

"Hannukah: Have the Jewish People Been Celebrating a Pagan Holiday?"

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Channukah Timeline

Alexander the Great Conquers Persian Empire	-332
Year 1 of the "Seleucid Era"	-312
Egyptian Ptolemy Greeks Conquer Israel	-301
Syrian Seleucid Greeks Conquers Israel under Antiochus III	-200
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Liberation of Temple by Judah the Maccabee; First Channukah	-165
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Rabbanite Blessing for Hannukah Lamps

"What benediction do we make? We bless: '[Blessed art thou Lord, king of the universe,] who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the lamp of Hanukkah.'" (*Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath 23a*)

Torah Prohibition to Add Commandments

"You shall not add to the law which I command you, nor shall you diminish from it" (**Dt 4:2**)

"All that I command you, you shall diligently do; you shall not add to it nor diminish from it" (**Dt 13:1**)

"Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar" (**Prov 30:6**)

"A person must not say, 'I will not keep the commandment of the elders because they are not from the Torah.' The Almighty says to such a person, 'No, My son! Rather all that they decree upon you, observe! As it is written, *According to the instruction which they teach you* (Dt 17:11). Even I must obey their decree, as it is written, *You will decree and he will fulfill it* (Job 22:28).'" (*Pesikta Rabbati* §3)

Biblical Judicial System

"(8) When a matter is too difficult for you in judgement between blood and blood, between verdict and verdict, and between leprosy and leprosy, matters of dispute within your gates, you shall arise and go up to the place where YHWH shall choose to place his name. (9) And you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the Judge who will be in those days, and you shall seek and they shall tell you the matter of the

judgment. (10) And you shall do according to the matter which they tell you, from that place which YHWH chooses, and you shall diligently do all they they instruct you. (11) According to the instruction that they tell you and according to the judgement that they say to you, do, you must not turn from the matter which they tell you right or left. (12) And the man who intentionally disobeys the priest who stands to serve YHWH your God there, or the Judge, that man shall die and you shall remove evil from Israel" (Dt 17:8-12)

"And they shall judge the nation at all times, and it shall come to pass that every great matter they shall bring to you and every small matter they shall judge themselves, and it shall alleviate you and you shall bear it together with them." (Ex 18:22)

"And he shall stand before Elazar the Priest and he shall ask him through the judgement of the Urim before YHWH, and according to it they shall go out and according to it they shall come in, all Israel with him, the entire congregation." (Nu 27:21)

Choshen Ha-Mishpat (Breatplate of Judgement) with Urim and Tumim (Ex 28:29-30)

4 Torah Precedents

1) Son of Egyptian Man who Cursed the Name (Lev 24:10-23)

2) Gatherer of Sticks on Shabbat (Nu 14:32-36)

3) Daughter of Zelophchad #1 (Nu 27:5)

4) Daughter of Zelophchad #2 (Nu 36:5-6)

"(61) And from the children of Chavayah, the children of Hakotz, children of Barzilai... (62) These sought their written geneologies but they were not found, and they were banished from the priesthood, (63) And the governor said to them that they must not eat of the most holy until a priest stands with the Urim and the Tumim." (Ezra 2:63)

"And many days Israel shall be without the true god and without a teaching priest and without Torah." (2Chr 15:3)

1 Maccabees 130 BCE

"(37) So all the army assembled and they went up to Mount Zion... (43) and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. (44) They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. (45) And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, (46) and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. **(47) Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. (48) They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. (49) They made new holy vessels, and brought the lamp stand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. (50) Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lamp stand, and these gave light in the temple. (51) They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken. (52) Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year, (53) they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering which they had built. (54) At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals... (56) 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... (59) 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 4:37, 43-54, 56-59)**

Dedication in Tanach

"And YHWH said to Moses, one prince each day shall offer their sacrifice as the dedication of the altar (*channukat ha-mizbeach* לְחַנּוּכַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ)". Since there were 12 princes, one for each tribe, the dedication lasted 12 days (Nu 7:11; see also Nu 7:84)

"And they observed an assembly on the eighth day, for they had performed a dedication of the altar for seven days and the pilgrimage-feast for seven days. (10) And on the twenty-third day of the Seventh Month he (Solomon) sent the people to their tents..." (2Chr 7:9-10; see also 1Ki 8:65-66)

2 Maccabees 100 BCE

"(1) Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; (2) and they tore down the altars which had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. **(3) 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...** (5) 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 Chislev. **(6) 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...** (8) **They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year".** (*2 Maccabees 10:1-3, 5-6, 8*)

Fire from Heaven

"Just as Moses prayed to the Lord, and fire came down from heaven and devoured the sacrifices, so also Solomon prayed, and the fire came down and consumed the whole burnt offerings." (2 Mac 2:10)

"And fire came forth from before YHWH and consumed upon the altar the whole burnt-offering and the chelev-fats, and the whole nation saw it, and sang, and fell upon their faces." (Lev 9:24)

"And when Solomon finished praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the whole-burnt offering and the meat-offerings" (2Chr 7:1)

"... let them not place fire... and I will not place fire. (24) And you shall call in the name of your god and I will call in the name of YHWH. It shall be that the god who answers with fire is truly God..." (1Ki 18:23-24)

2 Maccabees 100BCE

"the feast of booths in the month of Chislev" (*2 Maccabees 1:9*)

2Maccabees 100 BCE

"(18) **Since on the twenty-fifth day of Chislev we shall celebrate the purification of the temple, we thought it necessary to notify you, in order that you also may celebrate the feast of booths and the feast of the fire (πυρος) given when Nehemiah, who built the temple and the altar, offered sacrifices.** (19) For when our fathers were being led captive to Persia, the pious priests of that time took some of the fire of the altar and secretly hid it in the hollow of a dry cistern, where they took such precautions that the place was unknown to any one. (20) But after many years had passed, when it pleased God, Nehemiah, having been commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to get it. And when they reported to us that they had not found fire but thick liquid, he ordered them to dip it out and bring it. **(21) And when the materials for the sacrifices were presented, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and what was laid upon it. (22) When this was done and some time had passed and the sun, which had been clouded over, shone out, a great fire blazed up, so that all marveled...** (31) **And when the materials of the sacrifice were consumed, Nehemiah ordered that the liquid that was left should be poured upon large stones. (32) When this was done, a flame blazed up; but when the light from the altar shone**

back, it went out... (36) Nehemiah and his associates called this "nephthar,"... but by most people it is called Naphtha." (2 Maccabees 1:17-22, 31-36)

Megillat Ta'anit - Before 70 CE

"These are the days on which it is forbidden to fast and on some of them it is forbidden to mourn... On the third of Kislev the insignias were removed from the Temple... on the twenty-fifth thereof the day of the eight-day dedication on which it is forbidden to mourn." (*Megillat Ta'anit*)

Josephus - After 70 CE

"(7) 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 (φῶτα). I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival.**" (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 12:316-325 [7:6-7])

Brayta - 200 CE

"What is the reason for Hanukkah? For our rabbis taught: "*On the twenty-fifth of Kislev are the days of Hannukah, which are eight on which lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden*" [*Megillat Ta'anit*]. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmoneans [i.e. the Maccabees] prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the high priest, but which contained sufficient oil for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit the lamp therewith for eight days. The following year these days were appointed a Festival with the recital of praise and thanksgiving." (**Brayta in *Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath 21b***)

Scholion on Megillat Ta'anit - After 70 CE

"Why did they make this dedication eight days? Because in the days of the Greek kings the Hasmoneans entered the Temple and built the altar and covered it with plaster and prepared the Temple vessels and they spent eight days working on it." (*Scholion on Megillat Ta'anit*)

Brayta - 200 CE

"Our Rabbis taught: The precept of Hanukkah is one light for a man and his household; the zealous have one light for each member of the household; and the extremely zealous, — Beth Shammai maintain: On the first day eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced; but Beth Hillel say: On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased... Beth Shammai's reason is that it shall correspond to the bullocks of the Festival; whilst Beth Hillel's reason is that we promote in matters of sanctity but do not reduce." (**Brayta in: *Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath 21b***)

Babylonian Tamud - 500 CE

"Said R. Hanan b. Raba: KALENDA is kept on the eight days following the winter solstice. SATURNALIA on the eight days preceding the winter solstice...Our Rabbis taught: When Adam saw the day getting gradually shorter, he said, 'Woe is me, perhaps because I have sinned, the world around me is being darkened and returning to its state of chaos and confusion; this then is the kind of death to which I have been sentenced from Heaven!' So he began keeping an eight days' fast. **But as he observed the winter solstice** and noted the day getting increasingly longer, he said, 'This is the world's course', and he

set forth to keep an eight days' festivity. In the following year he appointed both as festivals. **Now, Adam established them for the sake of Heaven, but the heathens appointed them for the sake of idolatry.**" (*Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 8a*)

1 Maccabees - 130 BCE

"(36) Then said Judas and his brothers, 'Behold, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.' (37) So all the army assembled and they went up to Mount Zion. **(38) And they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. (39) Then they rent their clothes, and mourned with great lamentation, and sprinkled themselves with ashes.** (40) They fell face down on the ground, and sounded the signal on the trumpets, and cried out to Heaven." (*1 Maccabees 4:36-40*)