

Lesson Fifteen

(John 10:22-42)

The Festival of Shelters (i.e., Tabernacles) was held in October of each year, and John records Jesus' visit to that Festival in 7:2 to 10:21. A period of two months passes between the events ending with 10:21 and those beginning with 10:22. Now it is December and time for the annual Festival of Dedication.

Jesus is Rejected

(John 10:22-42)

²²It was winter, and the Festival of the Dedication of the Temple was being celebrated in Jerusalem. ²³Jesus was walking in Solomon's Porch in the Temple, ²⁴when the people gathered around him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? Tell us the plain truth: are you the Messiah?"

²⁵Jesus answered, "I have already told you, but you would not believe me. The deeds I do by my Father's authority speak on my behalf; ²⁶but you will not believe, for you are not my sheep. ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give

them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me. ²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than everything, and no one can snatch them away from the Father's care. ³⁰The Father and I are one."

³¹Then the people again picked up stones to throw at him. ³²Jesus said to them, "I have done many good deeds in your presence which the Father gave me to do; for which one of these do you want to stone me?"

³³They answered, "We do not want to stone you because of any good deeds, but because of your blasphemy! You are only a man, but you are trying to make yourself God!"

³⁴Jesus answered, "It is written in your own Law that God said, 'You are gods.' ³⁵We know that what the scripture says is true forever; and God called those people gods, the people to whom his message was given. ³⁶As for me, the Father chose me and sent me into the world. How, then, can you say that I am the Son of God? ³⁷Do not believe me, then, if I am not doing the things my Father wants me to do. ³⁸But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe my deeds, in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father."

³⁹Once more they tried to seize Jesus, but he slipped out of their hands.

⁴⁰Jesus then went back again across the Jordan River to the place where John had been baptizing, and he stayed there. ⁴¹Many people came to him. "John performed no miracles," they said, "but everything he said about this man was true." ⁴²And many people there believed in him.

The Festival of Dedication (later called the Festival of Lights) celebrated the cleansing of the Temple and the rebuilding of the altar in 165 B.C., after Judas Maccabeus had driven out the Syrian invaders (1 Maccabees 4:52-59). Here in 10:22 is the only time it is mentioned in the New Testament, so it is appropriate that we examine it in detail at this point.

The story of this Festival begins with Antiochus IV of Syria, a pagan ruler who proclaimed himself to be "The Divine" ("Epiphanes") but who was often called "The Mad Man" ("Epimanes"). Antiochus, whose ruthless ambition was unlimited, used his large army to subdue many of the nations around him. And when the Jewish people resisted his onslaught, he took personal command of his troops and cracked down hard.

To begin with, Antiochus made it a capital offense to worship on the Sabbath, to circumcise, or to give any kind of religious instruction. Then he deliberately desecrated the Temple in

Jerusalem (after killing perhaps as many as 80,000 Jews). He had an idol made of the pagan god Zeus and placed it in the Holy of Holies. And, in another act which horrified and angered the Jews, he had the blood of *swine* offered upon the Jewish altar in the Temple.

Antiochus also directed his soldiers to build pagan altars throughout Palestine. And he decreed that everyone had to worship those idols and everyone had to eat the meat of swine! Some of the Jews cooperated out of fear for their lives, but thousands of them refused to engage in such activities and were killed.

As time went on, however, more Jews gave in to the brutal demands of Antiochus. They began to accept the priests which he had appointed. Some of them exchanged their Jewish names for Greek names. Others forsook the study of the scriptures for the study of Greek literature. More and more Jews took upon themselves the speech, dress, and customs of the occupation forces.

Just when it seemed that all was lost, a priest named Mattathias and his five sons led a successful rebellion against the Syrian intruders in their hometown of Modin (just north of Jerusalem). The family, which came to be known as "the Maccabees," rallied others to their cause and directed a campaign of guerilla warfare from their improvised headquarters in the hills of Judea.

At last they recaptured Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple, exactly three years to the day after Antiochus had desecrated it. The jubilant Jewish people celebrated the victory for eight days, during which they kindled lights and sang praises to God. Then Judas Maccabeus decreed that the Jews should celebrate this victory every year as a memorial to the light of freedom which must shine for all nations.

The Festival of Dedication begins early in December on the 25th day of the Jewish month Chisleu (or Kislev), the anniversary date of the rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus. It lasts eight days. Each night the Jew lights the Menorah (the eight-branched candelabrum), beginning with one candle on the first night, two on the second, etc. The lighting of all eight candles on the eighth night symbolizes the victory of the forces of light over the powers of darkness, as well as the right to live as free people.

Since this Festival (now called Chanukah or Hanukah) is a minor festival, the people may carry out their normal work

activities. And in modern times the Jews in Israel have come to celebrate it as a children's festival in honor of the great heroes of Jewish history. Large outdoor menorahs burn throughout the land, and special torchlight parades are held. Many Jews also exchange gifts during this festival.

According to 10:23, "Jesus was walking in Solomon's Porch in the Temple" during the time that the Festival of the Dedication was going on. When a visitor came to the complex of Temple buildings and grounds, the first area he entered was the Court of the Gentiles. On the east side of that court was a row of pillars, about 40 feet high and roofed, called "Solomon's Porch". The pillars are thought to have been originally a part of Solomon's palace, a place where he received guests and conducted the ordinary business of his kingdom. In Jesus' time, it was a place where rabbis sometimes walked and talked with their students, and where the common people could pray and meditate.

Suddenly Jesus is surrounded by a group of people who are bound and determined to force Jesus to publicly commit himself. They want him to label himself as the Messiah who, the Jews believed, would assume the role of their political and military leader. (Of course, if he had done so, they would have taken him before the Roman authorities and accuse him of sedition.) Of, if that were not to be, they at least want to scare him into quitting his hard-line preaching against their hypocrisy. We are not told who identified Jesus and rallied this antagonistic crowd around him, but they are deadly serious.

Knowing full-well their evil intentions, Jesus courageously confronts them with the fact that he has tried to tell them "the plain truth" many times, without success (10:25). He had already revealed his true identity to the Samaritan woman (4:26) and to the man whom he healed of blindness (9:37). But what he has primary reference to are the many miracles which conclusively convinced such men as Nicodemus (3:2) and to his speeches in which he told how he and the Father are one (5:17-47; 8:16-58; 10:11-18). The evidence had been clear enough, for Jesus never subscribed to the "if you can't convince them, confuse them" philosophy of some politicians (and some preachers!). They saw the facts with their own eyes and heard them with their own ears.

But they would not believe because they are not Jesus' sheep (10:26). Here the Lord makes it clear that their unbelief is not caused by a lack of evidence; it is caused by their immoral nature. It is not a case of Jesus being the wrong Shepherd to follow; it is

that they are the wrong sheep! Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (10:27).

In 10:28-29 we have another of the favorite "proof-texts" of those who believe that a child of God can never fall from grace so as to ever be lost. The wonderful truth in these words is that no one — not even Satan himself — can overpower God and take Christians away from him (see also, Rom. 8:38-39). We believe it! We rejoice in our security!

Yet we cannot ignore the other side of the coin, the equally true doctrine that Christians may *voluntarily* reject God's promised protection by going back to their old life of sin.

But let's see what else the Bible says about this. We want our beliefs to be more than wishful thinking or some theologian's opinion. We want to know what *the Bible* teaches!

The Bible teaches that the lost can be saved and that the saved can be lost (Col. 1:21-23). Those who hear the gospel have to do two things if they are to reach heaven: (1) They must accept the conditions or terms of salvation; and (2) they must demonstrate by their actions the consequences of salvation.

The plain truth is that God's promises are always conditional. The promise to Abraham depended upon his own faithfulness (Genesis 17:1-14; 22:1-19). The promises given to the Israelites in the wilderness were conditioned upon their faithfulness (Exodus 15:25-26; 19:1-8). Similarly, the promise of salvation through Christ is conditioned upon our *continued* faithfulness to him.

For example, the apostle Paul warned: "I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest" (1 Cor. 9:27). And in that same letter he wrote: "You are saved by the gospel if you hold firmly to it — unless it was for nothing that you believed" (1 Cor. 15:2). Notice that big *IF* . . . "if you hold firmly to it . . ."

In the parable of forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-25), Jesus shows that whether the king continued to show mercy on that particular servant depended entirely upon whether the servant showed the *consequences* of having received mercy from the king. The servant would not forgive others, so the king punished him. That is also how God deals with unfaithful Christians.

In the parable of the vine and the branches (15:1-6), Jesus teaches that the relationship between himself and his disciples is dependent upon the will of the disciples. If we choose to "remain

united" with him, then we will "bear much fruit." However, if we choose to separate ourselves from him then we will be unproductive and will be punished. If that isn't falling from grace, what is?

Numerous other scriptures testify to the same idea (Luke 12:42-46; 8:11-15; 1 Cor. 10:12-13; 2 Peter 2:20-21; Hebrews 3:12-15; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 1 John 2:24; James 5:19-20; Rev. 2:4-5). And we have at least five specific examples in the New Testament of people who had once accepted Jesus but fell from his grace. There was Judas (Matt. 10:1-8; Acts 1:26), the legalistic brethren at Galatia (Gal. 1:6; 5:4), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Simon the magician (Acts 8:13-24), and some of the angels in heaven (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4)!

That's awfully clear, isn't it? Yet there are lots of people who, like the Jews surrounding Jesus, accuse us of "blasphemy" for believing and teaching exactly what the Bible plainly states! They sometimes become as upset at us as the Jews do with Jesus (10:31, 33, 39).

Well, in 10:34-38 Jesus once again tries to get them to open their prejudiced minds to the plain facts. But when they try to capture him (10:39), he goes back to the countryside. He doesn't go there to sulk or to give up, but to teach and preach. The result is that he finds some of his sheep there (10:42).

Thought Stimulators on John 10:22-42

1. In what month was the Festival of Shelters held?
2. In what month was the Festival of Dedication held?
3. Who was Antiochus?
4. Who started the Festival of Dedication and what was it intended to memorialize?
5. Describe the area known as "Solomon's porch".
6. Why did the Jews want Jesus to identify himself as the Messiah?
7. What reason did Jesus give for their unbelief?
8. Why can the faithful (not perfect, but trying to be) Christian feel that his salvation is secure?
9. Upon what did God's promise to Abraham depend?
10. Upon what does God's promise of salvation to us depend?
11. Give two specific examples from the New Testament of believers who fell from grace.

12. Based upon the example of Jesus, what should we do when a certain group of people just won't listen to our teaching?
13. What was the ultimate testimony to which Jesus pointed as proof of his position as the Son of God.
14. Ask a Jewish person to explain how he observes the Feast of Dedication and what it means to him (Note: Try to emphasize the common heritage which you both have as people who respect the Old Testament as the Word of God.)