

חג חנוכה



Chanuka! In previous issues of Besorah, we have dealt with the history of this winter holiday as its celebration arose out of the victorious Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid domination of Israel (cir. 165 B.C.). We also looked at the prophetic significance Jesus ascribed to this historical episode when He connected 'the abomination of desolation, being with child, winter, and the Sabbath day' – all things that happened during the Maccabean uprising - to events that will precede His return, in Matthew 24: 15 – 20 (Winter edition, 2020).

We examined the development of the holiday customs from rather obscure, mythical beginnings to the strongly nationalistic expressions found in Israel today (Winter edition, 2021). Last year, we considered the context of the New Testament mention of Chanuka in John 10, which reads: 'And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch.' (vv.22, 23).

As previously mentioned, this was not a feast commanded by God, so Jerusalem would not have been crowded with outsiders. It was the Judeans (locals and those in authority) who surrounded Jesus and said, 'How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly' (v. 24). At that time, Israel was occupied by Rome. The Judeans, against the backdrop of the Maccabees, posed this disingenuous question, either because of a political desire to overthrow Rome or to entrap Jesus.

At first glance Jesus' reply, referring to sheep, seems somewhat odd or, perhaps, arbitrary. However, it is certainly neither! Last year, we

considered the possibility that Ezekiel 34 was the prophetic reading for the holiday at that time. In this issue, I'd like to examine another portion of scripture which Jesus draws from in His reply: Psalms 80-82.

Jesus quotes Ps. 82:6 (John 10:34), but this is only after His initial reasoning with the Judeans. So let's back up, as it were, and examine the previous two psalms.

Psalm 80 is a plea to the Shepherd of Israel for deliverance from Israel's enemies. The opening verses describe Israel's battle array ordained by God Himself: Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh were the tribes that immediately followed the tabernacle, when it set forth (see Num. 2:17-24). Each family is referred to as a 'host'; in Hebrew: צבא – army. (See Num. 2:3, which translates the word as 'armies' and v.4 translates it as 'hosts'). In this Psalm, God is referred to as the 'Lord of Hosts' - or equally, the 'Lord of Armies'.

Once upon a time, as described in this psalm, Israel dwelt in prosperity (vv. 8-11), but now she is the strife and mockery of her enemies (vv. 5,6). Her hedge of protection is broken down so that all who pass by 'pluck' her (v.12, emph. mine).

The psalmist intones: 'The boar (literally, 'swine') out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which Thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that Thou madest strong for Thyself' (vv. 13-15). The Hebrew word 'visit' means 'to investigate' but can also mean 'punish'.



In verse 15, the Hebrew word which is translated 'vineyard' - כִּנֶּה – means 'base', 'rootstock', 'support' or 'establishment'. (It is the same word used for the 'bases' of the lavers, in Solomon's Temple, in I Kings 7:37,38. It is also the source of the name 'Yachin' – the pillar on the right hand in the Temple, I Kings 7:21) .

In the Hebrew text, the first Hebrew letter of the word 'vineyard/base' is greatly enlarged, looking like this: כּ. Whenever this happens, its purpose is to draw attention to the word. In some manuscripts, this letter sits below the line and is also crooked (can't duplicate that here). This is said to denote oppression. Further in Psalm 80:15, the word translated as 'branch' is actually the Hebrew word 'son' – בֶּן!

Verse 17 follows: 'Let Thy **hand be upon** the man of Thy right hand, **upon** the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself' (emph. mine). The preposition '**upon**' (עַל) is also translated as 'against' (see Ps 81:14). One of the targums (Jewish translations) renders the end of verse 17, '...[upon] King Messiah, whom thou hast strengthened for thyself'.

So a reasonable alternative rendering of these verses can be: 'Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and **punish this vine**; and the **rootstock** which Thy right hand hath planted, and the **son** whom thou hast strengthened for Thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let **Thy hand be against** the man of Thy right hand, **against** King Messiah, whom Thou hast strengthened for Thyself' (vv. 14-17 emph. mine). Jesus is not just 'the vine', but He declared, 'I am the **True Vine** and My Father is the husbandman'. Israel failed in its characteristic office and calling as a vine, but Yeshua fulfilled this calling.

These verses are clearly Messianic and point to Yeshua, who not only declared Himself the Good Shepherd, but also foretold of laying down His life for the sheep (John 10:11,17), taking the punishment in their place. He proclaimed that those sheep who 'hear' (obey) Him **will not be 'plucked'** out of His, or His Father's, hand (John 10:28,29).

When Jesus stated 'I and my Father are One', in John 10:30, He was clearly invoking the Shema: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One' (Deut 6:4). To the Judeans, this was blasphemy – and they took up stones to stone Him for it!

But Psalm 81 also reads: '**Hear**, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt **hearken** unto me; There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god...But my people would not **hearken** to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had **hearkened** unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned **my hand against their adversaries** (vv. 8,9,11,12,13,14; emph. mine).

The message that Yeshua was conveying to his audience, on that Chanuka day, was that He was not a political saviour, come to overthrow an oppressor as Judah the Maccabee did. People make the same mistake today with their personal illusions and expectations about the exact role of the Messiah: 'If Jesus was the Messiah, why isn't there peace in the world?' (see *Dean's report*). I remember a Jewish university student once saying, 'If the Messiah comes and He turns out to be Jesus, then the first thing I'm going to do is eat a cheeseburger!' Yes, He is the Messiah of Israel, but He is the Son of Man and the Son of God who took the punishment for sin.

Psalm 80's refrain clarifies the spiritual nature of Israel's battle with her mortal enemies: 'quicken (lit. 'revive') us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved' (vv. 18,19).

Jesus quoted from Psalm 82 at Chanuka after alluding to Psalms 80 and 81. Surely many Christians who love Israel are turning to Psalm 83 to pray for Israel in this present crisis. It is indeed a descriptive and faith-building plea for our time, but let's view it in its context: that it flows out from Psalms 80-82.

A Jewish Bible scholar once said to me, 'The Jewish people carry their history around with them in their shirt pocket. Our past is not distant,

but ever-present'. I'm sure that Chanuka will throb with meaning for Jewish people worldwide this year, with all of its historical significance and its modern nationalistic expression. Understandably, the Jewish people are fearful for their national and personal future. However, we know that the Keeper of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps! Israel has a future destiny as a nation and we pray that God will indeed protect His people. But rather than look to the Chanukia (9-branched menorah of the Maccabees), as it were, may they consider the menorah's message in Zechariah 4:6, call upon the name of the Lord of Hosts and His Messiah and be truly saved. Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the **LORD of hosts!**

Shalom in Yeshua, Chrissy Rodgers