

HANUKA

SHOULD WE OR SHOULDN'T WE?

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Hanuka is like a mini July 4th (Independence Day holiday for the USA). For God's people Israel there is more than one time when He delivered us from slavery and oppression, and Hanuka is one of those times. Purim (in the book of Esther) 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 that will fall in any eight day celebration of Hanuka). Neither Hanuka or Purim are found in Torah (Mosaic Law), but Purim is found in the *Tanach* (Old Testament), and Hanuka is mentioned in John 10:22. It's usually translated into English as the Feast of Dedication, and this is what *hanuka* means, to dedicate.

If you've not read the First Book of Maccabees it would be good to do so, as it is truly inspiring and faith building. I love the accounts where the Jewish soldiers are greatly outnumbered, but the leader, Judah Maccabee, offers powerful and godly prayers to God, and God gives him the victory. I center in on just the first book because it has the historical reality of the battles and conditions of the Jewish people. There are a number of books of Maccabees, but the first is the story of biblical heroism against all odds, grounded in faith toward Yahveh, the God of Israel, and it is the basis for Hanuka.¹

Hanuka celebrates the mighty deliverance of God through the Maccabees, who fought against the evil Syrian king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He forbid the observance of Torah, and demanded, upon penalty of death, that all the Jews walk in Hellenistic culture and worship the Greek gods and goddesses. Anyone who kept the Sabbath or had Scriptures in their possession, etc., was murdered.

Outnumbered by trained armies, the priests and people of Judah, under Judah Maccabee, fought and won battle after battle, due to their faith in God. They were able to re-take possession of the Temple and cleanse it from the idol statue of the Syrian king, Antiochus IV, three years to the day that it had been defiled by him. He had erected a statue of Zeus, with his face on it, and wanted everyone to worship him as Zeus incarnate, hence the title Epiphanes (God appears/manifests). The Jews called him Epimanes (the madman), a play on the word incarnate (Epiphanes). He also had pigs sacrificed on the Altar of Sacrifice, thus defiling it.

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

Did Yeshua Celebrate Hanuka?

It's more than interesting that Yeshua came to Jerusalem, in the middle of the winter, which was no mean task when traveling by foot from the Sea of Galilee, during the time of Hanuka. 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 or territory of ministering was one hundred miles (160 kilometers) north of Jerusalem, around the northern part of the Sea of Galilee. Why would Yeshua go all the way to Jerusalem and be there for a non-Sabbath holiday? Generally, the only times we see the Lord Yeshua in Jerusalem are at the Feasts of Israel (Mt. 26:2, 17; Lk. 2:41; 22:15; Jn. 2:23; 6:4; 11:55; 13:1, etc.), because Yahveh commands all Israeli males to appear before Him for those feasts (Ex. 23:17; 34:23; Dt. 16:16). Why was Yeshua in Jerusalem at Hanuka time, in the dead of winter? Why would Yeshua leave the relatively warmer climate of the Sea of Galilee area (for the Sea of Galilee and its surrounding villages are about 700 feet (215 meters) below sea level, and so it's warmer there in winter than in Jerusalem) for the mountainous, windy, cold and rainy city of Jerusalem in mid-December? (Jerusalem is 2,300 feet or 700 meters up in the mountains of Judah.)

Yeshua, being there at that time, indicates that He specifically came for the Feast of Dedication. Why? 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 Him (and all the Apostles) as 'good.' He was there, and Scripture records it, to make a point. It's good to celebrate Hanuka!²

When we look at what John writes and what transpired at Yeshua's Hanuka, we can't help but see a parallel between them and the reason for Hanuka. The King of Syria, Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes (God with us), 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 pigs), and building another (1st Mac. 4:38-47). They also took out all the pagan objects of worship. Once cleansed, the Temple was then dedicated, or rather rededicated, for the eight days that we've come to know as Hanuka.

With Yeshua, Immanuel (God with us; Is. 7:14; Luke 7:16), God the Son, coming into the Temple, we have the Living God manifest, just the opposite of the idolatry of the King of Syria proclaiming himself God incarnate, through his name and the statue. Unfortunately, there were Jews in Messiah's day that 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 other Jews who did believe that Yeshua was the Messiah (Jn. 10:40-42).

Yeshua's Hanuka is quite 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.

² I'm indebted to Margaret of San Antonio, TX, USA for these next two paragraphs. Her email spoke of the blasphemy that began Hanuka, and the blasphemy of Yeshua's Hanuka, with some Jews rejecting Him.

Hanuka Traditions

Rabbinic Judaism teaches that when the Temple was re-taken, there was some olive oil found in it for the Menorah (seven branched Lampstand; Ex. 25:31-40), but only a day's worth, yet miraculously, it lasted for eight days. 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, 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, they kept Sukote and its eight days (in their make-shift huts in the bitter cold of December?! Lev. 23:33-44) 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.'

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

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 Hebrew history that God moved to deliver His Jewish people from certain death. It is a mini-deliverance time or mini-Passover (Passover being *the* day of 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 or Presidents Day, etc., 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). 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 (hanuka) to our Father through His Son, Messiah Yeshua.

There are many Jewish traditions that surround both Hanuka and Purim, but Ruti and I generally don't follow them. One we do follow is the lighting of the Hanuka lights. We use either candles or small oil lamps 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 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. 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 watch Jesus of Nazareth (over a two night period),³ 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.).⁴ 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. In Tulsa we'd have 'Happy Hanuka' decorations and balloons, which always gave it a festive atmosphere. It's also a great time to sing praises to Yeshua and read from the Word.

Make up your own traditions for Hanuka. It's allowed :) Remember that the core of the celebration is 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 is nothing like 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.

Christmas is very pagan. It celebrates the birth of the *pagan* Christ or 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 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

³ The film *Jesus of Nazareth* is on two DVDs and lasts for six and a half hours. It can be bought from Amazon.

⁴ 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>.

world. The god of Christmas was called ‘the Christ’ (what we would call the false Christ or anti-Christ), and was also seen as the son of the sun god. The sun was the greatest natural object of veneration in ancient times.⁵

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. Please don’t tie it 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 Thanksgiving Day, with the Pilgrims, and what the Maccabees did in authorizing Hanuka. If the Maccabees could do that, why couldn’t the Pilgrims do a similar thing? There is a resemblance, but the link quickly breaks apart 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.

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, and 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, or 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 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 re-

⁵ For why Christmas is pagan, see *Christmas—Its Origin* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Christmas-Its-Origin.pdf>.

placed Israel:

“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...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 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 corrupt Church, though, the Gentile *is* (all of the ‘new’) Israel, an Israel that sins against her Savior by eating pigs, shrimp and catfish, something her Savior could never do and still remain sinless, and is also able to keep pagan holy days that the Church as baptized ‘in Christ,’ again, something her Savior could never do and remain sinless. The Church has no authority from God ‘to baptize’ a pagan holy day ‘in the name of Jesus,’ yet all the holy days of the Church are began in paganism, and are still there.

The history of Thanksgiving comes straight out of paganism, no matter what noble American Church cause 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 we 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 Him, 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. Thanksgiving Day was not acceptable to God 3,000 years ago in the northern kingdom of Israel. How could it be anything different today?

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 then. On the other hand, both Hanuka and Purim commemorate times when God moved mightily to save His people Israel, and they don’t take anything away from God’s holy days, but enhance them and us.

CONCLUSION

Hanuka has absolutely nothing to do with Christmas, nor Thanksgiving, which are a pagan holy days 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.

Hanuka is a time of remembering and celebrating the great deliverance that God gave to His people Israel, and of the cleansing and rededication of the Temple, about 165 years before Yeshua was born in Bethlehem. Hanuka is a beautiful time, in the dead of winter, to rededicate 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, no small feat in His day. 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 worshipped 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. Yeshua wasn’t seeking to be worshipped, although He is worthy of our worship, but sought to serve His brethren Israel (Deut. 18:18-19; Mt. 15:24; Mark 10:45). Yeshua authenticates Hanuka for all of us and our children.⁶

The major theme of Hanuka is re-dedicating ourselves 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 (1st Cor. 3:16).

⁶ Revised on 1 April 2016.