:2b; 20:16–17; Judg 2:2 and the attitude of Joshua, uncompromising in carrying out the Lord's commands (Josh 10:30, 32, 40, 42; 11:11–12; 21:44).

31 R. Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism. The Fall and Rise of a Controversial Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012) 18–25.

32 The same elements of faith in God's help in a battle, His direct intervention and the delivery of His faithful warriors are visible there, S.-M. Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 177; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1989) 194–223.

33 J.A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 41; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1976) 247.

34 D. Prévot, "La Judée sous les Séleucides," O. Picard et al., *Royaumes et cités hellénistiques de 323 à 55 av. J.-C.* (Paris: Sedes 2003) 204.

35 R. Doran, "The First Book of Maccabees," *The New Interpreter's Bible. A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (eds. L.E. Keck – D.L. Petersen) (Nashville, TN: Abingdon 1996) IV, 57. In Chapter VII of his monograph, Jan Assmann (*Violence et monothéisme* [Paris: Bayard 2009] especially 137–153) carries out an excellent analysis of military violence as a factor in defending or attacking religious values, i.e. a religiously motivated factor.

(1 Macc 3:34–36).<sup>36</sup> One cannot overlook the fact that the quoted speech of the leader of the uprising appears at the stage of the struggle for freedom of faith and worship by the inhabitants of the provinces because νόμιμος belongs entirely to the religious vocabulary of the Septuagint.<sup>37</sup>

Another issue, not elaborated on in this article due to the breadth of the subject itself, is the common belief of exegetes and historians that the Maccabean rebellion did not represent the entire Jewish society of the second century BC. The inspired author presents the struggle of those whose goals he most identified with.<sup>38</sup>

The uniqueness of the situation described in the book is evidenced by the fact that nowhere, except for 1 Maccabees, does the Septuagint mention directly the motive of the struggle for life or customs of the fatherland. Probably never – except in the time of queen Esther – in the history of Israel was there such a dramatic situation in which the chosen people found themselves on the verge of religious annihilation. In 1 Macc 2:40, the reader will encounter the motive of the fight (πολεμήσωμεν) for life (ψυχής), but this time also for strict, although not directly mentioned, native laws (δικαιωμάτων).<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is not about generally understood customs (νομίμων) although these are also based on the law, in line with the tradition of the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> Without them, the life of a faithful Judean loses its meaning.<sup>41</sup> Judah's speech is full of faith that God will help those who draw the sword for a just cause and will scatter those who pursue their selfish goals and start

36 For an overview of the opinions and beliefs prevailing among the Greeks about Jews, see, inter alia, L.H. Feldman, *Jew & Gentile in the Ancient World. Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1993) 107–176.

37 After the conquest of the temple and the resumption of worship (1 Macc 4:36–61), the fight was not over, which allows the conclusion that since then, the priorities of the uprising changed and the burden of fighting shifted to the political sphere, towards full independence of the entire country, S.J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster 1989) 30. It is possible, therefore, that the hagiographer is thus trying to remind readers of the fundamental reason and purpose of the uprising, which culminated in the spectacular victories in Gilead and Galilee (1 Macc 5:1–54). Its later stages, shifting goals from religious to political, revealed the more ostensible meaning of νόμιμα as the priorities slowly moved towards politics, not religion. After a series of brilliant victories, the religious struggle became more and more a cover for efforts to establish a royal dynasty, Will – Orrieux, *Judaïsmos-hellénismos*, 156–162.

38 The interested reader can learn a lot about this from the work by Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*. I. Text. II. Notes & Bibliography (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1981) especially I, 107–247.

39 The requirements concerning article length do not allow to deal with the relationship between various legal terms present in 1 Macc, therefore the relationship between νόμιμος, νόμος and δικαιωμα will not be considered here. For the same reason, the relationship between the two Books of Maccabees will also be omitted in the terminological issues raised. These issues may become a valuable topic for the next stage of research into the theological aspect of both books.

40 Some scholars are partially right to believe that the main struggle for νόμιμα focused primarily on rejecting acts that profane the sanctity of the Jerusalem Temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar of burnt offering and sprinkling its blood on the books of saints and on the menorah to extinguish it, M.-F. Baslez, *Prześladowania w starożytności. Ofiary – bohaterowie – męczennicy* (trans. E. Łukaszuk) (Kraków: WAM 2009) 137–138. However, the description found in 1 Macc 1:44–48 should be noted, significantly expanding the list of crimes against the Jewish law, approved by the decree of Antiochus IV.

41 Nawrot, *Pierwsza Księga Machabejska. Rozdziały 1, 1–6, 17, 577*.

an unjust war.<sup>42</sup> This struggle will continue also under Jonathan's leadership, after Judah's death (πολεμήσωμεν περὶ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν, 1 Macc 9:44).<sup>43</sup>

The military struggle for νόμιμα as understood by the author of 1 Macc broke out due to the decree of Antiochus IV Epiphanes mentioned in 1:42a, in which he ordered all the lands of the empire to abandon their own νόμιμα.<sup>44</sup> In those few places where 1 Macc mentions νόμιμα (1:14, 42, 44; 3:21, 29; 6:59), nowhere does the hagiographer specify which customs are meant. However, it can be partially deduced from passages 1:45–49, in which emphasis is placed on temple worship and feasts prescribed by law (v. 45), the prohibition of unauthorised places of worship and chastity of sacrifices (v. 46), circumcision and ritual chastity (v. 46), all of the law written in the Torah (v. 49). In 1:14, 44, the author mentions pagan customs,<sup>45</sup> and in the remaining verses – Jewish customs. From the context of individual records, however, it can be concluded that it is about the characteristic features of each nation in the Seleucid monarchy which allow it to distinguish itself from the others and thus confirm its own identity (2 Macc 11:24).<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, this diversity poses a danger to the uniformity of the monarchy. Undoubtedly, the ruler emphasised the good of his own state, not that of religious minorities. There is no room here for a description of the customs of all the nations making up the Seleucid empire, while the more general sense of νόμιμος in the Septuagint as presented above will allow a correct understanding of the reasons and the resultant sense of the struggle of the Maccabean insurgents who even agree to lose their lives in defence of νόμιμα.

### 3. Justification of the Fight for νόμιμα in 1 Macc

At this point, the question should be asked, what, in the opinion of the hagiographer, was the deepest and the most important motivation for the fight undertaken by the insurgents, that is, its theological meaning. It consists of both the immutability and durability of certain customs in the religious life of the Israelites and the prohibition implemented on the chosen people against adopting the customs of neighbouring nations. An important note to

42 W. Fairweather – J. Sutherland Black, *The First Book of Maccabees. With Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: University Press 1897) 92.

43 In Isa 19:2, there is a connection of πολεμέω with νόμος, but in a completely different context of God's action, who will cause confusion and fratricidal struggle between the Egyptians, as a sign of their beliefs being false and in a different sense of possibly contradictory laws and commands of authority (πολεμήσει). [...] Νομὸς ἐπὶ νομόν.

44 1 Macc 2:27–30. This struggle was also directed against the supporters of the king, the Jewish dissenters from the law, although before it broke out in the form of armed clashes, it was conducted in the form of passive resistance, which, however, led to the gradual defeat of the supporters of the defense of the national law, Baslez, *Prześladowania w starożytności*, 139–149; J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora. From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Berkeley, CA – Los Angeles, CA – London: University of California Press 1999) 244–246.

45 Against the Mosaic Law (2 Macc 4:11, also Jer 10:3; Ezek 16:27; 20:18).

46 Similar to the letter from the Persian ruler Artaxerxes to the Jews in the Book of Esther (8:12f, LXX).



supplement this sense is also the negative historical experience of the nation's deviations from faithfulness to God's commands for which the insurgents now have to fight.

### 3.1. The Eternity of Particular νόμιμα

The theological justification for the struggle derives its force from Moses' absolute ordinance that some statutes should be carried out eternally. Therefore, regardless of the times, the people are to make every effort to remain faithful to them. The term νόμινον αἰώνιον, "eternal law/order," was used by the Greek translators to describe this permanence of these provisions as the equivalent of the Hebrew term עֲוֹלָם עֲוֹלָם.<sup>47</sup> The term νόμινον should be understood here as a particular, proclaimed command, and not as a subsequent custom developed on its basis because each verse gives the content of what is to be considered imperishable in the life of the Israelites. Custom will develop over time through adherence to legal orders. And so, in Exod 12:14, 17, the Israelites are to remember forever the day of their exodus from the Egyptian captivity.<sup>48</sup> They are to commemorate it in the form of a feast lasting a week during which they eat unleavened bread, concluded with the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The feast is to be celebrated from generation to generation, and is to become a perpetual law (v. 17).<sup>49</sup> Another perpetual custom is the lighting of the candelabrum every day in the holy place of the Tent of Meeting (Exod 27:21; Lev 24:3).<sup>50</sup> The appropriate outfit for the worthy performance of priestly duties was established for centuries by the record of Exod 28:43. The garment is intended as an external form of respect for the sacred activities of lighting a candelabrum, replacing showbread or burning incense.<sup>51</sup> According to Exod 30:21, priests are forever required to ritually wash themselves before commencing their service. Also at this point, it is meant to be an external sign of the purity of heart and the dignity of a priest who enters into sacred activities in honour of the infinitely holy God and presents it to the people.<sup>52</sup> The perpetual command of the portion of the Israelite sacrifice to belong to Aaron and his descendants appears in Exod 29:28.<sup>53</sup> In turn, in Lev 10:9, there is a perpetual ban on priests entering into the service of the altar

<sup>47</sup> To be precise, in Exods 29:28 and 30:21, the construction of עֲוֹלָם עֲוֹלָם appears with the same meaning as the main Hebrew phrase עֲוֹלָם עֲוֹלָם under discussion.

<sup>48</sup> Exegetes indicate that the commandment of observance forever, that is through the generations (לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם) applies to the generations that are yet to come. The living conditions of the generation receiving a particular commandment made it impossible to execute it immediately, W.H.C., Propp, *Exodus 1–18. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2; New York et al.: Doubleday 1998) 402.

<sup>49</sup> The perpetual celebration of certain holidays in conjunction with the prohibition of work is also mentioned in Lev 23:14, 21, 31, 41.

<sup>50</sup> This task belongs to the priests, beginning with Aaron and his sons and successors, but since oil is always required to fulfill this command, all Israel is *de facto* responsible for faithfulness to this command, Lemański, *Księga Wjścia*, 559.

<sup>51</sup> W.H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2A; New York et al.: Doubleday 2006) 454.

<sup>52</sup> D.K. Stuart, *Exodus. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 2; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2006) 642.

<sup>53</sup> This theme is further developed in the provisions of Lev 6:11; 7:34, 36; 10:15; 24:9; Num 18:8, 11, 19.

when they are drunk. The holiness of God, profaned by a drunken priest, could then be exposed to mockery and disrespect by the people. A priest's sobriety allows him to properly fulfil the obligations imposed by law.<sup>54</sup> Perpetual is also the command to fast on the day of atonement, combined with the obligation to abstain from work (Lev 16:29, 31) and to make sacrifices for the sins of the people (Lev 16:34),<sup>55</sup> and the absolute prohibition of making sacrifices to pagan demons (Lev 17:7) to eradicate their presence from the consciousness of the people.<sup>56</sup> Also the Book of Numbers is a source of knowledge on the customs commanded to the Israelites to practice for generations: trumpeting the gathering (Num 10:8), the ritual of the "red cow" (Num 19:10), the act of cleansing from all cultic impurity (Num 19:21).<sup>57</sup> Each of these activities expresses the enduring status of the Old Testament priesthood, not merely the occasional activities performed by altar ministers.<sup>58</sup>

Perpetual regulations, so diverse in themselves, have three characteristics in common:

- a) they all concern cultic life, strictly defining the relationship of the people with the one God of Israel,<sup>59</sup>
- b) they are all specific to the members of the chosen people, distinguishing them from the surrounding pagan nations,
- c) their preservation through the generations determines the religious and national identity of the Israelites, irrespective of historical turmoil.

Perhaps it is in this perpetual ordinance that one should see the gradual "penetration" of a specific legal provision into the community's consciousness by force of habit, which in turn develops into a specific custom.<sup>60</sup> It can be assumed that the awareness of the aspects shown above accompanied the Maccabean insurgents fighting for their physical and religious survival.

54 A. Tronina, *Księga Kapłańska* (NKB.ST 3; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła 2006) 168–169.

55 For example, because the sins of the people are constantly repeated and require annual expiation, M.F. Rooker, *Leviticus. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 3A; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2000) 223–224.

56 It is about various deities as well as various practices performed in their honour, J.E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1992) 272–273.

57 The same motive of sin as a permanently present reality of the members of the chosen people and those living among them. They should absolutely submit to the religious rules of the community so as not to become a cause of its infidelity, R.D. Cole, *Numbers. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 3B; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2000) 308–309; T.R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1993) 368.

58 As a characteristic feature of the presentation of priestly functions in the priestly tradition, Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 306. The translation of individual texts in the LXX has kept this specificity in its entirety.

59 This meaning is emphasized by Helmer Ringgren ("תקק", *hāqāq*, תקה, *hāqā*, קה, *hōq*, תקה, *huqqā*," *TDOT V*, 144–145) in his discussion of the phrase עֲוֹנוֹת עֹלָמִית in the priestly tradition and the code of holiness, but without relating it to the period of the Second Temple. It is possible that the eternity of the laws concerning the prerogatives of priests is specifically intended to encourage exiles returning from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple and, in particular, restore worship. This would be consistent with the message from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

60 A certain – though not direct – parallel may be the Polish and Italian tradition of eating meatless Christmas Eve supper, founded on a centuries-old church order. Now the law itself has been abolished, but the custom has fortunately remained.

### 3.2. Prohibition of Seizing the νόμιμα of Pagans

The second theological justification of the struggle for the customs of the fatherland, which could have guided the insurgents, is the prohibition of adopting the customs of pagan nations, formulated in the Book of Leviticus. All the texts listed below emphasise the eternity of God's statutes (νόμινα αἰώνια) in the specific behaviour of His people. It is difficult to say whether the remark of Flavius Josephus about awarding Judah Maccabee the title of the high priest at a certain time (*Ant.* 12.10.6) is historically confirmed.<sup>61</sup> If so, then in exercising this office he should necessarily take into account the provisions of the book that directly pertains to priesthood duties. He is to observe them both in his personal life (Lev 18:4–5) and to instruct the people (Lev 10:11). It is because of the wickedness of the practices of the indigenous people that God expelled them from the Promised Land before the Israelites. Meanwhile, representatives of the Seleucid empire, in collaboration with Jewish apostates from the law, began to implement those practices in Judea (1 Macc 1:11–15; 2 Mac 4:11; 11:24). In the records of the Book of Leviticus, there are strict and unequivocal prohibitions against adopting the customs widespread in the world of the pagans.

The text of Lev 17:7 is where the term νόμιμον is used for the first time. It clearly prohibits any sacrifice to demons who were worshipped among the pagans who did not know the true God of Israel. To do so would make the Israelites more like them and would be against the law that connects God with His people, eventually, it would be a violation of the first commandment of the Decalogue. The Septuagint defines the deities with the term μάταιος, “vain, useless, lame, idle,” that is, ones who are of no use, no help, and sacrifice for whom is only a waste of time.<sup>62</sup> Νόμιμον αἰώνιον means in this case to protect the whole of human existence against giving up the sense of life, which can only be given to it in relation to the living, true God. Therefore, since Antiochus IV wants to force the Judeans back to the false idolatrous cults, the struggle of Judah and the insurgents is aimed directly at keeping the lives of the chosen people meaningful, as only in faithfulness to the true God can they be rational and fruitful.

Lev 18:3 relates the term νόμιμα to the customs cultivated by the pagans in the land to which the Israelites were heading. This noun was made more precise by the Greek author with a synonymous term, ἐπιτήδευμα, “occupation, habit, action.”<sup>63</sup> This noun can help in grasping the meaning of νόμιμα referring directly to idolatrous worship,<sup>64</sup> actions against

61 J. Flawiusz, *Dawne dzieje Izraela* (trans. Z. Kubiak – J. Radożycki) (Poznań – Warszawa – Lublin: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha 1979) 599.

62 Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1084. Μάταιος here extends the meaning of the Hebrew term עִשָׁן, “goat idol/demon,” which may refer to the old Semitic cults in which the idol was a symbol of fertility, cf. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 234. Thus, the author of the LXX probably deliberately develops the content of the verse, emphasising primarily the uselessness of such sacrifices. In the same sense, in relation to idols, see also, *inter alia*, 1 Kgs 16:13, 26; 2 Kgs 17:15; Wis 15:8; Hos 5:11; Amos 2:4.

63 Liddell – Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 666. This corresponds exactly to the Hebrew term עִשָׁן, “occupation, work, a piece of work,” which is an activity that becomes customary for practicing it.

64 Judg 2:19; 1 Kgs 15:12; Neh 9:35; Hos 9:15; 12:2; Zeph 3:11; Zech 1:4, 6; Jer 4:4.

others<sup>65</sup> or generally vicious, unwise, hardened deeds.<sup>66</sup> However, most likely, this general call to obey God's νόμιμα applies to an entire series of detailed recommendations, described in v. 6–23, referring to unclean and unacceptable relationships within the family (v. 6–16), between the sexes (v. 17–20), sacrificial infanticide (v. 21), homosexual relations and zoophilia (v. 22–23).<sup>67</sup> Thus, it can be seen that the deviation from the first commandment of the Decalogue is accompanied by the violation of moral principles and norms of social co-existence. The rejection of such an attitude is to be deeply motivated by the historical experience of the people's stay in Egypt when they encountered the rites and religious customs of the pagan inhabitants of the Nile. However, this memory is not enough, but an equally strong warning should be given to the Canaanites who inhabited the land to which the people were heading. A categorical rejection of these customs will make God's people radically different from the surrounding world of idolatrous pagans. The prohibition of the above deviations cannot be limited merely to not adopting pagan morality by God's people, but above all because of the moral value of one's own principles, ordering family and social life.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the awareness of the Maccabean insurgents as to the uniqueness of God's prohibitions reinforces the meaningfulness of their fight for faithfulness to Him. Categorical separation from the customs of the pagans is inextricably linked with the introduction/preservation of the chosen people's own moral and social order within the community of believers.

Verse 26 belongs to the same context as v. 7–27, summarising Moses' discourse. Undoubtedly, the divine νόμιμα is in complete contradiction with the νόμιμα of the pagans mentioned in v. 30. The difference in approaching them is above all in their origin: for the Israelites, any νόμιμον is not a result of the development of rituals through the centuries of its use, but it results from God's categorical formulation. Second, all Israeli νόμιμα is the antipode to what the pagans did.<sup>69</sup> The theological meaning of this verse, however, should be shown in conjunction with the preceding verse 25, which emphasises the relationship between living in the promised land and observing the principles of worthy conduct there. This is because only faithfulness to what God gives can guarantee the possibility of permanent residence in it. The content of this text suggests that it is not people who sanctify the land, but they must grow up to the holiness of the land that God has chosen for

65 Mic 2:9; 3:4; 7:13.

66 1 Sam 25:3; Ps 13:1 (LXX); 27:4 (LXX); 80:13 (LXX); 98:8 (LXX); 105:29, 39 (LXX).

67 A detailed description of the individual orders is presented, *inter alia*, in J.M. Kimuhu, *Leviticus. The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa* (StBibLit 115; New York *et al.*: Lang 2008) 69–98.

68 This is pointed out by A. Schenker, "What Connects the Incest Prohibitions with the Other Prohibitions Listed in Leviticus 18 and 20?," *The Book Of Leviticus. Composition and Reception* (eds. R. Rendtorff – R.A. Kugler) (Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2003) 167.

69 This study does not aim to describe the customs of the peoples surrounding the Israelites, which the reader can learn from J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3A; New York *et al.*: Doubleday 2000) 1768–1790; M. York, *Pagan Ethics. Paganism as a World Religion* (Heidelberg *et al.*: Springer 2016) 23–35.

them. Since the pagans desecrated the holy land by their morally wicked conduct, they were ultimately expelled from it. For the same reason, the Israelites must behave differently so as not to deserve the same fate.<sup>70</sup> In this light, the struggle of Judah and the insurgents must contain an element of the awareness that firmly cutting themselves off from the customs of the pagans and faithfully adhering to the Mosaic law will guarantee their continued living in the land that God had promised to the patriarchs of Israel and from which He had driven the pagans before His people.

The record of Lev 20:22 also forbids adopting the customs of the pagans, so that the people would not become like those whom God removes before them. The rejection of all pagan customs and behaviour of the people of God is, on the one hand, the result of God's election of this people, and on the other hand, it is a precondition of the survival of the people and of each individual member thereof in this affiliation.<sup>71</sup> However, when discussing the issue of the land, it is worth mentioning that the Greek text differs from its Hebrew source, translating the root נִקַּח, „vomit, disgorge, spew” by προσοχθίζω, “I am angry with..., I become angry, I become furious, I become enraged.”<sup>72</sup> This anthropopathism in relation to the land in an allegorical sense signifies its radical disagreement with the behaviour of its inhabitants who defile their own place of residence. As a result, it will be the fate of a sinner to be expelled from it.<sup>73</sup>

### 3.3. Recollection of the Infidelity of Previous Generations of Israel

The biblical justification for the struggle of Maccabean insurgents to preserve native customs is presented finally as opposing the attitude of previous generations, criticised by the prophets. Numerous νόμιμα were frequently abandoned by unfaithful people.

Hosea complained to his countrymen that they took God's commands (νόμιμα) as something strange and burdensome to them, which consequently resulted in their rejection by the people (Hos 8:12).<sup>74</sup> They were given by Moses to Israel upon God's command as holy and just commands relating to the worship of God and to the good of those who obey

<sup>70</sup> Tronina, *Księga Kapłańska*, 275.

<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Lev 20:24b; Deut 12:29–31; 1 Kgs 14:22–24; 2 Kgs 16:3; 17:7–17; Ps 106:35 (LXX); H.D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1992) II, 189. Of course, by virtue of the covenant made by God with Abraham (Gen 17), the point is not to definitively exclude the guilty from the people, but to apply the sanctions announced as the consequences of disobedience in Lev 17:14–43.

<sup>72</sup> The term, which is fairly rare in the LXX, can still be found in Lev 18:25, 28; 20:22. All verses link the verb to “land” as being agitated in the same context of the inhabitants' wickedness.

<sup>73</sup> The earth then cooperated with the God feeling נִקַּח, “disgust” towards the people, as a state of deep feeling of aversion due to permanent irritation by the persistence of sinners, Hartley, *Leviticus*, 341. Although the description in Gen 3:16–19, 23–24 lacks the motive of the earth's anger towards the sinful act of man, two other motives are present in it: the rebellion of the earth against him (v. 17) and his expulsion by God (v. 23–24). The motive of anger could have intentionally been replaced by a curse that God cast on the earth, as it were, declaring its refusal to cooperate with human work (Gen 3:16).

<sup>74</sup> The Hebrew text here includes the construction רַבִּי תוֹרָתִי “the multiplicity of my Torah,” most likely in the sense of the multitude of rules contained therein. Meanwhile, the emphasis is on the unity of legislation, which the Greek text seems to omit.

them. They were instilled by prophets through whom God reminded about them constantly. Therefore, the people cannot plead ignorance and justify themselves on that account. It was exactly the opposite. Especially the laws relating to sacrifices and the place where they were offered (v. 13) were disregarded and rejected by the Israelites for centuries.<sup>75</sup> They were treated as practices completely unfamiliar to them,<sup>76</sup> which they did neither care about nor care for, as if they were laws belonging to another people, not to them.<sup>77</sup> For this reason, instead of showing the holiness of God and the people by whom they were offered, the sacrifices degenerated into mere meals and even became an opportunity to succumb to sexual lust.<sup>78</sup> The Maccabean insurgents now wish to oppose this attitude, which the pagan royal officials and Jewish renegades were now trying to instil in the people.

Micah announced that the people would trample on God's laws (νόμιμα), leading God to withdraw His support in the hardships of human life and everyday efforts to survive (Mic 6:15 LXX).<sup>79</sup> The context of v. 10–12 first shows profound social injustice (exploitation of the poor, fraud and lies), while v. 16 emphasises the practice of idolatry among the people. A particular emphasis is placed on the sins of the Omri dynasty, especially Ahab. The statutes established by Omri and Ahab continued to apply and, accordingly, princes and people followed their intentions, taking the same steps and following the examples of past wickedness. The people's violation of God's laws resulted in a lack of the expected fruits of labour in the fields, olive trees, and vineyards. One of the reasons for the futility of their work is the invasion of foreign armies that plunder and destroy the crops, as has happened before in the history of the nation.<sup>80</sup> This is undoubtedly the result of non-compliance with the provisions of the Sinaitic Covenant.<sup>81</sup> The presence of the troops of the Seleucid invader in the times of the Maccabees can also be read as a sign from the Lord

75 Two centuries later, the shock of oblivion and ignorance shown by the people of Judea that King Josiah experienced when he introduced his religious reform (2 Kgs 22:11–13) may be a good example of this, D. Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, TX: Word Books 1987) 136.

76 The meaning of the adjective ἀλλότριος explains the attitude of the Israelites who treat God's commands as something alien, belonging to someone else, strange or even unfriendly.

77 Commentators see reluctant members of the nation primarily in the managerial layers of society, as indicated by the pluralis of the verb חָשַׁב, "to think, to treated as ..., to regarded as ...," F.I. Andersen – D.N. Freedman, *Hosea. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24; New York et al.: Doubleday 1980) 509.

78 E. Jacob, "Osée," E. Jacob – C.-A. Keller – S. Amsler, *Osée, Joël, Abdias, Jonas, Amos* (CAT 11a; Genève: Labor et Fides 1982) 65.

79 The note about trampling on God's laws by the people (v. 15b) is the addition of LXX, not present in the Hebrew text. Its presence in this place is puzzling. In the context of announcing the fruitlessness of farm work and hunger in Israel, one of the possible interpretations is the author's conviction that trampling on the laws is not the cause, but the result of the difficulties experienced (6:14–15a). The people despised the laws which, in their opinion, in contrary to Deut 28:1–14, did not guarantee their prosperity. Verse 16 continues the accusation against the people: their rejection of God's laws resulted in total idolatry of the Omri dynasty, especially as shown in the biblical portrait of godless Ahab.

80 Judg 6:3–5; 7:12, K.L. Barker – W. Bailey, *Micah – Nabum – Habakkuk – Zephaniah. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 20; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 1999) 119.

81 As a result of the announcement, as in Lev 26:16; Deut 28:51, F.I. Andersen – D.N. Freedman, *Micah. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24E; New York et al.: Doubleday 2000) 549.

that the people should return to faithfulness in carrying out His commands. In this light, the fight of the insurgents aims to deal with the sinful attitudes passed down for centuries to subsequent generations of young Jews and to restore the much-longed-for fidelity to customs decreed by God.

Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah warned the Israelites disobedient to the laws (νομίμοις) that God would destroy the temple in Jerusalem (Jer 33:4 LXX).<sup>82</sup> The immediate context of verses 4–6 contains the prophet's strong warning, given on behalf of God, that in case of disobedience to His statutes (v. 4–5), He will treat His house in the capital as He treated the Shiloh shrine.<sup>83</sup> Verse 4 first mentions the making of a law, which refers to the time of Moses, who gave it to the ancestors during the people's stay in Sinai.<sup>84</sup> The role of interpreters of the law was later taken over by prophets. Their message was not limited only to exhorting the people to faithfulness, but above all, it was to show obedience to the law as a condition for their staying in their own land and the only way of social and religious development. In spite of everything, the announcement of the destruction of the temple must have sounded shocking to the ears of the people who remembered God's promise to Solomon that His name would abide in the temple forever (1 Kgs 8:13, 16, 29).<sup>85</sup> Jeremiah's announcement came true just before the Babylonian army, led by Nebuchadnezzar II (Ezek 10:18), entered Jerusalem.<sup>86</sup> Both events probably remained in the deep-rooted memory of the Maccabean insurgents, the more so as the abandonment of the shrines in Shiloh and Jerusalem resulted in the complete destruction of both. They witnessed the same fate of the temple in the time after the invasion and looting of the temple by the armies of Antiochus IV (1 Macc 1:21–24). The association with history was not difficult in this case. Therefore, the current rising to fight for the divine νόμια has its most justifiable motivation for history not to repeat itself once again.

The prophet Ezekiel was commanded to speak to the people about the divine provisions (νομίμοις) which they had disobeyed (Ezek 5:6–7). The context of v. 5–17 first

82 This brings all historical events to the theological level. It is not man, but God that invariably directs the fate of His people, although depending on the attitude of the people towards Him. Everything that happens is ultimately due to His will, not to human factors. It is the people that are – consciously or not – the implementers of His will, L.C. Allen, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Louisville, KY – London: Westminster John Knox 2008) 306. Similar to Hos 8:12, this verse also uses the generalising term תּוֹרַתִּי, “my law,” which the LXX has broken down into specific regulations.

83 Shiloh was destroyed during the Philistine invasion of Israel around 1050 BC (1 Sam 1–4), which was interpreted as God's response to disregard for His law by the ancient Israelites in pre-royal times, J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1980) 525.

84 Paradoxically, nowhere in the book is law defined by a single term summarising its content or a statement about its origin from Moses. The law in the prophet's time was taught by priests (Jer 18:18) and writers (Jer 8:8), G.L. Keown – P.J. Scalise – T.G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC 27; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1995) 14.

85 The fate of Shiloh is recalled by the author of Ps 78:60, giving the same argument about the Israelites abandoning their fidelity to God (v. 56–58), which caused Him to be greatly agitated (v. 59) and leave the sanctuary.

86 The sacrileges committed in the temple courtyard described in 1 Macc 1:43b–48, performed under the decree of Antiochus IV, vividly resemble those that were committed in the time of the prophet (Ezra 8 and 9:7), D.I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 1997) 326.

gives a general remark about the crimes committed by the Israelites in the temple grounds (v. 5–7), followed by a series of terrible punishments that will be inflicted upon the unfaithful people (v. 8–17).<sup>87</sup> Once again, the Hebrew term תִּקְוֶה in the Book of Ezekiel and Deuteronomy, the Greek equivalent of which is νόμιμα, refers to the statutes carved on stone tablets as unchanging principles, taught mainly by priests.<sup>88</sup> Most often they have a moral and cultic overtone, unlike מצִוְוֹת, “commandments, orders,”<sup>89</sup> as legal decisions announced by a judge. Νόμιμα become habits due to their permanent practice.<sup>90</sup> Very puzzling is a note found in v. 5 about God placing Jerusalem among the pagans for its taking over all the darkness of paganism and becoming its own contradiction.<sup>91</sup> The announcement of drastic retaliation on the part of God is therefore not surprising. In this light, by reverting to fidelity to God, the struggle of the Maccabean insurgents can restore Jerusalem’s righteous centrality in the ancient world as a city where commandments are obeyed and a source of true faith spreading to the surrounding pagan nations.

Malachi affirmed the bitter fact of the departure from God’s laws (νόμιμα) by the people (Mal 3:7). The context of v. 7–10a is an exhortation to return to God and cease deceiving Him with dishonesty, although this time not in the moral but in the cultic sense, related to the cessation of the tithes due to God’s house.<sup>92</sup> This attitude is combined with a feigned failure to understand the accusation that the prophet makes against his listeners in the name of God. Verse 7 itself can be divided into two parts: the main part, that is, the call to conversion (v. 7b), and the reason given earlier: violating God’s statutes (v. 7a).<sup>93</sup> Worshiping God was an activity that needed to be constantly cared for as a sign of respect for God’s holiness. In the first place, the priests who taught the people the right attitude to God’s commandments were required to practice it, which they, however, did not do (Mal 2:8). As a result, the Israelites departed from God’s commands, most likely in the sense of practised idolatry.<sup>94</sup> They rebelled against God not only in worship but also in speech, not obeying His commandments. The Maccabees, as members of the priestly family, had

87 In describing this infidelity in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Greek author stressed the disobedience of the νομίμοις, similarly to the Hebrew author who pointed out that the Israelites לא־הִלְכוּ בְּקִדְוָה, „have not walked in my statutes.”

88 M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1983) 111.

89 L.E. Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 17; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 1994) 102.

90 Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 198–199.

91 In 3:7 there is a sharp accusation of just such depravity, sustained by the malignant attitude. More widely in L.C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19* (WBC 28; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1994) 73.

92 A similar emphasis on the persistence of such an attitude “from the time of the fathers” is also manifested in Ezra 9:7. This motif seems to develop particularly strongly in post-exilic theology.

93 R.A. Taylor – E.R. Clendenen, *Haggai – Malachi. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 21A; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2004) 410–412.

94 The Hebrew verb סָבַח means “to turn around, to depart from ...” In the context of the idolatry made by the Israelites, it can be found e.g. in Deut 9:12, 16; 11:16, 28; 31:29, A.E. Hill, *Malachi. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25D; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 1998) 298–299.



a deep awareness of the righteousness of worship and honesty towards God in the rites they performed. It seems that this aspect was also present in their struggle for the religious freedom of the nation.

An important note supplementing the meaning of the term νόμιμον was introduced by the Greek translator of the Book of Zechariah. In verse 1:6, he related the substantive not directly to the precepts of the Mosaic Law, but to the prophetic interpretations of the law in the context of exhortations to fidelity to them and prophesied the imminent punishments for the Israelites' unfaithfulness to the law.<sup>95</sup> All God's commands (νόμιμα) were already known to the ancestors;<sup>96</sup> therefore, they cannot justify their disobedience on any grounds. God carried out His threats announced by the prophets against them.<sup>97</sup> More importantly, however, reopening to God's eternal law will have a positive effect on changing the present, deeply discouraging plight of the people.<sup>98</sup> It was this awareness that could have been a very important motivation for the actions taken by the fighting insurgents to defend the law. They did not want to let God fulfil His threats against all the people in their day as well. On the contrary, a return to fidelity would allow the people to enjoy the much-desired favour of God again.

## Summary

The biblical content that may make up the theological content of the concept of νόμιμον in 1 Macc 3:21 is very rich. Regardless of the religious consciousness of the historical Maccabean insurgents, the word of God shows a wide range of meanings of this term, justifying military action. The most important theological motivation of the struggles seems to be the absolute ordinances of Moses concerning the perpetual exercise of specific orders. The analysis of the concept of νόμιμον, defined by the adjective αἰώνιος, leads to the conclusion that the perpetual νόμιμα concerned the cultic life of the nation, linking it inseparably with the one God of Israel. Moreover, they all allow Jews to remain deeply aware of their distinctness from the pagan nations around them. Fidelity to them in the history of the people determines their religious and national identity, especially in the difficult

95 The motive of the prophetic exhortation to the adoption of the law by the people is not present in the original Hebrew text, which asks only a rhetorical question about the fulfillment of the announcements made by God's servants, M. Cazevitz – C. Dogniez – M. Harl (trans.), *Les Douze Prophètes. Aggée – Zacharie* (La Bible d'Alexandrie 23/10–11; Paris: Cerf 2007) 221.

96 The Hebrew original uses the term פֶּתַי, "statute, ordinance," here which is – according to the context – the fulfilling will of God.

97 The prophet considers his work to be a continuation of the fundamental prophetic mission of reminding the people of God's commands and of exhorting them to obey them, which is to be attested by the history of the nation, fulfilled strictly according to their announcements, D.L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8. A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster 1984) 134–135.

98 G.L. Klein, *Zechariah. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 21B; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2008) 87.

historical circumstances which they experience. An additional theological justification of the ongoing struggle for the customs of the fatherland, by which the insurgents could have been guided, is the prohibition of adopting any customs of pagan nations, formulated several times in the Book of Leviticus. It was for the practice of such customs that they were removed by God from the land of Canaan that had been given to the Israelites after their return from Egyptian captivity (Lev 18:24, 27; Deut 9:4; 18:12). The effect of taking over these practices by the Maccabean Jews could be just as catastrophic. Therefore, the present struggle for fidelity to the Mosaic Law also warrants the nation's right to live in its own land. On the other hand, the historical justification for the insurgents' fight to preserve their native customs is the firm rejection of the actions of previous generations which repetitively violated God's νόμιμα. Awareness of the punishments foretold by the prophets, which the unfaithful people once faced for this same reason, becomes a warning against repeating by the Maccabean generation the stubborn infidelity of their ancestors to their God.

*Translated by Andrzej Marciniak*

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