

Chanukah: A Time for Rededication

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By this time everyone here knows its *Chanukah!* The first thing we ought to learn about *Chanukah* is how to pronounce it. It's not *Hanukah*, and it's not *Chanooka*. It's *Chanukah*. Let me hear you say:

CHANUKAH!

Okay! Now the next thing we have to know about *Chanukah* is the meaning of the word itself. That is actually a disputed issue. One explanation is that the word *Chanukah* is constructed in two parts – *Chanu* (*chet nun vav*) which means “they rested,” and “*kah*,” (*kaf hey*) which is the number 25. If we understand that *Chanukah* occurs in the month of *Kislev*, *Chanu* joined to *kah* would mean “they rested on the 25th day of *Kislev*. Although there are other explanations that have been suggested for the name *Chanukah*, this one is good enough for me.

So if “they rested” on *Chanukah*, must it not be that *Chanukah* is a Sabbath that God commanded us to keep? Well, today is a Sabbath, and today is also *Chanukah*, is it not? So who can show me where in the Bible we are commanded to keep *Chanukah*?

Oh? It's not there? Very strange. So if the Bible doesn't command us to keep *Chanukah*, why have Jews the world over kept the festival of *Chanukah* since even before Yeshua? The answer is that it is in response to a certain event of history that is recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees, in historical treatises such as those written by Josephus, and in the *Talmud*. Although Scripture is our primary source of information, other historical writings are sometimes used as well.

In brief, here is what happened. In 334 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered Judea and introduced the Jews to Greek culture. After Alexander's death, his central kingdom separated into an east and west component that warred against each other, and Judea was caught in the middle. The eastern component that included Jerusalem was ruled by King Antiochus IV. He mistakenly believed that the Jews were fomenting a rebellion, so he retaliated by slaughtering many Jews and prohibiting many Jewish practices upon pain of death. For example, he prohibited the keeping of Shabbat and the practice of circumcision, and he profaned the Jerusalem Temple by using it for heathen worship. In fairness, I must tell you (and I regret doing so), that some Jews had become Hellenized and supported King Antiochus against their own people.

There were a group of Jews in those days called *Chasidim* (no relation to the later *Chassidim* of Eastern Europe). They were led in opposing Antiochus' oppressive measures by the a family of priests called the Hasmoneans. Mattathias the priest was head of the Hasmoneans, and when an agent of King Antiochus commanded him and others to worship a foreign god, Mattathias refused. And when a fellow Jew stepped forward to obey Antiochus' command, Mattathias killed him along with a Greek official. Now Antiochus took a dim view of this, and Mattathias

and the other Hasmoneans had to flee to the mountains. But they soon regrouped, mustered an army under Mattathias' leadership, and began a revolt against Antiochus.

Mattathias appointed his son Judah, nick-named "Maccabee" to lead his small Jewish army. Judah the Maccabee used guerrilla tactics to overcome a first attack launched by King Antiochus, and when Antiochus sent a larger more powerful army, it too was defeated by Judah's much smaller band of men. Judah's victory was unquestionably due to God's divine intervention, and so, one of the themes of *Chanukah* that is relevant even today, is God's protection and miraculous preservation of His people Israel.

When Judah entered Jerusalem, he found God's Temple desecrated and in disarray. Since the Hasmoneans were a priestly family, they undertook to clean the Temple and restore it to its former use. They labored for almost a year and when the Temple was finally clean, Judah declared a great celebration to commemorate the Feast of *Sukkot* that had already passed and which they had not been able to celebrate for the three years they were fighting Antiochus. So, although the Temple was rededicated on the 25th day of *Kislev* (more than a month after *Sukkot*), the Jews undertook to celebrate the rededication as a belated *Sukkot* for the traditional eight days. This is why one of the terms used to describe *Chanukah* is the "Feast of Dedication."

Another term used to describe *Chanukah* is "Festival of Lights." This term is described in Josephus' *Antiquities*, and relates to a legend recorded in the *Talmud* which explained the eight-day celebration as being due to a miracle of God. It was said that an amount of sacred oil that was only enough to burn for one day, lasted a full eight days until new oil could be produced. As part of the Temple's dedication, it was necessary to light the seven-branch oil *menorah* but, because of the Temple's desecration, only one jar of consecrated oil containing the High Priest's seal was found. The legend explains that, instead of delaying the dedication, the Hasmonean priests chose to light the *menorah* using the one jar of oil they had, and because God blessed it, the oil lasted eight days instead of one. If you stop to think about it, this legend contains a subtle criticism of the Hasmoneans who could have had the forethought to manufacture the oil sooner. Anyway, that is the origin of the term "Festival of Lights."

With or without the story of the miracle of the oil, it is an historic fact that the rededication of the Temple lasted for eight days. That is the reason we celebrate Chanukah using an eight branch *menorah* called a *chanukiyah* and not a *menorah* that has seven branches such as the one that was lit in the Temple; the one in the Temple was similar to this *menorah* we display here at Ohev Yisrael.

Most *chanukiyot* have a 9th branch called a *shamash* or servant because it is used to light the other 8. In history, it was decided to cumulatively light a flame of the *chanukiyah* each night for eight nights so that on the eighth night all eight flames of the *chanukiyah* are lit. The tradition is to add the flames from right to left, but to light them from left to right. Because oil was used in the Temple's *menorah*, it is traditional on Chanukah to eat foods that contain oil and foods that are fried in oil. Hence the *Chanukah* tradition of eating fried potato latkes (pancakes to you southerners and flapjacks to you westerners).

Just an interesting bit of trivia: *Dreidl* (s'vivon in Hebrew) is a *Chanukah* game that uses a spinning four-sided top where each side of the top contains one of the Hebrew letters *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, and *shin* which stand for "A great miracle happened there." In Israel, *dreidlach* are different, however; there they replace the letter *shin* with a *pey* to cause the letters of the *dreidl* to mean "A great miracle happened here."

I started this teaching by telling you that *Chanukah* is not commanded in Scripture and that is true. However, *Chanukah* is mentioned in Scripture in the Book of John by its name "Feast of Dedication." In John 10:22-30 we read:

"Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Yeshua walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Yeshua 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. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 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. I and My Father are one."

So not only was Yeshua present in the Temple during *Chanukah*, but it was during this very feast – the Feast of Dedication, that Yeshua chose to reveal His divine identity and His oneness with The Father.

There are so many traditions connected to *Chanukah* that we can each choose our favorite. It used to be that for me, the tradition of eating potato latkes won hands down. Earlier in the week our sister Sandy sent me an email of a funny comment made by a Jew who was less than impressed with *Chanukah's* history. He said:

"It all boils down to this: They tried to kill us... They failed. Let's eat!"

That pretty much describes what my attitude used to be but, as I grew in the Lord, it was *Chanukah's* theme of rededication of God's Temple that came to impress me the most. We have already seen how *Chanukah* originated as an eight-day belated celebration of *Sukkot* and a rededication of the Jerusalem Temple. Solomon also took eight days to dedicate the Temple he built for the Lord. In 2 Chronicles 7:8-9 we read:

"At that time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt. And on the eighth day they held a sacred assembly, for they observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days."

Those were physical temples, but God also speaks of our bodies as temples:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 “*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*”

I have discovered that when I am conscious of my body being a Temple of the Holy Spirit, submit it to the will of God and dedicate it to His purposes, I hear God’s voice more clearly, I am certain that He hears mine, I walk with God, I feel empowered by God, I understand who I am in Him, and I am at peace with my purpose here on earth.

Although I wish it were otherwise, I know that some of you here – my family in Messiah – experience difficulty relating to and communicating with God your Heavenly Father whom you cannot see with your physical eyes, and cannot hear with your physical ears. God has impressed me that now is an opportune season for we who are members of Ohev Yisrael, to rededicate ourselves to God – our bodies to being Temples of the Holy Spirit – approaching it just as Judah the Maccabee did. First, we must clean out our Temples of all accumulation that is not of God. Second, we must ask God to fill our newly cleansed Temples with the consecrated oil of the Holy Spirit. And He will! Third, we must light up our oil by committing ourselves to a crucified life of service to both God and our fellow man. By doing this, we will fulfill His hope for us as we read Yeshua’s words in Matthew 5:13-16:

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

This cannot be achieved through preaching alone. Anyone who has cleaned out and restored a house and its furnishings knows that it’s hard work and takes time. So we will take the time by devoting the remainder of this month and the next to a goal of helping each other know God and hear His voice. *Chavurah* leaders, I will be calling you for a meeting to discuss how to minister this in your *Chavurot*. *HaDerekh* youth, this applies to you as well. I want to see all of you become leaders in hearing the voice of God.

If we follow Yeshua’s instruction and example, we will all be able to walk with God in intimacy, power, and unbroken fellowship. And we will all be able to hear His voice because He guaranteed it by His words in John 10:27:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”

In the same way as the first *Chanukah* was an extension of *Sukkot*, let’s let the next month-and-a-half be our extension of *Chanukah* – our miracle of lights – that we may ourselves be able to testify to the letters on the Israeli *dreidl*: “*nun, gimmel, hey, pey.*” “A great miracle happened here.”