

WITHOUT HANNUKAH, THERE COULD BE NO CHRISTMAS

By Messianic Rabbi Ed Rothman

The Time: 168 BCE. *The Place:* Mohdeen, a village several miles northwest of Jerusalem. *The People:* Mattathias, a Hasmonean priest who served in the Temple & Apelles, a Royal officer with soldiers sent from Antiochus Epiphanes. *The Situation:* Antiochus (Opposer, withstander) Epiphanes (G-d manifest), a vile ungodly, power hungry descendent of Seleucid. He ruled the portion of the empire conquered by Alexander the Great that included the area from Syria to the Mediterranean Sea. He was a type of the false Messiah spoken of in the books of Daniel & Matthew.

The Jewish people have always been different from all the other peoples of the earth. Exodus 19:5 says, "If you will obey My voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me from all other people: for all the earth is mine." The Torah, the Sabbath, their language, customs and dress have kept them separate from the other nations for several thousand years. Antiochus commanded that all the peoples under his authority become Hellenized (Greek in speech, customs, religion & thought). He believed that this would consolidate his control over everyone in his kingdom, but underestimated the unwillingness of the children of Israel to serve the false gods of their oppressors.

Antiochus was a man on a mission. He was obsessed with wiping out anything that stood in his way of total cultural domination. He forbid any Jew to worship the G-d of Israel by observing the Sabbath, keeping kosher or circumcising their sons. He forced Jewish brides to spend their wedding night with one of his officers, thus defiling them, intending to eventually erase our identity as a unique people. He

sent his soldiers all over Israel to enforce these malicious edicts.

Throughout the land of Israel, many Jews relented, for fear of dying a gruesome death. But when the troops came to Mohdeen, they met their match in Mattathias and his sons. Apelles, the royal officers, sent by Antiochus, ordered Mattathias to sacrifice a pig to Zeus (chief of the Greek gods), eat its meat and repudiate his faith in the L-RD G-d of Israel. He rose up and killed the soldier for ordering to commit blasphemy. Immediately his sons joined him and slew the other soldiers. They fled to the hills of Judea and started a revolutionary war for independence from the despot, Antiochus. Through G-d's supernatural intervention, this small band of guerilla warriors fought bravely for 3 years and overthrew the numerically superior Seleucidian forces. Mattathias' son, Judas the Maccabee (the Hammerer), led the revolt and succeeded in throwing off the tyrannical hold of Antiochus. Some scholars believe that G-d spoke of this great victory in prophecy (Zechariah 9:8-17), to give them hope to fight until the battle was won.

On the 25th of *Kislev* (a Hebrew month which coincides with December), 165 BCE, they eventually recaptured the Temple in Jerusalem. Antiochus had viciously desecrated it. He had sacrificed pigs on the Holy Altar to Zeus and other Greek deities and poured pig's broth all over the sacred scrolls and vessels. This was a prophetic picture of what is described in Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15, as the *Abomination of Desolation* standing in the Holy Place. The *Ner Tamid* (Eternal Light), the candelabra that perpetually burned in the Holy Place, had been snuffed out. Legend has it, that as the Temple was being cleansed, enough consecrated oil was found to last *only one day*. As they *rededicated* the Temple to G-d in faith, lighting the *Menorah* (the Candelabra) in the Holy Place, they marveled as the oil lasted and the light kept burning for 7 more days, until more holy oil could be consecrated. This is how long they celebrated their victory. They also celebrated for 8 days to commemorate the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles), which takes place in *Tishri* (a Hebrew month which coincides with September & October). Sukkot has a ceremony where great menorahs are lit in the courtyard of the Temple. That's when Y'shua (Jesus) said, "I am the Light of the world." John 10:22 reveals to us that Y'shua went to Jerusalem during the *Feast of Dedication* (Hannukah).

Today, *Hannukah*, which means *Dedication*, is celebrated for 8 days by lighting candles and retelling the story of how G-d miraculously delivered His people from tyranny and caused the oil to supernaturally keep burning for 8 days and nights. We need to understand that if

there had been no Hannukah, there could be no miraculous birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem to a young Jewish virgin named Miryam (Mary) and thus, there would be no Christmas.

Proverbs 20:27 instructs us that, "the spirit of man is the candle of the L-RD. There are nine candles on a Hannukah menorah. The ninth candle is called the *Shammah* (or *Servant*), which lights all the others. John 1:9 says that, "He was the True Light, that lights everyone that comes into the world." We can also *rededicate* ourselves to G-d as we are reminded in Matthew 5:14-16 that we are, "the Light of the world, not to hide our light under a bushel and to let our light shine so others might give glory to out Father in Heaven."

The 9 candles also speak to us of the 9 gifts & fruit of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit), which need to be rekindled in us through rededication of our lives as a living sacrifice to G-d. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 teaches us that our bodies are the *Temples of the Holy Spirit*, we are to therefore glorify G-d in our body and our spirit. The *Shammash*, or *servant candle* is used to kindle the others. In the same way, each of us is used to ignite faith, hope and love in the hearts of those whose lives are touched by ours. Isaiah, the Prophet, called Y'shua, G-d's *Servant* (Isaiah 52:13). Y'shua declared that He came not be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Y'shua calls upon all who follow Him to be the *servants of all* (Mark 10:44). This Hannukah may we DEDICATE our lives, as Temples of the Holy Spirit, to be holy for His glory and to be bright lights, shining in a dark world, holding for the Word of Life.

Philippians 2:15