

Feast of Dedication 2005

Background (Review from Last Year)

This year, Dec 25 is the beginning of the Jewish feast of Hannukah, or Dedication. It is not one of the Mosaic feasts, nor is its institution recorded in the Bible (like Purim). However, our Lord celebrated it in John 10:22, and so we include it in our cycle of studies on the feasts.

Daniel (11) prophesied the main events of the story. The prophecy concerns the Syrian general Antiochus Epiphanes, who attempted to invade Egypt but was deterred by the Romans. In returning to Syria, he took out his frustration on Jerusalem.

31, pollute the sanctuary ... place the abomination that maketh desolate.—Antiochus set up the abomination of desolation (probably an altar and/or image to Zeus Olympius) in the place of the brazen altar on 15 Kislev, and made subsequent offerings there on 25 Kislev, 1 Macc 1:54, 59. According to Josephus, 12.253, he offered swine on the altar. The year is 167 BC.

32, the people that do know their God ... shall do exploits.—These people are the priest Mattathias and his sons, especially Judas, called “Maccabeus” (the hammer). Eventually, they retook Jerusalem and purged the temple: 1 Macc 4:41-59. v.52, the restoration of sacrifice was on the same day, three years later, that Antiochus offered pagan sacrifices, the 25th of Kislev. Judas Maccabaeus ordained that the nation should celebrate this deliverance annually.

The Broader Context

Last year we studied the history, including the relevant texts from Maccabees. In a few months we will study John 10:22. So what do we study for our annual review of the feast?

The name of the feast is “Hannukah,” or Dedication, and reflects the feast's focus on the rededication of the temple after it had been defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes. This is not the only time in Israel's history that the temple was defiled and then purified. We can identify at least seven such episodes (including the original one), so we have texts for six more years!

<i>Date</i>	<i>Gap</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Defiler</i>	<i>Purifier</i>	<i>Notes</i>
814 BC	146	2 Chr 24; 2 Kings 12	Athaliah, dtr of Ahab and Jezebel	Joash	Led by Jehoiadah the priest
726 BC	88	2 Chr 29	Ahaz	Hezekiah	Stimulated by fall of Israel to Assyria
628 BC	98	2 Kings 23	Manasseh	Josiah	
516 BC	112	Ezek 8, Ezra 6	Children of Israel; Nebuchadnezzar	Zerubbabel	
164 BC	352	1 Macc 4	Antiochus Epiphanes	Judas Maccabaeus	
AD 30, 33	194, 3	John 2, Matt 21:12	Jewish priests	Our Lord	2x, one at either end of his ministry
Future	2000+	Dan 9:27	The Antichrist	Our Lord	

The dates show two interesting patterns.

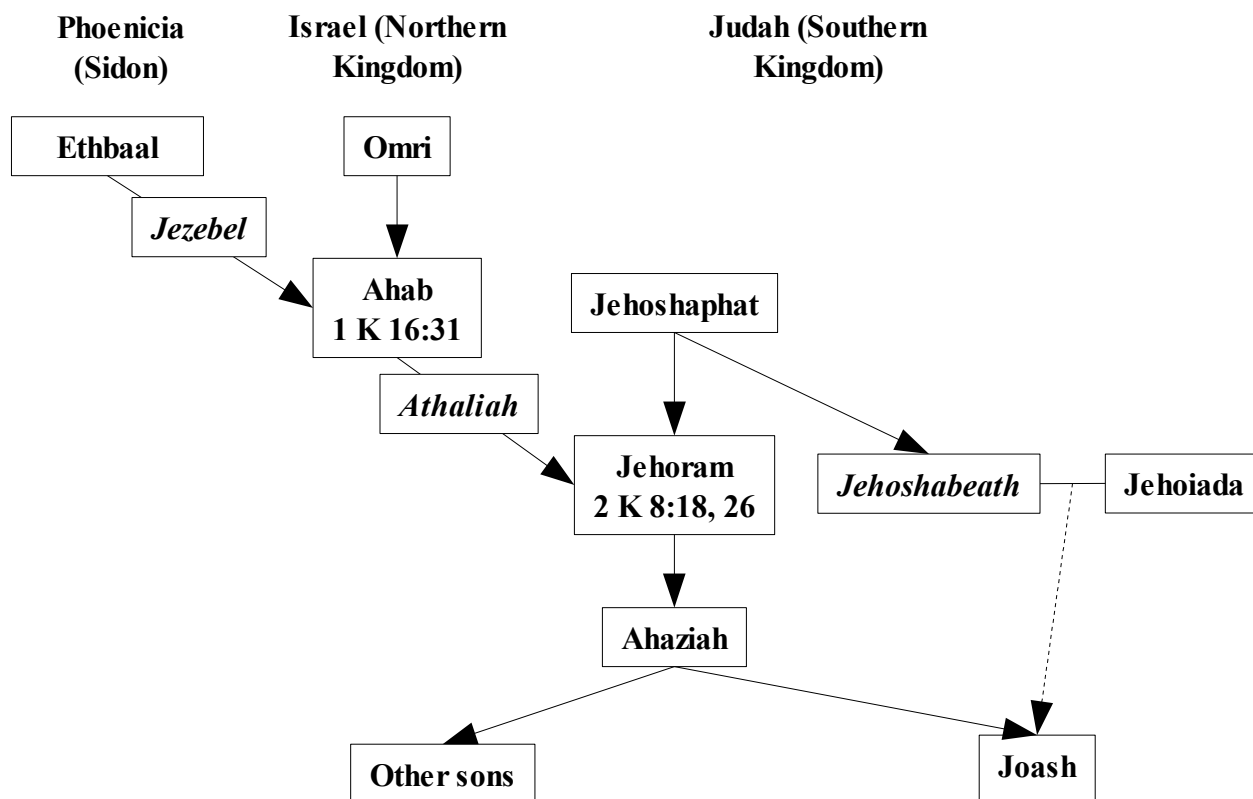
1. Intervals on the order of 100-200 years predominate. Things tend to go bad on a time period of this length. People tend to corrupt even a pure religious system, and it needs to be reformed every few generations. In the church age, it was in the middle of the second century that the monarchical bishop arose, leading to the RCC.
2. There are two much longer gaps without record of rededication. The second one, the church age, has in fact had a long string of reforms and revivals. Given the frequency of the need for purification observed in our previous point, we suspect that the first one, which lies in the silent period between Malachi and the Maccabees, also did. Malachi, about 450 BC, is clearly calling for reform, though we have no evidence of a rededication at that time. There may have been others.

Application: Rededication and purification of our worship is not a rare thing. Given human sinfulness, it must be a regular, recurrent practice among God's people. The feast of dedication ought to be not so much the memorial of one particular rededication, as a time to reconsider and renew our own devotion to the Lord.

Today we will consider the first rededication, under King Joash, about 814 years before Christ. Consider *why* rededication was needed, *who* led it, *how* it was done, and *how long* it lasted.

Why: The Need for Dedication: Athaliah's Corruption

Every instance of rededication arises because of foreign corruption. God's people are to be holy, separated unto God from the world. Whenever we allow the world to intervene in our spiritual affairs, corruption results.



In this case, the world's influence came in the form of a woman named Athaliah. She was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of the northern kingdom, the granddaughter of Omri, and the wife of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah. It helps to draw a diagram (previous page). Key verses:

- Jezebel comes into the royal family of Israel: 1 Kings 16:30-33; 21:25 “there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.”
- Her daughter Athaliah enters the royal family of Judah: 2 Kings 8:16-18, 26. Her parents gave her a Yahwistic name (Athah-yah, “YHWH has declared his eminence”), but 2 Chr 24:7 makes clear that she was the reason that the temple needed to be cleansed. She corresponds to Antiochus Epiphanes in the time of the Maccabees—a foreign influence who defiled the temple.

The fathers of the Jewish princes in both cases were trying to arrange a peaceful relationship with their neighbors, but they violated the fundamental instruction of Deut 7:1-5. This principle continues today. We must be careful to stay clear of intimate relations that would tempt us to depart from the Lord. 2 Cor 6:14-18. Superficial Christianity (cf. Athaliah's Yahwistic name) is not enough.

2 Chr 22:10-12 tells how Athaliah, after the death of her son Ahaziah, killed all of his children, but missed Joash.

Who: The Agent of Dedication: Joash under Jehoiada

2 Chr 23:1-3, 11-13 describes how Joash was spared by Jehosheba, his aunt, and then presented as king by the priest Jehoiada. According to 2 Chr 22:11, she was the wife of Jehoiada. This righteous couple preserved the Davidic line, and brought him forth after six years, at the age of seven, to be the king.

How: The Process of Dedication: financial details

2 Chr 24:4ff; 2 Kings 12 records Joash's restoration of the temple, which had been defiled by Athaliah. He corresponds to Judas Maccabeus, a civil ruler who sponsors the restoration of the temple. It is worthwhile to notice several details about how the restoration was financed.

Existing offerings.--2 Chr 24:5 describes a collection organized by the priests. 2 Kings 12:4 gives more detail, and describes it in three categories:

1. “the money of every one that passeth the account,” that is, the half-shekel census tax of Exod 30:13;
2. “the money that every man is set at,” the assessment associated with vowing a vow to the Lord, according to Lev. 27;
3. “all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the LORD,” that is, freewill offerings.

According to 2 Chr 24:5, the priests were to “go out unto the cities of Judah and gather ... money.” they were to have a special fund-raising campaign, urging people to undertake vows, to be numbered, and to offer free-will offerings. 2 Kings 12:5-7 show that the priests did not disburse these funds for the building. No wonder—up until now, they would have gone into the temple treasury, where the priests would have had the use of them. They don't want them to be diverted into a building project that enriches someone else!

A special offering.--2 Kings 12:9 describes the solution. Jehoiada put a special chest at the entrance of the house, and the offerings were collected there, as the people came to the house of the Lord.

The contrast between these two methods is important. The offerings of God's people are to be voluntary, brought as the Lord leads, not urged out of them by special solicitations. Paul does encourage the Corinthians to donate to the needy saints in Jerusalem, but the situation is far healthier when people bring their offerings voluntarily to the Lord.

Accounting.--Note in v.10 how they handled the money. Two people, the king's scribe and the high priest, counted it into bags. The handling of finances is far too sensitive an issue to be left to a single person, who might be tempted to abuse the funds (or even worse, unjustly accused of embezzlement). We always follow this example in managing the offerings: two brothers count the funds, two signatures are required on every check, and two see every bank statement.

Honest overseers.--v.15 memorializes the honesty of the overseers of the work. This is all the more astonishing when we consider 2 Chr 24:14. They had money left after the work was complete, and they brought it back, so that it could be used to replace the sacred vessels.

The Limits of Dedication: Joash's Decline

External sanctuaries and godly counselors are no substitute for a changed heart. Joash was malleable—by Jehoiada, but also by his princes. 2 Chr 24:15-27 recalls how Joash departed from the Lord after the death of Jehoiada. We began by observing how Athaliah was able to corrupt the kingdom. Joash's latter days remind us that even in a child reared in ideal circumstances, by the high priest, there is still indwelling sin. Ultimately, this is why sanctuaries require rededication: because they are used by sinful people.