

REDEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

164 [DECEMBER] Judas knew that the time had now arrived to rededicate the Temple.¹

“Then Judas and his brothers said, “See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.” So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

“Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one.

“They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

“Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them.

“So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

“Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.”² 1 Maccabees 4:36-59

¹ This timing filled the prophecies of Daniel 12:7, 11.

DAY 1 = Pentecost (Sunday, 4 June) of 167, when Antiochus IV stopped Temple sacrifices.

DAY 197 = 9*25 (Sunday, 17 December) of 167, when the Abomination of Desolation desecrated the Temple.

DAY 1,291 = 9*25 (Monday, 14 December) of 164, when the Temple was rededicated after 1,290 days.

DAY 1,335 = 11*10 (Wednesday, 27 January) of 163, probably represented a date after even more battles to defend the Jews from annihilation had taken place under the leadership of Judas.

² “They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.” 2 Maccabees 10:6-8

MODERN PRACTICE: THE EIGHT DAYS OF HANUKKAH LIGHTS



Like those before them, modern Jews celebrate Hanukkah (“Dedication”) by lighting eight lights over a period of eight days, beginning on 9*25. The Talmud attributes this eight day period to a miracle.

“What is [the reason of] Hanukkah? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Hanukkah, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day’s lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.” The Gemara portion of the Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 21b (written after AD 500)

Neither the books of the Maccabees (written shortly after the event) nor the histories of Josephus (written late in the 1st Century AD) cite this supposed miracle. In fact, Josephus indicated that he wasn’t altogether certain about how “lights” came to be connected to the holiday.

“And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival.”³

Since I believe that both these earlier sources would have had every reason to mention such a miracle, I doubt the veracity of the much later Talmudic account.

³Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1996, c1987). *The works of Josephus : Complete and unabridged*. Includes index. (Ant 12.325). Peabody: Hendrickson.

IMMEDIATE FALLOUT FROM THE DEDICATION

164/163 [DURING THE WINTER] According to 1 Maccabees 5, the Gentiles living in and around the “Promised Land” immediately tried to annihilate all the Jews living within their midst. Judas rushed through all those territories, defeating the aggressors & saving the Jews, then returning to Jerusalem. I now think it likely that this period represents the additional 45 days AFTER the rededication of the Temple on the 1,291st day after the stopping of sacrifices, as predicted in Daniel 12:11-12.

163 [DURING THE EARLY SPRING] Meanwhile, Antiochus IV, who was retreating back toward Babylon after a humiliating defeat at Persepolis (while trying to plunder a temple there), learned that the Jews had not only defeated his forces throughout Judea, but had rededicated the Temple back to Yahweh.

“Transported with rage, he conceived the idea of turning upon the Jews the injury done by those who had put him to flight; so he ordered his charioteer to drive without stopping until he completed the journey. But the judgment of heaven rode with him! For in his arrogance he said, “When I get there I will make Jerusalem a cemetery of Jews.”

“But the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, struck him with an incurable and invisible blow. As soon as he stopped speaking he was seized with a pain in his bowels, for which there was no relief, and with sharp internal tortures— and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions.

“Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence, but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews, and giving orders to drive even faster. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body. Thus he who only a little while before had thought in his superhuman arrogance that he could command the waves of the sea, and had imagined that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance, was brought down to earth and carried in a litter, making the power of God manifest to all. And so the ungodly man’s body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of the stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay.

“Because of his intolerable stench no one was able to carry the man who a little while before had thought that he could touch the stars of heaven.⁴ Then it was that, broken in spirit, he began to lose much of his arrogance and to come to his senses under the scourge of God, for he was tortured with pain every moment. And when he could not endure his own stench, he uttered these words, “It is right to be subject to God; mortals should not think that they are equal to God.”” 2 Maccabees 9:4-12⁵

⁴ Perhaps an allusion to Daniel 8:10.

⁵ “He lay there for many days, because deep disappointment continually gripped him, and he realized that he was dying. So he called all his Friends and said to them, “Sleep has departed from my eyes and I am downhearted with worry. I said to myself, ‘To what distress I have come! And into what a great flood I now am plunged! For I was kind and beloved in my power.’ But now I remember the wrong I did in Jerusalem. I seized all its vessels of silver and gold, and I sent to destroy the inhabitants of Judah without good reason. I know that it is because of this that these misfortunes have come upon me; here I am, perishing of bitter disappointment in a strange land.” Then he called for Philip, one of his Friends, and made him ruler over all his kingdom. He gave him the crown and his robe and the signet, so that he might guide his son Antiochus and bring him up to be king. Thus King Antiochus died there in the one hundred forty-ninth year. [By Jewish reckoning, Spring 163 – Spring 162 BC]” 1 Maccabees 6:9-16

MORE FALLOUT FROM THE DEDICATION

Following the death of Antiochus IV, and (no doubt) suffering great financial pressure from all the recent military disasters, the new Seleucid administration accepted terms of peace offered by two Jewish emissaries, probably dispatched before news of Antiochus IV's death had even reached Judea. The following are official letters recorded in 2 Maccabees 11:16-38.

“The letter written to the Jews by Lysias was to this effect:

“Lysias to the people of the Jews, greetings.

“John and Absalom, who were sent by you, have delivered your signed communication and have asked about the matters indicated in it. I have informed the king of everything that needed to be brought before him, and he has agreed to what was possible. If you will maintain your goodwill toward the government, I will endeavor in the future to help promote your welfare. And concerning such matters and their details, I have ordered these men and my representatives to confer with you.

“Farewell. The one hundred forty-eighth year,⁶ Dioscorinthius twenty-fourth⁷.”

“The king's letter ran thus:

“King Antiochus to his brother Lysias, greetings.

“Now that our father has gone on to the gods, we desire that the subjects of the kingdom be undisturbed in caring for their own affairs. We have heard that the Jews do not consent to our father's change to Greek customs, but prefer their own way of living and ask that their own customs be allowed them. Accordingly, since we choose that this nation also should be free from disturbance, our decision is that their temple be restored to them and that they shall live according to the customs of their ancestors. You will do well, therefore, to send word to them and give them pledges of friendship, so that they may know our policy and be of good cheer and go on happily in the conduct of their own affairs.”

“To the nation the king's letter was as follows:

“King Antiochus to the senate of the Jews and to the other Jews, greetings.

“If you are well, it is as we desire. We also are in good health.

“Menelaus⁸ has informed us that you wish to return home and look after your own affairs. Therefore those who go home by the thirtieth of Xanthicus⁹ will have our pledge of friendship and full permission for the Jews to enjoy their own food and laws, just as formerly, and none of them shall be molested in any way for what may have been done in ignorance. And I have also sent Menelaus to encourage you.

“Farewell. The one hundred forty-eighth year, Xanthicus fifteenth¹⁰.”

The Romans also sent them a letter, which read thus: “Quintus Memmius and Titus Manius, envoys of the Romans, to the people of the Jews, greetings. With regard to what Lysias the kinsman of the king has granted you, we also give consent. But as to the matters that he decided are to be referred to the king, as soon as you have considered them, send someone promptly so that we may make proposals appropriate for you. For we are on our way to Antioch. Therefore make haste and send messengers so that we may have your judgment.

“Farewell. The one hundred forty-eighth year, Xanthicus fifteenth.”

⁶ The Syrian Greeks counted the 148th Seleucid Year as Fall 164 BC to Fall 163 BC.

⁷ FRI/SAT 9/10 APR 163 BC.

⁸ This is the same Menelaus who had bribed his way into the High Priesthood nearly a decade earlier. He appears to be functioning as the emissary of Antiochus V to the Jews.

⁹ FRI/SAT 14/15 MAY 163 BC.

¹⁰ THU/FRI 29/30 APR 163 BC.