

The Chanukah Story

In 332 BCE, the armies of Alexander the Great defeated the Persian ruler Darius III at Issus. Only three years later Alexander's swift armies had conquered the entire then-known world from Europe to India. His mentor was Aristotle, and Alexander used Greek culture to unify his vast Empire.

After a very short career, Alexander died at only 33 years of age and his empire was divided between his four generals into four different kingdoms. Two of the superpowers, the Syrian and the Egyptian kingdoms referred to in Daniel chapter 11 as the king of the North and the king of the South, became bitter rivals with little Israel constantly caught in the middle.

In 171 BCE, Antiochus IV ascended the throne in Syria (Dan 11:21). He was a very evil ruler, full of pride, and he took the name Antiochus Theos Epiphanes, or Antiochus Epiphanes (meaning "God manifest"). He worked hard to "Hellenize" his subjects by forcing them to adopt the Greek culture and religion.

As a result two parties developed in Israel. The first wanted to adapt to the Greek influence, while the second was committed to stay pure and faithful to the covenant. The High Priest's own brother was among the Hellenists, and he even changed his name from Yeshua to the Greek name Jason. By offering Antiochus a bribe, he received his help to become High Priest instead of his brother, eventually killing his brother. The apostasy described in Daniel 11:32 was in full swing. *"With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him."*

The apostate Jason went on to build a Greek gymnasium in Jerusalem, where the men performed nude according to Greek fashion,

and a temple to the Greek God Phallus. He also enrolled the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch, the capitol of Syria.

An even more fanatical Hellenist named Menelaus, paid an even larger bribe to Antiochus to become High Priest instead of Jason. Menelaus was not even of a priestly family and in order to pay his promised bribe he had to sell the golden vessels from the Temple.

At this time the ambitions of Antiochus Epiphanes had grown, and he set out to conquer the world and revive the entire empire of Alexander. Eventually Rome stopped him in his tracks, and in anger he began to turn against the Jewish people, destroying Jerusalem and killing thousands. Daniel had prophetically foretold almost 400 years earlier exactly what happened.

"Ships of the western coastlands [Rome] will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. 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." (Dan. 11:30-31)

On Kislev 15, 168 BCE, Antiochus Epiphanes erected a statue of Zeus, but with his own face, on top of the holy altar in the Temple. Ten days later, on Kislev 25, the birthday of Zeus, he offered a pig on this altar. He sprinkled its blood in the Holy of Holies and poured out its broth over the Torah scrolls before he cut them to pieces and burnt them. The Temple was converted to a shrine to Zeus.

Antiochus then went on to issue a death sentence over anyone who observed the

Sabbath, kept the biblical dietary laws, was circumcised or even studied the Torah. Whole families were put to death. Babies were hung around their mothers' necks and they were thrown from the walls of the cities, as thousands became martyrs for their faith. One of them said before he died, "It is good, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God to be raised up again by him." (2 Maccabees 7:14). Hebrews 11:35 says, *"Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection."*

The Deliverance

Eventually the deliverance began with one righteous and godly father. Daniel 11:32 says, *"With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him."* Or as it also can be translated, *"the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits."* (NKJV)

When Antiochus soldiers came to the little town of Modin, close to Jerusalem, they built an altar to Zeus. Then they assembled all the townspeople and ordered an old priest named Mattathias to sacrifice a pig on it. Mattathias refused. But an apostate priest stepped forward in his place in order to perform the abomination. In rage Mattathias grabbed the sword of the closest Syrian soldier and killed him. He then rushed forward and also killed the apostate priest upon the altar. In the commotion that followed his five sons followed his example, and overpowered the other Syrian soldiers killing all of them.

The people fled to the mountains to avoid Antiochus' revenge. The revolt, however, spread. The old priest Mattathias died of exhaustion and sickness after one year, but Judah, one his five sons, who was nicknamed

"the Maccabee" or "the Hammer", because of his military might, succeeded him. After three years of hard guerilla warfare the small band under Judah the Maccabee and his brothers was able to throw out the Syrian forces after two stunning victories in open battle.

"I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword. Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south, and the LORD Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and overcome with slingstones." (Zech. 9:13-15)

After their victory, they immediately set out for Jerusalem to restore the Temple. On Kislev 25, 165 BCE, exactly three years after the Temple had been defiled, they rededicated the altar to the LORD. There was only enough holy oil for the menorah to last for one day, but according to tradition, the oil miraculously lasted for eight days until new oil had been produced.

Whether this is true or not, the Most High had forsure done a great miracle, in that a tiny nation had overcome the superpower of the day and gained an independence that lasted almost 100 years, as the saying goes during Chanukah: *"Nes gadol hayah sham."* "A great miracle happened there (or "here" if you live in Israel)."

The miraculous victory over the ungodly forces of apostasy through the Maccabees gained religious freedom for the Jewish people until the Messiah was born. When he was carried into the Temple by his God fearing parents to be presented before the LORD, the prophecy of Haggai was fulfilled, *"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the LORD Almighty.*" (Hag. 2:9)