

## THINK LIKE A MACCABEE

### 1 Kings 19:1-9, 13- Elijah Flees to Horeb

19 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” <sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” <sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” <sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>14</sup> He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” <sup>15</sup> The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. <sup>16</sup> Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. <sup>17</sup> Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. <sup>18</sup> Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

### Psalm 33:12-22

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance.

<sup>13</sup> From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind;

<sup>14</sup> from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth—

<sup>15</sup> he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.

<sup>16</sup> No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength.

<sup>17</sup> A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot

save.

<sup>18</sup> But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,  
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,

<sup>19</sup> to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

<sup>20</sup> We wait in hope for the LORD;  
he is our help and our shield.

<sup>21</sup> In him our hearts rejoice,  
for we trust in his holy name.

<sup>22</sup> May your unfailing love be with us,  
LORD,

even as we put our hope in you.

## **Romans 11:1-6 The Remnant of Israel**

11 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: <sup>3</sup> “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”? <sup>4</sup> And what was God's answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” <sup>5</sup> So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup> And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

### **Message:**

ALMOST SIX CENTURIES BEFORE JESUS WAS BORN, THE BABYLONIANS INVADED JUDEA. THEY CONQUERED JERUSALEM, TORE DOWN SOLOMON'S TEMPLE AND HAULED THE RESIDENTS OFF TO BABYLON AS PRISONERS OF WAR. WITH NO TEMPLE, THE JEWS WERE UNABLE TO WORSHIP AT ALL BECAUSE GOD HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY WERE TO WORSHIP ONLY IN THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE.

ABOUT SIXTY YEARS LATER, THE PERSIANS CONQUERED THE BABYLONIANS AND ALLOW THE JEWS TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM TO REBUILD THEIR TEMPLE. IN THOSE DAYS, THE PERSIANS—NOW CALLED IRANIANS—WERE FRIENDLY TOWARD THE JEWS. AFTER THE JEWS FINISHED REBUILDING THE TEMPLE, THEY DEDICATED IT TO THE LORD AS THE TORAH PRESCRIBED. THE HEBREW WORD FOR “DEDICATION” IS “HANNUKAH” AND IT IS THIS DEDICATION OF THE NEW TEMPLE THAT THE JEWS COMMEMORATE IN THEIR CELEBRATION OF THE FESTIVAL OF HANNUKAH. AFTER THEIR FIRST “HANNUKAH” THE JEWS RESUMED THEIR WORSHIP AND THINGS WENT WELL FOR A FEW CENTURIES. THEN, DISASTER STRUCK AGAIN. A MAN NAMED ALEXANDER THE GREAT, A GREEK, CONQUERED PERSIA ALONG WITH MOST OF THE REST OF THE KNOWN WORLD, AND ESTABLISHED A GREEK EMPIRE. WHEN ALEXANDER DIED, THE EMPIRE WAS DIVIDED INTO FOUR PARTS.

THE PART THAT INCLUDED ISRAEL WAS RULED BY A MAN NAMED ANTIOCHUS, WHO WAS THE KING OF SYRIA. NOW THE GREEKS WERE VERY PROUD OF THEIR CULTURE AND DECIDED TO DO THE WORLD A FAVOR BY CONVERTING EVERYONE TO HELLENISM—WHICH WAS WHAT GREEK CULTURE WAS CALLED. ANTIOCHUS WAS FANATICAL IN THIS REGARD. HE WAS PROBABLY A BORDERLINE LUNATIC. HE REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS “ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES”—WHICH MEANT “MANIFEST GOD.” THE JEWS CALLED HIM “ANTIOCHUS EPIMEDES” WHICH MEANT MANIFEST FRUITCAKE.

ANTIOCHUS SET ABOUT FORCING THE ISRAELITES TO ABANDON JUDAISM AND ADOPT GREEK CULTURE AND GREEK RELIGION. THE TORAH WAS BANNED ALTOGETHER. JEWISH DIETARY LAWS, CIRCUMCISION, TEMPLE WORSHIP, OBSERVANCE OF JEWISH FESTIVALS—ALL OF THESE WERE STRICTLY PROHIBITED. AND PUNISHMENTS FOR IGNORING THE PROHIBITIONS WERE HORRIFIC. IF A MAN WAS FOUND TO POSSESS A TORAH HE WAS KILLED. IF A MALE CHILD WAS FOUND TO BE CIRCUMCISED, HE WAS TORN FROM HIS MOTHER'S ARMS AND PUT TO DEATH BEFORE HER VERY EYES. THE

JEWS WERE FORCED TO SACRIFICE THEIR RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS ON THE ALTAR OF GREEK CULTURE.

DOES ANY OF THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

AS ANTIOCHUS WAS HOSTILE TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE TORAH, CONTEMPORARY SECULAR CULTURE IS INCREASINGLY HOSTILE TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE. "TOLERANCE" AND "DIVERSITY" ARE THE WATCHWORDS OF SECULAR CULTURE BUT CHRISTIANITY SEEMS TO FALL OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES OF TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY GOES DIRECTLY AGAINST THEIR DOCTRINES OF SEXUAL LIBERTY AND POLYMORPHOUS PERVERSITY. TO EVEN TALK ABOUT JESUS CHRIST IN PUBLIC IS LIKELY TO PRODUCE DISCOMFORT IF NOT OUTRIGHT HOSTILITY. THE SECULAR POINT OF VIEW IS THAT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH SHOULD BE KEPT BEHIND THE CLOSED DOORS OF THE CHURCH. AND THAT VIEWPOINT VIRTUALLY DOMINATES ACADEMIC LIFE AND THE MEDIA.

[ROBERT DUVAL TALKING ABOUT THE MOVIE "THE APOSTLE" ON JAY LENO TALK SHOW]

IN ANY CASE, IN 2<sup>ND</sup>-CENTURY ISRAEL ANTIOCHUS WAS HAVING SUCCESS IN FORCING THE JEWS TO ADOPT GREEK WAYS. THE MAJORITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAD ABANDONED THEIR FAITH AND EMBRACED GREEK CULTURE. YOUNG JEWS WERE DRAWN TO GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE WHICH, THEY FELT, LIBERATED THEM FROM THE STRICT WAYS OF THE *TORAH*. SOME OF THEM EVEN ASSUMED GREEK NAMES AND WERE SPENDING TIME AT THE GREEK GYMNASIUM WHERE NUDITY WAS THE NORM AND SEXUAL MORES WERE FLOUTED. THESE YOUNG GREEK-O-PHILES WERE EMBARRASSED BY THE TRADITIONAL MEMBERS OF THEIR COMMUNITY AND WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN THE DOMINANT CULTURE.

AGAIN—ANY OF THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

THE MAJORITY OF YOUNG CHRISTIAN COUPLES TODAY TRY LIVING TOGETHER BEFORE THEY GET MARRIED" JUST TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY'RE "A GOOD FIT." AND IF THEY DO GET MARRIED—WHICH MANY DO NOT—THERE IS ALWAYS THE OPTION OF "NO FAULT" DIVORCE. AROUND 50% OF YOUNG CHRISTIANS HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE, TRANSGENDERISM AND ABORTION. THE ATTRACTION OF "FITTING IN" WITH SECULAR CULTURE IS POWERFUL TO YOUNG CHRISTIANS, EVEN THOUGH GOD'S WORD TELLS US, "*DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD...*" (*ROMANS 12:2*)

ANTIOCHUS FINALLY WENT ONE STEP TOO FAR. HE HAD A PIG SLAUGHTERED AND HAD ITS BLOOD SPLASHED ALL OVER THE ALTAR OF THE TEMPLE. THIS PROVOKED A SMALL BAND OF REBELS, LED BY A MAN BY THE NAME OF JUDAS MACCABEUS, TO LEAD AN UPRISING THAT ATTRACTED ENOUGH SUPPORT TO DRIVE THE GREEKS OUT OF ISRAEL AND ESTABLISH JEWISH RULE ONCE AGAIN. THE REBELS CALLED THEMSELVES MACCABEES. THE MACCABEES PICKED A FIGHT WITH THE ENTIRE SYRIAN ARMY—AND WON.

AS THE PSALMIST HAD WRITTEN: "*THE KING IS NOT SAVED BY HIS MIGHTY ARMY; THE WARRIOR IS NOT DELIVERED BY HIS GREAT STRENGTH; A HORSE IS A FALSE HOPE FOR VICTORY—IT WILL NOT DELIVER ANYONE BY ITS GREAT STRENGTH. BUT THE EYE OF THE LORD IS ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM—WHO*

*HOPE IN HIM TO DELIVER THEIR SOULS FROM DEATH AND KEEP THEM ALIVE IN FAMINE.”*

THE MACCABEES WERE A SMALL MINORITY WHO PLACED ALL THEIR HOPES IN GOD'S PROMISES RATHER THAN IN THE POPULAR CULTURE. AND GOD DID NOT FAIL THEM. ONCE AGAIN, THEY CLEANSED THE TEMPLE WHICH HAD BEEN DESECRATED AND REDEDICATED IT TO THE WORSHIP OF THE GOD OF ISRAEL.

SO HOW ABOUT US?

UNLIKE THE MACCABEES, WE DO NOT TAKE UP LITERAL SWORDS IN WHAT SOME HAVE TERMED THE “CULTURE WARS.” BUT LIKE THE MACCABEES, WE CANNOT PERMIT THE GRADUAL EROSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AT THE HANDS OF AN INCREASINGLY HOSTILE SECULAR CULTURE. LIKE THE MACCABEES, WE PLACE OUR TRUST IN GOD TO DELIVER THE VICTORY TO HIS PEOPLE. BUT ALSO LIKE THE MACCABEES, WE ARE CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL PEOPLE WHO ACT UPON THEIR FAITH. THAT MEANS THAT WHEN WE ENCOUNTER IDEAS AND VALUES THAT CONTRADICT THE CLEAR TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES, WE ARE CALLED UPON TO SPEAK UP RATHER THAN GIVE THEM SILENT APPROVAL. IT MEANS LIVING OUT OUR FAITH AND VALUES IN OUR THOUGHTS AND WORDS AND ACTIONS SO THAT WHAT GOD TEACHES CAN BE KNOWN BY OTHERS EVEN IF IT CAUSES THEM DISCOMFORT OR MAKES THEM ANGRY. STANDING UP FOR THE TRUTH CAN BE COSTLY BUT WE ARE CALLED UPON TO DO IT.

WE NEED TO ADOPT WHAT DAVID BRICKNER, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF *JEWES FOR JESUS*, CALLS A “MINORITY MINDSET.” INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING THE MAJORITY OPINION LIKE LEMMINGS, WE NEED TO STAND UP WHEN NECESSARY AND GIVE THE MINORITY POINT OF VIEW. JOHN STONESTREET OF THE COLSON CENTER SUGGESTS BELIEVERS DEVELOP WHAT HE CALLS “A THEOLOGY OF BEING FIRED.” HE CITES THE EXAMPLE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO A MAN NAMED KEVIN COCHRAN WHO WAS THE FIRE CHIEF OF ATLANTA, GEORGIA.

COCHRAN WAS A CHRISTIAN AND HE HAD WRITTEN A DEVOTIONAL BOOK ON CHRISTIAN VALUES. HE WROTE THE BOOK ON HIS OWN PERSONAL TIME AND DID NOT DISTRIBUTE IT AT WORK. HIS BOOK INCLUDED ADVOCACY OF BIBLICAL VALUES ON SEXUAL MORALITY.

WHEN THE MAYOR OF ATLANTA HEARD ABOUT THE BOOK HE ORDERED AN INVESTIGATION INTO COCHRAN. ALTHOUGH AN INVESTIGATION FOUND NO EVIDENCE OF WORKPLACE EVANGELISM OR DISCRIMINATION ON COCHRAN'S PART, HE WAS ORDERED BY THE MAYOR TO UNDERGO THIRTY DAYS OF SENSITIVITY TRAINING. THEN, AFTER HE COMPLETED THE TRAINING HE WAS FIRED. IRONICALLY, THE MAYOR, KASSIM REED, CITED AS THE BASIS FOR HIS FIRING, THE NEED TO “TOLERATE DIVERSE VALUES.”

AFTER YEARS OF LEGAL WRANGLING, THE U. S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA ORDERED THE CITY TO PAY COCHRAN 1.2 MILLION DOLLARS FOR DAMAGES. STANDING UP FOR YOUR BELIEFS EXPOSES YOU TO PERSECUTION, BUT GOD STANDS BY THOSE WHO STAND UP FOR HIM. ADOPTING A MINORITY MINDSET OR A “THEOLOGY OF BEING FIRED” MEANS BEING WILLING TO FOLLOW GOD RATHER THAN MAN AND TRUST THAT GOD WILL HONOR THOSE WHO HONOR HIM.

THE MACCABEES RECOGNIZED THIS AND STOOD UP FOR THEIR IDENTITY AS JEWS. IF ANTIOCHUS HAD HAD HIS WAY, THE JEWISH PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BEEN ASSIMILATED INTO GREEK CULTURE AND CEASED TO EXIST AS THE UNIQUE PEOPLE GOD CALLED THEM TO BE. A PEOPLE WHOSE UNIQUE PURPOSE WAS TO BE A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES AND BRING THE MESSIAH INTO THE WORLD.

LIKE THE MACCABEES WHO TOOK PRIDE IN THEIR IDENTITY AS JEWS, WE NEED TO TAKE PRIDE IN OUR IDENTITY AS CHRISTIANS. IF WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO REMAIN SILENT AND LET SECULAR CULTURE PREVAIL, WE FAIL IN DOING OUR PART IN THE GREAT COMMISSION. PERHAPS WE TOO NEED TO REDEDICATE OURSELVES. MAYBE WE NEED OUR OWN HANUKKAH.

JESUS' DEDICATION TO OBEY THE FATHER LED HIM TO THE CROSS. THE FATHER'S DEDICATION TO HIS SON RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD SO THAT HE COULD POINT THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE. WITH JESUS NOW SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH, WE CAN DEDICATE—AND REDEDICATE —OURSELVES TO WORSHIPING AND SERVING HIM. WE CAN TAKE AS OUR CREED ST. JOHN'S ADMONITION: *"DEAR CHILDREN, LET US NOT LOVE WITH WORDS OR TONGUE BUT WITH ACTIONS AND IN TRUTH."* (1 JOHN 3:18)

IT IS THOUGHT THAT THE WORD "MACCABEE" MEANT "HAMMER," IN WHICH CASE JUDAS MACCABEUS MEANT "JUDAS THE HAMMER." BUT THE TRUE WIELDER OF THE HAMMER WAS GOD. JUDAS HAD THE FAITH AND THE COURAGE TO PUT HIMSELF ENTIRELY IN GOD'S HANDS WHEN HE RAISED THE REVOLT AGAINST ANTIOCHUS AND HIS ARMY.

AS GOD ACCOMPANIED DAVID WHEN HE RAN FORTH TO MEET GOLIATH; AS HE ACCOMPANIED GIDEON WHEN HE WENT OUT TO FIGHT THE MIDIANITES WHO HAD HIM OUTNUMBERED SIX TO ONE—GOD ACCOMPANIES ALL THOSE WHO TRUST HIM TO LEAD THEM THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH. DO NOT FEAR, HE SAYS, *"[FOR] SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE."* (MATTHEW 28:20)

SO AS THE NEW YEAR DAWNS, MAYBE IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA FOR US TO DEDICATE OURSELVES TO THINK LIKE A MACCABEE. MAYBE IT'S TIME FOR A CHRISTIAN HANNUKAH!

AMEN.