

## ḤANUKKAH – TRUTH OR TRADITION?

Whenever anyone mentions the word ‘Ḥanukkah’, the immediate thought is centred around a Jewish feast that is celebrated around the time of Christmas. According to Jewish teaching this feast must be observed from the 25<sup>th</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> month, which is known by its Babelonian name Kislev, for 8 days. While this has become possibly the most important time of the year for orthodox Jews, many who have come out of mainstream Christianity in order to walk in the Torah and learn their true Hebraic roots, find themselves being emotionally attached to this feast of Ḥanukkah, and look to Rabbinic sources to find out how they are to keep it. Should this feast be kept or not? Is this feast centred around traditional commands of men or is it Scripturally commanded for us to observe? I hope to dispel any doubts that some may have regarding this feast, and answer some questions on the origin of this feast and whether the adopted customs are to be observed or not.

For most who have an idea of what Ḥanukkah is about, will most probably tell you that it centres around a miracle of how a small amount of oil lasted for 8 days in keeping the Menorah alight, at the time of the rededication of the temple, after the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks, and there is a tradition of lighting candles each night. What about this summary is true and what is tradition?

Well, in order to do that, it is always best to look at the writings we have available to us that describe the details of the events that centre around this feast, which also became known as the festival of lights.

Firstly I want to look at the accounts as written in 1 and 2 Maccabees:

The historical event that culminated in what is known as Ḥanukkah, is clearly outlined in 1 & 2 Maccabees, which was recorded within a couple of decades after the events that took place. 1 & 2 Maccabees are parallel accounts, believed to have been written by two different authors, who describe similar events.

The story begins in 168 B.C.E (Before the Common Era), when the land of Yisra’el was being ruled by the evil Seleucid Greek king Antiochus IV.

Antiochus IV believed that his empire would be more secure if all his subjects became more Greek. 168 B.C.E. He issued a decree that would force all his subjects to adopt the Greek culture and only worship the Greek gods. This process was called Hellenization (to make one Greek), and was primarily accepted by most who saw the Greek way being more advanced and culturally relevant. The Yehuḏim (Jews) of the time refused to submit to this Hellenization process and therefore Antiochus issued a series of laws that were designed to suppress Torah observance:

**1 Maccabees 1:44-50 “And the king sent letters by messengers to Yerushalayim and the cities of Yehuḏah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, 45 to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the temple, to profane Sabbaths and feasts, 46 to defile the temple and the set-apart people: 47 Set up altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, 48 and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, 49 so that they should forget the Torah and change all the ordinances. 50 And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.”**

In order to carry this out, the first thing the Greeks did was capture the temple and sacrifice pigs on the Slaughter-Place to their pagan god Zeus. They then forced each Yehuḏi home set up an altar to the Greek sun-gods at their homes.

Public altars were set up all over the city and Yehuḏi were forced to eat pigs that were sacrificed to Zeus.

It was on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month (Kislev) that the abomination of desolation was set up on the Slaughter-Place in the Temple. They then destroyed and burnt any Torah writings that were found and on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month they sacrificed a pig on the Slaughter –Place of Elohim.

They hung the children and killed all who had circumcised them. Many Yehuḏi chose not to eat pig and profane the Covenant, and chose to rather be put to death instead of being Hellenized.

In those days there was a priest from a small town in Shomeron whose name was Matthias (Mattithyahu), son of Yoḥanan, who along with his sons tore their garments and lamented the invasion of the Greeks and the desolation of the Temple; and when the Greeks came to their town Matthias and his sons gathered with all the people of the town, and they openly refused to submit to the Greeks and would not forsake the Torah of Elohim, and called all who were zealous for the Torah and held fast the Covenant of Elohim in order to faithfully follow him. He and his sons then fled to the mountains, and they became outlaws.

The Greeks pursued many who had fled to the wilderness, and came to fight against them on a Sabbath and killed a thousand people, who refused to lift a stone on the Sabbath against the attacking Greeks. Matthias heard about this and mourned. Matthias and his sons then resolved to stand up and fight and went around breaking down all the abominable slaughter places that had been set up by the Greeks, and he recovered the Torah from the Greeks.

When it came for Matthias to die, he told his sons to be zealous for the Torah, and be ready to give their lives for the Covenant of their fathers, as he reminded them of the faith of Abraham, Yosēph, Pineḥas, Yehoshua, Kalēb, Dawiḏ and Dani’el, encouraging them not to be afraid of sinful men.

He then made his son Yehudāh Maccabaeus their captain, and commanded them to observe the Torah and avenge the wrong of their people. Yehudāh Maccabee then rose up and became like a lion avenging his people, and grieved many kings. After 3 years of intense fighting against the Greeks, Yehudāh Maccabee and his army defeated the Greeks and took back the Temple. After mourning and fasting over the defilement of the Temple they tore down the abominable slaughter-place to Zeus upon which pigs were slaughtered and proceeded to cleanse the Temple.

**1 Maccabees 4:43-47** “and they cleansed the Temple and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. <sup>44</sup> They deliberated what to do about the slaughter-place of burnt offering, which had been profaned. <sup>45</sup> And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, <sup>46</sup> and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. <sup>47</sup> Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new slaughter-place like the former one.”

They built a new slaughter-place of unhewn stones as it stipulates in **Shemoth/Exodus 20:24-26**, and restored the true set-apart vessels for the service of the Temple:

**1 Maccabees 4:48-51** “They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. <sup>49</sup> They made new holy vessels, and brought the lamp stand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. <sup>50</sup> Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lamp stand, and these gave light in the temple. <sup>51</sup> They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.”

After they had restored the Temple, it was time to dedicate it and make it fit and clean for service, and re-establish the sacrifices that had not been done for the 3 years that the Greeks had defiled the Temple.

This re-dedication of the Slaughter-Place took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> month – 3 years to the day, after the Greeks had defiled the Temple by offering a pig on the Slaughter-Place.

**1 Maccabees 4:52-59** “Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Kislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year, <sup>53</sup> they rose and offered sacrifice, as the Torah directs, on the new Slaughter-Place of burnt offering which they had built. <sup>54</sup> Look at what time, and what day the heathen had profaned it, even in that it was dedicated with songs, and citherns, and harps, & cymbals. <sup>55</sup> Then all the people fell upon their faces, worshipping and praising the Elohim of heaven, who had given them good success. <sup>56</sup> So they celebrated the dedication of the Slaughter-Place for eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise. <sup>57</sup> They decked front of the temple with crowns of gold; and with shields, and the gates, and the chambers they renewed and hanged doors upon them. <sup>58</sup> Therefore there was great gladness among the people, for that the reproach of the heathen was put away. <sup>59</sup> Then Yehudāh and his brothers and all the assembly of Yisra’ēl determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev.”

We also have a similar record being given in 2 Maccabees:

**2 Maccabees 10:5-8** “It happened that on the same day on which the temple had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the temple took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Kislev. <sup>6</sup> And they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, remembering that not long before they had held the Feast of Tabernacles when, as they wandered in the mountains and caves, like beasts. <sup>7</sup> Therefore they bore branches, and fair boughs and palms also, and sang Psalms unto Him, that had given them good success in cleansing His place. <sup>8</sup> They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Yehudim should observe these days every year.”

As we see these words contained in 1 & 2 Maccabees, we need to make a couple of observations that will help us discern between what happened historically and what is being celebrated as a tradition today.

One of the most notable things that we should see here, is the clear fact that no mention of oil and the miraculous supply of oil that supposedly caused the Menorah to burn for 8 days, nor the making of a 8 or 9 lampstand. The Lamps and lampstand is mentioned, yes, as well as the table of showbread and other utensils that were restored in order to perform the Scriptural requirements in the Temple service. What is very clear is that there is NO MAGICAL OIL!!!

These accounts contain the most detailed records of these events and with there being no mention of what many have been taught to believe, leaves us with a very big question of where this ‘traditional story’ of the miraculous supply of oil comes from, as being the central theme, according to tradition, of this modern day feast!

The whole reason for this great celebration and dedication that took place, was for the dedication of the Slaughter-Place, and the fact that they could enjoy this time of feasting and celebration like the Feast of Sukkoth (Tabernacles), which they had not been able to celebrate correctly for 3 years due to the Greek oppression and defilement of the Temple.

This celebration and ‘dedication’ had nothing to do with oil or its supposed miraculous supply, but rather had to do specifically with the ‘dedication of the Slaughter-Place’.

The Hebrew word for 'dedication' is **הִנְחִיחַ** **Hanukkah** – Strong's H2598 both meaning, '**dedication, consecration**', and corresponds to the Aramaic word **הִנְחִיחַ** **Hanukkah** – Strong's 2597 which we find being used in the book of Dani'el. These two words are collectively used 12 times in Scripture. The Aramaic word is used twice in Dani'el in the wicked kings call for the dedicating of his wicked image, and twice in Ezra when the Temple of Ėlah was dedicated. The Hebrew word is used 8 times in Scripture – 5 times in direct reference to the offerings of dedication, and consecration brought for the slaughter place, and twice it is used for the dedication of the walls of Yerushalayim, that was done with great joy; and once it used as a title of a Tehillah/Psalm at the dedication of the House of Dawid. As we read above from 1 Maccabees 4:56, they celebrated the dedication of the Slaughter-Place for 8 days, and not the miraculous provision of oil, that many focus on today according to traditions that have been taught!

When we ask why the dedication lasted 8 days, we need to see how this was a joyful response at wanting to dedicate the Slaughter-Place and give thanks to Elohim, in celebrating this dedication the way they would celebrate Sukkot/Tabernacles – as we clearly have read that they celebrated with palms, branches of trees etc., and did so with great rejoicing – for Sukkot is a commanded feast for rejoicing, which too lasts for 8 days (the command is to dwell in Booths for 7 days and on the 8<sup>th</sup> day have a closing ceremony). We can see from Scripture that there is no set period that is repeated for the amount of time the Slaughter-Place was to be dedicated, as we see in:

**Bemidbar/Numbers 7:11** “**And יהוה said to Mosheh, “Let them bring their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the Slaughter-Place.”**

The Slaughter-Place was dedicated for 12 days!

**Bemidbar/Numbers 7:84** “**This was the dedication of the Slaughter-Place from the leaders of Yisra'el, when it was anointed: twelve silver dishes, twelve silver bowls, twelve gold ladles.”**

At the dedication of the Slaughter-Place of the Temple we see in:

**Dibre haYamim Bet 7:9-10** “**And on the eighth day they held an assembly, for they performed the dedication of the Slaughter-Place seven days, and the festival seven days. 10 And on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their tents, rejoicing and glad of heart for the goodness that יהוה had done for Dawid, and for Shelomoh, and for His people Yisra'el.”**

Shelomoh had performed the dedication for 7 days and then they held the Feast of Sukkot for 7 days, and after the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Sukkot he sent the people away to their tents.

**Ezra 3:2-4** “**And Yeshua son of Yotsadaq and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel son of She'alti'el and his brothers, arose and built the Slaughter-Place of the Elohim of Yisra'el, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Torah of Mosheh, the man of Elohim. 3 So they set the Slaughter-Place on its stands, being afraid of the peoples of the lands. And they offered burnt offerings on it to יהוה, both the morning and evening burnt offerings. 4 And they performed the Festival of Booths, as it is written, and the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the right-ruling for each day”**

Here in the 7<sup>th</sup> month they rebuilt the Slaughter-Place and performed sacrifices on it and kept Sukkot, even though they had not yet finished rebuilding the Temple! In this account we are told that the Slaughter-Place was 'set up' and not dedicated, as the Temple had not yet been completed and the proper dedication only took place a number of years later in:

**Ezra 6:16-17** “**Then the children of Yisra'el, the priests and the Lēwites and the rest of the sons of the exile, did the dedication of this House of Ėlah with joy, 17 and offered at the dedication of this House of Ėlah one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Yisra'el twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Yisra'el.”**

In Neḥemyah we have the account of the dedication of the walls taking place:

**Neḥemyah/Nehemiah 12:27** “**And at the dedication of the wall of Yerushalayim they sought out the Lēwites in all their places, to bring them to Yerushalayim to perform the dedication with gladness, and with thanksgivings, and with singing, cymbals, harps and lyres.”**

In all of the 4 accounts of dedication we have in Scripture in regards to the Slaughter-Place or Temple or walls, we find that these dedications were not done according to a set number of days, or at a specific time. What we do see in Scripture, however, is a repeated picture of dedication or renewal of covenant often taking place in the 7<sup>th</sup> month, which pictures for us the fullness of יהוה dwelling with His restored people!

According to Maccabees this feast of dedication was done with the intention to make up for the Feast of Sukkot which had not been properly kept.

The question we must ask ourselves is whether or not this can stand as a mandated feast for us to follow?

In The Torah we do have the instructions regarding those who are able to perform the Pěsaḥ in the second month, yet does this standard apply to other feasts?

**Bemidbar/Numbers 9:10-13** “**Speak to the children of Yisra’ēl, saying, ‘When any male of you or your generations is unclean for a being, or is far away on a journey, he shall still perform the Passover of יהוה . 11 ‘On the fourteenth day of the second month, between the evenings, they perform it – with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they eat it. 12 ‘They do not leave of it until morning, and they do not break a bone of it. According to all the laws of the Passover they perform it. 13 ‘But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and has failed to perform the Passover, that same being shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of יהוה at its appointed time – that man bears his sin.’**”

The Maccabees had missed Sukkot, and in a manner of speaking they held a ‘second Sukkot’, which we can clearly see was done with great joy in celebrating a great victory over the enemy. What we must ask ourselves is whether or not this can now be practiced today, as a second Sukkot! We see that this feast of dedication was identified with the Feast of Sukkot in:

**2 Maccabees 1:9** “**And now see that you keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the month Kislev.’**”

The month of ‘Kislev’, as it was known from the Babelonian exile, as I have already mentioned, is the 9<sup>th</sup> month! Does this instruction from Yehuḏah Maccabee have the authority to change the Appointed Times of יהוה? The answer is absolutely NO!!!

After this victory they wrote to the Yehuḏim in Mitsrayim and said in:

**2 Maccabees 1:18** “**Therefore whereas we are now purposed to keep the purification of the Temple upon the twenty fifth day of the month Kislev, we thought it necessary to notify you thereof, that ye also might keep it, as the of the tabernacles, and of the fire when Neḥemyah offered sacrifice, after that he had built the Temple, and the Slaughter-Place.’**”

Here we clearly see, once again, that this dedication was referred to being like the Feast of Sukkot/Tabernacles, and had nothing to do with a miraculous story of oil that lasted 8 days!

In the years that followed, when they were able to keep Sukkot in the correct month – that is the 7<sup>th</sup> month, the Yehuḏim continued to keep this feast of dedication and even referred to it as ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Sukkot’, or ‘Sukkot in the month Kislev’.

Did the Maccabees have a right to establish such a feast?

In Scripture we have an account of a wicked king who established his own timing of feasts, that were like the feast of the Yehuḏim:

**Melakim Aleph/1 Kings 12:32-33** “**And Yarob’am performed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival that was in Yehuḏah, and he offered on the altar. So he did at Běyth Ėl, slaughtering to the calves that he had made. And at Běyth Ėl he appointed the priests of the high places which he had made. 33 And he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Běyth Ėl on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he performed a festival for the children of Yisra’ēl, and offered on the altar and burned incense.’**”

This was one of the sins of Yarob’am that provoked יהוה! Yarob’am established his own feasts just one month after Sukkot, while the Maccabees had their second Sukkot 2 months and 10 days after the Appointed Time, which has no Scriptural precedent for them to do this! We certainly recognise that this was the first time that they could actually perform a festival to יהוה, after being under the wicked control of the Greeks. Justified or not, it is very clear that the 8 days celebration was a substitute for the feast that they had missed!

Does this establish a lawful precedent, or do we adhere to יהוה’s Appointed calendar – I think that the answer is fairly obvious at this point.

Josephus also records the events around this dedication in Book 12 chapter 7:

**7** “**(323) Now Yehuḏah celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days; and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon: but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored Elohim, and delighted them, by hymns and psalms. (324) Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. (325) And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival. (326) Yehuḏah also rebuilt the walls round about the city, and reared towers of great height against the incursions of**

**enemies, and set guards therein. He also fortified the city Bethsura, that it might serve as a citadel against any distresses that might come from our enemies.”**

At the time of Josephus, this festival became known as the festival of lights, and what we can notice here is that Josephus says nothing about a miraculous oil that lasted 8 days, but rather says that this may have been called ‘lights’ because of the freedom that was brought to Yisra’el after an oppressive time! By the style of his writing, we can see that he is not really sure why it was called lights!

The first time we see any record of Hānukkah having anything to do with a new kind of Menorah and the miraculous supply of oils is in 200 C.E. as contained in the Bābelonian Talmud!!! Special Hānukkah lamps have their origin in the Bābelonian Talmud too!!!

When we consider this ‘festival of lights’, we can so easily be steered toward the influence of many pagan worship practices that are also referred to as being festivals of lights – Hindus celebrate Diwali (festival of lights) and much of modernised Christmas celebrations that are centred around lights, have their roots in ancient Roman pagan worship rites.

This modern adaptation of a feast that became established at the command of man has, through the traditions of man, become a festival that does not reflect the work of Messiah, nor acknowledge that He is the perfect sacrifice and the Light of the world!

Many Messianic believers today try to justify their keeping of Hānukkah by trying to say that יהושע Messiah celebrated this feast, through a skewed interpretation of a verse in:

**Yōhānan/John 10:22-23 “At that time the Hānukkah came to be in Yerushalayim, and it was winter. 23 And יהושע was walking in the Set-apart Place, in the porch of Shelomoh.”**

On the basis of these verses alone, many assume that יהושע Messiah was keeping a man-commanded feast, and they claim this because He was in the Temple at the time! Messiah declared Himself as the renewed temple:

**Yōhānan/John 2:19-22 “ יהושע answered and said to them, “Destroy this Dwelling Place, and in three days I shall raise it.” 20 Then the Yehudim said, “It took forty-six years to build this Dwelling Place, and You are going to raise it in three days?”**

So, why would He celebrate the Feast of Dedication? He is the True Temple and condemned the old temple for destruction. Why would we honour the wrong temple? For that matter, why celebrate a temple that no longer exists and that Messiah condemned to destruction and replacement?

Should Hānukkah, a man-made holiday whose basis is given from one line within the Talmud and a fleeting, uncertain reference within scripture, be equivalent to an Appointed Time of יהוה? Should Hānukkah hold any position in worship? Which are beneficial, יהוה’s Word and His commands, or man’s traditions that are taught as teachings? Does Hānukkah depict יהוה’s Salvation Plan, or teach believers about יהושע through the historical evidence we have? Are we to follow men in partaking of inherited rabbinical leaven?

While many may be emotionally offended at the presentation of this document, I simply want to highlight a sobering reality that we have inherited many vain traditions that have been established as being more relevant than the Word of Elohim, and it is time for the true worshippers of Elohim to worship in Spirit and Truth.

As you read through **Yōhānan/John 10** and see the words that יהושע Messiah spoke to the Pharisees and hypocrites at the temple, one does not have to look to far and see that He was not celebrating this feast with songs and praise, but rather He was clearly rebuking the religious hypocrites, who sought to stone Him for ‘making Himself Elohim’!

While we certainly can see how the Maccabees had a great victory against the Greeks in a partial fulfilment of Dani’el’s prophecies, we also can bring to remembrance many great victories over the enemy that we see recorded in Scripture, and we are able to give thanks to Elohim who fights for us and gives us great examples for us to remind us of this fact, yet we must not add to or take away from His Word. Sadly this feast of lights has grown in depravity over the centuries and today it has become nothing more than a substitute for Christmas, and the customary celebrations of this feast are based on the traditions of man as taught through the Talmud, written and taught by those who deny יהושע Messiah! This is NOT a Feast of יהוה!!!

**HANUKKAH – TRUTH OR TRADITION? Who are you listening to?**