

2017 HANUKKAH SPECIAL AT SCROLL TO SCROLL!

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Prayer for Blessing the Scriptures

Barchu et-Yahweh hamvorach

(*Cong.* Baruch Yahweh hamvorach lay-oh-lam va-ed)

Baruch Yahweh hamvorach lay-oh-lam va-ed

Baruch ata Yah-weh, Elo-hay-nu Melech Ha-Olam

Asher bachar banu michol ha-ah-meem

Ve-nah-tan lanu et-torah tow

Baruch ata Yah-weh no-tayn ha-Torah (ve'breet chah-dash-ah)

ALL READ IN UNISON IN ENGLISH:

Bless Yahweh, Who is to be blessed

Blessed is Yahweh, Who is to be blessed forever and ever

Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim, King of the Universe,

Who chose us from all the peoples and gave to us the Torah (and the Renewed Covenant Scriptures)

Introduction

Shalom everyone and welcome to our 2017 Hanukkah special!

Like last year's special we once again have a lot of material to go through with some twists and turns that I believe will be surprising. We also have fresh insights on this feast from such varied voices as Solomon, Philo, Roman historians Tacitus and Pliny the Younger and even, albeit indirectly, from Ebenezer Scrooge.

All that's for later but for now let me just say this:

BARUCH ATA YAHWEH ELOHAYNU MELECH HA OLAM ASHER
KIDDISHANU B'MITVO-TAV, VITZI-VANU, LE'KHAD LECH-NER, SHEL
HANUKKAH

Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim, King of the Universe, Who has Set us Apart with His Commandments and commanded us to light the Hanukkah candles.

I. Background on Hanukkah

Also for later are the Tanakh "hints" on Hanukkah. Excepting those, the roots of this historical occasion go back to the death of Alexander the Great. In 323 BCE Alexander lay dying with his goal of conquering India unfulfilled.

Alexander had no legitimate heir to take over after he was gone, except for a son born to him immediately, so he willed his Empire to his four best generals, with each one taking a quarter to rule. One of these portions included Syria and Israel, and this went to his general Seleucus. The Seleucid Empire named after him was officially inaugurated in 311 BCE.

After Seleucus and 8 other kings had reigned, a tyrant named Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) rose to power in 175 BCE. This would be the man who would invade Israel and defile the Temple for 2 years. However, as we will see later on, there is much more to this story than just the Maccabean Revolt.

II. The Historical Hanukkah (Josephus and the Books of Maccabees) and the Rabbinic story

There are three principal historical sources that have come down to us about the events from 167-165 BCE. The first of these are the Books of 1 and 2 Maccabees; the second is the writings from the first century Jewish historian Josephus; and finally there are the early writings of the Talmud.

Josephus and Maccabees, while having some differences, generally agree on the basic contours of the story. Antiochus Epiphanes invades Israel with his army, defiles the Temple for two years and is pushed out through an alliance of some priests and one Judah Maccabee. Antiochus will die shortly after this in disgrace in the winter of 164 BCE.

However, the Talmud is where we get the story of the one days' supply of oil miraculously lasting eight days, leaving some to wonder if it is proper to even light Hanukkah candles at all or is it just a rabbinic "flight of fancy"—their words, not mine.

The answer may be somewhere in between fiction and history. We know from Josephus for example that the original name of the occasion was the Festival of Lights:

Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon; but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored Elohim, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, **that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival.** Judas also rebuilt the walls round about the city, and reared towers of great height against the incursions of enemies, and set guards therein. He also fortified the city Bethsura, that it might serve as a citadel against any distresses that might come from our enemies. (Antiquities, 12.323-326)

So it is perhaps the case that Josephus knew of the Miracle of the Oil story but just didn't choose to report it. Understandably, given the details Josephus lavishes on this event, that omission may seem odd or it may simply be the starting point from where the full story developed in rabbinic imagination. Let's look at this passage on the same subject from Maccabees:

Judas and his brothers then said, 'Now that our enemies have been defeated, let us go up to purify the sanctuary and dedicate it.' So they marshaled the whole army, and went up to Mount Zion. There they found the sanctuary deserted, the altar desecrated, the gates burnt down, and vegetation growing in the courts as it might in a wood or on some mountain, while the storerooms were in ruins.

They tore their garments and mourned bitterly, putting dust on their heads. They prostrated themselves on the ground, and when the trumpets gave the signal they cried aloud to Heaven. Judas then ordered his men to keep the Citadel garrison engaged until he had purified the sanctuary.

Next, he selected priests who were blameless and zealous for the Torah to purify the sanctuary and remove the stones of the 'Pollution' to some unclean place. They discussed what should be done about the altar of burnt offering which had been profaned, and very properly decided to pull it down, rather than later be embarrassed about it since it had been defiled by the gentiles. They therefore demolished it and deposited the stones in a suitable place on the hill of the

Dwelling to await the appearance of a prophet who should give a ruling about them.

They took unhewn stones, as the Torah prescribed, and built a new altar on the lines of the old one. They restored the Set-apart Place and the interior of the Dwelling, and purified the courts. They made new sacred vessels, and brought the lamp-stand, the altar of incense, and the table into the Temple. They burned incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the menorah, and these shone inside the Temple. They placed the loaves on the table and hung the curtains and completed all the tasks they had undertaken.

On the twenty-fifth of the ninth month, Chislev, in the year 148 they rose at dawn and offered a lawful sacrifice on the new altar of burnt offering which they had made. **The altar was dedicated, to the sound of hymns, zithers, lyres and cymbals, at the same time of year and on the same day on which the gentiles had originally profaned it.** The whole people fell prostrate in adoration and then praised Heaven who had granted them success. **For eight days they celebrated the dedication of the altar, joyfully offering burnt offerings, communion and thanksgiving sacrifices.**

They ornamented the front of the Temple with crowns and bosses of gold, renovated the gates and storerooms, providing the latter with doors. There was no end to the rejoicing among the people, since the disgrace inflicted by the gentiles had been effaced.

Judas, with his brothers and the whole assembly of Israel, made it a law that the days of the dedication of the altar should be celebrated yearly at the proper season, for eight days beginning on the twenty-fifth of the month of Chislev, with rejoicing and gladness. They then proceeded to build high walls with strong towers round Mount Zion, to prevent the gentiles from coming and riding roughshod over it as in the past. Judas stationed a garrison there to guard it; he also fortified Beth-Zur, so that the people would have a fortress confronting Idumaea. (1 Maccabees 4:36-61 NJB)

So what I notice clearly is that Josephus mentions the LIGHTS but not the DEDICATION as a title whereas Maccabees mentions the DEDICATION but not the LIGHTS. Maccabees is the older source, perhaps around 120 BCE, whereas Josephus is writing about 90 CE.

Right in between these two sources is the RENEWED COVENANT, YOCHANAN 10, which directly calls it “The Feast of DEDICATION and it was winter.” Yochanan is probably writing this shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple, maybe about 74 CE, and Josephus’s writing maybe 10 years after this.

What does that tell us? I believe it shows that as the first century drew to a close both themes of Dedication and Lights became important to the Rabbis and they sought to draw

the two concepts together, first by lighting candles and then telling the story WHY they wanted to light candles. It is also important to note that while Josephus does not use the word “dedication” in his description, he does make it clear that the occasion is about the RESTORATION of the Temple and further knows such a restoration would require a dedication service.

According to some accounts in the Mishnah, the Hanukkah story was so common by the time they began compiling the official account that some thought it unnecessary to include some of the details that now survive in the fragments of later traditions. Others suggested that that the veneration of an occasion that celebrated a recent victory over a pagan nation was a little too close to comfort for a group of Jewish people who were crushed by Rome during the Bar Kochba Revolt, which was in their living memory when the Mishnah began being compiled.

My personal opinion is that the Rabbis remembered some form of candle lighting was involved in both the original and ongoing annual celebrations of Hanukkah—such is hinted at in Josephus and Maccabees though not directly stated—and their story took place from there.

But does that mean the idea of lighting candles is wrong if that “miracle” story never even happened? My answer to that question would be NO because it was customary to celebrate victories with feasts and candles anyway, even if the details of how this was done became obscured over the centuries. In addition, as Wikipedia accurately relates, there is another relatively early Jewish source to look at:

Another source is the Megillat Antiochus. This work (also known as "Megillat HaHasmonaim", "Megillat Hanukkah" or "Megillat Yevanit") is in both Aramaic and Hebrew; the Hebrew version is a literal translation from the Aramaic original. Recent scholarship dates it to somewhere between the 2nd and 5th Centuries, probably in the 2nd century, with the Hebrew dating to the 7th century. It was published for the first time in Mantua in 1557. Saadia Gaon, who translated it into Arabic in the 9th century, ascribed it to the Maccabees themselves, disputed by some, since it gives dates as so many years before the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE. The Hebrew text with an English translation can be found in the Siddur of Philip Birnbaum...

Finally though there is a clue in 2 Maccabees that needs to be looked at in answering this question:

This day of the purification of the Temple fell on the very day on which the Temple had been profaned by the foreigners, the twenty-fifth of the same month, Chislev. **They kept eight festal days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of Sukkot, remembering how, not long before at the time of the feast of Sukkot, they had been living in the mountains and caverns like wild beasts.** Then, carrying thyrsuses, leafy boughs and palms, they offered hymns to him who had brought the cleansing of his own holy place to a happy outcome. They also decreed by public

edict, ratified by vote, that the whole Jewish nation should celebrate those same days every year. (2 Maccabees 10:5-8 NJB)

So what I believe makes best sense is this. For two years the nation had been forbidden to observe Sukkot/Shemini-Atzeret and now they are free but need to wait another 10 months? I think they looked at this 8 day feast as a kind of belated Sukkot that they wanted to do right away, and that's because of this other linkage in Scripture:

Thus all the work done by King Solomon for the Temple of Yahweh was completed, and Solomon brought in the gifts which his father David had consecrated; and he had the silver, the gold and the utensils put into the treasuries of the Temple of Yahweh. Solomon then summoned the elders of Israel to Jerusalem to bring the ark of the covenant of Yahweh up from the City of David, that is, Zion **All the men of Israel assembled round King Solomon in the month of Ethanim, at the time of the feast (that is, the seventh month).** (1 Kings 7:51-8:2 NJB)

My main point is this: **The original Temple was dedicated around Sukkot so it makes sense for the 8 day festival for the Second Temple's re-dedication to be patterned after Sukkot!**

And according to the Talmud, there were festivals with lights that were associated with the Sukkot celebration:

The pipes were played sometimes on five days, and sometimes six. This means, the pipes played on during the time of water-drawing, which does not supersede either the Sabbath or the festival. ² He who has not witnessed the rejoicings at the water-drawing has, throughout the whole of his life, witnessed no real rejoicing. At the expiration of the first holiday of the festival they descended into the women's court, where a great transformation was made. **Golden menorahs were placed there, with four golden basins at the top of each; and four ladders were put to each candelabrum, on which stood four lads from the rising youth of the priesthood, holding jars of oil containing 120 jugs,** with which they replenished each basin. The cast-off breeches and belts of the priests were torn into shreds for wicks, which they lighted. **There was not a court in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the lights of the water-drawing.** Pious and distinguished men danced before the people with lighted flambeaux in their hands, and sang hymns and lauds before them; and the Levites accompanied them with harps, psalteries, cymbals, and numberless musical instruments. (Rodkinson Mishnah, Sukkah 5:1-2)

So if this Sukkot tradition was in force in about 165 BCE, we could easily see why the Festival of Lights idea might be transferred to the Feast of Dedication when the former could not have been celebrated during the war.

And finally there is another terrific linkage with Y'shua which we should look at. With these "festival of lights" rituals as described in the Talmud, it becomes important to

realize that Y'shua said the famous line, "I am the light of the world" on Shemini Etzeret, the last day of Sukkot.

In the most familiar version of John, the account of the woman taken in adultery has been inserted in John 7:53-8:11. However, this story is not in the 4 earliest Greek manuscripts of John and is completely lacking in ALL of the most ancient Aramaic versions of John.

For our purposes though, my sole point is this: John 8 has the story of the adulteress happening on the morning AFTER Shemini Etzeret, but if we remove the later addition from the chronology, now ALL of Yochanan 8 is also added to the last day of Sukkot, so that when Y'shua says "I am the light of the world" it is on THIS "festival of lights" that is later adopted into the Hanukkah occasion.

Some Surprises about the Books of the Maccabees

The Books of the Maccabees, one through four but especially regarding the first two, have an extremely rarified status in Jewish and Christian circles that I believe is utterly unique to them.

On the Jewish side, it is literally the "go to source" for what is taught about Hanukkah. Part of the reason is due to the fact that the Rabbis are uncomfortable (that is starting to change) with the next most ancient source, Josephus, and privately scholars will admit their tradition comes rather late.

The official decision regarding Greek materials was made in the 2nd C CE. The Rabbis decided to push some very valuable Greek traditions aside in favor of Hebrew and Aramaic ones, but Maccabees is a clear exception to the rule. There, this Greek work is considered primary source material while Josephus and Talmud have a secondary status. I note this as a result of seeing the priority of sources that the Orthodox apply in teaching about Hanukkah, and Maccabees seems to always be at the top and the traditions are given later.

But if so, why would the Orthodox, including Chabad, Hasidim and other very strict denominations, appear to break their own rule? My answer is they really didn't break the rule about avoiding Greek because they know something else about the Books of the Maccabees, as the Jewish Encyclopedia explains:

It is clear from the Semitic idioms which occur throughout the work that it was composed in a Semitic language (see, for example, ii. 40, iv. 2), **and certain passages indicate with great clearness that the original language was Hebrew** (see ii. 39, iii. 19). To this fact Origen and Jerome also bear testimony, though it is possible that the version or paraphrase known to them was Aramaic.

The Hebrew original seems not to have borne the name "Maccabees," though it is not known what was its real designation. Eusebius ("Hist. Eccl." vi. 25) quotes Origen as authority for the name,, a name which has been explained in many different ways. For some of these see Grimm... whom Torrey (Cheyne and Black,

"Encyc. Bibl.") follows, takes the name as a corruption of ספר בית חשמונאי (= "Book of the Hasmoneans").

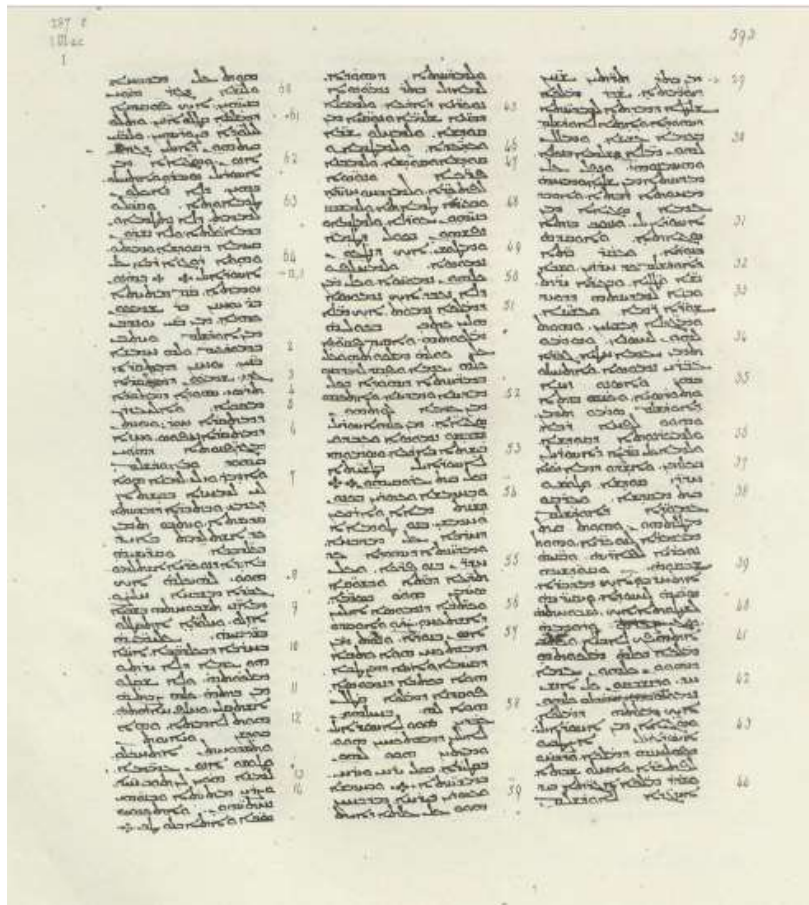
If this be the correct interpretation, an Aramaic translation of the book must have been made at an early time, and it was this translation which was known to Origen and Jerome—a view which does not seem improbable.

Be this as it may, the Hebrew was translated very early into Greek, and the Greek only has survived. The Greek version seems to be a literal one, often preserving the Semitic, and sometimes even the Hebrew, idiom; but it is clear, and probably it is, on the whole, a satisfactory translation. It is transmitted in three uncial manuscripts of the Septuagint—the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus, and the Codex Venetus—as well as in several cursives.- Crawford Howell Toy, George A. Barton, Joseph Jacobs, Israel Abrahams, *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906)

So the Rabbis surely know this source originally existed probably in both Semitic languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, which may explain why they overlook the surviving Greek vessel of that work.

However, this reference from the Jewish Encyclopedia is from 1906, and at that time it appears they were not aware of this important fact: The Aramaic version of all four books of Maccabees has in fact survived. It was maintained by the Jews of Babylon as part of their Peshitta Tanakh or Aramaic OT. Then the Peshitta Tanakh was adopted by Aramaic Christians who did not change the text one bit.

Today, there is one precious manuscript that has this Aramaic-Jewish version of Maccabees. It is called Codex Ambrosianus and it is a complete Aramaic OT with Apocrypha and a book from Josephus' Jewish War, all of which is dated more than 400 years earlier than the earliest complete Hebrew Tanakh manuscript (Leningrad Codex, 1008 CE). Codex Ambrosianus has a date range of no earlier than 500 but no later than 600 CE. What's more, thanks to the long term efforts of the Peshitta Institute in Leiden, Netherlands, an electronic searchable version of this resource has been made available, along with PDFs of the original kept in the University of Milan. Here is the opening page of 1 Maccabees:



However, what is even more surprising still is that while rabbinic awareness of a surviving Aramaic version and a probable lost Hebrew original of Maccabees informed their choice of trusting it as a historical resource, at this hour I have not seen any definitive Jewish scholarship on how this Aramaic version reads. Perhaps such may also change given enough time.

Finally, the Roman Catholic Church accepted 1-2 Maccabees as part of their canon, and even early Protestant English Bibles like Geneva and King James retained them as well. That's staying power!

Does Philo Mention Hanukkah?

Josephus' slightly earlier counterpart, Philo of Alexandria, has a completely different perspective. Several times Josephus tells us he is writing history to set the record straight and also to personally translate the Hebrew Scriptures he knew from the Jerusalem Master Scroll into Greek.

Very briefly the Master Scroll, for those who may be curious, is the definitive and fixed record of all the Hebrew Scriptures that were preserved in the Temple just prior to its destruction. Josephus also tells us he may have procured the last known copy of this

scroll, the last inheritor of a Scriptural tradition that went at least as far back as Ezra and I believe centuries before that.

And how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for, during so many ages as have already passed, **no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them**; but it is becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them. (Josephus, Against Apion, 1:42)

My point in mentioning this is only to contrast Josephus with Philo, for while Philo helps us by showing what the state of the Greek OT translation of the Scripture looked like in Egypt, Josephus is telling us what he has seen in Hebrew, including the now lost Hebrew or Aramaic version of the Book of Maccabees which contains the Hanukkah incident.

Philo however seems rather reluctant to mention Hanukkah directly, perhaps because Philo is trying so desperately to build bridges of understanding between Jews and Gentiles and the story of a Jewish-Gentile war with a zero-sum outcome goes totally against the kind of dialogue he is trying to foster.

Nevertheless, I believe Philo does manage to get in one oblique reference regarding Hanukkah:

Something of this kind, now, is the contribution made by the princes, selected and appointed with reference to worth and merit, which they made when the soul being properly prepared and adorned by philosophy, **was celebrating the festival of the dedication in a sacred and becoming manner, giving thanks to Elohim its teacher and its guide**; for it "offers up a censer full of frankincense, ten golden shekels in weight," [Numbers vii. 14] in order that the wise man alone may judge of the odors which are exhaled by prudence and by every virtue. (On the Preliminary Studies, 1:114)

Philo is extremely precise with words, frequently giving detailed discussions in his writings on both the Hebrew and Greek meanings on the same phrase. Therefore Philo well knows that when the Tabernacle was “dedicated” in Numbers 7, it was never officially called a *chag* or a *moed* and there was no additional remembrance requirement attached to the Hebrew day it happened. About the only thing you can call that occasion, at least just the first day, was a New Moon, but the 12 day occasion as a whole was not a “festival”.

So therefore it seems to me that Philo instead was thinking of the *other* “festival of dedication” for the Second Temple and linking it to its first incarnation, the Tabernacle. Philo further is aware that in the Hebrew text of Numbers 7, the word for dedicating the Tabernacle is most definitely *Hanukkah*.

Tacitus and Hanukkah

Then, around 110 CE, the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus had his own spin on the Hanukkah event. He claimed the victory of the Jews against Antiochus Epiphanes came about because his empire got distracted with Parthia, and not a bit of credit to the Maccabean Revolt!

While the Assyrian, Median and Persian Empires dominated the East, the Jews were slaves regarded as the lowest of the low. In the Hellenistic period, King **Antiochus made an effort to get rid of their primitive cult and Hellenize them, but his would-be reform of this degraded nation was foiled by the outbreak of war with Parthia, for this was the moment of Arsaces' insurrection.**

Then, since the Hellenistic rulers were weak and the Parthians had not yet developed into a great power (Rome, too, was still far away), the Jews established a dynasty of their own. These kings were expelled by the fickle mob, but regained control by force, setting up a reign of terror which embraced, among other typical acts of despotism, the banishment of fellow-citizens, the destruction of cities, and the murder of brothers, wives and parents. The kings encouraged the superstitious Jewish religion, for they assumed the office of High Priest in order to buttress their regime. -The Histories, Book V, 8.

Solomon's Hanukkah

One important foreshadowing clue among many we will go over here demonstrates how the re-dedication of the Second Temple is hidden in the initial dedication of the First Temple:

On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for the **dedication** (תְּנִנָּה) of the altar they observed seven days and the feast seven days. (2 Chronicles 7:9)

On the eighth day he sent the people away and they blessed the king. Then they went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that Master Yah had shown to David His servant and to Israel His people. (1 Kings 8:66)

Here Solomon basically added a week to the Sukkot festival and made the 8th day from when that feast started a very special feast day. As a result the roots of transferring some of Sukkot to Hanukkah go back nearly 800 years before the actual historical Hanukkah shows up!

In essence, the First Temple dedication gives us the length of the future feast and the Second Temple dedication gives us the Hebrew date to do the celebration. Later on though we will see this same 8 day pattern of dedication repeated with Nehemiah, at least according to the historian Josephus.

But our exploration into the Hidden Hanukkah is just getting started! **END PART 1**

PART 2

III. The Traditional Hanukkah readings with commentary

- 1) Zechariah 2:14-4:7
- 2) 1 Kings 7:40-50
- 3) Zot Hanukkah (8th day) –Numbers 7:84

With respect to Zot Hanukkah, it seems very much akin to Shemini Atzeret, the 8th and last day of the Feast with a special blessing. In this case it is Numbers 7:84:

זאת | חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בְּיוֹם הַמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ מֵאֵת נְשִׂאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל קְעֵרֹת כֶּסֶף שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה
מִזְרְקֵי־כֶסֶף שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר כַּפּוֹת זָהָב שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה:

Zot chanukat hamizbe'ach beyom himashach oto me'et nesi'ey Yisra'el ka'arot kesef shteym esreh mizrekey-chesef shneyim asar kapot zahav shteym esreh.

That was the dedication offering for the altar given by the princes of Israel on the day that it was anointed. There were twelve silver bowls, twelve silver sacrificial basins, and twelve gold incense bowls.

In Hasidic lore, this is a kind of 11th day of Awe, the final seal of the Yom Kippur process and a very powerful day to get prayer answered. Again, the linkage with Yom Kippur also suggests that Hanukkah was a belated Sukkot in its first occurrence, becoming a feast officially in its own right as the years passed.

IV. The Passage the Rabbis Forgot for Hanukkah (but shouldn't have)!

What the Rabbis forgot was that while the First Temple was dedicated during Sukkot, the Second Temple—which after all is the one that is being RE-dedicated that first Hanukkah, was dedicated on this familiar date:

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month [7th day Sukkot, Hoshanna Rabba], the word of Yahweh was addressed through the prophet Haggai, as follows, 'You are to speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak the high priest and to the remnant of the people. Say this, "Is there anyone left among you who saw this Temple in its former glory? And how does it look to you now? Does it not seem as though there is nothing there?"

But take courage now, Zerubbabel!-Yahweh declares. Courage, Joshua son of Jehozadak high priest! Courage, all you people of the country!-Yahweh declares. To work! I am with you -- Yahweh Tzavaot declares- and my spirit is present among you. Do not be afraid! For Yahweh Tzavaot says this: A little while now, and I shall shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I shall shake all the nations, and the treasures of

all the nations will flow in, and I shall fill this Temple with glory, says Yahweh Tzavaot. Mine is the silver, mine the gold!-Yahweh Tzavaot declares.

The glory of this new Temple will surpass that of the old, says Yahweh Tzavaot, and in this place I shall give peace -- Yahweh Tzavaot declares." ' '

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (1 day before Hanukkah would happen, on the 25th-AGR), in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh was addressed to the prophet Haggai as follows, 'Yahweh Tzavaot says this, "Ask the priests to give a ruling on this: If someone is carrying consecrated meat in the fold of his gown and allows the fold to touch bread, broth, wine, oil or food of any kind, will that become holy?" ' The priests replied, 'No.'

Haggai then said, 'If anyone rendered unclean by contact with a corpse touches any of these things, will that become unclean?' The priests replied, 'It will become unclean.' Haggai then spoke out. 'It is the same with this people,' he said, 'the same with this nation, in my view -- Yahweh declares -- the same with everything they turn their hands to; and whatever they offer here is unclean.'

'So now think carefully, today and henceforth: before one stone had been laid on another in the sanctuary of Yahweh, what state were you in? You would come to a twenty-measure heap and find only ten; you would come to a vat to draw fifty measures and find only twenty. Everything you turned your hands to, I struck with wind-blast, mildew and hail, and still you would not return to me -- Yahweh declares.'

So think carefully, today and henceforth (from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day the foundation of the sanctuary of Yahweh was laid, think carefully) if seed-corn is still short in the barn, and if vine and fig tree, pomegranate and olive tree still bear no fruit. 'From today onwards I intend to bless you.' On the twenty-fourth day of the month the word of Yahweh was addressed a second time to Haggai, as follows, 'Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah. Say this, "I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.

I shall overturn the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kings of the nations. I shall overthrow the chariots and their crews; horses and their riders will fall, everyone to the sword of his comrade.

When that day comes -- Yahweh Tzavaot declares -- I shall take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel my servant -- Yahweh declares -- and make you like a signet ring. For I have chosen you -- Yahweh Tzavaot declares." ' (Haggai 2:1 23 NJB)

Did you catch that? The Foundation Stone of the Second Temple is laid the 24th day of Kislev. So wouldn't the 25th, the next day, be a great time to have a Feast? And look at this great vision the prophet has. His very name-Haggai—is derived from CHAG—festival and here he is having TWO visions from Abba YHWH about the Temple on that

day. I really think the Rabbis kind of missed a great opportunity here—they SHOULD be reading Haggai 2 on Hanukkah as well!

V. Other Hanukkah clues in Tanakh

In Tanakh there are several occasions where we see “proto-feasts”, meaning events or hints that foreshadow the institution of an Appointed Time or Moed. For example, please consider the following:

- 1) The first time unleavened bread is mentioned is in Genesis 19, where Lot bakes matzah for the two Messengers visiting him in Sodom. General details in the story suggest this was also around the time Pesach would be instituted, early spring.
- 2) The “days of the wheat harvest” is mentioned in Genesis 30:14, where mandrakes are found in the field. In later times we would count the omer towards the wheat harvest and complete it on Shavuot.
- 3) In Exodus, several times Abba YHWH commands, “Let my people Israel go that they might sacrifice to Me in the desert”. This feast, which never happened, seems to have been a placeholder for a feast we now have at the full moon before Pesach—Purim.
- 4) The fact that Sukkot (Tabernacles) is called “the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year” (Exodus 34:22) suggests that this was the original name for an older harvest festival that later became tied to commemorating the Israelites 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Jacob builds SUKKOT for his animals and pitches his tent at SUCCOTH in Genesis 33.

But what about Hanukkah? Where is it hinted at in Tanakh? First of all, we should realize if there were no linkages at all, the Rabbis could not suggest the traditional Scripture readings they do for this occasion. These readings, as we saw, have to do with the establishment of the First Temple, and I also made a suggestion that Haggai 2—dealing with the Second Temple—should also be included in the liturgy.

Beyond those considerations, let’s see where this idea of “dedication” really comes from! Our first clue is actually in Genesis 1, where the 25th word in the Torah is AUR (light). Some rabbis believe this is a foreshadowing of an occasion about lights coming to happen on the 25th day of a given Hebrew month. Another clue has to do with Abraham here:

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his **trained men** (אֲנִיָּוֹת), born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. (Genesis 14:14 NAU)

So here we have the word *chanik* to mean “trained, reliable, dedicated”, and this is where we get the term *Hanukkah* which by the way is an Aramaic word:

3245 הַנְּבִיחַ [3246] (Hebrew) (page 335) (Strong 2598). † הַנְּבִיחַ n.f. dedication, consecration, as a matter of usage only P and late (NH הַנְּבִיחַ Feast of Dedication; so Aram. הַנְּבִיחַ)—abs ח' Ne 12:27; cstr. הַנְּבִיחַ Nu 7:10 + 6 t.; dedication of wall of Jerus. Ne 12:27, 12:27, by sacrifices and processions, with music; of altar in temple 2 Ch 7:9; of ' the house ' Psalm 30:1 (title), i.e. the temple (re-dedication by Judas Maccab., 1 Macc. 4:52 ff.), v. O1 Bae al. (opp. De), and esp. Che:OP 234. 247; = *dedication-offering* for altar in tabernacle Nu 7:10 (acc. c. וַיִּקְרִיבוּ), cf. לְחַנּוּכַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יִקְרִיבוּ אֶת־קֹרְבָנָם v:11, also v:84, v:88 (all P; v Di Nu 7:20).

Now what we need to look at is this fact: There was literally a HANUKKAH CEREMONY in the Tanakh. The same word is recorded in Nehemiah, chapter 12:

Now at the **dedication** (הַנְּבִיחַ) of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the **dedication** (הַנְּבִיחַ) with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs *to the accompaniment* of cymbals, harps and lyres. (Nehemiah 12:27 NAU)

Doesn't this sound eerily familiar?

Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon; but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored Elohim, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. **And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival.** (Antiquities, 12.323-325)

Not only that, but we have this binding tie as well:

Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our Elohim, being related to Tobiah, had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, **the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites**, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. (Nehemiah 13:4-5)

8036 יֶצֶהָר [8037] (Hebrew) (page 844) (Strong 3323). † I. **יֶצֶהָר n.[m.]** fresh oil (newly appeared, cf. 'Ausbruch' Lag:BN 129 Kö:ii. 1:93; > **Thes al. that which shines**);—*abs.* 'צ' Ho 2:10 +, sf. יֶצֶהָרָה Dt 7:13 +;—*fresh oil*, as product of land, in un-manufactured state, usu. + תִּירוּשׁ, תִּירוּשׁוֹ, תִּירוּשׁוֹת etc., rich possession, gift of, 'י Ho 2:10, 2:24, Je 31:12, Dt 7:13, 11:14, Jo 2:19, 2:24, so 'צ' חֶלֶב Nu 18:12; Dt 28:51, Hg 1:11, 2 Ch 32:28, Ne 5:11; tithed Dt 12:17, 14:23; firstfruits for priest 18:4, Ne 10:38 cf. v:40, 13:5 (tithe for Levites), v:12, for priest and Levite 2 Ch 31:5; 'צ' זֵית 2 K 18:32 *oil-olive*, i.e. oil-yielding olive-trees, cf. 'צ' alone Jo 1:10; 'צ' as *anointing oil* only in 'הֵי צ' זֵיתָה Zc 4:14, i.e. anointed ones.

This specific kind of oil, NEW OIL or (יֶצֶהָר) is actually called “that which shines”, meaning it is used to for special lamp lightings in connection with festivals! This means there was not only a CHANUKKAH ceremony in Nehemiah, it was ALSO a FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS as well!

Therefore, anyone who says that the lighting of candles at Hanukkah stems from paganism, **simply doesn't know what they are talking about! Lights have been a part of “dedications” centuries before the Maccabean Revolt AND endorsed in Scripture on top of it.**

Then the historian Josephus adds more interesting details to this Biblical occasion in Nehemiah here:

And this trouble he underwent for two years and four months; for in so long a time was the wall built, in the twenty-eighth year of the reign of Xerxes, **in the ninth month**. Now when the walls were finished, Nehemiah and the multitude offered sacrifices to Elohim for the building of them; **and they continued in feasting eight days**. (Antiquities 11:179-180)

So, as we saw earlier with Solomon and just like Hanukkah in the far future from this point in Scripture, we have a DEDICATION ceremony that lasts eight days. And also like Hanukkah, it takes place specifically in the ninth Hebrew month of Kislev!

In short, the combination of the dedication of the Second Temple in Haggai 2 is combined with themes in the dedication of the rebuilt wall in Jerusalem in Nehemiah 12-13 along with the exact kind of oil and lighting procedures such occasions commanded, and ALL these are weaved into the occasion that is Hanukkah! No wonder Y'shua himself endorsed this “optional” feast during the rainy season!

And finally, we should take a moment to explore the mystical and poetic sides of the term Hanukkah.

First, the word can be broken down in this manner:

חנו כ"ה =

They rested on the 25th!

The word NOACH—where we get the name “Noah” means “rest or comfort”. The letters KAPH and HEH add up to 25.

Secondly the word Hanukkah can have each letter in it start another Hebrew word to spell out a message. We call this process an ACROSTIC. It works this way:

Eight (ח/hey) candles (נְרוֹת/nerot) and halacha (ההלכה) like the house (הבית/kibeyt) of Hillel (הלל)

We will discuss though the full meaning of this message—i.e. the difference of opinion between Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai on how to do Hanukkah—a little later on.

VI. Hanukkah in the Renewed Covenant

1) Let’s delve into the Aramaic phrase “Feast of Dedication” in Yochanan 10:22!

And it was the AIDAH D’KHODATA (עֲאִדָּה דְחֻדָּתָא) in Jerusalem and it was winter.

AIDAH is simply the Aramaic cognate for CHAG, “feast/festival”, and it applies to both major or Great Feasts like Passover (Matthew 27:15) and minor ones such as Purim (Yochanan 5:1). However, it doesn’t have the “legal force” of requiring partial or total rest as the Annual Sabbaths in Pesach and Sukkot and elsewhere do. That aspect is addressed in separate Aramaic terminology, similar to the Hebrew term MOEDIM.

But it is KHODATA that should demand our special attention. It doesn’t merely mean “dedication” or even “re-dedication”, but has a special root-core meaning that is expressed in these NT passages:

And be not conformed to this world; but be you transformed by the **renovation** (חֻדָּתָא) of your minds: and discern you what is the good and acceptable and perfect pleasure of Elohim. –Romans 12:2 (AENT)

But when the kindness and compassion of Elohim our Life-Giver was revealed, not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy, he revived us by the washing of the new birth and by the **renovation** (חֻדָּתָא) of the Ruach haKodesh.-Titus 3:4-5 (AENT)

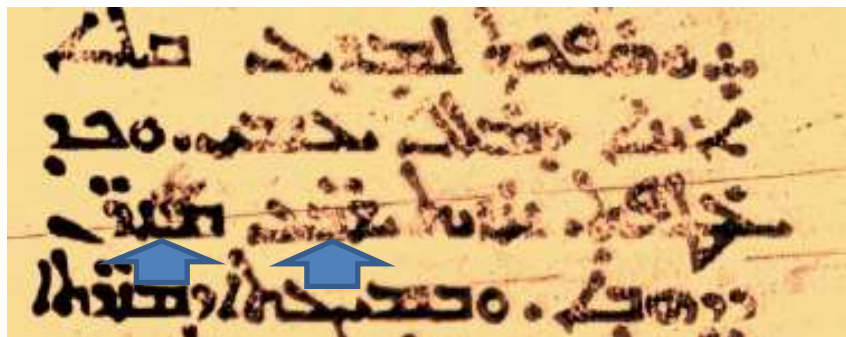
So this word is not just “dedicate” as an abstract concept, it is RENEWAL of spirit that leads to purer dedication. This makes sense because the Temple was not just re-

dedicated, it was “made new” or “restored” to prime condition. In fact this is the SAME word for the “new” in New Testament/RE-newed Covenant, CHADASH/CHADATA.

- 2) Those “lampstands” in Revelation are also menorahs! Although these menorahs are the seven branched variety and not the nine-branched Hanukkah version, there is still a lot of Hanukkah imagery and resonance:

And I turned myself to look at the voice that talked with me; and when I had turned, **I saw seven menorahs of gold; and, in the midst of the menorahs, one like the Son of man, clothed to the feet**, and turned about in a robe reaching to his feet with a girdle of gold. And his head and his hair were white, like white wool, like snow; and his eyes, like a flame of fire: and his feet were like fine brass, flaming in a furnace: and his voice, like the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and from his mouth issued a fervent spirit; and his countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet like one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, and said, “Fear not: I am the First and the Last; and who lives and was dead; and behold, I am alive for ever and ever. Amen. And I have the keys of death and of the unseen world. Therefore, write what you have seen, and the things that are; and the things that are to be after this: **the mystery of these seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven menorahs of gold. Those seven stars are the Messengers of the seven assemblies; and the seven menorahs are the seven assemblies.**” –Revelation 1:12-20 (AENT)

והפכת למדע קלא אינא דמלל עמי וכד עטפת חזית שבע מנרן דדהבא¹²
(Rev. 1:12 PES)



Revelation 1:12 from the Crawford Codex (11th C). Used with permission of the Rylands Institute, University of Manchester, UK. Blue arrows points to the phrase *seven menorahs*.

- 3) Detailed reading and study of Yochanan 10:22-42:

(Joh 10:22) And the Feast of Dedication occurred in Urishlim and it was winter.

In 29 CE, Hanukkah was from sunset on Sunday, December 16th to sunset on Monday, December 24th, the middle of the feast crosses the winter solstice on the 21st.

(Joh 10:23) And Y'shua was walking in the temple in the porch of Shleemon. (Joh 10:24) And the Yehudeans surrounded him and said to him, "How long will you hold our souls if you are the Mashiyach? Tell us openly." (Joh 10:25) Y'shua answered and said to them, "I have told you and you do not believe! And the works that I do in the Name of my Father they testify concerning me.

(Joh 10:26) But you do not believe because you are not of my sheep, just as I have told you. (Joh 10:27) My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they come after me. (Joh 10:28) And I give to them life that is eternal and they will not perish and no man will ever snatch them from my hands. (Joh 10:29) For my Father who gave them to me is greater than all, and no man is able to snatch them from the hands of my Father. (Joh 10:30) I and the Father are one."

(Joh 10:31) And again the Yehudeans took up rocks to stone him. (Joh 10:32) Y'shua said to them, "Many pleasing works from the presence of my Father I have shown you. For which of them do you stone me?"

(Joh 10:33) The Yehudeans said to him, "It is not because of the pleasing works that we stone you, rather because you do blaspheme and that while you are a Son of man you make yourself Elohim!" (Joh 10:34) Y'shua said to them, "Is it not written in your Torah that 'I have told you that you are Elohim.'

(Joh 10:35) If those people he called Elohim because the Miltha of Elohim was with them and Scripture is not able to be broken. (Joh 10:36) To him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world you say, 'You blaspheme!' concerning that I had told you that 'I am the Son of Elohim.' (Joh 10:37) Unless I do the works of my Father, do not believe me.

(Joh 10:38) If, however, I do them even if you do not believe me, you believe the works that you may know and believe that my Father is in me and I am in my Father." (Joh 10:39) And they were seeking again to seize him, but he escaped from their hands. (Joh 10:40) And he went to the crossing of the Yordanan to the place where Yochanan had been previously when he was immersing, and there he remained. (Joh 10:41) And many men came to him and were saying that Yochanan did not even one miracle, but everything that Yochanan said concerning this man is true. (Joh 10:42) And many believed in him.

END PART 2

PART THREE

VII. Echoes of the Cause of Hanukkah

Another reason to celebrate Hanukkah is that not only did it inaugurate the last independent Jewish kingdom of any kind in Israel prior to 1948, but that it also marked the last *somewhat successful* revolt against the insidious forces of Hellenism.

I say “somewhat successful” because a more modern take on Hanukkah asserts that the struggle of the Maccabean Revolt was more about two Jewish factions vying for power. One was Hellenistic, and the other one was even more Hellenistic!

So when we talk about the Maccabean victory, in the view of many like me, that victory did not go far enough. Granted the high priests that came next were better than the ones we could have had, but they still were not good enough. And so I think today’s historians really hit the mark when they point such intricacies out, like here:

Modern scholarship on the other hand considers the Maccabean revolt less an uprising against foreign oppression than as a civil war between the orthodox and reformist parties in the Jewish camp.-Joseph P. Schultz, (1981). *Judaism and the Gentile Faiths: Comparative Studies in Religion*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, p. 15.

Of course, this does not mean the Hanukkah commemoration is not also at its heart about repelling foreign oppressors. Rather, this post-modernist take merely asserts that some of the foreign intrigues would not have been as successful if it were not also for the internal struggle of how Jewish one should act in the wider world that was splitting the faithful apart.

Therefore, while many take comfort that the Jews entered a period of self-rule and kicked out the invaders, others point out that bad things happened in the wake of establishing that last Jewish kingdom, such as:

- 1) The original priests, the sons of Zadok, were kicked out in favor of the Hasmonean kings opting to serve as both rulers and high priests at the same time. The Zadokites had served their office faithfully since the time of David and were praised by Ezekiel for maintaining high standards.
- 2) As a result, many of the high priests that followed were little more than political puppets. Many were not righteous and some were not even sons of Aaron.
- 3) The Torah mandate that high priests serve for life (at least we are never told in Torah of one high priest replacing another while the elder lives) and that the current high priest chooses his successor were set aside and put into the hands of the uncircumcised powers that be.

And even when it seemed the Jews in the last two centuries when the Temple was standing did pick a high priest for themselves, Josephus complains the system was so corrupted by this time that it almost didn't matter:

And now the multitudes were going to rise against them already; for Ananus, the most senior of the high priests, persuaded them to it. He was a very prudent man, and had perhaps saved the city if he could have escaped the hands of those who plotted against him. These men made the temple of God a stronghold for them, and a place where they might resort, in order to avoid the troubles they feared from the people; the sanctuary was now become a refuge and a headquarters for tyranny.

They also mixed jesting among the miseries they introduced, which was more intolerable than what they did; for, in order to try what surprise the people would be under, and how far their own power extended, they undertook to dispose of the high priesthood by casting lots for it, whereas, as we have said already, it was to descend by succession in a family.

The pretense they made for this strange attempt was an ancient practice, while they said that of old it was determined by lot; but in truth, it was no better than a dissolution of an undeniable law, and a cunning contrivance to seize upon the government, derived from those who presumed to appoint governors as they themselves pleased.

Hereupon they sent for one of the high priests' families, which is called Eniachim, and cast lots which of it should be the high priest. By fortune the lot so fell as to demonstrate their iniquity after the plainest manner, for it fell upon one whose name was Phannias, the son of Samuel, of the village Aphtha. He was a man not only unworthy of the high priesthood, but that did not well know what the high priesthood was, such a clown was he!

Yet did they hail this man, without his own consent, out of the country, as if they were acting a play upon the stage, and adorned him with a mask; they also put upon him the sacred garments, and upon every occasion instructed him what he was to do.

This horrid piece of wickedness was sport and pastime with them, but occasioned the other priests, who at a distance saw their law made a jest of, to shed tears, and sorely lament the dissolution of such a sacred dignity. (The Jewish War, 4:151-157)

Nor did the Hasmonean victory prevent other Gentiles from defiling the Temple later on. Almost a century later, Roman general Pompey the Great did exactly that in 63 BCE:

Now of the Jews were slain twelve thousand; but of the Romans very few were slain, but a greater number was wounded.

But there was nothing that affected the nation so much, in the calamities they were then under, as that their holy place, which had been hereto seen by none, should be laid open to strangers; for Pompey, and those who were with him, went into the temple itself, where it was not lawful for any to enter but the high priest, and saw what was deposited therein, the lampstand with its lamps, and the table, and the pouring vessels, and the censers, all made entirely of gold, as also a great quantity of spices heaped together, with two thousand talents of sacred money.

Yet did not he touch that money, nor anything else that was there deposited; but he commanded the ministers about the temple, the very next day after he had taken it, to cleanse it, and to perform their accustomed sacrifices.

Moreover, he made Hyrcanus high priest, as one that not only in other respects had showed great alacrity on his side, during the siege, but as he had been the means of hindering the multitude that was in the country from fighting for Aristobulus, which they were otherwise very ready to have done; by which means he acted the part of a good general, and reconciled the people to him more by benevolence than by terror. (The Jewish War, 1:151-153)

And finally, in 40 CE, the Temple was almost destroyed thirty years before Titus did it when the Roman Emperor Caligula attempted to have a golden statue of his likeness and the name Jupiter on it put in the Holy of Holies. Fortunately the province of Judea was given a bit of a reprieve and Caligula backed down, but less than a generation later it was literally all over.

My point in all this is simple: As long as the pure worship of Father Yah and His Son Y'shua ha Mashiach is under threat to become wholly Gentile, the struggle of the Maccabees goes on to this very moment!

VIII. Early Gentile Christian Parallels to the Hanukkah Event (An open letter to the Church)

And for those folks who are still thoroughly wedded to the mainstream church and see little to no parallels between Hanukkah and Y'shua, I have this suggestion to offer you, particularly at this time of year.

It is very easy to forget that for three centuries, from the death of Y'shua on the torture stake to the Council of Nicea in 325 CE that Jews and Christians were equally persecuted by Rome and that Christians were just as willing to die as monotheists as Jews were.

So when the Jews and Hebrew Roots believers in your midst celebrate Hanukkah and you feel that your Christmas traditions are more than adequate, it would do well to remember that many of those traditions came from the Roman Empire first, and what the Jews went

through under Antiochus Epiphanes, your people most certainly also suffered under the Roman Emperors!

I offer to you then, in an effort to give you back your own history, Exhibit A: The Letter of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan on how to deal with Christians, and see please if this does not strike a chord in terms of what we have been discussing about Hanukkah and the Jews.

From 111-113 CE, Pliny the Younger was a Roman governor in Asia Minor, at a place called Pontus and Bithynia. If those names sound familiar, it's because both Peter and Paul ministered to believers there (Acts 16:7, 1 Peter 1:1).

Pliny, who freely admits he has very little leadership experience, writes to the Emperor on how he dealt with those "heretics" (from the Roman view, how interesting when the shoe is on the other foot!) who believe in Messiah. Pliny's brutal efficiency in his first attempts with this matter should put just as great a chill down your spine as the evil deeds and Antiochus and the eventual destruction of the Second Temple by Rome in 70 CE put a chill down mine. In any case, these are Pliny and Trajan's words, not mine, and this is what the record shows us:

**Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96-97, from
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/pliny.html>**

Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they

invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.

Trajan to Pliny the Younger

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

IX. The Modern Dilemmas of Hanukkah (and that other little feast on the other 25th day)

Hanukkah presents a number of complexities also that I don't think exist with any other feast. For one thing, it is the only major Jewish feast that is NOT in Tanakh but IS IN the Renewed Covenant. What's more, most Rabbis don't read the Renewed Covenant and most Christians who do read it don't practice Hanukkah but a feast originally dedicated to a Persian god instead!

Meanwhile, while many Christians ask WWYD (What Would Y'shua Do?) they refuse to even learn about the winter feast HE DID KEEP. Every year I get dozens of letters from well-meaning ex-church folks who feel "terrible" they have to "deny" their kids presents all of a sudden in December. It is for them that I tell them NO, they do NOT have to deny their kids but can do Hanukkah instead!

Then in Hebrew Roots circles, others ask questions like "Is the gift giving pagan?" and that's a much harder issue to answer well. The idea of giving presents is clearly a pagan one. The ancient Greeks, for example, baked cakes with candles in them to celebrate the birthday of Artemis. They would sing a song to the goddess and blow out the candles! Then in the book of Revelation we have this little piece of information:

"And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth...Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; **and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.** (Revelation 11:3,9-10 NAU)

Contrast this with the Magi in Matthew—the wise man with the frankincense didn't exchange gifts with the one who had the gold. No one went, "Oh, Balshazzar! You shouldn't have!" (And that would be correct, he shouldn't have!)

The problem is, the Nativity stories in Matthew and Luke simply cannot bear "Christmas Logic" because it doesn't line up with Gospel facts. The main fact is this: The wise men did not bring gifts for each other, but brought gifts for Y'shua the Mashiyach! So then, where is HIS gift, assuming he was even born in December, which he clearly was NOT.

The fact is, Y'shua was born just before the start of Sukkot, 14 Tishri (Friday, September 13th, 5 BCE) according to my research. In general, a Sukkot Nativity is widely supported throughout the Hebrew Roots community even if folks don't agree with my date which is, in any case, a longer story than I have time to tell at the moment. **So if you want to somehow remember Y'shua's birth in a kosher way, think about him at Sukkot just like you think of his death at Pesach. But don't tell me a Jewish birthday needs presents for all because first century Jews themselves didn't do birthdays.**

But for Hebrew Roots believers, Nazarenes and so on, there is one more aspect to the history that might really help get the celebrations flowing: **Since we agree that Y'shua was born at Sukkot, that means he had to be conceived 9 months earlier, at**

Hanukkah, the Light of the World at the Festival of Lights! If that's not a party, I don't know what is! I know, why not light a few candles???

On the other hand, Hanukkah's association with children and gift giving is, like Christmas, a fairly recent innovation-17th century Poland as a matter of fact. The Rabbis didn't like their kids feeling deprived at December either! But notice I said gift giving is "recent" with Christmas too? That's also true.

In fact, you don't get anywhere near giving gifts to kids on December 25th until you reach the middle of the 19th century. In the early years of the American colonies and later in the United States, Christmas found itself banned as too riotous. In some places in New England, a new holiday called Thanksgiving was called in to replace it.

And in terms of overall American history, to give just one example, George Washington crosses the Delaware River on December 25th to launch a surprise attack in the Revolutionary War, because it was just another work day to them, but the German Hessians on the other side were, admittedly, very drunk in the manner that many Europeans kept that day. It is also from the Germans that we get the Christmas tree for when Queen Victoria married her German Prince Albert, all of a sudden the trees were everywhere.

Furthermore, the reason December 25th really was, as Scrooge in a Christmas Carol said, "a poor reason to pick a man's pocket" was because at that time, the poor would expect to be given free food and drink in the houses of the rich. If they thought the food and drink was cheap, they had the right to trash the place, making this time of year more like Halloween, trick or treat.

In actual truth, this "wassailing" practice goes back to pagan Roman winter solstice feasts like the Saturnalia where slaves were put in charge of their masters, and the lowest slave of them all was proclaimed "the Lord of Mis-rule". It's important to know the real history of these things, to be immune from the hype.

But speaking of Scrooge, did you know that his first name, Ebenezer, is Hebrew for *rock of help*? Did you also know that personal name is in turn named after a place that held the Ark of the Covenant and also was named after a victory won by Samuel himself (1 Samuel 4:1, 5:1,7:12)? In fact, it is in that very part of the Scripture that we find something very similar to a feast of dedication going on:

And the men of Qiryath Ye'arim came and took the ark of יהוה, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and set apart El'azar his son to guard the ark of יהוה. And it came to be, from the day that the ark remained in Qiryath Ye'arim, that the time increased, it came to be twenty years. And all the house of Yisra'el lamented after יהוה. And Shemu'el spoke to all the house of Yisra'el, saying, "**If you return to יהוה with all your hearts** (i.e. re-dedicate yourselves to Him—AGR), then put away the foreign mighty ones and Ashtaroth from among you,

and prepare your hearts for יהוה, **and serve Him only, so that He delivers you from the hand of the Philistines.**”

And the children of Yisra’el put away the Ba’als and Ashtaroth, and served יהוה only. And Shemu’el said, “Gather all Yisra’el to Mitspah and let me pray to יהוה for you.” **And they gathered to Mitspah and drew water,** and poured it out before יהוה. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against יהוה.” And Shemu’el rightly ruled the children of Yisra’el at Mitspah.

And when the Philistines heard that the children of Yisra’el had gathered together at Mitspah, the princes of the Philistines went up against Yisra’el. And the children of Yisra’el heard of it, and were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Yisra’el said to Shemu’el, “Do not cease to cry out to יהוה our Elohim for us, that He would save us from the hand of the Philistines.”

And Shemu’el took a suckling lamb and offered it as a burnt offering, completely, to יהוה. And Shemu’el cried out to יהוה for Yisra’el, and יהוה answered him. And it came to be, as Shemu’el offered up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Yisra’el. But יהוה thundered with a great noise on that day on the Philistines, and troubled them, and they were smitten before Yisra’el.

And the men of Yisra’el went out from Mitspah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Bēyth Kar. And Shemu’el took a stone and set it up between Mitspah and Shēn, **and called its name Eben Ha’ēzer, saying, “Thus far יהוה has helped us.”**

Thus the Philistines were humbled, and no longer came into the border of Yisra’el. And the hand of יהוה was against the Philistines all the days of Shemu’el. (1 Samuel 7:1-13, The Scriptures 1998)

All this at “Eben-ezer”...not bad. Even Scrooge’s creator, Charles Dickens, while trying to inaugurate what he felt were better holiday traditions, used the miser to warn about the capitalistic excesses of this holiday even back in his day, the 1840’s. For example, how does this assessment by Scrooge sound?

What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in them through a round dozen months presented dead against you?

He should know, since in the book Scrooge ran a *counting house*, his own accounting firm, for banks and businesses. If anyone knows about having credit blues in January, it’s this guy.

And no, I will not suggest Scrooge was a kind of hero in disguise since his elitist arrogance with “if the poor are to die let them do it quickly and decrease the surplus population” is a fitting caricature of the “robber barons” of the time.

On the other hand, neither will I sanction the idea that Scrooge’s statements about the hypocrisy at this time of year can only be viewed from the lens of him just being a misinformed bad guy.

Also, to be sure, while his nephew Fred may present a very well intentioned argument to the contrary, you can’t build a novel around him. To me, Scrooge would not work so well as a main character if the ills he perceived did not exist at all, so bah, humbug, to just waiting for him to transform at the end.

But getting back to Hanukkah, people still want to know if the Rabbis adding the gift giving as an option is sufficient to “justify” giving gifts at Hanukkah now.

To answer, I would first point out this is NOT Y’shua’s birthday at Hanukkah anyway, so that difficulty is side-stepped. But the real deciding factor is to see if gift giving actually goes with the tenor of how the real festivals were kept. For that, let’s go to the historian Josephus:

Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, **and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon**; but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored Elohim, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. (Antiquities, 12.323)

I don’t think it’s a stretch then to suggest that, “omitting no sort of pleasures thereon” could not include some form of gift giving and celebration. Certainly gifts would have been exchanged—for this was customary—among the victorious Maccabean army for a job well done!

And then we have this little detail, from Maccabees, about how the people at this Holiday Party decided to give gifts after all, but to Father Yah instead!

For eight days they celebrated the dedication of the altar, joyfully offering burnt offerings, communion and **thanksgiving sacrifices**. They ornamented the front of the Temple with crowns and bosses of gold, renovated the gates and storerooms, providing the latter with doors. There was no end to the rejoicing among the people, since the disgrace inflicted by the gentiles had been effaced. (1 Maccabees 4:56-58 NJB)

Thanksgiving sacrifices = An optional offering that is given to Father Yah to celebrate His very special favor or deliverance.

In the final scheme of things then, giving gifts to your children in December while teaching them about the re-dedication of the Temple, these other grand Scripture themes and the conception of Y'shua to boot, don't seem like a terrible decision to me.

On the other hand though, if we are not careful, Hanukkah itself may one day become as overly commercialized as Christmas is now. I know some folks who think this is already true now. Let's be careful and keep the Mashiyach in Hanukkah but as for the Christ in Christmas, he never was there to begin with.

So celebrate yes. Tell the story yes. Read John 10, absolutely, but please don't make me have to do a parody late in my life called "Have Yourself a Jewish Style Christmas"! Every winter I bite my tongue...

X. How to Observe Hanukkah

(From Wikipedia)

There are three Chanukah blessings ([Modern Hebrew](#): בְּרִכּוֹת לְחֲנוּכָּה *Birkhat L'hanukah*, [Lit](#): Chanukah blessings) that are sung for lighting the candles of the [menorah](#). The third blessing ([shehecheyanu](#)) is only sung on the first night. After the two or three blessings are sung, [Hanerot Halalu](#) is chanted. The following blessings are transliterated according to proper Modern Hebrew.

English	Hebrew	Transliteration
Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah lights.	<p>בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי וְצִוּוֵנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנוּכָּה:</p>	<p>Baruch Ata Yah-weh, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kidi'shanu b'mitzvotav, vitzi-vanu le- had lik ner, shel Ha-nu-kah.</p>
Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim, King of the universe, Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time.	<p>בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה</p>	<p>Baruch Atah Yah-weh Elo- heinu melech ha'olam, she'asah nisim l'avotenu bayamim hahem baz'man hazeh.</p>

	<p>נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בֵּימֵים הַהֵם בְּזֶמֶן הַזֶּה:</p>	
<p>Blessed are you, Yahweh our Elohim, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us and allowed us to reach this season.</p>	<p>בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיִּנו וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגַּעְנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה:</p>	<p>Baruch Atah Yah-weh Eloheinu melekh ha'olam shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higianu lazman hazeh.</p>

How to Light the Candles

Earlier we saw the acronym associated with Hanukkah, “Eight days and the halacha is like the House of Hillel”. The house of Hillel was the most popular rabbinic school in ancient times, but it had a rival in the stricter House of Shammai. Hillel and Shammai knew each other and were friendly rivals. Some have suggested that Shammai was always the rigid one and Hillel was always too liberal, but this is a vast oversimplification as there are places where Shammai’s rules are easier and Hillel’s rules are harder. Generally speaking though, the school of Hillel did seem more open to discussion and since it prevailed in the Mishnah most of the time, well, as they say, the winners write history.

Hillel and Shammai had no less than 312 disagreements that we know of in the Mishnah, and many scholars suggest it could be quite a bit more than that. One of these rules was with respect to how to light the candles of the menorah at Hanukkah. It’s actually a good thing that they argued about this because it is one of the few times Hanukkah even gets mentioned in this literature at all!

The disagreement boiled down to this: Shammai believed the proper way to light the candles was to do all of them the first night and decrease the number of candles lit by one each successive night. Hillel on the other hand wanted to do it the other way, where you start with the central candle (the shamash) and light one candle the first night, two candles the second night and so on until the 8th and final night.

As for the order of lighting the candles, you can get more information on that aspect here:

<http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/How-To-Light-The-Hanukkah-Menorah.htm>

What About Dreidels?

Over the years, a lot of speculation has centered around the role of dreidels—wooden spin-top toys used by children at Hanukkah—and if these are somehow talismans transmitting messages of dark intent.

The answer is no of course, but that doesn't mean dreidels are merely toys without a wider message or purpose at all. Judaism looks for every opportunity to transmit its traditions the next generation. This is not just the purpose of Hanukkah but the Pesach seder, Shabbat commemoration and just about every other aspect of Jewish life.

The dreidel is meant to tell the story of Hanukkah with the four letters of the Hebrew alaph-beyt each standing for the first letter of a word. There are two types of dreidels. The first kind, which is largely for Jews outside of Israel, has the letters: נ (Nun), ג (Gimel), ה (Hei), ש (Shin), which forms the acronym, *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham*, or “a great miracle happened THERE (Israel).” But if you live in Israel the dreidel message will alter slightly and have the letters נ (Nun), ג (Gimel), ה (Hei), פ (Pei), or *Nes Gadol Hayah Pol*, “a great miracle happened HERE (in our current home of Israel)”.

The Jewish people have long recognized the power of memory enhancing tools to keep their culture alive through all manner of wars, pogroms and dispersions. Other obvious methods for this include the singing of songs, playing games as is the case here and the baking of traditional food to commemorate a particular occasion. At the heart of it all is not darkness or magic, but remembering the light of Abba YHWH's grace.

Traditional Hanukkah foods

Speaking of traditional food, while nothing is “binding” there have been a number traditional dishes that have come to be associated with the Feast. These recipes stem more from Europe than the Middle East but are enjoyed by Jews the world over. The two main dishes are *latkes* or potato pancakes and *loukomades* which are puffs that are deep fried in honey. Not exactly health food but happy food for the festival. Since cooking is not my area of expertise, allow me to direct all of you to this site for more information:

<http://homecooking.about.com/od/jewishholidays/a/hanukkahfoods.htm>

XI. Relationship to other Post-Mosaic feasts, like Purim

Hanukkah and Purim both represent a different kind of feast. Both refer to important events in the history of the Jewish people that happened many centuries after Moshe's death. Both holidays were also kept by Y'shua—Purim in Yochanan 5 and Hanukkah in

Yochanan 10. Both even have similar forms of foods to eat—each using a kind of potato latke for their feast.

It also seems that in Yochanan’s mind, Hanukkah was the more important occasion. I say this because in his narrative he calls out the occasion by name, but in 5:1 it is simply the generic “Feast of the Jews” and it takes then no small amount of detective work to figure out which “Feast of the Jews” he meant!

However, if my personal opinion is correct, both Hanukkah and Purim have deep roots in Tanakh that hold a place for their future occurrence and fulfillment. Some might say that anything we have Post-Moshe must be inferior or less binding, but I would disagree. I believe that Abba YHWH’s saving grace for His people should be celebrated every day of every year and so if there is a historical event that does that, so much the better. As long as it is Scriptural and doesn’t replace a Chag or Moed then I think further discussion would reveal such an endeavor to be positive.

X. Conclusions

It’s hard for me to not get at least a little emotional or sentimental about Hanukkah. I find it has a grace and beauty—along with an air of mystery—that no other time of year does. This is not to say that Hanukkah is more important than Pesach, more joyful than Sukkot or more powerful and solemn than Yom Kippur.

But, on the other hand, Hanukkah in its own way stands apart by giving us a number of challenges in wider history and some have found the way to placing it properly in Torah observance paradigms odd or difficult. For me though, there is nothing more natural or right than to remember our history and venerate the Set-Apart time that was so important to our Savior that he walked 90 miles in the rainy season to get to it, knowing he would also have a nasty argument waiting for him when he got there. If Y’shua can do that, I don’t see why we can’t at least remember the real story behind the legends and the Scriptural truth that lies at the heart of it all.

To that end I wanted to close with one other apocryphal quote to tie all these strands, whether Scriptural, extra-Scriptural or legendary, together. It’s a quote that allegedly comes from Baruch, son of Neriah, the scribe to the prophet Jeremiah. Although the text clearly did not come from him, the sentiment by whoever wrote it seems both genuine and appropriate to close with and what he talks about with respect to Solomon I think applies equally well to Hanukkah:

And there was at that time the building of Zion, the dedication of the sanctuary, and the shedding of much blood of the nations that sinned then and many offerings which were offered then in the dedication of the sanctuary.

***P*ence and tranquility existed at that time. *W*isdom was heard in the assembly. *T*he riches of understanding were magnified in the congregations. *T*he *S*et-*A*part festivals were fulfilled in blessedness and in much joy. *T*he judgement of the rulers was then seen to be without guile and the righteousness of the precepts of the *M*ighty *O*ne was accomplished with truth.**

***T*he land that was then beloved by *M*aster *Y*ah, because its inhabitants did not sin, was glorified beyond all lands! *T*he city *Z*ion ruled then over all lands and regions. *T*hese are the bright waters which you have seen. (*A*pocalypse of *B*aruch, 61:2-8)**

Truly, a great miracle happened over there, *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham*, but my prayer is equally wonderful miracles will happen with you and your house as we turn reverently to Master Yah and His Son Y'shua the Mashiyach, the Light of the World, for our own great deliverance!

May that final restoration of His Truth come, speedily and in our days! Chag Sameyach to you and your houses and, as not-so tiny 2 Tim 2:19 observed: May Master Yah bless us...everyone!

Andrew Gabriel Roth

December 10th, 2017