

temple. On the **25th of Kislev**, his forces stormed Jerusalem, still without walls, and tore down the desecrated altar, smashing all the pagan idols. To celebrate the consecration of the temple and the dedication of the new altar, the people celebrated a feast for **eight days**.

It was first called: "The ***Sukkoth [tabernacles] Feast of the month of Kislev***", to allow the Jews, who had not been able to celebrate Sukkoth while the temple was in enemy hands, to do so. As Sukkoth is celebrated for eight days, so was this new festival, as a kind of ***Second Sukkoth*** (especially since both the **first** and the **second** temples had been dedicated on the Feast of Booths - I K. 8:1, 2, 65, 66 and Neh. 8:13-18).

After many years of attempting to suppress the popular festival, the Rabbis formalized the celebration and an ordinance was issued and was eventually accepted by the people, both in Palestine, and in the Diaspora (the Dispersion):

" Then Judah and his brothers and the whole congregation of Israel established that the days of the consecration of the altar be celebrated for eight days at this period, namely beginning with the twenty-fifth of the month of Kislev, in joy and happy renewal. "(I Macc. 4:36-61)

Why did the rabbis try and suppress the festival? There were two main reasons. It had no biblical basis and it initiated a long period of civil war that eventually brought the infamous House of Herod to power. You see, the struggle did not end with Judah, who was eventually killed before a stable peace was established. He did not finish the work of defeating Israel's enemy and many parallels were drawn between Judah and the Messiah, whose arrival the people eagerly awaited.

Many converts were entering Judaism at this time and a great Messianic expectation was growing, along with a considerable eschatological expectation. People felt that it was time for the Messiah, David's Greater Son, to show up and for Him to set up His eternal kingdom on earth. They looked at the scriptural prophecies selectively, and made them fit into a picture which said that Messiah would be coming in their life time, along with the end of the world. Things haven't changed much, have they?

The rabbis had to deal with this messianic expectation, which was growing, and which came to be associated with the festival of Chanukah. At first there were no official rituals which the people gathered to observe during this season, except for the lighting of the menorah over an eight day celebration of a dubious victory. In anticipation of the Messiah's arrival, there was even a golden messianic crown kept in the temple and the people came to believe that Messiah would come into the temple at Chanukah, put on the crown and finish the work which Judah the Maccabee started.

The rabbis feared that the temple would be damaged or destroyed if one or a series of false messiahs showed up to claim the crown and to lead a military uprising, first against the successors of the Hasmonians, and then against the Romans. After the destruction of the second temple, and after the disastrous revolt under Bar Kokhba, the rabbis changed their tactics in a sort of: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" move.

They took over Chanukah and changed it from a celebration which anticipated the arrival of the Messiah, into a celebration of Jewish heroism. It is still one of the most popular of the festivals, and one where Jewish people express their commitment not to give into assimilation and also to let their lights shine in a dark world.

This year I would like to encourage all of you to continue to let your lights shine and would like to close by taking you to three passages of Scripture which reflect the priorities of this season: John 10:22-39; Mark 5:1-20; John 2:12-22.

(1) John 10:22-39 He declared Himself in the temple at Chanukah and outlined the purpose for

which He came – to win eternal life for all who would believe, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. He said that he and His Father are One and His hearers understood this to be a proclamation of His deity, that He was G-d come in the flesh to do the works of His Father. Which works? To fulfill in reality what all the sacrificial symbolism portrayed.

(2) Mark 5:1-20 Jewish people have been enriched by many cultures and our faith needs to be sensitive to respond to cultural shifts so that its core of eternal truth is always expressed in meaningful ways which each new group and each new generation of mankind can grasp as firmly as those who heard the thunder on the mountain, and those whose tongues thundered in the upper room. However, idolatry of any kind is wrong, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. The L-RD alone is to be worshipped, or He will slaughter all your pigs and drive all your false gods into the sea as finally as He slaughtered the Egyptians gods and ravaged their country.

(3) John 1:12-122. He has come to clean up our act and to return us to the clear original purposes of G-d. The temple was to be open to Jews and to Gentiles. The temple authorities had set up their business in the midst of the court of the Gentiles, when all business should be conducted outside the whole temple, not in the midst of a house of prayer for all nations. Does He need to cleanse the temple of your heart? Does He need to cleanse the temple of your life? How much of your life will the zeal of His house consume when He returns to set up His eternal Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind?

G-d's purposes are unstoppable. G-d's purposes suffer no rivals for our spiritual affiliation. G-d requires us to keep the practice of our spirituality free from compromise.

How are you doing this Chanukah?

Shabbat Shalom.