

"Hanukkah: Commit Your Life to God"

John 10:22-42; Daniel 8, 11

The last Jewish feast of our calendar year is Hanukkah. Hanukkah means 'dedication' and is a holiday that Jewish people celebrate that recalls God's miraculous rescue of the people of Israel from a tyrannical ruler who thought he was god in the flesh. Hanukkah is not mentioned in Leviticus so it is not commanded in the Bible as one of the festivals to keep but as we'll see, the historical events from which Hanukkah came about were prophesied in the Bible, in Daniel 8 and 11. And we'll visit John 10:22-42 where Jesus observed Hanukkah and used it to show us Himself that

Hanukkah foreshadows the Declaration of Israel's true King

And in order to show you Jesus Himself showed us Hanukkah foreshadows Him as Israel's true king, we have to learn how Hanukkah came about in the first place. Let's begin in the book of Daniel, Ch. 8.

Daniel was a Jew who, as a teenager, was taken as a prisoner of war to Babylon in 605 BC. He along with many of Israel's youngest, healthiest and smartest people were taken in the first of 3 waves of exiles to Babylon; the other two happening in 597 and 586 BC when Babylon finally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The early parts of the book of Daniel show Daniel and his 3 friends (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) staying faithful to God even though the Babylonians were schooling them to change their lifestyles, religion and even their names to reflect Babylonian gods and values. God the true God, used Daniel in remarkable ways for the next 70+ years enabling him to serve in the governments of Babylon and later Persia as an advisor to kings. God uniquely gifted Daniel to interpret special God-given dreams to Nebuchadnezzar, as well as gave him visions to see the next future world kingdoms after Babylon. All of these dreams or visions build on each other elaborating on more insight into the future world powers. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream Daniel interprets the dream of the giant statue made with a head of gold (representing Babylon), the silver head and shoulders (representing Medes and Persians who overthrew Babylon), the bronze waist and thighs (representing the Greeks who overthrew the Medes/Persians), the iron legs representing Rome (who overthrew Greece) and finally the feet made of a mix of iron and clay (representing a future as yet to appear empire) that will ultimately be destroyed by a boulder from heaven that will destroy all these kingdoms and establish God's rule. Let's jump to a specific vision of the third Kingdom, Greece, that Daniel gets in Ch.8.

Here Daniel sees a 2-headed ram (Medes and Persians) get attacked and killed by a speedy goat (Greece), who grows a very large horn (Alexander the Great) until it is broken off and in its place 4 horns grow stretching to the 4 winds of heaven (his kingdom was divided between 4 of his generals). An angel is sent to Daniel to interpret this dream and this is what he tells him in 8:21-25,

²¹ *The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king. ²² The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.*

²³ *"In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. ²⁴ He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. ²⁵ He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.*

So here we have a prophecy about the events that instigated the celebration of Hanukkah or the Feast of Dedication. Hanukkah historically

Commemorates God's Rescue of Israel from Destruction **(Dan. 8:21-25)**

This stern-faced king took the title Antiochus, he was the 4th one to do that. He was appointed to be the ruler of Syria, north of Israel but he desperately wanted to control Egypt, run by the Ptolemys. He also called himself Antiochus Epiphanes, Epiphanes means 'Exalted one' because he actually thought he was a god. But the Jews enjoyed calling him Epimanes, which by changing one letter meant 'madman.'

While Daniel prophesied about him, history records the terrible accounts of his atrocities in 1 Maccabees, an extra biblical book that records a lot of Jewish history in the 400 silent years between Malachi and the arrival of John the Baptist and Jesus. In 168 BC Antiochus decided to invade Egypt and take them over. He was actually winning until Rome, part of the 4-part Greek empire at the time but gaining more control, sent an envoy of soldiers and messengers to Antiochus telling him to stop immediately. Hesitating with his answer, the Roman commander drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and commanded him to make his decision before he left that circle. Agreeing yet humiliated, Antiochus sulked back to Syria bypassing Israel as he travelled along the Mediterranean coast. Antiochus had already invoked orders on Israel to renounce God, the Sabbath practices, circumcision and speaking Hebrew. Sadly many Jews compromised their faith and adopted Greek worship and cultural Practices. Yet, some Jews held out and this infuriated Antiochus. So on his return to Syria he detoured to Israel, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. He broke down the altar and the menorah and tore the curtain of the holy of holies. He then put a statue of himself in the temple and ordered people to worship him. And then on the 25th day of the month Kislev, which is November/December, he sacrificed a pig on the altar defiling, sprinkled its blood in the holy of holies then poured out its guts on the Torah scrolls and then set them on fire.

Later in Daniel 11:31-32 there are more prophecies regarding this:

³¹ "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. ³² With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

And there was a small group of brave men who lived in a town called Modin who firmly resisted Antiochus. And this is what Hanukkah recalls. It

Recalls God's Miracle Leading to the Temple's Rededication **(Dan. 11:31-32)**

In this town of Modin lived an old priest named Mattathias, who was the elder of the community. Antiochus' soldiers went there to enforce Zeus worship. As the elder of the community, he chose Mattathias to make a sacrifice to Zeus on the town's behalf or they would all die. He refused. Another Jewish man stepped forward to make peace and offered to make the sacrifice. Abhorred by his fellow Jewish brother's willingness to abandon God and make a sacrifice to Zeus, Mattathias struck down his own brother and then he and his 5 sons killed the soldiers who had come. Thus began the Jewish revolt that led to Antiochus' downfall. Led by his five sons, the leader was Judas who was nicknamed the 'Hammer' or Maccabee in Greek, this ragtag army led a guerilla warfare attack that eventually in 165 BC overthrew

Antiochus and recaptured Jerusalem and the temple.

So this was the first miracle: that small group of Jewish fighters were able to defeat a Syrian army and save Israel from destruction. The second miracle that is ascribed to this time is that when the Maccabee brothers cleansed the temple, removed the defiled altar of stones with clean uncut stones, repaired the Menorah and went to light the lamps once again. However, there is a special oil that can only be used for the Menorah and there was only enough to burn for one day. The process of preparing the proper oil takes a week. So they thought one day is better than none, they lit the 7 branched Menorah and the oil miraculously lasted 8 days. That's why a 9-branched Menorah called a Hanukkahayim, is lit for 8 days starting on the 25th day of Kislev. Some think that story is legendary and the reason for the 8 days was because they wanted to celebrate Tabernacles which had already come and gone and that lasts 8 days.

But the real miracle of Hanukkah is the rescuing of God's people from destruction and assimilation into the world. Because had Antiochus been successful and all Israelites adopted Greek practices, the line of the Messiah would have become corrupt. And Hanukkah

Shows the World's Attempts to Dethrone God **(Dan. 11:36-39; Rev. 13)**

Antiochus thought he was a god and he attempted to dethrone and remove once and for all the true God of the world. It is interesting in the prophecy about Antiochus in Daniel 11, that in the prophecies about the final kingdom that will attempt to dethrone God again, Daniel 11:37-45 doesn't speak about Antiochus but someone in the future very much like him. Because vv.36-45 we read about a future king who will

exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. ³⁷ He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all.

Antiochus invoked people to worship Zeus, the Greek gods. This false king will invoke worship of himself. This looks forward to the Antichrist called the Beast in Rev. 13. We read

⁵ The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. ⁶ He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. ⁷ He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸ All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

Hanukkah sadly reminds us that the world continually has wicked rulers and people who want to dethrone God and remove God's people from the world. And even more sadly, when we come to Jesus' celebration of Hanukkah we see that the Jewish people themselves wanted to remove Jesus who they think is another blasphemer, not much better than Antiochus. Let's go to John 10:22-42. Here we'll see how **Hanukkah prophetically** ...

Comforts us that God Will Eternally Rescue His People **(John 10:22-33)**

In the first part of Ch. 10 Jesus announced He is the Good shepherd and the Gate of the sheepfold. False shepherds, who only want to harm the sheep (a direct reference to the Pharisees and religious rulers in Jesus' audience) are only there to steal, kill and destroy. True sheep don't follow them because in Jesus is abundant life (v.10). Jesus goes on to say,

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

¹⁹ At these words the Jews were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

²¹ But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

And the next verse tells us Jesus attends Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication and this conversation about shepherds and sheep continues and obviously was very recent. Because listen to how this starts,

²² Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

We can see how Hanukkah connections are being made here. Hanukkah was a celebration of the miracles of God. Jesus has been doing miracles. Hanukkah recalled the great exploits of Messiah like leaders like the Maccabees and the Jewish leaders are confronting Jesus by asking Him who are you, once and for all. Jesus affirms that the miracles He has already performed clearly show he must be of God. And He assures His readers that God will rescue and protect His sheep from destruction just as He rescued and protected the Israelites from destruction from Antiochus.

They reject Jesus as the Messiah because he was claiming to be equal with God, something they would be very sensitive to during Hanukkah. So they attempt to stone Him. However, as we see next Hanukkah prophetically

Assures us that Jesus is the King & Light of the World **(John 10:34-42; 8:12)**

Jesus goes on to say in v. 34

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? ³⁵ If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken— ³⁶ what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? ³⁷ Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. ³⁸ But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

At this John tells us some still rejected Him but others did believe that Jesus is the Messiah and one with the Father. Jesus Himself assures us He is one with the Father and that His miracles affirm who He is, Messiah and rightful king of the world, even though he has yet to begin that rule on earth. But throughout John Jesus affirms His deity especially in the 7 I am claims. Back in John 8:12, Jesus announced

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Jesus used Hanukkah to affirm His deity through the miracles He did as proof and His prediction of His own death and resurrection. In that He also assures God’s people that we are secure in the Father’s hand.

But there’s one very practical application that Hanukkah points for us to do. Hanukkah

Encourages us Not to *Compromise* our Faith **(Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:11-12; 1 John 2:15-17)**

Antiochus changed the laws in Israel and made circumcision, observing the Sabbath, Israel’s dietary laws, prayers and the sacrificial system illegal. In other words if you wanted to practice your faith in the God of Israel you would die. Sadly, many compromised and forsook their worship of God and adopted the worldly practices of the day. Many, however, stood true to God and lost their lives for their faith. As have many children of God down through the centuries. So we see these reminders for us in the Bible not to compromise our faith. Paul pleads with us in Romans 12:1-2,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Mercy refers to the judgments God spares us from as His children Many of these are listed from Rom. 1:1- 11:36. In view of these don’t conform to the ways of the world but by renewing your mind you will transform yourself from a world like person to a God like person.

The apostle Peter said it from a different angle in 2:11-12,

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Aliens and strangers refers to travelers, pilgrim, tourists. Our citizenship is in heaven (2022 theme) not here. Selfishness should not be a characteristic of a child of God.

And John says it like this in 1 John 2:15-17,

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

The ‘world’ John defines is the sinfulness that people pursue, the boasting of what you have and accomplish and are willing to pursue and live for. That’s not of God. Those things don’t last. But

God does. Jesus does. The new earth will. And all Jesus' sheep will. Let's not compromise our love and faith in Jesus for a few trinkets or people's affirmation. Let's live for Jesus' Well done, good and faithful servant.'

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