

MESSIANIC HANUKKAH CELEBRATION

● DAY FIVE

Reading: John 17:1-8 and Psalm 19:7-11

Question: What can you do to serve your family in a more righteous and godly way? If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you have wished to say to them today?

● DAY SIX

Reading: Isaiah 9:2

Question: Do you have a particular loved one who does not know Yeshua? What can you do to bring God's light into their lives?

● DAY SEVEN

Reading: I Peter 2:4-6 and Romans 12:1-2

Question: Yeshua said that He is the light of the world. As you look at the flames of the menorah, identify as many physical characteristics of light as you can. What do these teach you about spiritual light? What one word would you choose to describe God's light?

● DAY EIGHT

Reading: Turn out the room lights and have everyone look at the menorah while someone reads Psalm 36:7-10, John 1:1-14 and Isaiah 60:1-5.

Question: Is there something in your heart that you still keep in darkness? Is there something about yourself that you are ashamed of? (You do not need to share this aloud with others in the room unless you want to.) Take some time to pray about these. Purpose to submit this area of your life to His light. Ask God to help you to know yourself to be a shining light in this world.

A Brief History of Hanukkah

The 11th chapter of Daniel records a prophecy concerning a tyrant who would someday rule over the people of Judah. Daniel prophesied that this man would profane the holy temple by entering the Holy of Holies, demanding to be worshipped as God. This prophecy was fulfilled in 168 BC by the Syrian king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The history of this evil ruler is recorded in the book of Maccabees.

In the year 168 BC, Antiochus issued his "Evil Decrees". Maccabees 1:41 says, "Throughout his empire, his subjects were all to become one people and abandon their own laws and religion." Antiochus began at this time to believe that he himself was the earthly manifestation of the supreme god of the Greek pantheon, Zeus Olympios. Antiochus' claim to be God coincided with his persecution of the Jews. His Evil Decrees are listed in I Maccabees.

- Ordered the destruction of the Torah scrolls.
- Enforced eating of swine's flesh.
- Made it illegal to circumcise sons.
- Forbade observance of the Sabbath or of the Holy Feasts.
- Morning and evening sacrifices were discontinued.
- Desecrated the temple and dedicated it to the worship of Zeus.
- Set up the abomination of desolation.

(No one knows exactly what the abomination was, but it was probably some sort of image which represented both Zeus and Antiochus.)

Daniel's prophecy refers to three types of Jews at this time:

- "Such as do wickedly against the covenant..." (11:32) These were the Hellenizers.
- "...many [who] shall join themselves unto them by flatteries..." (11:34) These were the ones who were willing to go either way with their allegiance.
- "...that are wise among the people [who] shall instruct many. And some of them that are wise shall fall." (11:33, 35) These were the Hasidim.

In 165 BC, the Jews, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, overthrew the much larger Syrian army. After cleansing the temple, the temple was rededicated on the 25th of Kislev. The priests found only enough uncontaminated oil for one night's lighting. But miraculously, the oil burned for eight days.

It is a tradition that the eight day celebration of Hanukkah represents the important first eight days in the conception of a child. Tradition has it that this is when the Messiah will be conceived. This is why birth is related to giving light. It is also a Jewish tradition that the lighting of the candles will announce the conception of Messiah because the acronym of "We light eight days of Hanukkah" in the Talmud spells out "Messiah". (Madlikin shemonah yomei Chanukah).

Hanukkah Observance

There are many significant reasons why believers should observe the Hanukkah season. Here are a few:

- It is a time to celebrate God's victory over our spiritual enemy.
 - We are "temples" that have been cleansed and made holy by God's victory.
 - As temples of the Holy Spirit, we too should dedicate ourselves to God.
 - The eight days of Hanukkah illustrate that dedication to God is a process that takes place over a period of time.
 - The eight days of Hanukkah illustrate that as our dedication grows, so too does our light.
- During the Christmas season as we celebrate God's gift to us of His Son, Hanukkah provides a season wherein we can make a gift of ourselves to Him.
- The *shamash* (servant candle) reminds us that Yeshua is the "shamash of the world" and we derive our light from Him.
- Just as a menorah provided light inside the temple, our Hanukkah menorah reminds us that our homes should be like tabernacles where God is honored in our midst.
- The lighting of the menorah impresses upon the minds of our children the importance of dedicating ourselves to God, and being lights in the world.
- If there had been no Hanukkah, there would be no Christmas.

Candle Lighting Ceremony

The candles are placed in the menorah from right to left. On the first night one candle is lit, the second night, two are lit, and so on. However, the candles are lit starting left to right! The idea is that you are lighting each day's new candle first.

The menorah is lit only at night. The first candle to be lit is called the shamash or "servant" candle. This is the ninth candle on your menorah. It is usually raised higher or separated from the other candles so that it can be recognized and distinguished from them. With this candle all of the other regular candles are lit.

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Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam she asah missim la-avotenu bayamim hahem bazman hazeh.

"Blessed are You Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has wrought miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season."

(And on the first evening only, add the following blessing.)

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam shehechyanu, ve-heegeenu, lazman hazeh.

"Blessed are You Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."

After lighting all of the candles for that night, place the shamash back into its position, still lit. Then read the day's Scripture passage below, and then discuss the question that follows it.

• DAY ONE

Reading: Psalm 145:1-7

Question: Think back over the year since last Hanukkah. What experiences has God brought you through for which you are grateful?

• DAY TWO

Read: Isaiah 42:5-9

Question: Have you experienced God's grace and mercy? What do you think your life would be like if you did not know Him?

• DAY THREE

Read: Psalm 89:13-18

Question: What do you imagine your life would be like if you were completely devoted to Him? What things about yourself would you like to change so that you can reflect His light more in your life?

• DAY FOUR

Read: Malachi 2:4-7, 4:4; Zechariah 8:20-23

Question: What historical events in your lifetime have effected the way you live today? How do you see God's hand in them?

