

OUTREACH

ISRAEL

NEWS



December 2007



THE MACCABEES
AND OUR FAITH TODAY

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.

Mark Huey
director

Margaret McKee Huey
office manager

J.K. McKee
TNN Press

Jane McKee
youth ministries

Members of the Board:

Mark Huey
Margaret McKee Huey
Russ and Lynda Kroeker
Grant and Julie Richards
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Charles and Carla Smith
J.K. McKee

Outreach Israel Ministries
1492 Regal Court
Kissimmee, FL 34744

Phone: (407) 933-2002
Fax: (407) 870-8986
Web: www.outreachisrael.net
E-mail: info@outreachisrael.net
info@tnnonline.net

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STATEMENT OF BELIEF

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.

There is only one assembly of chosen ones/elect, the people of Israel, of which all Believers in Messiah are a part. God does not have two groups of elect: Israel and "the Church."

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

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the saints 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

OIM Update

December 2007

by Mark Huey

It is difficult to believe that another secular year is rapidly coming to a close—but the standard calendar’s final page, complimented by the shortened days, reminds us that another year in our lives is coming to an end. As the often-used expression goes, “My, how time flies, especially when you are having a good time!” Or rather, as we like to put it: “...**if you are busy about the Father’s work.**” We understand another adage that “Idle hands or brains are the Devil’s workshop.” In order to stay productive in the work of the Kingdom of God, we continue to find various writing, recording, and outreach projects to keep ministering to those who are led to our ministry, who by extension, become a part of our spiritual family.

Once again this past year, it has been our joy to encourage our spiritual family, friends, supporters, and readers to more fully embrace a Messianic lifestyle **through the passing of time by learning to adopt and incorporate the Biblical festivals into their daily, weekly, and monthly routines.** Of course, this begins by first understanding the blessings of remembering the weekly *Shabbat*, and for the purposes of a consistent study, taking some time to consider the weekly Torah portions. Hopefully, our transmission of the TorahScope commentaries has been at least a springboard for some of your studies. Additionally, our Virtual Series of teachings and exhortations that commence during the Spring Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, through the Omer Count to *Shavuot*, and then on through to the Fall Feasts are designed to encourage your participation on some level. This month we will be continuing to encourage you as we celebrate the *Chanukah* season with varied teachings about the Feast of Dedication with **Virtual Chanukah.** Hopefully, your family, like ours, is looking forward to another year of rekindling some of the new family traditions now associated with this special time of year!

Last month, as our family gathered around the Thanksgiving dinner table to discuss all of the things we are thankful for during the previous twelve months, we marveled at just how fast this past

year had passed. Perhaps it was all of the milestones we seemed to pass along on the journey of life that accelerated the time. We were especially blessed that the Lord brought our daughter Maggie into a personal relationship with Him during the Passover season. As you might relate, there is nothing more special than realizing all of your prayers for the salvation of loved ones coming to fruition. Another highlight was having our daughter Jane graduate from graduate school and secure a wonderful job in Nashville, Tennessee. While we are going to miss her presence with us on a more regular basis, we are all confident that she is on the path that our Heavenly Father has ordained for her. With continuing education in mind, we were also very thankful for all of the work John has been able to accomplish with his studies at Asbury Theological Seminary. Although Margaret and I often think how grateful we are that it is John who is getting the intensive study in Biblical theology, we are all learning considerably from his experience. Finally, we were able to give thanks for those in our lives who have passed on in this past year, and are now in the presence of Yeshua.

All of this reminiscing brought to mind a psalm attributed to Moses, who gives us all some words of wisdom about how we should each view the passage of time, no matter where we are located in the annals of history. We are each admonished to number our days in order for us to present a heart of wisdom to our Heavenly Father. Note the conclusion as you read the following:

“A Prayer of Moses, the man of God. Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man back into dust and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’ For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or *as* a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; in the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; toward evening it fades and withers away. For we have been consumed by Your anger and by Your wrath we have been dismayed. You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret *sins* in the light of Your presence. For all our days have declined in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. **As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is *but* labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone**

and we fly away. Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom. Do return, O LORD; how long *will it be?* And be sorry for Your servants. O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, *and* the years we have seen evil. Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty to their children. **Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands”** (Psalm 90).

Can you hear the heart of Moses at the end of these declarations where He pleads with the Lord for favor, which confirms that the work of his hands is for God’s good? Have you taken the time to reflect on what is being said here by this man of God?

Clearly, Moses understood – as should we – that God is not constrained like humans by the ravages of time. The Maker, who created time, space, and matter, does not have to deal with what we as humans perceive to be the speeding up of time as we *age*. However, every human has to contend with the problems associated with time, aging, and the fact that at some point in time – whether before seventy, at seventy, or if by strength eighty or longer – we are each going to expire and depart the restraints of our bodies of flesh.

The question you might want to ask yourself as another secular year comes to a close is simply this: **“When it is all said and done, is the Father going to confirm the work of my hands?”**

May we all receive an approving nod, and perhaps the blessed words “well done, good and faithful servant!”

Until the restoration of all things...

William Mark Huey

If you have been blessed by OIM and T'N'N Online this year, please consider helping us with a Special Year End Offering.

Teaching on **1 Maccabees 1:41-62**

commentary by J.K. McKee

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that each should give up his customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. 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." In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city. Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had. Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death. They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities. And on the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar which was upon the altar of burnt offering. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food (1 Maccabees 1:41-62, RSV).

1 Maccabees 1:41-62 lays out the edicts that were mandated by Antiochus Epiphanes, as he spreads his domain over the Land of Israel. David S. Williams summarizes Antiochus' actions quite succinctly: "Antiochus IV issues a decree that strikes at the heart of Jewish religion, especially Torah observance."¹ There were, however, specific ways that Antiochus went about and did this.

In your studies of the Maccabees, there has no doubt an incredible amount of discussion given to the topic of "Hellenization." But what "Hellenization" actually is may vary from text to text, and from teacher to teacher. In order to have a proper understanding of what it is, dispelling any misinformation that might lead us to improper conclusions, this study lays out what the Maccabees fought against, and what they fought to restore. Perhaps even more importantly, what Antiochus does prefigures future events to befall Planet Earth.

41 Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, 42 and that each should give up his customs.

Antiochus Epiphanes thought he was powerful enough that he could decree everyone under his control to become "a single people" (NJB). The title *Epiphanēs* (Ἐπιφανής) actually means "God manifest," but he was nicknamed "epimanes" or "madman" by many who came in contact with him.² This obviously indicates that Antiochus was a self-delusional leader, but in spite of this, enough people feared him to go along with his intentions. Oftentimes in the history of nation-states where charismatic leaders come to power, those who "know better" will still go along with the leader's plans because of his promises to "restore" or "bring glory" to the country. Antiochus was ambitious to the point that he desired all to "abandon their own laws and religion" (NEB).

43 All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath.

We see that "The nations everywhere complied with the royal command" (NEB). The verb *eudokeō* (εὐδοκέω) actually means "to consent to do, be glad to do" (LS).³ Somehow the vision of Antiochus to expand his empire and make everyone into the same people after his design, worshipping the same gods, dispensing with local and regionalized culture, and perhaps even worshipping him, was appealing to many. If you were in the position of a pagan

¹ David S. Williams, "1 Maccabees," in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 1556.

² Neil J. McEleney, "The First Book of the Maccabees," in M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller, et. al., *The Oxford Study Bible*, REB (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1197.

³ H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 324.

Gentile during this period, and Antiochus' armies came into your town, and all of a sudden new buildings were constructed, along with aqueducts bringing water to your small farm, a police force keeping criminal elements at bay, and providing new services that you did not have under the previous local king or regent, what would you be thinking? Think of all the third-world dictators today who bring electricity or order into places where there is none? Think of the amount of political power drug lords in South America possess because they try to "help the peasantry." And how many people return loyalty for these services because the legitimate government may not help them?

These may be the kind of situations we see with Antiochus expanding his empire, and his edicts being so gladly followed. Certainly with many people, they had no choice but to follow his edicts, lest they get in trouble with the authorities. But what is very sad is that "Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion." Williams remarks, "The most prevalent theory has been that Antiochus aimed to use Greek culture to blend his heterogeneous empire into a more cohesive whole."⁴ They appear to have done this of their own free will, and demonstrated it to be so by practicing idolatry and breaking *Shabbat*.

44 And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, 45 to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts, 46 to defile the sanctuary and the priests, 47 to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, 48 and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, 49 so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances.

Antiochus Ephiphanes, in spite of being referred to as a "madman" behind his back, probably had enough common sense to know that getting the Jewish nation to agree to his demands was not going to be easy. V. 44 says "the king sent agents with written orders" (NEB) to Judea that would be responsible to enforce "strange laws" (LXE). These laws would be totally contrary to the Torah, prohibiting the Torah's commandments to be faithfully observed.

When we examine vs. 45-48 we see exactly the type of Hellenization that Antiochus wanted to introduce to the Jewish nation. The law enforced by the Seleucid overlords prohibited the Jews from observing the Mosaic sacrificial system, and likewise from observing the seventh-day Sabbath and appointed times. To add insult to injury, Antiochus sees to it that the Temple in Jerusalem is defiled by unclean animals being sacrificed on the altar, and pagan temples and shrines begin popping up all over the Land of Israel for Jews to worship the Greek Pantheon of gods. It is made illegal for the Jews to circumcise their sons, namely as in Greek culture the human body was viewed as a

⁴Williams, in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1556.

symbol of great perfection, and to do anything to it, especially the sexual organ, was viewed as mutilation. Commenting on the historical condition, the author of 1 Maccabees says that many people were “prostituting themselves to all kinds of impurity and abomination” (NJB).

The result of this was clear: Antiochus wanted the Jews to “forget the law and change all the ordinances.” By making it illegal to practice the principal elements of Torah observance, the people would be forced to forget what it was all about and by default accept his religious system. I personally believe that forced Hellenization of the Jewish people under Antiochus was only a means toward his ultimate end. Antiochus Epiphanes, as he was surnamed, wanted to be worshipped and immortalized as a god himself. Looking back on his work, I believe he wanted to be able to say, “No one could destroy Israel, but I did and now they’re worshipping me!” **Of course, he never succeeded.**

50 “And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.” 51 In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city.

The direct decree, “The penalty for disobeying the royal command [is] death” (REB), is a sure motivation to get many people to bow to your whim. Perhaps Antiochus and his subordinates were familiar with the stories of the Hebrew God, and how Israel had faced physical destruction many times over, with the most recent in his time being Haman trying to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire. Antiochus’ advisers may have told him that if he wanted the Jews to obey him, he would have to alter his tactics and not repeat the mistakes of the others. The enemy of our souls knew that the Jewish people were the only remnant of Israel left, and likewise that destroying them directly would not work. So, on the threat of death, the Jews living in the Land of Israel were commanded to dispense with their religion and become like the Seleucid-Greeks. While it equally applied for other parts of his empire, these laws were primarily directed toward the Jews.

V. 51 says that “superintendents” (NEB) or “overseers” (LXE) were sent to see that his laws were being enforced. To prove their loyalty to Antiochus, Jews were commanded, city-by-city, to sacrifice to the Greek gods, likely with unclean animals. Many went along with it probably to just preserve their lives, and did not do it happily. Interestingly enough, Judaism today largely believes that any commandment in the Torah can be broken to save a life under the principle of *Pikku’ach Nefesh*, with few exceptions. If one has nothing to eat but unclean insects, one can eat those insects to extend life. But idolatry cannot be committed to save one’s life. Imagine the job the Maccabees had once they defeated the Seleucids and reestablished Jewish independence, the social problems experienced by who was loyal to the God of Israel, and who

went along with the paganism. Suffice it to say, there was probably a substantial amount of suspicion of some in the generation that followed.

52 Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; 53 they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

This is a very interesting statement to consider: “Many of the people—that is, every apostate from the Law—rallied to them and so committed evil in the country, forcing Israel into hiding in any possible place of refuge” (NJB). Here, the author of 1 Maccabees is clearly considering “Israel” to be those who are loyal to the Torah and the One True God. But what the text seems to imply is that it was many Jews, who had become apostate, who joined with Antiochus’ forces, and who pursued their own fellow Jews who had not committed the abominations. One meaning of the verb *sunathorizō* (συνᾱθροίζω) is “**to link w. others in a common experience, unite with, be joined to**” (BDAG).⁵ These Jews who had decided to obey Antiochus’ law not only decided to join in his militia forces, but were a part of the whole experience to dispense with the Torah obedient lifestyle God had ordained for His people. It is bad enough that they obeyed these terrible laws, but here they actively participate in their enforcement.

We are told that the Jews who were faithful to the God of Israel had to flee “into hiding in every possible place of refuge” (NEB). George A. F. Knight comments that “the best of the Jewish people recognized that a crisis had arrived and so went **into hiding** (vs. 53). God’s people could do no other.”⁶ If you were loyal to the Torah and to the One True God, what else would you have done? Not only were occupiers of your homeland coming against you, but some of your own people, collaborating with them, were as well. How difficult would it have been to find a place to hide? The Jewish collaborators knew the Land of Israel much better than the Seleucids, and possibly could even have known the best places to hide. Would it have been hard to find a place where you would not be discovered? This is why an organized resistance against them was the only viable solution.

54 Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, 55 and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets.

While laws were being placed to curtail the Israelite religion, the ultimate desecration came on the 15th of Kislev. McEleney notes, “On December 7, 167

⁵ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 964.

⁶ George A.F. Knight, “The First Book of the Maccabees,” in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 592.

B.C.E., Antiochus built an altar to Zeus Olympios on the temple's altar of holocausts...This *abomination* replaced the Holy of Holies as the center of worship in the temple, and the worship of Zeus replaced that of Israel's God."⁷ Zeus, of course, was the principal deity of the Greek Pantheon, being the king of the gods. To supplant the worship of Israel's God, Adonai Elohim, with this imposter god, would have been the ultimate insult to the Jewish people.⁸ But for some, who may have been wavering in their loyalty to the Lord, it may have also been the turning point for them deciding to abandon their faith in favor of what Antiochus was offering.

This event was in fulfillment of the Prophet Daniel's words in Daniel 11:31: "Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation." It may seem confusing for us because the eschatological term that often describes "the Abomination of Desolation" in most pre-millennial prophecy circles is used to refer to another event, that of Daniel 9:27:

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

Without a doubt, what Antiochus did was an abomination before the God of Israel. But it was not the final abomination spoken of by Daniel that occurs at the end of the seventy-weeks prophecy. A future leader, much like Antichous, eager to unite the world as one people worshipping him, will make all of the previous abominations that have occurred on the Temple Mount seem like nothing. The text uses the plural *kenaf siqutzim* (כְּנַף שִׁקּוּצִים), indicating that there have been *multiple abominations* committed, but this future one will be the *extreme abomination*, topping all the others.⁹ The Apostle Paul describes this in greater detail in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4:

"Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God."

⁷McEleney, in *The Oxford Study Bible*, 1199.

⁸Note that some fringe teachers in the Messianic community today, of the Sacred Name Only persuasion, actually equate the abomination of Zeus on the Temple Mount with Christians who pray in the name of Jesus. Other than such individuals setting themselves up as arbiters of spirituality in God's universe, *not theirs*, the fact of the matter remains that *Zeus* (Ζεύς) and *Iêsous* (Ἰησοῦς) **have two totally different spellings and pronunciations in Greek**. The name *Iêsous* is of Jewish origin, being employed as the transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ) in the Greek Septuagint.

⁹The Hebrew *kanaf* (כְּנַף) specifically means, "**wing, extremity**" (Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], 489).

From Paul's vantage point, the Abomination of Desolation has yet to occur; and from our view today, it likewise has yet to occur. There has been no leader like Antiochus, who has entered into the Temple in Jerusalem to be worshipped as God. In fact, there is no Temple in Jerusalem today where this prophecy could even be fulfilled. The seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel has yet to be completely fulfilled, as when it is all over we are to see the restoration of God's Kingdom on Earth, stated clearly in Daniel 9:24:

"Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*."

The example of Antiochus Euphianes is very, very important to understand. It lays the historical precedent as being one of the many abominations that has occurred on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This abomination in 167 B.C.E. was followed by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., and the subsequent erection of a temple to Jupiter. Likewise, when Islam expanded throughout the Middle East the Dome of the Rock was built on the Temple Mount. Today, we await the reconstruction of the Temple by many of the Temple Mount faithful groups in Israel, and then we can see the climax of all of these abominations. Unlike those who committed abominations in the past, though, the man of lawlessness will be able to broadcast himself to the world, so everyone, not just those in Jerusalem, will be able to see him declare himself to be a god. Do you think Antiochus Euphianes would have liked to do this? Well, the same spirit of antimessiah that was in him will be in someone else in the future.

56 The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. 57 Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death.

Vs. 56-57 describe how religious texts of the Jews were sought out and "torn up and burnt" (NEB). While most Messianic readers may gloss over this, and assume that the Torah or *Chumash* (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is all that is being spoken of, notice that the author of 1 Maccabees has two specific groupings of text in mind. He first references "the books of the law," *ta biblia tou nomou* (τὰ βιβλία τοῦ νόμου), and then refers to "the book of the covenant," *tini biblion diathēkēs* (τινὶ βιβλίον διαθήκης). This was during the time when only the Written Torah, "the book of the covenant," would have been composed for people to read. But, it does not disclude the possibility that some laws or rulings or other texts of the Jewish community used in Torah interpretation may be what are referred to as "the books of the law." Perhaps more likely and probable, "the books of the law" is a reference to the Prophets and

Writings. A hunt was sent out to find these texts and destroy them. Anyone found in possession of the Scriptures was executed.

It is quite amazing that the Bible, in any of its forms, has survived through the history of our faith. Here in 1 Maccabees we see an excellent example of how those even possessing a copy of the Torah, the Prophets or Writings, or quite even writings related to these, were given a death sentence. Almost 2,200 years later many in the Messianic community today, while largely not debating the veracity of the Hebrew Tanach, do call the validity of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures into question.¹⁰ Such individuals do not believe that the God of Israel is powerful enough to inspire His Word in languages other than Hebrew, and that the gospel message could only have been written in Hebrew. In spite of the fact that no text(s) has even been discovered to support such a claim, nor does Biblical history support their opinion, do they consider what the Second and Third Century Believers had to go through in order to preserve the message of Messiah Yeshua? Just like the Jewish people during the times of the Maccabees, the Christians of the Second and Third Centuries faced persecution and the death sentence by possessing copies of Scripture. If Messianics can so unwisely consider their sacrifice in vain, because they were preserving "Greek texts," then what is to be said of the sacrifice of Jews in this passage? Did they die in vain?

Some in the Messianic community do not consider the statements that they make in light of history and the example of the giants of faith. The Maccabees did not give in to religious assimilation; the early Believers in Yeshua endured the persecution of the Romans; and the many Reformers translated Scripture into their native languages on threat of death from the Catholic Church. If it were not for these people, we would not be where we are today: **restoring the faith to its Torah foundation.** We have to be very thankful that God by His sovereign hand preserved the Holy Scriptures as we have them. And we also need to be thankful for the Jewish and Christian saints that have gone before us in the faith.

58 They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities. 59 And on the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar which was upon the altar of burnt offering.

The author of 1 Maccabees writes that "these wicked men used their power against the Israelites" (NEB). Why is the term *en ischui* (ἐν ἰσχύι) used in the text, which literally means "in power"? Is it to contrast human power used against God's people, to God's power which is infinitely *more powerful* and used against His enemies? Notice once again that the author uses the term "Israel," as a reference to the faithful ones who resisted against the evil decrees. The process of going into a town and finding those faithful to the

⁴Consult *Scripture Under Scrutiny: Was the New Testament Really Written in Hebrew?* edited by Margaret McKee Huey.

God of Israel and rooting them out continued along with the abominations in the Temple.

60 According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; 61 and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. 62 But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food.

Our text selection ends describing more of the persecution that was going on among the Jewish faithful who refused to give in to the decrees of the Seleucids. Women who circumcised their children were put to death. Worse yet, "Their babies, their families, and those who had circumcised them, they hanged by the neck" (NEB). Circumcision is pointed out in the text as being one of the prime elements of Torah observance that brought death, likely because it was so offensive to the Greeks.

History has shown that many Jews have been persecuted because of being circumcised, and there are many examples in the Books of 1-4 Maccabees that attest to this. Consider the fact that one practice some Jews had to adopt in Europe was that of semi-circumcision: "In Europe before the war [World War II], Jews concerned with recognition often underwent this half-circumcision. In this procedure, only half of the foreskin is removed. The procedure is enough to satisfy the religion, but equally important, the skin can be pulled over the gland without risk of an infection underneath. This enabled many Jews to escape detection at a time when their religion brought them much persecution."

Likewise, in v. 62 we are told that "many in Israel...stood firm and found the courage to refuse unclean food" (NJB). It is during this same time that Jewish animosity toward pork began. Alfred J. Kolatch states in *The Second Jewish Book of Why*, "scholars have associated the deep Jewish aversion to the pig with the Hasmonean period in Jewish history (second century B.C.E.) when the Syrian-Greeks, led by Antiochus Euphianes, dominated the Palestine scene and tried to force Jews to sacrifice pigs in the Temple and to eat of their flesh."

In the Messianic community today, we do not face the threat of death for keeping the Torah, or for that same matter believing that Yeshua is the Messiah. We might get the occasional snide remark made to us, or subtle put-downs among those of the world, but nothing like the Jews during this period experienced. These people, as committed followers of the God of Israel, did not give in to the prevailing culture around them. They resisted the attempts made to get them to deny Him and His ways. 2 Maccabees 5:22-7:42 describes in greater detail the extent of their persecution and what they endured for all of us. If it had not been for them, *Israel in any form would have been wiped out*, and there would have been no nation for Messiah Yeshua to have been born

into. We are forever in their debt, and must consider their example through whatever challenges we face today in our lives.

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NEW FAQ ADDITIONS

from TNN Online

Chanukah, Celebrated instead of Sukkot: What can you tell me about the Feast of Dedication being celebrated in place of *Sukkot* by the Maccabees when they rededicated the Temple?

When the Seleucid-Greek invaders occupied the Land of Israel, it was forbidden for any of the Biblical holidays to be celebrated, possibly under the threat of death. Obviously, this would have included *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Tabernacles. Many Jews continued to celebrate the appointed times in secret, or in some limited way without being caught.

Some in the independent Messianic community, who largely frown on observing *Chanukah*, say that when the Maccabees rededicated the Second Temple that the eight-day festival they celebrated was Tabernacles, which they were unable to celebrate prior to this time. They base it on statements made in 2 Maccabees 10:5-6:

"It 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. And they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of booths, remembering how not long before, during the feast of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals."

The REB actually says "they recalled how, only a short time before, they had kept that feast while living like wild animals in the mountains and caves." Did the Maccabees actually try to "keep *Sukkot*" while evading the Seleucid armies in the wilderness? We might never have an answer to this question. But what we do know is that while there were some elements of *Sukkot* brought in to the first Festival of Dedication, it was celebrated and mandated as its own unique holiday. The text continues, clarifying what the Jews assembled in Jerusalem were actually doing:

"Therefore bearing 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. They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year" (2 Maccabees 10:7-8).

We are told that this new holiday, commemorating the rededication of the Temple, was "decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year" (NRSV). This makes *Chanukah* something new and unique that was not intended to be a substitute for *Sukkot*.

NEW BOOKLETS AVAILABLE!



REVISITING THE TWO-HOUSE TEACHING

The Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim has become a lightning rod in much of the Messianic community. Many believe it is a claim to a person's lost "birthright," whereby all Believers should begin to take a stake in the Land of Israel and make *aliyah*. Many others also believe that the Two-House teaching is a form of racially-based salvation, with redemption only available to physical descendants of the Patriarchs. Is this really what the Two-House teaching is as defined by the prophecies of Scripture?

Those who recognize what the Two-House teaching actually is—a critical and often overlooked component in the end-time restoration of God's Kingdom—are often sidelined from the extremism that commonly dominates the current discussions. Yet, an objective and moderate approach to the issue is absolutely imperative if all Israel is to be gathered together prior to the return of Yeshua.

In *Revisiting the Two-House Teaching* TNN Online editor J.K. McKee explains what the restoration of Israel is from the Scriptures, how Israel has a mandate from God to bless the entire world, and how Messianic Believers must change their approach to this topic in order to be effective in His service.

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YOU WANT TO BE A PHARISEE

Having the accusation of being a "Pharisee" is one that is not only commonly used by some Christians against Messianic Believers, but has become integrated into the vernacular language of many Christians relating to any individual or group that is perceived as being legalistic and/or archaic in their approach to society and the Bible. It is perceived among many people that being "Pharisaical" is a status that no born again Believer should even try to attain to, because after all, were not the Pharisees the primary antagonists of Jesus Christ? Did not Yeshua have most of His conflicts with the Pharisees and the Pharisaical religious system? Did He not rebuke the Pharisees time and time again for their keeping of the Law?

Few are aware of the fact that the foundational ideas of Messianic faith are firmly rooted within the tenets of Pharisaism. The beliefs in angels, demons, miracles, an afterlife, the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection all stem from the Pharisees. Without a theology based in Pharisaism, today's evangelical Christianity has little to stand upon.

TNN Online editor J.K. McKee addresses the significance of Pharisaical theology to Messianic Believers, and how we can work beyond some of the extremes we often face.

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