



Chanukah

A Struggle for Worship

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Chanukah- A Struggle for Worship Kislev 5781

To many individuals, the days of Chanukah are simply about a miracle that involved oil, which happened more than 2,000 years ago in a distant place to Jewish people. In fact, most Christians do not celebrate this festival nor see any relevance in it for them. Such an understanding and response shows great ignorance concerning the moving of G-d and His message to followers of Messiah Yeshua (Jesus Christ). However, in our generation, more and more believers are learning from the Gospel of John, that Yeshua went up to Jerusalem specifically to celebrate the feast of Chanukah (see John 10:22) and therefore, if these days (Eight Days of Chanukah) were important to Him, then certainly they should also be important to us.

Although Chanukah did involve a miracle with oil, this miracle only served to confirm a greater miracle; namely, the miraculous victory of the Jewish people over the mighty Greek Empire. This victory was about one thing~the right to worship G-d according to the Torah. The wicked leader of the Greeks who ruled over Israel was Antiochus Epiphanes. Under his leadership, the Jewish people were ordered to turn away from G-d's instructions, i.e. the Torah, and assimilate into the Greek culture. Such behavior would grieve G-d, prohibit Him from blessing Israel and ultimately bring destruction to the nation. What may be surprising is that most of the Jewish people were agreeable to assimilate.

Obviously, Antiochus Epiphanes was a tool of Satan and as often is the case, Satan uses governmental leaders to institute his policies; policies that are intended to weaken the people of G-d and turn them towards satanic purposes and away from the will of G-d. At first, only a very small group of priests (led by the Maccabean family) resisted the Greek Empire. However, over time more Jews joined with them and G-d gave to His covenant people a great victory. For the purpose of this article, we will examine what the war was really about. It has already been said that it concerned the right / freedom to worship according to the Scriptures. What one learns about Chanukah provides a most informative perspective concerning the End Times. Having this perspective will help Yeshua's followers overcome the attacks of the enemy and worship G-d faithfully in the midst of most difficult times.

Many students of the Bible see Antiochus Epiphanes as a typology of the antichrist. In regard to the antichrist, there are two issues which will be considered: *The Mark of the Beast* and *The Abomination of Desolation*. The final seven years of this world, prior to the Millennial Kingdom, is known as Daniel's 70th week. This period will begin with a Temple functioning in Jerusalem. This Temple will not be one that is pleasing to G-d or represent the true worship of Him. It will solely be for the purpose of the antichrist. The "worship" that will be endorsed at this time will be that of religious pluralism, which will assert that all religious views are legitimate and any attempt to present one religion as the true faith of G-d will be prohibited and persecuted. Yet, as the antichrist will strengthen his position as the leader of a one world government (an empire known as the beast), he will eventually demand that all people worship him.

The Mark of the Beast. One of the most frequent questions asked relating to the Mark of the Beast concerns fear. Many believers are very worried that one will take this *Mark* by accident or unknowingly. This is not a possibility! The primary purpose of this *Mark* is to affirm an absolute loyalty to the beast, i.e. the empire of the antichrist. It would not meet the

objectives of the antichrist for individuals to receive the *Mark* unwittingly. Although there will be much coercion and pressure placed upon all people to take the *Mark* (for example, one will not be allowed to do any financial activity without this *Mark*), nevertheless one must affirm an absolute loyalty to the antichrist's empire in order to receive it. Believer's must refuse the *Mark of the Beast* and therefore our refusal will make it very clear who is to be persecuted, arrested, and eventually put to death. It is most significant that in Revelation chapter 13 the *Mark of the Beast* is discussed in relationship to making an idolatrous image. This image is to the *Beast* and introduces a major shift in a policy of the antichrist's empire. Although initially there was a degree of freedom to worship whatever and however one desired (religious pluralism), with some restrictions as previously were mentioned; as the antichrist becomes more secure in leadership, religious pluralism will end and there will be abrupt change to only worship the *Beast* (the government) and its leader (antichrist). This is taught in Revelation chapter 17, when the Harlot in verse 16 is destroyed. It is important for the reader to understand that the Harlot represents the primary tenet of the empire, idolatry.

Idolatry will serve at the beginning of the End Times as the basis for gathering support for the antichrist empire. Idolatry is nothing more than a human attempt to justify and conceal one's own sinful desires through a "religious" expression. The world will embrace this condoning of immorality and unwillingness to acknowledge the true and absolute standards of G-d. Only believers in Yeshua will oppose these policies of the antichrist and they will be persecuted intensely, suffering much and even being put to death.

One of the most important events during the End Times will be the *Abomination of Desolation*. Even though religious tolerance was a major tenet of the empire, both the *Mark of the Beast* and the making of the image to the *Beast* (Revelation 13:12-17) lay the foundation for the *Abomination of Desolation*. It is significant that both Yeshua (Matthew 24:15) and Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) spoke of this event in the terms in which they did. Both placed the *Abomination of Desolation* in the End Times. Whereas Yeshua said it would take place prior to the time known as Jacob's Trouble, Paul revealed that it will precede the Rapture. It is vital that one remembers that the promise which believers have from the L-rd is that we will not encounter / experience the wrath of G-d. This is not the case for those of Israel (the Jewish people) who have yet to receive the Gospel. This means that the time of Jacob's Trouble will coincide with the outpouring of G-d's wrath. However, just like in Egypt during the plagues, the L-rd will protect His covenant people from His plagues. This fact does not mean that the Jewish people will not suffer during this period. In reality, the Jewish people will suffer their worst persecution ever in the End Times. But this persecution will not be from the wrath of the L-rd, but from antichrist and his followers. Daniel prophesied about this period in Daniel 12:1 and Yeshua also in Matthew 24:21.

Many Bible students err in assuming the period known as *The Great Tribulation* is concurrent with the wrath of G-d being poured out upon the world. This is not the case. When Yeshua spoke in Matthew 24:21, He speaks about "great tribulation" and NOT *The Great Tribulation*. There is no definite article in this verse (Matthew 24:21) in regard to the phrase "great tribulation". However, when John writes in the book of Revelation, he does in fact speak about those who suffered during primarily the fifth seal as coming out of *The Great Tribulation* and, although many translations ignore the definite articles, the Greek text does have them. The mistake many make is applying human logic to the text rather than relying on the exegetical indications in the text. In other words, it makes sense to assume that The Great Tribulation will be the worst time of suffering in the world and will relate to Almighty G-d pouring out His wrath. Yet, in reality, this is not what the Scriptures reveal. One must become very familiar with John, the author of the book of Revelation. When he wrote the book of Revelation, **he**

focused upon the disciples, i.e. believers in the end times, who would experience the things about which he wrote. In Revelation 7:14 one reads,

“...and he said to me, ‘These are the ones having come out of The Great Tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.’”

It is incorrect to understand those ones which John is speaking about as only referring to those who were unbelievers at the time of the Rapture and who came to faith in the midst of the outpouring of G-d’s wrath. There are two primary reasons why such a view is incorrect.

The first is that Scripture does not have any references to a great multitude **πολύς ὄχλος** coming to faith during G-d’s wrath (other than a remnant of the Jewish people). On the contrary, the book of Revelation states emphatically that people would not repent even when experiencing the pain of the wrath of G-d (See Revelation 9:20-21, 16:9, and 16:11). The second reason is that when John speaks of this great multitude which came out of *The Great Tribulation*, he also states that they will be before the throne of G-d, serve Him day and night, neither hunger or thirst and nor shall the sun or heat harm them. Such blessings are not reserved only for the limited group who came to faith at one particular time, but for all believers who came to faith throughout the generations. Hence, *The Great Tribulation* refers uniquely to the persecution that believers will endure in the End Times which is carried out specifically by the empire of the antichrist.

One additional issue which is often discussed concerns the Temple that will be functioning in the End Times. It has already been stated that this Temple will not be pleasing to G-d and will not involve proper worship. However, the Temple that will be in the Millennial Kingdom will indeed be pleasing to G-d and true worship will take place there according to the Torah. It is of this Temple (Millennial Temple) that the Prophet Zechariah spoke in Zechariah 6:12-15.

In conclusion, a proper understanding of the events and circumstances of Chanukah greatly assist believers to perceive the events of the End Times and the faithfulness of G-d to provide victory to His covenant people so we can worship our L-rd in Spirit and in Truth.