

# HANUKA

## SHOULD WE OR SHOULDN'T WE?

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Hanuka is a Jewish holiday. It's like a mini July 4th (Independence Day holiday in the USA). There has been more than one time that God has saved His people Israel from slavery and oppression, and Hanuka is one of those times. Purim is another time. They both commemorate God's deliverance of His people, and as such, are mini-pictures of the great deliverance known as Passover—both the First Passover by Moses in Egypt and the Second Passover of Yeshua (Jesus) in Jerusalem.

Hanuka and Purim are holidays, not holy days (or holy times) like Passover. There are no Sabbaths associated with either Hanuka or Purim (except for the weekly 7th Day Sabbath which might fall within their days of celebration). Neither Hanuka or Purim are found in Torah (Mosaic Law), but Purim is found in the *Tanach* (Old Testament, in the book of Esther), and Hanuka is seen in John 10:22. It's usually translated into English as the Feast of Dedication, and that's what *hanuka* means—to dedicate.

If you've not read the First Book of Maccabees it would be good to do so, as it's truly inspiring and faith building. I love the accounts where the Jewish priests and people are greatly outnumbered, but their leader, an Aaronic priest by the name of Judah Maccabee, offers powerful and godly prayers to God, and God gives him victory after victory.

I center in on just the first book of Maccabees (there are four books), because it has the historical reality of the suffering, battles, prayers and conditions of the Jewish people. It's the story of biblical heroism against all odds, grounded in faith toward Yahveh, the God of Israel, and it's the basis for Hanuka; the Feast of Dedication.<sup>1</sup>

Hanuka celebrates the mighty deliverance of God, which began in the town of Modin, not too far from Jerusalem, through the High Priest Mattathias and his five sons, who fought against the evil Syrian king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In 168 BC Antiochus looted the Temple, massacred many Jews and forbid the observance of Torah upon penalty of death. Also, he ordered the Jews to worship the Greek gods and goddesses and adopt a Hellenistic lifestyle. Anyone who kept the Sabbath, or who wanted to circumcise their eight day old son was brutally murdered; mother, father and child.

In 167 BC Antiochus erected a statue to Zeus, with his face on it, in the Temple. He wanted the Jewish people to worship him as Zeus incarnate, hence the title Epiphanes (God incarnate/manifest). The Jews called him Antiochus Epimanes (Antiochus the madman), a play on the word Epiphanes (incarnate). The Syrian king also had pigs sacrificed on the bronze Altar of Sacrifice, thus defiling it.

Outnumbered by trained armies, the priests and people of Israel, under Judah, one of the sons of Mattathias the High Priest, fought and won battle after battle, due to their faith in God and love for His Torah. They were able to retake possession of the Temple and cleanse it of the idol statue of the Syrian king, Antiochus IV, three years to the day that Antiochus had robbed it (i.e. 25 *Kislev* 165 BC; *Kislev* is the 9th

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<sup>1</sup> The First Book of Maccabees can be read in the New Revised Standard Version, etc., or ask me to email you its PDF.

Jewish month). The celebration of Hanuka begins on *Kislev* 25 and lasts for eight days. The son of the High Priest, Judah is also known as Judah the Maccabee or in Hebrew, *Yehudah haMakabi* (Judah the Hammer). He is acclaimed as one of the greatest warriors in Jewish history alongside Joshua, Gideon and David.

## ***Did Yeshua Celebrate Hanuka?***

It's very interesting that Yeshua came to Jerusalem during the time of Hanuka, at the beginning of the winter, which was no small task when traveling by foot from the Sea of Galilee area. The Apostle John writes:

‘At that time, the Festival of the Dedication (Hanuka) took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the Temple, in the portico of Solomon.’ (John 10:22-23)

Yeshua's main area of ministry in Israel was the northern part of the Sea of Galilee in its surrounding vil-lages, like Capernaum. The Sea of Galilee is one hundred miles (160 kilometers) north of Jerusalem, and because the villages, Tiberias and the Sea are in a basin, about 700 feet (215 meters) below sea level, it's a much milder and warmer climate than Jerusalem in December. Jerusalem is 2,300 feet or 700 meters above sea level, in the mountains of Judah, and in December it's very windy, cold and rainy.

Why would the Lord Yeshua leave that area and travel in the cold and rain of winter to Jerusalem for a non-Sabbath holiday? Generally, the only times we see the Yeshua in Jerusalem are at the three major Feasts of Israel,<sup>2</sup> because Scripture commands all Israeli male adults to appear before God for those feasts.<sup>3</sup> Why was Yeshua in Jerusalem, though, at Hanuka time, in the dead of winter?

Yeshua, being there at that time, indicates that He specifically came for the Feast of Dedication because there's no reason for Him to be in cold, windy and wet Jerusalem in the winter, other than He went there, with many other Jews, to celebrate God's mighty deliverance of Israel through the Maccabees about 200 years earlier. Now I realize that this is not definitive proof, but it is a strong indication that Hanuka was seen by Yeshua as a Jewish feast to be observed. He was there, and John records it, to make a point—it's good to celebrate Hanuka!

## **The Parallel**

There's an interesting parallel between Yeshua's Hanuka and the reason for Hanuka. The King of Syria, Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes (God with us; i.e. Immanuel), had control of Judah before the Maccabees rose up. Into the Temple he placed a statue of himself to be worshipped as God. On the Altar he had many pigs sacrificed to himself and other gods. The Maccabees put an end to that demonic intrusion, destroying the Altar (because it had become defiled by the pigs), and building another (1st Mac. 4:38-47). They also took out all the pagan statues and objects of worship for the sun, moon and the stars. Once cleansed of the imposter, the Temple was then dedicated, or rather re-dedicated, for the eight days that are know as the Feast of Dedication—Hanuka.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mt. 26:2, 17; Lk. 2:41; 22:15; Jn. 2:23; 6:4; 11:55; 13:1, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. 23:17; 34:23; Dt. 16:16.

<sup>4</sup> I'm indebted to Margaret of San Antonio, TX, USA for the thoughts in this, and the following paragraph. Her email spoke of the blasphemy that began Hanuka by Antiochus, and the blasphemy of some Jews rejecting

With Yeshua, the true Immanuel (God with us; Is. 7:14; Luke 7:16), God the Son came into the Temple, the Living God manifest, just the opposite of the idolatry of the King of Syria. The true God was there. Unfortunately, as the parallel continues, there were Jews in Messiah's day who wanted to stone Yeshua because He was telling them that He was God incarnate; one with God (Jn. 10:22-39). Yeshua told those Jews that they weren't His sheep (but later we see many other Jews who did believe that Yeshua was the Messiah; Jn. 10:40-42).

Yeshua's Hanuka is very significant. The Maccabees fought so they could worship the Living God. With the appearance or manifestation of Yeshua we see the Living God enter His Temple (John 14:1-11), a direct refutation of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his setting himself up as Zeus incarnate in the Temple. (Shades of the anti-Christ to come!)

## *Hanuka Traditions*

Rabbinic Judaism teaches that when the Temple was re-taken, there was some olive oil found in it for the Menorah (the seven branched Lampstand; Ex. 25:31-40), but only a day's worth of oil, yet miraculously, it lasted for eight days. However, there's no reference in Maccabees to any oil being 'found,' or that one day's worth lasted for the eight days of Hanuka. It's a rabbinic fairy tale the Rabbis made up to embellish Hanuka, and try to find meaning in why Hanuka is an *eight* day celebration (1st Mac. 4:59), and not just a day or two. Eight days for Hanuka is seen in First Maccabees:

'Then Judas (Judah) and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that *every year at that time*, the days of *dedication* of the Altar should be observed with joy and gladness for *eight* days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev.' (1st Maccabees 4:59)

Some think the eight days were a substitute for the fact that they hadn't been able to observe the previous Sukote (Feast of Tabernacles) in October, which lasts eight days (Lev. 23:33-44), and so, they were doing it in December. So, in December, when the Maccabees cleansed the Temple of the pagan things and tore down the desecrated Altar, some teach they kept Sukote and its eight days as a way of celebrating their victory in not having been able to celebrate the previous Sukote.

There are problems, though, with aligning Hanuka with Sukote. Even the Maccabees didn't have the authority to *change* the Lord's time for keeping Sukote, in the 7th month, to the 9th month. Also, their edict speaks of *keeping* the celebration of *Hanuka* in Kislev (December) *annually*, which means that it wasn't Sukote they were keeping during those eight days. The edict plainly states that the celebration was to be kept in memory of 'the days of *dedication* of the Altar.' Finally, it's hard to imagine that anyone would want to live in make-shift huts made of branches and leaves, for that's what Sukote entails in Israel, for eight days in Jerusalem in the bitter cold and rain of winter!

There is a biblical reason, though, why the Maccabees made Hanuka to last for eight days. When Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons for the priesthood, and the Tabernacle was initially *dedicated* for service, there's a seven day period of dedication and on the eighth day the Tabernacle 'was open for business' (Lev. 8-9). Seven days were the days of consecration and dedication of the priests and the Tabernacle, and the eighth day was the first day of official service. This was on the minds of the Torah observant Maccabees, and thus, the reason for the eight days because the word *hanuka* means dedication. As such, Hanuka becomes for us an eight day period of re-dedication of ourselves (the temple of God; 1st Cor.

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Yeshua at this Hanuka.

3:16-17; 6:19) to God the Father, in the name of His Son, Messiah Yeshua, asking Him to cleanse us of our foreign idols and self-worship, that we might be fully consecrated and dedicated to our Father!

Hanuka is a holiday commemorating a time when Yahveh moved mightily for the salvation of His Jewish people. It's a real historical event. It's not a holy time, but a holiday commemorating an historical time in Jewish history that God moved to deliver His Jewish people from certain death and annihilation. It is a mini-deliverance time or mini-Passover (Passover being *the* day of God's deliverance).

## *Holy Day vs Holiday and Hanuka Traditions*

What's the difference between a holy day and a holiday? Holy days and holy times are authorized and commanded by God, and have annual Sabbaths within them. These can all be seen in Leviticus 23. Holidays, like Hanuka and Purim, are not holy and fall into the category of something like the Fourth of July for the USA.

Much on Hanuka is culturally Jewish, of course, like eating potato latkes in commemoration of the Temple's olive oil for the Menorah that allegedly lasted for eight days (building on the oil of the rabbinic legend because the latkes are fried in oil).<sup>5</sup> Some other things are very non-productive, though, like the giving of gifts for the eight nights. This competition with Christmas is not to be emulated. As nice as gifts are to receive, Hanuka is not about gift giving, but about God's deliverance of the nation of Judah and the re-dedication of the Temple, which speaks of the giving of ourselves, our re-dedication (our hanuka) to our Father through His Son, Messiah Yeshua.

There are many Jewish traditions that surround both Hanuka and Purim, but Ruti and I choose which ones to follow. One we follow is the lighting of the Hanuka lights. We use either candles or small oil lamps or tea lights for the eight days. The first night one lamp is lit and the second night two lamps are lit, etc. It's a visual reminder for each of the eight days about God's ability to deliver from wickedness and darkness.

When we had our congregation in Tulsa, OK, USA we'd meet every other night (as every night was very taxing on the people and on us), and everyone would bring food. We'd read a chapter or two from the First Book of Maccabees, light the lights for the night and bless the Lord and sing a few songs. Then we'd sit down to eat and fellowship together. After that we'd watch something like *Fiddler on the Roof*, or *The Chosen*, or *Exodus* with Paul Newman, for their ethical and cultural Jewish content. Also, we might watch Jesus of Nazareth (over a two night period),<sup>6</sup> which is the best 'Jesus' film ever made, in spite of some flaws (like Joseph wearing *payot*, the long side-curls of the Hasidic and some Orthodox Jews today, and also, many Jews wearing the *yarmulke* or *kippa*, etc., which didn't come about until much later).<sup>7</sup> We'd also see *The Rabbi From Tarsus* by Phil Goble (again some flaws, like the wearing of the *kippa* and the fact that Paul was never a rabbi, and no one ever spoke of him as such, not even he), but the content is exceptional. We would have 'Happy Hanuka' decorations and balloons, which always gave it a festive atmosphere. It's also a great time to read from the Word about what it is to be dedicated to the Lord.

Make up your own traditions for Hanuka. It's allowed : ) Remember that the theme of the celebration is

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<sup>5</sup> A fried 'pancake' made with grated potatoes and eaten with either sour cream or applesauce.

<sup>6</sup> The film *Jesus of Nazareth* is on two DVDs and lasts for six and a half hours. It can be bought from Amazon.

<sup>7</sup> Why is the *kippa* wrong in these films? Because no Jew back then ever heard of a *kippa*, let alone wore one. The *kippa* is of relatively modern origin, first appearing around the 16th century. What the Jews wore in the days of Yeshua was a traditional head-covering to protect their hair from the sun and the dirt in the air. For more on the *kippa* see *The Kippa* at <http://seedofabraham.net/The-Kippa.pdf>.

dedication to God. You might also want to read a portion of a book every night like, *Hinds' Feet on High Places* by Hannah Hurnard, or *A Tale of Three Kings* by Gene Edwards, or *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson, or *Hudson's Taylor's Spiritual Secret* by Dr. Howard Taylor, etc.

## ***Is Hanuka the Jewish Answer to Christmas?***

Hanuka has nothing to do with Christmas, and so it can't, and shouldn't be compared to it. The only 'connection' is that they both come in the winter of December (and now Jews give gifts to their children).

Christmas is pagan through and through. It celebrates the birth of the *pagan* Christ savior (and every country had one) from the stump of an evergreen tree, in the dead of winter, and hence, why an evergreen tree is a symbol for the pagan, and now, Christian Christmas. This symbolizes the pagan Christ's victory over the darkness of winter, as Dec. 25th is the first day that ancient man could determine when the amount of light in the day *increased* (having decreased from mid-summer or the summer solstice), and so, spring, or life, was returning to the world. The god born at Christmas was called 'the Christ' (what we would call the false Christ or anti-Christ), and was the son of the sun god. The sun was the greatest natural object of veneration in ancient times.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Hanuka is an historical time that remembers that the God of Israel delivered the Jewish people from annihilation. The only thing Christmas and Hanuka have in common is that they are both in December.

As for the giving of 'Hanuka gifts,' I discourage this as it's only a recent Jewish custom that has bled over into Hanuka because it's so close to Christmas. The Jewish children would tell their parents of all the toys that the Christian children got for Christmas, and so, the Jewish parents began to give their children gifts for each night of Hanuka, but it's not part of Hanuka proper, and we should steer ourselves away from that. It's not only expensive and unnecessary, it pollutes and corrupts the Jewish holiday. If you want to give gifts to your children, you can do it on any day of the year (and for Purim; Esther 9:21: it's two 'days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor'). Please don't tie gift giving into Hanuka, the Feast of Dedication. It's a time of teaching our children to give themselves to Yeshua, not of receiving gifts. They are the gift to God.

## **If Hanuka, Can't We Also Celebrate Thanksgiving?**

Some Christians see a link between the Pilgrims 'authorizing' Thanksgiving Day in the USA, and the Maccabees instituting and authorizing Hanuka. If the Maccabees could do that, why can't Christians keep Thanksgiving Day? There is a resemblance, but the link quickly dissipates because Hanuka, and Purim, do not oppose the holy days of God, but Thanksgiving Day does.

Thanksgiving Day wasn't a creation of the Pilgrims. It was first celebrated in the America by them in 1621, but they had taken the day of giving thanks to God for the harvest, from England, where they had come from. England had taken it from the ancient Romans and the Greeks, who had taken it from the Babylonians before them. All ancient peoples had a day of giving thanks unto their gods and goddesses for the harvest of the final crops of the year in autumn. Isn't that what the eight day Feast of Tabernacles is all about?

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<sup>8</sup> For why Christmas is pagan, see *Christmas—Its Origin* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Christmas-Its-Origin.pdf>.

Both Hanuka and Purim denote victories of God over the enemies of Israel, while Thanksgiving Day, a *holy* day for the Pharisaic Church, in whatever country it is observed, for many countries have ‘Thanksgiving Day’ (e.g. Canada, who had no Pilgrims, celebrates it on a different day than the USA), confronts, contradicts and nullifies *Sukote* (the Feast of Tabernacles)—God’s *eight* days of *giving thanks* to Him for the end of the year harvest, which is the *exact concept* of Satan’s counterfeit—Thanksgiving Day.

Neither Hanuka, nor Purim do away with nor are a substitute for Pesach (Passover), but fall under it as mini-times or days of deliverance, and as such, should be kept by all Christians. Why? Because all Gentile Christians are part of the one Flock of Yeshua, which is called Israel:

“I am the Good Shepherd, and I know My (Jewish) sheep, and am known by them. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the (Jewish) sheep. And *other* sheep I have (the Gentiles), which are not of this fold. Them, also, I must bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be *one Flock* and one Shepherd.”  
(John 10:14-16)

The Apostle Paul taught that the Gentile (believer) was part of Israel, not that the Gentile believer had replaced Israel, as many churches wrongly teach. That’s called Replacement Theology, but it flies directly against what Paul said:

“I say then, have they (the Jewish people) stumbled *that they should fall?* ***Certainly not!*** But through their fall, *to provoke them to jealousy*, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure, riches for the Gentiles, *how much more their fullness?!* For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am an Apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry...And if some of the branches were broken off, and ***you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them***, and *with them* became a partaker of the root and fatness of the Olive Tree (i.e. Israel).”

“You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in’...‘Well said! Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. *Do not be haughty, but fear!*...For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either!...And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again! For if you were cut out of the olive tree, which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature, *into a cultivated olive tree, how much more* will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own Olive Tree?”

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this Mystery, lest you should be conceited, that blindness, in part, has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and so, *all Israel will be saved*, as it is written:”

‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’

“Concerning the Gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are ***beloved*** for the sake of the Fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable!” (Romans 11:11-13, 17, 19-21, 23-26, 28-29)

The Apostle Paul also wrote that the Gentile was specifically now part of the Commonwealth of Israel. The Church, according to Scripture, is not a separate entity apart from Israel, and as such, should walk out her faith in Jesus as He did; keeping all Mosaic Law that applies to any believer:

“Therefore, remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were *without* Christ, being strangers from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers

from the Covenants of Promise, having no hope and without God in the world, but now, *in Messiah Yeshua, you who once were far off have been brought near* by the blood of Messiah. For He, Himself, is our peace, *who has made both one*, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,” (Ephesians 2:11-14 NKJV)

What has the Gentile believer been brought near to? According to Scripture, the Gentile believer is now *part of Israel*, and therefore, should walk as Israel walks, in Mosaic Law. According to the Pharisaic Church, though, the Gentile *is* (all of the ‘new’) Israel, but doesn’t have to keep Mosaic Law. She is an Israel that sins against her Savior by eating pig, shrimp and catfish, something her Savior could never do and still remain sinless, and she also keeps pagan holy days that the Church has baptized ‘in Christ,’ again, something her Savior could never do and remain sinless. The Church has no more authority to change God’s holy days than Antiochus IV had. She can do it, but it’s not of God. One cannot ‘baptize’ a pagan holy day ‘in the name of Jesus,’ because God hasn’t authorized it. It is a sin of presumption, yet *all* the holy days of the Church began in paganism, and are still pagan. Basically, the only thing that has changed is that the Church has replaced the name of Baal with Jesus.

The history of Thanksgiving comes straight out of paganism, no matter what noble Church idea has been added to it (i.e. giving thanks to Jesus). The Pharisees also had their noble ideas and ways, which also nullified God’s Word. Should Christians celebrate a pagan holy day to the God of Israel, when He expressly forbids such? Here’s what Scripture says to Israel:

“Observe and obey *all* these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your sons after you, forever, *when you do what is good and right in the sight of Yahveh your God*. When Yahveh your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, ***take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them***, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ***‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise!’*** You must not worship Yahveh your God in that way; for every abomination to Yahveh, which He hates, they have done to their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it! *You must not add to it, nor take away from it.*” (Deuteronomy 12:28-32)

The first king of northern Israel, Jeroboam, also proclaimed a substitute time for giving thanks to God, but it wasn’t acceptable to God, as is evident from what Scripture records about the king (1st Kings 12:26–13:5). Man has no right or authority from God to proclaim a holy day unto Him. God has already done that. Thanksgiving Day was not acceptable to God 3,000 years ago in the northern kingdom of Israel. How could it be anything different today?<sup>9</sup>

Thanksgiving Day came from paganism. It’s not something that our God, or His people, originally came up with. It has nothing to do with the God of Israel, even though the Pilgrims worshipped Him. They didn’t know or keep Torah, which meant that they didn’t know about *Sukote*. If they had, it would have been different. On the other hand, both Hanuka and Purim commemorate times when God moved mightily to save His people Israel, and those two times don’t take anything away from God’s holy days, but enhance them and inspire us.

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<sup>9</sup> See *Thanksgiving Day—Pagan?* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Thanksgiving-Day-Pagan.pdf> for where Thanksgiving Day originated from and how Jeroboam instituted it because he didn’t want the Israelis of the northern Kingdom to go to Jerusalem for God’s Thanksgiving—the Feast of Tabernacles.

# CONCLUSION

Hanuka is not the Jewish Christmas. Hanuka is a time of remembering and celebrating the great deliverance that God gave to His people Israel, and of the cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple, about 200 years before Yeshua began His ministry in Israel. Hanuka is a beautiful time, in the dead of winter, to re-dedicate ourselves, every one of the eight days of Hanuka, to our Lord Yeshua.

Yeshua not only celebrated Hanuka, but came all the way from the Galilee area to do so, a five or six day journey on foot. At that time, while in the Temple, Yeshua became the anti-thesis to the wicked Syrian king, who had made himself into a god and wanted to be worshiped as such. There was Yeshua, though, God the Son, the visible manifestation of the invisible God, what the Syrian king had made himself out to be, dwelling among His people Israel! What significance this lends to Hanuka!

Yeshua wasn't seeking to be worshipped, although He is worthy of our worship, but sought to serve His brethren Israel.<sup>10</sup> Yeshua authenticates and affirms Hanuka for all of us and our children.

The theme of Hanuka is re-dedicating ourselves, the temple of the living God, to our Father, in the name of Yeshua, and to His purpose for our lives. The cleansing of the Temple, in the days of the Maccabees, is an apt picture for what Yeshua wants to do with us—cleanse us as His temple!<sup>11</sup>

Thanksgiving is a pagan holy day that the Church 'baptized, in the name of Jesus.' Christians, who love Jesus, shouldn't have anything to do with Christmas and Thanksgiving Day because they are the traditions of man that nullify God's Word.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Deut. 18:18-19; Mt. 15:24; Mark 10:45.

<sup>11</sup> 1st Cor. 3:16; cf. Mt. 21:10-13; Mk. 11:15-17; John 2:13-21.

<sup>12</sup> Revised on 22 November 2017 at 2:15 PM.