



Jewish Studies Initiative  
of North Texas

## **Hanukah**

### **The Deeper Religious Significance of the Hanukah Victory**

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To Zion Oil and Gas

*November 30, 2012*

#### **Major terms and concepts**

**Greek Seleucid Empire** – encompassed Syria Mesopotamia and Persia

**King Antiochus the 4<sup>th</sup>** - 2<sup>nd</sup> century before the common era

#### **The Hellenizing Jews**

**The Pietistic Jews / Hasidim** - martyrdom

**The Maccabean Family** – Matityahu, Yochanan, Shimon, Yehudah, Elazar, Yonatan

**The Books of the Maccabees** – not included in the canon and not even preserved by Jewish tradition

#### **Second Book of the Maccabees chapter 4**

**10** When Jason received the king's approval and came into office, he immediately initiated his compatriots into the Greek way of life.

**11** He set aside the royal concessions granted to the Jews through the mediation of John, father of Eupolemus (that Eupolemus who would later go on an embassy to the Romans to establish friendship and alliance with them); he set aside the Torah practices and introduced customs contrary to the Torah.

**12** With perverse delight he established a gymnasium at the very foot of the citadel, where he induced the noblest young men to wear the Greek hat.

**13** The craze for Hellenism and the adoption of foreign customs reached such a pitch, through the outrageous wickedness of Jason, the renegade and would-be high priest,

14 that the priests no longer cared about the service of the altar. Disdaining the temple and neglecting the sacrifices, they hastened, at the signal for the games, to take part in the unlawful exercises at the arena.

15 What their ancestors had regarded as honors they despised; what the Greeks esteemed as glory they prized highly.

### **First Book of the Maccabees, chapter 1**

11 In those days there appeared in Israel transgressors of the Torah who seduced many, saying: “Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles all around us; since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us.”

12 The proposal was agreeable to them;

13 some from among the people promptly went to the king, and he authorized them to introduce the ordinances of the Gentiles.

14 Thereupon they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem according to the Gentile custom.

15 They undid their circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant; they allied themselves with the Gentiles and gave themselves over to wrongdoing.

41 Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, 42 and abandon their particular customs. All the Gentiles conformed to the command of the king,

43 and many Israelites delighted in his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath.

52 Many of the people, those who abandoned the Torah, joined them and committed evil in the land.

53 They drove Israel into hiding, wherever places of refuge could be found.

57 Whoever was found with a scroll of the covenant, and whoever observed the Torah, was condemned to death by royal decree.

58 So they used their power against Israel, against those who were caught, each month, in the cities.

60 In keeping with the decree, they put to death women who had their children circumcised,

61 and they hung their babies from their necks; their families also and those who had circumcised them were killed.

62 But many in Israel were determined and resolved in their hearts not to eat anything unclean;

63 they preferred to die rather than to be defiled with food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.

64 And very great wrath came upon Israel.

## **First Book of the Maccabees chapter 2**

23 As he finished saying these words, a certain Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein according to the king's order.

24 When Mattathias saw him, he was filled with zeal; his heart was moved and his just fury was aroused; he sprang forward and killed him upon the altar.

25 At the same time, he also killed the messenger of the king who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar.

26 Thus he showed his zeal for the Torah, just as Phinehas did with Zimri, son of Salu.

27 Then Mattathias cried out in the city, "Let everyone who is zealous for the Torah and who stands by the covenant follow me!"

28 Then he and his sons fled to the mountains, leaving behind in the city all their possessions.

29 At that time many who sought righteousness and justice went out into the wilderness to settle there,

30 they and their children, their wives and their animals, because misfortunes pressed so hard on them.

31 It was reported to the officers and soldiers of the king who were in the City of David, in Jerusalem, that those who had flouted the king's order had gone out to secret refuges in the wilderness.

32 Many hurried out after them, and having caught up with them, camped opposite and prepared to attack them on the sabbath.

33 The pursuers said to them, "Enough of this! Come out and obey the king's command, and you will live."

34 But they replied, "We will not come out, nor will we obey the king's command to profane the sabbath."

35 Then the enemy attacked them at once.

36 But they did not retaliate; they neither threw stones, nor blocked up their secret refuges.

37 They said, "Let us all die in innocence; heaven and earth are our witnesses that you destroy us unjustly."

38 So the officers and soldiers attacked them on the sabbath, and they died with their wives, their children and their animals, to the number of a

thousand persons.

**39** When Mattathias and his friends heard of it, they mourned deeply for them.

**40** They said to one another, “If we all do as our kindred have done, and do not fight against the Gentiles for our lives and our laws, they will soon destroy us from the earth.”

**41** So on that day they came to this decision: “Let us fight against anyone who attacks us on the sabbath, so that we may not all die as our kindred died in their secret refuges.”

**42** Then they were joined by a group of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all of them devoted to the Torah.

**43** And all those who were fleeing from the persecutions joined them and supported them.

**44** They gathered an army and struck down sinners in their wrath and the transgressors of the Torah in their anger, and the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety.

**45** Mattathias and his friends went about and tore down the pagan altars;

**46** they also forcibly circumcised any uncircumcised boys whom they found in the territory of Israel.

**47** They put to flight the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands.

**48** They saved the Torah from the hands of the Gentiles and of the kings and did not let the sinners triumph.

## **Second Book of the Maccabees chapter 6**

**10** Thus, two women who were arrested for having circumcised their children were publicly paraded about the city with their babies hanging at their breasts and then thrown down from the top of the city wall.

**11** Others, who had assembled in nearby caves to observe the seventh day in secret, were betrayed to Philip and all burned to death. In their respect for the holiness of that day, they refrained from defending themselves.

**18** Eleazar, one of the foremost scribes, a man advanced in age and of noble appearance, was being forced to open his mouth to eat pork.

**19** But preferring a glorious death to a life of defilement, he went forward of his own accord to the instrument of torture,

**20** spitting out the meat as they should do who have the courage to reject food unlawful to taste even for love of life.

**30** When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned, saying: “The

Lord in his holy knowledge knows full well that, although I could have escaped death, I am not only enduring terrible pain in my body from this scourging, but also suffering it with joy in my soul because of my devotion to him.”

**31** This is how he died, leaving in his death a model of nobility and an unforgettable example of virtue not only for the young but for the whole nation.

## **Second Book of the Maccabees chapter 7**

**1** It also happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king to force them to eat pork in violation of God’s law.

**2** One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said: “What do you expect to learn by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.”

**3** At that the king, in a fury, gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated.

**4** These were quickly heated, and he gave the order to cut out the tongue of the one who had spoken for the others, to scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of his brothers and his mother looked on.

**5** When he was completely maimed but still breathing, the king ordered them to carry him to the fire and fry him. As a cloud of smoke spread from the pan, the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, with these words:

**6** “The Lord God is looking on and truly has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song, when he openly bore witness, saying, ‘And God will have compassion on his servants.’”

**7** After the first brother had died in this manner, they brought the second to be made sport of. After tearing off the skin and hair of his head, they asked him, “Will you eat the pork rather than have your body tortured limb by limb?”

**8** Answering in the language of his ancestors, he said, “Never!” So he in turn suffered the same tortures as the first.

**9** With his last breath he said: “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up\* to live again forever, because we are dying for his laws.”

**10** After him the third suffered their cruel sport. He put forth his tongue at once when told to do so, and bravely stretched out his hands,

**11** as he spoke these noble words: “It was from Heaven that I received

these; for the sake of his laws I disregard them; from him I hope to receive them again.”

**12** Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man’s spirit, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

**13** After he had died, they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way.

**14** When he was near death, he said, “It is my choice to die at the hands of mortals with the hope that God will restore me to life; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life.”

**15** They next brought forward the fifth brother and maltreated him.

**16** Looking at the king, he said:<sup>d</sup> “Mortal though you are, you have power over human beings, so you do what you please. But do not think that our nation is forsaken by God.

**17** Only wait, and you will see how his great power will torment you and your descendants.”

**18** After him they brought the sixth brother. When he was about to die, he said: “Have no vain illusions. We suffer these things on our own account, because we have sinned against our God; that is why such shocking things have happened.

**19** Do not think, then, that you will go unpunished for having dared to fight against God.”

**20** Most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance was the mother who, seeing her seven sons perish in a single day, bore it courageously because of her hope in the Lord.

**21** Filled with a noble spirit that stirred her womanly reason with manly emotion, she exhorted each of them in the language of their ancestors with these words:

**22** “I do not know how you came to be in my womb; it was not I who gave you breath and life, nor was it I who arranged the elements you are made of.

**23** Therefore, since it is the Creator of the universe who shaped the beginning of humankind and brought about the origin of everything, he, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law.”

**24** Antiochus, suspecting insult in her words, thought he was being ridiculed. As the youngest brother was still alive, the king appealed to him, not with mere words, but with promises on oath, to make him rich and happy if he would abandon his ancestral customs: he would make him his Friend and entrust him with high office.

**25** When the youth paid no attention to him at all, the king appealed to the

mother, urging her to advise her boy to save his life.

**26** After he had urged her for a long time, she agreed to persuade her son.

**27** She leaned over close to him and, in derision of the cruel tyrant, said in their native language: “Son, have pity on me, who carried you in my womb for nine months, nursed you for three years, brought you up, educated and supported you to your present age.

**28** I beg you, child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see all that is in them; then you will know that God did not make them out of existing things.\* In the same way humankind came into existence.

**29** Do not be afraid of this executioner, but be worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that in the time of mercy I may receive you again with your brothers.”

**30** She had scarcely finished speaking when the youth said: “What is the delay? I will not obey the king’s command. I obey the command of the law given to our ancestors through Moses.

**31** But you, who have contrived every kind of evil for the Hebrews, will not escape the hands of God.

**32** We, indeed, are suffering because of our sins.

**33** Though for a little while our living Lord has been angry, correcting and chastising us, he will again be reconciled with his servants.

**34** But you, wretch, most vile of mortals, do not, in your insolence, buoy yourself up with unfounded hopes, as you raise your hand against the children of heaven.

**35** You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty and all-seeing God.

**36** Our brothers, after enduring brief pain, have drunk of never-failing life, under God’s covenant. But you, by the judgment of God, shall receive just punishments for your arrogance.

**37** Like my brothers, I offer up my body and my life for our ancestral laws, imploring God to show mercy soon to our nation, and by afflictions and blows to make you confess that he alone is God.

**38** Through me and my brothers, may there be an end to the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.”

**39** At that, the king became enraged and treated him even worse than the others, since he bitterly resented the boy’s contempt.

**40** Thus he too died undefiled, putting all his trust in the Lord.

**41** Last of all, after her sons, the mother was put to death.

## **Jeremiah chapter 21**

**8** And unto this people thou shalt say: Thus saith the LORD: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. **9** He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he who leaves and goes over to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, he shall at least gain his life.

### **Jeremiah chapter 25**

**8** Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts: Because ye have not heard My words, **9** behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and I will send unto Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations. **10** Moreover I will cause to cease from among them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the lamp. **11** And this whole land shall be a desolation, and a waste; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. **12** And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it perpetual desolations. **13** And I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. **14** For many nations and great kings shall make bondmen of them also; and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the work of their own hands. {P}

**15** For thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto me: Take this cup of the wine of fury at My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. 16 And they shall drink, and reel to and fro, and be like madmen, because of the sword that I will send among them.-- **17** Then took I the cup of the LORD'S hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me: **18** Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them an appalment, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; **19** Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; **20** and all the mingled people; and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Gaza, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod; **21** Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon; **22** and all the kings of Tyre, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isle which is beyond the sea; **23** Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that have the corners of



their hair polled; **24** and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the wilderness; **25** and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes; **26** and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another; and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth.--And the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. **27** And thou shalt say unto them: {P} Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Drink ye, and be drunken, and spew, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. **28** And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thy hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them: Thus saith the LORD of hosts: Ye shall surely drink. **29** For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city whereupon My name is called, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts.

### **Jeremiah chapter 27**

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Thus shall ye say unto your masters: **5** I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the face of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm; and I give it unto whom it seemeth right unto Me. **6** And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field also have I given him to serve him. **7** And all the nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come; and then many nations and great kings shall make him their bondman. **8** And it shall come to pass, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I visit, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. **9** But as for you, hearken ye not to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers, that speak unto you, saying: Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon; **10** for they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out and ye should perish. **11** But the nation that shall bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, that nation will I let remain in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein.'

### **Jeremiah 29**

**4** Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all the captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem unto Babylon: **5** Build ye

houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; **6** take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply ye there, and be not diminished. **7** And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the LORD for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

### **Lessons of Hanukah**

- 1 -Triumph of traditional religious commitment  
as over against assimilation into the prevailing universalist culture
- 2 – Triumph of political self-determination  
as over against the imperialism of the world power
- 3- Triumph of an activist religious approach that teaches
  - that it is incumbent upon man to struggle against evil  
and
  - that religious texts should be interpreted in a broader context of value  
as over against a passivist religious approach
  - that leaves man to accept God’s decree, even if that means martyrdom  
and
  - that reads religious texts in a fundamentalist fashion

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