

Philosophy, the Culture War, and Hanukkah - Part Two

An Answer to "Greek Thinking" - The Story of Hanukkah

We saw in Part One how Christianity embraced the philosophical (i.e., not literal) way of reading Scripture - which has led to periods of tremendous moral decline among those who say that they follow the Messiah. We also saw in Part One, the Jewish people, after they returned from their exile in Babylon began to take the Word of G-d seriously, and literally.

Something needed to be done - the Enemy could not have G-d's people **actually reading and studying** G-d's instructions, *literally*. So, he went back to his tried and true method from the Garden.

Cue the organ music. The Enemy's rejoinder to G-d's people's renewed emphasis on G-d's very words taken literally, began around 345 BCE.

In the temple of the Nymphs at Mieza around 345 BCE, King Philip II of Macedonia hired a philosopher named Aristotle to tutor his young son. Aristotle had been the star pupil of Plato, who was a pupil of Socrates. Aristotle tutored the young prince for five years and when Philip II died, that young prince became the King of Macedonia. His name was Alexander, and in the next few years he would conquer the known world, and would be called Alexander the Great. Alexander brought to the world the Greek language, the Greek religion, and Greek science; but most of all he brought the world Greek philosophy. When Alexander died suddenly in 323 BCE his empire was eventually divided into four parts, by his four Hellenist generals. The age of universal Hellenism was upon us.

Hellenism was the influence and culture of Alexander's Greek Empire. It permeated all the known world for at least four hundred years, and as we have seen - it is still present with us today.

Two of the empires that emerged from Alexander's one-world empire, was Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Asia. These two Greek empires were in constant competition until the rise of the Roman Empire around 60 BCE. Between Seleucid Syria and Ptolemaic Egypt was the little land of Israel. Israel rests on the land bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa. For the history of the back-and-forth influence that the Ptolemaic Dynasty and the Seleucid Dynasty had on Israel and her people, one must only read the prophetic accounts from 11th chapter of Daniel - written two hundred years before they occurred. The king of the north and the king of the south are easily identified when looking at the history of the Greek empires of Ptolemy and Seleucus.

So the Enemy's plan of attack against G-d's Word was to spread the philosophy and religion of Greece throughout the world. Specific to his plan was the tiny land of Israel. It was there he focused his energy - because his goal was not just to deceive the world, but to destroy G-d's people.

Hellenism began to catch on in the land of Israel in the Second Century before the birth of Messiah. The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, in of all places Egypt. Greek

became the popular language of the people of Israel that had moved to societies like Alexandria, Egypt. Along with the language and culture, came the philosophy and logic. G-d's literal instructions were allegorized by such notable Jewish philosophers as Egypt's Philo. A "kinder, gentler" Judaism that fit better with the other cultures around them began to emerge in Jewish communities in Egypt. No more literal sacrifices - and "beliefs" replaced actual deeds.

All of the machinations of the Enemy were not lost upon a small group of G-d's people in the land of Israel. They were dedicated to the literal words of G-d - and they did not ask the question, "Has G-d indeed said?" or "What did G-d *really* mean?" The battle over G-d's Word would have not occurred if it had not been for these few. Instead, G-d's people would have quietly disappeared into the melee of Hellenism. These few stood up against the attack of the Enemy seen in Hellenism and philosophy. They later became known as "the Maccabees."

Around 175 BCE, a king rose to power in Seleucid Syria. His name was Antiochus IV. He later named himself "Epiphanes" - and claimed to be divine. He is the one Daniel prophesied about in Daniel 8:9. He is called the "little horn." This Antiochus IV is one of the most often alluded despots of Scripture. That is because he took the culture war to new levels of aggression against the very Person of G-d. Daniel 8:11-14 tells us about it,

"He [little horn] even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, 'How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?' And he said to me, 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.'"

Daniel 8:11-14

Just as Daniel had prophesied, in 167 BCE, Antiochus IV cast truth to the ground by issuing the following decree to Israel (1Macc 1:44-48):

- They could no longer follow the Torah of G-d
- They could no longer observe the Sabbath or the Festival days
- They could not circumcise their sons
- They must eat meat that was unclean

Then on the 25th of the month of Kislev (corresponds to December), Antiochus marched into his province of Judea and went into the Temple of G-d in Jerusalem and desecrated it by erecting a statue of Zeus in the Temple and sacrificing a pig on the Brazen Altar. He forbade the daily sacrifices in the Temple.

The historical book of 1Maccabees 1:49-50 tells us,

"To the end they might forget the Torah, and change all the ordinances. And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king [Antiochus], he said, he should die."

1Maccabees 1:49-50

Hmm, sounds like Antiochus has some things in common with modern Christian theologians!
Ah, but that is another story. Back to the point.

Some of G-d's people living in the land of Israel could no longer sit idly by. They were a decided minority, but they had determined never again to ask the questions, "Has G-d indeed said?" or "What did G-d *really* mean?"

It started in the small village of Modin. A Levite of the priestly caste named Mattityahu watched dumbfounded as a Greek official demanded that a local Levite sacrifice a pig to prove the loyalty to the new Hellenistic culture in the land. When the man succumbed to the official pressure (no doubt reasoning in his mind, "Surely G-d did not expect me *to die* for His instructions did He?") - Mattityahu was filled with zeal like Pinchas (Phinehas of Numbers 25). He stood up and said in a loud voice,

"Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments: Yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. G-d forbid that we should forsake the Torah and the ordinances. We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or the left."

1Maccabees 2:19-22

With that, Mattityahu pulled out a sword and killed the errant Levite and Antiochus' official. He then called out,

"Whosoever is zealous of the Torah, and keeps the covenant, let him follow me."

He took his five sons and fled to the hills. They began a rebellion against Antiochus. His eldest son, named Judah (also known as "Maccabee" or "the Hammer") became the leader of their small army. One stunning victory after another, against enormous odds, caused the ranks of the Maccabees to swell (now this is a movie Mel Gibson should make).

Finally, in 164 BCE, the Maccabees succeeded in driving the Greeks from Jerusalem.

On the 25th of Kislev in 164 BCE, just 2300 evening and morning sacrifices (1150 days, or 3 years and 2 months) after the decree against the daily sacrifices - just as Daniel had prophesied - those that would not compromise on G-d's instructions rededicated the Brazen Altar and began the daily sacrifices again in the Temple in Jerusalem. The next eight days were set aside as a time of rededication for the Temple. This would later become known as the "Dedication" or in Hebrew "Hanukkah." This is the "Feast of Dedication" [*Chag Chanukah* in Hebrew] that Yeshua celebrated in Jerusalem in John 10:22-23.

What Hanukkah Teaches

Just what can we learn from the story of Hanukkah to help us in the culture war? Am I calling for armed rebellion? No, and that is not what the story is ultimately about. If one sits down and reads 1Maccabees and Daniel 8 and 11, it becomes very clear what the message is: ***G-d blesses with victory, those who are zealous for His literal words.*** Victory in what form? Against the culture that lulls us into compromise and ineffectiveness. The rebellion against Antiochus did not actually start in Modin, when Mattityahu took up arms. The rebellion against the culture

began when G-d's people purposed and did what G-d commanded. The rebellion began long before Antiochus issued his decrees that were opposed to Torah. Remember them?

- They could no longer follow the Torah of G-d
- They could no longer observe the Sabbath or the Festival days
- They could not circumcise their sons
- They must eat meat that was unclean

Now, go down that list and you will find that these are things in which most Evangelical Christians would **agree with Antiochus completely**. Add to that the annulling of the Temple service and the only thing modern Christians have any beef with Antiochus over was his idolatry. Makes you wonder doesn't it? Or maybe not...

The men and women who determined to literally obey G-d, no matter how silly it looked, and no matter how great the persecution that followed, had great exploits because through their faith-filled obedience, they learned to know G-d. Here is how Scripture prophetically speaks of these very same men and women of the time of the Maccabees:

"...but the people who know their G-d shall be strong, and carry out great exploits."

Daniel 11:32b

You see, the better part of Daniel 11 is a prophecy against Antiochus and for the godly men and women who did not fall prey to his deceit - and a foreshadowing of a time yet to come. Antiochus was a type, or figure, of the coming Anti-Christ. Just like Antiochus pronounced his decrees to logically annul G-d's commands; and just like the Greek culture and philosophy that sought to allegorize the Word of G-d - so will the coming Anti-Christ.

Antiochus, was called a "man against Torah." Yeshua, in Matthew 24:15 indicates that one like Antiochus would repeat what Antiochus did when He polluted the Temple of G-d. Paul indicates that the coming Anti-Christ would also mirror what Antiochus did with regard to G-d's instructions. 2Thessalonians 2:37 refers to him as the "man of sin" and coming in the "mystery of lawlessness." The word "lawlessness" when taken into the Greek and then Hebrew is literally, "Against Torah," or against G-d's instructions. The coming Anti-Christ will be like Antiochus - "one against Torah."

Faithful Obedience

G-d has given us a mind. G-d does expect us to use it. That does not mean that we should approach G-d's instructions with a philosophical approach.

Let's look at that word for just a moment. The English word "philosophy" comes from the Greek "*philosophia*" - *philo* is "love"; and *sophia* is "wisdom." It means, "love of wisdom." So who doesn't want to love wisdom? I don't, not if it is man's wisdom. And that is what philosophy is: man's wisdom. Scripture has much to say about true wisdom from G-d, and man's wisdom. First and foremost true wisdom is quite simply Scripture, *not man's perspective of Scripture*. Let's go back to the Garden...

There were two unique trees it seems in the Garden. There was the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" and the "Tree of Life" (Genesis 3:22). The Woman and the Man were free to eat

of the Tree of Life - but because they decided that knowledge gained their way was better, they were forbidden to eat of the Tree of Life after that time. There was a choice: Knowledge, or Wisdom. Our choice is the same, and all Scripture is focused upon getting back to the Garden, and to the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life is Wisdom, G-d's Wisdom. This is what Proverbs 3:13-19 is speaking of:

*"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; For her [wisdom] proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. **Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are shalom. She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.** HaShem by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens."*

Proverbs 3:13-19

This passage is a part of the Synagogue liturgy, which has been said since before the days of Yeshua with regard to the Torah. **Torah = Wisdom**. All G-d's instructions are paths of shalom. All G-d's instructions are as a Tree of Life to those who take hold of them.

By the way, if you saw that it was by wisdom that G-d created the earth, then you also understand that this is language that John used in John 1 in referring to Yeshua as the "Word." You see, "wisdom" = Torah = Yeshua. He is the embodiment of G-d's Word, His instruction, His Torah; or better yet, it represents Him.

Our response to G-d's instructions will dictate whether we are living in man's wisdom, or depending upon G-d's. For example: Let's say you are reading G-d's Word and come across something you have never seen before. An instruction, a command, that appears to be something G-d wants His people to do. The man or woman who approaches G-d's Word as David did in Psalms 19 and Psalms 119 thinks like this: *"This is something G-d has said. G-d is good, and all of His instructions are ways of shalom and pleasantness. This will make me happy as I learn from Him in doing it."* This person will be disappointed if the command outlined is impossible for him to do.

Impossible? Why yes. There are commands in Scripture that were given to certain individuals only. For example, Genesis 22 where G-d instructs Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. It is also impossible for women to obey all the instructions to men and vice versa. It is impossible (for now) for most to fulfill the commands that deal with living in the Land of Israel.

The difference is in our approach to G-d's Word. If we are looking for ways or explanations as to why something does *not* apply to us, as opposed to looking for ways to do whatever G-d commands, we will never see what G-d has said. On the other hand, if we approach G-d's instructions with delight, we will immediately have a complete change of perspective on all of G-d's Word. This is faithful obedience. Not obedience in order to gain some right standing with G-d. Not mental agreement alone in order to replace the actual *doing* of what G-d has said. **Faithful** obedience. This is what James was speaking of when He summed up the Royal Torah of G-d (James 2). It is faith **mixed with** obedient deeds.

Treat with extreme suspicion any teaching (and **especially** any teacher) that attempts to explain away the plain meaning of Scripture by use of allegory.

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 5:19

The Revelation

You have no doubt heard the biblical axiom, *"Without a vision the people perish..."* It is used often in an effort to establish a *raison etre* for a "church." It attempts to use Scripture to support the build-it-and-they-will-come model to promote church building projects; or the "praise = entertainment; worship = solemnity" model to promote church programs. Try finding a church building program that does not contain the word "vision" in it and you are doing well. One problem with this axiom is that it is only half of the verse from Proverbs 29:18:

"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps [guards and cherishes] the Torah."

Proverbs 29:18

Notice, the word "revelation" is used. This better explains what the King James Version is saying when it uses the word "vision." In typical Hebrew parallelism, the phrases are meant to offset one another.

- "no revelation" versus "cherishes the Torah"
- "cast off restraint" versus "happy [blessed]"

Beloved, this one verse could be a proof text for what I am writing. The fact that the American Evangelical church has lost the culture war by **forfeit** is proof that she has not adhered to "revelation" - which is Torah (i.e. G-d's revealed Word). She has "cast off restraint" because she thinks G-d's instructions are merely suggestions, and all that matters is "faith" (Read Romans 3:31: *"Do we then make void the Torah through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, **we establish the Torah.**"*).

It is time for a change. It is time for G-d's people to abandon man's thinking and turn to, and *do* G-d's ways. It is time for G-d's people to abandon Greek thinking and simply delight in obedience to G-d's Word. But that will not happen as long as G-d's people continue to listen to sermons, teachings, and read for themselves about the theology of the Bible - instead of humble, faithful obedience to G-d's Word. It will never happen as long as G-d's people approach Scripture in the way of philosophy.

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Messiah."

Colossians 2:8

Have a Blessed Hanukkah, and may you dedicate anew yourself to Yeshua - the Light of the World.