

Yeshua-The True Shamas

An Unusual Chanukah Chaim Urbach

It is common (at least in Messianic congregations) to hear sermons about Chanukah. The Chanukah story is re-told (for the umpteenth time) and we draw the conclusion that the L-rd always protects his covenant people. Then, we remember that Yeshua celebrated Chanukah and then, we go home. But, perhaps more natural for us, as followers of the Messiah, is to begin with Him and proceed from there. Let's remember one Chanukah that Yeshua celebrated...

"Then came the feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Yeshua was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade," (John 10:22).

Chanukah was a relatively recent celebration in Yeshua's day--it was instituted by the Maccabees, 135 years before. Although it was not a Scriptural holiday, (required in Leviticus 23), it was a national celebration, remembering how the L-rd gave victory to the Jewish people, so it is natural to find the L-rd in Jerusalem, celebrating the festival.

John continues: "The Jews gathered around [Yeshua] saying, 'how long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly,' (John 10:24).

Their question had special significance at Chanukah. When the Maccabees re-took the Temple from the Syrians, they found that the altar had been desecrated--the Syrians had sacrificed a sow (pig) on it. They had a problem--the stones had become desecrated, so they couldn't be used to serve as an altar; yet, since these stones had been consecrated (set apart for the L-rd--could only be used in the Temple) they could not be used for any "regular" use. They came up with a solution--the altar was taken apart and the stones were heaped in a pile in the Temple. Tradition held that when the Messiah would come, he would show them what to do with those stones.

Here was this miracle-working teacher (rabbi) from Galilee. Could he be possibly the Messiah? Chanukah would be a natural time for him to prove himself...

What was Yeshua's response? "I did tell you, but, you do not believe! The miracles I do in my father's name speak for me." The L-rd is not interested in a popularity contest, that's for sure. It's hard for us to understand why the L-rd never came out and explicitly stated, "I AM THE MESSIAH!" He did acknowledge that, but only in private--to the Samaritan woman and to the blind man (John 4:26; 9:35; also, in Matthew 26:64--to the high priest, shortly before his crucifixion).

Why? Did Yeshua not speak about himself as the "Messiah"? The word "messiah" in those days had the connotation of a mighty, conquering king, who would come and

rescue Israel from the yoke of the hated Romans. Yeshua's attitude was this, "my kingdom is not of this world." In other words, he came to fulfill the Father's will, not the carnal expectations of people.

The L-rd had been teaching in public, in Jerusalem and made all sorts of claims about himself (John 5:18,39; 6:41; 8:58; 9:35). Why did these people, especially the leaders, not grasp what he was saying? Yeshua further explained that the miracles that he performed, validated his claims. His point--you are spiritually obtuse; the issue is not that I have not been clear, but that because you are not willing to believe what I am saying, you don't understand. This is an important principle--when G-d reveals Himself and His will to us and we refuse to believe, we become more dense spiritually. From that point on, it becomes harder for the L-rd to get through (see Romans 1:21-22).

Then followed another big bombshell--"No one can snatch my sheep away from me...no one can snatch [my sheep] from my father. My father and I are one." Yeshua's meaning may cause controversy today, but it was crystal clear to his audience--he was claiming deity.

They took up stones to carry out the death sentence, as Leviticus 24:16 stipulated for blaspheming the name of G-d. To blaspheme G-d means to slander or mock Him--Yeshua's opponents felt that by claiming to be G-d, he was saying that G-d [the Father] was no greater than himself, a mere man. In other words, he was belittling G-d.

Yeshua stayed there, cool under fire, and gave them an answer that stopped them in their tracks. His answer (actually beginning with a question) doesn't seem to clarify anything for us, at least not immediately. What did He mean?

Yeshua reminds his listeners that Psalms 82:6 refers to the judges of Israel as "elohim," which normally means "G-d, [or G-ds]." The writer of this Psalm (Asaph, one of David's choir leaders) challenges the judges of Israel to remember that they are elohim--in the sense of being G-d's representatives and so must be sure to carry out His justice. His argument is this--if they could be called "elohim" how much more could I do so, who was sent by the Father?

This is not the only example of Yeshua claiming to be deity in John. In John 8:58, Yeshua said, "before Abraham was, I AM," which is clear reference to the time when G-d appeared to Moses from the burning bush, (also, 1:1, 14 etc.)

Why does John record so many statements about Yeshua's deity? Perhaps because John lived during a time when believers were severely persecuted in the Roman empire. There were places where everybody was expected to throw incense on an altar to Caesar and proclaim, "Caesar is L-rd!" John, as he is recording the life of Yeshua for future generations, is led of the Spirit to emphasize the fact that Yeshua, our Messiah, is not a mere man. He is the L-rd, "whose arm is not shortened that He cannot save," as Isaiah reminds us (50:2; 59:1).

Did you notice that the L-rd does not answer their question directly, or at all? The L-rd doesn't seem to fit into our boxes. He is the L-rd Almighty. There are times when we expect the L-rd to do certain things for us, and He just does not perform according to our expectations.

An unusual Succot

Against that kind of background we can now understand Yeshua's words in John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Like He often did, Yeshua used the "local color," to illustrate his points. Why did He refer to himself as "The Light of the World," then? This incident took place during the feast of Succot, which in those days was the real Festival of Light.

At night, all of Jerusalem was lit up with giant lamps and with torches, especially the Temple area. It was possible to see Jerusalem at night for miles around.

Again, if Yeshua was a mere man, claiming to be The Light of the World would be preposterous. His statement was also poorly received because his listeners refused to accept the fact that they were in darkness and needed his light. Only the pagans around them needed this spiritual illumination. The truth is that they were as blind as the pagans around them.

There are a number of ways in which Yeshua lights up our life. John (I John 1:5-7) shows us one way in which the L-rd's light affects us. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, the blood of His son purifies us from all sin." Being in fellowship with a holy G-d means that our own particular spots of darkness become exposed to His light.

There is another way that Yeshua lights up our lives, like the shamas does. Shamas (in Hebrew shamash) means "servant," because it serves to light the other candles. Yeshua taught us that He did not come to be served, but to serve. As G-d came in the flesh, He had every right to expect to be served, yet, He set an example for us to follow - a shamas. During this season, let us reflect His light in the darkness around us.

Let us learn to serve as He did.