

Suspended Dedication

John 10:22-23 (KJV)

22 And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. **23** And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch.

In this verse, we see that Jesus is in the temple in the winter time. John mentions the time because he's establishing a time line for when events take place in his gospel. For example, the events that took place in chapter seven were at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (around September.). So, around September Jesus entered the temple and a few months later, around the time of The Feast of Dedication, he entered again. The Feast of Dedication takes place on the 25th day of 'Kislev' in the Hebrew calendar. This day occurs in the Gregorian calendar between November and December. So, by giving us this information, John lets us know that Jesus has been in Jerusalem for about 2½ months, presumably teaching in the temple the whole time.

But what is the Feast of Dedication? Nowhere in the laws of Moses is there anything called "The Feast of Dedication." However, this feast is still regularly practiced today; we call it "Hanukkah." You see, the Hebrew word for 'dedication' is 'Hanukkah.'

It turns out that this feast isn't a Christian practice, but it does have a message that can be applied in Christian context.

The Bible doesn't explain the origins of Hanukkah, but there is a book called the Apocrypha, which means "hidden," that accounts the origins of Hanukkah. Keep in mind that the books of the Apocrypha are not considered to be a part of the Word of God, so they should be treated as such.

In the Apocrypha, there are two chapters called 1st and 2nd Maccabees. These books tell the story of a group of Jewish soldiers who fought to free Jerusalem from a Seleucid King, Antiochus.

This King outlawed Judaism and started sacrificing pigs to Zeus on the altar of the temple in Jerusalem. This caused one family to rise and overthrow the Seleucids.

I won't go into detail, but there's one passage in 1st Maccabees 10 that talks about the re-dedication of the temple to God.

"1 Maccabees 10:41-46

41 Then Judas appointed certain men to fight against those that were in the fortress, until he had cleansed the sanctuary. 42 So he chose priests of blameless conversation, such as had pleasure in the law: 43 Who cleansed the sanctuary, and bare out the defiled stones into an unclean place. 44 And when as they consulted what to do with the altar of burnt offerings, which was profaned; 45 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, 46 And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them."

Remember, this is history, not scripture. Notice that the book itself says that there was no one speaking on God's behalf during all this; there wasn't a prophet.

Yet, the men knew that the stones were unclean and could not be used in God's temple anymore. The stones had been defiled by having pig's blood spilled on them in the worship of the false god Zeus. They knew they were defiled, because they had scripture that told them so. The stones were also used in the temple for the sanctification of the people through the sacrifice of the red heifer.

Bible Trivia Time: Does the sacrifice of the red heifer negate the effects of the pig's blood, or does the pig's blood negate the power of the heifer?

This was a question that was not in the scripture. There wasn't guidance for this in the Law of Moses. More importantly, there wasn't a prophet of God to tell them God's word.

In the military, there's a philosophy that states if you're given orders, but lose contact with your commander, you should continue executing the last orders you received until you're given new orders.

In this book, these boys did the same exact thing; they didn't have a prophet to give them a new word of God, so they kept implementing the Words they had.

“1st Maccabees 10:47 *Then they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the former;”*

They took new stones and built a new altar. God gave Moses instructions on how to build an altar out of unfinished stones. The stones couldn't be chiseled and worked by humans in any way. The stones had to be taken in their natural state and fit together to make an altar. Since this is what the scriptures said, that is what they did.

Sometimes we mess up; we do things, in our dedicated life to the Lord, that are unholy. We sin and become unsure what to do with the broken life we've created.

We must lay down that life and say, “I'm not going to deal with that right now.” We need to take that broken life, put it aside, repent, and start over. Sometimes, we need to say, “I don't what God wants me to do with this, but I'm going to put it aside for right now and do what he told me to do the last time I heard from him.”

“1st Maccabees 10:48-50

48 *And made up the sanctuary, and the things that were within the temple, and hallowed the courts. **49** They made also new holy vessels, and into the temple they brought the candlestick, and the alter of burnt offerings, and of incense, and the table. **50** And upon the altar they burned incense, and the lamps that were upon the candlestick they lighted, that they might give light in the temple.”*

The Maccabees brought vessels into the temple and lit the gold candlestick (the menorah) to bring light into the temple. It's this lighting of the menorah and rededication of the temple in Jerusalem that gives this holiday it's names: The Feast of Dedication, The Feast of Lights, or Hanukkah.

The Feasts of Lights

Jesus is often associated with lights. One of the first prophecies about Jesus is in Isaiah:

Isaiah 9:2 (KJV) *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*

Later, we see:

Isaiah 42:1 (KJV) Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

This scripture is quoted when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. Translated in Matthew and Mark as:

Matthew 17:5 (KJV) While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Many people try to take this as proof that there's a God the Father and a God the Son who are separate, but this isn't the case. The words spoken from the cloud at Jesus' baptism are quoting Isaiah 42:1 and we're expected to know where it came from and what it means. Even more importantly, we're expected to understand the Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that it says in the rest of Isaiah 42.

Isaiah 42:6 (KJV) I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

The words spoken from the cloud at Jesus' baptism tell us that he's the fulfillment of the prophesy saying he would be a light to the Gentiles.

Remember, the wise men came to find Jesus because of a light:

Matthew 2:1-2 (KJV)

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, **2** Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

His entrance into the world was announced by a star and the light of that star guided the wise men to King Herod to ask where the new king is. God put signs in the heavens so that everyone could see the truth.

The light of the heavens showed them the way to the Light of the World. Just in case you missed any of the other clues, Jesus comes right out and tells us that he is the light of the world:

John 9:5 (KJV) As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Jesus is the light of the world when he's in the world. If Jesus is God and God created the world, then God must be in the world in some way, shape, or form always. Yes, this is true, but in this case, he's talking about his human form.

Stay with me, I'm not saying that since Jesus' body is no longer on earth there isn't any good in the world.

In the temple, the Menorah was lit with oil. When the Maccabees went to light the Menorah in the temple, they had to find a cruse of oil that had the seal of the High Priest still on it. The oil was prepared by the priests and was sealed by the High Priest to certify that it was fit for use in the temple. During better times in Israel, these cruses of oil were plentiful, but when the Maccabees rededicated the temple they weren't. They had to search to find a cruse that was holy and set aside for the Lord.

Oil in the Bible often symbolizes the spirit of God or the Holy Ghost. The High Priest had to be covered in oil from his head to his feet before he could enter the Holy of Holies. The oil was also used for light. It was put into the menorah to create light inside the temple. The light was put into the stand, but then a human being had to light it. There isn't light in the temple unless a human being brings it into the temple.

It takes a human being to bring light into the world. The smallest light is more powerful than the darkest dark. Darkness, no matter how powerful, must run from light. However, that light will never defeat darkness unless a human being brings it into the world.

Jesus, God robed in human flesh, was that light to the world. He was a light to the Jew and a light to the Gentile. As long as He's in the world, He's the light of the world.

Later, He said:

Matthew 5:14 (KJV) Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Jesus was the light of the world while he was in the world, but we're the light the world when he's not. He expects us to be a light to the world like a city on a hill. A city in a valley might hide it's light, but a city on a hill shines its lights for all to see.

We're the light of the world. Just like the menorah in the temple, we're to bring that light into the world. The Holy Ghost fills us just as the oil filled lamp stand. But the oil isn't supposed to just sit in the lamp stand on its own; it's expected to create light in the darkness. So, the Holy Ghost within you shouldn't sit stagnant; it should bring light into the world. It can only do that if a human being brings that light.

When John tells us that Jesus is in the temple and it's winter, he's giving us a clue as to the time that's elapsed since the stories that began in chapter seven. Yet, there's also a symbolic element to John's story. You see, the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, is the anniversary of the re-lighting of the menorah in the temple. Jesus is the light of the world. Where is he? He's in the temple.

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The Feast of Dedication

It's in this location that Jesus is approached by some men who ask him whether he's the Messiah.

John 10:24 (KJV) Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

The light of the world has been brought into the temple by a human being: Jesus Christ, but Jesus' answer to them is equally telling:

John 10:25-27 (KJV)

25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. **26** But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. **27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

John 10:37-38 (KJV)

37 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. **38** But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

What happened when the Maccabees dedicated the temple in Jerusalem? First, they cleaned the temple. Then, they dedicated the temple. Finally, they lit the oil that was within the temple so that they could see.

The men coming to Jesus wanted to see the light, but they didn't want to dedicate themselves.

On this day, let's celebrate the re-dedication of the temple to God. Jesus is telling us, "You first need to clean the temple within you, then you need to dedicate the temple to me, and then you'll see the light."

Remember, the menorah that stood in the temple was well within the temple itself. Without the lamp stand, the interior of temple was dark. The light had to be kept within the temple and burn oil. Likewise, the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the infilling of the Holy Ghost is something that must be within each of us.

The light of Christ must burn within our innermost being, being sustained by the oil of the Holy Ghost. We must let our light shine out into the world, but the source of that light must be constantly kindled within us.

Let us take this day to dedicate the temple that is within our own hearts. Tear down the altar within you if it's become defiled, build a new altar, and fill up the candlesticks in your holy place with new oil. Find a fresh cruse of the Holy Ghost and pour it into the lamp stand, that menorah in your heart. A human being by the name of Jesus Christ is about to bring a fresh light into the world once again.