

Hanukkah. Should we keep it?

December 2018

By Philip W. Shields

Light on the Rock Sermon

Hanukkah is here, beginning at sundown Dec 2nd, 2018.

What is it? Why are more and more Christians, even Sabbath keepers, recognizing and keeping Hanukkah? Some feel it is merely a Jewish counterbalance to Christmas. Others believe it is a Jewish festivity not mentioned in Scripture.

What's true? **Should you and I – believers in Yeshua -- keep Hanukkah? Is it WRONG for us to keep it? Or is it OK to keep it? Can we just ignore it? What did Jesus do about Hanukkah?** Yes, we're actually told in Scripture!

In Scripture, Hanukkah is called “**the Feast of Dedication**”, since the name “Hanukkah” means “to dedicate”. It is also called the Feast of Lights. It occurs in December and lasts for 8 days.

It's called “the feast of Dedication” because it celebrates when the Jews rededicated the temple in Jerusalem when they finally drove out their Greek conquerors. The Greeks had done much to defile the temple. The Greeks desecrated the temple Holy of Holies when they erected a large idol to Zeus – in the most holy place. Then they offered swine's flesh on the altar.

So it was a grand day when Jews regained control, cleansed and then rededicated their temple to God. More on this – and what it has to do with us today -- as we go along.

It's **also called the Festival of Lights** because of the miracle of the holy oil used to light the menorah that lasted so long. More on that in a moment also.

Hanukkah is not one of the 7 holydays of God that he ordained in Leviticus 23. Only God himself can make or declare a day to be holy. But nonetheless, it's a happy and special day – maybe in a way like our Thanksgiving Day is not a holyday but is a special day. However Hanukkah does remember when God gave the Jews a great victory.

So did Yeshua (Jesus) participate in Hanukkah? Let's see what we're told.

John 10:22-23

“Now it was the Feast of Dedication [Hanukkah] in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus [Yeshua] walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch”.

So Jesus was there. If you wanted nothing to do with a festivity, would you be at the center of the celebrations? Of course not. But as a good Jew, Yeshua was there! Though that is not proof that he “observed” or “kept” Hanukkah, it comes pretty close to it.

It was while in Jerusalem during Hanukkah that Yeshua proclaimed Himself divine (“I and my father are one” – John 10:30).

Yeshua was in the midst of the festivities, for the temple compound area was the center of the celebrations. IF it were wrong to participate in Hanukkah, the temple would be the last place you would want to be during the 8 days of Hanukkah.

So my first observation is that it is OK to participate in Hanukkah – as Yeshua did -- and we could learn vital lessons from it. It's not a pagan holiday by any means, OK? But neither is Hanukkah one of the commanded “moedim”, or divinely appointed festivals of our Creator. It is a Jewish celebration and I cheer them on in its celebration. But, having said all that, neither would it be wrong to choose not to have anything to do with Hanukkah, especially among those that make it their Jewish counterpart to Christmas. But remember, originally and even today, Hanukkah had no connection with Christmas.

I'M not a Jew. I do not keep Hanukkah myself, but do not see anything wrong with keeping it. Yeshua did, so how could we condemn it?

Daniel 8:22-25 prophesied of the time when Alexander the Great's generals, who divided up his empire, would conquer the Promised Land and desecrate the temple. Years after Alexander's death, the area of Judea finally came under Antiochus IV “Epiphanes”. **The time period of 165-163 BC was when the events leading to “Hanukkah” took place.**

Antiochus was intent on “Hellenizing” the Jews, or making them accept Greek culture. Many Jews did so, to curry favor with the rulers. Some quit circumcising their boys. They started dressing, speaking and acting like Greeks and began to drop their Jewish heritage. **This is also part of the lesson of this feast: remaining faithful to Yah's word.**

Nations that resisted the Greek empire's moves were left out of commerce and deemed “backward”. If you wanted to be successful, it was tempting to give in to Hellenism. Many Jews began to practice their faith in secret. Others outwardly in public behaved as Greeks, but in private as Jews. That is – until the Greeks imposed the death penalty for those secretly holding on to their faith.

Remember I said Antiochus also defiled the temple and altar by sacrificing a pig on their altar. Then he erected a status of Zeus in the very Holy of Holies. Can you imagine the Jews' consternation over this? Some believe this was the first “abomination of desolation” prophesied by Daniel in **Dan. 11:31-32**. So Jews revolted. Finally Jews, led by Judah Maccabee, drove out the Greeks in 163 BC and took over Jerusalem and their temple once more. (You may have heard about **the Maccabees**. This is what all that was about.)

When they went to light the menorah – the 7 candle light in the holy place - they discovered they had only enough of the special oil to last one day. It would take eight more days to make and consecrate more of this oil. This didn't stop them. They lit the menorah anyway and the little oil they had for one day somehow miraculously burned for the entire 8 days until more oil was ready.

Thus began the eight-day Feast of Dedication to celebrate this miracle, their great deliverance from oppressors and the dedication of the newly cleansed temple.

This explains why it is also called the “**Feast of Lights**,” when celebrants bring their candles or 9-branched candelabras. Why 9 instead of 7 total lights?

Eight of the lights or candles recall the eight days they had light even when there should not have been enough oil. The 9th is the “Servant” candle used to light the others.

[Many believers see Yeshua as the Servant candle.].

Apparently more and more candles are lit as the feast progresses. Just one candle is lit the first night, then two on the second, and so on, until all 8 lights plus “the Servant light” are burning in Jewish homes. Jews today also exchange gifts, have big parties, lots of food and special Hanukkah items.

Many Jews probably gloss over the real meaning of the day, much like Americans may refer to Thanksgiving Day as “turkey day”. Some have virtually turned it into a “Jewish Christmas” with their elaborate decorations and Christmas-like gift-giving. I can’t recommend anything that smacks of turning this holiday into a Christmas equivalent. **Hanukkah should remind us that God delivers us from those who try to destroy His people or from those who keep us from worshiping Him in spirit and truth. If you do wish to observe it, do it with the real history in mind and with the praises of Yah from your lips.**

IF we understand the real history and background to the original Hanukkah, we could ponder:

- How much would we be willing to give up in our worship and service to Father in heaven in times of persecution? Life and death was at stake here.
- Will we compromise when the end-time prophesied “Beast system” forces a false worship on all believers – or die—as Antiochus Epiphanes did to the Jews of 165 BC?
- **The Maccabees had to cleanse their defiled altar and temple.** The Greek soldiers had trashed the temple compounds. **WE are the temple of the Holy Spirit today.** If we took an honest look at our lives, are they holy, set-apart to YHVH – or are our lives “trashed” by worldliness, pagan traditions and secularism? Perhaps this season reminds us to ask Yeshua to cleanse Father’s temple once more: cleanse our lives, our actions, our minds, our words, our bodies.
- The Maccabees resumed proper temple sacrifices. Today, WE are to be living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). Let’s present to our Father the kind of lives that truly represent a holy sacrifice acceptable to Him.
- **Hanukkah is more about the rededication of the temple than it is a remembrance of the victory over the Greeks. Is it time for us to re-set, to rededicate ourselves to our Master? I say a resounding “YES” to that!**
- In the Hanukkah candelabra, it is the middle light – the “Servant Light” that lights all the others. In the same way we are reminded in scripture that Yeshua is the Light of the

world (John 8:12). **We are also lights, but we must first receive our light from the Servant light – our Master.**

- **The Maccabees dedicated the newly cleansed temple. In the same way, we should remember to re-dedicate our lives, our spiritual temples, to the One we worship and live more and more so in harmony with that.**

So, though we don't have to keep Hanukkah, and it is NOT a holyday, apparently Yeshua felt it was OK to be IN THE VERY MIDDLE OF ALL the temple festivities during Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication). So neither do I think it wrong to understand it, or to even observe it and partake in it -- or to even thank YHVH for His providence as our Jewish neighbors observe this happy time in their otherwise often difficult history.