

GROWING IN GOD PODCAST



GIG280 – Hanukkah – Do Not Be Conformed to This World

We are into the celebration of Hanukkah, and I personally am very excited about this Hanukkah. I want to share with you some of my thoughts and feelings about what I am looking for in God during this time on a very personal level. In order to do that, I want to give a little bit of history and talk about what Hanukkah is all about, what it represents.

When most people think of Hanukkah, they think, “Well, it is a celebration that is in Judaism, and it mimics Christmas,” and that is not true. Hanukkah existed before the celebration of Christmas. It is not just trying to provide something for the Jewish people during December that competes with the Christmas season, it is not that at all. It is a very historically-based event, it is a very scripturally-based event, and it has very deep meaning personally to me and I know to many people. We think of lighting the hanukkia or the candelabra with the eight candles, and that is mostly what people think about or find as the symbolism or the recognition of Hanukkah. And that is true, that is done. In many places it is called the Festival of Lights. The focus is that there was a cruse of oil that was supposed to last for one day in lighting the Temple menorah, and instead it lasted eight days. Now historically there is no real evidence of that transpiring, and neither was that really the basis of the Hanukkah celebration; and for me, it does not hold the depth of meaning of what Hanukkah is really all about. So let me drill down a little bit into it and see where we can go.

I will start with John the tenth chapter. Verse 22 says, “At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem.” Biblically, Hanukkah is referred to as the Feast of Dedication, and this is touching on really the significance of Hanukkah. It was about the rededication of the Temple after the Maccabean Revolt, when they recaptured Jerusalem, recaptured the Temple, and purified it from its defilement. We see in verse 23, “It was winter, and Jesus [Yeshua] was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.” So here is Christ, in Jerusalem, on the Temple Mount, celebrating at this time of the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah. It was something that existed back at that time, and it was something that He participated in.

So we see Christ’s participation in Hanukkah. Now, what is the basis of it? I want to present this very quickly because it is a long story, and it is a beautiful story – I encourage you to get in and study it. But I will try to be quick here with just a thumbnail sketch of what really we are looking at for Hanukkah. At the time the Maccabean Revolt started, Israel was under the suppression of the Greeks in the Seleucid empire. The ruler at the moment was Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was very determined to wipe away Judaism, all of its practices, to get rid of it completely. Under many of the rulers of the Greek empire from Alexander on, there had not been a persecution and a requirement of the Jews to convert. But there was under Antiochus, and he was determined, so he did many things. He outlawed all celebrations and all performances of circumcision, and Sabbath, and other things that were done by the Jewish people. He was going to completely get rid of that and wipe that culture from Israel, and institute the new culture which was the paganism of the Greek people. So we find many events taking place. The Jews were being severely persecuted; they were publicly being forced to eat pork as a proclamation that they were now following the ways of the Greeks. And all of these things were transpiring in the Temple

itself. They were sacrificing swine on the altar, and they were turning the Temple itself into a temple of the Greek gods.

This was a terrible, terrible situation. And in this atmosphere, some of the government leaders went to Modi'in, the city Modi'in, which is very close to Jerusalem, and they were forcing people to, again, eat swine publicly. They decided to pick on one particular man – and actually, they picked on the wrong guy. Mattathias was very well-respected in the city of Modi'in, and so they were going to march him up to this altar that they built and have him eat swine publicly, to show the population of Modi'in that he was following the Greek ways. Well, it did not quite work out that way. Mattathias began a riot, which we refer to quite often, and this riot actually ended the reign of the Seleucid empire in Israel over a period of time.

Now, like I said, there are a lot of details that we could go into about the Maccabean Revolt and about how this happened. But we know that this small band of Jewish men and women that refused to be hellenized, or converted into pagans, rose up and fought until they literally battled the armies of the Greeks and won. They took over Jerusalem. They took over the Temple Mount. This was the atmosphere and the events that were later celebrated as Hanukkah. We see this actually in the Book of Maccabees, which many Protestants are not familiar with because it is not in most Protestant Bibles. It is in some of the Scriptures that we know, it is in the Catholic Bible. I am going to read to you from the Book of Maccabees because it is a very historic book, it is a very accurate book, and it tells some of the events that happened after the Maccabean Revolt took possession of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

First Maccabees 4:42-43, RSV, says, "He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place." Now remember, biblically, when we read John, the Feast of Hanukkah is referred to as the Feast of Dedication, and this is the reason why. It is this event of cleansing the Temple from its defilement that brings about the name of Hanukkah as the Feast of Dedication. They cleansed the sanctuary, they removed the defiled stones; because remember, the altar was made out of unhewn stones that they sacrificed the animals on. And now, under Antiochus, they had been sacrificing swine and other unclean animals on the altar. So they had to find a way to purify the Temple and bring it back to a pure state.

In verses 44-46 it says,

They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet [really speaking of the Messiah] to tell them what to do with them.

Remember, the altar is sacred. It had been made sacred and it had been sanctified. So they do not want to just throw these stones away, and they are not sure what to do with them because they are defiled. So they set them aside, kind of with this idea, "Well, we will wait for Messiah to come, and then He will know what to do with these defiled stones." And that takes care of the problem.

Going on in verses 47-57, it says,

Then they took unhewn stones [which, remember, was the requirement under Moses: you could not hew the stones, they had to be raw stones in their natural state], 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 burned incense on the altar and lighted 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 and forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering which they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it [isn't that interesting? to the very day it had been defiled they retook it, restored it, rededicated it, and began the offerings again], 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....

Of course, we celebrate Hanukkah for eight days, and part of it is the lighting of the menorah. We light the lamps – that was a part of the celebration, even though maybe the cruse of oil did not last for eight days. But still, what a miracle! They were worshiping heaven, thanking God for the miracle that they won the war – this little band of farmers that was able to take on the Greek army and bring them down, retake Jerusalem, re-establish the sacrifices of the Temple, and save Judaism from being hellenized into a pagan religion. This is something to celebrate. And they “...offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns.”

This was a great time of celebration, and so it should be. They were celebrating the things that they had done. So what do we celebrate? Why is this something that we should look to? Because the Scripture tells us in Romans the twelfth chapter, verses 1-2, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” These few under Mattathias refused to be converted. They refused to be hellenized. They refused to be turned into pagans, so they rebelled; and by faith and with the help of God, they won the battle and they held on to the faith of Judaism, which could have been destroyed at that very moment. Remember, this was before the advent of Christ, so who knows what impact this would have had.

Here we are with this tremendous recognition that out of the determination of people not to lay down their faith, not to keep quiet, these things were accomplished. I mean, this was intimidating. These people were being persecuted, they were being killed. And that is part of the history behind Hanukkah. There have been times under different regimes and nations where to put a menorah out in your front yard, which is where it was supposed to be, and light the candles of Hanukkah meant persecution, potentially death. And so it has been celebrated by the Jewish people down through time as almost a sign of their resistance to be converted and enculturated into pagan cultures, away from their faith and their foundations of the fathers in Judaism. We see that this was the attitude that they had, this was the spirit behind it; and that is why I think it is important today to celebrate this coming Hanukkah, and every Hanukkah, with this drive and determination. Because we as believers in Yeshua, in Jesus, live in a culture today that is determined to move us off of our Christian values, move us away from our system of faith, move us away from the Scriptures, and try to enculturate us into a different way of life, try to persecute us or put us down for our beliefs. And yet Jesus says in Matthew 5:11-16,

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

These are our instructions from Yeshua. We are the salt of the earth. We are to be the light. And that is what you can say about those who participated in the Maccabean Revolt, who refused to be removed off of their faith. This should be our cry today. This is something that we need to have in our hearts.

You know, today Jews and Christians alike face a world where religious freedoms are being eroded and persecuted, and the leftist, socialist agenda and cancel culture are seeking to tear down and remove our longstanding foundations of Judeo-Christian values and morals. To celebrate Hanukkah is to follow after the spirit of Mattathias who refused to be hellenized or converted to the paganism of the Greek culture. We likewise should refuse the demands of today’s culture and the pressure of today’s cultures against us that would force us to deny our faith, force us to deny our beliefs, force us to convert to the paganism of today’s world – which is quickly abandoning the Scriptures, abandoning morals, abandoning pure thought and right ways of life. These are the traditions that especially we in America were raised on. This is the tradition of the Church and what it has stood for. Christ promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against His Church, but it takes a determination in us. We need to draw the spirit that rested upon those that participated in this revolt against the cultures of that day. We need to take on their spirit that says, “I will not give up the Word of God. I will not give up the promises. I will not give up the teachings and the morals. I will not give up the lifestyle of the Kingdom that God has given me. I will not give up the faith for a Messiah coming and ruling and reigning from Jerusalem in this age again. I will not give up the ways of life that we know in Christ we are to live – to honor God, to glorify Him, to be that light, that city that is on a hill.”

So why are we doing this? I want you to remember just a few things about this, and about your celebration of Hanukkah. We are believers, and we are not to be conformed to this world. We are not to be conformed to its cultures, its beliefs, and its ways of life when they are contrary to God and to His Word. We are to be a light to this world; and believe me, this world is getting darker by the day. We as the Church, we as believers in Christ, we should shine brightly; and the Jewish people should shine as a light on a hill, as being those who hold forth the Word of God and the promises of God and the prophecies to come. We cannot let our light go out, and we certainly cannot in fear and intimidation hide it under a bushel basket in this day. As Yeshua said, we are the salt of the earth; and I know that the salt has a flavor, and that is what the Scripture refers to, but salt was also used as a preservative. They would preserve meat and fish and other things; and if the salt loses its strength, it cannot preserve. Part of what we, as the salt of the earth today, are to do is to preserve the culture of the Kingdom of God. We are to preserve the ways of God. We are to preserve the love and the Word of God in this day and age.

I encourage you – celebrate this feast with the same spirit in your heart that was on those believers in that day, who refused to be converted into something that was against the will of God and against the teachings of God. Let us stand. Let us stand against the cancel culture and everything that would tear

down our faith, our beliefs, and our way of life. Let us celebrate this time, this Feast of Dedication. It was a rededication; and yes, maybe we have been really impacted over the last twenty years by this slow, slow change in our culture. But they were able to go in and cleanse the Temple. They were able to rebuild the altar. They rebuilt the implements, they rebuilt the menorah, all of these things. They rededicated them and they put them back into service. Let us put our faith back into service. Let us rededicate and purify everything that has been touched and destroyed during these days under the attempts of satan to bring about his purpose. Remember, if satan gets his way, no flesh will be saved alive; he will destroy all faith in God, all faith in the Word. We stand in this Hanukkah celebration to resist that with all of our heart, in the name of the Lord.