

## 24 A Feast at Valley Forge

Greetings Patriots. I am Perry Greene with GNA. I am sure you noticed a lack of music in the intro, I am A Capella today. Thank you for listening in on this Christmas Day, 2022. While Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus today, Jewish people are concluding their eight-day festival, commonly called “*Hanukkah*.”

My friend, Kevin Clarkson, recently told a story about **Hanukkah in Valley Forge** in December 1777. I want to share with you the noteworthy Hanukkah incident. I have entitled this Podcast, “*A Feast at Valley Forge*.” I am going to take you on quite a journey, to get there, but let's start with Jesus (Jesus is always a good starting point) in **John 10:22-30** (NKJV):

**<sup>22</sup>Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. <sup>23</sup>And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch. <sup>24</sup>Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. <sup>26</sup>But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup>And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup>I and My Father are one.”**

“*Hanukkah*” is the Hebrew word for “*Dedication*,” and Jesus participated in this meaningful feast. If you know about the festivals God gave to the Hebrew people, God did not authorize this feast and the feast of Purim according to **Leviticus 23**. The rabbis added them later.

Jesus participated in the Feast of Dedication even though it was not scripturally authorized. He also attended and led synagogue services that do not have a biblical basis. God often accepts sincere and innovative offerings. Take the example of the woman who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume in **Matthew 26** and **Mark 14**. Jesus neither commanded the woman to perform this task nor implied it. She did it of her own accord, and we remember her as Jesus said we would.

A lesson we can learn is that Jesus will come to us in our sincere efforts to please God. If we are off-base, He will correct us, but if our efforts are in harmony with the will of God, Jesus affirms and participates with us. Jesus did not remove the feasts of Purim or Hanukkah but participated in them with His fellow Jews. He did not remove the synagogues and shout, “*This is unscriptural!*” as He did when He drove the moneychangers out of the temple courts. Instead, He embraced the opportunity to meet people where they were to take them where they needed to go.

As Bill Federer described in a recent blog post, let me introduce you to the origin of the **Feast of Dedication**.<sup>1</sup> At approximately 334 BC, Alexander the Great invaded from the west and speedily conquered the Medo-Persian Empire. The prophet **Daniel** foretold this in **chapter 8**. At the height of his power, **Alexander the Great** suddenly died, and his four generals divided up his empire as Daniel had prophesied in **Daniel 11**.

The generals divided Alexander's Empire after numerous "Diadochi" battles in this manner:

- Lysimachus ruled Thrace and Asia Minor.
- Cassander ruled Macedonia and Greece.
- Ptolemy ruled Egypt and some of the Middle East.
- **Seleucus** ruled the rest of the Middle East, Syria, Babylon, Persia, and parts of India, collectively known as the “*Seleucid Empire*.”

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<sup>1</sup> Federer, Bill. "Hanukkah: Festival of Lights, Rededication of Second Temple c.164 BC - American Minute with Bill Federer." *American Minute*, 19 Dec. 2022, americanminute.com/blogs/todays-american-minute/hanukkah-festival-of-lights-rededication-of-the-second-temple-c-164-bc-american-minute-with-biill-federer?\_pos=1&\_sid=945572c79&\_ss=r.

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Around 167 BC, an aggressive king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, arose out of the Seleucid Empire. Antiochus' men called him the "Mad Man." **Daniel 8:8-9** (NKJV) emphasizes this prediction:

**<sup>8</sup>Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. <sup>9</sup>And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land.**

Daniel predicted the attack on Jerusalem in **Daniel 11**.

Antiochus confirmed Daniel's prediction and attacked Jerusalem, as reported in the **2nd Book of Maccabees** (some Christian groups include the Maccabean books in their canon, but most Protestant groups do not but consider them extra-biblical). **Listen to 5:11- 14:**

**"The king ... thought that Judea was in revolt. Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. ... There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants ... In the space of three days, eighty thousand were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery."**

Listen as Daniel goes into greater detail in **Daniel 11**.

**Verse 28: <sup>28</sup>While returning to his land with great riches, his heart shall be *moved* against the holy covenant; so he shall do *damage* and return to his own land.**

**Verse 31: <sup>31</sup>And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation.**

Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to force the Jews to abandon their beliefs, adopt the Greek culture, and profane the temple by dedicating it to the Greek god Zeus. They also brought forbidden things into the temple and covered the altar with abominable offerings prohibited by the Torah. A man could not keep the Sabbath, celebrate traditional feasts, or admit he was a Jew. Antiochus arrested Jewish women for circumcising their children. He publicly paraded them about the city with their babies hanging at their breasts and then threw them down from the top of the city wall. Others, who had assembled in nearby caves to observe the Sabbath in secret, were betrayed and burned to death."

These evil things happened to Israel, just as Daniel had predicted. But notice what else the prophet foresaw in **Daniel 11:32** (NKJV):

**but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out *great exploits*.**

Enter the Maccabees and the story of the Feast of Dedication (AKA "Feast of Lights" and "Hanukkah"). Around 167 BC, Mattathias and his sons began the Maccabean Revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes using guerilla-style warfare. Judas Maccabaeus was finally successful in driving the enemy out c.164 BC. When the Jews cleansed the Second Temple of all pagan defilement, a week-long re-dedication began on the 25th day of Kislev, c.164 BC.

There was a problem – they found only enough holy olive oil to light the golden lampstand - the menorah, for one day, and it would take a week before the priests could make enough sacred olive oil. The priests decided to relight the menorah anyway, and miraculously, the light burned for eight days.

The priests dedicated themselves to overthrowing the Seleucids, much like our forefathers resisted the British. The priests also rededicated the temple to God after cleansing it from the gentile defilements, and God shined His light miraculously in the darkness. Our Founders and Framers dedicated and rededicated themselves and their new nation to God, and He honored their efforts. For a time, America was the "city set on a hill."

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Let's fast-forward to that brutal winter at Valley Forge in 1777. Just like the Maccabees, we engaged the British in the formal military and informal guerilla styles of warfare. After the British assault on Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, patriots lined the road to Boston and ambushed the retreating British army from behind rocks and trees. The "**Swamp Fox**," **Francis Marion**, led his men to stealthily attack the British and escape into the swamps and forests.

The Continental Army won some much-needed victories. You will remember the battle of Trenton early on December 26, 1776, when Washington and his forces surprised the Hessian garrison and rapidly defeated them. Washington used a clever strategic maneuver to defeat the British at Princeton in January 1777. Before his treasonous betrayals, **Benedict Arnold** led in our victory at Saratoga in October 1777. Historians often call Saratoga the "*turning point of the war*." Then the troops moved to winter quarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

Soldiers at Valley Forge were from every State in the new union, some as young as 12 and others as old as 60. Though most were of European descent, some were African American and American Indian. Among them were:

- Marquis de Lafayette
- Colonel "Mad Anthony" Wayne
- Future Chief Justice John Marshall
- Lutheran pastor turned Major-General John Peter Muhlenberg
- George Washington's Jewish physician, Dr. Philip Moses Russell

During that bitter winter, the men at VF lived in makeshift cabins and tents or had no cover. Some had only rags for their feet, and their legs turned black because of the extreme cold. Approximately twelve soldiers died each day due to disease and the winter hardships. Five hundred women "camp followers" died as well. Washington needed help getting supplies for his soldiers. General Nathanael Greene, one of Washington's most trusted generals, assumed the quartermaster's office and supplied the soldiers.

General Washington cared deeply for his men. An admirable quality of Washington was that he took the time for his troops and would walk among them to encourage and care for them. On one such excursion, the General came into one of the cabins to find a young Polish immigrant on his knees lighting a *Hanukkah*, a menorah specific to Hanukkah. After he lit the menorah, he began to pray. As he prayed, he began to weep.

Washington courteously waited for the young Jewish soldier to finish his prayers and then asked him about the ceremony he had just performed. The young man explained how the Jewish freedom fighters had defeated the Seleucids and rededicated the temple, the meaning of the menorah, and Hanukkah.

The story impressed General Washington, and then he asked, "But why were you weeping in your prayer?" The Jewish man replied that he thanked God for the victory He would give Washington and his troops the next time they engaged the enemy.

The young man's prayer and explanation encouraged Washington. He renewed his dedication to the cause over which God had placed him. He determined not to quit and to urge his men forward.

General Washington was a devout man of prayer and had his own prayer in the snows of VF. He often isolated himself from the troops as Jesus sometimes had done so that he could be alone with God. One day he went off to pray and a Pennsylvania farmer named **Isaac Potts** overheard him. Potts was a Quaker and a pacifist.

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Mr. Potts shared the story with Pastor Nathaniel Randolph Snowden, who recorded it in his “*Diaries and Remembrances*.” Snowden recounted:

*I was riding with Mr. Potts near the Valley Forge where the army lay during the war of ye Revolution, when Mr. Potts said, ‘Do you see that woods and that plain? There laid the army of Washington. It was a most distressing time of ye war, and all were for giving up the Ship but that great and good man. In that woods (pointing to a close in view) I heard a plaintive sound as of a man at prayer. I tied my horse to a sapling and went quietly into the woods. To my astonishment I saw the great George Washington on his knees alone, with his sword on one side and his cocked hat on the other. He was at Prayer to the God of the Armies, beseeching to interpose with his Divine aid, as it was ye Crisis and the cause of the country, of humanity and of the world. Such a prayer I never heard from the lips of man. I left him alone praying. I went home and told my wife. We never thought a man could be a soldier and a Christian, but if there is one in the world, it is Washington. We thought it was the cause of God and America could prevail.’<sup>2</sup>*

The Feast of Dedication stirs the patriotic spirit of the Jewish people as they recall the providential intervention aiding the Maccabees in defeating the Seleucids. For generations, Jewish people have understood the bonds of slavery and the divine gift of freedom and have celebrated independence in feasts like Passover and Hanukkah. The Feast of Dedication stirred the spirit of General George Washington to a more profound dedication to the cause of liberty. Washington attributed America’s independence to the hand of Providence, the same Providence that kept the menorah burning for eight days.

Like George Washington, I am not Jewish, but I can appreciate the celebration of the Feast of Dedication. **Romans 11:17** reminds us that the non-Jewish followers of Jesus are grafted into Hebrew history. God did not stop working in the “silent period” between Malachi and Matthew. There were no prophets, but God impacted His people by giving them independence from an overbearing tyrant.

Freedom is funny; it must begin with the liberation of the human spirit, which we find in Christ, and then it will lead to civil autonomy. It generally does not work the other way. People came to America for religious and spiritual freedom. Then, God worked to free the American colonies from an oppressive king in His providence. According to our Founders and Framers, we owe our allegiance to God for His divine intervention.

In a letter to Pastor John Rodgers, June 11, 1783, George Washington wrote:

*“Glorious indeed has been our Contest: glorious, if we consider the Prize for which we have contended, and glorious in its Issue; but in the midst of our Joys, I hope we shall not forget that, to divine Providence is to be ascribed the Glory and the Praise.”*

What application will you make at this time of year? We celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Savior, and Great Liberator. This time of year is also a time of Dedication and renewal for the Jewish people as they remember God’s hand in their history. Perhaps we can take a lesson from Hanukkah and remember “His story in our history.”

Keep The Light of *Dedication to God* Burning!

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<sup>2</sup> "Washington’s Prayer at Valley Forge." , Friends of the American Revolution, 21stcenturycicero.wordpress.com/faith/washington%E2%80%99s-prayer-at-valley-forge/.