

CHANUKAH: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Growing up in the United States, Chanukah by virtue of its proximity to Christmas became the festival of Jewish identity. In a gentile world of decorative lights, spruced-out lawns depicting the Nativity, chestnuts roasting on an open fire and holiday cheer harmonizing on the streets of Manhattan, my Chanukah candle would somehow outshine it all.

What is most ironic about this holiday is that it represents opposition to Jewish assimilation into Greek culture, yet, today, the most unaffiliated Jew will celebrate the Festival of Lights. For a feast that has no Jewish scriptural basis, it has risen to some iconic status, giving it almost a higher ranking than the Day of Atonement.

The Book of Maccabees never made it into the canon of the Hebrew bible. There isn't even a Talmudic tractate dedicated to Chanukah. It comes up incidentally in the second chapter of the Tractate Shabbat in a discussion about candle lighting. "What is Chanukah?" asks the Talmud. The explanation can be recited by any 5-year-old Hebrew school student: "The 25th day of the month of Kislev begins eight days of Chanukah. When the Greeks entered the Holy Sanctuary, they defiled all the oil there. But after the Hasmoneans defeated them, they found only one jar of oil sealed with the High Priest's seal. It contained enough oil for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit from it for eight days. The next year they set these days as a holiday with strong prayers of thanks."

The Talmudic summation of Chanukah is just seven lines. What is truly amazing about Judaism's oral tradition on the subject is that you will never find the miracle of the oil in the Book of Maccabees. It simply states that they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days and joyfully offered burnt and thanksgiving offerings. Why does the rabbinic account scan over the most important details of the Chanukah story; frivolities of the Hellenists, the ravings of the insane Antiochus, the rebellion of the Hasmoneans, as well as the miraculous victories and final triumph of a small clan of Jews over the powerful army of Greco-Syria?

While the original intention of the Hasmoneans was purely motivated to bring back the nation of Israel to God and rid the Temple of all pagan influences, the dynasty that followed after continued to hold monarchical power over the Jewish people. They mixed the power of the Priesthood with Monarchy and this was in direct violation of scripture that *the scepter shall never deviate from Judah*

(Genesis 49:10). In response, the Sages decided the Book of Maccabees would not be part of the sacred canon, but serve as only a historical account.

Power is God's alone and He picks who receives it. It is very clear that the priesthood and monarchy served two different functions and it is not up to man to decide differently. The Hasmoneans overextended their role.

Commemoration of Chanukah through lighting a candle is the doctrinal truth sensed by the community of the faithful to acknowledge that God and His word in our very darkest moments is a light unto us. The world of Hellenistic thought, at the time of the Hasmoneans, stripped away the very essence of a Jew's mission on earth. The very act of learning God's word and performing His commandments was forbidden and violation of this enactment resulted in death.

A mitzvah [commandment] is a candle and Torah is light (Proverbs 6:23). It is through the Shekinal (the Holy Spirit) that when the Second Temple was destroyed the lighting of the candle would replace the *dedication of the altar* on Chanukah. Unlike the Shabbat candles, no one is allowed to derive pleasure from the Chanukah lights. It stands as a complete offering to God.

There is a belief in Judaism that light before the creation of the sun was hidden by God through His Word. A hint of this is demonstrated "When Moses descended from Mount Sinai—and in the hand of Moses were the two tablets of testimony when he descended from the mountain—Moses did not realize that the skin of his face had become radiant from [God] speaking to him (Exodus 34:29)."

With the experience of receiving the Torah from God Himself, Moses became, quite literally, a radiant light. It seems that while the "light" may be hidden, it is far from lost. In fact, the same vessel that contains the hidden "light" is the vehicle for its revelation.

The Sages' emphasis on the miracles of the oil is to help Jewry understand that true power is through God's Word not through military might.

Response to the article *CHANUKAH: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS*
By Jack W. Langford

CHANUKAH: A LIGHT FOR THE FUTURE!

The vital importance of Chanukah (known as *Hanukkah* by many in the United States) is most certainly overlooked by most Christians and Jews alike. Actually it stands not merely as a celebration of a light that has shown in the darkness past, but as a light focused upon a great future darkness. Indeed, every one of us needs to refresh our knowledge about the particulars of this celebration. However, and most importantly, the Jews themselves need to review, and be alerted to, its amazing connection to Biblical prophecy regarding their own nation, which nation has recently been restored before our very eyes. Indeed, the Scriptural doctrine of eschatology (last things) points to a climactic repeat of the events leading up to Chanukah in the last days. Thus, like a flashing light, Chanukah stands as a sober warning of impending danger for the nation of Israel.

Chanukah, which in the Hebrew language means *to consecrate* or *dedication*, has reference to the re-dedication of the Temple (165 B.C.) after it had been totally polluted by the “*abomination of desolation*” placed in its Holy Place by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Grecian monarch in about 171 B.C. (I Maccabees 1:10, 54 & 5:43). After removing the “abomination” the Jews began the celebration of the re-dedication of their Temple on the 25th day of Chislev (I Maccabees 4:43 & 52). In the New Testament Scriptures this celebration was referenced as *The Feast of Dedication* (see the Gospel of John 10:22). It is also sometimes called *The Feast of Lights* (Josephus, Ant. XII:5:4) because of the special account of the relighting of the Menorah (Lamp stand) in the Temple on that original occasion. Truly the Menorah light must have been beautiful to see.

The purpose of Antiochus Epiphanes was to totally Hellenize the Jews, and thus obliterate their unique standing in separation before the world as ordained by God. He was, no doubt, satanically inspired. If Antiochus could not physically destroy the Jews, he certainly would attempt their total assimilation within all the idolatry, paganism and hedonism in the Greek culture. In this small regathered nation of Israel, with its rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, the torture and butchery of Jews who resisted this assimilation was horrible. It was also indeed sad to see multitudes of Jews cooperate with Antiochus. To prohibit the use of the Temple, Antiochus had a pig slaughtered upon the altar and also set up an image of a Greek god in the Holy of Holies. Yet a remnant of faithful Jews fled the immediate area, and with purpose of heart formed a small army. Amazingly, their tenacity was rewarded. They finally recaptured the Temple and much of the land. The full history of this is recorded in the apocraphal books of I and II Maccabees.

Yet, even more significant than the record in the books of Maccabees is the fact that the prophet Daniel, hundreds of years earlier, had prophesied of this “*abomination of desolation*” by the Grecian king—see Daniel 8:9-14 & 11:31. However—and this is of cardinal importance to remember—additional prophecies of Daniel make it very clear that there is also a second primary application of this “*abomination of desolation*” to the

“*end time*” events of the future last days. Now this is what is most significant about Chanukah, and usually overlooked—prophetically it actually points to a future last days “abomination of desolation” danger for Israel.

In Daniel 8:16-25 we are told that this vision is actually “appointed for the time of the end,” at which time an ungodly ruler will “stand up against the Prince of princes.” No doubt, this “Prince” has reference to Israel’s Messiah. In Daniel 9:27 we are to understand an “abomination that makes desolate” is to happen in the midst of a final 7 year week of time. This final week (of years) will bring in “the (final) consummation.” In Daniel 11:31-36 this “abomination of desolation” was transposed right up to climactic confrontations at “the time of the end” (verse 40), at which time this world ruler will speak “blasphemies against the God of gods” (verse 36). And finally in Daniel 12 this whole scenario will unfold in the same proximity of the very worst trouble the world will have ever seen (verse 1). In addition it will last until the very time of the resurrection of the dead (verse 2). According to verses 12 & 13 of the same chapter, an actual schedule in terms of “days” (approx. 3 ½ years) for when the “abomination of desolation” takes place is given. This means this “abomination” will last for the last half of that future “week” (i.e., a seven year period of time). Many references in context indicate this will all take place just prior to the coming of the Messiah to destroy all earthly rule, including this ungodly ruler, deliver Israel in finality, and set up the Kingdom of God on earth over a restored Israel and a restored, *rededicated* Temple (Ezekiel 40-48).

In other words, we are to understand that in the last days another remnant nation of Israel will experience the wrath of a pagan world ruler all over again, and in even much greater severity. Nor is Daniel alone in speaking about this. Jesus Christ spoke of it, as recorded in Matthew 24 as being “the great tribulation,” during which a final “abomination of desolations” will take place (Matthew 24:15 & 21). Christ said, “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the Holy place...let those in Judea flee to the mountains.” The apostle Paul also speaks of this event as recorded in II Thessalonians 2:3-10. Paul calls this future world ruler “the man of sin” who will “sit in the Temple of God,” and make the claim of being “God.” The apostle John speaks of it extensively in the book of Revelation chapter 13. This world ruler will be a prince over a seemingly revived Roman Empire. He will speak blasphemies, even against God. An image will be made to this “beast,” and the world will be called upon to worship it.

There has been nearly a two thousand year gap since the nationhood of Israel, the city of Jerusalem and its Temple were all destroyed in 70 A.D. Yet all these Scriptures presuppose there will be the national entity of Israel once again. Likewise, Jerusalem will again be under Jewish control. In addition, there will obviously be another Temple standing in Jerusalem. And, today, in 1948 Israel was declared a nation once again. In 1967 that nation regained control of Jerusalem once again. And, we are all anticipating a new Temple to be rebuilt. What seems to be an absolute impossibility, in light of present world attitudes and conditions, is no obstacle with God. And the prophecy of Daniel, Jesus, Paul and John will be fulfilled. Yet, as stated in the CJCUC article, “*God and His Word in our very darkest moments is a light unto us.*”