

## WHAT ABOUT HANUKKAH?

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### WHAT IS HANUKKAH

**Hanukkah**, a Hebrew word written as **חֲנֻכָּה** and variously spelled in English as Hanukkah, Chanukah and Hanukah, literally means “*dedication*.” Hanukkah is often called the “**Feast of Dedication**” or alternatively, the “**Feast of Light**.” It is an eight-day celebration that begins on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Kislev (the ninth month of the Biblical calendar), which usually corresponds to sometime in December.

Hanukkah celebrates the historical event in which Jewish soldiers fighting in what is called the Maccabean Revolt were victorious in overcoming the ruling Greek Seleucid Empire. On Kislev 25, 167 BC, the hated Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV desecrated the altar in the temple by erecting an idol of Zeus on top of it, and there sacrificing a pig. That began a revolt which lasted exactly three years. It ended on Kislev 25, 164 BC, when the temple was reclaimed, the altar cleansed, and sacrifices to YHWH resumed. On this day the temple was again dedicated to the God of Israel, and an eight-day thanksgiving celebration was instituted.

As part of the temple dedication the menorah in the holy place was lit. Only specially and blessed olive oil could be used for this menorah. According to tradition, they had only enough holy oil to last one day, and it would take a week to properly prepare a new batch. Miraculously the one-day supply of oil lasted all eight days until the new was ready. For this reason Hanukkah is often called the “Festival of Lights.”

### IS HANUKKAH FOR CHRISTIANS?

Hanukkah is usually considered to be a Jewish tradition so some would not think Christians should celebrate it. And it is true that nowhere in Scripture does God instruct his people to commemorate Hanukkah, as He does for the annual appointed times in Leviticus 23. The event that Hanukkah commemorates takes place after the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) were written, so we would not expect to find any commands there for us to celebrate this day.

But what about the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament)? While there is no specific command to celebrate Hanukkah, we do see that Yeshua apparently kept the feast, in accordance with the tradition of the day:

#### ***John 10:22–23***

At that time the **Feast of Dedication** took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.

It may be argued that Scripture doesn’t state that Yeshua was keeping the Feast of Dedication; only that he was in the temple at that time. However, the Feast of Dedication was specifically to commemorate the dedication of the temple. The temple was where the big celebration would be taking place. To say that he was there at that time but not actually keeping the feast, would be like saying someone went to a birthday party but didn’t really join in celebrating the birthday. Everyone at the temple that week would have been celebrating that very special event.

So if Yeshua, whom we Christians openly state is our example of how to live on earth, celebrated the Feast of Hanukkah, at the very least it would not be wrong for us to do so as well. And perhaps it would be appropriate for us to keep it if for no other reason than that our Lord and Savior Himself did so.

However there are other reasons that it would be good for Christians to celebrate Hanukkah. These have to do with not only the event that is commemorated by Hanukkah, but also with the past events in Scripture it relates to as well as the future events related to the return of the Messiah that it prophetically hints at. Among other things, the Hanukkah celebration should help us to offer thanksgiving to God for:

- Victory over evil and oppression
- God’s provision in all our needs

- God's presence in our midst
- The return of the Messiah

These and more become evident as the details of Hanukkah are understood. But for now, the short reply to the question of whether or not a Christian should celebrate Hanukkah is, "Why *wouldn't* Christian's want to celebrate these things?" It is all about giving glory and thanksgiving to God, and expectantly looking forward to the return of the Messiah. There is certainly no reason not to celebrate these things, and every reason we should!

## **THE HANUKKAH STORY**

After Solomon, king of Israel, died there was a civil war in Israel. Only two of the tribes of Israel, referred to as the Southern Kingdom (or the house of Judah), following the legitimate kingship of Solomon's son. The ten tribes of the north, called the Northern Kingdom (or the house of Israel or Ephraim) followed an illegitimate king and lived in disobedience to the covenant with YHWH. Eventually God had enough, and in 723 BC He sent Assyria to invade the Northern Kingdom. The Israelites of the north were largely dispersed and intermingled with their conquerors.

Meanwhile the Southern Kingdom was also drifting farther away from their adherence to God's Torah. Finally, in 587 BC YHWH allowed the Babylonians to conquer them as well. The Israelites of the south were mostly deported to Babylon as slaves.

In 539 BC Persia conquered Babylon, and shortly after King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree allowing Israelites to return to their homeland if they so desired. Many returned and repopulated the area around Jerusalem, rebuilding the temple as well as the city itself. However, the Israelites remained under the control of Persia and served the king of Persia as their master. That changed in 331 BC when Alexander the Great took over Persia. Now all the lands and peoples that had been under Persian control, including Israel, came under Greek control. But Alexander the Great died just a few years later in 323 BC, and his empire was divided into four pieces, each ruled by one of his generals. Cassander took Greece and Macedonia. Lysimachus took Thrace and Asia Minor. Seleucus got Syria, Mesopotamia and regions farther east. Ptolemy got Egypt to the south. Israel, on the border between Seleucus and Ptolemy, was under the control of either one or the other at various times. However by 197 BC the Seleucids (sometimes called the Syrians) retained solid control of Israel.

In 175 BC the most infamous of all Seleucid kings began his reign: Antiochus IV, also called Antiochus Epiphanes. The word "epiphanes" means "God manifest." Antiochus believed himself to be Zeus incarnate. His rule was brutal, and he used it to force the assimilation (Hellenization) of the Jewish people into all ways of Greek life and religion. Many called him Antiochus "Epimanes", meaning Antiochus "the Madman". The historical books of 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees each record these events. (Note that these two books are two entirely separate accounts covering much of the same history, rather than a sequential two-part historical account as the naming could imply.) First Maccabees gives some detail on the rule of King Antiochus Epiphanes:

### ***1 Maccabees 1:41-50***

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; **he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised.** They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."

Second Maccabees records this additional information:

### ***2 Maccabees 6:1-11***

Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their

ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God; also to **pollute the temple in Jerusalem and to call it the temple of Olympian Zeus**, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus-the-Friend-of-Strangers, as did the people who lived in that place. Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. **The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. People could neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews.** On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices; and when a festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to wear wreaths of ivy and to walk in the procession in honor of Dionysus. At the suggestion of the people of Ptolemais a decree was issued to the neighboring Greek cities that they should adopt the same policy toward the Jews and make them partake of the sacrifices, and should kill those who did not choose to change over to Greek customs. One could see, therefore, the misery that had come upon them. For example, two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. They publicly paraded them around the city, with their babies hanging at their breasts, and then hurled them down headlong from the wall. Others who had assembled in the caves nearby, in order to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day.

This situation escalated further in the month of Kislev, usually corresponding to our December:

#### ***1 Maccabees 1:54–63***

**Now on the fifteenth day of Kislev**, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. **On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering.** According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.

Note that the 145<sup>th</sup> year refers to the number of years since the establishment of the Seleucid kingdom, which began in 312 BC. This would place these events in 167 BC. What happened next would result in the beginning of a massive grass-roots revolt:

#### ***1 Maccabees 2:15–28***

The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modi'in to make them offer sacrifice. Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honored and great in this town, and supported by sons and brothers. Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the people of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the Friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts." But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: **"Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, everyone of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left."** When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modi'in, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: **"Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!"** Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town.

Thus, the Jewish revolt against the Greek Seleucids began, led by Mattathias. Unfortunately Mattathias soon died, apparently of natural causes, after which the leadership was passed to his son Judah, called Judah “the Maccabee”, meaning Judah “the Hammer”. It is from Judah Maccabee that the revolt is called the Maccabean Revolt. Three long years of fighting ensued. But it seems that God was with them.

## **2 Maccabees 8:1–7**

Meanwhile Judas, who was also called Maccabeus, and his companions secretly entered the villages and summoned their kindred and enlisted those who had continued in the Jewish faith, and so they gathered about six thousand. **They implored the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all;** and to have pity on the temple that had been profaned by the godless; to have mercy on the city that was being destroyed and about to be leveled to the ground; to hearken to the blood that cried out to him; to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the blasphemies committed against his name; and to show his hatred of evil. As soon as Maccabeus got his army organized, **the Gentiles could not withstand him, for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy.** Coming without warning, he would set fire to towns and villages. He captured strategic positions and put to flight not a few of the enemy. He found the nights most advantageous for such attacks. And talk of his valor spread everywhere.

It is incredulous that a small, untrained band of Jewish men should ever be victorious against the highly-trained, professional army of the Greek Seleucids that vastly outnumbered them, but with God’s miraculous help victory was indeed won. And upon receiving victory, their very first act was to purify the temple.

## **1 Maccabees 4:36–40**

Then Judas and his brothers said, “See, our enemies are crushed; **let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.**” So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

## **1 Maccabees 4:41–51**

Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. He **chose blameless priests devoted to the law**, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. Then **they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar** like the former one. They also **rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple**, and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

## **1 Maccabees 4:52–58**

**Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Kislev**, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. **So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days**, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

So on Kislev 25, three years to the day that Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed to Zeus on the altar and defiled the temple with pig blood, the house of YHWH was purified and the temple sacrifices to YHWH were resumed.

### ***1 Maccabees 4:59***

Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season 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.**

Thus, the festival of Hanukkah “dedication” was proclaimed as an eight-day celebration to be kept every year beginning on Kislev 25.

A further tradition regarding the menorah at the dedication of the temple is recorded in the teachings of the Talmud:

What is Hanukah? The rabbis taught: “On the twenty-fifth day of Kislev Hanukkah commences and lasts eight days, on which lamenting (in commemoration of the dead) and fasting are prohibited. When the Hellenists entered the sanctuary, they defiled all the oil that was found there. When the government of the House of Hasmoneans prevailed and conquered them, oil was sought (to feed the holy lamp in the sanctuary) and only one vial was found with the seal of the high priest intact. **The vial contained sufficient oil for one day only, but a miracle occurred, and it fed the holy lamp eight days in succession.** These eight days were the following year established as days of good cheer, on which psalms of praise and acknowledgment (of God’s wonders) were to be recited. (b. Shabb. 2:1, IX.14)

For this reason a special nine-branched menorah, rather than the standard seven-branched menorah, is used to celebrate Hanukkah. The center branch of the menorah represents the Light of YHWH, while the other eight branches represent each of the eight days of celebration during which the holy oil miraculously continued to burn.

## **HANUKKAH AND SUKKOT**

The eight-day Hanukkah celebration was not the first eight-day dedication of the temple. It just so happens that almost 800 years earlier, when the temple was first built by King Solomon, it was also dedicated with an eight-day celebration.

### ***2 Chronicles 5:1–3***

Thus all the work that Solomon did for the house of YHWH was finished. And Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, and stored the silver, the gold, and all the vessels in the treasuries of the house of God. Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers’ houses of the people of Israel, in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of YHWH out of the city of David, which is Zion. And all the men of Israel assembled before the king **at the feast that is in the seventh month.**

### ***2 Chronicles 7:1–10***

As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of YHWH filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of YHWH, because the glory of YHWH filled YHWH’s house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of YHWH on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to YHWH, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before YHWH. King Solomon offered as a sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God... At that time **Solomon held the feast for seven days**, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of Egypt. **And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly**, for they had kept the dedication of the altar seven days and the feast seven days. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and glad of heart for the prosperity that YHWH had granted to David and to Solomon and to Israel his people.

So Solomon dedicated the temple at the feast that is the seventh month. They held the feast for seven days and then held a special assembly on the eighth day. What is this feast? None other than the appointed time of Sukkot, which was a seven-day feast in the seventh month, followed by a special assembly on the eighth day. YHWH gave instructions for keeping this appointed time in Leviticus:

### *Leviticus 23:39–43*

On the fifteenth day of **the seventh month**, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of YHWH seven days. **On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.** And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before YHWH your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to YHWH for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, **that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt:** I am YHWH your God.

God told His people He wanted them to remember the time He took them from Egypt. This was a time when His people were living in tents in the desert. Tents or booths or any kind of temporary shelters are called **sukkot** in Hebrew. So this festival of **Sukkot** is often called the Feast of *Booths* or *Shelters* or *Tabernacles*.

Sukkot is really an eight-day thanksgiving celebration. It is a time to celebrate God's **presence**, as He was dwelling with them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And it is a time to celebrate God's **provision**. During 40 years of living in a harsh desert, they always had food and water. Their sandals never wore out. And their numbers did not decrease.

When the temple was built, Sukkot was a natural time to dedicate it. God had provided. And God's presence would dwell in the temple, in the midst of his people. And 800 later, when the miraculously Maccabees won their revolt, and the temple was again purified and rededicated, it would only seem natural to have another eight-day celebration of Sukkot. It wasn't the seventh month, but that didn't stop them. The account in 2 Maccabees makes it clear that they had Sukkot in mind when they instituted this Hanukkah celebration:

### *2 Maccabees 10:1–8*

Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Kislev. **They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals.** Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.

The Maccabees had not been able to celebrate the prior Sukkot because they were fighting a war "**wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals.**" They realized that God had delivered them from the Seleucids just like He had delivered their fathers from the Egyptians. Furthermore, they recognized their wandering in the mountains and living in caves (temporary dwellings) were not unlike the wandering of the fathers in the desert and their living in tents during that time. So now it would only seem natural to have a thanksgiving celebration of Sukkot, to thank God for His **miraculous provision** and for His **presence** that would once again fill the temple.

Since they weren't able to celebrate the prior Sukkot, this delayed celebration at Hanukkah became extra special. It was not only a "late Sukkot" due to the war; it was also a thanksgiving for their new independence and freedom -- something they had not had for over 400 years. It was independence day! God had truly provided. They were finally free, and His presence would once again dwell within their midst in this newly dedicated temple.

It is interesting that the annual celebration of Sukkot not only recalls the presence and provision of YHWH during the exodus from Egypt, but it also has a future significance as well. Just as during the exodus the Israelites were being led to the Promised Land, even now God's people are being led to the true Promised Land. This true Promised Land is the future kingdom of the Messiah, which he will establish upon His return. When the Messiah returns He will establish His kingdom, throw Satan into the bottomless pit for 1000 years, and then reign with His followers in the very land YHWH had promised to Abraham so long ago. So Sukkot recalls the past events of the Exodus and at the same time points toward the future fulfillment when the Messiah return to establish his kingdom on earth.

Could it be that the events surrounding Hanukkah, which were celebrated “**in the manner of the festival of Sukkot,**” may also prophetically foreshadow future events relating to the return of the Messiah?

## **HANUKKAH AND PROPHECY**

While Scriptures don't specifically refer to Hanukkah (other than in John 10:22 where we see Yeshua at the temple during the feast), there are several prophetic passages of Scripture which do refer to some of the events surrounding Hanukkah, most notably those relating to Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

In the sixth century BC, Daniel was in exile in Babylon, which was at that time still under Babylonian rule. Daniel had a vision of a ram with two horns trampled by a goat with one large horn. Then the large horn broke and four horns grew in its place. Out of the one of those four horns came a little horn which grew very great, even to challenge the authority of the Prince of the host (YHWH), and make desolate His sanctuary, stopping the burnt offerings there.

### ***Daniel 8:3–14***

I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a **ram** standing on the bank of the canal. It had **two horns**, and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great. As I was considering, behold, a **male goat came from the west** across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground. And the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then **the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns** toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came a **little horn, which grew exceedingly great** toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. **It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host.** And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and **the place of his sanctuary was overthrown.** And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.”

The interpretation of this vision is given in verses that followed:

### ***Daniel 8:20–26***

As for the **ram** that you saw with the **two horns**, these are the kings of **Media and Persia**. And the goat is the king of **Greece**. **And the great horn between his eyes is the first king.** As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, **four kingdoms shall arise** from his nation, but not with his power. And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great—but **not by his own power**; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and

in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand. The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now.”

In hindsight we can see that the goat with one large horn refers to Alexander the Great. The four horns that grow from the one refer to Alexander’s four generals that divided up his empire. From one of those four horns, the Seleucid kingdom, comes a little horn, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who grew to be very great, declared himself to be god, desecrated the Sanctuary of YHWH and stopped the burnt offerings (regular morning and evening offerings each day) for just over three years. Note that Scripture implies that the power of Antiochus Epiphanes IV comes from Satan. Therefore he is to be defeated by the power of God rather than man.

A further prophetic discussion of Antiochus Epiphanes is found throughout the entire chapter of Daniel 11. The mighty king of Daniel 11:3 is Alexander the Great. His kingdom is short-lived and then divided into four:

#### *Daniel 11:3–4*

Then **a mighty king shall arise**, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. And as soon as he has arisen, **his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven**, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these.

What follows are prophesies of the kings of the north (Seleucids) battling with the kings of the south (Ptolemies). And then we are again told about the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes IV:

#### *Daniel 11:21–24*

**In his place shall arise a contemptible person** to whom royal majesty has not been given. He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant. And from the time that an alliance is made with him he shall act deceitfully, and he shall become strong with a small people. Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province, and he shall do what neither his fathers nor his fathers’ fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time.

#### *Daniel 11:31–36*

**Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple** and fortress, and **shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.** He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time. And the king shall do as he wills. **He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god**, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done.

While it is clear from the context that these prophesies apply to events surrounding Antiochus Epiphanes IV, as the prophesy continues it becomes evident that the latter days are also symbolically being portrayed.

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every god, and shall **speak astonishing things against the God of gods**. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done.

Thus Antiochus Epiphanes IV (recall the name means “God manifest”) is seen as an evil ruler whose power comes from Satan and who pits himself against the Prince of Princes. He is the one who desecrates the holy place, the abomination of desolation. But this prophesy that starts out so clearly speaking of Alexander the Great and the generals that succeed him, and then speaks of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, ends up just as clearly speaking about the end times just prior to the Messiah’s return:

#### ***Daniel 12:1–4***

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. **But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, **some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.** And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.

So it seems from this prophesy in Daniel that Antiochus Epiphanes IV is a **type** of the anti-Messiah to come in the end times. This is also evident from the similar prophesies of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 (see also Revelation 20) in which it seems the anti-messiah is symbolized by the beast with ten horns out of which a “little horn” grows. These visions seem to indicate that the anti-messiah will come from the later Roman Empire, although there are clear similarities with the prophesies of Daniel 8 and Daniel 12 which link similar events to Antiochus Epiphanes growing out of the Greek Empire. While all this can get complicated and be hard to understand, the main point is that it all lends support to the view that the events surrounding Antiochus Epiphanes are in some ways parallel to what we expect to see in the end times with the anti-messiah, only on a larger scale.

This is also supported by the words of Yeshua, almost 200 years after Antiochus Epiphanes IV, when he warns people about the tribulation of the end times:

#### ***Matthew 24:15–20***

So when you see **the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel**, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

So, if the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV in some way foreshadow the time of tribulation during the latter days, when believers will be deceived, mislead, and forbidden to keep God’s law, then **it would seem likely that the Maccabean victory over Antiochus and the subsequent cleansing and reopening of the temple are also likely to foreshadow the end times.** Based on other end-time prophesies in Scripture, it seems that after the anti-messiah (the beast in Revelation) appears and deceives many, the true Messiah will return to battle against him. For example in Revelation we read:

#### ***Revelation 19:11–20***

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and **the name by which he is called is The Word of God.** And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his

army. **And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet** who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. **These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire** that burns with sulfur.

And immediately after this great victory, we have the beginning of the thousand-year reign of the Messiah, called the Millennium:

#### ***Revelation 20:1–4***

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that **he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended**. After that he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and **reigned with Christ for a thousand years**.

We also see this end-time battle prophesied the Zechariah:

#### ***Zechariah 14:3–9***

Then **YHWH will go out and fight against those nations** as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. **Then YHWH my God will come, and all the holy ones with him**. On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to YHWH, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light. On that day **living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem**, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. **And YHWH will be king over all the earth**. On that day YHWH will be one and his name one.

*“Living waters flowing out of Jerusalem”* recalls the end-times prophesy of Ezekiel 40-47, in which Ezekiel is given a vision of a very large, future temple, filled with the glory of YHWH, and out of which a river of Living Water would flow. This future temple is also prophesied about in Zechariah. What is interesting is that just after Zechariah speaks of the final battle end-time battle resulting in YHWH as *“king over all the earth,”* we see that all the nations will now gather at the restored temple to celebrate a certain festival:

#### ***Zechariah 14:16–19***

Then everyone who survives of **all the nations** that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, YHWH of hosts, and **to keep the Feast of Booths**. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, YHWH of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which YHWH afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the **punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths**.

We conclude from these (and other) prophesies that when the Messiah returns and destroys the Beast (the anti-messiah), the temple will be rebuilt and people from all nations will come and celebrate Sukkot (the feast of Booths). And how fitting to celebrate Sukkot, since Sukkot itself is the appointed time that foreshadows the millennial reign of the Messiah. It is the ultimate Promised Land, where His people can live with Him, totally in His presence, experiencing His full provision.

It is therefore little wonder that Hanukkah was celebrated *“in the manner of the Festival of Booths”* (2 Maccabees 10:6). The event that Hanukkah celebrates is the victory over Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the rededication of the temple, and the freedom to again worship apart from the oppression of evil rule. This foreshadows the events surrounding the return of the Messiah, who will win victory over the anti-messiah, reestablish the temple, and bring a reign of worship to YHWH that is finally free from all oppression. This is exactly the future fulfillment we look forward to as we celebrate Sukkot.

## HANUKKAH AND CHRISTMAS

At first glance it would seem that Hanukkah and Christmas have nothing in common with each other, other than that they are usually celebrated in December each year. However, these two holidays may actually share common roots. How is that?

Recall that Antiochus Epiphanes “God manifest” considered himself to be Zeus incarnate. And on Kislev 25 according to the Biblical calendar (usually December in the Gregorian calendar) he offered sacrifice to Zeus on the altar he erected in the temple of YHWH. But why did Antiochus chose this particular time, Kislev 25, for his worship of Zeus?

We can’t be sure which date in December corresponded to Kislev 25 during the year 167 BC, but we do know that it often comes late in December. Some years Kislev 25 is actually the same as December 25. This date, in ancient times, corresponded to the time of the winter solstice. The winter solstice is the time when daylight is shortest. Beginning with the winter solstice, each subsequent day has progressively more and more minutes of sunlight. To those who worshipped pagan gods, this was seen as the beginning of victory for the sun god. The sun god was now gaining control over the darkness! It was also seen as the day of the sun god’s rebirth each year. For this reason, it was not uncommon for the winter solstice to be a day of special importance in pagan worship, and especially when worshipping a god of the sun, such as Tammuz, Ra, Zeus, or Mithra. Each of these gods was worshipped on their special day, the winter solstice, as their annual day of rebirth, considered to be their birthday.

For Antiochus, as a worshipper of Zeus, there would have been no better time to offer sacrifice than the winter solstice, celebrated as the day of Zeus’ birth. Therefore it seems reasonable to assume that the infamous sacrifice of Kislev 25 may have been on that very day.

In addition to the celebration of the birthday of the sun god Zeus (and later Mithra) on Dec 25, there was another public holiday that by the time of Messiah’s birth was growing in popularity. This was the Saturnalia festival, beginning on Dec 17, and eventually lasting 7 days, culminating at the time of the winter solstice. This week long festival grew to become the most popular festival of the entire year. It seems to have been practiced throughout the Roman Empire.

It wasn’t until the 4th Century AD that we see any evidence of Christ’s birth being celebrated on December 25. At that time, the choice of this date incorporated the winter solstice, the culmination of the Saturnalia, and the birthday celebration of Mithra. Mithra worship had by that time grown to largely replace that of Zeus. We know that the roman Emperor Aurelian (270-275 CE), proclaimed December 25 as the *Dies Natalis Invicti Solis*, the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun, Mithra. This was long before any evidence shows that Christians celebrated the birth of the Messiah on that day. It was not until about 100 years later that Christians were being told to celebrate the birthday of Christ on this same day. The earliest source that gives us a reason why is in the writings of the Bishop Chrysostom (398-403):

*“On this day also the Birthday of Christ was lately fixed at Rome in order that while the heathen were busy with their profane ceremonies the Christians might perform their sacred rites undisturbed. They call this (Dec. 25th or viii. Kal. Jan, as the Romans wrote it), the Birthday of the Invincible One (Mithras); but who is so invincible as the Lord? They call it the Birthday of the Solar Disc; but Christ is the Sun of Righteousness.”*

So it seems clear from this earliest source that the church at that time sought to counter the growing influence of paganism by giving Christian meaning to the most popular pagan celebration of the year. The Celebration of Messiah’s birth on December 25 came first from Rome, but eventually spread to most of Christianity. Interestingly, the church in Jerusalem was one of the last to accept it, holding out until the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century.

Thus, through totally different circumstances, the roots of both Hanukkah and Christmas appear to be linked to the winter solstice. Antiochus likely sought to worship Zeus on that day, and three years later to the very day the temple was rededicated and Hanukkah instituted. Then, about five hundred years later, leaders of the Christian church decided to proclaim the day of the winter solstice as the day of Christ’s birth, apparently in an attempt to sway the populace away from celebrating pagan rituals of sun worship and saturnalia and point them instead to a Christian purpose.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hanukkah, meaning “dedication”, is a celebration that is a part of Jewish as well as Christian heritage. There are many reasons why Christians would want to celebrate Hanukkah, including:

1. Hanukkah reminds us of how God leads his people to unlikely victory over seemingly unconquerable oppressors.
2. As the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah reminds us that the Messiah is the Light of the World.
3. In the miracle of the oil, Hanukkah reminds us that God always provides just enough, when we trust Him to do so.
4. Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the temple and the presence of God dwelling in their midst, reminding us that He now dwells in each of us as well.
5. Yeshua celebrated Hanukkah. As our Rabbi, He is our example to be emulated
6. Hanukkah, like Sukkot, reminds us of God’s presence and his provision, even in difficult times, as He leads us to the Promised Land.
7. Hanukkah foreshadows the victorious return of the Messiah, when He will lead His people to victory over all evil, and establish his millennial reign on earth.
8. Hanukkah reminds us that the future temple will once again be dedicated, and that all the nations will gather there to worship YHWH at Sukkot, celebrating the fullness of His presence and His complete provision.

Praise be to YHWH, our God our Father, for opportunities to remember what He has done, and what He will do. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever!