

## HAPPY HANUKKAH AND MERRY CHRISTMAS? : PART 1

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If you are a student of Biblical history, you may possibly know that insofar as Jewish history is concerned, the first and second centuries BC coincided with the various Maccabean revolts against the Seleucid kings of Syria. These revolts were instigated in large part when Jewish religious worship in the Temple -- and throughout Israel -- came to an abrupt end, and was replaced by forced Hellenistic idol worship, by Antiochus IV Epiphanes during the mid-2nd Century BC. In the First Book of the Maccabees, after explaining how Antiochus came to power, conquered and destroyed much of Jerusalem, defiled the Temple and stole many sacred things from it, the writer describes how this heathen king then forced the Jews to forsake the God of Israel, and to worship the pagan gods of Greece, as we see here:

"Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that each should give up his customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. 'And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.' In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city."

## 1 Maccabees 1:41-51

Only a few verses later, this same writer informs us of an event which occurred in the Temple at Jerusalem, which some Bible scholars believe may have been a direct fulfillment of a prophecy given to the Prophet Daniel hundreds of years before, concerning the Abomination of Desolation. Consider the following verses:

"Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death. They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities. And on the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar which was upon the altar of burnt offering."

1 Maccabees 1:54-59

In the Book of Daniel, we find the following prophetic verses which, on the surface, appear to be describing the very same events which are written in the First Book of the Maccabees:

"And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate."

Daniel 11:31, KJV

"And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days."

Daniel 12:11-12, KJV

As I said, some Bible scholars and theologians are convinced that Daniel was writing about the events that occurred during the reign of Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, during the Second Century BC. For me personally, as I have briefly mentioned in other articles, the problem I have in embracing this Antiochus interpretation, is that in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus stated the following:

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be

shortened."  
Matthew 24:15-22, KJV

This very same warning by Jesus concerning the Abomination of Desolation is repeated by the writer of the Gospel of Mark, as we see by the following verses:

"But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains: And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house: And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days."  
Mark 13:14-20, KJV

Now, if we believe that Jesus Christ lived during the early part of the First Century AD, and was crucified around the year 30 AD, then we obviously cannot accept the Antiochus IV Epiphanes interpretation concerning Daniel's prophecy about the Abomination of Desolation. As the previous verses make very plain, Jesus was talking about a future event, and not about a past event which occurred almost two hundred years before His time. As you may know, the other interpretation that is popular amongst Bible scholars and theologians, is that Jesus truly was referring to an event which occurred in His future; that is, an event that occurred some forty years later when Roman forces, led by General Titus -- the son of Emperor Vespasian -- invaded and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. I discuss this topic in a number of other articles.

If, on the other hand, you accept that the Prophet Daniel was prophesying about the defilement of the holy Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, when his people offered swine and other unclean animals on the altar in the Temple, amongst all of the other evil things that they did, then how do you resolve the obvious conflict with what Jesus stated in the Gospels about the Abomination of Desolation being a future event?

In my mind, if you accept this latter view, there appears to be only one way in which you can bring harmony between what both Daniel and Jesus prophesied, and what the First Book of the Maccabees reports; and that is by suggesting that Jesus lived considerably earlier than what we have supposed during the past two millennia. In other words, we would have to move Jesus' life to the very early part of the Second Century BC, so that His future prophecy concerning the Abomination of Desolation could have been given before the events that were perpetrated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his followers, in the mid-2nd Century BC.

It may surprise you to know, that I personally do not totally reject this scenario as one possibility. After all, just like

scientists, historians do not have a perfect understanding of all past events. While they know a lot, they don't understand everything, because the historical record is not as complete as some of them might like for us to think. If you undertake a study of ancient history, you will discover that there are a number of debates regarding who was who, who lived at what time, who ruled at what time, etc. I in fact came across this problem a number of years ago when I was researching all of the Persian kings for my "Kings Of The North And The South" article. Questions of this nature continue to challenge the historians even today.

Such debates amongst historians often result from a lack of physical historical evidence, or from incomplete or unclear historical records, such as clay tablets, parchments, etc., and even from different interpretations of the same data. It also has a lot to do with ancient politics whereby a certain conquering power would often strive to destroy all evidence of the people whom they had conquered, etc. Let's not be too quick to forget that history is often written by the victor; which means that it may be skewed, without us even realizing it.

There's also the problem of different historical leaders being known by different names by different people. It all depends on who was writing about them. For example, some of the names of foreign rulers that are used in the Bible are not the same as those used by secular historians. If, for example, you undertake a study of the Biblical Persian king Ahasuerus, you'll discover that there exists some confusion regarding whether this particular Persian king was Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, Artaxerxes II, Cyaxares I or Cyaxares II.

To make the situation even more confusing, the ancients did not use the same kind of dating system as we do today. For example, while we might say that a particular event occurred in the year 2007, which for us is a fixed point in time that we can easily recognize, an ancient historian might describe a particular event as having occurred in the fourth year of the reign of king so-and-so. For that ancient historian, it was clear to him exactly what time he was referring to, but for historians today, trying to establish exactly when the fourth year of king so-and-so may have occurred can be very difficult, particularly if historical records are unclear or not complete.

So please just remember that historical records aren't always complete or clear, and that historians are not perfect. Their words are not the Word of God, and they can be wrong. While a modern historian may be accurate with some of his dates, just as easily, he could be way off the mark by dozens or hundreds of years with other dates. Regarding how to resolve the issue concerning the prophecies of Daniel and Jesus, the account of the Maccabees, and the Abomination of Desolation, let me just mention that this is something which I personally continue to research. I will have more to say concerning this topic in future articles and series.

At any rate, it was in large part a result of the atrocities which had been committed by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, that the Hasmonean Dynasty came to power. The actual Hasmoneans, that is, the Maccabee brothers, were the five sons of Mattathias

the Hasmonean. Mattathias was a Jewish priest who, so we are told in the First Book of the Maccabees, led the very first revolt against the Seleucids; that is, against Antiochus IV Epiphanes. According to chapter two, when the officers of Antiochus IV Epiphanes came to Modein -- which was the home town of Mattathias and his sons -- in order to demand that everyone demonstrate their loyalty to Antiochus by making a sacrifice to the pagan gods, Mattathias and his sons refused to do so. In fact, Mattathias killed another Jew who made an attempt to follow the officers' order, as we see by these verses:

"Then the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to make them offer sacrifice. Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honored and great in this city, and supported by sons and brothers. Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the men of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts." But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left." When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city. Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there, they, their sons, their wives, and their cattle, because evils pressed heavily upon them."  
1 Maccabees 2:15-30

As you can see, according to the account in the First Book of the Maccabees, Mattathias and his five sons fled to the hills and were apparently joined by quite a few other Jews who were not about to bow to the unrighteous demands of a heathen king.

From that time forward, it was a time of guerrilla warfare, violence, assassinations and murder, as the Jews struggled against both the Seleucid forces, and against the encroaching influences of Hellenism. The five Maccabee brothers continued their struggle until Israel and Jerusalem were brought under Roman control in the year 63 BC by Roman General Pompey. With the death of the final Maccabee, the Herodians came to power in Israel, when Herod the Great became the first puppet king of Israel under Roman rule in 37 BC. He was an Idumean; that

is to say, he was an Edomite from the land of Edom, which was originally the land of Esau and his descendants, who took it from the Horvites -- or Horims -- as I explain in the series "Nephilim: The Giants Of Genesis". Today ancient Edom forms a part of modern Jordan.

One development during that time period was the establishment of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, or Chanukkah. This Jewish word signifies "dedication" or "consecration". Following the victory of Judah Maccabee -- or Judas Maccabeus -- and his guerrilla army against the forces of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Jews sanctified and rededicated the Temple that was in Jerusalem. As a matter of clarification, this was the Second Temple which was built under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, Ezra and others, following the Jews' return from their Seventy Years of Babylonian Exile. Jonathan Maccabee became the new high priest following the victory over the Syrians; that is, the Seleucids. The Seleucids derived their name from Seleucus Nicator, who was one of four generals who took over, and then greatly expanded, the Babylonian portion of Alexander the Great's vast empire after Alexander's death. Eventually, the Seleucids power base centered in Syria, which formed the northwestern section of the Seleucid Empire.

According to the Jewish tradition, when the time arrived to light the flame in the Temple in Jerusalem, it was discovered that there was only enough consecrated olive oil to last for one day. However, Jewish tradition states that by a miracle, the oil lasted for eight full days until new consecrated oil could be prepared. This event resulted in Hanukkah -- or the Festival of Lights -- which is celebrated for eight days each Jewish year. This year -- 2010 -- Hanukkah is celebrated from sunset on December 1st to sunset on December 9th. The First and Second Books of the Maccabees tell us the following:

"So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and furnished them with doors. There was very great gladness among the people, and the reproach of the Gentiles was removed. Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev."  
1 Maccabees 4:56-59

"Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; and they tore down the altars which had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they burned incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. And when they had done this, they fell prostrate and besought the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. It happened that

on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislew. And they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of booths, remembering how not long before, during the feast of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. Therefore bearing ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year. Such then was the end of Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes."  
2 Maccabees 10:1-9

Please notice that the previous verses don't actually mention a miracle; which is why I have specifically referred to it as a Jewish tradition. Furthermore, please note that the miracle of Hanukkah is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible either. I will note, however, that there is one verse in the Gospel of John where this feast does appear to be mentioned, without saying anything about a miracle occurring. That verse is the following:

"And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter."  
John 10:22, KJV

The word "dedication" is derived from the Greek "egkainia", and means "dedication" or "consecration", which is the same as the Hebrew "chanukkah" in the Old Testament. In fact, my Thayer's Greek lexicon states the following:

----- Begin Quote -----

"In particular the annual feast celebrated eight days beginning in the 25th of Chislew (middle of our December), instituted by Judas Maccabaeus [164 BC] in memory of the cleansing of the temple from the pollution of Antiochus Epiphanes."

----- End Quote -----

You will notice that the verse from the Gospel of John does mention that this feast occurred during the winter months; so again, it may possibly be referring to the Festival of Lights, unless there was another dedication feast in Israel that also occurred during the winter months.

Please also notice that where the word "chanukkah" is used in the Old Testament, it is not referring to the events of the Second Century BC surrounding the Maccabees. Rather, in the Book of Numbers, it is referring to the dedication of the altar during the time of Moses and the Tabernacle, as we see by these verses:

"This was the dedication of the altar, in the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve chargers of silver, twelve silver bowls, twelve spoons of gold: Each charger of silver weighing an hundred and thirty shekels, each bowl seventy: all the silver vessels weighed two

thousand and four hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary: The golden spoons were twelve, full of incense, weighing ten shekels apiece, after the shekel of the sanctuary: all the gold of the spoons was an hundred and twenty shekels. All the oxen for the burnt offering were twelve bullocks, the rams twelve, the lambs of the first year twelve, with their meat offering: and the kids of the goats for sin offering twelve. And all the oxen for the sacrifice of the peace offerings were twenty and four bullocks, the rams sixty, the he goats sixty, the lambs of the first year sixty. This was the dedication of the altar, after that it was anointed."  
Numbers 7:84-88, KJV

In the Second Book of Chronicles, the word "chanukkah" is used to refer to the seven-day dedication of the altar that Solomon observed once the construction of the First Temple had been completed. We are informed that in addition to this dedication, there was also a seven-day feast, for a total of fourteen full days. The Scriptures tell us that these events began on the eighth day, and concluded on the twenty-third day, when Solomon sent everyone back to their tents, as we see here:

"Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people."  
2 Chronicles 7:8-10, KJV

We can be certain that these feasts do not correspond to the Festival of Lights for two main reasons. First, they lasted for a total of fourteen days; and second, they occurred in the seventh month, which is Tishri, which corresponds to the civil calendar months of September-October. In contrast, the Festival of Lights occurs during the ninth Jewish month of Kislev which corresponds to the civil calendar months of November-December.

The next dedication we find in the Old Testament occurs in the Book of Ezra, where we find the Jews who have returned from the Babylonian Exile, dedicating the Second Temple. We are told that they completed the Temple on the third day of the twelfth month of Adar -- which corresponds to the civil calendar months of February-March -- and that they observed the Passover feast on the fourteenth day of the first month -- or Nissan -- which is March-April on the civil calendar, as we see here:

"And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the



tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month."  
Ezra 6:15-19, KJV

Again we see by the months involved that this could not be a celebration of the Festival of Lights, which occurs during the ninth Jewish month of Kislev in the winter time.

In the Book of Nehemiah, we also discover some verses which discuss the dedication ceremony of the walls of Jerusalem. As you may recall, these walls had previously had been destroyed by the forces of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. In the sixth chapter, we learn that the wall repairs were completed on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul. This is the sixth month on the Jewish calendar which corresponds to the civil calendar months of August-September. This again demonstrates that this event had nothing to do with the Festival of Lights; that is, Hanukkah. Please consider the following verses:

"So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days."  
Nehemiah 6:15, KJV

"And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall."  
Nehemiah 12:27-30, KJV

There are two other places in the Old Testament where the Hebrew word "chanukkah" -- or dedication -- is found. The first is in a brief description of Psalm 30, as we see by this verse:

"[A Psalm and Song at the dedication of the house of David.]  
I will extol thee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me."  
Psalms 30:1, KJV

Finally, the last place where the word "dedication" is found is in the Book of Daniel; and it concerns the huge image of gold that Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar set up in the plain of Dura. Obviously, this event had absolutely nothing to do with the first Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah, or with the Maccabean brothers. Consider these verses:

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the

treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up."  
Daniel 3:1-3, KJV

What we see then is that while the Hebrew word "chanukkah" is used a number of times throughout the Old Testament, in not a single case is it ever referring to the Hasmoneans and the Festival of Lights. How could it, when all of the events that I just shared with you occurred many centuries prior to the time of the Maccabee brothers? In short, there exists only one very short verse in the entire Bible, which suggests a possible reference to Hanukkah, and that is John 10:22; but even that lone verse makes absolutely no mention of a miracle occurring on Hanukkah.

Please go to part two for the conclusion of this article.

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HAPPY HANUKKAH AND MERRY CHRISTMAS? : PART 2

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## To Raise Jewish Morale And To Compete With Saturnalia And The Christian Christmas Celebration?, My Theory, Closing Remarks

Allow me to also remind you that, to my knowledge, the Books of the Maccabees are not considered or recognized as a part of the Christian Canon -- that is, the collection of Divinely Inspired books that form a part of our Bible -- other than in the Roman Catholic Church. The Books of the Maccabees are in fact regarded by quite a number of Christian scholars as what are referred to as apocryphal writings. This is due to their questionable authorship, as well as serious doubts concerning their Divine Inspiration. It is for this reason that they are a part of the Apocrypha and not a part of the Christian Bible.

It may surprise you to know that even though the Festival of Lights -- or Hanukkah -- appears to have originated in the Books of the Maccabees, and even though the four Books of the Maccabees contain quite an abundance of Jewish history, the Jewish rabbinical authorities likewise chose to not include these books as a part of the Hebrew Bible Canon; that is, the Tanakh. Regarding why this is so, several theories have been proposed. One weak theory suggests that perhaps the rabbis of that time had already drawn up an official list of the Books which were to be included in the Tanakh, and for reasons that are not made clear to us, there simply wasn't time to add the Books of the Maccabees to it.

However, if that is the case, then I would ask the following. Hundreds and hundreds of years have passed since that time; so if more recent rabbis who hold positions of authority deem the Books of the Maccabees as truthful, inspired accounts of Jewish history, why haven't they taken the necessary steps to include them in more modern versions of the Tanakh? What is preventing them from doing this? Is it possible that they too doubt the authenticity and Divine Inspiration of these books? If so, what does that say about Hanukkah?

So, if the "miracle" of Hanukkah isn't found anywhere in the Christian Bible, or in the Hebrew Bible, or even in the Books of the Maccabees themselves, then where did it originate? My personal suspicion is that this "miracle" may actually be a human invention of the Jewish rabbis of the Fifth Century AD. This "miracle" appears to find its origin in the Talmud; and more specifically, in the Gemara.

For those of you who aren't familiar with them, the Mishnah and the Gemara are basically compendiums, or collections, of rabbinic thought, opinions and commentary, that both explain and define Jewish Oral Law and expound upon other topics that are important to Orthodox Jews, in written form. Prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. by Roman General Titus, Jewish law was primarily maintained in an oral form. However, after that time, as the years progressed, and with the whole of Jewish society in disarray, the Jewish religious leaders -- the rabbis -- realized that in order to retain the Oral Law and rabbinical opinions in a cohesive form, they had to be written down. Thus, around 200 A.D., or more than three hundred and fifty years after the revolt against the Seleucid kings began, the first compendium, that is, the Mishnah, was redacted by Rabbi Judah haNasi.

Some three hundred years later, around 500 A.D., the Gemara, which was an expansion and a clarification of the Mishnah, was likewise redacted. This would have been about six hundred and fifty years after the original events that are described in the pages of the Books of the Maccabees. As I said, together, the Mishnah and the Gemara form the whole Talmud. As I mention in other articles, the most widely used version of the Talmud is the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmud consists of six orders, or primary subject divisions, which are likewise divided into more than sixty tractates. Tractates are more restricted and focus on the rabbis' legal opinions regarding specific topics.

What I find interesting is the fact that the historical origin of Hanukkah, and the laws and traditions that are associated with it, are not even mentioned in the Mishnah. There are just a few brief mentions of this event in the Mishnah. In other words, the Bible does not mention the Hanukkah "miracle"; the Books of the Maccabees -- which are of questionable origin, and of doubtful Divine Inspiration -- likewise don't make any mention of the Hanukkah "miracle"; the Tanakh doesn't mention the "miracle" of Hanukkah; and the Mishnah is silent as well. A few Jewish rabbis have offered theories regarding why the Hanukkah "miracle" is absent from the Mishnah, but it doesn't change the fact that it is not there.

The only place where the "miracle" of Hanukkah appears to be mentioned, is in the Gemara, in Tractate Shabbat Chapter Two, which is entitled "Regulations Concerning The Sabbath And Hanukah Light". As you read the following, keep in mind that this was written about six hundred and fifty years after the alleged events are said to have occurred in the Books of the Maccabees, and that it was written by rabbis who were quite distanced in time from the events, and who weren't firsthand witnesses of the events. An online English version states:

----- Begin Quote -----

"What is 'Hanukah? The rabbis taught: "On the twenty-fifth day of Kislev 'Hanukah commences and lasts eight days, on which lamenting (in commemoration of the dead) and fasting are prohibited. When the Hellenists entered the sanctuary, they defiled all the oil that was found there. When the government of the House of Asmoneans prevailed and conquered them, oil was sought (to feed the holy lamp in the sanctuary) and only one vial was found with the seal of the high priest intact. The vial contained sufficient oil for one day only, but a miracle occurred, and it fed the holy lamp eight days in succession. These eight days were the following year established as days of good cheer, on which psalms of praise and acknowledgment (of God's wonders) were to be recited."

----- End Quote -----

As I continued to ponder why the Hanukkah "miracle" was not mentioned until six hundred and fifty years after the event, and in only one authoritative Jewish source for that matter, my research led me to the writings of First Century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus.

As you may know, his most notable works include "The Jewish War" and "Antiquities Of The Jews", which are believed to

have been written while Josephus was living in Rome. Being as Josephus lived from 37 AD to about 100 AD, he was a firsthand witness of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans, and other important events of that time period. It is important to note that Josephus also lived considerably closer to the period of the Maccabean revolts than did the rabbinical authors of the Mishnah and the Gemara. In Volume Twelve of his twenty-one volume "Antiquities Of The Jews" -- also known as "Jewish Antiquities" -- which he wrote more than twenty years after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, Josephus mentions the Hasmonean victory over the forces of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Consider the following:

----- Begin Quote -----

"Now Judas 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 very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored God, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. 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. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival. Judas also rebuilt the walls round about the city, and reared towers of great height against the incursions of enemies, and set guards therein. He also fortified the city Bethsura, that it might serve as a citadel against any distresses that might come from our enemies."

----- End Quote -----

I would like to call your attention to the fact that, as with the other sources -- including the original source, that is, the Books of the Maccabees -- Josephus made no mention of any miracle occurring during that event. The reason why this fact seems rather unusual to me, is because according to his own writings, amongst other things, Josephus was a Law-observant Jew, as well as a priest from Jerusalem. That being the case, and given his priestly background, I would think that if any miraculous event had actually occurred during that very first Festival of Lights, surely he would have thought it important enough to inform his potential readers about it; yet, he is silent concerning this matter. We must wonder why that is. Is it maybe because it never happened, and was just invented by Jewish rabbis four hundred years after the time of Josephus, and six hundred and fifty years after the time of the Jewish uprising by the Maccabee brothers?

In contrast, the writers of the Christian Bible considered miraculous events important enough to write about them. For example, when Zechariah -- the father of John the Baptist -- had an Angelic Encounter in the Temple as he carried out his priestly duties, someone thought it important enough to write about it. When that very same Angel -- Gabriel -- appeared to Mary prior to the birth of Jesus, someone wrote about that as well. And there are so many other miraculous events described

in both the Old and the New Testaments, which testify to the Power of El Shaddai, the Almighty God: Moses and the Burning Bush; the Plagues upon the Egyptians; the parting of the Red Sea; the manna and other miracles in the wilderness; the Angel who appeared to Joshua prior to the fall of Jericho; an Angel who appeared to Samson's parents prior to his birth; the many miracles of Jesus in the Gospels, the Angel-assisted escapes in the Book of Acts, and so many more. As I said, they each testify to the Power of God; so why is the alleged "miracle" of Hanukkah only found in one source, which was written many years after the fact; a source which is not even recognized by the Christian world as being Divinely Inspired?

Similar to the four Books of the Maccabees, the controversial "Megillat Antiochus" which is likewise known as "The Scroll Of Antiochus" and "The Scroll Of The Hasmoneans, recounts how the Hasmoneans overcame the Seleucid kings and celebrated the very first Hanukkah, or Festival of Lights. It states in part:

----- Begin Quote -----

The Hasmoneans entered the sanctuary, rebuilt the gates, closed the breaches, and cleansed the Temple court from the slain and the impurities. They looked for pure olive oil to light the Menorah, and found only one bottle with the seal of the high priest so that they were sure of its purity. Though its quantity seemed sufficient only for one day's lighting, it lasted for eight days owing to the blessing of the God of heaven who had established his name there. Hence, the Hasmoneans and all the Jews alike instituted these eight days as a time of feasting and rejoicing, like any festival prescribed in the Torah, and of kindling lights to commemorate the victories God had given them. Mourning and fasting are forbidden on Hanukkah, except in the case of an individual's vow which must be discharged. Nevertheless, the Hasmoneans did not prohibit work on this holiday.

From that time on the Greek government was stripped of its renown. The Hasmoneans and their descendants ruled for two hundred and six years, until the destruction of the Temple.

And so the Jews everywhere observe this festival for eight days, beginning on the twenty-fifth of Kislev. These days, instituted by priests, Levites and sages of Temple times, shall be celebrated by their descendants forever.

----- End Quote -----

The date of origin of the Megillat Antiochus is said to be between the Second and Fifth Centuries AD, exactly like the Mishnah and the Gemara; however, it was not published for the first time until 1557 in Mantova, Italy. While some Jews do accept the Scroll of Antiochus as being reliable, there are others, such as Jewish author and theologian, Louis Ginzberg, who viewed it as a spurious work which was not only based on unhistorical sources, but which also heavily plagiarized from the First Book of the Maccabees.

While I am by no means an authority on Jewish manuscripts, I would have to concur with Ginzberg's assessment for several reasons. The most obvious reason is that there is a rather glaring historical error in the portion of the scroll which I

quoted. The author of this scroll states that the Hasmoneans ruled for two hundred and six years until the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. That claim is factually wrong, and quite simply impossible; because as I noted earlier, Israel and Jerusalem were brought under Roman rule in the year 63 BC by Roman General Pompey. Furthermore, Herod the Great became the first puppet king of Israel under Roman control in 37 BC; and he was an Idumean, and not a Hasmonean. Herod's dynasty, and not the Hasmoneans, was still in power when the Temple was destroyed by General Titus in 70 AD.

More specifically, historians concur that Judah Maccabee, who was the oldest brother, defeated the forces of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 165 BC. From 165 BC to 63 BC is only one hundred and two years, and not two hundred and six years. While Herod the Great married Mariamne -- a Hasmonean princess -- in order to gain political leverage and legitimacy, he also conspired to have the last male Hasmonean heir drowned in his palace in Jericho. While there was a brief resurgence of the Hasmoneans, it was quickly crushed by the Romans under Mark Antony and Octavian. That led to Herod the Great assuming power in 37 BC. So again, the author of the Scroll of Antiochus is clearly in error when he states that the Hasmoneans ruled Israel for two hundred and six years, right up to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

There are other problems with the account in the controversial Scroll of Antiochus. The fact that it was supposedly written during the same time frame as the Mishnah and the Gemara make it suspect in my view. Let me clarify that it was the Aramaic version that was supposedly written between the 2nd and the 5th Centuries AD. The Hebrew version is dated a few hundred years later during the 7th Century AD. The fact that it uses words such as Menorah, Hanukkah, holiday and Greek government which weren't used by the earlier authors, that is, the authors of the Books of the Maccabees, or by Josephus, also make it seem strange and out of place, and I just sense that the scroll is a fake.

So, when all is said and done, following are the facts which seem to remain regarding the "miracle" of the menorah:

1. Two of the four Books of the Maccabees make mention of the Festival of Lights, but they are absolutely silent regarding any kind of miracle occurring with the menorah.
2. The Jewish rabbis chose not to include the Books of the Maccabees in the official Hebrew Bible Canon, or Tanakh. They could have easily have done so by now, so why haven't they?
3. Most Christian scholars, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, likewise reject the Books of the Maccabees as official Canon. That is why they are only included in the Apocrypha.
4. There is only one verse in the entire King James Version of the Bible which seems to be referring to Hanukkah, but it likewise makes no mention of a Hanukkah "miracle". The verse is John 10:22.
5. There are only two sources which specifically mention the Hanukkah "miracle": the Jewish Gemara, which isn't recognized

by Christians as inspired Canon, and is only the opinion of the Jewish rabbis, and the Scroll of Antiochus, which is of even more doubtful origin and reliability.

In light of all of this evidence, or perhaps better said, a lack of convincing evidence, it seems to me that the Hanukkah "miracle" story may have possibly been invented by the Jewish rabbis at least six hundred and fifty years after the actual Maccabean revolts had occurred. Perhaps one of those rabbis decided that adding a small "miracle" to the account of the Festival of Lights that is found in the commentaries in the Gemara, would make the story more interesting. Who knows. If this is the case -- and I cannot prove that it is -- wouldn't this be considered one of those "Jewish fables" that some of the Apostles warned us against? Consider these verses:

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."  
Colossians 2:8, KJV

"Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do."  
1 Timothy 1:4, KJV

"But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness."  
1 Timothy 4:7, KJV

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."  
2 Timothy 4:3-4, KJV

"Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth."  
Titus 1:14, KJV

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."  
2 Peter 1:16, KJV

If my theory is correct, and certain Jewish rabbis invented the story of the Hanukkah "miracle" hundreds of years after the events had actually taken place, and inserted it into the rabbinic commentaries of the Gemara, why would they do this? While I can't provide you with a definitive answer, I would like to put forth a speculation for your consideration. As I sat here pondering this issue, I began to think about other important historical events that were occurring at the very time that the Mishnah and the Gemara were being redacted. As it turns out, 200 AD to 500 AD were the formative years of the early Roman Catholic Church.

If there is one thing that the Scriptures make rather clear, both in the Gospels, as well as in the Book of Acts, and in some of the Epistles, it is that from the foundation of our Christian faith, the unbelieving Jews were a constant source



of trouble and persecution. We know that they persecuted and ultimately murdered Jesus by proxy through Roman hands. We know that they then immediately proceeded to persecute and kill the early Apostles and Disciples as well. All of this is covered in other articles that I have written. Please avail yourself of them.

As the centuries passed, the gulf that existed between the unbelieving Jews and the Christians continued to grow. When the Early Christians began to cool off, and eventually made the mistake of compromising with Rome, this only caused the hostilities and the animosity between Christians and Jews to grow all the more. Ultimately, some of the Christians became influential people in Rome, while quite often -- as during the reign of Emperor Claudius Nero -- the Jews were told to get out of town, as we see by this verse:

"And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; [because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:] and came unto them."  
Acts 18:2, KJV

Once the pact was made with Emperor Constantine in the Fourth Century, the Roman Catholic Church began to grow powerful and to exert its influence over the masses. As I have mentioned before, one way in which the nascent Roman Catholic Church exerted influence over the masses, and attracted the heathen to its doors, was by "Christianizing" certain pagan beliefs and customs. In fact, the Roman church continues to use this tactic to this very day, except now it is called ecumenism.

At any rate, there is one very popular Roman festival that we are interested in. Known as Saturnalia, it received its name from the Roman god of agriculture and harvest, Saturn. While this festival was in progress, the roles of master and slave were reversed, moral restrictions were loosened to a degree, and the rules of etiquette were also ignored. Saturnalia was a one-day festival initially. It occurred on December 17th. However, eventually, it was extended so that it lasted for a full week; that is, from December 17th to December 23rd, so that it actually engulfed the Winter Solstice on December 21st.

As I mentioned a moment ago, it is a historical fact that in order to increase its size, power and influence, the early Roman Catholic Church began to so-called "Christianize" some of the beliefs and customs of the heathen people that it had begun to absorb. It's my personal belief -- and that of many other Christians as well -- that this is exactly what it did with the Saturnalia festival. It turned Saturnalia into a Christian holy day.

In other words, just as the Winter Solstice on December 21st marks the day when the Sun resumes its northerly course, and begins to bring longer and warmer days, and the hope of new life to the frozen countries of the northern hemisphere, the Roman Catholic Church chose to give the Saturnalia festival, and the Winter Solstice, a new "Christianized" meaning, when it introduced the birth of the Son of God on December 25th, who would likewise bring hope and new life to the world -- Eternal Life -- even though the Bible makes it rather clear

that Jesus was most certainly not born anywhere near that time of year, as this verse from the Gospel of Luke reveals:

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."  
Luke 2:8, KJV

Jewish shepherds simply do not abide in the field, with their grazing flocks, in the middle of the cold, dead winter, when there is nothing on the ground for their herds to eat. At the very least, the weather would have been very cold and very rainy on December 25th in the land of Israel. The flocks and the shepherds would have been indoors; at least in a cave or a barn. To validate this point, consider the following info I extracted from the [www.bethlehem-city.org](http://www.bethlehem-city.org) website:

----- Begin Quote -----

Winter lasts for three months, from mid-December to mid-March, and can be severe . . . Summer temperatures reach 35\* centigrade and in the winter temperature may drop to Zero . . . The rainy season starts in the second half of autumn (mid-October) and continues until the end of April. Heavy rain is, however, limited to fewer than 50 days, with around 70% of the rain falling during November to February . . . Bethlehem receives an average of seven hours of sunshine a day during the winter and thirteen hours during the summer . . . Average temperatures range from 9-18\* C in winter and 26-30\* C in summer.

----- End Quote -----

While some Westerners automatically equate the Winter season with heavy snowfall, please note that due to its subtropical climate, snow is very rare in Israel, and is usually limited to the area near Mount Hermon in the northern Golan Heights. However, due to the hilly topography of the region of Judea, some of the higher elevations -- such as Jerusalem -- also receive at least one snowfall each year. Being as Bethlehem is located only five miles south of Jerusalem, I assume that it likewise receives snowfall occasionally as well. So what we see then is that Bethlehem -- the birthplace of Jesus -- experiences a cold, rainy season which lasts from the middle of December to the middle of March; during which time there is very limited sunlight, and temperatures can drop to 0\* C.

This weather is certainly not conducive to shepherding flocks at night, outside, during the Winter season. What we are able to conclude then, is that Luke 2:8 is referring to some other time of year, and that is when Jesus was really born; which nullifies and exposes the worldly deception of Jesus Christ being born on Christmas day, December 25th. If you would like to learn more about the pagan origin of the annual Christmas celebration, please take the time to view the information that is found in the "Christmas - Its Pagan Origin" section of the following page on the Endtime Prophecy Net website:

<http://www.endtimeprophecy.net/Articles-Non-EPN/index.html>

Having now explained this error, let's return to the Jews. So think about this. The Romans had their Winter Solstice festival of Saturnalia from December 17th to December 23rd.

The Christians had their Christmas on December 25th, thanks to the deception of the power-hungry Roman Catholic Church. But what about the Jews? At that time in history, the Jews were still in recovery mode from the total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which had been the very center of their form of worship. To make matters worse, the Romans chose to disperse the Jews throughout their empire, exactly as Jesus had told His Disciples it would happen, as we see by these verses. Please note the words that I have placed in upper case:

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, AND SHALL BE LED AWAY CAPTIVE INTO ALL NATIONS: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Luke 21:20-24, KJV

In short, their way of life had been totally destroyed. They were emotionally, mentally and spiritually devastated. Their morale was at an all-time low. They were outcasts in foreign lands, and were shunned by many. That being the case, I have this suspicion that perhaps the rabbis of that time may have gotten together, and decided to do something in order to try to lift the morale of their people. What if they purposely chose to introduce the eight-day "miracle" of the menorah in the Festival of Lights story at the time that the Gemara was redacted, so as to give it a "magical", mystical quality, just like Christmas?

In other words, those Jews needed something to compete with the joyous occasion of both the Roman's Saturnalia festival, and the Christian's Christmas celebration. Think about it. Without the eight-day "miracle" of the menorah, the account that is told in the Books of the Maccabees really amounts to nothing but a bloody war story. However, once the "miracle" of the menorah is added to it, it suddenly becomes something much more than that. It becomes an awe-inspiring story, and it suggests that God was vindicating the Jews through their so-called "miracle". But if that is truly the case, then why did God utterly destroy their hypocritical religious system some two hundred and thirty-five years later in 70 AD, just as Jesus himself said would happen?

So again, perhaps adding this "miracle" to the Festival of Lights -- or Hanukkah -- was the Jewish response to the popularity of the joyous Roman Saturnalia, as well as the joyous, but bogus, Christmas celebration that was promoted by the Roman Catholic Church. What do you think?

Allow me to reiterate that this is simply my personal theory and speculation, which I obviously cannot prove one way or the other; but it is interesting food for thought. Unless you can provide me with a convincing explanation regarding why no

miracle is mentioned in the Books of the Maccabees, or in the writings of Josephus, and why both Christians and Jews reject the Books of the Maccabees as Divinely Inspired text, I will stick with my theory.

With these thoughts I will bring this article to a close. I hope that you have found it informative, and I pray that it has been a blessing and an inspiration in your life. If you have enjoyed reading this article, please consider sharing its URL with your online friends. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter or Google+, I would also appreciate if you would take the time to click on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter or Google+, I would really appreciate if you would take the time to click on the corresponding link that is found on this page, and thus share this series with your friends. Thank you so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this article, or which are related to this article, and which are likewise located on the Endtime Prophecy Net web server:

Christmas: Its Pagan Origin  
Halloween and Samhain : No Room For Compromise  
Our Pagan World: The Easter Myth Exposed!

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