

**דרשה**

**DRISHA INSTITUTE  
FOR JEWISH EDUCATION**

**The Stanley Rudoff Memorial  
High Holy Day Lecture Series**

**Presents:**

**The Death of the Martyrs:  
A Lesson for Living**

**Shuli Taubes**

**Sunday September 9, 2012**

In some congregations each of the paragraphs of the following *piyut* is recited by the congregation and repeated by the *chazzan*. In others, it is recited by all in its entirety, with the *chazzan* reciting just the last verse aloud.

**אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ** *These shall I recall\* and I pour out my soul within me,<sup>1</sup>*

*for wanton people have devoured me*  
*as if I were an unturned cake;<sup>2</sup>*

*for in that ruler's time there was no reprieve<sup>3</sup>*

*for the ten who were murdered by the government.*

**כַּ** *As [the ruler] studied the Book taught by the [Sanhedrin]*

*which is likened to a nourishing heap,<sup>4</sup>*

*he understood and analyzed the inscribed law;*

*he opened it to 'These are the statutes'<sup>5</sup> and thought of a plot regarding:*

*'If someone kidnaps a person and sells him,*

*and he is found guilty, he is to be put to death.'<sup>6</sup>*

*(We have erred,\* our Rodek; forgive us, our Molder!)*

**ז** *He became arrogant against the great [Sages]*

*and ordered that his palace be filled with shoes,\**

*and sent for ten great sages,*

*who plumbd the law and its principles through analytical discussion.*

**ח** *[He commanded:] Judge this case authentically,*

*and state the decision without perverted deceit —*

*rather you must elucidate it truthfully and clearly\*:*

*[What is the law] if a man is found to have kidnapped a member*

*of his Jewish brethren, and he enslaved him and sold him?<sup>7</sup>*

*(We have erred, our Rodek; forgive us, our Molder!)*

**ט** *They answered him, 'That kidnapper is to die.'<sup>8</sup>*

*Said he, 'Then what of your ancestors who sold their brother,*

*to a caravan of Ishmaelites they peddled him,<sup>9</sup>*

*and gave him away for shoes?<sup>9</sup>*

**י** *Now you must accept the heavenly judgment upon yourselves,*

*for since your forefathers' times there have been none like you.\**

*Were they alive I would have prosecuted them before you,*

*so you must bear the sin of your ancestors.<sup>10</sup>*

*(We have erred, our Rodek; forgive us, our Molder!)*

(1) Cf. Psalms 42:5. (2) Hoshua 7:8. (3) Cf. Jeremiah 8:22. (4) Exodus 21:1.  
(5) 21:16. (6) Deuteronomy 24:7. (7) Cf. Genesis 37:28-29. (8) Cf. Amos 2:6.

Sanhedrin to teach him.

**דְּמִיּוּתָם מִיְהוֹשֻׁעַ** — *To 'These are the statutes,'*  
*The *sidrah* דְּמִיּוּתָם מִיְהוֹשֻׁעַ, These are the statutes,*  
*includes the law that if someone kidnaps a fellow*  
*Jew, forces him to work and then sells him, the*  
*kidnapper is liable to the death penalty (Exodus*  
*21:16). This law provided the Roman ruler with*  
*the pretext to execute the Sages for a crime that*  
*had been committed more than sixteen centuries*  
*earlier!*

**וַיִּשְׁמַע** — *We have erred.* This refrain appears  
after every two stanzas of the *piyut*. It expresses  
our own repentance and plea for forgiveness,  
which are inspired by the tragedy of the martyrs.  
**וַיִּמְלֵךְ ... מִיְהוֹשֻׁעַ** — *Be filled with shoes.*

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 38) and  
*Targum Yonasan* (Genesis 37:28), based on  
*Amos 2:6*, when Joseph's brothers sold him, they  
used the money to buy themselves shoes. Now,  
as part of his charade, the Roman ruler filled his  
palace with shoes to incriminate the sages.  
**מִיְהוֹשֻׁעַ** — *Truthfully and clearly.* After the  
sages pronounced to do so, he presented the case for  
their consideration.

**וַיִּשְׁמַע** — *There have been none like you.*  
The Roman claimed that in all of the years since  
Joseph, there had never been such a collection of  
outstanding leaders. Consequently, they should  
be punished in place of the ten brothers.  
**וַיִּמְלֵךְ ... מִיְהוֹשֻׁעַ** — *So you must bear the*

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**אֵלֶּיךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ** *נפש עולי אשכנז,*

*כי בלתינו זורים קצעה בלי הופנה\*.*

*כי בימי השור לא עלתה ארובה<sup>2</sup> לעשרה חרוגי מלכות.*

*פלמרו ספר מפי משולי ארמת\* ומברן ורקוקן ברת רשומת*

*ופתח בולעלה המשפטיים\* ותשב מזומת*

*ולגב איש ומברן נמקצא בירז מותר יומת.<sup>5</sup>*

*(תפאנו עירנו סלה לנו יחזרנו)*

*גבה לך בנרולים, רצנה למולאות פלטרז ועלים,*

*ומקרא לעשרה דקמתי גדולים, מקינו ורת וטעמיהם בקפולאים.*

*דינו משפט יה לעשרה, ואל מערןהוה בקב ללאמר,*

*כי אם דורצארוז לאמתו ולאור,<sup>6</sup>*

*כי נמקצא איש גב גפוש מאתרו מפרני ישראל, והקעמקו בו ומברן.<sup>6</sup>*

*(תפאנו עירנו סלה לנו יחזרנו)*

*הם בקנו לו ומת הוצגב הורא,<sup>6</sup>*

*כם אנה אבותיכם אשר אדחתם מברודא,*

*לארחתם ושמעאלים סחרודא? ובערו בעלים ומנוהו.<sup>6</sup>*

*ואתם קפלו רון שקמים עליכם, כי מימי אבותיכם לא נמקצא בקב,\**

*ואם היו בתיים תייתי ונם לפניכם (תפאנו עירנו סלה לנו יחזרנו)*

This *piyut* by striking we have not only blended ourselves, but impeded the normal functions of the universe.  
**אֵלֶּיךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ** — *These shall I recall.* The story of the Ten Martyrs is an emotional highlight of the Yom Kippur service as well as of the *Kinno* (Lamentations) of Tishah B'Av. It is the moving and tragic story of ten sages of the Mishnaic period who were brutally put to death to satisfy the anti-Semitic caprice of a Roman ruler. It should be noted, however, that while all ten of these righteous men were murdered by the Romans, their executors did not take place simultaneously, as described here, nor could they have since two of the ten did not even live in the same generation as the other eight. Namely, the martyred Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yishmael the *Kohen Gadol* lived before the Destruction of the Second Temple, and were murdered shortly thereafter, while Rabbi Akiva was a relatively young man at the time of the Destruction and he (as well as the others mentioned here) was killed after the Bar Kochba revolt, over sixty years later. The liturgical accounts of the martyrdom were not meant as historical records, but as dramatic accounts of the story, in order to evoke feelings of loss and

repentance on the part of the congregation. There are several differing midrashic accounts of this event, and the *piyut* draws on all of them. This *piyut* was composed by an otherwise unknown *paytan*, whose signature *פיק דקור, Yehudah*, may be strong, follows the alphabetical acronym. It is inserted in *רקוקן רור, Remember Your mercy*, because it is here that we beg God to recall His covenant with the Patriarchs to be merciful to their descendants, even if those descendants are undeserving.

**אֵר** — *An unturned cake.* A thin pastry baked directly over coals, it is heated so quickly by the glowing coals that it can be eaten even without being turned over. This metaphorically depicts how greedily Israel was devoured by its enemies.

**אֵר** — *A nourishing heap.* The Sanhedrin is compared to a heap of wheat (*Song of Songs* 2:3), because it provides spiritual and intellectual nourishment to the nation. Moreover, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 37a) states: just as everyone can benefit from a heap of wheat, so did everyone benefit from the Sanhedrin. According to one Midrash the name of the Roman ruler in this episode is Lulianus, who insisted on studying the Torah and forced members of the

1 'Give us three days time, until we can ascertain\* whether this was decreed from on High. If we are liable and guilty, we will endure the decree of the All-Merciful.'

11 All of them trembled, shivered and shuddered. Upon Rabbi Yishmael the Kohen Gadol they fixed their eyes, for him to utter the Divine Name and ascend to his Master, to learn if the decree had emanated from his God.

12 Rabbi Yishmael purified himself and uttered the Name\* reverently. He ascended to the heights and inquired of [Gabriel] the angel\* dressed in linen.<sup>1</sup>

13 Said he to him, 'Accept it upon yourselves, O righteous and beloved ones, for I have heard from behind the partition that you have been destined for this.'

14 He descended and related the word of God to his comrades — whereupon the evil tyrant commanded that they be killed by force and brutality.

15 Two of them, who were the leaders of Israel, were taken out first: Rabbi Yishmael the Kohen Gadol; and Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, the Nasi [Prince] of Israel.

16 That his head be severed first,\* [Rabban Shimon] begged exceedingly, saying, 'Kill me first and let me not see the death of [Rabbi Yishmael the Kohen Gadol] — the minister of Him Who dwells in the Temple.'

17 The serpent ordered that lots be cast, and the lot fell upon Rabban Shimon.

18 He hastened to shed [Rabban Shimon's] blood as if he were an ox, and when his head was severed, [Rabbi Yishmael] took it and waited over him in a bitter, shofar-like voice:

19 'Woe is the tongue that hastened to teach words of beauty — how could it now lick the dust because of sins?'

20 How very much he shudderingly wept over him!

21 The daughter of the wicked one stood still at the sound of Rabbi Yishmael's weeping, inwardly she covered his physical beauty,\* and begged her father to let him live.

22 The wicked one contemptuously refused to grant this request! She then asked of him that the flesh be flayed\* from [Rabbi Yishmael's] face:

(1) Ezekiel 9:11. This awful end. <sup>1</sup>הוא נהג — His physical beauty. The ruler's lecherous daughter was impressed with Rabbi Yishmael's handsomeness and she wanted him spared for her personal gratification.

הוא נהג — The flesh be flayed. In a display of cruelty that showed what a contemptible being she was, she asked that Rabbi Yishmael's flesh be torn from his face while he was still alive. She could then stuff the skin to preserve his handsome features for her to gaze upon.

וזמן תקנה לנו שלשה ימים. עד שפדעו. אם נגמור תדבר מפורזמים. אם אנו חייבים ונאשמים. נספול פגורת מלא רחמים. חלו חתנו ונענו פלגמו, על רבי ישמעאל פתו גדול נהנו עירקתנו, להיפיר את השם לעלות לארדוקתנו, לעצת אם יצאה התגורה מאת אלתקתנו.

טתה רבי ישמעאל עצמו והזפור את השם פסלודים, וקלה לפורום ושאל מאת ראשי. לבלש הפירדים, וגם לו קפלו עילכם עירקים וידודים, פי שמקתה מאדודי הפרגוד פי בואת אמת קלפדים.

גד והגוד קתבריו מאמר אל, רצה הפלצעל להרגם פכס ולא, ושקנים מהם הוצאו חתלה שיהם גדולי ישראל, רבי ישמעאל פתו גדול, ורפון שמעון פון גמליאל קשיא ושקראל.

פירורח לאשו חתולה. הרפה לכתנו, וגם תרגי חתלה ואל אודאה פמיתת משורת לדר פמעון, ולהפיל גוללות אקה צפעון, ונפל הגולל על רפון שמעון.

לשפור דמלו מהה פשור פור, וקשודפור לאשו וקולו וצרה עליו בקול פור פשופור, אי הקישון התמקורת להורות פאמרי שפור, פציונותי. איך עקפה לחרבת את חקפור.

מה מאד בקרב עליו בתודתו, פת פלצעל לקול פכיתו של רבי ישמעאל עמורה, חאר פכיו. פלפיה חמורה, ושאלה מאת אברה חתה להקמורה.

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he did not refrain from doing so.

When [the executioner] reached the place of tefillin,\* [Rabbi Yishmael] shrieked with a bitter scream to the Molder of his soul

(We have erred, our Rock; forgive us, our Molder!)

ט The celestial Seraphim\* cried out bitterly,

'Is this the Torah and this its reward —

○ God Who cloaks Himself in light as with a garment?!

The enemy insults Your great and awesome Name,

and reviles and blasphemes against the words of the Torah!

ע A voice from Heaven responded,

If I hear another sound, I will transform the universe to water,

I will turn the earth to astonishing emptiness —

this is a decree from My Presence;

accept it, you who delight in the two-thousand-year-old law!\*

(We have erred, our Rock; forgive us, our Molder!)

פ Leaders were murdered, those who sit up late in synagogues,

who were as full of commandments as a pomegranate

and as the Alar's corners.\*

They took out Rabbi Akiva, who expounded upon the crowns of the letters,\*

and lacerated his flesh\* with sharp-toothed combs.

א [The ruler] ordered that Rabbi Chananya ben Teradyon

be brought from his study hall,\*

and they burned his body with bundles of branches.

They placed saturated wool sponges on his chest to delay his death —

as soon as they were removed,

he was buried together with his Torah Scroll.

(We have erred, our Rock; forgive us, our Molder!)

ק Lament, you holy members of the people that is never abandoned,\*\*

because they were murdered and their blood was shed for a trivial cause,

to sanctify the Heavenly Name they martyred themselves,

through the murder of Rabbi Chutzpis the Interpreter.\*

(1) Cf. Psalms 104:2. (2) cf. 99:3. (3) Cf. Proverbs 8:30. (4) Cf. Jeremiah 51:5.

praise-worthy, R' Akiva, for you are ready to enter the life of the World to Come. (Berachos 61b; Yerushalmi Berachos 9:5).

תלמי תלמי — From his study hall. The Mishnah teaches that the priest to execute Rabbi Chananya was that he violated the Roman edict against teaching the Torah publicly. The Romans took the Torah Scroll that he always kept with him and wrapped him in it, before setting him afire. To prolong his agony, they packed his chest with water-soaked wool. To his horrified daughter and students, Rabbi Chananya said, 'The parchment is consumed, but the letters fly up in the air.' The Roman executioner was deeply moved by Rabbi Chananya's boldness and asked, 'If I remove the wool from your heart, will I have a share in the World to Come?' Rabbi Chananya promised that he would, whereupon the Roman removed the

חזרת הש"ס/עשרת החרוג מלכות

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ולא ערב דבר זה לצעשותו, וקשהגזע למקום תפילתי צרח בקול מר ליוצר נשמתו.

(תקענו צורנו סלה לנו יתקנו.)

עורפי מניצלי צעקו במקרה, זו תורה וזו שבתך,

עטת בשלמתי אורחי, אינני מנאץ שמך הנורו והנורא.

וגמתוך ומננה על דברי תורה.

צבתה בך קול משמים, אם אשמע קול אחר אהפוך את העולם לקום

לחיהו ובהו אשית הדומים,

גודד היא מלפני, קולות משעשעי רוח יתומים.\*

(תקענו צורנו סלה לנו יתקנו.)

פקורים נהרגו מאמר שבה פתי בנטיזת, מלאי מצות ברוח וכוונות,\*

ודואצאו את רבי עקיבא הולש בתרי אורתות.\*

וקרוקו קשרי, פסקאות פיקיות.

צנה לוחיצא רבי חנניא בן תרדיון מפיה ארלמו,\*

ובבתילי ומורות שרפו גלמו,

וספודן של צמר שמו על לבו לערב עצמו,

וכשופסולקו מרד נשרוף וקרן מורה עמו.

קונו קוראשים עם לא אלמון,\*

כרי על דבר מועט נשפר דמן,

לקול שם שמנים מקרו עצמן, פהררית רבי חוצפית המהרן למון.\*

(תקענו צורנו סלה לנו יתקנו.)

It was the time of the morning Shema reading when R' Akiva was taken out to be murdered publicly. During his fighful ordeal, he accepted God's sovereignty upon himself by reciting the Shema joyously, and oblivious to the pain. Turnus Rufus, the Roman commander who ordered the barbarous execution, was flabbergasted. 'Have you no feeling of pain that you can laugh in the face of such intense suffering?' he exclaimed. Even R' Akiva's own students wondered, 'Our teacher, even to this extent?'

The dying sage explained, 'All my life I was concerned over a phrase of the Torah. We are taught in the Shema to accept God's sovereignty and decrees upon ourselves יקח את כל עם ישראל על ידו (Deuteronomy 6:5) — this implies that one must serve God even if it means forfeiting one's life. I used to wonder if I would ever have the privilege of serving God to such a degree. Now that the chance has come to me, shall I not grasp it with joy?'

He repeated the first verse of Shema — Hear O Israel, Hashem is [now] our God, Hashem [will be] One — and he drew out the word 'One' until his soul left him.

A Heavenly voice was heard saying, 'You are praise-worthy, R' Akiva, for your soul left you as you proclaimed God's Oneness! ... You are

למקום תפילת — The place of tefillin, i.e., the place on his head where God's Name had rested and which symbolized man's intellectual submission to God.

עורפי מניצלי — The celestial Seraphim. The angels were agitated that such a punishment could befall people who were so great in Torah. Also, they questioned how God could be silent in the face of the Roman insults and blasphemies.

צנה לוחיצא רבי חנניא בן תרדיון מפיה ארלמו, — The two-thousand-year-old law. The Torah existed for two thousand years before the world was created. To God, a thousand years is like a day (Psalms 90:4), therefore the psalm uses the term תרתי, literally two days.

וקרוקו קשרי, פסקאות פיקיות. — And as the Alar's corners, upon which the blood of countless offerings had been placed.

עטת בשלמתי אורחי, אינני מנאץ שמך הנורו והנורא. — Who expounded upon the crowns of the letters. Rabbi Akiva's understanding of the Torah was so deep and all-encompassing that he was able to derive 'mounts and mounds of laws' from each of the crowns that adorn the tops of certain letters in the script of the Torah (Menachos 29b).

וגמתוך ומננה על דברי תורה. — And lacerated his flesh. R' Akiva was tortured to death in this barbaric manner.

צבתה בך קול משמים, אם אשמע קול אחר אהפוך את העולם לקום לחיהו ובהו אשית הדומים, — Godehood will be one, and he drew out the word 'One' until his soul left him.

גודד היא מלפני, קולות משעשעי רוח יתומים.\* — A Heavenly voice was heard saying, 'You are praise-worthy, R' Akiva, for your soul left you as you proclaimed God's Oneness! ... You are

פקורים נהרגו מאמר שבה פתי בנטיזת, מלאי מצות ברוח וכוונות,\* — The Roman commander who ordered the barbarous execution, was flabbergasted. 'Have you no feeling of pain that you can laugh in the face of such intense suffering?'

ודואצאו את רבי עקיבא הולש בתרי אורתות.\* — Even R' Akiva's own students wondered, 'Our teacher, even to this extent?'

וקרוקו קשרי, פסקאות פיקיות. — The dying sage explained, 'All my life I was concerned over a phrase of the Torah. We are taught in the Shema to accept God's sovereignty and decrees upon ourselves יקח את כל עם ישראל על ידו (Deuteronomy 6:5) — this implies that one must serve God even if it means forfeiting one's life. I used to wonder if I would ever have the privilege of serving God to such a degree. Now that the chance has come to me, shall I not grasp it with joy?'

עטת בשלמתי אורחי, אינני מנאץ שמך הנורו והנורא. — He repeated the first verse of Shema — Hear O Israel, Hashem is [now] our God, Hashem [will be] One — and he drew out the word 'One' until his soul left him.

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1 Let a shudder seize all who hear the news,<sup>1</sup> and let every eye release a flow of tears, and let every delight be turned to grief, with the murder of Rabbi Elazar ben Shamma.\*

(We have erred, our Rock; forgive us, our Molder.)

2 My enemies and oppressors destroyed me, and gorged their stomachs with my delicacies,<sup>2</sup> but they made me drink poison and wormwood,<sup>3</sup> with the murder of Rabbi Chanina ben Chachinai.\* They overwhelmed us to make us violate the commandments, and refused to accept wealth and ransom\* — only the lines of those who studied the words of beauty, like Rabbi Yeshetav the Scribe.\*

(We have erred, our Rock; forgive us, our Molder.)

3 The pampered people [Edom]\* — that will be made desolate — crushed me, they did us more evil than did all the kings of the earth, and murdered more and more of us, as with the murder of Rabbi Yehudah ben Dama.\*

4 You said that the House of Jacob is fire\* and the House of Joseph is a flame,<sup>4</sup> but now, the straw [of Esau] has extinguished them, and O Living One, crush their haughtiness in the conflagration of the time to come,<sup>5</sup> for they have agreed to murder ten righteous men, with Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava.\*

(We have erred, our Rock; forgive us, our Molder.)

This befell us, and we have related it clearly, and poured out our degraded, aggrieved heart. From on High, be attentive to supplication — O HASHEM, HASHEM, Compassionate and Gracious God!<sup>6</sup> Chazan — O Compassionate One, look down from the heights, at the spilled blood of the righteous and their very lifeblood, see from Your chamber and remove the stains [of sin], O King, Who sits on the Throne of Mercy.

All:

**זכור לָנוּ** Remember for us the covenant of the Patriarchs, as You said: And I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember, and the Land will I remember.\* Remember for us the covenant of the ancestors, as You said: And I will remember for them the covenant of the ancestors whom I removed from the land of Egypt in the very sight of the nations, to be a God to them; I am

(1) Cf. Exodus 15:15; Psalms 48:7. (2) Cf. Jeremiah 51:34. (3) Cf. 23:15. (4) Ovadiah 1:18. (5) Cf. Malachi 3:15. (6) Exodus 34:6. (7) Leviticus 26:42

Israel, it was as if the straw had extinguished the flames. Like R' Akiva and R' Chananya ben Teradion, he publicly defied the Roman decree against teaching the Torah. In particular, he showed his courage by ordaining the five great students of

רצדה תאחת כל שומע שמועג, ותזל כל עין המועג, ותהפך לאבן כל ששועג, בתרומת רבי אלקעזר בן שמועג.\* (טשאט צטרנט קלח לנה יתצטרנט)

שחרתגי צו"ר ומענני, ומלאנו ברכס מעצריני,

והשקנתי מי רלח וקלעני, פחרצנת רבי חנוניא בן חנקאני.\* מתקפו עלינו צרות מאות לחפר, ומאננו לקחתם הו"ו נלפר, כי אם נפשות סהנוות אמרי שפר, כמו רבי ישבב השופר.\* (טשאט צטרנט קלח לנה יתצטרנט)

והתנו בני צירידי השומקת, תרעו לנו מפל מלכי ארצות, וחרנו לנו פמת נכמת, בחרצנת רבי יהודה בן רמת.\*

והפרת בית יצקב אש\* ובריה יוסף לתבה, הו עמתה קש אורם פבת, חי זעך קולמתם פבעור זים תפא, כי תסריטו לחרוג עשרה צדיקים עם רבי יהודה בן פבת.\* (תשאט צטרנט קלח לנה יתצטרנט)

זאת קראתנו וספרנו פשנו, ושפכנו לב שפול ואנו, מפולום הסבת פתנו, יהיה ידוח אל רחום ותנו, הנוח הנישה מפרדומים, תשפכת דם הצדיקים ותמצית דומים, תראה פפרצוה ותעבר פתמיים, אל מלך ישב על פסא רחמיים.

All:

**זכור לָנוּ** גרית אבות פאשר אמרת: וקברתי את פריתי יקוב, ואף את פריתי יצחק, ואף את פריתי אברהם אפר, והארץ אופר, זכור לנו גרית ראשונים, פאשר אמרת: וקברתי לָנוּ גרית ראשונים, אשר הוצאתי אתם מארץ מצרים לעיני הגוים, להיות לָנוּ לאלהים, אני

for his generosity and had to be restrained by R' Akiva from giving too much charity. Before he was executed, he urged his students to remain loving and devoted to one another.

The pampered people (Edom). The Romans, descendants of Edom, indulged themselves with all kind of pleasures. But when it came to their enemies, they were merciless. Rabbi Yehudah ben Dama, Except for the reference to him as one of the Ten Martyrs, no mention of R' Yehudah ben Dama is found in the Talmud or Midrash.

The House of Jacob is fire, and the House of Joseph are like fire and flame, which will consume the House of Esau, which is likened to straw. But when the Romans overpowered