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Hanukkah

It happened during the reign of Constantine, Emperor of Rome, in the 4th century AD, that the first Christ-mass (as it was originally called) occurred. It was precisely in the year 354 and it is recorded on the Calendar of Philocalus, the official scribe for Pope Damasus. It was finally made an official Christian holy day by edict of the Roman Church Pope not quite a century later, in 440. And if one will only take the time to read the actual minutes of the various ecumenical councils of the Bishops of the Church under Constantine and the councils of Nicea and Laodicea.

Under Constantine Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire and certain Christian holidays were ordered to occur on the already well-established pagan holidays so as to not create offense or upset within the vast and diverse population that was Rome. The intent was generally quite honorable: to make Christianity the preferred Roman religion.....but only to a point. In that era, the preeminent religion of the Roman Empire was Mishrain.....Sun Worship.

Not only had a day of the week been dedicated to communal worship of the Sun-god (Sun-day, the 1st day of the week) but also for centuries the birthday of the Sun god had been celebrated. That day was December 25th. The official name of the day was “Dies Natalis Invicti Solis”.....the Day of the Nativity of the Unconquered Sun”. The problem was that there were MANY religions in the empire that worshipped the Sun; each in their own way, with varying degrees of dedication, and each with a different name for their Sun God. So, a common holiday name that would not show favoritism to one faction over another was eventually chosen for the day to celebrate the Sun God’s birth: Brumalia. We should well understand and identify with this effort at tolerance and compromise as we see this ongoing battle in America in our day over whether the word “Christmas” should be used for the December holiday season because it causes such a wide range of feelings from warmth for some to downright outrage for others. So the search for a politically correct title for the holiday season is underway in America as we speak (Happy Holidays).

The Jews were particularly offended over all this business. Because for them December 25th (or more accurately, by their calendar Kislev 25th) was also a Holy day. Because the Julian calendar and the Hebrew calendar are different, December 25th and Kislev 25th only intersect every few years. And, this holy day of Kislev 25 was established precisely AGAINST any celebration of the Sun god. On December 25th in the year 168 B.C. the hated Syrian governor Antiochus Epiphanies walked into the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, on Zeus’s birthday, and placed a statue of



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Zeus (the sun god) in the Holy of Holies. Next he sacrificed a pig to the pagan god, then had the pig chopped up and boiled, and poured the meat and broth over all the sacred Torah scrolls and furnishings of the Temple. The Syrians took complete control of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, and this led to the Jewish uprising led by Judas the Maccabee that is now called the Maccabean Rebellion.

Three years later, on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, the Jewish rebels fought and took back the Temple, purified it, removed the statue of the sun god, and celebrated by relighting the Menorah that had been dark for the past 3 years. This event was the first Hanukkah. Hanukkah simply means "dedication"... (hence the translation "Feast of Dedication") for on Kislev 25, 165 BC, the Temple was re-dedicated to the God of Israel.

First, even though Hanukkah is NOT listed as one of the 7 Biblical holy days, it IS in the Bible and its occasion is validated, usually under the name of Feast of Lights, or Feast of Dedication. And we know for a fact that Jesus, Yeshua, celebrated Hanukkah, because we're told the story of the trip he made from his home in Galilee to Jerusalem to be a part of that joyous celebration. Further, He used Kislev 25th (Hanukkah) to make a startling statement that is so important to all of us, but also insured that he would not survive too much longer.

22 At that time Hanukkah took place at Jerusalem; 23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. 24 The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. 26 "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them

out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 "I and the Father are one." John 10:22-30

Jesus Christ participated in Hanukkah. And He chose that day, Hanukkah, to announce His deity.

Hanukkah is an 8 day celebration that begins on Kislev 25th. And the focal point is the Menorah. But, it is a special Menorah; not the standard Temple Menorah. The original Temple Menorah had 7 branches, at the tips of which were 7 oil lamps. The Hanukkah Menorah.....today called a Hanukkiah..... has two extra branches and oil lamps, for a total of 9.



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It was to remember the miracle that began on Kislev 25, 165 B.C. The story goes that when the Temple was purged and then the Jews readied the Temple Menorah for lighting, they had a problem; they had only one jar of olive oil for the lamps. It's not that other burnable olive oil wasn't present, it's that the olive oil used for the Temple Menorah was specially made and set-

apart, by the priests, as called for in Leviticus. They took the only holy olive oil, carefully filled each of the 7 oils lamps with oil, and to their surprise, the Menorah burned brightly for 8 days. One jar of oil was typically sufficient for only ONE day.

So in remembrance of that miracle (and after the pattern of the Feast of Tabernacles) Hanukkah was made 8 days, and eventually the 9 branch Menorah was developed (after the Temple was destroyed for the final time in 70 A.D.)

Why 9 branches and not 8? The center branch that you see here stands above the other 8 branches; it is given a higher place, yet it is called the Shamash, or servant, lamp. The Shammash is lit on the first night of Hanukkah, and from this the first of remaining 8 lamps is ALSO lit on Kislev 25. Each night of Hanukkah, another of the lamps is lit, generally going left to right, using the fire of the Shammash lamp to light the others.

What wonderful symbolism is here for Disciples of Yeshua; the light of the servant is used to kindle the light of all that follow.

The first Hanukkah was about cleansing the Temple, and as Paul states, our bodies are now the Temples of God, as within us lives the Spirit of the Lord.

Hanukkah was a re-dedication of the Holy Temple from a place of pagan ritual to worship of the Yehoveh.

The Blessings

Blessings over the candles

Typically three blessings (Berakhot singular Berakhah) are recited during this eight-day festival. On the first night of Hanukkah, Jews recite all three blessings, on all subsequent nights, they recite only the first two. The blessings are said before the candles are lit. On the first night of Hanukkah one light (candle, lamp, or electric) is lit on the right side of the Menorah, on the following night a second light is placed to the left of the first and is lit first proceeding from left to right, and so on each night.



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The first blessing

Recited all eight nights just prior to lighting the candles:

"Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah lights."

The second blessing

Recited all eight nights just prior to lighting the candles:

"Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who performed wondrous deeds for our ancestors, in those days, at this season."

The third blessing

Recited only on the first night just prior to lighting the candles:

"Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season."

After kindling the lights

When the lights are kindled the Hanerot Halalu prayer is subsequently recited:

"We light these lights For the miracles and the wonders, for the redemption and the battles that you made for our forefathers, in those days at this season, through your holy priests. During all eight days of Hanukkah these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make them serve except for to look at them in order to express thanks and praise to Your great Name for your miracles, Your wonders and Your salvations."

Singing of Maoz Tzur after lighting

Each night immediately after the lighting of the candles, while remaining and staring at the candles, Ashkenazim (and, in recent decades, some Sephardim) then usually sing the following hymn written in Medieval Ashkenaz (Germany).