

Hello, to the Body of Without Spot or Wrinkle Ministries International,

I have been asked the questions, "Why as Christians are we celebrating Hanukkah - The Feast of Dedication? Are we substituting Christmas for Hanukkah?"

We have not celebrated this feast day, at Without Spot or Wrinkle, because I had not studied it and did not want to replace Christmas with it. After studying it, and praying about it, I believe it again has great meaning for us as believers. Many things in the old testament has a spiritual meaning as a shadow and a type, for us on this side of the cross.

The feast of Dedication is not one of the Seven feast that God commanded. However it is a remembrance of a miracle that took place, that Jesus Himself celebrated.

I have added this article that I found that helps us better understand that history, has a way of repeating itself, physically and spiritually, and why we should remember this miracle.

Before you read his article, ask God to let you see how this applies to us today in the physical and spiritually realm.

After reading it and praying about it, you decide if it is something you would like to start celebrating with your family.

I will be teaching this on December 26, the Sabbath that I return. I hope to see all of you then.

With much love and blessings,
Dr. Patricia Venegas

Although commonly known as the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah actually means Dedication. The theme of this holiday is **rededication** - we recall the rededication of the holy Temple of Jerusalem after it had been delivered from the power of the pagan ruler. But for Believers in Messiah, the Festival has a deeper meaning. The corporate body of Messiah is meant to be a corporate expression of Him, dedicated to carrying out His holy purposes, having been delivered from the power of the evil one. We can also apply the principle of dedication to our lives as individual members of His body. We are to dedicate our lives on a daily basis to Him who loves us and we are to proclaim the glorious Gospel of Messiah Yeshua as we seek, by His empowering, to be His lights in this darkened world.

To fully understand Hanukkah, we need a little history lesson. Most of what we know concerning the history of this Feast

is found in the extra-biblical books of I and II Maccabees and in the writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus. The time between the Old and the New Testaments has been labeled the silent years, but the truth is a fictional novel couldn't hold more intrigue or imaginative narrative than this period. The story of Hanukkah is a story of survival, bravery, overcoming faith, and our sovereign God. These lessons are too rich to ascribe to a silent past. The message is that in the face of enormous odds, with God, we are victorious.

Although he lived long before the events which Hanukkah commemorate, the drama actually begins with Alexander the Great. Beginning in Greece in the 4th Century BC, the highly ambitious Alexander conquered the known world by the age of 23. The book of the Prophet Daniel portrays him, symbolically, first as a leopard and later as a horned goat who charges so swiftly, that he does not even touch the ground (Daniel 7:6, 8:5-7).

It was through the conquest of Alexander the Great that the Hellenization of the world began. The ideas of Greek philosophers, glorifying the human body both in sport and in fine art, and the Greek way of perceiving the universe around us permeated the world. These new philosophical ideas changed the existing cultures and sought to influence existing religions in conquered lands.

Upon Alexander's death in 323 BC, there was a scramble for power among 4 of his generals, which ushered in a period of war that lasted for almost 200 years. The kingdom split into four pieces, ruled by different dynasties. Eventually, the Seleucid/Syrian dynasty, under the leadership of Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes (which means manifest God), gained control of the area that included the land of Judea.

Antiochus' passionate goal was to unify his kingdom, including Judea. He enforced a policy of assimilation into the prevailing Hellenistic culture, irrespective of the culture and beliefs of the captured people. The Greeks thought that to be truly effective this assimilation must apply to all aspects of life, including language, the arts, and religion. Everything and everyone was to conform to the superior Greek way of life. This Hellenization policy didn't present a big problem for many people living under the Seleucid rule. In fact, the Greeks were highly respected for their culture and even many of the Jews in Judea converted to the Hellenistic way and openly advocated adherence to it. However, there were a significant number of Jews who were appalled at the changes in their society and stubbornly refused to submit. So began a massive struggle between cultures: Judaism vs. Hellenism.

Antiochus believed that the Jewish religion was the obstacle standing in the

way of Hellenism's acceptance, so he made the practice of Judaism a capital offense. Ritual prostitution was established in the Temple. Possession of the Hebrew Scriptures was outlawed. Whole families of Jews were executed for their observance of the Sabbath and circumcision. A number of families who were discovered to have circumcised their sons were crucified with those babies hung around their necks. Yet despite these aggressive and horrific measures, many Jews still refused to submit to assimilation.

So, in 167 BC Antiochus Epiphanes marched to Jerusalem, entered the Temple and ransacked it. There, Antiochus set up an image of his god, Zeus and on the sacred Temple altar, he sacrificed a pig. The "rebellious" Jews soon came up with an appropriate reflection of their feelings. Instead of calling him Antiochus Epiphanes (manifest God), they referred to him as Epimenes - which is the Greek equivalent as "nutty as a fruit-cake" (crazyman). Who knows, maybe that's where the custom of exchanging fruitcakes this time of year comes from?

He sent his soldiers out into the countryside, forcing each village to destroy their synagogues and take part in a celebration to Zeus with a feast of pork. When they came to the town of Modi'in, they came up against an old devout priest named Mattathias and his five sons. The people were assembled in the town square by Syrian Greek soldiers, an altar was built, and the old priest Mattathias was ordered to sacrifice a pig for the townspeople to eat. Mattathias refused to defile himself or his people. The soldiers insisted, offering "financial incentive."

Finally, another man from the village volunteered to collaborate with the Syrian Greeks. As the man approached the pig, Mattathias suddenly ran forward

The five sons of Mattathias drew their weapons, struck down the soldiers, and headed for the hills. They were joined by many fellow revolutionaries, and so began a lopsided revolt against the mighty Syrian Greek Empire.

Shortly afterwards, Mattathias died and his son, Judah, assumed the leadership of the group, who became known as the "Maccabees." There are two theories about this title. The first and most common is that "maccabee" is the Hebrew word for "hammer" - derived from the root "makav." It is believed that Judah was given the name Maccabee because of his great strength. The second theory is that the word "maccabee" is an acrostic - something the Jewish people are fond of using created by joining the first letter of the Hebrew words "Mi kamokha ba'elim Adonai" which means, "Who among the mighty is like You, O Lord?"

It is believed that "Maccabee" was the battle cry of the Jews who battled against the Syrian army.

Under Judah's leadership and facing unbelievable odds, the "rebels" used guerilla tactics in their home hill country, and time after time surprised and defeated the Syrian armies sent to bring their revolt to an end. Convinced that God was true and faithful, the rebels pushed on to Jerusalem, drove out the Syrians, and recaptured the Temple. They toppled the statue of Zeus and tore down the defiled altar, building a new one. A date was set for the rededication of the Temple - the 25th of Kislev, the same day on which, three years earlier, Antiochus had issued his decree and committed his "abomination of desolation."

In the Holy Place inside the Temple, the rejoicing Jewish conquerors found the huge menorah, which to them symbolized the light of God. It had been badly damaged during the occupation, but they

repaired it and looked for some of the special oil in order to light it. In one of the storerooms they found a single bottle, which was only enough to burn for one day and the procedure for making more oil took eight days. They were faced with the decision of whether to make more oil and wait eight days to light the menorah, thus giving the Syrians time to regroup and attack them, or to light it immediately and hope that the people would see that the light of God was once again in the Temple and perhaps join their fight.

The thought of rekindling the light only to see it go out again was heart wrenching. Yet the zeal to rededicate the Temple was so strong that, despite the dilemma, they decided to light the candelabra. Tradition tell us that God showed His "stamp of approval" of their deeds of valor and zeal, when the oil, which should have lasted for only one day, miraculously lasted the entire eight days until new oil was processed and consecrated. By that time, local sentiment had grown to the point that the Syrians could no longer retake Jerusalem. Judah declared that these events would be commemorated by an annual holiday, Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication. A traditional saying arose from this Hanukkah story: "nes gadol haya sham," which means, "a great miracle happened there." For this reason, this 8-day holiday is also known as the "Festival of Lights."

There are a few traditions associated with the celebration of Hanukkah, but I want to focus on the one that most clearly shows Messianic symbolism. During the Feast, a special menorah, called a Hanukkiah, is used. The Hanukkah Menorah has nine candleholders instead of the normal seven. The "Shamash" or "Servant" candle is usually set off to one side, or elevated slightly in the middle. The first night, a candle is placed in the Shamash position and one candle on the end.

We light the Shamash with a match or lighter, then take the Shamash from its holder and light the other candle(s). The second night, we would place the Shamash and two candles, and so on. During this lighting, the family recites the traditional blessing.

It is the Shamash candle I want to talk about. The central candle - The Shamash - The Servant - reminds us of Yeshua in that He said of Himself: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve... (Mat 20:28). As the Shamash is the only true source of light for all the candles so to is Yeshua the only true source of light in our lives. We see in John 1:9 "There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." For Messianic Believers the imagery is rich: Yeshua, the "light of the world" (Jn 8:12), came as a servant (Mk 10:45) to give light to everyone (Jn 1:4-5), so that we might become lights to others (Mt 5:14)

To the Jewish community, Hanukkah has become a time to express Messianic hope. The key point as it relates to Messianic fulfillment is that Hanukkah is a celebration of deliverance. One Jewish publication says; "Then, the light is kindled to give inspiration, for the light of Messiah must burn brightly in our hearts" (Chanukah, Mesorah Publications) I believe that during the Jewish Holidays, when there is a heightened awareness of Messianic hope among the Jewish people, we should pray that this be the year that their eyes are opened to this Hope revealed in the True Shamash - Yeshua, the Light of the World.

Now, I mentioned earlier that the clearest reference to Hanukkah is found in the New Testament, John 10:22-30 to be exact. Here we read that Yeshua was in Jerusalem to celebrate the festival and it

was during this time that He chose to publicly declare His divinity - declare Himself the Messiah.

The passage begins: "At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter and Yeshua was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon (v.22-23). The Jews of Yeshua's day were well aware of the events that had led to the Feast of Dedication when they approached Him in the holy Temple on Hanukkah. It was in the context of that recent history that they said to Him, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly!" (v24) If He really was the Messiah they reasoned, He had the power to preserve the Jewish people from the tyranny of the Romans, just as God had preserved them from evil Antiochus. Yeshua answered them with a rebuke, "I told you, and you do not believe." (v 25).

Yeshua boldly asserted His Messiahship. He claimed divine power to preserve and sustain His people, but not in the manner they had hoped for and expected. "The works I do in My Father's name testify on my behalf, but the reason you don't trust me is that you are not included among my sheep. My sheep listen to My voice, I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life. They will absolutely never be destroyed, and no one will snatch them from My hands. My Father, who gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no one can snatch them from the Father's hands." (vv. 25-29) Yeshua's power to preserve was not a temporal, physical power. It was eternal and spiritual - and it was based on faith in Him as the Holy One of God. The salvation He offered was not from Roman oppression but from the oppression of satan, sin and even death itself.

The rededication of the Temple was a reminder of God's power to keep His promises and preserve His people Israel. But One greater than the Temple stood on Solomon's porch that day. And He made an astounding claim. "I and My Father are one." (v30) Remember, this is Hanukkah. Fresh in the people's minds was the fact that they had rightly rejected the false claims of Antiochus. Now here is Yeshua, standing in the Temple asserting His own claim to deity. The reaction of the people was predictable. "Then the Judeans once again picked up rocks to stone Him. (v 31) And if He hadn't been who He claimed to be, they would have been absolutely right to do so. Make no mistake, they understood exactly what He was claiming: "Yeshua answered them, "You have seen Me do many good deeds that reflect the Father's power. For which of these are you stoning Me?"

The Judeans replied, "We are not stoning You for any good deed, but for blasphemy - because You, who are only a man, are making Yourself out to be God."

When the people rejected Antiochus, God kept His promises, miraculously preserving them. But when the Jewish leaders wrongly rejected Yeshua's claims that day, they missed an even greater miracle than Israel's against-all-odds victory over the overwhelming Syrian army. They missed the miracle of Emmanuel, God with us. That miracle gave Yeshua the right to claim power to preserve those who come to Him. Only as God come in the flesh is Yeshua "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him."

You know - God does keep His promises - even when we fail to recognize it. He said, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel. For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son

is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6). Yeshua fulfilled these precious promises from God. In Him, God has proven His faithfulness to Israel and to all the world.

When we look at the miracle of Hanukkah, we know we have reason to celebrate. Because God keeps His promises, He will save and sustain Israel. Because God keeps His promises, He will save and keep all those who call upon His name through faith in Emmanuel, our Messiah Yeshua. Because God keeps His promises, He has made each blood-bought believer to be His own Temple, where Emmanuel, God with us, has taken up residence. And because God keeps His promises, we join with others in dedicating ourselves anew to live for Him by the power of the Ruach ha Kodesh, the Holy Spirit who burns within us. If you have never considered Hanukkah as a holiday - a Holy Day - I would encourage you to enjoy it. To remember that each of us, illuminated by the Shamash, is now the Temple of God. We have been given an eternal flame - a never-ending supply of "oil in our lamps." Let's keep the Undying Flame burning brightly in our hearts throughout the year.

And now, may God give you enlightenment of the eyes, that you may see Yeshua in the coming days. May the light of His presence illuminate your homes. May He enable each of us to go forth as shining lamps into the world in which we live. May He give you grace in the eyes of your fellow man, that you may be called Beloved of God. Let it be so.

* Material for this study is taken (with permission) from an article titled " Christ in the Feast of Hanukkah" by David Brinker in the Jews For Jesus Newsletter, Volume

