

Dedicate Before You Celebrate

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“So Shlomo celebrated the festival at that time for seven days, together with all Isra'el, an enormous gathering; [they had come all the way] from the entrance of Hamat to the Vadi [of Egypt]. On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, having observed the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days.” – 2 Chronicles 7:8-9

Hanukkah has a long history, longer than many people may think. The majority of the people believe Hanukkah was established and instituted between the 500 year gap of the writing of the Tenakh and the Apostolic Writings, during the time of the Maccabees, when they took back the Temple from the Greco-Syrian invaders and rededicated it and got it back up and running again. In fact, every time the Temple Altar was dedicated – after its construction or reconstruction – a Festival of Dedication occurred.

In Numbers 7 & 8, the original Altar and the Cohanim (Priests) were dedicated. This is followed immediately by Numbers 9, where the Israelites are instructed to keep the Passover. They've already been given the commandment to keep the Passover, so why give it again? I would suggest that God's message was: it is alright to celebrate the Dedication of the Altar, and I want you to do it for eight days, in keeping with this festival forthcoming.

When King Solomon (Shlomo) dedicated the Altar in the Temple, they did it on the seven days before Sukkot, as 1 Kings 8 makes clear. But then, as Sukkot was ending, the people wanted so much to continue celebrating that they extended it another week and a night – eight nights set aside to celebrate the Dedication of the Temple!

In Ezra chapter six, we read the story of the Rededication of the Temple after the Babylonian exile. This Rededication took place immediately before Passover. And we read they “had renounced the filthy practices of the nations... in order to seek ADONAI the God of Isra'el, ate [the Pesach lamb] and joyfully kept the feast of matzah for seven days; for ADONAI had filled them with joy by turning the heart of the king of Ashur toward them, so that he assisted them in the work of the house of God, the God of Isra'el.”

So, while they cleaned up the Temple to prepare it for Rededication, they cleaned up their own lives at the same time – they renounced and cleansed themselves of their assimilation into the pagan practices of the lands in which they had dwelt as exiles! Similarly, the Levites in Numbers 8 had to be cleansed before the Dedication could be complete and the Festival could begin.

In many places in the Apostolic Writings, we are God's Temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:15-20; 2 Cor. 6:15-18; Eph. 2:18-22), and that we are also a nation of priests (1 Peter 2:9). If we are to celebrate the Festival of Dedication... don't we first have to Dedicate the Temple? And if we are to Dedicate the Temple, don't we first have to cleanse and prepare ourselves... not just as the Temple, but as Priests?

I see this as the end of a three-festival cycle. Prior to Passover – which symbolizes our salvation – we work on our relationship with God, make t'shuvah, so we don't take the Cup of Redemption and the Afikoman in an "unworthy manner," as Rav Paul warns against in 1 Corinthians 11. Prior to Yom Kippur, we work on both our relationship with God and our fellow man – reconciliation. Yom Kippur celebrates our time of reconciliation, as Passover celebrates our time of redemption. And Hanukkah celebrates our Dedication to God, which means we are now to keep His commandments, just as the Dedication of the Altar meant they were ready to keep His commandments of sacrifice on it.

This Shabbat marks five days before the beginning of the Festival of Dedication. Let me encourage you to spend some of that time preparing yourself to be Dedicated to the Most High. Is there a project you've been putting off, that keeps you from serving Him as well as you might? For me, it has been disorganization – of my living space, my work space, and my life in general. Maybe that's yours, but maybe it's not. What's important is that you put your house in order – in whatever way is necessary, just as the Babylonian exiles and the Maccabees did with the Temple before they Rededicated it each of those times.

Then, during the last couple of days before Hanukkah, rededicate your life to the service of God. How? Sacrifice – do without something special in your life, something you especially enjoy. Give a special offering to God of money or time or something else you can give. And pray. Offer prayers every day during that week, telling HaShem that you are rededicating your life to Him and His Service.

Then, after you've Dedicated... you can properly celebrate the Festival of Dedication... afterall, how can you celebrate doing something if you've not done it yet?

