

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Jesus at the Feast of Hanukkah

John 10:22

Although Hanukkah is not included as one of the seven annual feasts required in Leviticus 23, it was observed by Jesus (John 10:22-24). An ancient lighting ceremony of a golden candlestick in the Temple was accompanied by a miracle of an even greater light almost 200 years later at the annual *Hanukkah/Dedication*. Jesus was observing the fulfillment of a 500-year-old prophecy by Daniel about how Jews would not only survive but triumph under extreme persecution (Daniel 11). In 168 BC Israelis risked their lives for the deliverance of their nation and the restoration of their religious freedom in the Temple. It was at Hanukkah (John 9:1-7) that Jesus performed one of the four identifying miracles of the Messiah foretold in Isaiah 35:5 and 42:6,7.

Historic Context

From the writing of the prophet Malachi in about 430 B.C. to the inspired Gospels which were penned in 50-60 AD there were almost 490 “silent” years where there is little record and no inspired account of God’s activities among the Jewish people. There were other records in the Apocrypha namely the four books of Maccabees which give us key parts of the history of these “silent years”. The major theme of these books was the coming of the Messiah. The sufferings of the Jews in this period only strengthened that desire for a military and political deliverer. Because of the prevailing Greek influence on Jewish society, the Jews translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (known as the Septuagint).

The Greek Empire had declined after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E. His kingdom was divided into four sections governed by his 4 generals. Israel was in the territory given to General Seleucia. They tried to forcibly “Hellenize” and secularize their Jewish subjects. Antiochus Theos “Epiphanes” was the eighth Seleucid ruler. He reigned in Syria from 175 to 164 B.C. and held an intense bitterness against the Jews. In 168 B.C. Antiochus *Epiphanes* (self-proclaimed “God Manifest”) unleashed his fury on Judea, destroying much of the city of Jerusalem and slaughtering hundreds of men, women and children. He plundered the Jewish Temple and slaughtered and sacrificed a sow to Zeus on the Holy Altar.

In 168 B.C. laws were passed to secularize all public life and extinguish Judaism.

1. After defiling their Temple, Seleucia forced the Jews to abandon Judaism and worship the Greek gods.
2. He outlawed Jewish religious observance as punishable by death.
3. He outlawed the reading of the Bible and burned the Torah.

This desecration defiled the Temple and was the first of two “abominations of desolations” prophesied by Daniel. Daniel’s vision prophesied the historical events from this period and about a God-fearing minority. “they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily *sacrifice*, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate, but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do *exploits*.” (Daniel 11:30-32). This was fulfilled in the Maccabean revolt from 168-164BC which began when an old man of the village of Modine

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was ready to bow to a Greek idol and defile himself with swine meat. Mattathias the head of the priestly Hasmonean family, and his five sons led by Judah attacked, and killed the Syrian official and the man who was complying with the demand of the Syrian official. They then fled to the hill country where many rebels flocked to them. This was the beginning of a war that lasted over three years. Their strikes were hammer-like thus the Hebrew descriptive title “Maccabee”. Their strike forces reclaimed and rededicated the Temple and the miracle of a one-day supply of a cruise of oil lasting 8 days. This lighting of candles for eight nights and giving gifts celebrates national and religious freedom.

Jesus’ Power Exhibited and His Proofs Examined

- Prophesied by Isaiah “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped,” “for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes” (Isaiah 35:5; 42:6,7).
- By the Scriptures “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 8:18,39). “the works that I do ... they bear witness of me” (John 10:25).
- By miracles “I am the light of the world.” Then the blind man “came seeing.” (John 9:1- 7)
- By John the Baptist – (Luke 7:22) “Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.”

Jesus Pronouncements Exclaimed

- He had recently claimed to be equal with God. (John 5:16-29)
- He claimed His knowledge and doctrine to be directly from God. (John 7:16)
- He referred to His miracle, “work” as proof (John 7:21-23). The last time He was in Jerusalem, he healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda near the Temple. (John 5:1-16).

The annual globally observed celebration by Jews is of a historic freedom fight that God blessed with a miracle.

What if the Jews of the silent years had remained silent when they were threatened with death, and if they had bowed down to secularism and compromised and become polluted? There would have been no Temple for Jesus to walk into and in which to heal the blind, revealing His power. We must follow their example and be strong in these later days as the history of religious persecution begins to repeat itself. It was in that very same Temple that Simeon read Isaiah 35:5;42:6,7 when Jesus was brought to be circumcised. “A light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of my people Israel” (Luke. 2:32). When Jesus proclaimed that before Abraham was He already existed, they chased Him out of the Temple and were ready to stone Him (Luke 8:58). They quickly found the healed man and asked him who did this. Once they heard “Jesus” they were infuriated and came running out of the Temple in pursuit. They had had enough of

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this Nazarene and demanded that He clearly say whether he was the Messiah/Christ or not! He answered that His works clarify who He is (John 10:24-25). The Jewish children play a game with a four-sided top called a "Dreidel". Each side has a Hebrew letter standing for the acronym, a Great Miracle Happened There. Greater than the oil lasting eight days to give light in the rededicated Temple a cacophony of miracles including light to blind eyes had happened here. To make sure this was clearly understood by the Jewish national leaders, Jesus made these proclamations. "Many priests believed (Acts 6:7). "Certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed" (Acts 15:5). One of those was Nicodemus. **At the Festival of Light, Jesus claimed to be the Light of the World** John 8:12; 9:5,39

A Rabbi and member of Israel's Sanhedrin came to Jesus by night and asked how to have eternal life. Jesus answered in John 3:16 - 21 "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe" (John 1:4-7).