

Introduction:

1. The man is one of the great heroes of Jewish history. He saved the Jewish nation from extinction.
 - a. Nicknamed “the hammer,” he is unknown to most folks, though a holiday honors his exploits.
 - b. The man and his companions were the subject of a notable prophecy in the book of Daniel.
2. Who is the man? What did he do? What holiday honors his great military success?

The Lesson:

I. As a beginning point, we go to the book of Daniel.

- A. Daniel sets the historical context for this man and the events associated with him.
 1. Daniel spoke of four empires, Daniel 2:36-40, 44: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome.
 2. Our focus is on Greece, the dominant world power as Alexander the Great conquered the nations. Daniel prophesied of Greece and Alexander in Daniel 8:20-22. Alexander defeated Media and Persia and established Greece as the ruling power in 331 BC.
 3. Alexander died eight years after his conquest (323 BC). His kingdom was then divided among his four generals. Four kingdoms arose out of Greece. Daniel spoke of these in Daniel 8:22, 5-8. The two prominent generals (for our study) were Ptolemy and Seleucus.
 4. Ptolemy ruled the south—Egypt. Seleucus ruled the north—Syria. These kingdoms play a prominent role in Daniel’s prophecies, Daniel 11:3-5, 13. These kingdoms warred against each other for an extended period. Jerusalem was controlled by the South from 320-198 BC. The North controlled Jerusalem in 198 and ruled until 165 BC. Three different Syrian kings ruled this period, the last of which was Antiochus Epiphanes.
 5. Antiochus Epiphanes is the subject of prophecy in Daniel 11:21.
- B. Antiochus Epiphanes (“the illustrious”) was vile! (Jews called him Epimanes, “the madman.”)
 1. In 167 BC, he enforced a policy of Hellenization upon the Jews. They were required to adopt Greek culture and Greek gods. He forbade all Jewish practices and customs. The temple was defiled with pagan worship. The keeping of the Sabbath, circumcision, and other Jewish practices were strictly forbidden. An image of Jupiter was erected in the Temple; Greek soldiers with prostitutes practiced lewd acts in the temple courts; pigs were sacrificed on the altar; drunken orgies were held in the holy city; copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were ordered destroyed (*Pfeiffer, Between the Testaments*, p. 81).
 2. Sadly, some Jews accepted these changes. Many who did not died as martyrs.
 3. All of this was the subject of prophecy in Daniel 11:29-35. Notice the words, “but the people who know their God shall be strong and shall carry out great exploits.” Historically, these people are identified as the Maccabees.
- C. The Maccabees was a group of Jews who resisted Hellenism and fought against the desecration of Judaism. They led a successful rebellion against Syrian rule.

1. A priest named Mattathias was determined to stop the flagrant pagan worship and reclaim the temple for worship of God. He was ordered by an emissary of Antiochus to offer a pig as a sacrifice; he refused! When another Jew stepped forward to do it, Mattathias killed him as well as the emissary of Antiochus. With five sons and a small army, Mattathias fled to the mountains. From there, they conducted guerilla warfare against the Syrians.
 2. After the death of Mattathias, the battle passed to his son, Judah the Maccabee (“the hammer”). Through his leadership many victories came. The name was eventually worn by his forces. The Syrians underestimated Jewish strength and the power of their God! The Maccabees eventually took the city of Jerusalem, as the Syrians fled for their lives.
 3. Judah reclaimed the temple, cleansing it of paganism; heathen altars and statues were destroyed. Altars to the true God were erected. Holiness was restored to the temple!
 4. It was in the winter, on the 25th day of Kislev, that the Jews observed a special feast, dedicating the temple to God once more. But when they came to light the golden lampstand they found only one cruise of oil—enough to light the menorah for only one day. It was claimed by the Jews that the oil in the lampstand lasted, not one day, but eight days. If the story is accurate, then we can only conclude that God performed a miracle!
- D. From that year (165 BC) forward, the Jews have observed an eight-day feast—the Feast of Dedication (*Hebrew*—Hanukkah). This was a feast that Jesus attended at least once, John 10:22. It is known as the Festival of Lights because of the eight days of miraculous light.

II. The observance of the Festival of Lights—Hanukkah.

- A. Jews today keep this annual celebration beginning on the 25th of Kislev (November 20, 2011).
 1. A menorah with nine lamps is used (the one in the temple had seven lamps). The center light is used for lighting one of the other eight on each of the eight nights of the festival.
 2. Hanukkah customs include a game played with a dreidel, a four-sided top with Hebrew letters on the sides—the first letters to the words “Nes Gadol Haya Sham”—“A Great Miracle Happened There.” It is also customary to eat potato latkes (pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly donuts), foods with oil in them, to remind them of the miracle of the oil.
 3. And, in a similarity with Christmas, gifts are given to the children.
- B. Hanukkah to the Jews might be compared to the American Fourth of July. It is about liberty.
- C. Christians do not celebrate Hanukkah, but the events of 165 BC do have meaning to us!
 1. They remind us that God protected the Jewish nation as a distinct people.
 2. Thus, God kept alive His promise to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3. The Jewish nation existed so that God might bring about His promise of a Savior—the seed promise to Abraham.
 3. Christ has now come; God has worked out a plan for our salvation, Galatians 3:16, 26-29.

Conclusion:

1. When you see a menorah, or hear the word Hanukkah, remember it has to do with your salvation.
2. God has done a lot to secure your salvation. What have you done in response to God?