

The Good Shepherd:

What Jesus Taught on Hanukah

By Christopher J. Patton

“At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.” (John 10:22)

The Jewish Feast of Hanukah celebrates the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem in 165 BC. This dedication occurred within the context of the liberation of the returned Jewish exiles from the oppression of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who was a prophetic ante-type (forerunner) of the coming Antichrist or Beast. Daniel predicted these events as recorded in Daniel 11: 21-35, which is referenced by and merges with Jesus’ prophecy of the Last Days in Luke 21 and Matthew 24 (especially v.15).

In the biblical history and prophecy of Israel, political liberation always goes hand-in-hand with spiritual liberation, because the truth makes free. In the first commandment the God of Israel identifies Himself as the One who brought Israel out of Egypt. Then, the Jewish people had to be free, and largely dedicated, as a nation to God’s service, or Jesus could not have been born into a home enabling Him to enjoy a sinless infancy. Today, because of His sinless sacrifice, the faithful are delivered from the Kingdom of Darkness. (Colossians 1:11-16)

The miracle of Hanukah focused on the re-lighting of the temple’s menorah, or seven-branched lamp stand. The Maccabees only had oil enough for one day, but it burned for eight days – the time that passes between birth and circumcision. There was no ark in this re-built temple, but God placed His presence there in this miracle. I believe that this miracle indicated that the true Light of the World was soon to come to His temple. Only 160 or so years later, Yeshua was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born and circumcised in the flesh as a man - eight days after His birth. (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:35 and 2:21)

Son of Man - Son of God

John chapter 10 records a couple of teaching sessions that took place during Hanukah in the temple’s portico of Solomon. The chapter begins with Jesus’ presence in Jerusalem for the feast, as was His custom. Purposefully at Hanukah, He gave the parable of the “Good Shepherd.” In this teaching not only does He reference the salvation of the nations and allude to His death and resurrection (16-18), He is also declaring His Messiahship and identity as God in the flesh. He had come to fulfill the next stage in the liberation of Israel and the world from oppressive destruction, sin and death - the dominion of the Devil. (10) The Good Shepherd must replace the human hirelings as the Melchizedek priest replaced the Levitical priesthood. (Hebrew 7)

Yeshua's identification of Himself as the Good Shepherd is the fulfillment of Ezekiel 34. In verses 2-10, The God of Israel condemns the fleshly shepherds of Israel who led the people astray. Because of the failure of human leadership, God promises to come Himself to search for and deliver His sheep. (11) The deliverance is both physical and spiritual. The sheep scattered due to disobedience are brought into millennial rest and healed. (13-16) David is raised up as their king, which shows that the divine Shepherd must be a human son of David, too. (23) Israel enters into the spiritual covenant of knowing God intimately. Nevermore shall the sons and daughters of Jacob need to endure the insults of anti-Semitism hurled against them by the nations. (29)

But many of the Jewish audience did not grasp the significance of Yeshua's parable, so He had to speak plainly in John 10:24-39, Here He declares that He has the power to give eternal life to human beings because of His oneness with the Father. That even the hostile ones now understood His message is plain because they took up rocks to stone Him for the blasphemy of declaring Himself to be God. Jesus escaped then, and in verse 40-42 it states that many of the Jews followed him to beyond Jordan and believed in Him there.

So Yeshua/Jesus' message at Hanukkah was that the Father had sent Himself, through the Son, as the Good Shepherd to redeem Israel from failed human leadership according to His promises. It is not possible for man to be holy on his own ability and character, but through the doorway of the Good Shepherd we acquire the grace by faith to become His sheep. With the metaphor changing from sheep to living stones, Yeshua, the Melchizedek High Priest is building a new, eternal temple, permanently purged from all sin, from which the Light of love, justice and truth shall never depart. (I Peter 2:4-10)