

The Feast of Lights
Hannukah
The Feast of Dedication



1. What the Feast of Hannukah?

Hannukah, the term meaning “dedication,” commemorates the recovery and cleansing of the Second Temple after the successful revolt against the Syrians in the late second century BC. It also looks forward to the rebirth of the nation in the post-exilic period although that was not secured until 142 and lasted until the Romans vassalized the land under Pompey in 63 BC.

Like Purim, Hanukkah, is not a festival commanded by the Mosaic Code. The celebration is described in the Talmudic volumes, Jewish sacred commentary, a compilation and application of the teachings of Moses. It is an expansion of the Law that incorporates ethics and the customs of Judaism, composed of the Mishnah (the oral law) and the Gemara (rabbinic discussions on it).

“On the 25th of Kislev are the days of Chanukkah, which are eight... these are appointed festivals with Hallel (prayers of praise) and thanksgiving” (Shabbat 21b, *Babylonian Talmud*).

2. What are the historic origins of the Feast of Hannukah?

- a. The contextual origin of the celebration is found in the destruction of the Southern Kingdom, the destruction of the Solomonic Temple, and the resultant captivity of the nation to Babylon in three deportations from the land 605, 596/7, and 586/7), the fulfillment of numerous prophetic announcements.

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me,

the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns,
broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 1:13).

“Yet I planted you a choice vine, a completely faithful seed.
How then have you turned yourself before Me
into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?” (Jer. 1:21).

- b. God promised His people seventy years of captivity. The Jews were permitted to returned 538, the Persians having destroyed the Babylonian Empire and reversed the deportation policy under Cyrus I. The Second Temple was completed in 516; thus, the captivity was dated from the deportation of 586 (the destruction of the Temple) to it rebuilding in 516, seventy years). The Temple signified the presence of God to the Jews; they had been temporally beyond of God’s presence for seventy years, but certainly not abandoned!
- c. The Book of Daniel, chapter 7, written in the exilic period, explains that four great nations would rise to deeply define the Jewish experience.

“The first was like a lion... and it was lifted up... to stand on two feet like a man...”
(7:4): Babylon (626-538).

“...another beast...like a bear with three ribs in its mouth” (7:5): Medes and Persians
(559-321).

“After this...another like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the
beast had four heads (7:6): The Greeks (336-63)

- 1) Alexander the Great, the son of Philip the Macedon, conquered the Persian Empire (334-323).
- 2) Alexander died in 323 and the empire was divided to his generals, two in the Middle East, four in all.

“And a mighty king will arise, and he will rule with great authority
and do as he pleases. But as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom
will be broken up and parceled out toward the four points of the compass”
(Dan. 11:3-4).

- a. The Ptolemaic kingdom in Egypt under Ptolemy.
- b. The Seleucid Kingdom under Seleucus I ruled over parts of Asia Minor, the Persians, the Jews, the Assyrians, and the Armenians.
- c. The two kingdoms incessantly fought to conquer each other with the Jews caught between.

“At the appointed time he will return and come into the land of the South,

but this time it will not turn out as it did before. For the ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore, he will be disheartened...and become enraged at the holy covenant. And the forces from him will desecrate the sanctuary.... And they will set up the abomination of desolation” (Dan. 11:29-31).

- d. In the Sixth-Syro-Egyptian War, the Seleucids appeared to be on the verge of triumph when the Romans (the fourth beast, “terrify and dreadful and exceedingly strong” [Dan. 7:7]) emerged to align with the Egyptians and seriously tip the balance of power in the Middle East toward the West.
 - e. Antiochus Epiphanes IV, greatly fearing a collapse of his empire, set the stage for what became the Feast of Lights by creating a military buffer for protection, a Hellenized buffer-state in the ancient Jewish land.
- 3) To completely Hellenized the Jewish providence, the Second Temple was looted, Jews massacred, the Jewish Faith was outlawed, and a pig was offered on the temple altar (having become a shrine to the Greek god Zeus [the supreme god]) in 165.
 - 4) This precipitated what in Jewish history is known as the Revolt of the Maccabees (165-168). As a result of a stupendous triumph through Mattathias, the high priest, and his five sons, the temple recovered and cleansed, the Second Temple restored (Maccabee means “the Hammer”).
 - 5) In cleansing the temple was found only a day’s supply of sacred oil to burn the menorah; however, it lasted eight days and thus the duration of the feast.
 - 6) The light of the Menorah took place on the 25th of Kislev according to the Jewish calendar so that it roughly approximates the Christmas season and coincides with the winter solstice. One rabbi made application of the timing this way: “It symbolizes the creation of light in the darkest times, which will be especially this year. Jewish holidays are connected to the earth and the cycle of season. It is o that a holiday creating light happens during the darkest day of the year.”
3. How is Hannukah celebrated within Observant Judaism today?
- a. The celebration focuses upon the lighting of the menorah on the eight successive days of the feast. Though there are several traditions on how to do this, one is that each successive day an additional candle is lit until the eighth day (day one, 1; day 2: one again and a second one; and so forth [the order is not important]). Candle lighting was to be after nightfall and are to be burned no more that ½ hour.
- Why are there nine candles, the middle one higher than the others? We will return to this a little later!
- b. The reading each evening before the menorah the Holy Scriptures with family and friends was primarily from Numbers 7 (the presentation of gifts for the service of the Tabernacle).

First Night: 7:1-17

Second Night: 7:18-29

Third Night: 7:24-35

Fourth Night: 7:30-41

Fifth Night: 7:36-47

Sixth Night: 7:42-47

Seventh Night: 7:48-53

Eighth Night: 7:54-8:4 (the final reading deals with the lampstand, the Menorah)

“Now this was the workmanship of the lampstand, hammered work of gold,
from its base to its flowers, it was hammered work, according
to the pattern which the Lord showed Moses, so he made the lampstand” (8:4).

c. Once more this celebration is centered around family, friends, and food.

- 1) Since the celebration has to do with oil (olive), the food items are fried (Potato pancakes, fried donuts filled with jelly, cheese, and other dairy products).
- 2) Children play a game called with dreidel; the dreidel is a top that the children spin with a Hebrew letter on each of the four sides. Together each letter has a meaning.



Nun: “miracle”

Gimmel: “great”

Hey: “happened”

Shin: “there”

“A great miracle happened there” (remember Jews read from right to left, and what we call back to front)

Each child then gets some twenty-fives pieces of an eatable (peanuts, M&M’s, chocolate in the shape of coins in foil). Each in turn spins the dreidel and the letter becomes the direction.

Nun: Nothing

Gimmel: Take all collection plate

Hey: Take half of the collection plate

Shin: Pick one of your items in the collection plate

(The winner is the one who has all the goodies, and your opponents have nothing left).

4. Did Jesus observe Hannukah?

“At that time the Feast of Dedication took place in Jerusalem, it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the Portico of Solomon” (John 10:22-23).

Jesus observed this feast and sought to explain, through its symbolism, its fulfillment in Himself.

- a. As the Feast of Lights looked back to a tremendous deliverance, Jesus claimed to be the embodiment of the deliverance, deliverance from their enemies, hope in a final deliverance.

I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

“For a little while the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that the darkness may not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become the sons of light” (John 12:35-36).

- b. There is a truth in the menorah itself. It holds nine candles, not eight symbolic of the miracle of light for eight days, and the center candle is elevated above the others. What is the point? What is the significance? The middle candle is called the servant. Within Observant Judaism it can have one of two functions: It serve the other candles by lighting them, or, if desire, it provides extra light if so needed.



Jesus is the ultimate servant.

“...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,
and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

“If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet,
you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you
an example that you should do as I did to you” (John13:14-15).

5. What can Christians learn from the Feast of Lights?

- a. That we owe much to the ancient people of God in that they were the chosen vessels through which the promises of God have come to us. However disobedient they proved to be they were the light through which “The Light” came to us.
- b. Light symbolizes the presence of God. In the Tabernacle and Temple, it spoke of God’s willingness be dwell among His people. The “Light” now dwells in His people by the Holy Spirit (often depicted under the metaphor of oil). We now possess the light of God within. We shine because of the ninth candle-symbolism. Can you think of a greater gift to us? He shines from within outwardly. We are to let that light emanate from within us to a darkened world.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a peck measure and it gives light
to all that are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that
they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”
(Matt. 5: 14-16).

- c. Not only does the symbolism point to our Lord’s servanthood when He walked among us, he is the “True Light” when we find ourselves in darkness.

“There came a man sent from God whose name was John.
He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light...
He was not the light, he came that he might bear witness to the light
There was the true light... He was in the world, and the world was made,
by Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:6-9).

- d. Like our Lord, we are to be servants; we are too be “lights” in our world that there is reason for rejoicing, that life can be fulfilling, that there is hope beyond the management of circumstances.

“...you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it.... It is not so among you,
but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,
and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just as the Son of Man

did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many”
(Matt. 20:25-28).

“A pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone, after he has been
fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).