This place in Jewish History: Gadot Gonen Forest
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When we think of the Maccabees, we usually imagine the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem and the lighting of the Menorah. Yet the struggle to secure Jewish life in our land continued long after that first Chanukah. Some of the Maccabees' battles occurred in the Upper Galilee.

Who were they fighting? The Seleucids were a Greek-Macedonian dynasty whose kingdom emerged after the breakup of Alexander the Great's empire. They ruled over a vast territory, including the Land of Israel. Antiochus IV, remembered from the Chanukah story, was a Seleucid king. His persecution of the Jews helped spark the Maccabean revolt, led by Matityahu and his sons.

After Judah Maccabee's death, his brother Yehonatan assumed leadership and later served as High Priest. As rival Seleucid rulers competed for the throne, Yehonatan sought alliances to strengthen the Jewish people's position. After King Demetrius II broke his promises to him, Yehonatan supported a rival king. Demetrius's commanders then marched into the Galilee to remove Yehonatan from power (I Maccabees 9:28–31; 11:53–63).

The Book of Maccabees describes what happened next. Learning that Demetrius's army had arrived at Kedesh, Yehonatan set out to confront it. After encamping beside the waters of the Kineret, his forces advanced into the **plain of Hazor**. There, enemy soldiers confronted them, while others waited in ambush in the surrounding hills (I Maccabees 11:63–69).

Yehonatan's men fled. Only two commanders remained beside him. Mattathias son of Absalom and Judah son of Chalphi (I Maccabees 11:70).

Yehonatan tore his garments, placed earth upon his head, and prayed. Then he returned to the battle and drove the enemy back. Seeing this, his fleeing soldiers turned around, rejoined him, and pursued the enemy toward Kedesh (I Maccabees 11:63–74).

What a powerful moment. There is something deeply human about this account. Yehonatan feels the weight of the moment, turns to God, and finds the strength to act. Yehonatan's anguish did not prevent him from moving forward. Through prayer and courage, he and his men found the strength to continue.

Today, as northern Israel recovers from war, this lesson very much speaks to us again. Rebuilding takes resolve, partnership, and people willing to take the next step.

KKL-JNF is helping strengthen northern communities and encourage visitors to return. Visiting the region, discovering its ancient Jewish connections, and supporting local businesses are meaningful ways to participate.

The North’s forests, waters, and archaeological sites invite us to discover how earlier generations lived, struggled, and sustained their connection to this land.

In the landscape of Hazor, Yehonatan’s story reminds us that courage can spread. Each of us can help the North move forward.

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