

# Celebrating *Hanukkah* – *The Festival of Lights*

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The word “Hanukkah” means “dedication,” and it is a celebration of another of God’s miraculous deliverances of His people. It is a joyful remembrance of the victory God gave His people, led by the Maccabees family, over the wicked Syrian ruler, Antiochus IV, around 165 b.c. He had forbidden them from practicing their religion, was trying to force them to give up their faith in the One True God, and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. But he far underestimated the strength of the faith and resolve of the people of the Most High. There was a little family, living in a little town in Israel; the head of the family was a man named Mattathias. He and his five sons brought the people together, inspired them to rise up against the Syrians, and mounted a revolt against overwhelming odds. Mattathias and his sons were given the nickname, *Maccabees*, which means “*Hammer*,” as they dropped the hammer on the enemy, defeating the Syrians and re-taking Jerusalem!

The total uprising actually lasted three years, but in the end, the Maccabees were successful. As they took control of Jerusalem though, the people were horrified to find the Temple completely desecrated, as they had set up idols of their false gods and even sacrificed pigs on the altar. They did a cleansing of the Temple, removed all the idols, and rebuilt the altar. They also found that the oil lamp that was to burn continuously, never going out, had only enough holy oil to burn for one day. It was an eight day process to purify more oil for the light. Miraculously, the oil in the light lasted eight days—until the new oil had been prepared! It was the cleansing of the Temple and God performing the miracle of the oil burning for eight days, that was celebrated at the rededication of the Temple to Yahweh, as His worship and service was restored. It was given the name *Hanukkah*...and became known as the Festival of Dedication, or Festival of Lights.

During the eight day celebration, a special Hanukkah Menorah with nine candles is lit. The ninth candle, usually in a prominent position, is used to light the other candles. On the first night, the ninth candle is lit, and used to light the first night’s candle. One additional candle is lit each night, from left to right, in remembrance of God’s miracle with the oil in the light, until all nine are lit on the final night. It is traditionally lit in the evening for at least 30 minutes. One of the blessings recited each night is: “*Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.*” Special foods, games, and giving of gifts are a part of the celebration. It is a time of rejoicing and fellowship, reading Scripture, singing praises, and giving thanks to the Lord for His mighty miracles on behalf of His people. This is an example for us to keep telling the wonders God does in our lives today, so that we and others never forget His miracles and deliverance.<sup>1</sup>

## **How it Reveals Jesus:**

The Festival of Lights is a picture of how God saved His people, the Body of Christ, through His Son, Jesus. We were miraculously delivered out of the hand of the enemy, by the Blood of Jesus. The remembrance celebration of Hanukkah teaches us important things about God and His fierce love for His people as He preserves, defends, protects, and does miracles for them. Hanukkah is not one of the seven main appointed times God instituted for His people to observe throughout all their generations, but history reveals how important it was to the Jewish people, and the Bible records Jesus Himself in the Temple during Hanukkah—referred to as the Festival of Dedication in John 10:22-23.

The ninth candle on the special Hanukkah Menorah is called the “*Servant*” Candle, as it is used to light all the other candles. Jesus referred to Himself as *Servant* in Mark 10:44-45: “*And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” “*Servant*” and “*minister*” are from the very same Greek word. Jesus was actually connecting it with a prophecy concerning Himself in Isaiah 53:10-11, where He is referred to as

God's "Righteous Servant." Hanukkah is about the dedication of the "temple" and celebration of the "lights." Jesus also referred to His body as the "Temple" in John 2:19, and revealed Himself as "the Light of the World" in John 8:12. He also made an incredible connection with us when He said in Matthew 5:14 that we are "the light of the world," as we reflect His Light to the world.

### "Rehearsal" of Things Yet to Come:

The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:16-17: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a *holy day*, or of *the new moon*, or of the *Sabbath days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Paul wrote this AFTER Jesus had already come, died, and rose again, so the special celebration days are not only all about Jesus and a shadow of His first coming, but also a shadow **of things still yet to come!** This is one reason why we should *still be* celebrating them. The Apostle Paul obviously was; and so was the early Church for hundreds of years. Even though Hanukkah isn't one of the 7 major "appointed times" by God, there is a prophetic message within Hanukkah for us today. It is another message for the Bride of Christ, instructing her in her preparations for her soon-coming King!

The word "Hanukkah" (Hebrew words: *chanukkah* or *chanuk*), meaning "dedication," is found throughout Scripture, speaking of dedicating things like the House of God, the House of David, the altar, the wall of Jerusalem, a new house, a child, etc (Ezra 6:16; 1 Kings 8:63; Psalm 30:1; Numbers 7:10; 2 Chronicles 7:9; Nehemiah 12:27; Deuteronomy 20:5; Proverbs 22:6). To dedicate something means to make it holy, set-apart and dedicated to God for a special purpose. His Word says that our bodies are the "temple" of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19). Ephesians 2 speaks of believing Jews and believing Gentiles being made into one body in Christ: "In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord: in Whom you also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit (verses 21-22; see verses 14-22). *We are the Temple!* Even though we should be mindful of this all the time, Hanukkah gives us a special reminder once a year to cleanse our *temple*, removing any idols, false worship, rebuild our altar of worship to the One True God, and rededicate ourselves to the LORD. Our soon-coming King will be coming back for a pure, spotless Bride (Ephesians 5:22-32)! As we cleanse and rededicate ourselves to Him, we can truly be the *lights of the world* that Jesus said we are to be. We must keep our lamps trimmed and filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit as we wait for our Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13)!

In the parable in Luke 12:37, the "lord" was a picture of Jesus: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He comes shall find watching: truly I say to you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." This is talking about the Lord's second coming, and confirms His role as the "Servant" of all, as depicted in the "Servant Candle" on the Hanukkah Menorah. The Festival of Lights is also a prophecy of the Lord (the Light of the World), as it is told of Him in the Book of Revelation:

- "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof" (Revelation 21:23).
- "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them Light: and they shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

*Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who performed miracles for our forefathers, in those days, at this time...and for us still today.*

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<sup>1</sup> Historical details from: *Enter His Gates To Your Jewish Roots*, by Susan Marcus, copyright T-land Ltd. Allon Center, Kibbutz Ginosar 14980 Israel, [www.jesusboat.com](http://www.jesusboat.com)