

HANUKKAH – Feast of Dedication⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾

BACKGROUND:

Hanukkah is traditionally called a ‘feast’, but it is not to be confused with one of the seven Appointed Time in the Scriptures. It is a special festival, the result of a great deliverance, honored also by Yeshua as can be seen below.

Hanukkah is set in the period around 167 B.C.E. – a time when the Jews were greatly oppressed.

Generations earlier the Greeks had come to power led by Alexander the Great. Under him the world had become united under a common government and culture called Hellenism.

Alexander died untimely. The result was political upheaval as a battle for power by four of his generals ensued. The empire was divided, the Seleucids taking control of the northern area around Syria, and the Ptolemies controlling the south. Judea was stuck in the middle, awaiting the outcome.

Under Antiochus IV the Seleucid/Syrians eventually gained power, and sought to control the provinces through a policy of assimilation into the Hellenistic culture. To them, “assimilation” included every facet of life, including religion.

The Greek culture was a highly respected one. Even many of the more liberal Jews in Judea willingly adopted their ways. However, many traditional Jews were appalled, and were not quiet about it. Antiochus and the Seleucids grew increasingly antagonistic to the “stubborn Jews”, increasing their pressure to conform, until an ultimatum was given: the Jews either give up all their customs, or die.

Antiochus reinforced this by marching his troops into Jerusalem and desecrating the Temple, altars, utensils, and Menorah, then slaughtered a pig on the holy alter and erected a statue of Zeus. He then proclaimed himself Antiochus “Epiphanes” (God manifest).

Not long after, Syrian troops entered a small village named Modi’in to erect a false god and force the people to participate in its pagan ceremony. They tried to force an old godly priest Mattathias and his five sons to lead the ceremony. This was a mistake. In their indignation, he and his five sons killed the soldiers. One of the sons, Judah, nicknamed “Maccabee” (The Hammer) rose to leadership. He and a small army engaged in guerilla warfare against the far greater army of the Syrians. In the month Kislev, they finally drove the troops out, recapturing Jerusalem, being spurred on by their knowledge and faith that the God of Israel was true and faithful to HIS people.

Temple restoration began immediately. Of particular importance to them was lighting the Menorah immediately. The Menorah was always to be kept continually burning to show forth the Light of God. In searching though, they found only enough of the needed specially prepared oil to last one day, and it took 8 days to make more. They decided to lite it for that one day anyway, thinking it important for the Light of God shine right away.

BUT GOD. That wonderful statement once again!

They lit the Menorah, and according to tradition it burned for the full 8 days until new oil was made!

The temple was restored and rededicated, and an 8-day festival was established to commemorate the wonderful work of God in both the miracle of the oil, and the miraculous military victory. The festival was called Hanukkah – ‘Dedication’ - and has been celebrated on the 25th day of Kislev ever since.

Daniel 8:21-25 is prophetic of this series of events.

THE FESTIVAL:

Each year the festival is started on the 25th day of Kislev.

Its beginning is marked by the lighting of the *hanukkiyah*, the 9-branched Hanukkah Menorah. This is the traditional 7-branch Menorah, with an 8th branch added to symbolize the 8 day miracle of the oil, and a 9th added in the center which stands out and is called the *shamash* (servant), which is used to

light the others one by one each of the 8 days. They are lit after dark, normally in connection with a festive celebratory meal.

After blessings are said, holiday songs are sung, then the meal is enjoyed – usually one that is cooked in oils, such as *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiot* (Israeli doughnuts), again to remember the miracle of ADONAI's 8-day burning of the one day of oil.

A traditional game of *dreydels* may also be played – a game with tops that have the Hebrew letters *Nun, Gimel, Hey* and *Shin* on their sides. These stand for *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham* - "A great miracle happened there."

More recently, gift-giving has found its way into regularity with the festival too, mostly toward the children in the form of *Hanukkah gelt* (money) – usually some amount for each year of their age.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Hanukkah calls us to consider many things.

First of course, the great miracle of deliverance from destruction by the Hellenists through the hand of God working with the remnant of the Faithful. As such, it represents the victory of Faith over Reason – the Hellenist platform.

Then we have the great miracle of the Light of ADONAI shining forth for eight days on the oil sufficient for just one. Not only is HE our deliverer, HE is also our Provider.

We note Yeshua celebrating Hanukkah (John 10:22-23) in the B'rit Hadashah. The Temple He was observing it in is the very one that was cleansed and re-dedicated.

Because Hanukkah is a celebration of deliverance, it has come to be a symbol of Messianic hope. Many feel that in the same way ADONAI used the Maccabees in this season to redeem faithful Israel, the Great Deliverer might also return at this season.

Then of course, the festival brings a prophetic message for us. True worship of ADONAI was restored with the Temple. That of course, is now gone once again. But the believer is now the Temple ADONAI Elohim. And just as idolatry was always a danger to proper worship in the Temple before, so it remains a danger for each individual believer now. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 speaks clearly to us about the ongoing caution against the attack of the Hellenists of every age past, present and future.

May we rejoice in the coming of Messiah to fulfill His work in life, death and resurrection.

May we keep our temples cleansed, our oil in supply, and our light properly burning to show forth HIS glory.

Hallelu Yah.

⁽¹⁾Much of the material here is taken from *God's Appointed Times*: Barney Kasdan, Lederer Books, copyright © 1993 pp. 107-116, and *Growing to Maturity*: Daniel C. Juster, Lederer Books, copyright © 2011 pp. 183-185. Material has been cross-checked against other available resources.

⁽²⁾Hanukkah is also called the Festival of Lights, commemorating the miracle of the oil and relighting of the Menorah. *There is some speculation that Yeshua may have been conceived on Hanukkah, the festival of lights, and born on Feast of Tabernacles, also called the 'show of lights.' How appropriate then, for him to say "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). **Unlocking the Secrets of the Feasts*: Michael Norten, Westbow Press, copyright © 1995 digital version pp.91-92.