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Then Came Hanukkah at Jerusalem and It Was Winter

John 10: 22-39

Then came Hanukkah at Jerusalem and it was winter **DIG: Given the meaning of Hanukkah, what feelings about Rome’s authority might surface among the masses during that holiday? Given these tensions, what might be the real intent of the Pharisees’ question in verse 24? How does Yeshua push things even further? Why? How does He diagnose their problem? How do they interpret His claim to be one with God? How does Jesus sidetrack them? What evidence does He offer?**

REFLECT: What has convinced you that Yeshua is the Messiah? What “old ways” of looking at Christ must you overcome by faith? What difference does it make that Jesus is YHVH and not merely a man? Would the promise of verse 28 mean so much otherwise? Do you look for security in physical places? Financial holdings? Temporal relationships? What does it mean to your faith to know that you are eternally secure?

Without Hanukkah there would be no Christmas.

The name of the holiday, **Hanukkah**, is based on the Hebrew root word meaning *dedicate*, because it commemorates the rededication of **the Temple** after its recapture of the Jews from the Greco-Syrians. But why did it need to be re-dedicated?

About 175 years before the birth of **Jesus**, the Syrian empire ruled over the land of Isra’el. The Syrian ruler, Antiochus IV, was a tyrant – a madman, a Hitler archetype. He became king and took the title “Epiphanes” meaning *the illustrious one*. His goal was to consolidate his power and take over all the territory conquered by Alexander the Great. He forced Greek customs upon his Jewish subjects. Thousands of Jews were killed. All Jewish worship was forbidden. The scrolls were confiscated and burned. Honoring the Sabbath, circumcision and the dietary laws were prohibited under penalty of death. Antiochus conspired to depose and later assassinate the

righteous high priest, Yochanan. His henchmen ordered 90-year-old rabbi Eliezer to eat pork as an example to his followers. He refused and was put to death. In a plot to undermine the strength of the Jewish family and morality, Antiochus decreed that any Jewish maiden who was to be married had to first spend the night with the local governor or commander. Here is a time line of the history of **Hanukkah**.

175 BC Antiochus IV Epiphanes became king of Syria.

171 BC Onias III, the legitimate high priest was murdered and a pseudo-line of priests were installed. Thus, the Great Persecution of the Jews began. Massacres at Tziyon were common. The Syrians built Fort Antonia to guard **the Temple**. Decrees were issued abolishing Jewish practices and establishing the cult of the Greek god Zeus in **the Temple**.

170 BC Antiochus plundered **the Holy City** of **Yerushalayim**.

167 BC On 25 Kislev (November-December), Levitical sacrifices in were forcibly stopped. Antiochus erected an altar to the Greek god Zeus in **the Temple** and pigs were slaughtered in **the Most Holy Place**. He required sacrifices to the Greek deities in every city and village.

In the village of Modi'in lived an elderly priest, Mattathias, and his five sons. Mattathias determined to kill the first Jews who approached to offer the pagan sacrifice in his town rather than bow to the pagan desecration. He and his sons fled to the hills, where they formed a band of rebels who fought Antiochus' established army. Mattathias died shortly after, leaving authority to his son, Judah, who was named Maccabee (probably from the Aramaic word *maqabah* or *hammer*). This nickname became applied to the entire band of rebels. The traditional Jewish explanation is the Maccabee is an acronym for the Torah verse that was the battle cry of the Maccabees: **Michamocha ba'elim YHVH**, or **Who is like You among the gods, ADONAI (Exodus 15:11)**; as well as an acronym for Mattathias the Priest Son of John, or **Mattiyahu Kohen ben Yochanan**.

165 BC Antiochus IV Epiphanes died during a military campaign in Modi'in.

165 BC After three years of fighting, the Maccabees defeated the army of Antiochus, recaptured Yerushalayim and rededicated **the Temple** on 25 Kislev, exactly three years after the Temple had been desecrated. It was the crowning moment of the Maccabean revolt, which essentially gave Isra'el its independence

for a short time. The time for the eight-day feast **was** in the **winter (John 10:22 CJB). The feast** started on the 25th of Kislev (November-December), and lasted for eight days. Each day the Hallel was sung, the people carried palm and other branches, and **the Temple** and of all private houses were illuminated.¹⁰⁵⁸

Since the dedication of **the First Temple** was such a joyous occasion, Solomon decided that the festivities should reflect the joyous **seven-day** festival of **Sukkot** (see the commentary on **Numbers Fg - The Hag Sukkot Offering**), followed by **the eighth day assembly** (see the commentary on **Numbers Fh - The Eighth Day Assembly**). Therefore, the dedication of the First Temple was observed for **eight days** with the lighting of lampstands. Three-hundred-and-fifty-two years later, the Maccabees decided to duplicate those same celebrations. This is why **Hanukkah** is celebrated for **eight days**. It is also the reason that lights became associated with **the Feast of Dedication. The Temple** was purified, the daily tamid offering was restored and Jewish worship began once again. **Much later, the rabbis invented the legend of the miracle of Hanukkah: a small jar of oil kept the candles burning in the rededicated Temple for eight full days.** However, this legend did not appear in any Jewish texts until 600 years after the first **Hanukkah**, and there is no historical record of any such miracle taking place. Thus, the real miracle of **Hanukkah** was in the Maccabean victory over Antiochus Epiphanes and their Persian oppressors.



Consequently, this **festival**, like the feast of Booths, commemorated a divine victory when the Land was restored to Isra'el. Jewish resentment for Roman occupation ran especially high and it was a time that brought new aspirations of the

messianic hope from the Jewish community.¹⁰⁵⁹ About two months had passed since **Yeshua's** last confrontation with the Jewish religious leaders in October (see [Go - Jesus Teaches at the Feast of Booths](#)). **He** had been ministering throughout Perea. **Then came Hanukkah at Jerusalem. The Feast of Dedication** (or **consecration**) is usually called the **Hanukkah** today. You could say that **Hanukkah** and Christmas are connected because **the Feast of Lights** paved the way for the coming **Messiah** through Isra'el.

The message of **Hanukkah** for us today is one of dedication, a reminder that dedication is costly. The Maccabean revolt cost many lives, demonstrating determination to live for **God**, regardless of the price. Ultimately, for us and for the Maccabees, the outcome doesn't depend on our effort. As we read the Haftarah for **Hanukkah**, "**Not by force, and not by power, but by My Spirit,**" says **the LORD of heavens angelic armies (Zechariah 4:6).**¹⁰⁶⁰

And being a cold day, **Jesus** sought a protected place for **His** teaching. So, **He** went to **the Temple courts walked in Solomon's Colonnade (Yochanan 10:23; also see Acts 3:11 and 5:12)**. This was the royal porch that ran along the eastern wall of **the Temple** Mount, and faced the Beautiful Gate that led into the Court of the Women. **The Colonnade** was splendid, not merely consisting of a double row of columns, but a triple **colonnade**. The royal porch, where the ancient palace of **Solomon** once stood, consisted of a central enclosure 45 feet wide, with gigantic pillars 100 feet high. This was the hall of judgment where the king would exercise his rulings. When Herod the Great rebuilt **the Temple**, he incorporated with it this site of the ancient royal palace.

The Jews gathered around Him. Actually they *closed in* (Greek: *ekyklosan*) on **Him**. The hostile leaders of the Great Sanhedrin were determined to pin **Him** down so **they** surrounded **Him**. Our **Lord's** cryptic sayings plagued **them**, and **they** wanted **Him** to declare **Himself** on **their** terms. **How long, they** said to **Him, will you keep us in suspense** (literally: *hold up our soul*)? **They** insisted: **If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (John 10:24)**. This was no honest question. **They** wanted to try to get **the Living Word** to say something that would be the basis of an accusation before the Sanhedrin (see [Lg -The Great Sanhedrin](#)), or the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. But **His** words and actions had already demonstrated that **He** was indeed **the Meshiach**. Actions speak louder than words. But the Sanhedrin wanted a **Messiah** who believed in **the Oral Law** (see [Ei - The Oral Law](#)) and participated in the making of new **Oral Laws**.

The Chief Shepherd's reply was sincere but wise. **He** understood **their** motives; and therefore, did not repeat what **He** had said earlier: **My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working (John 5:17)**. **Jesus** made **His** earlier indictment plain again, saying: **I did tell you, but you do not believe**. Reverting to the allegory of **the true Shepherd He** had given them when **He** was in **the Holy City of Tziyon** three months before (see [Gu](#) - **The Good Shepherd and His Sheep**). **The works I do in My Father's name testify about Me**. **He** declared that **they do not believe because they** were **not His sheep (John 10:25-26)**. That was the problem . . . **they** were **not His sheep**.



My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life. Those who have it, have it eternally. **They shall never perish.** The security of **the sheep** is found in the ability of **the Shepherd** to defend and preserve **His** flock. This security does not depend on the ability of **the** frail **sheep**. **No one will snatch them out of My hand** (the Greek word **snatch** is *harpasei*, which is related to *harpax* meaning *ravenous wolves, robbers (Yochanan 10:27-28)*).¹⁰⁶¹ This is one of the greatest security-of-the-believer sections in the entire Bible (see [Ms](#) - **The Eternal Security of the Believer**). **ADONAI** gives **His life** to those who believe in **His Son**. Those who possess **eternal life** can no more **perish** than **God Himself** can **perish**. Who are the true **sheep**? The ones who follow. Who are **the ones** who **follow**? The ones who are given **eternal life**. The plain truth is simple: those who believe/trust/have faith in **Messiah** will never be lost from predestination to justification to sanctification to glorification. That is **God's** unbroken and unbreakable chain of salvation.

Faith obeys . . . unbelief rebels. The fruit of one's life reveals whether that person is a believer or an unbeliever. There is no middle ground. (That is not to say that believers can and do fall into sin. But even in the case of a sinning believer, **the**

Holy Spirit will operate by producing conviction, hatred of sin and some kind of desire for obedience. The idea that a true believer can continue in continuous, unbroken disobedience from the moment of conversion, without ever producing any righteous fruit whatsoever, is foreign to Scripture).

Merely knowing about the gospel without obedience to the truth of the gospel is not believing in the biblical sense. Those who cling to the memory of a one-time decision of “faith” but lack any evidence that faith has continued to operate in their lives had better pay attention to the clear and solemn warning of the Bible:

Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them (Yochanan 3:36b).¹⁰⁶²

My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. The Father and I are One (John 10:29-30), an allusion to the chief doctrinal statement of the Jewish faith: **ADONAI is one (Deuteronomy 6:4)**. They have the closest possible unity of purpose. **Jesus’** will is identical to that of **the Father**. Therefore, the believer is doubly secure. As **Ha’Shem** and **the Son** are one, so the believer becomes one with **the Father** and **the Son**, and the believer’s life is just as **eternal** as that of **the Father** and **the Son**. This is one of the great security of the believer passages in the Scriptures. What does **eternal** mean? Could **Yeshua** have used another word here instead of eternal? Does **eternal** mean **eternal**? In asserting that the believer’s oneness with **Him** is the same as **His** oneness with **the Father**, **Jesus** was claiming to be deity. **He** had answered **their** question. **He** was the **Messiah**, but not their kind of **Messiah**.¹⁰⁶³

This statement enraged **them**. To **the Jews** this was a blasphemous claim and **again they picked up stones to stone Him (Yochanan 10:31)**. **They** had heard the same blasphemy from **Him** before in **the Temple (John 8:59)** and **they** had attempted to **stone Him** then. **The rabbis called this “death by the hand of God”** but, ironically, it was actually in the hands of **the people**, who might administer **“the rebels beating”** on the spot without trial if anyone were caught openly defying some positive teaching, whether from the Torah or the Oral. **The rebels beating** was until death. What happened to **Jesus** in **Nazareth** is a microcosm of the nation of Isra’el as a whole; what happens locally will eventually happen nationally. It’s remarkable that when **Messiah** and **His** martyr Stephen were before the Sanhedrin, both were tried in direct contradiction to all of their own self-imposed “rules” (see [Lh - The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding](#)

Trials).¹⁰⁶⁴

There were no **stones in Solomon's Colonnade**. **They** would have had to run outside the northern wall of **the Temple** compound to find some building materials from which to **stone Him**. **Christ** could have slipped away. **But Jesus** remained calmly in **His** place until they had returned. **They** had probably expected **Him** to leave **the Temple** grounds and had to be in awe to find **Him** stand there. For a moment, **their** wicked purpose was checked. **His** voice sounded clear and resolute, while the worshipers around them stood in stunned silence. Then **He said to His accusers: I have shown you many good works from the Father**. A word is something about which people can argue; but a **deed** is something beyond argument. They remembered the healing of the man born blind, the healing of the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, and many others. **For which of these do you stone Me?** It was not lawful to **stone** someone for good works, only for crimes. At the very least, they had to cite at least one offense in the presence of the people before they carried out their wicked deed. **"We are not stoning You for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because You, a mere man, claim to be God" (John 10:32-33)**. Earlier (**Yochanan 5:18**) they had come to the same conclusion when **Jesus** called **God His own Father**, making **Himself** equal with **God**. Now **He** claimed equal work and equal power with **God**. **They** were right in **their** accusation, but wrong in **their** conclusion that it was blasphemy.¹⁰⁶⁵ Because **the Nazarene** had rejected **the Oral Law** (see **Ei - The Oral Law**) in **their** minds, **He** could not possibly be **the Meshiach**.

Then **Jesus** appealed to the Scriptures: **Is it not written in your** (Hebrew: *ketuvim*) or **writings: I have said you are "gods" (Psalm 82:6)? If he called them "gods," to whom the word of God came - and Scripture cannot be set aside - what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse Me of blasphemy because I said, "I AM God's Son" (Yochanan 10:34-36)?** Here, **Jesus** defended **His** claim to be **God (John 10:33)**. **He does so by using the kind of biblical argument typically used by the rabbis**. The words: **I have said you are "gods"** is a direct quote from **Psalm 82:6** as translated by the Septuagint (The Greek translation of the TaNaKh). The psalmist refers to the judges of Isra'el as **gods** (Hebrew: *elohim*) because they were to be **ADONAI's** representatives and administrators of **His** justice. **They did the works of God**. By doing **His work** they were called *elohim* or *gods*, because they were **His** representatives. If *elohim* sent **Yeshua** to the earth, how could it be blasphemy

if **Jesus** claimed to be the Son of **God** since **He** received, not merely transmitted authority, but direct personal command to do **the Father's work**? Moses was a god to Aaron in **Exodus 4:16** and to Pharaoh in **Exodus 7:1** because he brought **God's** message to them. It was **God** who sent Moses to Aaron, so why wouldn't **Jesus** be called **the Son of God**. **Jesus**, like Moshe, was **God's** messenger, with **God's** message. The children of Isra'el listened to Moses, why shouldn't they listen to **Christ** because **His** work proved **His** claims. It's as if **Messiah** was saying, "If the Scriptures call **gods** those who are no more than merely human, how much more would this title apply to **Me**, the one **Ha'Shem** has sanctified and sent!"¹⁰⁶⁶

Then **the Lord** invited **His accusers** to evaluate **His** irrefutable **works**, the quintessential proof of goodness according to Hebrew wisdom. **He** declared: **Do not believe Me unless I do the works of my Father**. Then **He** goes on to reaffirm **His** deity in a different way, by saying: **But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I AM in the Father.**" **His** continuous godly **works** were a testimony to who **He** really was. **Again they tried to seize Him, but He escaped their grasp (John 10:37-39)**. Overawed and outwitted, **they** had let **their** stones fall from **their** hands to the ground. **Yeshua** had used **their** own rabbinic reasoning against **them**. However undeterred, **they** would continue **to try and seize Him** and drag **Him** before the Great Sanhedrin and/or Pilate. **But His time had not yet come (John 2:4 and 7:6)**, and **He escaped their grasp**. Just how, we do not know.

Twenty centuries after the first **Hanukkah**, **ADONAI** was still defending Isra'el in a miraculous way. After her formation after World War II and the holocaust, a military coalition of five Arab and Palestinian forces (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia) attacked Isra'el in 1948. She was not prepared.

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister created a modest domestic war industry in which small arms such as submachine guns and hand grenades were manufactured. But the disadvantage with which the Jewish forces could muster to do battle was seen in the fact that the total number of weapons the Israel Defense Forces had at their disposal was 900 rifles, 700 light machine guns and 200 medium machine guns, **with sufficient ammunition for only three days fighting**. In fact, they could only arm two out of every three soldiers, and at that stage, heavy machine guns, anti-tank guns and artillery were but a dream. Not one existed in the entire Israeli army.¹⁰⁶⁷

To all outward appearances the deck was stacked.

And indeed it was.

In 1949 Israel and the Arab states reached an armistice agreement.

The armistice held until 1967.

Are you a part of **the true Shepherd's** flock? At some point in your past you should be able to recall a time when you were convicted of your sin by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, repented and of it and acknowledged your utter helplessness to save yourself, and then received **the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9)** through the atoning sacrifice of **Jesus Christ** on your behalf. The Bible teaches that this decision is the beginning of a lifelong process of transformation called sanctification (see [Kz - Your Word Is Truth](#)). As the years pass, the sheep faithfully follow their **Shepherd** and become more and more like **Him**.

1. God's sheep are sensitive to His leading (John 10:27a). If you were to travel the world and hold an informal conversation with believers in various countries and from different cultures, you would eventually hear them describe a common experience: the inner prompting of **the Holy Spirit** leading them to do certain things or go certain places. I'm amazed by the similarities in the descriptions of people living on opposite side of the world.

2. God's sheep are eager to obey His commands (Yochanan 10:27b). Sheep follow their shepherd because sheep without a shepherd die; they fall prey to wild animals, they wander into danger, they fail to find food and water, and they succumb to the elements. Obedient sheep live. Genuine believers want to obey; they are motivated by love, not fear. Moreover, genuine believers soon learn that obedience allows them to enjoy life to its fullest.

3. God's sheep are confident (John 10:28). Domestic sheep and sheep in the wild behave differently while grazing. Wild sheep remain ever vigilant against predators; they chew with their heads up, constantly scanning their surroundings for danger. Domestic sheep graze with their heads down, popping them up only when a noise draws their attention. When Sheep have a good shepherd, they feel secure and confident; they don't live life in constant fear.

4. God's sheep are secure (Yochanan 10:29). This is a fact, not a feeling.

Regardless of how insensitive, how disobedient, or how fearful the sheep choose to be, their place in the flock is secure (see [Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer](#)). This is not to suggest the believer's behavior is irrelevant or unimportant. People who willfully resist spiritual growth and who evidence no change in their values or behavior need to seriously question their spiritual condition. Eternal security, however – like salvation itself – is not based on the goodness of the believer. We are just as incapable of holding on to salvation as we were of earning it in the first place.¹⁰⁶⁸

*Dear **Heavenly Father**, I thank **You** for my life in **Christ**. I know that my relationship with **You** is eternal. Teach me to see life from **Your** perspective. Open my eyes to the truth of my security in **You** so that I may see that I am safe in **Your** arms. Protect my heart and my mind from the evil one. I place my trust in **You** for all eternity, and I put no confidence in the flesh. In **Messiah's** precious name I pray. Amen.¹⁰⁶⁹*