

Incremental Redemption

Hanukka - Rav Hanan Schlesinger

Sometimes it's the little things that would often escape our attention, that hold the key to worlds of understanding. Such may be the case with Hanukka. The 'little matter' of its date may unlock a treasure chest of significance.

The Maccabean victors over the Seleucid Greeks made a conscious decision to delay the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem until the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. That day commenced an eight day celebration of joyful thanksgiving.

And why did they choose that day and none other? The explanation might just be found in a rarely studied book tucked away among the minor prophets of our Bible - the Book of Hagai.

The Prophet Hagai lived at the time of the construction of the Second Temple. The First Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and the Jewish People were driven out of their land. At that time the Prophet Jeremiah had promised that following 70 years of exile, an edifice rivaling the original Temple would be built, and the Jewish exiles scattered to the corners of the earth would return home in a show of redemption that would rival the significance of even the Exodus from Egypt.

70 years passed, and the prediction of Jeremiah was fulfilled - but only partially. Some of the Jewish exiles returned from Babylonia as promised. A second Temple was built, but it was only a shadow of the original one. Judea remained a vassal province of the mighty Persian Empire. Full redemption never materialized.

The Book of Hagai tells us that the foundation stones for that Second Temple were laid on 25th of Kislev! And it cannot be mere coincidence that just a little more than 300 years hence, on this very same day, that same Holy Temple was re-consecrated after having been defiled by the Hellenists. Judah the Maccabee and his men were making a powerful statement about the continuity of Jewish history: Centuries may have passed, but this is the same Temple that was slated to herald the greatest national redemption of all times. The fulfillment of prophecy may



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be slow in coming, but ultimately the full vision will indeed be realized! Gradual, slow, incremental progress over the course of hundreds of years may be the path through which God's stupendous hopes for us are brought to fruition.

The Maccabees created a sovereign Jewish state the likes of which had not been seen since the destruction of the 1st Temple. Hopes were high for the ultimate redemption that Jeremiah had prophesized four hundred years earlier. Sadly, that was not to be. Independence was squandered and within two hundred years the Temple was again destroyed. Exile came upon us once again, this time at the hands of the Romans.

But still, the Maccabean effort was not in vain. Not only did the Jewish People enjoy partial redemption for two centuries, but more than that: their battles, their efforts, their conviction and their kingdom teach us patience and the importance of seeing the big picture, that if redemption is not achieved immediately in one fell swoop, all is not lost. When Jeremiah's original prophecies were not fulfilled to the letter after the 70 years that he spoke of, it might have been natural to throw in the towel, to assume we are not worthy and that God has given up on us. But the Jewish People did not give up, but rather showed themselves ready for the long haul. They never abandoned Jeremiah's vision of sovereignty and redemption. And after three hundred years, when the opportunity presented itself, they were ready again to strive towards the implementation of that vision.

Alas, full redemption eluded us in Maccabean times, but it may be that the lessons they taught us are what allowed the flame to remain alive in the aftermath of the disintegration of the kingdom they established. During two thousand years of exile we have not lost our nerve, maintaining the conviction that prophecy not completely fulfilled when promised is not a dead letter. Visions of redemption continue to empower us.

Those visions have borne fruit in our own days. The Maccabean victories of yore have again been enacted on the battlefield. Sovereignty has again been established. The exiles have been ingathered from the four corners of the earth. Let us pray and let us endeavor that this partial redemption becomes the full and ultimate one.



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