

THE UNDYING FLAME
CHRIST THE LIGHT IN HANUKKAH-PT 1
JOHN 10:22-24

Introduction

This is the time of year leading up to when we, along with many others, celebrate the **BIRTH** of our **LORD** and **SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST (MESSIAH)** into this world. The time as the **APOSTLE JOHN** records:

John 1:14– “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

MESSIAH’S BIRTH was the fulfillment of that which had been **PROPHESED** long ago by **ISAIAH** and other of the **OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS!** **CHRISTMAS** is special time for us because we needed a **SAVIOUR** and **GOD** sent us **HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON** into the world to provide that **ONE SACRIFICE** that we needed! That is what this time of the year is all about to those of us who are **SAVED!**

However, Sunday at sunset began the **JEWISH** celebration of **HANUKKAH** that many **CHRISTIANS** know little or nothing about. Some folks say that **CHRISTIANS** have **CHRISTMAS** and the **JEWS** have **HANUKKAH** and that is about all that most folks know about **HANUKKAH**.

Although overshadowed by **CHRISTMAS**, **HANUKKAH**, (which is also known as **THE FEAST OF DEDICATION** and **THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS**) graphically illuminates the **MESSIAH’S** life and ministry.

HANUKKAH is an **eight-day celebration** beginning each year on the **25th** of the **JEWISH** month **KISLEV**, which usually falls in **DECEMBER**. (This year it fell on 11/28)

It is a **festive holiday** among the **JEWS** because **it commemorates the bravery and resolution shown by the people of ISRAEL in the revolt against their heathen oppressors.** (Specifically, the **MACCABBEAN** revolt against the **SYRIAN GREEKS** in **167-164 B.C.**)

Although commonly known as the **FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS**, the word **HANUKKAH** actually means **DEDICATION!**

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That’s because the **JEWS** liberated the **TEMPLE** and **REDEDICATED** it to the service of **GOD**.

Many **CHRISTIANS** don’t realize that we find this holiday in the **SCRIPTURES**. **JESUS** was in **JERUSALEM** at the **TEMPLE**, no doubt for the celebration of **HANUKKAH** as recorded in *John 10:22-24* where it is called **“THE FEAST OF DEDICATION.”**

It was during **HANUKKAH** that **CHRIST** publicly revealed **HIS MESSIANIC** identity by proclaiming to them, **“I and my Father are one”** (*John 10:30*)

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HANUKKAH.
HANUKKAH is the one **JEWISH** holy day which originated in the period between the two **TESTAMENTS**. The story is found in the **APOCRYPHAL BOOKS** of **1 and 2 MACCABEES**.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT was a young, brilliant military commander who thought that the best way to unite his kingdom was to establish a **common culture, language, and religion** among all his conquered territories.

When **ALEXANDER THE GREAT** died in **323 B.C.**, his kingdom split into four pieces, ruled by different dynasties.

The **SELEUCID** dynasty ruled the **SYRIAN** part of **ALEXANDERS** kingdom, which included **ISRAEL**—in those days called **JUDEA**.

In **171 B.C.** a ruler ascended named **ANTIOCHUS IV**, called **EPIPHANES**, which means **“THE MANIFEST GOD.”** His passionate goal was to unify his kingdom, including **JUDEA**, into one monolithic **GREEK** culture. And so there began to be a massive struggle between cultures: **JUDAISM vs HELLENISM**.

ANTIOCHUS believed the **JEWISH** religion was the main obstacle keeping the people from accepting **HELLENISM**, so he made the practice of **JUDAISM** a capital offense.

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He established ritual prostitution in the **TEMPLE**. He outlawed possession of the **HEBREW SCRIPTURES**. And he executed whole families of **JEWS** for observing the **SABBATH** and **circumcision**.

A few families who **circumcised** their sons were **crucified** with those babies hung around their necks. Thousands more were **martyred**.

In **167 B.C.**, **ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES** fulfilled a prediction made by the **PROPHET DANIEL** in *Daniel 11:31*. He marched to **JERUSALEM**, entered the **TEMPLE** and ransacked it. He then set up an image of his god, **ZEUS**. Then, on the sacred **TEMPLE** altar, he sacrificed a pig.

In the **JUDEAN** village of **MODIIN (which was 20 miles NW of JERUSALEM)**, soldiers assembled all the people in the town square. They built an altar and ordered the old priest **MATTATHIAS** to sacrifice a pig for the people to eat.

MATTATHIAS refused to defile himself or his people. The soldiers insisted, offering great financial incentive.

Finally, another man from the village volunteered to collaborate with the **SYRIAN GREEK** soldiers. As the man approached the pig, **MATTATHIAS** rushed forward and assassinated the collaborator.

The five sons of **MATTATHIAS** drew their weapons, struck down the soldiers, and headed for the hills.

Many fellow revolutionaries joined them, and so began a lopsided revolt against the mighty **SYRIAN GREEK EMPIRE**.

Soon thereafter, the leadership of the ragtag **JEWISH** army passed to **MATTATHIAS'** son, **JUDAH**, nicknamed *THE HAMMER*, or in **HEBREW**, **MACCABBE**. Thereafter, the revolutionaries were known as *THE MACCABBEES*.

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II. THE MENORAH OF HANUKKAH.

After **three years** of **JEWISH** guerrilla warfare, the band of rebels achieved victory. On the **25th** of the month **KISLEV, 164 B.C.**, **exactly three years** from **ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES'** **abomination of desolation**, the **MACCABBEES** triumphantly entered the defiled and half-demolished **TEMPLE**. They then began the process of **REDEDICATION**.

The **FLAME** of the **TEMPLE MENORAH**, which was **the great seven branched candelabra** that was so central to the worship of the **LORD** in **ISRAEL**, had been extinguished. It was meant to be and was supposed to be an **UNDYING, ETERNAL FLAME!**

The **GREEKS** had not only extinguished the **FLAME**, but they had desecrated nearly all of the sacred **OIL** used for the **MENORAH**. Only a small container remained which contained a **one-day supply**.

It would take **eight days** for the priests to **CONSECRATE more OIL**. Nevertheless, the **MACCABBEES** lit the **MENORAH**. It burned for one day. **Then a miracle occurred**. The **MENORAH kept burning the next day and then kept burning for eight full days!**

JUDAH MACCABBE declared that these events would be commemorated by an annual holiday, **HANUKKAH, THE FEAST OF THE DEDICATION**. Understandably, the people also called it *Hag ha Urim*—i.e. **THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS**.

As the holiday became popular, a tradition of lighting **miniature MENORAHS** began within **JEWISH** homes during the **eight-day celebration**. These **MENORAH'S** had **eight** branches, one candle for each evening of the holiday, with an additional **ninth branch elevated in the center**.

This **center candle** is known as the *SHAMASH*, **HEBREW** for *SERVANT*, which is used to light the other candles as they are added each evening.

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In the modern observance of **HANUKKAH**, it is celebrated for **eight days** in accordance with how long that one day's worth of **HOLY OIL** burned in the **MENORAH**. So, the main focus is the lighting of a small "*hanukkiyah*" (**HANUKKAH MENORAH**) each night.

A *hanukkiyah* is a candelabrum with **eight** candleholders in a row and a **ninth** candleholder set a slightly higher than the others. It's different from the **TEMPLE menorah**, which has seven branches and was used in the **TEMPLE** before it was destroyed in 70 A.D. A *hanukkiyah* is nevertheless a kind of *menorah*.

But also there are other parts of the celebration. Typical foods include those made using **OIL**, such as "*sufganiyot*" (donuts) and "*latkes*" (potato cakes).

Also, children receive gifts and "*gelt*" (chocolate coins) and they play a game with a *dreidel* (a spinning top) inscribed with a **HEBREW** acronym, which stands for, "*A great miracle happened there*" ("*A great miracle happened here,*" if you live in **ISRAEL**.)

We're out of time for this evening, but **LORD** willing, we will come back next **WEDNESDAY** and look at some more about **HANUKKAH** including...

THE UNDYING FLAME OF HANUKKAH.

HANUKKAH AND JEWISH EVANGELISM.

Some parts were adapted from Steven Ger (Th.M. 94), a Messianic Jew, who is founder and director of Sojourner Ministries. He is also the producer of the video, The Unleavened Messiah: A Portrait of Christ in the Passover.

Other parts were adapted from an article by Daniel Abraham, a Jewish believer serving as a Pastor in Israel. That article "Hanukkah: A Miracle Of Lights" was published in "The Everlasting Nation" December 2021