

## **Should we keep Chanukkah?**

Most Messianic believers are fine with celebrating Chanukkah even though it is not in the Torah. It is not a pagan feast. We understand that Chanukkah is a remembrance celebration of God liberating the Jews from the pagan Greeks who were trying to destroy the faith of the true God. It is worth celebrating Chanukkah based on that alone. Without the Jews we would have no Bible or Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). Also, the ancient rabbis said that the Messiah would reveal Himself on Chanukkah (Fruchtenbaum).

We celebrate Chanukkah mostly as a remembrance ceremony and for fun. We do not have to do the ritual that some do, but some sort of ritual a good way to observe Chanukkah. Observing ritual as a commandment of God when it is not, is wrong. We are not to add or take away from God's commandments (see Deuteronomy 4:2). We should also not observe pagan ritual. We should not include the Chanukkah bush which mimics the pagan trees that some put in their homes. We have both written evidence and archaeological evidence that Yeshua and His family probably lit an 8-hole Chanukkah oil lamp.

Chanukkah means dedication but Chanukkah is also known as the "Feast of Light." Josephus was a first century Jewish historian who refers to Chanukkah as being commonly called "The Light Feast" He calls it, *Chag Ha'or* in Hebrew. The feast recalls the rededication of the Temple after the Greeks has desecrated it. The rededication of the Temple involved 7 days of dedication and a final 8<sup>th</sup> day sacrifice for a total of 8 days (see Leviticus Chapters 8 and 9). So, the Chanukkah celebration takes place over 8 days.

Some incorrectly believe that a Temple dedication lasts only 7 days. Also, some incorrectly think that Chanukkah is simply an observance of Sukkot. The modern Chanukkah 8-candle holder (plus the one to hold a candle to light with) is not pagan and is modeled after the 7-candle menorah. Pagan cultures used candle holders in their practice and even the pagan Romans used a 7-candle holder, but the Jewish candle holders have no association or design with anything pagan. This includes the Chanukiah which is the name given to the candle holder for Chanukkah.

While on the topic, the liberation of the Jews from the Greeks is recorded in the books of Maccabees. Some say that the books of Maccabees were rejected by the Jews. That is not true. There are other Jewish writings other than the Bible, but certain books were not deemed to be inspired by God and that is why they are not included in our Bibles. Some of these extra biblical writings are even quoted in the Bible. Also, the Samaritans only believe in the first 5 books of the Bible and not the whole Bible, so they do not celebrate Chanukkah. Karaites also do not celebrate Chanukkah for similar reasons, but I think there are good reasons to celebrate Chanukkah like the one I gave previously.

In the ancient writings, there are references to Chanukkah and a miracle of oil occurring. I believe in miracles, so it is not difficult for me to accept this. Perhaps we also got the name of the "Feast of Lights" because of the miracle of the menorah oil lasting for 8 days when they only had enough oil for one day. The Megillat Antiochus talks about the miracle of oil. Some

think it was written in the first century BC which is close to when the rededication of the Temple took place. The rededication of the Temple occurred in 165 BC when the pagan Greeks were defeated. Some think it was written in the first or second centuries AD, but it makes more sense to me that it was written earlier. Archaeologists have also found 8-hole oil lamps in Israel that were used for Chanukkah that they date to the first century AD. So, Yeshua would have observed Chanukkah. Chanukkah means dedication and we see Yeshua going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication in John Chapter 10.

The light of Chanukkah could also refer to the return of the shekinah glory at the Temple. Josephus could have been talking about the shekinah glory (light) of God returning to the Temple at the rededication of the Temple in, Antiquities 12.7.7. What the rabbis call the shekinah glory is that presence of God seen at the Mishkan (the Tent of Meeting in the desert) in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

I find it particularly interesting that, The Light, Yeshua, who came into the world to give light to the world goes to Jerusalem on the Feast of Lights some 2,000 years ago, how appropriate. In John Chapter 9, Yeshua heals a man born blind and Yesha says he is the light of the world just before He goes to Jerusalem for Chanukkah as seen in the next chapter, John Chapter 10. The ancient rabbis said that the Messiah would reveal Himself on Chanukkah. There were also stones left from the desecration of the altar. They expected the Messiah to tell them what to do with them.

In 1 Maccabees 4:44-47 it talks about the stones that were replaced for the rededication of the Temple because they were desecrated by Antiochus. They were set aside until a prophet comes to tell them what to do with them. They expected a prophet like Moshe (Moses) to come, namely the messiah. Here is the record about the stones from:

1 Maccabees 4:44-47 King James Version which says,  
And when as they consulted what to do with the altar of burnt offerings, which was profaned; They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down, and laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them. Then they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the former.

(Maccabees was originally in the 1611 King James Version.)

Yeshua was at the Feast of Dedication and at the place where the Temple stones had been set aside (also known as Solomon's Porch). The people there asked Him to reveal who He is. He said He already told them. He had just healed a man born blind and declared He is the light of the world. Yeshua came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Chanukkah, the Feast of Lights and the Feast of Dedication, to confirm that He is indeed the Messiah. This is also a great reason to celebrate Chanukkah.

For more detailed information on Chanukkah, also see our teaching entitled: "Hanukkah and Yeshua" on our Observing the Feasts page. <https://www.teshuvahsa.org/observing-the-feasts>

