

The Renee and Alexander Bohm
Memorial Lecture

“The Prophet Who Stole Channukah: The
Biblical Roots of a Rabbinic Holiday”

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

December 15, 2014

24 Kislev 5775

דרישה

DRISHA INSTITUTE
FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

A| Ezra Chapter 1

- א** ובשנת אחת, לכורש מלך פרס, לכלות דבר-ה', מפני ירמיה: העיר ה', את-רוח כרש מלך-פרס, ויעבר-קול בכל-מלכותו...
- ב** כה אמר, כרש מלך פרס--כל ממלכות הארץ, נתן לי ה' אלהי השמים; והוא-פקד עלי לבנות-לו בית, בירושלם אשר ביהודה.
- ג** מי-בכם מכל-עמו, יהי אלהיו עמו, ויעל, לירושלם אשר ביהודה; ויבן, את-בית ה' אלהי ישראל--הוא האלהים, אשר בירושלם.
- ד** וכל-הנשא, מכל-המקומות אשר הוא גר-שם-ינשא והוא אנשי מקומו, בכסף ובזהב וברכוש ובבהמה; עם-הנדבה--לבית האלהים, אשר בירושלם.

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, at the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah –God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he proclaimed:

2 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD, the God of heaven, given me; He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem.

3 Whosoever there is among you of all His people--his God be with him--let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD, the God of Israel, He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever is left, in any place where he lives, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill-offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'

B| Ezra Chapter 4

- א** וישמעו, צרי יהודה ובנימין: פי-בני הגולה בונים היכל, ליהנה אלהי ישראל.
- ד** ויהי, עם-הארץ--מרפים, ידי עם-יהודה; ומבלהים (ומבהלים) אותם, לבנות.
- ה** וסכרים עליהם יועצים להפר עצתם-פלמי, כורש מלך פרס, ועד-מלכות, דריוש מלך-פרס.

1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a Temple

4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, & harried them while they were building,

5 and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

C| Haggai Chapter 1

- א** בשנת שנים, לדריוש המלך, בחדש הששי, ביום אחד לחדש--היה דבר-ה' ביגד-חגי הנביא אל-זרבבל בן-שאלתאל פחת יהודה, ואל-יהושע בן-יהוצדק הכהן הגדול, לאמר.
- ב** כה אמר ה' צבאות, לאמר: העם הזה אמרו, לא עת-בא עת-בית ה' להבנות.
- ז** כה אמר, ה' צבאות: שימו לבבכם, על-דרכיכם. עלו ההר והבאתם עץ, ובנו הבית...

1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the 6th month, in the first day, came the word of God by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

2 'Thus says God: This people say: The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.' {P}

7 Thus says God: Consider your ways. Go up to the hill-country, and bring wood, and build the House...

D| Zechariah Chapter 2 [Haftara for Shabbat Chanuka]

- יד** רני ושמחי, בת-ציון--כי הנני-בא ושכנתי בתוכך, נאם-ה'.
- 14 'Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD.

E] Haggai Chapter 2

- א** בַּשְּׁבִיעִי, בְּעֶשְׂרִים וְאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ--הָיָה, דְּבַר-ה', בְּיַד-חֲנַי הַנְּבִיא, לֵאמֹר... ג מִי בְּכֶם, הַנִּשְׁאָר, אֲשֶׁר רָאָה אֶת-הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה, בְּכַבֹּדוֹ הָרִאשׁוֹן; וְיָמָּה אֲתֶם לֹאִים אֹתוֹ, עַתָּה--הֲלוֹא כְּמָהוּ כְּאִין, בְּעֵינֵיכֶם?
- ד** וְעַתָּה חֲזַק זְרֻבָבֶל נְאֻם-ה' וְחֲזַק יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-יְהוֹצָדָק הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל וְחֲזַק כָּל-עַם הָאָרֶץ, נְאֻם-ה'--וַעֲשׂוּ: כִּי-אֲנִי אֶתְכֶם, נְאֻם ה' צְבָאוֹת.
- ט** גָּדוֹל יִהְיֶה כְבוֹד הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה הָאֲחֵרוֹן, מִן-הָרִאשׁוֹן--אָמַר, ה' צְבָאוֹת; וּבִמְקוֹם הַזֶּה אֶתֵּן שָׁלוֹם, נְאֻם ה' צְבָאוֹת.
- י** בְּעֶשְׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ, בַּשְּׁנַת שְׁתַּיִם לְדַרְיוֹשׁ--הָיָה, דְּבַר-ה', אֶל-חֲנַי הַנְּבִיא
- טו** וְעַתָּה שִׁימוּ-נָא לִבְבְּכֶם מִן-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וּמַעַלְהָ מִטָּרֶם שׁוֹם-אֲבָן אֶל-אֲבָן, בְּהִיכַל ה'.
- יח** שִׁימוּ-נָא לִבְבְּכֶם, מִן-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וּמַעַלְהָ; מִיּוֹם עֲשׂוֹרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ, לְמִן-הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִסַּד הַיִּכְלָה--שִׁימוּ לִבְבְּכֶם.
- יט** הַעוֹד הַזֶּרַע, בַּמְּגוּרָה, וְעַד-הַגֶּפֶן וְהַתְּאֵנָה וְהַרְמוֹן וְעֵץ הַזַּיִת, לֹא נִשְׂא--מִן-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, אֲבָרָד.
- כ** וַיְהִי דְבַר-ה' שְׁנִית אֶל-חֲנַי, בְּעֶשְׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ לֵאמֹר.
- כא** אָמַר, אֶל-זְרֻבָבֶל פַּחַת-יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר: אֲנִי מִרְעִישׁ, אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ.
- כב** וְהִפְכֹתִי, כֶּסֶף מִמַּלְכוֹת, וְהִשְׁמַדְתִּי, חֹזֵק מִמַּלְכוֹת הַגּוֹיִם; וְהִפְכֹתִי מִרְכָבָה, וְרֹכְבֶיהָ, וַיֵּרְדוּ סוֹסִים וְרֹכְבֵיהֶם, אִישׁ בְּחַרְבַּת אָחִיו.
- כג** בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נְאֻם-ה' צְבָאוֹת אֶקְחֶךָ זְרֻבָבֶל בֶּן-שְׁאַלְתִּיאֵל עַבְדִּי, נְאֻם-ה', וְשִׁמְתִּיךָ, בְּחוֹתֶם: כִּי-בָדַד בְּחַרְתִּי, נְאֻם ה' צְבָאוֹת.
- 1** On the 21st day of the 7th month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying: **3** Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is not such a one as nothing in your eyes?
- 4** Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work; for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts.
- 9** The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the LORD of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.'
- 10** In the 24th day of the ninth month, in the 2nd year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet,:
- 15** And now, I pray you, consider from this day and forward--before a stone was laid upon a stone in the Temple of God
- 18** consider, I pray you, from this day and forward, from the 24th day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider it;
- 19** is the seed yet in the barn? yea, the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree hath not brought forth--from this day will I bless you.'
- 20** And the word of the LORD came the second time unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying:
- 21** 'Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: I will shake the heavens and the earth;
- 22** and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.
- 23** In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, My servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.'

F] Zechariah Chapter 4 – [Symbol of the state of Israel]

- ב** וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי, מָה אַתָּה רֹאֶה רְאִיתִי וְהִנֵּה מְנוֹרַת זָהָב כְּלֵת... ו וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי לֵאמֹר זֶה דְּבַר-ה', אֶל-זְרֻבָבֶל לֵאמֹר: לֹא בְחֵיל, וְלֹא בְכַח--כִּי אִם-בְּרוּחִי, אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת
- 2** And he said unto me: 'What seest thou?' And I said: 'I have seen, and behold a candlestick all of gold...6 Then he answered and spoke unto me, saying 'This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

G. Time line of 'seventy years' of Bavel

YEAR ONE = 4th year of Yehoyakim -Nevuchadnezar's rise to power (Yirm 25:1)

Year 7 = Galut Yehoyachin = 11th year of Yehoyakim - first wave of Exile

Year 18 = Galut Tzidkyahu - Temple destroyed - second wave of Exile

Year 43 - Yechezkel's vision of Temple (chapters 40-48)

Year 70 - Cyrus Decree - first return of the Exile w/Zrubavel (Ezra 1:1)

[building freeze for 18 years / Ezra 4:4-5]

Year 88 - Groundbreaking of Second Temple on 24 Kislev - Year 2 of Darius

[see Chagai 2:10-18 & Zecharya 1:12]

Year 92 - Construction completed on 3 Adar - year 6 of Darius / see Ezra 6:15

Two Models for Redemption:

I. Yirmiyahu - "Teshuva" first!

כ"ט - י בי-כה, אָמַר ה', בִּי לְפִי מְלֵאֵת לְבַבְךָ שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה, אֶפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם;

וְהִקְמַתִי עֲלֵיכֶם, אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הַטּוֹב, לְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם, אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה. ...

יב וּקְרֵאתֶם אֹתִי וְהִלַכְתֶּם, וְהִתְפַּלַּלְתֶּם אֵלַי; וְשָׁמַעְתִּי, אֲלֵיכֶם.

יג וּבִקְשַׁתֶּם אֹתִי, וּמְצֵאתֶם: כִּי תִדְרָשׁוּנִי, בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם.

יד וּנְמַצְאתִי לָכֶם, נְאֻם-ה', וְשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-שְׁבוּתְכֶם וּקְבַצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל-הַגּוֹיִם....

II. Yechezkel - "Return to Israel" first!

ל"ו כב לָכֵן אָמַר לְבֵית-יִשְׂרָאֵל... לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אָנִי עֹשֶׂה, בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:

כז כִּי אִם-לְשֵׁם-קִדְשִׁי אֲשֶׁר חִלַּלְתֶּם, בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר-בָּאתֶם שָׁם.

כח כִּי וּקְדַשְׁתִּי אֶת-שְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל... כִּד וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם מִן-הַגּוֹיִם, וּקְבַצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל-

הָאָרְצוֹת... כֹּה וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיַּם טְהוֹרִים, וּטְהַרְתֶּם...

כט כֹּה וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ, וְרוּחַ תְּדַשָּׁה אֶתֶּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם; וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת-לֵב הָאָבֶן,

מִבְּשָׂרְכֶם, וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם, לֵב בָּשָׂר. כֹּה וְנָתַתִּי אֶתֶּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם...

ל"ז כֹּה וְיִשְׁבְּתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבֹתֵיכֶם; וְהֵייתֶם לִי, לְעָם, וְאֲנִכִּי, אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים.

K] Maccabees: Book One, Chapter Four:

36 Then said Judas and his brethren, Behold, our enemies are discomfited: let us go up to cleanse and dedicate the sanctuary.

41 Then Judas appointed certain men to fight against those that were in the fortress, until he had cleansed the sanctuary.

42 So he chose priests of blameless conversation, such as had pleasure in the law:

43 Who cleansed the sanctuary, and bare out the defiled stones into an unclean place.

44 And when as they consulted what to do with the altar of burnt offerings, which was profaned;

45 They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down,

46 And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them.

47 Then they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the former; 48 And made up the sanctuary, and the things that were within the temple, and hallowed the courts.

49 They made also new holy vessels, and into the temple they brought the candlestick, and the altar of burnt offerings, and of incense, and the table.

50 And upon the altar they burned incense, and the lamps that were upon the candlestick they lighted, that they might give light in the temple.

51 Furthermore they set the loaves upon the table, and spread out the veils, and finished all the works which they had begun to make.

52 Now on the five and twentieth day of the ninth month, which is called the month Casleu, in the hundred forty and eighth year, they rose up in the morning,

53 And offered sacrifice according to the law upon the new altar of burnt offerings, which they had made. 54 At the same time and day the heathen had profaned it, even in that was it dedicated with songs, and citherns, and harps, and cymbals. 56 And so they kept the dedication of the altar eight days and offered burnt offerings with gladness, and sacrificed the sacrifice of deliverance and praise.

59 Moreover Judas and his brethren with the whole congregation of Israel ordained, that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season **from year to year by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month Casleu, with mirth and gladness.**

L] Josephus Antiquities Book XII chapter 8

7. Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon; but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored God, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it **Lights**. I suppose the reason was, **because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival.** Judas also rebuilt...

M] How Xmas Come to Be Celebrated on December 25

www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/Christmas_TheRealStory.htm

A. Roman pagans first introduced the holiday of Saturnalia, a week long period of lawlessness celebrated between December 17-25. During this period, Roman courts were closed, and Roman law dictated that no one could be punished for damaging property or injuring people during the celebration...

B. The ancient Greek writer poet and historian Lucian (in his dialogue entitled *Saturnalia*) describes the festival's observance in his time. In addition to human sacrifice, he mentions these customs: widespread intoxication; going from house to house while singing naked; rape and other sexual license...

C. In the 4th century CE, Christianity imported the Saturnalia festival hoping to take the pagan masses in with it. Christian leaders succeeded in converting to Christianity large numbers of pagans by promising them that they could continue to celebrate the Saturnalia as Christians.

D. The problem was that there was nothing intrinsically Christian about Saturnalia. To remedy this, these Christian leaders named Saturnalia's concluding day, December 25th to be Jesus' birthday...

[Because of its known pagan origin, Christmas was banned by the Puritans and its observance was illegal in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1681.]

[The Reverend Increase Mather of Boston observed in 1687 that "the early Christians who first observed the Nativity on December 25 did not do so thinking that Christ was born in that Month, but because the Heathens' Saturnalia was at that time kept in Rome,]

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא עמוד ב

ת"ר מצות חנוכה, **גר איש וביתו**
והמהדרין -גר לכל אחד ואחד
והמהדרין מן המהדרין- ב"ש אומרים: יום
ראשון מדליק שמנה מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך
וב"ה אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק אחת מכאן ואילך
מוסיף והולך ...

* **מאי חנוכה** דתנו רבנן: בכ"ה בכסליו יומי
דחנוכה תמניא אינון; דלא למספד בהון ודלא
להתענות בהון. שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל
השמנים שבהיכל, וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי
ונצחום -בדקו ולא מצאו **אלא פך אחד של שמן**,
שהיה מונה בחותמו של כהן גדול. ולא היה בו אלא
להדליק יום אחד -נעשה בו נס, והדליקו ממנו שמונה
ימים! לשנה אחרת -קבעום, ועשאוים ימים טובים
בהלל והודאה.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת עבודה זרה דף ח עמוד א

דף ח,א משנה: ואלו אידיהן של עובדי כוכבים
גמרא: אמר רב חנן בר רבא: קלנדא - ח' ימים
אחר תקופה; סטרנורא - ח' ימים לפני תקופה.
ת"ר לפי שראה אדם הראשון יום שמתמעט
והולך, אמר אוי לי שמא **בשביל שסרתתי**
עולם חשוך בעדי וחוזר לתוהו ובוהו - וזו היא
מיתה שנקנסה עלי מן השמים. עמד וישב ח'
ימים בתענית ובתפלה; כיון שראה תקופת טבת, וראה
יום **שמאריך והולך** - אמר: מנהגו של עולם הוא! הלך
ועשה שמונה ימים טובים.
לשנה האחרת עשאן לאלו ולאלו ימים טובים.
הוא קבעם לשם שמים, והם קבעום לשם עבודה
כוכבים.

H]. Talmud Bavli -Tractate Shabbat 21b

The rabbis taught: The law of Hanukah: **one candle for each household. Those who seek to fulfil it well-** one candle for each person. **Those who seek to fulfil the law in the best possible manner:** Beth Shamai says- the first night light eight candles, and every following night one flame less. According to Beth Hillel [the reverse] -the first night one candle, and increased by one on each night...

***What is 'Hanukah?** The rabbis taught: "On the twenty-fifth day of Kislev Hanukah commences and lasts eight days, on which lamenting the dead and fasting are prohibited. When the Hellenists entered the sanctuary, they defiled all the oil. When the Hasmonians prevailed and conquered them, oil was sought (to light the Menorah) and **only one vial was found with the seal** of the high priest intact. [Even though] the vial contained sufficient oil for one day only, a miracle occurred, and they **lit from it** for eight days. The following year - these 8 days were established as days of Praise and Thanksgiving.

J] Talmud Bavli- Tractate Avoda Zara 8b

MISHNA: These are the festivals of the heathens: *Kalends, Saturnalia...*

GEMARA: The rabbis taught: Adam [the first man], when he noticed that each day became shorter and shorter, he cried: Woe is to me, for the world becomes darker and darker - **because of my sin**, and it seems to be returning to 'chaos and ruin'; and this is my death which was decreed by heaven.

He arose and fasted and prayed eight days. Thereafter, he noticed the 'winter solstice', **as the days become longer**, he understood that such is the cycle of the world, and celebrated for eight days. The next year, he also proclaimed the eight days on which he had fasted as holidays. **He established them to laud heaven;** his descendants, however, made them holidays for the idols.