Should Believers Observe Hanukkah?

By Larry and June Acheson

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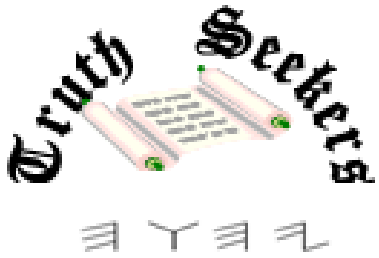

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Amended Introduction

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're dealing with business associates or customers who observe it. When approached by a well-meaning individual with whom you know you'll only engage in a fleeting conversation, and that person wishes you a Merry Christmas, it can be downright awkward explaining to that individual why you don't observe Christmas, especially when there's a 99% likelihood that he or she isn't the least interested in listening to your explanations!

There ***is*** an alternate festival that falls 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 profound, spiritual healing effect on those who observe it, ourselves included. We delve into this aspect of Hanukkah in this study; however, that is not why we chose to put this study together.

When I composed this study in 2004, I thought countering "Merry Christmas" with "Happy Hanukkah" served as a neat way of opening the door to an in-depth discussion about why we do not celebrate or recognize Christmas. Since both Christmas and Hanukkah occur during the same season, I thought this would be an effective means of politely sharing our faith while simultaneously giving the other person a glimpse of the pagan origin of Christmas (and who in his or her right mind would want to celebrate a holiday with pagan roots?). It turns out my idea wasn't the best way to go on at least three levels. First, I eventually found that this approach doesn't actually *work* insofar as piquing anyone's interest, and when you think about it, countering "Merry Christmas" with "Happy Hanukkah" most likely won't ignite some giant light bulb in the other person's brain and make them want to check out Hanukkah. The only summary perception they'll likely come away with is, "Oh, he doesn't celebrate Christmas. **I** do, so *whatever 'floats his boat'*!" I don't think I ever angered anyone with my "Happy Hanukkah" retort, but neither did I find myself involved in a meaningful discussion about why I believe the way I do. Most reactions were something akin to, "Oh, you're *Jewish*! I'm sorry if I offended you!" and that's pretty much where the conversations have ended. Since around 2005, I've been countering "Merry Christmas" with "Merry *every* day!" It's my way of saying, "I don't actually celebrate Christmas, but I *do* wish you a joyous day *every* day!" I mean, shouldn't we all wish everyone the best *every* day, not just a few days a year?

Now please don't get me wrong: I don't see anything necessarily *wrong* with countering a "Merry Christmas" wish with "Happy Hanukkah"; in fact, a close friend of mine recently shared that this is precisely what he does while in such venues as airports during the Christmas season, where he has found many different faiths represented, not just Christian and Jewish. He prefers this type of response because although he knows in advance it's not likely going to strike up any meaningful conversations with others, occasionally he actually runs into a "reform Jew" who soon has second thoughts about his "Merry

Christmas" compromise. And when you think about it, paying homage to Christmas *is* a compromise. We'll cover that later. So much for my *first* reason for regretting my "Happy Hanukkah" response to "Merry Christmas"; here's my *second* reason:

Let's face it: Wishing everyone you meet "Merry Christmas" is a bit ill-mannered because it assumes everyone out there is just like you. Assuming everyone you meet is just like you and that this in turn means *everyone* celebrates Christmas is simply poor reasoning at best. Taking it a step further and greeting everyone you meet with "Merry Christmas" borders on rudeness. Society's coming to grips with this realization is essentially where the generic "Happy Holidays!" greeting originated – out of a desire to not wrongly and inappropriately assume anything about the other person. Of course, even exclaiming, "Happy Holidays" assumes the other person observes any holidays at all, but that's another topic. For now, I will simply state it occurred to me that if someone is so thoughtless and assuming as to greet me with "Merry Christmas," isn't replying with "Happy Hanukkah" treating him or her *worse* than they treated me? I mean, they essentially just established that they celebrate *Christmas*, which means they probably have little or no regard for Hanukkah. If I counter with "Happy Hanukkah," I'm not assuming *anything*; I already <u>know</u> they have little or no regard for Hanukkah, yet I'm imposing that holiday wish on someone who doesn't even observe it. In summary, they may have been guilty of *wrongly assuming*; but replying with "Happy Hanukkah!" may be construed as *wrongly imposing*. Personally, I don't want to do that any more than I want to go around generically wishing everyone I meet a "Happy Passover," "Happy Shavuot" or "Happy Sukkot."

Finally, offering my "Happy Hanukkah" retort as a viable counter-response to "Merry Christmas" apparently created the (false) impression for a few Torah believers that I regard Hanukkah as a *substitute* for Christmas, as in, "Hey, I miss the fun Christmas celebrations I used to enjoy while growing up, so why not mingle some Christmas celebrations with my newfound Hanukkah observance? Why not put up a Hanukkah bush instead of a Christmas tree, splash my home and lawn with 'Happy Hanukkah' lights and ornaments and have eight days of exchanging presents!" Yikes! That's precisely the impression one man had of me! His impression was a dire misinterpretation of my intentions, which eventually led to a rather unpleasant e-mail exchange. In the interest of addressing and hopefully squelching his concerns, I will incorporate excerpts from our e-mail discussion into this, our 2021 update. Sadly, our exchange revealed an indelibly strong bias, not only against Hanukkah itself, but also against all who observe or *have* observed it, including the very first ones back in 165 BCE. His bias really needs to be exposed because it's a misleading and deceptive message he's shared with other believers, not just me. I can only hope they aren't naïve enough to adopt his reasoning process. Those who are open to checking out another perspective are welcome to check out mine!

Our primary 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 not only read our perspective, but to also let us know if you share our vision for how we can best serve our Heavenly Father and His Son.

Appended Introduction:
"Alternate Festival" Versus "Substitute Festival"

It is now 2021, seventeen years after we first shared this study with others. Since then, we have received several heartwarming e-mails and even snail-mail letters from various individuals expressing an understanding of a new perspective of Hanukkah that they previously hadn't considered. Yes, we've also received some negative feedback. One individual, the man I referenced on the preceding page, expressed disagreement in no uncertain terms. After a back-and-forth e-mail exchange, he finally wrote, "We have had the opportunity to exchange our positions. I am not moving from mine and I suspect you will not move from yours. On this subject we do not and will not agree. It is what it is."[1]

That's one way to end a discussion. To the best of my knowledge, the above summary is correct in that his mind has not changed since 2012, nor has mine.

Another gentleman expressed his anti-Hanukkah sentiments in his book *Torah Calendar*. In the chapter titled "Hanukkah Reconsidered," he summarizes:

> What shall we say about man-made observances, such as Hanukkah and Purim? As with Christmas and Easter, the first thing we should admit is that these festival days are not commanded by Yahweh: they are commanded by men. Yet Yahweh warns us very clearly not to add anything to His instructions, so that we might live, and be preserved in safety.[2]

My brief answer to the above commentary is that no one I know regards Hanukkah as an observance "commanded by Yahweh" or even "commanded by men."[3] It's simply a time of reflection. If at this time of year, you prefer not to pause and reflect on the meaning or origins of Hanukkah and how it relates to us today, I'm not about to admonish you to change your ways. Would I prefer that everyone regard Hanukkah as a time to memorialize and reflect on all the lives lost for the sake of Torah observance while simultaneously committing to lead lives in obedience to Yahweh's Word? Sure, but I do not support *mandating* such a memorial!

Both individuals referenced above lead their own separate ministries and in this revision I will incorporate additional quotes from both men.

The primary reason I decided to append my introduction is to quickly defuse any thoughts that when I described Hanukkah as "an alternate festival" to Christmas, my intention was to infer that it is a *substitute*

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[1] Grandpa Joseph Dumond, from an e-mail received on 11/26/2012. Our e-mail exchange was brought about by my decision to respond to his e-mail newsletter (Newsletter 5848-039) sent on 11/23/2012 titled "The Festival of Lights; Do we have to deal with this again?" That article is currently available online at sightedmoon-archives.com/the-festival-of-lights-do-we-have-to-deal-with-this-again/.

[2] Norman Willis, *Torah Calendar*, chapter 14, "Hanukkah Reconsidered," by Norman B. Willis, Nazarene Israel (publisher), 2012. Willis' book is currently available at his nazareneisrael.org website (currently found at https://nazareneisrael.org/books/the-torah-calendar/).

[3] I realize some have taught that Hanukkah observance is a "law." For example, Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XII, ch. 7, § 7, translated by William Whiston, A. M., wrote, "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."

for Christmas. Not in any way! "Alternate" and "substitute" are two separate terms that should not be confused with each other. While I regard Hanukkah as an *alternative* to Christmas, I do not regard it as a *substitute* for Christmas. If you just can't find it within yourself to give up your Christmas celebrations, the pretty lights, the gift-giving, the tree, etc., yet you want to embrace your Hebrew Roots by honing in on a different day to celebrate while borrowing from Christmas customs, I can only say, "Please do not settle on observing Hanukkah." They're memorials to two completely different events. In fact, I would go so far to say that infusing a pagan holiday's customs into Hanukkah observance can rightly be construed as an insult to the very reason it was instituted in the first place. Briefly, Hanukkah came about as a direct result of the Jewish nation of believers revolting against a heathen nation's decree for them to abandon Yahweh's laws. Those who oppressed the Jews would have had no problem with them celebrating a pagan holiday!

During the five-year interval between our rejection of Christmas and our decision to memorialize Hanukkah, we did not search for a replacement holiday with a more Jewish flair. We were content to inform our families that we would not be joining in their celebrations and we treated December 25th as we did any other day, with the exception of knowing there would be no shopping on that day because all the stores were closed; at least that's the way it was back in 1985. Frankly, I hardly knew what "Hanukkah" was when I stumbled across it during my studies. I knew it was a Jewish observance, I knew it wasn't commanded in the Bible, so my thought was, "Why bother looking into it any further?" I think it was via an educational newspaper funded by the National Education Association through our local school that the details of Hanukkah eventually grabbed my attention.

It's one thing to *examine* the history of Hanukkah, but something else entirely to mentally *put yourself in the shoes of the Jewish population* who experienced the horrors perpetrated upon them by brutal heathens back around the year 168 BCE. Over the course of time as I have communicated with those who are opposed to memorializing Hanukkah, a common thread I've found is this: I have never for one moment sensed that these individuals are able to put themselves in the shoes of those who watched loved ones being savagely killed or maimed by calloused heathens. Putting oneself in another's shoes is an idiomatic expression for exhibiting *empathy*. It's sad, but I have encountered believers who, though otherwise kind and respectful, approach Scripture from a purely clinical perspective. To them, it's either black or white with no "wiggle room." To *memorialize* an event, in their opinion, equates to *mandating* its observance in contradistinction to Yahweh's directive to not deviate from His commands (*cf.*, Deuteronomy 5:32). If you think it's wrong – even *sinful* – to pause in remembrance of those whose lives were mercilessly taken – all because they chose to take a stand for Yahweh's laws, then I really don't think anything else I write in this study will impact you in any way.

In view of all the above, I would implore you to please *not* think for even a moment – as some have already done – that June and I recommend memorializing Hanukkah as a "substitute" for Christmas. They're just not the same at all! The *only* thing these days have in common is the fact that they both generally occur at the same time of the year and are commonly associated with lights. My experiences with those who object to observing Hanukkah is that they seem unable to separate the late infusion of pagan traditions into Hanukkah from an appreciation of the original meaning of Hanukkah. While I *could* regard this as being "their problem, not mine," at the same time I know there are some who truly are open to the respectful sharing of ideas, even if it may mean eventually changing their minds. That includes an individual whose writing I addressed in our original study. On that basis, I've decided to update our study.

Finally, you may have noticed my frequent framing of the words "memorializing Hanukkah." I personally try to avoid referring to Hanukkah as a *festival*, even though it's commonly thought of as such, *e.g*., "the festival of lights." I prefer to think of it as a "memorial," in much the same vein as the United States' Memorial Day, a day whose origin spawned from the aftermath of the Civil War, at which time Americans in various towns began holding springtime tributes to the countless fallen soldiers. There was hardly a family who didn't lose a loved one during that bleak time in the history of our nation. I think those families who have lost loved ones in service to our country can appreciate this small token of remembrance, accompanied by a grateful spirit for the freedoms their loved ones' sacrifices brought to this country. This time of somber reflection can also be a time of celebration – celebrating those freedoms that came about through "blood, sweat and tears." Hanukkah, for me, is *that* type of memorial observance. I reflect and mourn the loss of so many innocent lives at the hands of a coldhearted ruler who spurned Yahweh and His ways. At the same time, I rejoice that a small army, out of their love for Yahweh and His ways, fought to preserve their freedom to worship Him, overcoming the odds and finally cleansing the Temple, rededicating it to Yahweh.

I. What's Wrong with Christmas?

Many believers, upon recognizing the unscriptural, 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 customs of a Roman holiday called *Saturnalia*, cosmetically converting its rituals into a "Christian holiday" under a new name: *Christmas*.[4] 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.[5] 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.[6] Those who are so adamant about "putting Christ back in Christmas" must contend with 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.[7] The state of Massachusetts became the last state to finally repeal its law against Christmas observance in 1856.[8] It wasn't until our nation's 14th President, Franklin Pierce, came along in 1853 that a Christmas tree was decorated *outside* the White House,[9] and it wasn't until our nation's 23rd President, Benjamin Harrison,

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[4] As 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."

[5] From *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, edited by Dr. R. J. Zevi Werblowsky & Dr. Geoffry 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, the sole such occasion mentioned in the Bible being Pharaoh's b. (Gen. 40:20)."

[6] From *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."

[7] Many sources corroborate this statement. For example, from Yankee Publishing, Inc.'s NewEngland.com, article "How the Puritans Banned Christmas," by Heather Tourgee, 12/21/2020, we read, "In 1659 the Puritan government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony actually *banned* Christmas."

[8] *Cf.*, History.com, "When Massachusetts Banned Christmas," by Christopher Klein, 12/21/2020. He writes, "Not until 1856 did Christmas —along with Washington's Birthday and the Fourth of July—finally become a public holiday in Massachusetts."

[9] *Cf.*, History.com, "Dreaming of a White (House) Christmas: 17 Photos," by Madison Horne, 03/18//2019. Madison writes, "Christmas trees in the White House would not appear until the mid-19th century when 14th president Franklin Pierce decorated an evergreen tree on the White House lawn in 1853."

came along that the first known Christmas tree was brought *inside* the White House. That tree was erected upstairs for the President's grandchildren.[10] Moreover, it wasn't until 1870 that Christmas was declared a federal holiday.[11]

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 heathens[12], 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 hopefully understand and agree that it is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7:25. In this chapter of Daniel 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[13] and Christmas, all of which on the surface may seem so innocent and pure, but under the close scrutiny of Scripture, are abominations.[14]

Thus, as earlier mentioned, many believers who understand the above concerns look for an alternative to the celebration of Christmas. That's what June and I did back in 1985, the year we rejected the observance of Christmas. For five years we observed no festivals in December. Then, as we explored a Jewish festival called *Hanukkah*[15], we decided to give it a try, *not* as a substitute for Christmas, but as an *alternative* memorial occurring during the same season of the year. It's a decision we have not regretted. Our observance of Hanukkah is very simple compared to the elaborate celebrations we have read about over the years, but hopefully no less meaningful. Although we highly recommend observing this memorial to all who strive to put Yahweh and His Torah first in our lives, we would nevertheless first

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[10] *Cf.*, The White House Historical Association, "White House Christmas Traditions," by Press Room: Backgrounders. Retrieved 01/02/2021.

[11] *Cf.*, history.com, "History of Christmas," by History.com editors, 12/22/2020. We read, "Christmas was declared a federal holiday in the United States on June 26, 1870."

[12] According 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.

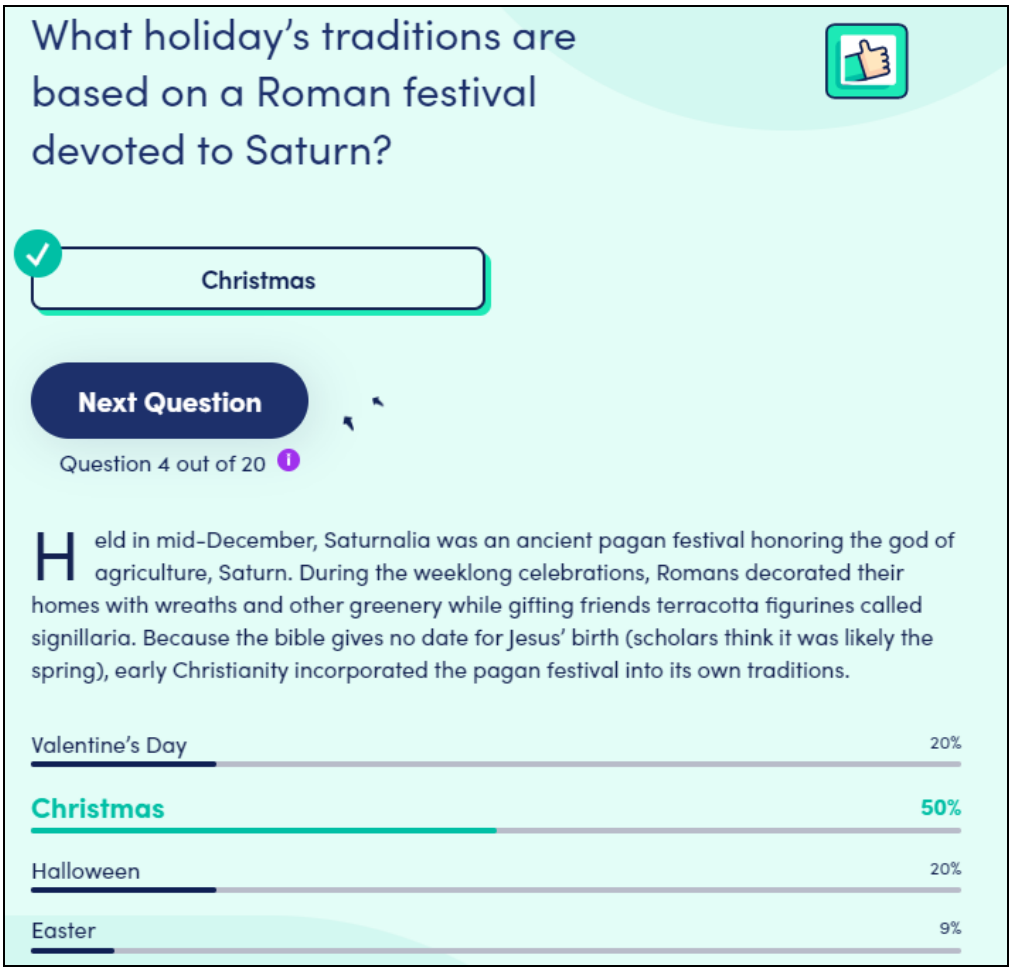
[13] Yahweh had already given His people a Thanksgiving feast long before man decided to come up with a day of his own choosing. For more details, we invite you to read our study *Thanksgiving: Yahweh's Way … or On Man's Day?*

[14] We 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.

[15] Also spelled in various ways, such as *Chanukah*.

counsel you to read and study the origin and significance of Hanukkah before deciding to join in its observance.

The following is taken from an online "quiz" that came to my e-mail inbox in August 2022. It's pretty clear the "quizmaster" trivializes the well-known fact that Christmas is simply a repackaging of a pagan holiday, rebranded with a name that glosses over its origin from heathen roots:



2. What *is* Hanukkah?

Hanukkah is observed 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 BCE. Three years prior to that victory, in 168 BCE, the Temple had been seized and dedicated to the worship of Zeus. Antiochus Epiphanes, 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 Maccabee[16] 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 pure worship of Yahweh, in accordance with the rituals outlined 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.
> 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 ordained 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

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

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 gleaned from 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 enough oil to light the menorah for one day. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days, which explains why the feast lasts for eight days.[17] However, this legend appears to be based more on "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 Babylonian Talmud wasn't compiled until the fifth century CE, around 700 years after the events of Hanukkah took place. The fact that such a "footnote" to the Hanukkah story first appears 700 years after the events took place, and is only found in the Babylonian Talmud, known for its stories of folklore and magic, does not add credibility to the account.[18]

Nevertheless, in spite of the Talmud's apparent embellishment of the Hanukkah account, this does not detract from the event itself, an observance that is not only recorded by the historian Josephus[19], but is also found in the Bible, as we will discuss later.

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[17] *Cf., The Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Shabbat 21b, where we read, "And when the Hasmonean monarchy [the Maccabees] overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest, undisturbed by the Greeks. And there was sufficient oil there to light the candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit the candelabrum from it eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *hallel* and special thanksgiving in prayer and blessings." Quoted from The William Davidson Talmud translation, which is currently available for reading online at www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.21b.

[18] According 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)."

[19] *Cf.*, Josephus, *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, "*Why*?" Why do we observe Hanukkah? This is a question that we have never once been asked! Instead, we've 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 righteousness 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. Many of us remember where we were and what we were doing when we first learned of the tragedy of 9/11. Some of us remember where we were when we watched Neil Armstrong take man's first walk on the moon. A few remember where we were when we learned that President Kennedy had been shot. Even fewer 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 calamity. The recent tragedy of 9/11 strikes a particularly emotional chord within all of us, as the still-fresh memory lingers of how nearly 3,000 lives were snuffed out with two sudden, swift blows from hijacked jet airplanes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York. Two other planes were hijacked, one of which crashed into the Pentagon and the other crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. 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, but we must move on. Life goes on.

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.[20]

Each year, on the anniversary of the tragedy of 9/11, commemoration events are held at the locations of each attack. 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 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

[20] Al-Qaeda terrorist Osama bin Laden, who claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks in a videotaped message he delivered in October 2004, was himself killed in a raid by U.S. forces on May 2, 2011.

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 a man named Czeslaw Stylinski wants everyone to ***remember*** the tragedy of 9/11. Mr. Stylinski 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.[21]

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.[22]

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.[23]

Again, the above came from an 11 year-old. Please think about that. 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 Epiphanes. The best 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 40,000 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.[24]

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[21] Quoted from BBC News Online web site: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/world/americas/2251406.stm
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Cf.*, 2 Maccabees 5:11-14.

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. Maybe you, like so many out there, don't believe this really happened. Maybe you are unable to process reality – that men could ever have been so vicious. *No one*, you reason, could be so cruel. For those in today's society who regard Yahweh's laws as having been "done away," eating some pork would seem like such a minor, trivial request. Punishment for refusing to eat it, though, 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 on the horrors inflicted upon the Jewish people, I believe 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 Righteousness 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 when sinister men are punished for their evil deeds, we simultaneously 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's safe to say 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 were plundered. Sabbathkeepers were brutally and shamelessly executed. 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. Righteousness 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 righteousness over evil***, I am persuaded that one cannot properly observe Hanukkah without pausing to count our blessings for the freedoms we currently have. With the direction in which our nation is heading, I'm afraid they may be taken away sooner than we previously expected. Until that time comes, we need something to hold on to, something to remind us that regardless of what may come to pass, in the end righteousness will prevail.

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 have 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. Once 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 was compelled to refuse; unfortunately, my manager did not understand what would be wrong with me asking someone else to work on the Sabbath. However, when I stated my reason for not being able to comply with his request, he did not demand that I "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 recognize the validity of Yahweh's laws, at least they respect the beliefs of those who do. Hanukkah is a good time to count those blessings; the Jews of 168 BCE were not afforded this luxury. 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.[25] In spite of the inherently evil nation 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 actually include actions that each of us can perform on a daily basis, yet June and I also know that we, like so many others, simply do not take the time to properly 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 righteousness 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

[25] I wrote this in 2004. Ask yourself: *Have things improved in 2021?* As I write this, I am personally mourning the horrible shooting death of a convenience store clerk here in Dallas, TX. According to the news report, a man walked into a convenience store on the morning of 01/17/2021 and fired eight shots into the clerk, then turned and left. Adding to the agony of this story, others walked into the store witnessing the clerk's suffering, but turned and walked out. *Have things improved in 2021? How about 2023 (i.e., the 10/07/23 Hamas attack on Israel)?*

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 ever 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, several years ago we took it upon ourselves to send Hanukkah cards to a few of our acquaintances in the faith. Since we are so scattered, it would not have been possible for all of 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 did not hear back from her.[26] 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, along with my responses, 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, nor have we ever 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 excellent 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 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 righteousness over evil. Not only that, but like Hanukkah, Purim is not a commanded observance.[27] Since Purim *is* honorably mentioned in Scripture, yet not commanded, does this mean it should not be observed?

Or how about the daughters of Israel who made a custom of going up to lament for the daughter of Yephthah, four days per year?[28] 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, his only child, came forth to meet him, thus sealing her doom.

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[26] Sadly, our friend passed away a couple of years after I composed our original study.

[27] We 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.

[28] *Cf.*, Judges 11:39-40.

Perhaps those who are opposed to Hanukkah would also have objected to the daughters of Israel's yearly custom of lamenting for Jephthah's daughter. Yahweh never commanded anyone to start the custom of lamenting for Jephthah's daughter, yet neither is there a record of negative implications resulting from that decision. Thus, no one can truthfully say the daughters of Israel made a poor decision in remembering the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. It was a remembrance based on love and the respect for life. In fact, had they chosen to ***not*** remember her 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. I say this with the understanding that we do not either teach others that Hanukkah is commanded or that it should replace any of Yahweh's ordained festivals.

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, if the word *Hanukkah* 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* <u>does</u> 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 "Chănukkâh," 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* <u>didn't</u> 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 Jephthah's daughter. If ordaining the observance of *Hanukkah* constitutes "adding to the Word," then so do the observances of *Purim* and lamenting for Jephthah's daughter. 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. By *replacing* Yahweh's ordained feast with another one of his own choosing, Jeroboam effectively *substituted* one feast with another. Jeroboam's feast was held "in the month which he had devised of his own heart" (I Kings 12:33), and most certainly did <u>not</u> 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 <u>hates</u> 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 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~~ <u>dedication</u>, 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 I'm sure you noticed, I put the words "~~feast of the~~" in a red font with a "strikethrough." That's because those words are simply not found in the Greek text. Usually the King James Version translators did an admirable job of putting added words or phrases in *italics* to show the reader that they were inserting those words into the otherwise translation of the Greek text. However, in this instance, they failed to clue the reader in to the added words. This is significant in that, to the best of our knowledge, no one ever referred to Hanukkah as a "feast" or "festival" until the writings of Josephus.[29] Moreover, Josephus adds, "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."

The above is an instance in which I object to Josephus' summary of the original Hanukkah observance. Judah Maccabee and his men had no more right to sanctify the observance of Hanukkah than the Israelites had authority to sanctify a yearly time for their daughters to lament the daughter of Jephthah. To be sure, if this discussion turns to whether or not men have the authority to *command* or *sanctify* an observance such as Hanukkah, I will take the side of *rejecting* its observance.

And now, back to the question at hand: Did Yeshua attend the Jews' Hanukkah memorial to criticize its observance? Why was He there? 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

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[29] *Cf.*, Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XII, ch. 7, § 7, translated by William Whiston, A. M. Josephus writes, "Now Judas [Maccabeus] 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 every rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored the Almighty [Gr. *Theos*], and delighted them, by hymns and psalms."

as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* attest that Yeshua was at the Temple to *attend* the Hanukkah festival, not condemn its observance.[30]

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 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 postulated, 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!"? Finally, as we read above, a careful reading of John chapter 10 reveals that Hanukkah was not regarded as a "feast" at all! It was not referred to as a feast – it was simply termed "the Dedication."

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? I am persuaded 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, just as today's detractors do. 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."[31] 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.

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[30] *Cf.*, *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."

[31] *Cf.*, Mark 7:7-8.

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 of us have been conditioned to believe. Sadly, many believers 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.

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 unreasonable. 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 although Hanukkah is not a feast ordained by Yahweh, this cannot mean taking the time for remember those whose lives were taken from them from calloused heathens is wrong, nor does it mean celebrating the victory of righteousness over evil doesn't have His blessing. Thus, we do not need to expound on this aspect of Hanukkah observance any further. She also admonishes us to read the story in the Book of Maccabees, which we have done. In fact, we believe anyone who seriously studies the books of Maccabees will conclude that there is nothing wrong with observing Hanukkah, at least not with the manner in which they observed it.

What we *really* need to address from our friend's commentary above is her attempt to connect Hanukkah to December 25th, which in turn represents an attempt to link it to Christmas observance. Her approach is not unique because it persists even today, 17 years after I addressed it back in 2004.

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. In 2020, it fell on December 15th.

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 from it sprang forth another "holiday" – a *manmade* holiday – that was named after a heathen goddess.[32]

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."

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?"

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[32] According 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.

Great question.

I Maccabees was originally composed in Hebrew[33] and was indeed considered to be a part of Scripture by early believers.[34] In fact, it was St. Jerome who, in the year 400 C.E., chose to separate Maccabees from the rest of Scripture.[35] 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.[36] 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. Does this truth make you feel comfortable about your rejection of I Maccabees?

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.

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[33] *Cf. 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; Enermalm-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."

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

[35] Ibid, 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."

[36] *Cf. 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

In our 2004 study, we 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 did 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 should 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."[37]

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

[37] It should be noted that I e-mailed a copy of my original study to the gentleman referenced here and to my surprise, not only did he express agreement, but he also posted a copy on his web site. I have since lost contact with him over the years, but when I recently checked out his web site, I found that all studies, including ours, have been removed. It appears his web site is now solely aimed at producing new moon reports.

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 righteousness triumphing over evil. It is a story that needs to be told and retold at least once a year because we should never forget the atrocities that savage men are capable of perpetrating on others. At the same time, we can rejoice in the promise to those who remain faithful to Yahweh.

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. I made this statement back in 2004; in 2021, it seems like a rather harsh thing to say, but nevertheless there is a least a kernel of truth to it. In fact, some have told me that Hanukkah should be regarded somewhat as an "Independence Day" for Jews, but for no one else. It's something that the nation of Israel might want to commemorate, 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.

I am persuaded that those who have such a casual regard for Hanukkah are missing out, not only on 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. If you don't agree, please reach out to those who survived the 1993 siege on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas and ask them. 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 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 prevailed to the end – 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 commemorating. They are in essence stating that if the physical Temple were still here, they would *then* observe Hanukkah. Since the "physical" is no longer here, they choose to not even observe it spiritually. We should not need a physical Temple to remember those who gave their lives any more than we should 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, i.e., *be substituted for*, 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 reinforce that Hanukkah is not a mandated observance. Rather, we believe that its observance should be a matter of what is laid upon our hearts to do. For us personally, a decision to observe or not observe Hanukkah should *not* be a test of fellowship.

The author pointed out that a down side to Hanukkah lies in its being used as a substitute for Christmas. We agree! We, too, are opposed to such a manner of observance. Hanukkah was instituted by people who were opposed to compromising their beliefs by incorporating heathen customs into their worship. It therefore makes no sense to undermine the true significance of Hanukkah by incorporating Christmas customs into our Hanukkah observance or making Hanukkah a substitute for Christmas.

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. <u>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.</u>[38]

[38] The complete essay can be accessed at the following URL: http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday7.htm

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, 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 an occasion to rejoice over one of those times when righteousness triumphed over evil, but it is not a time to even ***think*** about competing with Christmas!

The True Roots of Hanukkah – A Violation of Torah?

In 2012 I had a brief e-mail exchange with a fellow believer named Joseph who, like us, upholds Torah observance. If I had to summarize our core "disconnect," it's a 2-part issue characterized by: 1) His refusal to regard Hanukkah as anything other than man's attempt to squeeze in an "added" feast and 2) His adamant conclusion that those who observe Hanukkah do so in an attempt to find a substitute for Christmas. I've already addressed these claims, but maybe framing my answers in a different way may help make a difference for some who are still "on the fence." I referenced this same gentleman in my appended introduction; he's the one who pretty much ended the discussion by stating he wasn't going to move from his position and I'm not going to move from mine. Before that abrupt end, I tried and failed to get him to see that observing Hanukkah in the same way it was *originally* kept cannot and should not be compared to Christmas. Here's are a few excerpts from our exchange:

> I am going to comment here as I read your article. The first thing I do with articles like this is replace Christmas with Chanukah and see just how many times they fit. It is just one of the things I do. Not meant to insult you.
>
> You said
>
> > "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 heathens, 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."
>
> All you have to do now is replace the word Christmas with Chanukah and you would have the exact same argument I would have and do have with those who keep Chanukah.[39]

[39] Grandpa Joseph Dumond, from an e-mail received on 11/25/2012. Our e-mail exchange was brought about by my decision to respond to his e-mail newsletter (Newsletter 5848-039) sent on 11/23/2012 titled "The Festival of Lights; Do we have to deal with this again?" That article is currently available online at sightedmoon-archives.com/the-festival-of-lights-do-we-have-to-deal-with-this-again/.

The above represents the common thread woven throughout the anti-Hanukkah believers we have met or corresponded with: They attempt to identify Hanukkah with Christmas. Let's separate fiction from fact. First, the roots of Hanukkah and the roots of Christmas are completely separate and vastly different. In fact, it's the proverbial "apples and oranges." Next, Hanukkah is not, nor had ever been regarded as a replacement for any of our Creator's ordained holy days – until the advent of modern-day anti-Hanukkah believers. I can only conclude that the above response represents an attempt to force-associate Hanukkah with Christmas.

Hanukkah a Replacement for Christmas?

Here's another comment from the same gentleman:

> You next go on to tell the story of the Macabees. This is fine and all good. I have no problem with this. You even go on to say:
>
> > 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.
>
> Again this is good. BUT… many Ephraimites come out of pagan christmas and now use Chanukah as a replacement for it. Many Jews use Chanukah to pretend to be normal with the pagan festivals going on. I reject this. The Book of Maccabees is not an ordained book of the bible. Yet some will use it as such.[40]

I have already addressed Joseph's view that the book of Maccabees should not be regarded as Scripture, along with the fact that it wasn't until a 4th century Catholic decided it should be separated from the canon of Scripture that anyone thought otherwise. Until then, it was regarded as being as Scriptural as any other historical book of the Bible.

In the above commentary, Joseph uses what is known as a "straw man argument" to prove his case. We both agree that we shouldn't use Hanukkah as a replacement or substitute for Christmas, nor should Jews pretend to be "normal" with heathens by borrowing Christmas customs in their observance of Hanukkah. So Joseph burns down the straw man with his excellent reasoning, but avoids addressing whether or not mirroring the *original* Hanukkah observance – without incorporating pagan customs – is wrong.

Yeshua's Temple Visit at Hanukkah: Just a Coincidence?

Our study addresses the fact that, according to the Apostle John, Yeshua visited the Temple area at Hanukkah (John 10:22). Certainly, if His fellow Jews were observing a heathen ritual in violation of Torah, this would have been a prime opportunity for Yeshua to have pointed it out. He certainly did this

[40] Ibid.

on other occasions, but not here. Yeshua's silence is markedly different from the admonitions spewing from modern-day Hanukkah critics. Here's what Joseph wrote:

> To use the argument that Yehshua did not condemn Chanukah does not legitimatize it. Come on. He never said anything about driving cars on the left hand side either although there were chariots there. So this means that we should drive on the right side. This is a lame argument. One that does not hold up in a court of law. And remember we are to judge angels. So if your going to claim chanukah then you have to have sound facts and not hearsay or lame arguments. You are not convincing me here at all. Just giving me more ammunition. Sorry.

Joseph's comparing Yeshua's silence regarding Hanukkah observance with His also not saying anything about driving cars (or chariots) on the left hand side is obviously "reaching" because the Apostle John didn't record anything about driving chariots in John chapter 22. John *did* record the fact that a Hanukkah observance was in progress. John *did* record that Yeshua was at the "scene of the crime," i.e., the Temple, but if those Jews *shouldn't* have been observing Hanukkah, certainly Yeshua would have spoken up, right? Yet John recorded no admonitions. Let's face it: Joseph would have "spoken up."

The made-up example of Yeshua never having said anything about which side of the road people should drive their chariots reminds me of a sarcastic former Christian friend's reaction when he could no longer refute any of my arguments in favor of observing the weekly Sabbath. I had just told him that Yeshua obeyed His Father and the Apostle Peter told us that we should "follow His steps" (1 Peter 1:21). My friend's reaction was, "So does that mean you're going to go and get baptized in the Jordan River?" Both reactions (which side of the road to drive on and whether or not I need to get baptized in the Jordan River) are simply faulty generalizations ultimately based on a failed desire to create a logical, yet unrelated, parallel argument. I think the term is "red herring argument." The argument only fits if you've already made up your mind.

The "Oil Miracle"

The fact that people invent and incorporate false customs into various celebrations should not be used as a reason to discontinue observing the celebration. For example, we have no intention of incorporating a boiled egg into our Passover Seder, even though it's evolved into a prevailing Jewish custom without Scriptural support. We simply omit the egg. However, if we relied on Joseph's reasoning process as presented below, we should ***stop*** memorializing Passover because Jews have inserted a tradition about a boiled egg into the Seder. Here's what Joseph had to say about my admission that the "oil miracle" is a late interpolation to the Hanukkah story:

> Larry you then go to admit the 8 day oil thing is a false teaching only found in the Talmud. Yet you dismiss this out and out lie in order to justify the keeping of this celebration that is modelled after the 8 days of Saturnalia. ANd Diwali all of which are modelled after the worship of Nimrod and the yule log and all that is bad about Christmas. Only now we dress it in Jewish words so it sound OK. By keeping chanukah you are teaching others to accept the lie about the 8 days. And you see nothing wrong with that? PLease think on this. You did ask me to tell you and I am being straight. Not trying to slam or hurt you. Just straight up. Not holding any punches.
>
> Please forgive me Larry for using your words on you. I just cannot resist.

In circuitous and confusing fashion, Josephus somehow takes the late interpolation about the "Hanukkah oil miracle," then attempts to correlate it with Christmas, and thereby negates any just reasoning for observing Hanukkah. So he again circles back to Christmas, even though Hanukkah's

inception *pre-dates* Christmas and even though Hanukkah was most certainly not modeled after *Saturnalia*. For reasons known only to Joseph, even though Hanukkah pre-dates Christmas, and even though its observance has absolutely no connection with *Saturnalia*, he is persuaded that its celebration is modeled after "the eight days of *Saturnalia*." However, according to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Saturnalia only lasted *seven* days, not eight.[41] Moreover, I'm not quite sure how those persecuted 2nd century BCE Jews who were being hunted down and executed for obeying Torah got caught up in the trappings of Saturnalia and Diwali, nor does Joseph explain this anomaly, yet that's what he expects us to believe happened.

Why Didn't Yahweh Protect the Israelites from Antiochus Epiphanes?

During my correspondence with Joseph, I appealed to his empathetic side, as I often do to others when I share our reasons for observing Hanukkah. I suggested that he read the account of the mother and her seven sons who were mocked, maimed, then fried alive, all because they refused to disobey Yahweh's law forbidding His people to eat pork. To my surprise, Joseph's response was not one of empathy, but of callous disregard for the lives the perished. He essentially asked, "If they were so righteous, then why didn't the Almighty protect them?" Here's the excerpt from his commentary:

> YOu said "
>
> > 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."
>
> If these people were willing to die in order not to eat pork, then why are we not willing to obey and NOT ADD TO TORAH, the same Torah that they were willing to die for. (I was not Yelling just emphasizing) We are so easy to just let things go. Yet they had a zeal to want to keep Torah. But...again if they were keeping Torah then where was Yehovah? A question I often think of. Why did He not protect them. How corrupt had they become?

In my response to Joseph, I expressed surprise at his callously wondering why Yahweh didn't protect His people. His thoughtless musing over why Yahweh didn't protect the Jews from Antiochus Epiphanes and his army reminds me of the thoughtless insults hurled at Yeshua as He died on the cross: "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He be the Messiah, the chosen of Elohim!"[42] "Let the Messiah the King of Israel descend now from the cross that we may see and believe!"[43] "He trusted in Yahweh; let Him deliver him now if He will save him, for he said, 'I am the Son of Yahweh'!" Would Joseph have chimed in, "Yes! He claimed to be the Son of Yehovah, but why is His Father abandoning His Son in this way and allowing Him to suffer like this? *How corrupt had He become?*"

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[41] *Cf.*, Britannica.com, ©2021 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., where we read, "Originally celebrated on December 17, Saturnalia was extended first to three and eventually to seven days."
[42] Luke 23:35.
[43] Mark 15:30

And what would Joseph have to say in response to the news that John the Baptist had been beheaded? Or the stoning of Stephen? Would it be, "Why did He not protect them? How corrupt had they become?"

Surely, as Joseph would reason, if those Jews in 168 BCE had been righteous, Yahweh would have put His shield of protection over them. However, as we all should know, that's not always how it works. We should all know that. Just ask the author of the book of Hebrews:

> 35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:
> 36 And others had trial of *cruel* mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:
> 37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;
> 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and *in* mountains, and *in* dens and caves of the earth.
> 39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:
> 40 Elohim having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.[44]

The obvious question that Joseph needs to answer is, "Do you likewise wonder why Yahweh didn't protect those righteous men and women who were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted and slain with the sword? Would you likewise wonder how corrupt those people had become?"

And how would Joseph answer the righteous saints of Revelation 6:9-10?

> 9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of Elohim, and for the testimony which they held:
> 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Sovereign, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on earth?

Would Joseph answer, "Why cry ye out so? Had ye not been so corrupt in thy ways, Yehovah would have spared thee and thou wouldst have lived to a ripe old age!" This seems to be the approach Joseph would take, at least with regard to the Jews of 168 BCE.

I also wonder if Joseph would have been right there with Yeshua's disciples when they saw the man who was blind from his birth. This account can be read in John 9:1-7. When the disciples saw the blind man, they didn't express empathy for his condition. Rather, they dispassionately asked, "Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Yeshua set them straight – the man's blindness had *nothing* to do with anyone sinning. The disciples' reasoning was skewed. Would Joseph have joined in their philosophical musing? I think one of the definitions of "pharisaical" is exhibiting hypocritical self-righteousness. When we hold such a high regard for our own level of righteousness while regarding others' misfortunes as "payback" for the lack thereof, I think this attitude fits the definition of "pharisaical." We need to be careful about assuming others' hardships are repercussions for sin.

[44] Hebrews 11:35-40.

Is the Observance of Hanukkah Sinful?

In our appended introduction, I also quoted from Norman Willis' book *The Torah Calendar*, where he, like Joseph Dumond, attempts to cross-associate Hanukkah with Christmas. In addition to their joint attempt to fuse Hanukkah and Christmas, another common theme these men share is that of assuming Hanukkah is a commanded festival. Here's another excerpt from Willis' book:

> It is clear that Yahweh did not instruct us to keep either Hanukkah or Purim: men did. Yet since Yahweh tells us to be careful not to add anything to His Instructions, then at least in one sense, if we keep Hanukkah or Purim, are we not being disobedient to His will? And might we not even be unwittingly guilty of esteeming these men as 'greater' than Yahweh, since we are following their instructions, rather than Yahweh's?[45]

I have already addressed the fact that Hanukkah wasn't termed a "festival" either in the book of I Maccabees or in the book of John. Moreover, it appears that no one regarded it as "commanded" until Josephus penned his *Antiquities of the Jews* some 150 years later. To the best of my knowledge, first-century Jew Philo never even *mentions* Hanukkah in his listing of special feast days. In this study, we have demonstrated that Hanukkah was neither ordained as a special "feast," nor was it mandated as such. The days of Hanukkah were not ordained to replace Sukkot or any other of Yahweh's ordained feasts; rather, Hanukkah was ordained as a memorial in the same vein as the ordaining of the days on which the daughters of Israel would lament for Jephthah's daughter. It's not a *commanded* observance, yet it's an *appropriate* observance to help us remember those things that should not be forgotten.

In summary, and in response to Willis' questions, the answers are no and no. No, we are not being disobedient to Yahweh's will by memorializing Hanukkah for those who came before us and preferred to lose their lives than risk offending any of Yahweh's precious laws. And no, we are not esteeming any men as "greater than Yahweh" when we pause to reflect on the price paid for the freedom they gained, giving thanks to the One who gave Judah Maccabee and his men the victory.

Willis goes on to write:

> Yahweh indeed gave a miraculous victory to the Jews in their war against Antiochus Epiphanies and the Seleucids, and nothing can ever take away from that. Yet there have been many other miraculous victories in Israel's history, such as when Yahweh felled the wall at Jericho (Joshua 6), Gideon's miraculous victory over the Midianites (Judges 7), Shimshon's (Samson's) slaying of the Philistines (Judges 16), and many other miraculous victories. However, we do not add festival days to Yahweh's calendar because of these other miracles; so why should we add to Yahweh's calendar because He gave a victory against Antiochus Epiphanies or because of an alleged miracle with oil?[46]

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[45] Norman Willis, *Torah Calendar*, chapter 14, "Hanukkah Reconsidered," by Norman B. Willis, Nazarene Israel (publisher), 2012. Willis' book is currently available at his web site (nazareneisrael.org/books/torah-calendar).
[46] Ibid.

In response to the above, let's just say that Norman Willis doesn't ascribe a great deal of significance to the events of Hanukkah. He begins his paragraph on such a positive note, but then he ends with a "pooh-pah" token acknowledgement of the triumph of righteousness over evil. He asks, "… why should we add to Yahweh's calendar because He gave a victory against Antiochus Epiphanies or because of an alleged miracle with oil?" In other words, he may as well ask, "So what?" or say, "Big deal!" In summary, I will just say that I do not expect to ever share a Hanukkah celebration with this man.

Willis also mentions some other significant events recorded in the Bible, such as when Yahweh felled the wall at Jericho, when Samson slew the Philistines and Gideon's victory over the Midianites. These are all very significant events, but we aren't told to pause and reflect on those victories, except when we read about them in Yahweh's Word – and we definitely need to do that. Two of the events Willis mentions are found in the book of Judges. Another event found in Judges is the account of Jephthah's daughter, who was offered as a burnt offering by a man who uttered a foolish vow to Yahweh. This sacrifice is so detestable and horrible to think about that many find excuses to teach that Jephthah never actually followed through on his vow. Yet it became a custom for the daughters of Israel to yearly lament Jephthah's daughter. In other words, they commemorated the life of Jephthah's daughter, remembering and lamenting that her innocent life was cut short. I rather imagine the daughters of Israel didn't gather to lament Jephthah's daughter because anyone *commanded* them to do so. They went because the understood the importance of *remembering* and likely to also ponder the importance of vowing *reasonable* vows.

As Willis points out to his readers, there have been many miraculous victories in Israel's history, some of which are dated, but many of which are not. If Norman wishes to commemorate the 10th day of Abib in remembrance of the Israelites crossing into the Promised Land (Joshua 4:19), he will hear no objections from me; on the other hand, if he begins teaching that it's a commanded feast day, all he'll hear from me are protests.

The other arguments presented in Willis' book are so similar to Joseph Dumond's that answering them would essentially require duplicating my efforts and needlessly burdening readers with "more of the same."

6. Conclusion and How We Observe Hanukkah

I believe we have successfully demonstrated that Hanukkah is an observance and a memorial, but not a commanded festival. As a time to commemorate the lives of those who preferred to suffer death at the hands of a wicked tyrant rather than disobey Yahweh's Torah, I am persuaded that it 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 spurn 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 righteousness over evil, not only the victory that took place in 165 BCE, but also the ultimate victory of righteousness 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 29 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. We pause and give thanks that we have freedoms that those who perished did not have. Our remembrance is nothing spectacular, yet it is an observance and a commemoration of a miraculous victory of righteousness over evil in the face of certain defeat by an immensely larger army. It is also 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!