

The Jesus and Hanukkah connection

Two thousand years ago this week, Jesus “walked in the Temple” in Jerusalem during one of Israel’s most explosive moments of remembrance – the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah (John 10:22). The festival looks back to 164 BC, when Judah Maccabee led a defiant revolt against the brutal Syrian tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes.

Only years earlier, Antiochus had savagely desecrated the Temple: forcing priests to eat pork, erecting an altar to Zeus inside its sacred courts, turning holy chambers into houses of prostitution, and brazenly declaring himself Theos Epiphanes – the “manifest god.”

It’s impossible to grasp the extent of this dark defilement from a Western perspective – but consider this: the Capitol lying in ruins, the White House smashed to the ground, the Constitution ripped apart, and Abraham Lincoln’s face on the Lincoln Memorial replaced with the chilling visage of Adolf Hitler.

Needless to say, a deep darkness would settle over the land. In Israel, that darkness hung heavy for ten long years.

Yet behind the scenes, a revolt was quietly taking shape. Led by Judah Maccabee (called the “Hammer!”), the uprising ultimately prevailed, and Antiochus was overthrown in 164 BC on the 25th of Kislev (some traditions say December 25th).

Now the focus became the rededication of the Temple which was the epicenter of worship in the nation of Israel.

The determination to restore the Temple was so strong that even despite having only enough consecrated oil for one day’s use and the looming disappointment of the seven-branched

Menorah in the Holy Place possibly going out, the decision to proceed with the rededication was made anyway. According to the Talmud, miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days – symbolizing a new beginning.

Hanukkah means, “dedication” or “rededication” and is also known as the Festival of Lights.

But let’s be clear: the real miracle of Hanukkah is not the miracle of the lights, but the fact that God once again preserved His chosen people against all odds! The Lord kept His promise to Israel that they would not be destroyed (Jer. 31:35-37, Rom. 11:29).

If God had not enabled the Maccabees to overthrow Antiochus, the Jewish people might very well have been destroyed. And, as Dr. Mitch Glaser has said, “If the Jewish people had been destroyed, then the birth of the Savior could never have taken place!”

WHY RELEVANT FOR US TODAY?

Why is Hanukkah relevant for us today? The answer: there is a profound Jesus and Hanukkah Connection revealed.

Jesus made an extraordinary claim about Himself during Hanukkah when He said, “I am the good shepherd...” (John 10:11–18). This statement no doubt would have evoked Messianic expectations among His listeners, recalling passages such as Ezekiel 34:23–24, which describes God’s promise to establish one shepherd over His people: “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall be their shepherd, and I, the Lord, will be their God.”

The fact that Jesus made this claim during Hanukkah – which celebrates the triumph over the evil tyrant Antiochus – reminds us that many would have been thinking of the Messiah as embodying political and military power over the tyranny of Rome.



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This helps explain why Jesus was approached and asked, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered them with a rebuke: "I told you, and you do not believe..." (John 10:24).

Why did Jesus say this? What had Jesus told them up to this point?

John's Gospel reveals the answer with a series of bold, defining actions and declarations by Jesus in Jerusalem.

First, He cleansed the Temple, calling it "My Father's house" and reclaiming its sacred purpose. He then revealed to Nicodemus, the chief rabbi, that He came down from heaven to be lifted up for the sins of the world, promising eternal life to "whosoever believes in Him."

Jesus made it clear that He will ultimately judge all humanity (John 5:19–23) and affirmed that the Hebrew Scriptures testify about Him (John 5:39).

He declared, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31–32).

He claimed to always please the Father (John 8:29) and boldly declared, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58) – a direct claim to divinity.

Finally, He foretold that He would raise Himself from the dead (John 10:17–18).

In response to the question, "Are you the Messiah?" Jesus simply answered: "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. And no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand (John 10:27)."

In addition, it was during Hanukkah that Jesus revealed that although He is distinct from the Father, He is equal with the Father in giving eternal life – revealing Himself as God in human form. Jesus said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:31), underscoring the foundational confession of Judaism: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4).

No doubt this was a direct contrast to the dynamics 200 years earlier, when Antiochus IV, a mere man, proclaimed himself God. But now Jesus makes the claim that He is God who has become a man – rather than a man proclaiming to be God

A PREVIEW AND PROPHECY TO COME

The Jesus and Hanukkah Connection also previews the Second Coming of Jesus, because when Jesus returns to Jerusalem, He will defeat a type of Antiochus in Jerusalem – known as the Antichrist!

This confrontation will take place one day when the nations will be in a fully intoxicated rage against God, and when "the lawless one" seeks to replace the Davidic King Jesus by declaring that he himself is God in the Temple in Jerusalem. "He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

When this takes place, wrath and breakdown will have come to their fullness, and Jesus will return to a repentant Israel to rescue her and to judge the nations, with "all Israel [being] saved" (Rom. 11:26; Mt. 23:39; Acts 3:19–21; Zech. 12:10). Jesus will then establish His Kingdom on planet Earth from Jerusalem (Ps. 2:6; Acts 1:11–12; Is. 2:2–4).

Second Thessalonians 1:7–10 "...when the Lord Jesus is revealed

from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."

REVEALS NEEDED DISCERNMENT

There's more!

The Jesus and Hanukkah Connection also offers crucial insight for our times, revealing that a fierce spiritual battle is ongoing and that an even deeper darkness lies beneath the surface.

Think about it: Antiochus sought to destroy Israel's God-given identity. Let me say it again: Antiochus sought to destroy Israel's God-given identity!

This has been the enduring pattern of deluded, destructive, and demonic forces for thousands of years.

For example, when the Catholic Church declared in 1215 that the elements of Communion literally became the body and blood of Jesus, Jews were accused of stealing and torturing Communion wafers, leading to entire Jewish communities being burned at the stake.

Later, the Black Plague in Europe was blamed on Jews, with false accusations that they had poisoned wells using a mixture of spiders, lizards, and the hearts of Christians, combined with the sacred elements of the Lord's Supper. These lies led mobs to slaughter thousands of Jews.

And then, in 21st-century enlightened Germany, what rises again but a genocide against Jews. So depraved were the Nazis (and other perpetrators of anti-Jewish violence) that Jewish

infants were sometimes thrown alive into burning pits in order to save a bullet.

Today, in the Muslim world, it is still promoted that every year Jews kidnap and torture a priest (or other victims), using their blood to make Passover matzah (unleavened bread).

As I write this op-ed, I am grappling with the horror of awakening this morning to news of a tragic shooting at a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach, where New South Wales police have confirmed that twelve people have been killed so far.

The reality is that antisemitism and anti-Zionism are skyrocketing throughout the world!

What The Jesus and Hanukkah Connection reveals is that this battle is not merely political or social – it is spiritual, it is demonic, it is a struggle between light and darkness that has been waged for thousands of years in the attempt to undermine God's plan in and through Israel, and in the Messiah of Israel – who is the Savior of the world.

Our responsibility is to be Biblically discerning, to stand against antisemitism, and to stand on God's promises with moral courage in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

HE BRINGS CLEANSING TO OUR LIVES

This week 2000 years ago Jesus stood in the Temple during Hanukkah and declared Himself the One “sanctified” by the Father “sent into the world” (John 10:36).

In that moment, He revealed Himself as the true Hanukkah – the true center and source of God's rededication and renewal – which He would accomplish by giving His life for the sins of the world, conquering death through resurrection, and, in doing so, launching a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Mt. 19:28; Rev. 21:15)

Where Hanukkah restored a Temple stone by stone, Jesus restores the whole world – person by person – making His people “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5), building a renewed, living Temple.

As Scripture reminds us: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Cor. 6:19–20)

This Hanukkah week, I encourage you to embrace a holy rededication – being set apart, removing all defilement, and giving full room to the Holy Spirit in your life. What a picture we have from when Jesus cleansed the Temple: “the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them” (Matt. 21:14).

The point is clear: when our lives are pure and filled with the Spirit, they are powerful! This is God’s will for us.

And the best news? As followers of Jesus, we have the eternal ‘oil’ of the person and work of the Holy Spirit living in us every day – empowering us to follow Jesus, live boldly, make Him known, and glorify God in a dark world.

I wish you a holy and happy Hanukkah!

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