

Hanukkah: The Feast of Dedication and the Resistance to

Assimilation

1. Meaning and Focus: Dedication

The word **Hanukkah** (חֲנֻכָּה) means *dedication*. It comes from the Hebrew root **חנך** (**h-n-k**), meaning *to dedicate or inaugurate*. Hanukkah is therefore not merely a historical remembrance, but a call to renewed dedication—of sacred space, of covenant faithfulness, and of obedience to the Torah.

While the specific festival of Hanukkah is not commanded in the Torah, the **concept of dedication** appears repeatedly:

- **Numbers 7:10–11, 84–88** – *Chanukat ha-mizbeach* (dedication of the altar)
 - Numbers 7:10–11 (NASB95) The leaders offered the dedication *offering* for the altar when it was anointed, so the leaders offered their offering before the altar.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Let them present their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar.”
- **2 Chronicles 7:9** – Dedication of the Temple

- 2 Chronicles 7:9 (NASB95) On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for the dedication of the altar they observed seven days and the feast seven days.

- **Ezra 6:16** – Dedication of the Second Temple
 - Ezra 6:16 (NASB95) And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

- Dedication in Scripture is never merely ceremonial. It always involves:
 - Separation from impurity
 - Obedience to God's instructions
 - Commitment to holiness

- Hanukkah, therefore, is not simply about remembering the past. It is about **renewing our dedication**—of worship, of identity, and of daily life—to the Elohim of Israel.

2. The Maccabean Struggle and Victory

Hanukkah commemorates the events of the 2nd century BCE, when the Seleucid ruler

Antiochus IV Epiphanes outlawed Torah observance, desecrated the Temple, and erected pagan worship in Jerusalem.

The **Maccabees**, a priestly family led by Mattityahu and later Judah Maccabee, rose up to defend:

- Torah obedience
- Circumcision and Shabbat
- The sanctity of the Temple

Against overwhelming odds, they reclaimed Jerusalem, purified the Temple, and **rededicated** it to the service of the Almighty. Their victory stands as a testimony that faithfulness to God, not military strength, determines true success.

In the 2nd century BCE, Judea was under Seleucid Greek rule. The danger Israel faced was not only political oppression, but **cultural and religious assimilation**.

Greek (Hellenistic) culture promoted:

- Philosophical rationalism over divine revelation

- Physical perfection and athletic competition (often involving public nudity)
- Pagan worship integrated into civic life
- The abandonment of Torah observance as “outdated” or “backward”

Many Jews willingly embraced these influences. Some even:

- Abandoned circumcision
- Neglected Shabbat and kashrut
- Supported the desecration of the Temple

Assimilation, not persecution alone, was the greatest threat.

Against this tide of assimilation stood a small group led by the priest Mattityahu and his sons, most notably **Judah Maccabee**.

Their struggle was not merely military. It was spiritual and covenantal. They fought to preserve:

- Torah observance
- Circumcision
- Shabbat
- The sanctity of the Temple

The Maccabees refused to redefine obedience to make it more culturally acceptable. They understood that **faithfulness to God cannot be negotiated**.

Their victory reminds us that:

- God does not require large numbers to accomplish His purposes
- Courageous obedience can reverse spiritual decay
- True victory begins with loyalty to the covenant

3. The Eight Days and the Oil — Rooted in Torah

The later rabbinic tradition of the “miracle of the oil” is well known, but the **eight-day framework** itself is grounded in Torah instruction.

After reclaiming Jerusalem, the Maccabees found the Temple desecrated. It could not simply be cleaned and reopened. According to the Torah, it had to be **properly consecrated**.

Key Torah foundations:

- **Exodus 27:20–21** – Pure olive oil is required for the menorah, to burn continually.
 - Exodus 27:20–21 (NASB95) “You shall charge the sons of Israel, that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. “In

the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel.

- **Exodus 30:22–33** – Holy anointing oil must be specially prepared.
 - Exodus 30:22–33 (NASB95) Moreover, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred *shekels*, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. “You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. “With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand. “You shall also consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be holy. “You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me. “You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. ‘It shall not be poured on anyone’s body, nor shall you make *any* like it in the same proportions;

it is holy, *and* it shall be holy to you. ‘Whoever shall mix *any* like it or whoever puts any of it on a layman shall be cut off from his people.’ ”

- **Exodus 29:33–37** and **Leviticus 8** – The consecration of priests and sacred items

requires **seven days**, with service beginning on the **eighth day**.

- Exodus 29:33–37 (NASB95) “Thus they shall eat those things by which atonement was made at their ordination *and* consecration; but a layman shall not eat *them*, because they are holy. “If any of the flesh of ordination or any of the bread remains until morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire; it shall not be eaten, because it is holy. “Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you; you shall ordain them through seven days. “Each day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement, and you shall purify the altar when you make atonement for it, and you shall anoint it to consecrate it. “For seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it; then the altar shall be most holy, *and* whatever touches the altar shall be holy.

- **Leviticus 9:1** – Service begins on the eighth day

- Leviticus 9:1 (NASB95) Now it came about on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel;

The **eight days of Hanukkah** align perfectly with the Torah's pattern of sanctification and renewal. Whether one emphasizes later rabbinic tradition or not, the Torah itself establishes that **holiness requires time, preparation, and obedience**.

Thus, even apart from later tradition, **eight days represents the full cycle of purification and dedication** according to Torah. The Temple could not simply be “cleaned”; it had to be properly consecrated, in obedience to God's instructions.

4. Where Hanukkah Appears in Scripture

The word *Hanukkah* itself does **not appear in the Tanakh** as a festival name. However:

- **John 10:22-23** explicitly mentions “*the Feast of Dedication*” (*Hanukkah*), and records that **Yeishua was present in the Temple** during this feast.

- John 10:22–23 (NASB95) At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of

Solomon.

Significantly, **Yeishua is present in the Temple during Hanukkah**. He does not distance Himself from the festival. Instead, He teaches openly during a celebration centered on dedication, purification, and restored worship.

This confirms that Hanukkah is not a rejection of Torah values, but a reaffirmation of them.

This is significant: Yeishua did not reject Hanukkah. He honored a celebration centered on dedication, faithfulness, and restored worship.

5. Yeishua: The Light of the World

During a feast centered on the Temple menorah, Yeishua declares:

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

Hanukkah points beyond the menorah itself:

- The menorah symbolizes divine light in a dark world.
- Yeishua embodies that light—not replacing the Torah, but illuminating it and calling people back to faithful obedience.

- Light in Scripture represents:
 - God's truth (Psalm 119:105)
 - Moral clarity
 - Divine presence
- Yeishua does not replace the menorah or the Torah. Rather, He **embodies and reveals the light** they were meant to point toward. He calls people out of darkness—ignorance, compromise, and assimilation—back into covenant faithfulness.

Just as the Temple was rededicated, **our lives are to be rededicated**—to walk in the light of God's truth, revealed through the Torah and lived out through Messiah.

6. Lessons From Hanukkah

- Hanukkah teaches that:
 - God desires **dedication**, not compromise.
 - Faithfulness can overcome oppression.
 - Sacred things must be prepared God's way.
 - Light triumphs over darkness.

- Yeishua stands in continuity with this message as the light that leads us back into covenant faithfulness.
- **Hanukkah is not about replacement—but restoration, dedication, and enduring light.**

7. Hanukkah and the Call to Resist Assimilation

- The message of Hanukkah is urgently relevant today. God’s people still face pressure to assimilate:
 - To soften Torah obedience to fit cultural norms
 - To redefine holiness as personal preference
 - To treat God’s commandments as symbolic rather than binding
- Assimilation rarely comes as open persecution. More often it comes through:
 - Convenience
 - Social acceptance
 - The desire not to appear “different”
- Yet Scripture repeatedly warns against this:
 - **Leviticus 18:3** – Leviticus 18:3 (NASB95) ‘You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes.

- **Deuteronomy 12:30–31** ‘beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?’ “You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.
- **Romans 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- Hanukkah reminds us that **faithfulness often requires standing apart**.

8. Personal and Communal Dedication

- Hanukkah is not only about the Temple in Jerusalem. It challenges us to ask:
 - What influences have crept into our worship?
 - Where have we compromised Torah obedience for comfort?
 - What areas of our lives need rededication?

Conclusion: Walking in the Light

Hanukkah teaches us that:

- Dedication is costly, but necessary
 - Assimilation leads to spiritual loss
 - God honors faithful obedience
 - Light overcomes darkness
 - Yeishua calls us to walk in that light
- Hanukkah is a celebration of restored worship, renewed commitment, and enduring hope.

It calls each generation to choose dedication over compromise, faithfulness over assimilation, and light over darkness.

May we be a people who burn brightly—set apart, faithful, and dedicated to the God of Israel.

Ha Sof