

# OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

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HAPPY  
HANUKKAH  
2020!

5050!

DECEMBER 2020

THE IMPORTANCE  
OF CHANUKAH

# OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

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## STATEMENT OF BELIEF

*Outreach Israel Ministries  
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

**Outreach Israel News** is the monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries, a non-profit organization with an emphasis on reaching, teaching, and encouraging the Messianic community. Subscription to **Outreach Israel News** is without cost and supported only by donation.

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All Believers in Israel's Messiah are to be regarded as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to respect one another in mutual love as brothers and sisters, and are to work together for the salvation of the Jewish people and return of Israel's Messiah.

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be studied and heeded by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the Believers after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

*For a fuller Statement of Faith, consult the OIM website*

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# OIM UPDATE

## December 2020

Last month, our annual Thanksgiving holiday celebration commenced with a Thanksgiving Eve party for friends and family who are in the area where we live. While preparing the front walk for the incoming guests, with my leaf blower launching fallen leaves, an ancient Hebrew praise song that I had not heard in years, bubbled up in my spirit. Suddenly, I found myself searching my memory for the words, and quietly began singing *Hodu l'Adonai*, or in English, "Give Thanks to the Lord." For the remainder of my task the words slowly came back. When the song migrated to English, I immediately realized I was "**giving thanks to the Lord for He is good!**" How appropriate, I pondered, as the festivities of the holidays were about to begin, and we *all* have so much to be thankful for, as His mercy forever endures! Then as I secured my equipment, another thought percolated to my mind, and I told Margaret that we should sing this song before giving thanks for the evening meal. Her comment that our daughter Jane, a member of the Dallas Choral Symphony, should lead the singing to establish the proper key, made sense, so the stage was set for a brief songfest.

Gratefully, most of our guests were from a Messianic perspective, and many were familiar with the song and could join in the chorus. After a brief statement about what had occurred earlier on the leafy walkway, Jane took the cue, and the song was sung with gusto the following verses:

*ho-du la-do-nai ki tov, ki l-o-lam khas-do.*  
*ho-du la-do-nai ki tov, ki l-o-lam khas-do*  
*ho-du ho-du ho-du ho-du ho-du la-do-nai ki tov.*  
*ho-du ho-du ho-du ho-du ho-du la-do-nai ki tov*

Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,  
His mercy forever endures  
Give thanks to the LORD for he is good,  
His mercy forever endures  
Give thanks! Give thanks! Give thanks! Give thanks!  
Give thanks to The LORD for he is good!  
Give thanks! Give thanks! Give thanks! Give thanks!  
Give thanks to The LORD for he is good!

Obviously, the theme of "**giving thanks**" on Thanksgiving was understood by all. But then one of our guests from Israel gave us a little more understanding of the word *hodu*. She informed us that the Hebrew word *hodu* also has two additional meanings. First, **hodu** is also the word for **turkey** in Hebrew. This realization brought a joyful gasp to the crowd, because the aroma of the smoked turkey was already permeating the house. The double entendre elicited smiles around the room as all marveled at God's humorous ploy. In addition, the word **hodu** is also

the Hebrew word for the country of **India**. Coincidentally, the historical fact is that when Christopher Columbus sailed west from Europe, he was attempting to find a shorter route to India. Why do you think the indigenous population discovered in "America" became known as "Indians"?

Of course, if you know your American history, on November 11, 1620, exactly 400 years ago on Veteran's Day in America (or Armistice Day in Europe), the Mayflower Compact was signed by the Pilgrims and "strangers" who survived the voyage across the Atlantic landing at Plymouth Rock. Without going deeply into the fascinating story of Squanto, the American "Indian" who was instrumental in helping the English Pilgrims overcome the hardships and eventually celebrate what became known as the first "Thanksgiving," the ironies cannot go unnoticed by the discerning eye of God's children. Clearly, the Almighty One wants His faithful ones to recognize His fingerprints on everything where visibly tangible. It is not a "**coincidence**" that Israel spent 400 years as "slaves" in Egypt. Note the parallel time sequence. How about the "**providence**" of Squanto, a former slave captured and enslaved in Spain, making his way to England where he learned the language and then became employed by the English settlers for translation and instructional purposes. So today when we sing, *Hodu, Hodu, Hodu, Hodu lada-nai ki tov*, it can literally mean, "**Give thanks, turkey, india(ns), give thanks to the Lord for He is good!**" How about that for a "**sign**" that God is always in control of His created order? These unique circumstantial signals just might preach using these informative verses from the apostle Paul found in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25:

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, '**I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the intelligent.**' Where is the wise one? Where is the Torah scholar? Where is the debater of this age? **Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** For seeing that—in God's wisdom—the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased—through the foolishness of the message proclaimed—to save those who believe. **For Jewish people ask for signs and Greek people seek after wisdom**, but we proclaim Messiah crucified—a stumbling block to Jewish people and foolishness to Gentile people, but to those who are called (both Jewish and Greek people), Messiah, the power of God and the wisdom of God. **For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men**" (1TLV).

In addition, and I suppose for my sake, for by "the testimony of two or three witnesses a thing is confirmed" (Deuteronomy 17:6; Matthew 18:16), I was blessed on Thanksgiving morning by the testimony of General Michael Flynn. The previous day while I was subduing the cascade of leaves, the President officially pardoned Flynn and declared him innocent of any crime. In response to that declaration, the decorated hero posted a Tweet that reflected his thankfulness and joy

for his release from under an ungodly cloud of lies and deceit. As this godly man concluded his remarks, he referenced the words found in 1 Chronicles 34-36:

**"Give thanks to ADONAI for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.**

Declare, 'Save us, O God of our salvation! Gather and rescue us from the nations, that we may give thanks to Your holy Name, that we may glory in Your praise.' Blessed be Adonai, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Then all the people said 'Amen,' and 'Praise ADONAI'" (TLV).

As I read these words, my heart soared into the Heavenly realm when I realized that the Sovereign Ruler of the universe was sharing His immutable Word with multiple people preparing for their Thanksgiving celebrations. Certainly, the Flynn household was ecstatic about their husband/father's freedom from illicit prosecutorial persecution, from a corrupted judge and legal system. In fact, I was so elated that I sent a flurry of exhortative texts to various friends, expressing these "coincidences," and how our God is absolutely in control of all the circumstances of His created order!

Of course, as people of faith, we can all marvel at the handiwork of the Creator and how He operates through human agency. For His Divine purposes, He has chosen to employ different people for specific assignments to advance His Kingdom on Earth. The Holy Writ is replete with examples like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, David, Daniel, Esther, Deborah, Peter, Paul, and John to name a few. But one does not have to peruse the ancient texts to note more recent agents like Squanto or the Pilgrims, or the founding fathers of the United States of America, or Abraham Lincoln, or various evangelists, missionaries, preachers, and teachers of the Word of God (and the list could go on and on). However, at this point in the history of the world, it appears that the Holy One is using some unique characters with their various abilities, both genuine and flawed, to accomplish His will on Earth.

Consider, for example, the current President of the United States, Donald J. Trump—who is no doubt a complex individual with a variety of capabilities and skills. Some have claimed he has a "King Cyrus anointing," which certainly has some parallels. But I have always believed that a "King Jehu anointing" is far more accurate. After all, Jehu's assignment, despite his flawed nature, was to totally upset the ruling class in Ancient Israel and Judah. This Jehu did personally by killing the kings of Israel and Judah, and then presiding over the demise and death of Queen Jezebel. After that was accomplished, Jehu then went after the worshippers of Baal (those obsessed for power, money, and perverted sex) remaining in the Northern Kingdom of Israel with ruthless vengeance. In 2 Kings 10:18-28, the description of how Jehu connived the worshippers of Baal into their destruction is found:

"Then Jehu gathered all the people together and said to them, '**Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve him much!** Now therefore, summon to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshippers, and all his priests, let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for Baal—whoever is missing will not live.' **But Jehu**

**did it in cunning, in order to destroy the worshippers of Baal.** Then Jehu said, 'Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal.' So they proclaimed it. Then Jehu sent throughout Israel and **all the worshippers of Baal came**, so that there was not a man left who did not come. When they went into the temple of Baal, the temple of Baal was filled from one end to another. Then he said to the one over the wardrobe, 'Bring out vestments for all the worshippers of Baal.' So he brought out vestments for them. Then Jehu and Jehonadab son of Rechab went into the temple of Baal, and he said to the worshippers of Baal, '**Search and look that there is here with you none of the servants of Adonai—only servants of Baal.**' Then they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had already stationed 80 of his men outside and said, 'If any of the men whom I am bringing into your hands escapes, your life will be for his life.' Then it came to pass, as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, '**Go in, strike them down—let none get out.**' So they **struck them down with the edge of the sword, and the guard and the captains threw them out.** Then they proceeded to the inner room of the temple of Baal, brought out the pillars of the temple of Baal, and burned them. Then they demolished the pillar of Baal, tore down the temple of Baal and turned it into latrines—as it is to this day. Thus Jehu eradicated Baal from Israel" (TLV).

God indeed used a proud and arrogant warrior—yet with a unique anointing—to eliminate the blatant worship of Baal (power, money, and perverted sex) from Israel in ancient times. In many respects, those with the eyes to see, are witnessing a similar set of modern-day circumstances line up in a comparable fashion. But only time will tell how the present battle between good and evil concludes. . . .

Interestingly, the Biblical concept of a "time of testing" has typically been forty days. Consider the forty days and nights of rain during the Flood, the two forty-day treks of Moses up Mount Sinai to receive the Decalogue, the spies' forty-day reconnaissance of the Promised Land, Ezekiel's forty days on his right side to symbolize Judah's sin, Elijah's forty-day fast on Mount Horeb, or most memorable, Yeshua's forty days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. How providential is it that from November 3rd to December 14th is forty days? Is it possible that the Holy One of Israel is testing His faithful followers, with the relatively agonizing task to watch and research much of the confusing coverage of the Presidential election results? Who can be believed with all the maligned misinformation and deceitful disinformation?

Many people we know or follow on social media, are like yoyos emotionally going up and down over a Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or Parler communique. This is understandable for the natural man or woman, but as Paul informed the Corinthians, the spiritual person has a much more unique perspective given the indwelling of the Holy Spirit or *Ruach HaKodesh*:

**"But as it is written, 'Things no eye has seen and no ear has heard, that have not entered the heart of mankind—these things God has prepared for**

**those who love Him.**' But God revealed these things to us through the *Ruach*. For the *Ruach* searches all things—even the depths of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, except the man's spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the things of God except the *Ruach Elohim*. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God—so we might come to know the things freely given to us by God. These things we also speak—not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the *Ruach*, explaining the spiritual to the spiritual. **Now a natural man does not accept the things of the *Ruach Elohim*, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. But the one who is spiritual discerns all things, and he himself is discerned by no one.** For 'who has known the mind of Adonai, that he will instruct Him?' **But we have the mind of Messiah**" (1 Corinthians 2:9-16, TLV).

With the discerning mind of the Messiah available to Believers, we cannot avoid how the Holy Scriptures indicate that there has always been a conspiracy by the nations of the world against the Lord and His Anointed One. However, according to Psalm 2, the wrath of the Son has on occasion flared up to execute righteousness and justice among the people and nations of the planet:

**"Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples mutter vanity? The kings of earth set themselves up and rulers conspire together against ADONAI and against His Anointed One 'Let's rip their chains apart, and throw their ropes off us!' He who sits in heaven laughs! ADONAI mocks them.** So He will speak to them in His anger, and terrify them in His fury: 'I have set up My king upon Zion, My holy mountain.' I will declare the decree of ADONAI. He said to me: **'You are My Son—today I have become Your Father. Ask Me, and I will give the nations as Your inheritance, and the far reaches of the earth as Your possession.** You shall break the nations with an iron scepter. You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's jar.' So now, O kings, be wise, take warning, O judges of the earth! Serve ADONAI with fear, and rejoice with trembling. **Kiss the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish along your way—since His wrath may flare up suddenly. Happy is everyone taking refuge in Him!**" (Psalm 2:1-12, TLV).

Give thanks to the Lord for He is good! Be anxious for nothing! Take refuge in the Son! And pray that the Messiah will stand up at the right hand of the Father and allow Americans to maintain their God-given inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!

In this season of great uncertainty, the Holy One of Israel will be glorified! He will draw all searching souls to the good news of the salvation available in His Son, Yeshua! Amen and Amen! *Hodu I'Adonai!*

Mark Huey

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CHANUKAH

by J.K. McKee

The subject of what Messianic Believers are to be doing for the Winter holiday season can be very controversial. On the one hand, Messianics should not really be celebrating Christmas, because it is non-Biblical and was created to be one replacement for observing the appointed times of Leviticus 23. On the other hand, should all Messianic Believers celebrate *Chanukah* (חֲנֻכָּה), or the Feast of Dedication? Primarily the debate surrounds the fact that often the celebration of *Chanukah* can become a replacement for Christmas, and that *Chanukah* is not a Biblically-mandated holiday, as it is not in the Leviticus 23 list.

If there is anything we must consider regarding this issue it is two things: (1) We must have an attitude that brings glory to our Heavenly Father, and (2) our actions must foster unity and understanding between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers. Sadly, like many of the issues that we face, the subject of whether or not we should celebrate *Chanukah* has two extremes. There are those who vehemently oppose its observance, and perhaps might even consider it a "gross Jewish error." And, there are those who go overboard in encouraging its celebration, in an effort to prove that they are "better" than Christians who celebrate Christmas in ignorance. Neither one of these positions is right.

In this article, we examine the historical origins of the celebration known as *Chanukah*, *Chanukah* and Yeshua, and *Chanukah* as a special time for those who who are a part of the Messianic community.

## The Prophecies of Daniel and the Rise of Antiochus

Before we can examine the issues pertaining to the celebration of *Chanukah*, we must first understand its historical origins, which actually precede the time of the Maccabees in Second Century B.C.E. Israel, going back much further to the exile of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon in the 500s B.C.E. While in Babylon, the Prophet Daniel was shown visions of the future, which included both the immediate future concerning his time as Babylon would be overtaken by Persia, as well as the far distant future. One of these prophecies included the vision of the four beasts, representative of the em-

pires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (and revived Rome in the end-times). The third kingdom, Greece (Heb. *Yavan*, יָוָן), would arise and would conquer the Persians:

“The he-goat, the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between its eyes is its first king” (Daniel 8:21, NASU).

Many conservative expositors are agreed that this prophecy is a reference to Alexander the Great, the Macedonian king whose father Philip II had conquered the Greek Peloponnesus. Alexander continued his father’s legacy by extending his military campaign into Asia Minor, Egypt, Persia, and all the way into India. Alexander, however, died at the age of 33 in 323 B.C.E. in Babylon. After his death, his empire was divided among his four generals who took control of Macedonia, the Greek Peloponnesus, Egypt, and Syria. It is not surprising to know that ancient history tells us that these four kingdoms became rivals and often fought among themselves:

“As for the broken one, in whose place four arose, four kingdoms will arise from one nation, but lacking its strength” (Daniel 8:22, NASU).

A notable part of Alexander’s conquering of the ancient world was not only the extension of his rule, but also the exposure of the Greek language and culture into foreign areas. Macedonia itself, not really considered to be “Greek” by the Greeks, had been Hellenized during the childhood of Alexander, who was tutored by Aristotle. Part of Philip’s, and later Alexander’s military campaign, was to spread the way of life that had made Macedonia the great power that it was. But, not everyone in the ancient world desired to be Hellenized or forced to become like the Greeks.

Prior to Alexander the Great, the Jewish exiles had returned from Babylon to the Land of Israel. The Jewish province was a vassal of the Persian Empire, but later became engulfed into Alexander’s empire and became a part of Syria. Greek culture was slowly influencing the Jews, with many Jews abandoning the Torah and its commandments in favor of Greek customs and philosophies. It became increasingly more difficult for the Jews to maintain a Torah-obedient lifestyle with the policies of the Syrian Greeks.

Things got out of control when Antiochus IV of the Seleucid dynasty came to power (175-164 B.C.E.). He was actually called Epiphanes or “God manifest.”<sup>1</sup> Antiochus made it illegal for the Jews to practice the Torah, perform circumcision, follow the kosher laws, and worship in the Temple. He moved his troops into Jerusalem and had the Temple desecrated by the sacrificing of a pig, and by having a statue to the god Zeus erected. This, and the subsequent and related events following, are recorded in the Apocrypha in the Books of 1-4 Maccabees:

“And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of

Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die" (1 Maccabees 1:44-50, RSV).

It can be rightly assumed that Antiochus was an ambitious man, and he was making a political power play, demonstrating that he was more powerful than the Ptolemaic Greeks of Egypt. After fighting Ptolemy, he sought to fully control the Land of Israel and Jerusalem:

"When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, that he might reign over both kingdoms. So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. He engaged Ptolemy king of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. And they captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt. After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred and forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force" (1 Maccabees 1:16-18, RSV).

## The Maccabean Era

As you can imagine, the actions of Antiochus were not well received by the majority population of the Land of Israel. Led by the retired priest Mattathias, many Jews opposed the oppression of the Syrian Greek invaders and sought to see them pushed out of the Land of Israel. Many of the Jews, fearing for their lives, succumbed to not following the Torah and would not follow the rite of circumcision or eat kosher. Many of them adopted Greek religion and wanted to "blend in."

As Antiochus' army entered into the town of Modin, where Mattathias and his five sons were living, they tried to persuade them to forsake the Law of Moses and sacrifice to Greek gods. Mattathias refused to give into their demands and proclaimed his loyalty to the God of Israel and to His Instruction:

"But 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 do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's

words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left” (1 Maccabees 2:19-22, RSV).

Mattathias then declares that any Jew succumbing to these demands was a traitor to the covenants and to the God of Israel, and he calls all to join him in a revolt:

“When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Modein, according to the king’s command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar” (1 Maccabees 2:23-24, RSV).

He then began a military revolt against the Syrian Greeks, killing those who opposed him. His zeal is described like that of Phinehas in the wilderness:

“Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: ‘Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!’” (1 Maccabees 2:26-27, RSV; cf. Numbers 26:7-8).

Mattathias would not live through his campaign to see the final victory over the Syrian Greek oppressors. The mantle would pass onto his son, Judas Maccabeus, who would lead the Jews in a revolt against the Seleucids that would take around three years. He was nicknamed *Makkabbi* (מַכַּבִּי), which means “hammer.” During this time, a guerilla-type warfare was carried out against the Syrian Greeks, while the Jews sought allies in the Egyptian Greeks or Ptolemies, the Spartans, and the Romans. Their military challenges and triumphs are detailed and chronicled in the Apocryphal Books of 1-4 Maccabees.

The rise of Antiochus Epiphanes and the events of the Maccabean Era were prophesied by Daniel after speaking about the division of Alexander’s kingdom into four regions. Daniel rightly prophesied that Antiochus would arise to expand his own kingdom, would come against the faithful ones, but would not die in battle:

“In the latter period of their rule, when the transgressors have run *their course*, a king will arise, insolent and skilled in intrigue. His power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power, and he will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform *his will*; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people. And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; and he will magnify *himself* in his heart, and he will destroy many while *they are* at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without human agency” (Daniel 8:23-25, NASU).

Antiochus was unable to stand against the Jews, many of whom faith-

fully resisted any attempt to Hellenize them, namely getting them to reject the Torah, circumcision, kosher eating, and the Temple service, and instead practice Greek religion. Antiochus believed himself to be a god, but later wasted away and died not in battle, but from a flesh-eating disease:

“But the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, struck him an incurable and unseen blow. As soon as he ceased speaking he was seized with a pain in his bowels for which there was no relief and with sharp internal tortures—and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions. Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence, but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews, and giving orders to hasten the journey. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body. Thus he who had just been thinking that he could command the waves of the sea, in his superhuman arrogance, and imagining that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance, was brought down to earth and carried in a litter, making the power of God manifest to all. And so the ungodly man's body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of his stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay” (2 Maccabees 9:5-9, RSV).

## The Miracle of the Oil

The Maccabees drove the Seleucids out of the Land of Israel in the month of Kislev 165 B.C.E., which is in about the month of December. They had the task of cleaning up the mess that the Seleucids had left, notably in the city of Jerusalem and in the Temple complex. Antiochus' forces had completely ransacked the Temple and made it into a haven of idolatry. The Temple needed to be cleansed of its defilement and restored to its previous sanctity so proper sacrifices could once again be performed. Of all of the items of Temple furniture that had to be cleansed and rededicated, one of the most important was the great lampstand or *menorah* (מְנוֹרָה). The *menorah* required special consecrated oil in order to be lit.

As many of you are no doubt aware, modern observance of *Chanukah* is commemorated by the lighting of a *chanukia*, or a special nine-branched *menorah*. This is different from the *menorah* that was in the Temple that had seven branches. It is used because when the Temple was rededicated there was only enough oil to be lit for one day. However, the oil remained lit for eight days, allowing time for newly consecrated oil to be produced. Today a ninth candle or servant candle is used to light the eight candles of the *chanukia* to commemorate the eight days the *menorah* was lit. *Chanukah* (חֲנֻכָּה), meaning “dedication,” became the nation's commemoration of this miracle.

The miracle of the eight days of oil is spoken of in the Talmud:

*“What’s the point of Hanukkah? It is in line with what our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev the days of Hanukkah, which are eight, begin. On these days it is forbidden to lament the dead and to fast.*

“For when the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they made all of the oil that was in the sanctuary unclean. But when the rule of the Hasmonean house took hold and they conquered them, they searched but found only a single jar of oil, lying with the seal of the high priest. But that jar had enough oil only for a single day. But there was a miracle done with it, and they lit the lamp with it for eight days. The next year they assigned these days and made them festival days for the recitation of Hallel psalms [Psa. 113-118] and for thanksgiving” (b.*Shabbat* 21b).<sup>2</sup>

What would have happened if the Maccabees had not stood up to Antiochus and his armies? Not only would they have succeeded in wiping out the Jewish people, either through military defeat or cultural assimilation—but Israel, *in any form*, would not have existed to give rise to Messiah Yeshua. We have ample reasons to celebrate *Chanukah* as Believers in Yeshua today—the foremost of which being that if the miracle of *Chanukah* had not taken place, **there would be no miracle of Yeshua!**

## Today’s Dilemma: Encountering Hellenism

One of today’s serious dilemmas is how *Chanukah* is handled in certain sectors of the Messianic movement. Because *Chanukah* often occurs in close proximity to Christmas, many people say *Chanukah* is a more Biblical celebration than Christmas, even though neither holiday is mandated in Scripture. Many, in wanting to expose the questionable nature of the Christmas tree, become vehemently opposed to commemorating the birth of Messiah Yeshua. Certainly, if Yeshua’s birth is to be commemorated, it would be appropriate to remember it during the actual time of His actual birth (which some Messianics are agreed was during *Sukkot* or Tabernacles, making His conception sometime around *Chanukah*).<sup>3</sup> But celebration of *Chanukah* should not be viewed as a replacement for Christmas. Celebrating *Chanukah* should be an occasion where we rededicate ourselves to God and to one another, as the Maccabees did to the Temple some 2,200 years ago.

Another serious problem is that *Chanukah* often becomes a time for unwarranted “Greek bashing,” which oftentimes manifests itself in criticism and denial of the inspiration of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures. Hellenism, or Greek philosophy, is by no means something that we endorse, but definitions of Hellenism vary. As it concerns the time of the Maccabees, there are some

very distinct definitions of Hellenism that must be taken into account that the Seleucid Greeks forced upon the Jews:

“And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die” (1 Maccabees 1:44-50, RSV).

The Hellenism that the Maccabees fought against included:

- Following the Greek religion, which included the worship of multiple gods and images, and making sacrifices to them with unclean or unfit animals
- A prohibition on animal sacrifices and prescribed offerings according to the Torah
- A prohibition on keeping the seventh-day Sabbath
- A prohibition on circumcision
- A prohibition on studying the Torah and its ordinances, so the people would forget their covenant status with the God of Israel

Hellenism, as the Maccabees understood it, included these things. Are there Christians, and indeed liberal Messianics, that adhere to some of these things? Yes. There are those who believe that God’s Torah is unimportant, that the seventh-day Sabbath was done away with, that eating kosher is unimportant, that circumcision is unimportant, and that the significance of the Temple service is unimportant. **I am not one of those who believes these things to be unimportant.** These things are being restored to and appreciated once again in the Body of Messiah as we approach the Lord’s return.

However, in fair balance to First Century history and the time of Yeshua, the Greek language and Greek philosophy did exist in the world of the Messiah. Hebrew and Aramaic were the local languages of the Land of Israel, but Greek became the standardized language of the Eastern Mediterranean and of business on the street. *NIDB* states it correctly in saying, “The fact that Greek became the language of literature and commerce throughout the ‘inhabited world,’ for example, was of inestimable importance to the spread of the gospel.”<sup>4</sup> If it had not been for Alexander the Great, the Apostles would have had a very difficult time in going out on missionary journeys, as there would have been a whole host of local languages they would

have had to learn, rather than one standardized international language. A Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, was widely disseminated and was helpful in seeing many non-Jews convert to Judaism, or at least hear about the God of Israel, prior to the First Coming of Yeshua.

The use of Greek in the First Century is no different than how the expansion of the British Empire in the Nineteenth Century, and American television in the Twentieth Century, have helped make English the dominant international language of today. We should be thankful that English has the widespread usage that it has today; otherwise the restorations that are being accomplished to the Body of Messiah may not be taking place as easily as they are through communication with Believers worldwide.

Our *Chanukah* celebrations should not be a time for “Greek bashing.” Those who would do so need to understand the complex history of the ancient world a little better. Our *Chanukah* celebrations need to instead focus on the unity of all of God’s people, as we each rededicate ourselves to the Lord *and* to one another—and that individually we need to clean our personal temples of any defilements that we may have.

## Commemorating Chanukah

As we focus on the Festival of Lights, we must not forget the Light of the World, Messiah Yeshua, and we must not forget the hardships and trials that the Jewish people have had to endure. We must be inspired by the dedication of the Maccabees to stand, fight, and even die for the truth of God. We must not succumb to the temptations of the popular culture, but stand for what we know is right, just, and godly.

All of us must join together and rejoice in the miracle that the Lord God performed those many centuries ago as the *menorah* remained lit for those eight special days. *Chanukah* is a great time for us to contemplate the ongoing **salvation history** of our Heavenly Father, and how we should stand up for Him in the similar challenges that the world may present us with today.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Grk. *Antiochos Epiphanēs* (Ἀντίοχος Ἐπιφανής); *epiphanēs* actually means “coming to light, appearing, of gods” (H.G. Liddell, and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 306).

<sup>2</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

<sup>3</sup> Even trying to remember Yeshua’s birth at Tabernacles has been met with a great deal of resistance. Indeed, probably the “safest” time to address the subject is when *Shemot* (Exodus 1:1-6:1) appears in the yearly Torah cycle, as parallels between Moses’ birth and Yeshua’s birth in the Gospels can be considered.

<sup>4</sup> Brewster Porcella, “Alexander the Great,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 33.