

Should Believers Observe Hanukkah?

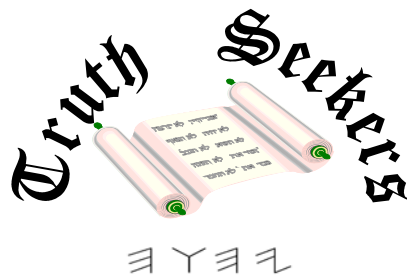
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Introduction

The month of December is a challenging month for those who choose to conform to Yahweh's laws. Those of us who understand the heathen origin of Christmas reject its observance, but often we are faced with tolerating the customary greetings of "Merry Christmas" from those who don't know us very well, not to mention the office party invitations that we do not accept.

Choosing to not observe Christmas can be particularly awkward if you are dealing with customers who observe it. When one is approached by a well-meaning individual with whom you will engage in no more than a few moments of conversation, and that person wishes you a Merry Christmas, it can be downright awkward to try explaining to that individual why you don't observe Christmas, especially when there's a 99% likelihood that he or she isn't interested in listening to your explanations!

There *is* an alternate festival that often occurs during the "Christmas season," and if one chooses to observe it for the proper reasons, it offers blessings that far exceed anything we could ever have expected to receive while observing Christmas. This festival is called *Hanukkah*, and we have found that the rich and meaningful history of this observance can actually have a spiritual healing effect upon those who observe it, ourselves included. Furthermore, we have found that countering "Merry Christmas" with "Happy Hanukkah" can serve as opening the door to offering a more thorough, in-depth rationale for why we do not observe Christmas.

Surprisingly, many who uphold Yahweh's laws have criticized and downplayed the observance of Hanukkah. Our aim in this study is to present to you the truth about Hanukkah, as well as our response to those who have criticized us for observing it. We invite you to read our study, and we also invite you to let us know if you share our vision for how we can best serve our Heavenly Father and His Son.

1. What's Wrong With Christmas?

Many believers, upon recognizing the unscriptural and pagan origin of Christmas, look for alternatives to this heathen observance. We do not intend to incorporate into this study all the details regarding the unscriptural observance of Christmas, and how it actually **dishonors** the Son of Almighty Yahweh instead of honoring Him. Nevertheless, for those who may not be familiar with the origin of Christmas, most scholarly resources readily admit to its heathen origin, of how it absorbed the Roman holiday called *Saturnalia*, cosmetically converting its rituals into a "Christian holiday" under a new name: *Christmas*.¹ Although many proclaim Christmas to be a Christian victory over paganism, it can be demonstrated that the opposite is true: Christmas is in fact a heathen triumph over Christianity. Consider this: It was never a Jewish custom to observe birthdays.² Thus, Yeshua the Messiah never celebrated His own birthday. Furthermore, there is no record of any early believers observing His birthday or any semblance of the holiday we know as "Christmas." In fact, it wasn't until the **fourth century** that a Catholic pope named Julius first declared December 25th as being the anniversary of the Messiah's birth.³ Consider, therefore, the fact that for over three hundred years the Holy Spirit never led anyone to observe or celebrate the birthday of the Messiah!

At first, many Protestants rejected the observance of Christmas. In fact, here in the United States, Christmas observances were outlawed in Puritan New England for many years. The state of Massachusetts became the last state to finally repeal its law against Christmas observance in 1856, the same year that President Franklin Pierce became the first president to place a Christmas tree in the White House. Moreover, it wasn't until 1885 that the U.S. Congress passed a law giving federal employees the day off.

While much of our society perceives the United States' gradual, but final, acceptance of Christmas as "progress," those of us who understand the true roots of its observance, combined with the Scriptural admonition to **not** mix our faith with the practices of

¹As an example of resources acknowledging the pagan origin of Christmas, notice the following excerpt from *Encyclopedia International*, Vol. 4, Grolier Incorporated, New York, 1972, item "Christmas," p. 414: "December 25 was already a major festival in the pagan Roman world, the *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*, or 'Birthday of the Unconquered Sun,' falling within the week-long celebration of the Saturnalia, a feast honoring the renewal of the sun at the winter solstice. Pagan celebrations on December 25 had included feasting, dancing, lighting bonfires, decorating homes with greens, and giving gifts. So when this became a Christian festival, the customs continued, but with a Christian meaning imparted to them."

²From *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, edited by Dr. R. J. Zevi Werblowsky & Dr. Geoffrey Wigoder, Hold, Rinehard & Winston, Inc., Chicago, IL, 1965, item "Birthday," p. 71: "No observances or celebrations are traditionally connected in Jewish custom with the anniversary of a person's birth"

³From *The Pageantry of Christmas*, by the Editors of LIFE, TIME INCORPORATED, New York, 1963, p. 10: "Until 350 A.D., when Pope Julius I proclaimed December 25 as the date of the Nativity, almost every month in the year had, at one time or another, been named by reputable scholars as the likely date of Christ's birth." This same book later adds: "Christians began absorbing these old customs and infusing them with Christian meaning in order to help spread the faith. Many Church fathers considered the method dangerous."

heathens,⁴ recognize the observance of Christmas as a violation of Torah. Add to this the fact that Christmas observance, along with other commonly accepted holidays, is treated as a replacement of the observance of our Creator's ordained holy days, and we can understand that it is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7:25. In this chapter we read of a symbolic "little horn" that comes out of the fourth beast mentioned in the prophetic account. Notice one of the characteristics of this "little horn":

²⁵ He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law.

There is considerable debate over the precise identity of the "little horn," but whoever or whatever organization it represents, it has largely succeeded in its mission. It has persuaded most of the civilized world that our Creator's laws have been either "changed" or "done away," and the "sacred seasons" or holy feast days ordained by our Creator have been replaced with such counterparts as Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, all of which on the surface seem so innocent and pure, but under the close scrutiny of Scripture, are abominations.⁵

Thus, as earlier mentioned, many believers look for an alternative to the celebration of Christmas. This is what June and I did back in 1985, the year that we rejected the observance of Christmas. For five years we observed no festivals in December. Then, as we explored a Jewish festival called *Hanukkah*⁶, we decided to give it a try. It is a decision that we have not regretted. Our observance of Hanukkah is very simple compared to the elaborate celebrations we have read about, but hopefully no less meaningful. Although we highly recommend observing this festival to everyone, we would first counsel you to read and study the origin and significance of Hanukkah before deciding to join in its celebration.

⁴According to Deuteronomy chapter 12, we are not to infuse heathen worship practices into our faith: "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them [the heathen nations], after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise." As any credible resource will admit, Christmas represents the adoption of a heathen observance, with all the customs retained, only given new meanings and a new name. Those who recognize the timeless validity of Yahweh's law understand that the observance of Christmas is a violation of His Torah.

⁵We could also add to this list the fact that an organization claims responsibility for having transferred the solemnity of the weekly Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Have any other organizations "changed times and laws" in fulfillment of Daniel 7:25? This is a legitimate question that truth seekers need to ponder.

⁶Also spelled in various ways, such as *Chanukah*.

2. What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days and nights, starting on the 25th day of Kislev (or *Casleu*), the ninth month on the Hebrew calendar (which corresponds to November-December on the Gregorian calendar). In Hebrew, the word "Hanukkah" means "Dedication." The story of Hanukkah is found in the apocryphal books of First and Second Maccabees.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews' victory over the Hellenist Syrians in the year 165 B.C.E.. Three years prior to that victory, in 168 B.C.E., the temple had been seized and dedicated to the worship of Zeus. Antiochus Epiphanies, the Greek King of Syria, outlawed Jewish rituals and ordered the Jews to worship Greek idols. Many Jews, in fear of their lives, honored the new decrees of their conquerors. Others, however, decided to fight back.

The fighting began in Modiin, a village not far from Jerusalem. A Greek officer and soldiers assembled the villagers, compelling them to sacrifice swine, an animal that is considered unclean to those who put their faith in Yahweh. The officer attempted to persuade Mattathias, a Jewish High Priest, to take part in the ceremony. He refused, so another villager stepped forward and offered to do it instead. Mattathias, "inflamed with zeal," ran to the altar and killed the man, then killed the presiding officer. His five sons and the other villagers then fled to the nearby mountains to hide, joined by other Jews who were willing to fight for their freedom. They attacked the Greek soldiers whenever possible.

About a year after the rebellion began, Mattathias died. Before his death, he put his brave son Judah Maccabee⁷ in charge of the growing army. After three years of intense fighting, the Jews defeated the Greek army, despite having significantly fewer men and weapons. They immediately began cleaning up and restoring the temple, and on the 25th day of the ninth month (*Casleu*), they "offered sacrifice according to the law upon the new altar of burnt offerings, which they had made" (I Maccabees 4:53). At long last, the temple had been restored to its former state for the worship of Yahweh, in accordance with the rituals outlined by Yahweh in the Torah. I Maccabees 4:56-59 describes the rejoicing, as well as Judah Maccabee's decree that future generations should celebrate their victory during that ninth month of the year:

⁵⁶ And so they kept the dedication of the altar eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness, and sacrificed the sacrifice of deliverance and praise.

⁵⁷ They decked also the forefront of the temple with crowns of gold, and with shields; and the gates and the chambers they renewed, and hanged doors upon them.

⁵⁸ Thus was there very great gladness among the people, for that the reproach of the heathen was put away.

⁷The term "Maccabee" is considered to have been derived from the Aramaic word "maqgaba" which means "a hammer". Cf. *The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, by The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville, NY, 1977.

⁵⁹ Moreover Judas and his brethren with the whole congregation of Israel ordained, that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season from year to year by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month Casleu, with mirth and gladness.

As denoted by the above passage, Judah Maccabee and the entire congregation of Israel decreed that a memorial to their miraculous triumph over the vast Syrian army should be held each year. Many folks misconstrue the word "ordained" in such a way as to indicate that Judah Maccabee was commanding the observance of a new festival. However, history has proven otherwise. Jewish national assemblies had the authority to proclaim a day of gladness, but never the power to raise such a day to a sacred status. Proof that they never intended Hanukkah as a commanded observance can be found in the fact that Judaism has never **regarded** Hanukkah as a commanded festival. Rather, it is a "minor festival" that many choose to keep as a *remembrance* of the miracle that happened in Jerusalem, combined with a celebration of the victory of good over evil.

One popular legend attached to the Hanukkah celebration involves a miracle that is mysteriously missing from the books of Maccabees. According to a legend mentioned only in the Babylonian Talmud, when Judah and his men searched for oil to light the menorah for the rededicated temple, they were only able to find a small flask that contained only enough oil to light the menorah for one day.⁸ Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days, which explains why the feast lasts for eight days. However, this legend appears to be based more upon "wishful thinking" than sound evidence. Surely, if such a miracle had indeed occurred, the authors of the books of Maccabees would not have ignored or otherwise left off mentioning it to their reading audience. The fact that such a "footnote" to the Hanukkah story first appears in the Babylonian Talmud, known for its stories of folklore and magic, does not add credibility to the account.⁹

Nevertheless, in spite of the Talmud's apparent embellishment of the Hanukkah account, this does not detract from the event itself, a celebration that is not only recorded by the historian Josephus¹⁰, but is also found in the Bible, as we will discuss later.

⁸The following is the English translation of the account found in *The Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Shabbat 21b: "What is the reason for Chanukah? For our Rabbis taught: On the 25th of Kislev begin the days of Chanukah, which are eight, during which lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils in it, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they [the Hasmoneans] searched and found only one cruse of oil which possessed the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient oil for only one day's lighting; yet a miracle occurred there and they lit [the lamp] for eight days. The following year these days were appointed a Festival with the recitation of Hallel and thanksgiving." This account explains that the reason for the eight-day observance is because of the oil that lasted for eight days. However, according to the account in Maccabees, it is observed for eight days to make up for the eight days of Tabernacles, a feast that they were not able to keep during their battle for freedom.

⁹According to *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, Doubleday, New York, p. 312, "Scholars have long noted that angelology, demonology, sorcery, magic, astrology, and other folk beliefs are much more prominent in the Babylonian Talmud than they are in the Palestinian Gemara (Ginzberg 1970: 20-24, Goldberg 1987b: 306), even occurring in Babylonian retellings of Palestinian materials (Goldberg 1987a: 336)."

¹⁰*Cf. The Wars of the Jews*, Book I, chapter 1, sections 1-4.

3. Why Observe Hanukkah?

Since our decision to observe Hanukkah, we have been surprised at the number of folks who have expressed disagreement with the choice we made. What is surprisingly missing from their criticism of our decision is the simple question of "Why?" Why do we observe Hanukkah? This is a question that we have never once been asked! Instead, we have received letters from people telling us why we **shouldn't**, and we have received an article authored by a man who explained why his family **doesn't**. We certainly respect a person's right to express his or her opinion, but at the same time, it seems only fitting that before we tell someone why they **shouldn't** do something, we should find out why they do it!

As previously mentioned, Hanukkah is a "minor festival" that many choose to keep as a remembrance of the miracle that happened in Jerusalem, combined with a celebration of the victory of good over evil. These are perhaps the two most basic reasons for observing Hanukkah. However, if we are only interested in "scratching the surface" with our "why" question, we will miss out on the deeper significance of Hanukkah. With this in mind, let's go a little deeper.

Remembrance

It really takes very little effort to remember important events. Most of us remember where we were and what we were doing when we first learned of the tragedy of 9/11. Many of us remember where we were when we watched Neil Armstrong take man's first walk on the moon. Some of us remember where we were when we learned that President Kennedy had been shot. A few remember where they were when they learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor. These are all events that strike an emotional chord within us - whether they were days of national pride or days of national tragedy. The recent tragedy of 9/11 strikes a particularly emotional chord within all of us, as the still-fresh memory lingers of how over 3,000 lives were snuffed out with two sudden, swift blows. Many of us either openly or privately wept at the very thought of the thousands of innocent men and women who were so cruelly and abruptly taken from their families. We have read stories of children who had to be told that their mother or father would not be coming home again ... families that were left with a cold void by heartless men ... and we wept for them. For those who know the family of one or more victims, this tragedy is particularly evocative. Those who suffered the loss of family members will grieve every day for the rest of their lives, and the rest of the nation mourns with them.

Although the huge loss of life has emotionally hurt so many, we all take courage in the resiliency and resolve of our nation to bounce back and move on with our lives. We also take comfort in knowing that our nation is working on bringing the masterminds of 9/11 to justice.

However, on the anniversary of the tragedy of 9/11, for the past two years our nation has conducted memorial services at the site of the ruins of the World Trade Center. Our nation chooses to look back in remembrance of the horror of the events of that day

because remembering evokes special emotions within us. Remembering the suffering of others can help us achieve a deeper appreciation of the freedoms that we have, and reminds us to not take our lives and our freedoms for granted. In this sense, such a remembrance of those who lost their lives is a memorial of how precious the gift of life is, a particular means of remembering which marks the passing, in the present, of something or someone of value. The remembrance of such a sorrowful event can spur within us the resolve to not allow such an event to happen again. It can spark the determination to not allow those who died to have died in vain.

There are undoubtedly those who reject the notion of pausing to remember those who died at the hands of the terrorist hijackers. That is certainly their right. However, I would like to ask if this is the way any of the relatives of those who perished that day feel. I wonder if anyone who lost a loved one on 9/11 would prefer that our nation just "get over it" and move on without conducting future memorial services at the site where the towers collapsed. I know that a man named Czeslaw Styliniski wants everyone to **remember** the tragedy of 9/11. Mr. Styliniski lost his sister in the attack, and this is what he said to a BBC News reporter on September 11, 2002, one year after his sister's final day of work at the World Trade Center:

"I lost my sister in the attack, Maria Jakubiak. Coming here makes me feel as though this tragedy happened today. We cannot forget."¹¹

Even Russian president Vladimir Putin understands that we must remember the lives lost on September 11, 2001:

"In Russia, we say that time heals everything, but there are things that we cannot forget and which must not be forgotten."¹²

Perhaps the most touching, yet meaningful sentiment came from young Murial Borza, aged 11, whose sister Deora Bodley died when Flight 93 crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania:

"People can make a pledge to do a good deed that will help mankind in some small way. Even if it's a hug, kiss, smile or wave, prayer or just a silent thought of those we love, it will make people feel good and the remembrance of our loved ones will not be forgotten."¹³

In each of the above-cited examples, those who lost loved ones expressed a desire that we *remember* those who lost their lives at the hands of the terrorist hijackers.

But now, let's transfer those thoughts ... those emotions ... to the observance of Hanukkah. Please ponder the remembrance that a hurting nation recognizes as being a part of the healing process, and allow that remembrance to bring to mind those who suffered at the hands of the cruel, anti-Torah, anti-Semitic Antiochus Epiphanies. The best

¹¹Quoted from BBC News Online web site: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/americas/2251406.stm>

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

way to understand what those people had to endure is to actually **read** it for yourself. We cannot read it for you. We suggest reading the entire account in a quiet setting where you can peacefully reflect upon the significance of what you read, knowing that this is an historical account undisputed by scholars on all sides. The tragedy of 9/11 is sobering, but try converting those 3,000 lives lost to 80,000 lives lost. We know from the book of 2 Maccabees that at least this many innocent men, women and children were slaughtered and an additional 40,000 were sold into slavery.¹⁴

Read the account of the mother and her seven sons (2 Maccabees chapter 7). She watched as Antiochus Epiphanes attempted to persuade each one to taste swine's flesh. For those in today's society who regard Yahweh's laws as having been "done away," this would seem like such a minor, trivial request. Punishment for refusing to eat the pork was torture, followed by death in an immense frying pan. Surely, one might reason, they should have consented to eat the pork. Those who recognize the holiness and the permanence of Yahweh's laws, however, understand that dishonoring our Heavenly Father in such a way is simply not an option. Such was the understanding of the mother and her seven sons. One by one, each refused, and one by one they were all tortured, maimed and fried alive.

When we reflect upon the horrors inflicted upon the Jewish people, a part of us should cry out in similar fashion as the families of those who perished in the 9/11 attack. We should cry out, "REMEMBER what happened there! Never forget!"

Hanukkah is that remembrance.

Celebrating the triumph of good over evil

Many of us enjoy watching a movie wherein the good guy, after considerable struggle, is finally able to defeat the bad guy. In many such movies, once the battle is over, there is a victory celebration of sorts, and we inwardly, subconsciously, join in the celebration. We inwardly rejoice that the bad guy "got what was coming to him."

In the world of reality, we rejoice even more upon learning that the bad guys have been apprehended. It makes us feel safer, more secure. When we know that sinister men are punished for their evil deeds, we have confidence that our system of law and order is working. On the other hand, when evil deeds go unpunished, when crimes abound, we feel less secure and fear begins to pervade our minds. In the words of King Solomon, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (Proverbs 29:2).

I believe it is safe to say that most of us take our justice system for granted. We have religious freedoms that few people in the history of the world have enjoyed. We will not be able to truly appreciate these freedoms unless they are taken away. The Jews in the days of Judah Maccabee experienced the loss of those freedoms. Their temple was ravished, emptied of its precious contents. Funds reserved for widows and orphans was plundered.

¹⁴Cf. 2 Maccabees 5:11-14.

Sabbathkeepers were brutally and shamelessly murdered. Those found observing any of the Torah were subject to death.

The Maccabees' triumph over the Syrian army could not replace the thousands of lives that had been taken away, yet it signaled an end to the tyrannical persecutions and a beginning to the restoration and healing process. Good had triumphed over evil, and when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice. Hanukkah is a time to remember what Yahweh's people experienced at the hands of wicked men, and to rejoice in their triumph.

Counting our Blessings

As a side note to **remembrance** and **celebrating the triumph of good over evil**, we believe that one cannot properly observe Hanukkah without pausing to count our blessings for the freedoms we have.

No one has ever commanded me to eat pork or else face torture and death. No one has ever given me the ultimatum of either working on the Sabbath or else being killed. Others have been given such directives. Some gave in, while others accepted the consequences of choosing righteousness over breaking one of Yahweh's laws. I count my blessings that I have not been given such ultimatums.

Yes, things would have been vastly different for me employment-wise if I had not chosen to observe the Sabbath, but my employer has never turned me in to the authorities for refusing to work on the Sabbath.

I am thankful to work for a company where my religious beliefs are respected, even if no one really cares to understand them. Only recently, I was asked to do something that would not have involved my working on the Sabbath, but it would have resulted in someone else working on the Sabbath. I had to refuse, and unfortunately my manager does not understand what would be wrong with me asking someone else to work on the Sabbath. Thankfully, when I stated my reason for not being able to comply with his request, he did not impress me to "do it anyway." He merely asked someone else to do it in my place!

I count my blessings that, in spite of working for people who do not respect Yahweh's laws, at least they respect the beliefs of those who do. Hanukkah is a good time to count those blessings, for the Jews were not afforded this luxury, at least not in 168 B.C.E.. For them it was either forsake Yahweh's laws or be killed.

In a perfect world, there would be no suffering. There would be no murdering of innocent lives, no crimes, no hatred, for we would all live in a world populated by decent, loving, law-abiding citizens. In fact, in a perfect world, everyone would be joyfully obeying Yahweh's perfect law. However, we do not live in such a utopian world, at least not at this time, and evil abounds all around us in various forms. In spite of the inherently evil nation that we live in, we can still pause to count our blessings that we have the freedom to worship Yahweh without fear of being imprisoned or killed.

The reasons we have listed for why we observe Hanukkah are things that each of us can do on a daily basis, yet June and I also know that we simply do not take the time to pause and reflect on these things every day. Maybe others do. If so, that is great! Since we don't always set aside the time to remember those who gave their lives for Yahweh's sake, and since we don't spend our days rejoicing at the triumph of good over evil (Passover being an exception to that), we believe it is altogether fitting and proper to determine to set aside some time for that very purpose. For those who actually experienced and survived the schemes of the evil Antiochus Epiphanes, we're sure Hanukkah was a very, very special time. Certainly, none of the Hanukkahs we have observed have come close to resembling their blessed experience ... remembering how close they came to death, crying out for those who didn't survive, and counting their blessings that they were now free to practice their faith in accordance with Yahweh's laws. Hanukkah must have been so very special to those who first observed it year after year, so we recognize that our feeble attempts to imitate their remembrance and their rejoicing will not even come close to being as meaningful to us as it was to them. Nevertheless, we will try.

4. Objections to the Observance of Hanukkah

Although June and I are normally not very good at corresponding with our friends and families, a few years ago we took it upon ourselves to send Hanukkah cards to several of our acquaintances in the faith. Since we are so scattered, it would not have been possible for us to have gathered for a Hanukkah observance, so we hoped that no one would take offense at receiving a Hanukkah card.

As it turned out, one woman sent us a very critical letter challenging our decision to observe Hanukkah. I responded to each negative comment about this festival, but for some reason I have not heard from her regarding this issue since. Either I persuaded her that Hanukkah isn't as bad as she made it out to be or else she simply didn't want to pursue the matter any further. I would like to incorporate some of her criticisms into this study, just in case others may have sentiments similar to hers.

1. "I don't find this commanded of Yahweh in His Word."

This comment, while very true, is at the same time missing the point of Hanukkah. We have already addressed the fact that Judah Maccabee, in ordaining the festival commemorating the rededication of the altar and the temple, did not in any way intend for future generations to understand that he was implementing a new law. Hanukkah is not a commanded observance, and we have never presented it as such to anyone.

This having been said, we believe the question is not whether or not Hanukkah **must** be observed, but rather whether or not it **should** be observed. I believe we have given very good reasons as to why it should be observed. If others do not share our view, we believe it is their loss, but the loss is in the present, not an eternal one!

Many folks, like our friend who sent us the letter in opposition to the observance of Hanukkah, believe that its not being commanded equates to its having the disapproval of Yahweh. This is a mistake. The observance of Purim, for example, is mentioned in the book of Esther. It is an observance very similar to that of Hanukkah in that it represents the triumph of good over evil. Not only this, but like Hanukkah, Purim is not a commanded observance.¹⁵ Since Purim is mentioned in Scripture, yet not commanded, does this mean it should not be observed?

¹⁵We should point out that there are some who regard the story of Esther as being fictitious, yet inspired by Yahweh, which we believe is an oxymoron, especially in view of the fact that in Esther 10:2 the author ascertains that the account is true, as he claims it is recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. If the story **isn't** true, yet it is inspired, the author would not have made such a claim, unless we are to believe in such a thing as an "inspired lie." Furthermore, a reference to Purim can be found in the 15th chapter of 2 Maccabees, where we read of the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (Adar) as being the day before "Mardocheus' day." Mardocheus is a Greek rendering of Mordechai, one of the chief characters in the Esther account.

Or how about the daughters of Israel who made a custom of going up to lament for Tamar, the daughter of Yephthah, four days per year?¹⁶ They mourned for a girl who never married because she became the victim of her father's mindless vow to sacrifice whoever would come forth from his house to meet him if Yahweh gave him victory over the Ammonites. Yephthah's daughter, Tamar, his only child, came forth to meet him, thus sealing her doom.

Yahweh never commanded anyone to start the custom of lamenting for Tamar, yet neither is there a record of negative implications resulting from that decision. Thus, no one can truthfully say that the daughters of Israel made a poor decision in remembering the sacrifice of Tamar. It was a remembrance based upon love and the respect for life. In fact, had they chosen to *not* remember Tamar as they did, one could say that such a decision would have reflected a calloused mentality, an indifference towards the suffering of others.

Thus, the ordaining of special observances, if it does not in any way conflict with Yahweh's Word, is not necessarily a bad thing to do, especially if it is chosen in such a way so as to bring honor to Yahweh and to the memory of those who courageously took a stand for His laws.

2. "I can't find the word 'Hanukkah' in *Strong's*."

The implication of this comment is this: Since this word isn't in *Strong's Concordance*, this can only mean that "Hanukkah" doesn't even *appear* in the Bible. Of course, since the word doesn't appear in the Bible, this might serve as a valid reason against observing Hanukkah. This, we believe, is the point our friend was attempting to make.

However, the truth of the matter is, the word *Hanukkah* does appear in both the Bible and in *Strong's Concordance*. This Hebrew word means "dedication," in memory of the dedication of both the altar and the temple of Yahweh. It is word #2598 in *Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*. In *Strong's*, the English transliteration is rendered "Chanukkah," pronounced "khan-oo-kaw'." According to *Strong's* listing of this word, it means "initiation, i.e., consecration: — dedicating (-tion)." *Chanukkah*, by the way, does not appear in *Strong's* as a result of the Hanukkah story. Rather, it simply appears because the Hebrew word for "dedication" is used throughout Scripture, such as the occasion where the Israelites dedicated the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:27).

We should point out that even if the word *Chanukkah* didn't appear in the Bible, this would not serve as a valid reason against the observance of the festival called by that name. The ordaining of an observance commemorating an event that brings honor to Yahweh, so long as it is not mandated, is not spoken against in Scripture. For those who claim that it constitutes "adding to the Word," we can only remind them of the previously cited examples of *Purim* and the custom of lamenting for Tamar. If ordaining the observance of *Hanukkah* constitutes "adding to the Word," then so do the observances of

¹⁶Cf. Judges 11:39-40.

Purim and lamenting for Tamar. Since we recognize that both of these observances have the blessing of Yahweh, we believe *Hanukkah* does as well.

As a side note, *Hanukkah* cannot in any way be compared to the feast that was ordained by Jeroboam during the eighth month of the year (I Kings 12:32). The feast ordained by Jeroboam was designed to actually **replace** the Feast of Tabernacles, which falls during the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. Jeroboam's feast was held "in the month which he had devised of his own heart" (I Kings 12:33), and most certainly did not have Yahweh's blessing!

3. "Notice that in John 10:22, the Jews were apparently keeping these days a 'feast of dedication' and what I see here is Yahshua rebuking them! I believe this is one of their *customs, traditions* or *feasts* that He (Yahweh) says He hates in other scriptures."

The above commentary is a reference to the only time the Hanukkah festival is mentioned in the commonly accepted canon of Scripture. Contrary to the perspective offered by our friend, we believe that John 10:22 actually serves as strong evidence that Yeshua the Messiah **observed Hanukkah** with his fellow Jews. Shown below is John 10:22-24 as it appears in the King James Version:

²² And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.

²³ And Yeshua walked in the temple in Solomon's porch.

²⁴ Then came the Jews round about Him, and said unto Him, How long doest Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Messiah, tell us plainly.

As we already know, the term "dedication" as used in most Bible versions, is the English translation of the Hebrew word *Chanukkah*. Yeshua was at the temple, which may figuratively be designated "the scene of the crime," on the anniversary of its rededication to the worship of Yahweh. Whether His presence signaled His approval or whether it was just a coincidence that He happened to be there at that particular time depends upon each individual's perspective. Typically, those who are opposed to the observance of Hanukkah do not attach any significance to His appearance at the Temple on that particular day. Those who support its observance, as we do, point out that if He had anything negative to say with regard to Hanukkah observance, He had the perfect opportunity to do so in John chapter 10. However, He offered no derogatory words in opposition to the festival of Hanukkah, and we believe this fact is very significant. Furthermore, scholarly references such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* attest that Yeshua was at the temple to attend the Hanukkah festival.¹⁷

Perhaps one of the most frustrating aspects of responding to negative letters is having to address untrue, untenable remarks. The woman quoted above incorrectly cited Yeshua as rebuking the Jews at the Hanukkah observance. Instead of Yeshua criticizing the Jews in this chapter, however, we read exactly the opposite. It was the Jews who

¹⁷Cf. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, by Merrill F. Unger, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1988, p. 422. The exact quote reads: "Without doubt, our Lord attended this festival at Jerusalem (John 10:22). It is still observed by the Jews."

approached **Him**, asking Him to plainly prove He was who He said He was. He answered their questions, but obviously they did not like His answers, so they picked up stones to stone Him! If one simply **must** find any words of rebuke from the mouth of Yeshua in that passage, we would say the best one can come up with is what He said in verse 26, where He quipped, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you."

Next, let's address the woman's comment that those Jews were observing a tradition ... a feast that "Yahweh hates." We have already shown that there is no record of Yeshua offering any criticism towards His fellow Jews for observing *Hanukkah*. If, as our friend is persuaded, this was a feast that "Yahweh hates," why didn't John record Yeshua expressing any animosity or negative sentiments about this feast of theirs? Why is there no record of Yeshua stating, "Ye hypocrites! Full well ye reject the Scriptures and observe a feast of thine own choosing ... a feast not commanded by Yahweh! Thy worship is in vain"?

Seriously, if indeed it is true that Yeshua's presence at that festival was to rebuke the Jews for observing it, then why is He not recorded as having capitalized on that opportunity? And if He **did** rebuke His fellow Jews for observing Hanukkah, why did none of the authors of the Messianic books make mention of such a serious charge? Could it be because Yeshua had nothing negative to say about the Feast of Dedication (*Hanukkah*)? In fact, could it be because Yeshua Himself observed this festival as well? The answer is "yes" to both questions. Truly, if He felt the same way about Hanukkah that today's critics obviously do, He would have plainly denounced the observance of this festival. The silence of the entire New Testament regarding any negative aspects of *Hanukkah* testifies that, indeed, its observance has the blessing of Yahweh and the approval of His Son.

Finally, we believe we should also address the woman's comment pertaining to not following the customs or traditions of men. Of course, as she expressed, Hanukkah is one of the Jews' customs (traditions), a point that we will not argue. Her obvious purpose in making reference to Jewish customs and traditions is to address the same concerns expressed by Yeshua. For example, in one passage, Yeshua stated, "Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching *for* doctrine the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of Eloah, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups, and many other such like things ye do."¹⁸ Certainly no one will argue that the Jews held on to some customs that conflicted with obedience to Yahweh's commandments, so if Hanukkah represents one of those "traditions of men," then Yahweh's people should not be observing it.

However, should we presume that **any** custom of the Jews must be "bad"? Hopefully we all know better than to believe such nonsense. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, the Apostle Shaul wrote, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." As demonstrated by the Apostle Shaul, not all traditions are "bad," as many have been conditioned to believe. Sadly, many of us have been conditioned to believe that any Jewish tradition "must" be bad, but as we hope any serious student of the Word is able to recognize, this is simply not true.

¹⁸Cf. Mark 7:7-8.

What we need to bear in mind with regard to the use of the word "tradition" is the context in which Yeshua used this word. It was only when people used a tradition to replace or otherwise subvert Yahweh's Word that Yeshua had a problem. He said, "Thus have ye made the commandment of Yahweh of none effect by your tradition" (Matt. 15:6). A tradition does not become abhorrent unless it undermines Yahweh's Word, as clearly pointed out by Yeshua. Does the observance of *Hanukkah* subvert any of Yahweh's Word? No. Does it make void any of His commandments? No, it does not.

4. "I don't believe Yahshua would be pleased to have his name connected with these customs."

The above remark ties in with her previous one, which means we have essentially already answered it. Nevertheless, we feel a need to address this particular comment, as it is a prime example of a statement based upon an assumption which is in turn derived from a false premise.

If we are to believe that Yeshua would not be pleased at having His name associated with Hanukkah, perhaps someone should have protested and argued with the Apostle John that he should not have even mentioned the Messiah's name in the same context of the observance of the Feast of Dedication (*Hanukkah*)! You see, in John chapter 10, Yeshua is indeed mentioned in connection with *Hanukkah*, a perfect opportunity for John to have recorded any negative remarks that Yeshua may have made in association with this festival. However, in spite of having His name mentioned in conjunction with this custom, Yeshua had nary a bad thing to say about *Hanukkah* celebrations! We are definitely left with the impression that Yeshua would **not** be displeased that His name was used in connection with that custom!

I believe we have already sufficiently demonstrated that *Hanukkah* celebrates the cleansing of the altar from having had swine sacrificed there; it is in fact the celebration of the re-dedication of the temple. The rededication of **what?** The temple! Now, let's see: Exactly where do we find Yeshua when the Feast of Dedication is mentioned? He is standing in the very place where the events of *Hanukkah* occurred: **The Temple!** What a coincidence! Yet, the woman quoted above would have us to believe He was only there to rebuke the Jews for observing a feast that Yahweh hates?! We find this sort of logic to be absurd. We are reminded of the old argument used by some that the Apostle Shaul only attended synagogue services on the Sabbath in order to teach that the Sabbath had been "done away"! In the same way, our friend expects us to believe that Yeshua only attended the *Hanukkah* celebration to tell them they shouldn't be observing it!

5. "Read *The Universal Standard Encyclopedia*, p. 4,155, the history and how it's connected with Dec. 25th on the topic of Hanukkah. Not a feast of Yahweh. Also read the story in the Book of Maccabees."

There are three things that our friend addressed in the above commentary. First of all, she connects it to the observance of Christmas. Secondly, she offers her conclusion that Hanukkah is not a feast of Yahweh. Finally, she makes reference to the story as found in Maccabees.

We have already addressed the fact that just because Hanukkah is not a feast ordained by Yahweh, this cannot mean that it doesn't have His blessing, so we will skip that particular comment. She also admonishes us to read the story in the Book of Maccabees, which we have done. In fact, we believe that anyone who seriously studies the books of Maccabees will conclude that there is nothing wrong with observing Hanukkah.

What we really need to address from our friend's commentary is her attempt to connect Hanukkah to December 25th, which in turn represents an attempt to link it to Christmas observance.

The festival of *Hanukkah* will only fall on December 25th in a year in which the new moon just happens to occur on December 1st. That is very rare. Hanukkah begins on the 25th day of the 9th month (called *Casleu* or *Kislev*) on the Hebrew calendar, which in no way ties in with our solar calendar. In 2003, for example, it began at sunset on December 19th. Just because *Hanukkah* might happen to fall on December 25th once every few years in no way implies that it has any pagan connections. According to Clarke's Commentary, *Hanukkah* "answers to the eighteenth of our December." According to the *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, it's the fourteenth.

We have a question for those who reject *Hanukkah* because of the fact that it happens to coincide with the "Christmas season" each year. Shall we shun the Feast of Unleavened Bread as well because of its "connection" to Easter? For those of us who recognize that the Feast of Unleavened Bread always occurs right around the time of Easter, this "connection" might cause one to reject the observance of that feast. However, those who do the research learn that, if anything, the Christian Easter observance sprang from the resurrection account, which occurred during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Therefore, we recognize that the Feast of Unleavened Bread's observance **preceded** that of Easter. If the Feast of Unleavened Bread had been a spinoff of a pagan observance such as Easter, that would be one thing. Since the reverse is true, however, one can hardly reject the observance of a feast because it generated another "holiday" that was named after a heathen goddess.¹⁹

In the same way, it is not logical to reject *Hanukkah* simply because it just happens to fall near December 25th each year. Those who seriously research the events surrounding the inception of *Hanukkah* will learn that it has absolutely no connection to Christmas.

6. "Can you give scripture for your observance of this?"

In a way, we have already responded to the above question. We have demonstrated that Yeshua's presence at the "Feast of the Dedication" was certainly not to criticize those who observed it, and it was very likely to *join in its observance*. This is certainly deserving of the term "approval by Scriptural example."

¹⁹According to *The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, by The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville, NY, 1977, the term "Easter" is derived from an Old English name, *Eastre*, the goddess of spring.

However, let's take this a step further. We have already quoted I Maccabees 4:56-59, which is a record of the first-ever Hanukkah celebration. The question could well be asked, "Why aren't the books of Maccabees considered a part of Scripture?"

Good question.

I Maccabees was originally composed in Hebrew²⁰ and was indeed considered to be a part of Scripture by early believers.²¹ In fact, it was St. Jerome who, in the year 400 C.E., chose to separate Maccabees from the rest of Scripture.²² The fact of the matter is, we have all been conditioned to accept the current "canon" of Scripture as found in most modern Bibles as being the "only possible" books of inspiration. However, as we debate the issue of which books should be regarded as "inspired" versus those that should not, it might be of interest to learn that it was Athanasius, a Catholic bishop, who first proposed the canon of Scripture as handed down to us today.²³ Thus, in accepting only the current books of the Bible as being "the only possible inspired books," we are merely following a teaching first disseminated by a Catholic bishop.

Since the books of Maccabees were considered authoritative enough by the early believers, we believe they merit being grouped in with the other approved books of Scripture. Thus, the account of Hanukkah as found in Maccabees can be appropriately considered a Scriptural account.

²⁰Cf. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, Doubleday, New York, item "Maccabees, Books of," p. 440: "1 Maccabees was originally composed in Hebrew, as both Origen and Jerome attest (Abel and Starcky 1961: 7 and n. a, 15; Goldstein *1 Maccabees* AB, 14-16; Schunck, JSHRZ, 289; Dommershausen 1985: 6; HJP 3/1: 181-82 and n. 3; Eneim-Ogawa 1987: 11-12; survey of research in Neuhaus 1974a: 47-49). The only surviving text is a Greek version containing many Hebraisms and translation errors (Neuhaus 1974a: 46), as, for example, in 10:1: '*Alexander ... the Epiphanes*.' The Greek documents are retroversions, not the *verbatim* transmitted originals."

²¹Ibid, p. 439: "Both 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees were regarded as more or less authoritative by the early Church (Abel and Starcky 1961:8)."

²²Ibid, p. 439: "St. Jerome, around A.D. 400, was the first who explicitly distinguished these *libri ecclesiastici* from the *libri canonici* of the Hebrew Bible."

²³Cf. *Encyclopedia International*, Vol. 4, by Grolier Incorporated, New York, 1972, article "Canon of Scripture," p. 67: "The first list enumerating all 27 books [of the New Testament] was compiled by Athanasius, when Bishop of Alexandria, in 367."

5. Other Objections

We recently reviewed a study pertaining to the observance of Hanukkah. While the author plainly expressed that his intent was not to discourage anyone from observing Hanukkah, he then proceeded to explain why his family does not observe it. On the surface, it might seem innocent enough for a person to state that he is not out to discourage anyone from doing something, while simultaneously explaining why he himself does not do it. However, upon closer scrutiny, we all recognize that if we explain why we do not observe a certain festival, we are indeed discouraging its observance. Let's examine some of this author's reasons for not observing Hanukkah to see if they have merit. We prefer to leave his name anonymous, as our intent is to expose his reasoning, not his name. We will hereafter refer to him as "the author."

Minimizing Yeshua's Attendance at a Hanukkah Observance

Here are the author's opening remarks that we feel serve to minimize the significance of Hanukkah:

"A good place to start with this study is in the Scriptures of the New Testament. John 10:22 **And it was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem.** This is the only reference to Chanukah found in most English versions of the Scriptures. Interestingly enough this reference doesn't really explain what Yah'shua was doing in the temple other than answering those that would question him of Yahweh's word. It is apparent that it is not John's concern to explain Chanukah but rather to expound on Yah'shua's interaction with the Yahudim in their search for Ha Mashiyach."

The author of the above commentary finds it interesting that the Apostle John did not attach any notable significance to the fact that the Messiah just happened to be in the temple area on the anniversary of *Hanukkah*. However, as we have already expressed elsewhere in this study, we believe Yeshua's presence in the temple area on the anniversary of this monumental victory over a heathen nation is **very** significant. Again, this observance celebrates the cleansing of the altar from having had swine sacrificed there; it is in fact the celebration of the re-dedication of the temple. In the apparent estimation of the author, Yeshua's presence in that place, at that moment in time, was mere coincidence, and he attaches greater significance to Yeshua's "interaction with the Yahudim in their search for Ha Mashiyach." Thus, he minimizes the significance of the Messiah's presence at the very spot on which the main thrust of the *Hanukkah* event is focused.

Could it be that Yeshua, along with His fellow Jews, was there in commemoration of the rededication of the temple? Yes, it could. I would propose that John, instead of displaying a lack of concern regarding *Hanukkah* observance, casually mentioned it because there would have been no need to explain its observance to first century believers. The very fact that John **mentioned** its occurrence, combined with Yeshua's presence at that observance, clearly demonstrates that *Hanukkah* was being celebrated in

the winter month of the year, during the month known as "Casleu," or as some render it, *Kislev*. Although we have stated this before, it bears repeating: The fact that Yeshua is recorded as having said nothing in opposition to this observance extends a clear message of His approval to all subsequent generations wishing to join in remembering the great miracle that Yahweh performed on behalf of His people.

The message of *Hanukkah* goes beyond the great miracle that happened in Jerusalem. There is a human story that needs to be told. There is a story of cruel acts perpetrated on humanity. There is a story of bravery, of defiance in the face of certain defeat. There is the story of a mother and her sons who would rather die than spurn Yahweh's laws. It is a story of good triumphing over evil. It is a story that needs to be told and retold at least once a year.

Those who know the truth about Hanukkah's origin, yet prefer to not participate in at least a Hanukkah *remembrance*, silently support suppressing this story. In fact, some have told me that Hanukkah should be regarded somewhat as an "Independence Day" for Jews. It's something that the nation of Israel might want to celebrate, they say, but the United States has its own Independence Day. In other words, the Hanukkah story isn't a story that we need to "relate to." It's something that happened to them, not us. We don't need to identify with such an observance in the same way that they don't identify with our Independence Day, or so they reason.

We believe that those who have such a casual regard for Hanukkah are missing out on not only what it should mean, but also the implications that it holds for us today, such as the reminder that what happened to that nation could happen here. It certainly happened in Germany, and it could certainly happen here. Just ask those who survived the 1993 siege on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. Perhaps, during Hanukkah, all of us should pause in remembrance, not only of all those who gave their lives rather than disobey Yahweh at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanes, but also at the hands of other cruel tyrants, such as the lives lost during the Spanish Inquisition, the atrocities perpetrated by Nazi Germany, and of current interest are the lives cruelly ended by order of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Perhaps, if we could all collectively look back and reflect upon those who suffered rather than forsake Yahweh, maybe we can also find a way to look forward to and even prepare ourselves for a new world where there will be no more sorrow. If nothing else, it will give us a much deeper appreciation for the freedoms that we now enjoy. *Hanukkah* is a time when we can all collectively pause for thought ... for remembrance ... for counting our blessings ... and for rededication of our spiritual temples.

The Temple's Destruction Means "No More Hanukkah"?

The author of the study went on to list another reason for why his family does not observe Hanukkah:

"The point of explaining these things is important to understand the history behind the holiday and the reason that many keep it today. The reason that I don't keep Chanukah is because the temple that was being dedicated served its purpose and was destroyed. The temple that we dedicate today is a spiritual one

in a physical shell that when we are submerged in the baptismal waters we come out dedicated to Yahweh. The temple being destroyed I believe is important, according to Josephus it was exactly three years to the day after being defiled by Antiochus that it was restored by Yahuda. It was this dedication for Sukkot that would have been very important while the temple still stood."

As the author explains, it is important to understand the history behind the holiday. Unless we set aside the time to reflect on the historical events that happened, not only will the story lose its meaning for us, but also for our descendants. Moreover, not only will our descendants lose the meaning of the story, but more significantly, they will **lose the story**. The author seems to believe the temple, now destroyed and lying in ruins, has served its purpose and can now be forgotten. Again, unless the stories are told, unless the lessons are learned, *Hanukkah* will have lost its meaning and those who lost their lives will have their memories, their courage, and their dedication to Yahweh evaporated into the mist of time. We maintain that we need to remember what happened to that **physical temple** so we can work on keeping our **spiritual temples** clean and properly dedicated to Yahweh. If we forget the physical temple, the spiritual one may not be far behind.

We must also remember that the Hanukkah story isn't really about a **physical building**. It's about an **event**. The destruction of a physical temple does not mean that evil men have ceased persecuting and murdering righteous men, women and children. Evil continues to pervade our world with or without a temple. Remembering those whose resilience and determination to obey Yahweh - no matter what the cost - should serve as a constant reminder of the examples that we should want to follow.

In effect, those who claim that we cannot "really" observe Hanukkah because the temple is destroyed are themselves relying upon the "physical aspect" to determine whether or not Hanukkah is worthy of celebrating. They are in essence stating that if the physical temple were still here, they would observe Hanukkah. Since the "physical" is no longer here, they choose to not observe it spiritually. We should not need a physical temple to remember those who gave their lives in the same way that we don't need a World Trade Center to remember those who died on 9/11.

Many of us recognize that the physical temple was only a pattern of the temple that is in heaven: **Yahweh's temple**. Thus, what those impious men did to that physical temple, they did to **Yahweh's temple**. And what they did to Yahweh's temple, they did to **us**. The question is, "What are we going to do about it?" Relegate this magnificent story to collect dust on the shelf of a library somewhere **or** will we diligently work to ensure that our children and our children's children remember what took place?

History buffs know that in Mexico's war against the United States, their decisive victory over the Alamo's defenders actually turned *against* them, as America's rallying battle cry became, "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!" Now **why** would they want to remember the Alamo? After all, it had been the scene of a crushing blow to the United States military. All American defenders were killed in the battle. Why would anyone cry out, "Remember the Alamo!" when such a remembrance was one of *defeat*? It was because those men weren't so concerned about the Mexican victory as they were over the loss of

their compatriots' lives, who fought to defend the Alamo until the last man was killed. With no reinforcements to come to their rescue, defending the Alamo became the ultimate test of a man's courage. That selfless courage, the willingness to die for a just cause, became the basis for the battle cry.

It is a battle cry that made the history books, and school children are still taught about the brave men who courageously defended the Alamo - and the rallying battle cry that brought this nation together and helped win the war against Mexico.

And now - now that we know the story of **another** battle cry, and the resolute determination of those who chose to fight for restoration of Yahweh's law or died trying - are we going to allow our children to only remember Hanukkah as something "the Jews observe"? May we suggest that we REMEMBER THE TEMPLE? **Remember** those who fought to see the day when its chambers would be cleansed of the swine's blood that had been offered there, and **remember** their call to celebrate their triumph - a true triumph of good over evil. Remember the temple! Remember Hanukkah!

Hanukkah in Competition With Christmas

The author brought up some legitimate dangers in *Hanukkah* observance that we believe should be addressed. Notice his warning:

"In sincerity many brethren keep the Feast of Dedication. The Feast of Dedication cannot replace and should not compete with Sukkot. Chanukah is not a commanded feast and lacks the foundation of Yahweh's unchanging pattern by which we are to live. Yah'shua's example in John doesn't specify either a recommendation or command to keep Chanukah. The result is that Chanukah is a personal preference that has to be tempered with knowledge and love. The downside of Chanukah is that some use it as a substitute for Christmas."

We share the author's concern that Hanukkah observance cannot replace and should not compete with Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles). We have already pointed out that Hanukkah was never intended to replace any of Yahweh's ordained feasts. We also mentioned that it was only when people used a tradition to replace or otherwise subvert Yahweh's Word that Yeshua had a problem, and He never expressed any objections to the observance of Hanukkah.

Furthermore, as the author established, Hanukkah is not a commanded feast. We addressed this particular concern in chapter 4, section one, so for now we will simply state that Hanukkah is not a festival that we should dogmatically insist that others observe. Rather, we believe that its observance should be a matter of what is laid upon our hearts to do.

The author pointed out that a down side to Hanukkah lies in its being used as a substitute for Christmas. We are also opposed to such a manner of observance. Hanukkah was instituted by people who were opposed to compromising our beliefs by incorporating heathen customs into our faith. It therefore makes no sense to undermine

the true significance of Hanukkah by incorporating Christmas customs into our Hanukkah observance.

A Jewish web site entitled "Judaism 101" contains a short essay on the history of Hanukkah, as well as a personal lament over the way some folks have "watered down" the original intent of this festival:

"Chanukkah is probably one of the best known Jewish holidays, not because of any great religious significance, but because of its proximity to Christmas. Many non-Jews (and even many assimilated Jews!) think of this holiday as the Jewish Christmas, adopting many of the Christmas customs, such as elaborate gift-giving and decoration. It is bitterly ironic that this holiday, which has its roots in a revolution against assimilation and the suppression of Jewish religion, has become the most assimilated, secular holiday on our calendar."²⁴

We couldn't agree more with the above commentary. Hanukkah is not a time for putting up a "Hanukkah bush" and bestowing lavish gifts upon each other. It is a time of remembrance. It's a time to count our blessings for the religious freedoms that we now enjoy. We should not take them for granted!

Earlier, in chapter 4, section three, we mentioned that Hanukkah has the blessing of Yahweh. We should add a caveat to that remark, stating that it has Yahweh's blessing provided no heathen observances or trappings are incorporated into its celebration. It is a time for rededicating our lives to Yahweh, and it's a time to rejoice over one of those times when good triumphed over evil, but it is not a time to even **think** about competing with Christmas!

²⁴The complete essay can be accessed at the following URL: <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday7.htm>

6. Conclusion and How We Observe Hanukkah

I believe we have successfully demonstrated that Hanukkah is an observance that has the blessing of the Almighty. It was not instituted as a replacement for any of Yahweh's laws; in fact, Hanukkah represents the Jews' refusal to scorn any of Yahweh's laws. For them to have subsequently adopted an observance that either replaced or compromised any of Yahweh's laws would have been unthinkable. As we pause to remember those who suffered and died, Hanukkah observance can serve as a vital part of the never-ending healing process. It can be a time of remembrance, as we reflect upon those who chose death over transgression of Yahweh's laws. It can be a time of celebration, as we rejoice in the triumph of good over evil, not only the victory that took place in 165 B.C.E., but also the ultimate victory of good over evil.

For those who may not know how to begin observing Hanukkah, here is what June and I have tried to do over the years, in spite of my busy work schedule that often requires my staying late at my place of employment. We have, for the past 12 years, observed *Hanukkah* in our own very informal way. We often light a menorah and we try to take time to read the story of *Hanukkah* as related in the apocryphal book of either First or Second Maccabees. Nothing spectacular, yet it is an observance and a remembrance of a miracle that occurred in the year 165 B.C.E., as well as a reminder of how blessed we are to have the freedoms we now enjoy. We have been blessed during these remembrances year after year, in spite of how seemingly small and insignificant our celebrations have been. We believe you will be blessed, too!

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