

Dec. 21, 2003 **Jesus King of All Nations** J. M. Terrett

Text: Genesis 49:10

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes and the obedience of the peoples is his."

This holiday season is a very special one for Messianic Jews. This year, 2003, the festival of Chanukah occurs at the same time as Christmas. Double the presents! As Messianic Jews we light the Chanukah candles each night of the festival, and on Christmas Eve we will light six candles plus one. You see, each night we first light the Shamash, or servant candle and use it to light one candle for each of the eight nights of Chanukah. That is why the Chanukah menorah has nine candles, when there are only eight days in the festival. Make sense? It does to me. Today I want to talk to you about what Chanukah and Christmas have in common.

Did you know that Chanukah was originally a festival of the Messiah? In the Gospel of John (10:22), when Jesus was in the temple at the Feast of the Dedication (which is what Chanukah means), the Jews asked Him if He was going to declare Himself to be the Messiah. You see, on the 25th of Kislev, in the second century before the birth of Jesus, Judah the Maccabee drove the Greeks out of Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. He went on to establish a free Jewish kingdom, which the descendants of Herod were still ruling during the time of Jesus.

The common people believed that Messiah would come into the temple on Chanukah, and finish the job which Judah the Maccabee started. They believed that He would not only free the Holy Land from the Romans, but that He would declare himself King of all the nations and, starting from Jerusalem, begin to conquer the world and establish the Messianic Kingdom of David over all the nations of the world. They even had an idea how this would be done.

The people believed the Messiah would arm them with special weapons of mass destruction and that an invincible army of Jews would sweep over the earth and conquer all their enemies, just like Judah the Maccabee did – only this time it would be to the ends of the earth. That is why the temple authorities wanted Jesus to declare Himself – not because they believed in Him, but so that they could arrest Him as a troublemaker and a rebel. You can be sure that the temple authorities who came to talk to Jesus were backed up with temple guards, waiting for the signal to arrest Jesus.

Right up until the fourth century, Jewish people still believed Messiah would come at Chanukah, and establish His kingdom over all the nations. The rabbis tried hard to forbid Chanukah, and the temple authorities disliked the festival, because there was always someone claiming to be Messiah, who would stir up trouble at this time of year. So, over the years, the rabbis turned Chanukah into a festival of Jewish heroes, and into a festival of lights. They took a Greek symbol of victory – a candle holder with nine candles, and selected a legend about how the temple menorah miraculously burned for eight days, added some special prayers. They took the Messiah out of Chanukah and made it into a festival of lights, of keeping the faith in a dark world.

But instead of trying to get them to return to the original meaning of the festival, as Messianic Jews, we celebrate both meanings of the festival. It is always good to be a hero and refuse to abandon your faith, and Jesus told us to keep our light shining. We also recognize that one day Messiah will return and establish His kingdom over all the nations of the world.

So while we join you to celebrate His birth at Christmas, we also celebrate His return, when the prophecy of Jacob will be fulfilled. The text I selected comes from the prophetic blessings Jacob pronounced over His sons just before he died. He knew that Abraham's seed would become both a great nation, and become a blessing to all nations. In his dying moments, he understood that this blessing over all nations would come through the tribe of Judah and would involve a worldwide kingdom under someone called Shiloh. Some translations say: "the one to whom it belongs", instead of Shiloh, because that is what Shiloh means in Hebrew.

Jacob was shown that the blessing of all nations would come through a mighty ruler, a lawgiver, whom all the peoples would obey. You see, at Babel, the L-rd scattered the peoples of the earth. Some of them even went as far as China and some even ended up in Canada. In Messiah, G-d will gather all the peoples into the kingdom of His Son. Jesus is the Shiloh of prophecy. Jesus is the Messiah who did come into the temple, and who will one day establish His kingdom over all the peoples of the earth. He is coming again as Shiloh, the one whom the peoples will obey.

Only before that can happen, he does want to send His followers to conquer the world, but not with weapons of mass destruction. He sends us out with something much more powerful – the Gospel. How is the Gospel more powerful than any weapons of mass destruction? The Gospel can break the chains of sin. The Gospel can defeat the powers of darkness. The Gospel can even overcome death. There is no weapon as powerful as this Message of G-d's love in Jesus.

Conclusion

Let me ask you some questions this morning as you prepare to celebrate Christmas, and as Messianic Jews celebrate Chanukah. Are you part of the army of G-d? Has Jesus come into the temple of your heart and cleansed it? Has He overcome sin and darkness and death in your life? When He comes back to set up His everlasting kingdom over all the peoples and generations of mankind, will you welcome Him as your king, or will you try and hide, ashamed and frightened?

From before the beginning of time, G-d decided that His Son's Kingdom would come in two stages, and the two festivals, Christmas and Chanukah, celebrate these two aspects. He decided His Son would come first to suffer and die on the cross to save the world. This is what we are celebrating at Christmas. He also decided that at the end of the ages, His Son would return to set up His Kingdom over all the peoples of the earth. This is what we celebrate at Chanukah.

Pray for the Jewish people that they would not only recognize Jesus as the only true King of Israel, but that they would invite Him into the temple of their hearts, and celebrate His coming Kingdom. Dreidels and potato pancakes are nice, but recognizing the light of the world is better.

May the Holy One of Israel, who was born as an innocent baby in a stable, grant you two things at this season. First may He become your Saviour, as you invite Him into to your heart to forgive your sins and give you eternal life. Second, may He become your King, as He arms your life with the Gospel, so you can be part of His army which will conquer the hearts of all the peoples, before He returns to set up His Messianic Kingdom on the earth. The King is coming!

Merry Christmas and Happy Chanukah.