

How is Channukah about the coming of Messiah? Is it?

Much of what we know and understand about Channukah is based on two streams of understanding.

- 1) The instigation of the 8 day festival that took place in remembrance of the restoration of the altar of burnt offering in the Temple by Judas Maccabeus. The 8 days is associated with the festival of Sukkot, which could not be celebrated previously due to the ban that had been placed upon the celebration of the Shabbat, Festivals and the circumcision of the male children.
- 2) Associated with the fact of the events of the festival is the traditional story which accompanies it. During the sacking of the Temple, the marauding hoards destroyed the olive oil that used for the kindling of the lights of the Menorah, the 7 branched candlestick that was burning at all times in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary. At the rededication of the Temple, when the kindling was to take place, it was discovered that there was insufficient oil for the lamps that was acceptable to be burned. There was insufficient time for more to be made ready. The High Priest used the single flask of oil which then burned for 8 days, sufficient time for the oil to be replenished and the flames to remain alight.
- 3) The Channukah that is generally celebrated bases all of its traditions around the story of the oil. The foods eaten are generally fried in oil (jelly doughnuts and latkas) being the traditional fare. Gifts are given, similar to the Gregorian holiday.
- 4) The Gospel of John refers directly to the Feast of Dedication in John 10, where Yeshua is walking through the precincts and is asked by the teachers of the time directly if he is the Messiah. Yeshua does not answer them directly yes or no but points them to a previous conversation which is recorded earlier in John 10 which happens after the Festival of Sukkot. It may be that John is connecting these two events because they do have Messianic significance as Channukah echoes the structure of Sukkot but without the same proscribed instructions.

What about the 15th of Kislev?

It is important understand the historic context of Chanukkah because it is one of the most important parts of the prophetic history that is referred to and without understanding the events that take place around it, we may not understand events that are spoken of in the future.

In the gospel of Matthew, Yeshua specifically speaks of the Abomination of Desolation “standing in the Holy Place” then let those in Judea flee to the mountains.

The apocryphal text of 1 Maccabees 1:54 states that this event first happened on the 15th of Kislev which was yesterday (Thursday 15th December 2022). It was not until 10 days later on the 25th of Kislev that the sacrifice was made upon the Altar in the Temple. It was also the day the women who had circumcised their children were killed and their children hung around their neck.

These events are precursors to the pronouncement that Yeshua makes but are important nonetheless as they point to the events in history that were points of remembrance for the people he was speaking to.

The 25th of Kislev which is the beginning of Chanukkah is not just a moment of destruction but also the moment of restoration. However, if we look back to the time of the beginning of the Greek Empire, when Alexander the Great was beginning to come to power, we see a very different relationship between the Greeks and the Jews.

Josephus in his Antiquities gives a detailed history of the events that took place as Alexander approached Jerusalem. During this time, the Temple had been somewhat restored after the Babylonian destruction and exile. Nehemiah and Ezra had returned, and a rededication of sorts had taken place, but the Temple was not a shadow of it's former glory as in the days of Solomon.

The restoration of the Temple in Nehemiah's time was significant in many ways, but the contentions amongst the Jewish leadership were still problematic, despite the exile. The power struggles that took place were to bring about further difficulties.

Here is an interesting extract from Josephus during the time of the building of the Temple and adds some additional information to what was happening as recorded in Nehemiah.

HOW JOHN SLEW HIS BROTHER JESUS IN THE TEMPLE; AND HOW BAGOSSES OFFERED MANY INJURIES TO THE JEWS; AND WHAT SANBALLAT DID.

1. WHEN Eliashib the high priest was dead, his son Judas succeeded in the high priesthood; and when he was dead, his son John took that dignity; on whose account it was also that Bagoses, the general of another Artaxerxes's army, (22) polluted the temple, and imposed tributes on the Jews, that out of the public stock, before they offered the daily sacrifices, they should pay for every lamb fifty shekels. Now Jesus was the brother of John, and was a friend of Bagoses, who had promised to procure him the high priesthood. In confidence of whose support, Jesus quarreled with John in the temple, and so provoked his brother, that in his anger his brother slew him. Now it was a horrible thing for John, when he was high priest, to perpetrate so great a crime, and so much the more horrible, that there never was so cruel and impious a thing done, neither by the Greeks nor Barbarians. However, God did not neglect its punishment, but the people were on that very account enslaved, and the temple was polluted by the Persians. Now when Bagoses, the general of Artaxerxes's army, knew that John, the high priest of the Jews, had slain his own brother Jesus in the temple, he came upon the Jews immediately, and began in anger to say to them, "Have you had the impudence to perpetrate a murder in your temple?" And as he was aiming to go into the temple, they forbade him so to do; but he said to them, "Am not I purer than he that was slain in the temple?" And when he had said these words, he went into the temple. Accordingly, Bagoses made use of this pretense, and punished the Jews seven years for the murder of Jesus.

2. Now when John had departed this life, his son Jaddua succeeded in the high priesthood. He had a brother, whose name was Manasseh. :Now there was one Sanballat, who was sent by Darius, the last king [of Persia], into Samaria. He was a Cuthean by birth; of which stock were the Samaritans also. This man knew that the city Jerusalem was a famous city, and that their kings had given a great deal of trouble to the Assyrians, and the people of Celesyria; so that he willingly gave his daughter, whose name was Nicaso, in marriage to Manasseh, as thinking this alliance by marriage would be a pledge and security that the nation of the Jews should continue their good-will to him.¹

Sanballat is a treacherous character who shows up again in the history of the Jews and rise of Alexander as he seeks to betray Darius in favour of Alexander. Through Alexander, Sanballat becomes the High Priest of the Temple, but only for a very brief period before he dies within the year. The result is that a Jaddua becomes High Priest and in the knowledge of Alexander's approach is greatly concerned. However, through a dream, the Holy One warns him and instructs him

"... that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest should appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in the habits proper to their order, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent. Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced, and declared to all the warning he had received from God. According to which dream he acted entirely, and so waited for the coming of the king."²

Alexander is met by the High Priest and is impressed by all he sees but is questioned by one of his general as to why Alexander conducts himself in this way.

".....when I was at Dios in Macedonia, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is that, having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the Divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind." And when he had said this to Parmenio, and had given the high priest his right hand, the

¹ Antiquities of the Jews – Book 11, chapter 7

² Antiquities of the Jews – Book 11, chapter 8

priests ran along by him, and he came into the city. And when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the Book of Daniel was showed him (23) wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended. And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present; but the next day he called them to him, and bid them ask what favors they pleased of him; whereupon the high priest desired that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers, and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired.³

What we see here is fascinating. We are perhaps not all familiar with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 2. But what we do see here is the Holy One using the obedient and faithful Jew to interpret the dream of a gentile King, known for his cruelty. We then see a similar thing with the High Priest who reveals to Alexander, who has also dreamt of meeting the High Priest, who is able to show the dream of Nebuchadnezzar to him in the book of Daniel and to show him his part in the fulfillment. This is not dissimilar to the situation with Cyrus and Jeremiah.

Within all of this we see that the Holy One is weaving a symphony that is far and beyond anything that we might see, and that we are not to be disconcerted about the future, but to seek the face of the Holy One in how we might participate in bringing about His purposes without fear.

As we continue to read the story that leads up to the events of the 1st Chanukkah, we see also that it is the lack of faithfulness of the people of Jerusalem, desiring the things of the Greeks that brings about dissension that causes Antiochus to bring in the armies and desecrate the Temple. Prior to this time during the Ptolemaic period of Alexander and then Philip of Macedonia we see the establishment of the library at Alexandria which gained such great favour with the Greeks that they helped restore the Temple and its furnishings.⁴ However, this was not before further injury had taken place between the Samaritans and the Jews and the established the temple on Mount Gerazim, which has been turned into a mosque as we see it today.

History repeats itself

After these wonderful co-operations which took place between the Jews and the Greeks, we start to see that the greed of the priesthood creeps in once again, similar to the events that we see in the prophet Samuel's time. This greed and impudence begins to effect the people, the Land and how they are perceived by the ruling powers. The lack of faithfulness brings dissent.

The dissent brings the following:

1. ABOUT this time, upon the death of Onias the high priest, they gave the high priesthood to Jesus his brother; for that son which Onias left [or Onias IV.] was yet but an infant; and, in its proper place, we will inform the reader of all the circumstances that befell this child. But this Jesus, who was the brother of Onias, was deprived of the high priesthood by the king, who was angry with him, and gave it to his younger brother, whose name also was Onias; for Simon had these three sons, to each of which the priesthood came, as we have already informed the reader. This Jesus changed his name to Jason, but Onias was called Menelaus. Now as the former high priest, Jesus, raised a sedition against Menelaus, who was ordained after him, the multitude were divided between them both. And the sons of Tobias took the part of Menelaus, but the greater part of the people assisted Jason; and by that means Menelaus and the sons of Tobias were distressed, and retired to Antiochus, and informed him that they were desirous to leave the laws of their country, and the Jewish way of living according to them, and to follow the king's laws, and the Grecian way of living. Wherefore they desired his permission to build them a Gymnasium at Jerusalem. (15) And when he had given them leave, they also hid the circumcision of their genitals, that even when they were naked they might appear to be Greeks. Accordingly, they left off all the customs that belonged to their own country, and imitated the practices of the other nations.⁵

3. King Antiochus returning out of Egypt (16) for fear of the Romans, made an expedition against the city Jerusalem; and when he was there, in the hundred and forty-third year of the kingdom of the Seleucidse, he took the city without fighting, those of his own party opening the gates to him. And when he had gotten possession of Jerusalem, he slew many of the opposite party; and when he had plundered it of a great deal

³ ibid

⁴ ibid Book 12, chapter 3

⁵ Ibid, chapter 5

of money, he returned to Antioch.

4. Now it came to pass, after two years, in the hundred forty and fifth year, on the twenty-fifth day of that month which is by us called Chasleu, and by the Macedonians Apelleus, in the hundred and fifty-third olympiad, that the king came up to Jerusalem, and, pretending peace, he got possession of the city by treachery; at which time he spared not so much as those that admitted him into it, on account of the riches that lay in the temple; but, led by his covetous inclination, (for he saw there was in it a great deal of gold, and many ornaments that had been dedicated to it of very great value,) and in order to plunder its wealth, he ventured to break the league he had made. So he left the temple bare, and took away the golden candlesticks, and the golden altar [of incense], and table [of shew-bread], and the altar [of burnt-offering]; and did not abstain from even the veils, which were made of fine linen and scarlet. He also emptied it of its secret treasures, and left nothing at all remaining; and by this means cast the Jews into great lamentation, for he forbade them to offer those daily sacrifices which they used to offer to God, according to the law. And when he had pillaged the whole city, some of the inhabitants he slew, and some he carried captive, together with their wives and children, so that the multitude of those captives that were taken alive amounted to about ten thousand. He also burnt down the finest buildings; and when he had overthrown the city walls, he built a citadel in the lower part of the city, (17) for the place was high, and overlooked the temple; on which account he fortified it with high walls and towers, and put into it a garrison of Macedonians. However, in that citadel dwelt the impious and wicked part of the [Jewish] multitude, from whom it proved that the citizens suffered many and sore calamities. And when the king had built an idol altar upon God's altar, he slew swine upon it, and so offered a sacrifice neither according to the law, nor the Jewish religious worship in that country. He also compelled them to forsake the worship which they paid their own God, and to adore those whom he took to be gods; and made them build temples, and raise idol altars in every city and village, and offer swine upon them every day. He also commanded them not to circumcise their sons, and threatened to punish any that should be found to have transgressed his injunction. He also appointed overseers, who should compel them to do what he commanded. And indeed many Jews there were who complied with the king's commands, either voluntarily, or out of fear of the penalty that was denounced. But the best men, and those of the noblest souls, did not regard him, but did pay a greater respect to the customs of their country than concern as to the punishment which he threatened to the disobedient; on which account they every day underwent great miseries and bitter torments; for they were whipped with rods, and their bodies were torn to pieces, and were crucified, while they were still alive, and breathed. They also strangled those women and their sons whom they had circumcised, as the king had appointed, hanging their sons about their necks as they were upon the crosses. And if there were any sacred book of the law found, it was destroyed, and those with whom they were found miserably perished also.⁶

At the heart of these problems lies a lack of faithfulness by those who are meant to lead, but don't and in return seek favour from the world. The result is not as simple as identifying the wicked and condemning them, because the wicked are the spiritual leaders who bring about the condemnation on their own lives and the citizens that they are meant to be protecting. It seems that this is the reason for Yeshua's reference in John 10 regarding His role as the shepherd and the people His sheep. Within the account in John we see the leadership seeking to stone Him. These are the stones that were used in the sacrifice to the Abomination of Desolation; stones that were sanctified for a purpose to which it was decided that they would be left in the gentile area which was not regarded as ritually clean, also known as Solomons Portico, until the Prophet came to instruct them what to do with them.

So he chose priests of blameless conversation, such as had pleasure in the law: Who cleansed the sanctuary, and bare out the defiled stones into an unclean place. And when as they consulted what to do with the altar of burnt offerings, which was profaned; They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down, And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them. Then they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the former; And made up the sanctuary, and the things that were within the temple, and hallowed the courts. They made also new holy vessels, and into the temple they brought the candlestick, and the altar of burnt offerings, and of incense, and the table. And upon the altar they burned incense, and

⁶ ibid

the lamps that were upon the candlestick they lighted, that they might give light in the temple. Furthermore they set the loaves upon the table, and spread out the veils, and finished all the works which they had begun to make. Now on the five and twentieth day of the ninth month, which is called the month Kislev, in the hundred forty and eighth year, they rose up betimes in the morning,

[1 Maccabees 4:42-52](#)

What we have here is only a small sample of the verses from the book of Maccabees and the writing of Josephus.

What we should take away from this is that the events that we are experiencing and coming toward, as difficult as they may seem need to be understood in their correct context. We are not to be discomfited by them, it is the non-believer who should be discomfited and we should recognise that the Holy One is using whoever and whatever to bring about His purposes. We are to remain faithful and trusting, seeking His counsel and guidance.

"To the angel of the Messianic Community in Sardis, write: 'Here is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars: "I know what you are doing — you have a reputation for being alive, but in fact you are dead! Wake up, and strengthen what remains, before it dies too! For I have found what you are doing incomplete in the sight of my God. So remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and turn from your sin! For if you don't wake up, I will come like a thief; and you don't know at what moment I will come upon you. Nevertheless, you do have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; and they will walk with me, clothed in white, because they are worthy. He who wins the victory will, like them, be dressed in white clothing; and I will not blot his name out of the Book of Life; in fact, I will acknowledge him individually before my Father and before his angels. Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities." '

[Revelation 3:1-6](#)

Then came Hanukkah in Yerushalayim. It was winter, and Yeshua was walking around inside the Temple area, in Shlomo's Colonnade. So the Judeans surrounded him and said to him, "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us publicly!" Yeshua answered them, "I have already told you, and you don't trust me. The works I do in my Father's name testify on my behalf, but the reason you don't trust is that you are not included among my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice, I recognize them, they follow me, and I give them eternal life. They will absolutely never be destroyed, and no one will snatch them from my hands. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all; and no one can snatch them from the Father's hands. I and the Father are one."

[John 10:22-30](#)

No temptation has seized you beyond what people normally experience, and God can be trusted not to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. On the contrary, along with the temptation he will also provide the way out, so that you will be able to endure. Therefore, my dear friends, run from idolatry!

[1 Corinthians 10:13-14](#)