

A Précis of Chanukah

Alexander the Great died in 323B.C. at the age of 33. For about the next 150 years his successors played tug-of-war for control of the empire with Israel stuck in the middle of the conflict. Around 175B.C. *Antiochus IV Epiphanes* (whose name means literally *God made manifest*) comes to power. Antiochus was an evil and arrogant tyrant. He attempted to consolidate his fading empire through a policy of radical *Hellenization*. While a segment of the Jewish aristocracy (and priesthood!) had already adopted Greek ways, most Jews were outraged. Antiochus' atrocities were aimed at the eradication of *Torah* and Hebrew culture. He prohibited most of the central elements of Jewish practice, attempted to destroy all copies of the *Torah Scrolls* and required offerings to the Greek god Zeus. His crowning outrage was the erection of a statue of Zeus and the sacrificing of pigs in the temple itself!

Antiochus's blasphemous reign triggered the *Maccabean* revolt from 166-142B.C., led by *Mattathias*, a Jew of priestly lineage, and his five sons lead by *Judah*: *"¹In those days Mattathias son of John son of Simeon, a priest of the family of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein. ²He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, ³Simon called Thassi, ⁴Judas called Maccabeus, ⁵Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus. ⁶He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem, ⁷and said, "Alas! Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city, and to live there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens? ⁸Her temple has become like a person without honor; ⁹her glorious vessels have been carried into exile. Her infants have been killed in her streets, her youths by the sword of the foe. ¹⁰What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils? ¹¹All her adornment has been taken away; no longer free, she has become a slave. ¹²And see, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned them. ¹³Why should we live any longer?" ¹⁴Then Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly" (1 Macc. 2:1-14)*

Judah Maccabee, his family, and the loyal *Torah*-keeping Jews of around the 160'sB.C. fought against the Greeks: *"¹⁵The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modein to make them offer sacrifice. ¹⁶Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. ¹⁷Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honored and great in this town, and supported by sons and brothers. ¹⁸Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the people of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the Friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts." ¹⁹But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, every one of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, ²⁰I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. ²¹Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. ²²We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left." ²³When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. ²⁴When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. ²⁵At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. ²⁶Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu. ²⁷Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" ²⁸Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town" (1 Maccabees 2:15-28).* However, they fought more than a land war because they warred for the independence to be the people God. In our terminology they fought for their religious freedom. *Antiochus* had ordered pigs to be sacrificed in the Temple – they were to be cooked, the meat fed to the priests, and the blood poured on the altar. It is not hard to imagine the mess and stench that must have been in the altar of God where no unclean animals had ever been sacrificed. The sanctuary was desecrated, desolated, ruined...

Eventually God gave victory, and they recovered the Temple: *"³⁰When he saw that their army was strong, he prayed, saying, "Blessed are you, O Savior of Israel, who crushed the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of your servant David, and gave the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor. ³¹Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. ³²Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. ³³Strike them down with the sword of those who love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns." ³⁶Then Judas and his brothers said, "See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it." ³⁷So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. ³⁸There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. ³⁹Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes ⁴⁰and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven. ⁴¹Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. ⁴²He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, ⁴³and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. ⁴⁴They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which*

had been profaned. ⁴⁵And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, ⁴⁶and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. ⁴⁷Then they took unhewn^[d] stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. ⁴⁸They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. ⁴⁹They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. ⁵⁰Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. ⁵¹They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken. ⁵²Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, ⁵³they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. ⁵⁴At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. ⁵⁵All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. ⁵⁶So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. ⁵⁷They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. ⁵⁸There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed. ⁵⁹Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.”

In the Second Book of the Maccabees, we read the context of the events surrounding the Rededication of the Temple: *“¹Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; ²they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. ³They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. ⁴When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. ⁵It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. ⁶They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. ⁷Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. ⁸They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.”* This the Scriptural basis for the Jewish Holiday referred today as the *Chanukah*.

The Maccabees gained independence for Judah until 63B.C., when Rome, under General Pompey, dug its iron talons into the land of Israel after a three-month siege of the temple area, massacring priests in the performance of their duties and entering the Most Holy Place. This sacrilege marks the beginning of Roman rule in a most despicable way. These actions are not forgotten/forgiven by the Israelites from the time of *Yeshua* until today.

Were the Greeks the real enemies? Some historians suggest that the Greek/Syrians, though they were certainly the Children of Israel’s foreign enemy, were not Israel’s greatest enemy. They suggest: *“The villains of the story of Chanukah were Jewish Hellenizers – a group of Jewish aristocrats who wished to form a Greek-polis, a Greek state.”* According to this view the real enemies were fellow Jews who sought assimilation in the form of Hellenization. Thus, it is until today believed that assimilation has been the number 1 enemy of the Children of Israel. Assimilation into the world and the world system has also been the number 1 enemy of the Body of Messiah.

In our day we want to ‘Do What *Yeshua* Would Do’ (WWJD). Let me close with the narrative and context given in the John 10 when *Yeshua* was on the earth. This is the well-known parable of the Good Shepherd: *“²²Then came Hanukkah (literally rededication); it was winter in Jerusalem. ²³Yeshua was walking in the Temple around Solomon’s Colonnade. ²⁴Then the Judean leaders surrounded Him, saying, “How long will You hold us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us outright!” ²⁵Yeshua answered them, “I told you, but you don’t believe! The works I do in My Father’s name testify concerning Me. ²⁶But you don’t believe, because you are not My sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸I give them eternal life! They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one.” ³¹Again the Judean leaders picked up stones to stone Him. ³²Yeshua answered them, “I’ve shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone Me?” ³³The Judean leaders answered, “We aren’t stoning you for a good work, but for blasphemy. Though You are a man, You make Yourself God!” ³⁴Yeshua answered them, “Isn’t it written in your Writings (Ps. 82:6): ‘I have said you are gods’? ³⁵If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the Word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), ³⁶do you say of Him, the One the Father set apart and sent into the world, ‘You speak blasphemy,’ because I said, ‘I am Ben-Elohim’?” ³⁷If I don’t do the works of My Father, don’t believe Me! ³⁸But if*

I do, even if you don't trust Me, trust the deeds. Then you may come to know and continue to understand that the Father is in Me, and I am in the Father. ' 39Therefore they tried to capture Him again, but He escaped from their hand." (John 10:22-39)

When *Yeshua* affirmed his divinity (“*I and the Father are one (echad)*”), he did so after first reminding the audience of the fact that “*27My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me. 28I give them eternal life!*” The parable of the Good Shepherd was given during the time of *Chanukah!* Sheep that hear (*shema*) are the kind of sheep He is looking for in this Feast of *Chanukah*. In His words: “*8All those who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9I am the gate! If anyone comes in through Me, he will be saved. He will come and go and find pasture. 10The thief comes only to steal, slaughter, and destroy. I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly! 11I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12The hired worker is not the shepherd, and the sheep are not his down. He sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep and flees. Then the wolf snatches and scatters the sheep. 13The man is only a hired hand and does not care about the sheep. 14I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, 1just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father. And I lay down My life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that are not from this fold; those also I must lead, and they will listen to My voice. So there shall be one flock, one Shepherd. 17For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life, so that I may take it up again. 18No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father” (John 10:8-18). *Shabbat Shalom!**