

The Historical Background HANUKKAH (WOFM Torah study 12/14)

Hanukkah, "The Feast Of Dedication," stands out among the celebrations of the Bible. The fact that Hanukkah is not spoken of by Moses in Lev. 23 should not cause us to assume that it is therefore non-biblical. To fully understand this holiday, we must go back to what is referred to as the silent four hundred years between the Old Testament and New Testaments. This period of time is referred to by historians as the Hellenistic period of 167 B.C.E. The New Testament reveals the celebration of Hanukkah in John 10:22. John tells us that Yahushua was at the Temple walking on Solomon's Porch during the "Feast of Dedication." John also tells us that Yahushua reveals an amazing spiritual truth about His divine nature on this holiday.

A few generations earlier, the Greeks had come to world power under the leadership of Alexander the Great; he seemed to have unified the ancient world into one common government and culture called Hellenism. After Alexander's death, there was a political scramble among four of his generals, resulting in the division of the Hellenistic empire. The Ptolemies took control of the South, which included Egypt. The Seleucids took charge of the northern area around Syria. This left Judea caught in the middle of a tug-of-war, wondering what the outcome would be. Eventually, the Seleucid/Syrians, under the leadership of Antiochus IV, gained power and sought control of the new provinces. Seeking to unify his holdings, Antiochus enforced a policy of assimilation into the prevailing Hellenistic culture. Irrespective of the culture and beliefs of the captured peoples, the Seleucids required submission to the Greek way of life. The Greeks thought that to be truly effective this assimilation must apply to all aspects of life, including language, the arts, and even religion. Everything was to conform to the Greek way of life and values.

Hellenism is a polytheists practice that worshipped the ancient Greek elohims Ñ the Olympians, nature divinities and underworld deities. Examples of these Elohim are; Zeus, Hera, Athena, Hephaistos, Apollo, Artemis, Demeter, Dionysos, Hermes, Ares, Poseidon and Aphrodite, along with Hades and Hestia. Hellenists also honored other types of divinities, including nature spirits (Pan, nymphs, river elohims), chthonic or underworld deities (Persephone, Hermes Psykhopompos), and heroes (e.g., Herakles). The Jewish people were living under the oppression of this king and the above pagan practices. Many Jews in Judea had converted to the Hellenistic way and openly advocated adherence to it. However, there

were a significant number of faithful Jews who were appalled by these practices and the changes in their culture.

An ultimatum was given: either the Jewish community must give up its distinctive practice (Shabbat, feasts, Torah reading, circumcision, etc.) or die. To prove his point, Antiochus marched his troops into Jerusalem and desecrated the Holy Temple. The altars, the utensils, even the golden Menorah (lampstand) were all defiled or torn down. But that was just the start! Antiochus also ordered that a pig be sacrificed on the holy altar and erected an image of the Greek elohim Zeus as the new point of worship in the Temple! Antiochus insisted on being called "epiphanies" (elohim manifest). These Greek practices were in direct conflict with the Ten Commandments and Torah (first five books of the bible).

The Jewish community soon came up with an appropriate reflection of their feelings. Instead of calling him Antiochus Epiphanies they made a play on words, and called him "epimanes" (crazyman)! The murmurings for a revolt were heard in Judea and birthed in a small village called Modi'in. Living in this village was an old, Elohimly priest named Mattathias and his five sons. When the Seleucid soldiers chose him to lead the pagan ceremony, Mattathias and his sons reacted with holy indignation. Enough was enough! They killed the soldiers and started a revolt against the oppressors. One of the sons, Judah, rose to leadership and was nicknamed "Maccabee" (the hammer). Spurred on by their firm conviction that the Elohim of Israel was true and faithful, the Maccabees proved that the impossible could happen. In the Hebrew month Kislev (December) they drove out the Syrians and recaptured the Temple in Jerusalem. The Maccabees and their followers quickly cleansed the altars and restored the Holy furnishings. Of particular importance to them was the broken Menorah symbolizing the light of Elohim. They restored it and lit it, but there was a problem. Jewish tradition created (made up) by a Rabi hundreds of years later recounts that as they searched for some specially prepared oil, they found only enough to burn for one day. The priests knew it would take at least eight days for new oil to be produced. What to do? They decided it was better to light the Menorah anyway; at least the light of Elohim would shine forth immediately. To their amazement, the oil burned not only for one day, but for eight days until additional oil was available! The truth of the matter is that it took eight days to make the alter Holy to allow for the morning sacrifice to take place. This was done according to the preparation of the alter recorded in the Torah. It took eight days to dedicate the Temple and all of the utensils including the alter.

The Temple was restored and rededicated to the Splendor of the Elohim of Israel and an eight-day festival was established. It is called Hanukkah (Hebrew for Dedication). Every year, starting on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the Jewish community recalls the two-fold miracle: the miracle of the oil as well as the miraculous military victory. Some people may question why include Hanukkah with the "biblical" holy days, since it is not mentioned in the feasts of Lev 23. However, the Tanakh (Old Testament) reveals that Hanukkah is clearly predicted in later prophetic writings. The vision given to the prophet Daniel is an amazingly detailed description of the events surrounding Hanukkah as he describes the coming kingdoms that would have impact on Israel. Daniel 8:21-25 also predicts a miraculous deliverance by Elohim! The miracle of Hanukkah is mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures with such detail that some liberal scholars have suggested that Daniel was writing after the fact and not prophetically.

The Traditional Jewish Observance

The traditional Hanukkah (passed down by the Rabi's) is an enjoyable holiday with many meaningful customs. Every year, starting on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the Jewish community begins its eight-day celebration. The holiday focuses on the Hanukkiah, the nine-branched Hanukkah Menorah. The usual Menorah, like the modern symbol of the State of Israel is seven-branched. The eight branches of the Hanukkiah are to remind us of the eight-day miracle of oil. The ninth branch (in the center with four branches on either side) stands out. It is used to light the other candles and is called the shamash (Hebrew for "servant"). The Menorah is lit after dark, usually in connection with a meal.

After the baruk's are said it is traditional to sing holiday songs. Then it's time to enjoy the meal with its traditional foods. Because of the tradition of the miracle of the oil, it is customary to eat foods cooked in oil, such as latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiot (jelly doughnuts). Another reminder of the miracle of this holiday is the dreidel game. These wooden or plastic tops have different Hebrew letters on each of their four sides: *Nun*, *Gimel*, *Hey*, and *Shin* standing for the phrase *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham* ("A Great Miracle Happened There.") There is an interesting story behind the dreidel. It is said that the Jewish children of Judea during the Maccabean period wanted to study Torah, but the anti-Semitic policies of the Syrians made this difficult. They came up with a creative answer: they would study the scrolls in the streets until a foreign soldier came, then they would quickly

hide the scroll, bring out the dreidel, and pretend to be engrossed in a game of tops! When the soldier left, the Torah study would begin again. In modern celebrations, dreidels are played with for fun. Each Hebrew letter has its own value for keeping score. Children are given Hanukkah money; which is usually foil-covered chocolate coins they use to wager with and make the game more interesting. What is interesting is that the dreidel game is a German gambling game and not around during that time. In addition the Torah Scroll's are so Holy and expensive children would not be having them and reading them in the street's the Rabi's don't even touch them with their fingers they use a special stick with a silver finger on it. More recently, the custom of giving gifts has found its way into the celebration of this holiday. Many families give real Hanukkah money to children, perhaps 25 cents for each year of their age. There is nothing wrong with these traditions. Often people try to establish a connection between Christmas and Hanukkah simply because they occur at the same time. However, they celebrate two entirely different events and any intermingling of the two celebrations is often man-made.

Hannukkah and the New Testament

"And it was at Jerusalem the Feast of The Dedication (Hanukkah), and it was winter. And Yahushua walked in the temple in Solomon's porch" John 10:22-23 ^{KJV}. Most surprising to both the Jewish and the Christian communities is that the clearest mention of Hanukkah in the Bible is in the New Testament! This brings us to the first reason believers in Yahushua Messiah might want to understand and celebrate this holiday. The Messiah celebrated it. Not only did Yahushua celebrate Hanukkah, but he observed it in the same Temple that had been cleansed and rededicated just a few generations earlier by the Maccabees. Many Jewish scholars see a deeper spiritual meaning to Hanukkah. As the editors of the popular Artscroll Mesorah Series state: *Then, the light is kindled to give inspiration, for the light of Messiah must burn brightly in our hearts.* (Hanukkah, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, 1981, pg. 104).

Did Yahushua Understand The Importance Of Hanukkah? Yes, while Yahushua was walking in the Temple during Hanukkah, they demanded that he tell them whether He was the Messiah. The scripture records that, He told them who He was (John 10:7-23). This "Feast of Dedication", is the time when the Jewish nation was celebrating a holiday about deliverance from a false ruler who had declared he was to be their Elohim. Think of the Elohimly wisdom and timing for Yahushua to choose this place and

celebration to reveal that He is Elohim! Antiochus of Epiphanies' made a similar claim, the coming anti-Messiah will do the same and now here is Yahushua confronting the cultural, political and religious leaders with the truth that He is the Messiah; *"I and my Father are one. 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him."* John 10:30-31 ^{KJV}

He has just declared to them, He is Elohim. He was saying that He is equal to Elohim in all aspects and that He is "Elohim in the flesh". To have chosen the Feast of Hanukkah to declare, "I and my Father are one," is strategic! Elohim is one Elohim, but He exists in a plurality of beings, Elohim The Father, Elohim The Son and Elohim The Holy Spirit. The religious leaders were enraged and picked up stones to stone Him. It is no different today; there are many who prefer the religious traditions of men and stone throwing instead of truth (John 10:32-33).

The primary Jewish declaration of faith proclaims that; *"Hear, O Israel: Yahuwah our Elohim is one MASTER"* Deut 6:4 ^{KJV}. The multitude that heard Him was taken back. They understood exactly what Yahushua meant (John 17:21). At this very moment Israel was celebrating their deliverance from such a declaration made by Antiochus the oppressive king and the pagan practices he tried to force upon the people of Elohim. He portrayed that he was a elohim to them two hundred years earlier on the Temple Mount. Daniels prophecies declare that another anti-Messiah will be coming in the future that will do the same. It is no mistake that Yahushua chose Hanukkah to proclaim His deity (John 10:37-38). There is a weapon that every generation has against Elohimlessness, lawlessness, and the traditions of man. Hanukkah teaches us that the weapon that combats, "assimilation" into unElohimly practices and religious acceptance is unwavering obedience to The Word of Elohim and removal of every high place. Just like the Maccabees we cannot allow one to remain in place, even if the odds are thirteen to one against you! The story of the Maccabees (the hammer people) is a reminder of the unswerving devotion of people who dedicated themselves to uncompromised obedience and faith (Rom 12:1).

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." (John 4:23-26 ^{NKJV})

Authors Personal Exhortation

Hanukkah is not an alternative to the winter solstice celebrations of man. It is the story of a people who said enough, re-dedicated and separated themselves from an anti-Messiah spirit and the religious practices it

represented. Yahushua was not born on December 25th.. His conception was near or during the period of Hanukkah and His birth came during the [Fall Feast of Tabernacles](#) (Sept. / Oct.). Because Spirit and Truth Worship are foundational to the Christian way of life, I want to encourage you to research where the [Yule Tide, Winter Solstice and Christmas](#) celebrations originated from. Then ask yourself, how did these practices and symbols become interwoven into the worship of the Messiah? How did His birth become a celebration during the Winter Solstice instead of the biblical time of Tabernacles?

The biblical "[Feasts of Yahuwah](#)" and other Hebrew celebrations mentioned in the bible have nothing in common with the spring Easter, fall Halloween and winter Xmas celebrations that have become part of Christianity. The feasts of the bible are recorded in Leviticus 23. Elohim told Moses they are; *"a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am Yahuwah that doth sanctify you,"* (Ex. 31:12-13). Zechariah tells us they will be celebrated during the thousand year millennial reign of Yahushua Messiah (Zec. 14:15-16). Isaiah tells us that they continue on in eternity after the new heaven and earth is completed (Isa. 66:22-23). If they are celebrated during the millennium and in eternity what makes us think we can change or replace them? Will you understand the relevance of Hanukkah and be a modern Maccabee (a hammer) and declare as they did? *"Yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. Far be it for us to desert the law and the ordinances"*.

Let me conclude this overview by sharing three simple truths that I have learned during the process of teaching about the Bibles Holy Days.

1. *Sacred Cows make Gourmet hamburgers.*
2. *All truth passes through three stages. First it is ridiculed. Second it is violently opposed. Third it is perceived as self evident.*
3. *Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin James 4:17.*

Hanukkah is a celebration of conception and deliverance, it is a time to express hope and renew our dedication to serve Him. It is time to throw off the mentality that biblical feasts and celebrations are just Jewish! The scriptures reveal that Yahushua and His original twelve apostles celebrated the feasts and other biblical holidays. They didn't quit celebrating them just because churches were planted in gentile nations. History actually reveals that the apostles and their disciples actually taught the gentiles these

celebrations and practiced them together. It wasn't until the Roman Church began systematically replacing Hebrew teachings and practices with non biblical dates and pagan celebrations that they began disappearing from the lineage of the original churches (in 325 A.D).

You celebrate what you want..., *"but as for me and my house we will chose the biblical patterns seen in the life of Yahushua Messiah and His apostles, including the historical practices of the churches that originated from the twelve apostles."* During the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) I renew and re-dedicate myself and my household to not practicing the pagan and religious co-opted practices of the Roman Church and the pagan traditions of men. Certainly all believers in Yahushua have important reasons to remember the Feast of Dedication, Yahushua did (Jn.10).

The Prophetic Fulfillment

As with all the biblical holy days, there are spiritual lessons to be learned from Hanukkah-light, courage, and belief, to name a few. Perhaps the most vital one is seen in its name. This festival commemorates a time when true worship of Elohim was restored and the pagan practices completely removed from the House of Elohim in Jerusalem. The Temple in Jerusalem no longer stands today. The heart of each true believer in Yahushua Messiah the Messiah and savior is the temple where the Spirit of Elohim dwells. Too often believers endanger the cleanliness of this Temple by allowing idolatry and pagan practices into their lives. Hence the timeless exhortation from Scripture:

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Yahushua." - Col 2:8 ^{KJV}

A Practical Guide for a New Testament Hanukkah Celebration

1. Hanukkah Reading Night One:

*Ps 27:1-3 Yahuwah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
Yahuwah is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?*

2. Hanukkah Reading Night Two:

Ps 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

3. Hanukkah Reading Night Three:

Matt 5:16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and esteem your Father who is in heaven.

4. Hanukkah Reading Night Four:

Acts 26:18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to Elohim, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.

5. Hanukkah Reading Night Five:

John 8:12 Then Yahushua again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

6. Hanukkah Reading Night Six:

Eph 5:11-15 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Messiah will shine on you." Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,

7. Hanukkah Reading Night Seven:

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a CHOSEN RACE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, a HOLY NATION, a PEOPLE FOR {Elohim's} OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

8. Hanukkah Reading Night Eight:

Phil 2:14-16 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of Elohim above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Messiah I will have reason to Splendor because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.