Chanukah (Feast of Dedication) Parashah & Haftorah

Numbers 7:1-11, Zechariah 2:14-4:7, 1 Kings 7:40 – 50, John 9:1-7, 10:22-39

"**When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils.**" (Numbers 7:1)

This special holiday reading is chosen for Chanukah because of it being not only the Festival of Lights, but also a 'Feast of Dedication'. This word, dedication, is 'chanukah' **חנכה** in Hebrew, which is also related to the Hebrew word hinukh – education.

It comes from the root – h-n-kh – חנך – dedicate – which can also mean '*educate*'.

Once Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, anointing it and consecrating it and all its furnishings, it came time to offer up the *'dedication offering'* (chanukat hamizbeach) for the altar, thus the altar was dedicated unto the Lord.

We may complete a work or project; it may be anointed and beautiful – but it is only when we have truly dedicated it to Adonai that our true education may begin.

At the time of Chanukah in ancient Israel, only a remnant of God's people were truly dedicated to Him and to His Torah; the rest went along with the Hellenists' plan to assimilate the Jewish people into the Greek culture and their pagan faith.

Chanukah was not simply a battle between the Greek-Syrian military forces and the small band of Jewish freedom fighters called the Maccabees; it was a deeper spiritual battle, still going on today, between a true Biblical faith and the powerful forces that attempt to lure God's people into paganism.

At this time of the year, when Chanukah and Christmas so often coincide, the war is on again. While a remnant strive to remain true to the Torah and Biblical faith, the large majority of God's people are celebrating a non-Biblical festival which has its roots in paganism; and setting up Christmas trees, whose decorative balls give homage to the pagan 'sun god'.

The Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah about this custom: "Do not learn the ways of the goyim (Gentiles) or be terrified by signs in the heavens, though the nations are terrified by them.

For the practices of the (pagan) peoples are worthless**; they cut a tree out of the forest,** and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. **They adorn it with silver and gold**; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter." (Jeremiah 10:1-4)

Father and son collecting a tree in the forest, painting by Franz Krüger (1797–1857)

Just as many Jewish people at the time of the first Chanukah were ready to renounce their Biblical faith in order to join the Hellenists, so are many of God's people doing the same today:

"**And many from Israel agreed to this kind of worship and offered sacrifices to idols and broke the Sabbath**." (1 Macccabees 1:43)

As people of the God of Abraham, Jew and non-Jews, we are forbidden to worship God in the way of the pagan peoples that surround us. "**You shall not worship me *in their way.***" (Deut. 12:31); and yet many have adopted a pagan form of worship simply because it is accepted by the majority.

Many Jews forgot the Torah, "…**to leave their sons uncircumcised and defile themselves, so that they might forget the Torah…And many of the people and everyone who was ready to forsake the Torah joined with them and they did wrong in the land**." (1 Maccabees 1:48)

Today, it is not the threat of torture and death that causes God's people to forsake the Torah, but simply peer pressure and tradition. God's power will help us to stand on the truth of His Word and not to be conformed to the values of the world in this present corrupt generation.

"Do all things without complaining and arguing, that you may become blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:14)

Although we live in this world, our ultimate allegiance is to God and His Torah. We can re-dedicate ourselves at this season of Chanukah - and may our true education begin!

Note: For a more complete study on Chanukah, you may order your copy of my book or DVD, Messiah Revealed in Chanukah: www.voiceforisrael.net

Haftorah Sabbath Chanukah I: (Zechariah 2:14-4:7)

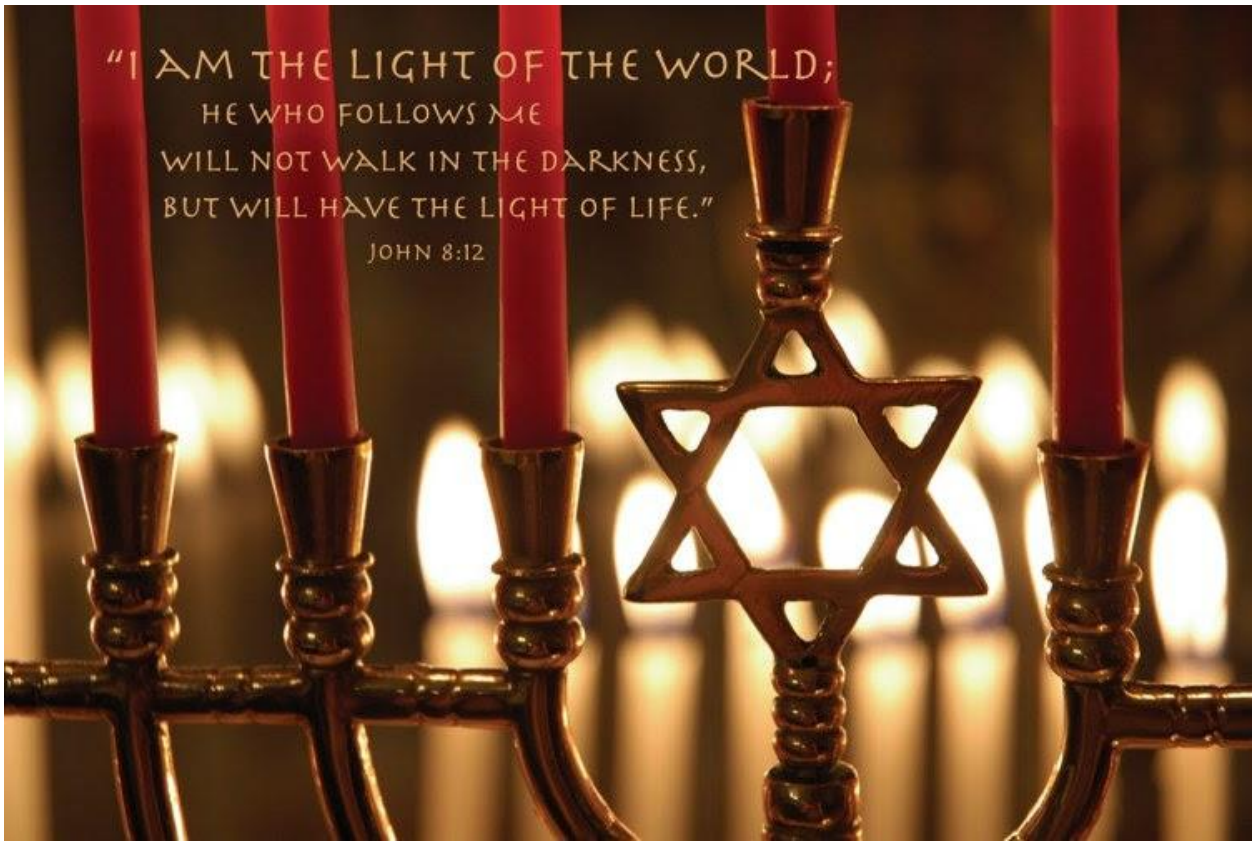
It is during this time of year when the winter nights are the longest that we sense our need for the light more intently. Some people even experience what has been termed S.A.D (Seasonal Affective Disorder) – a particular depression brought about by a deficiency of sunlight.

Likewise, when we are going through our 'long, dark night of the soul', we feel more intensely our desire to see even a glimmer of light.

Joseph was brought out of the darkness of an Egyptian dungeon to interpret the strange dreams of the Pharaoh. In one day, Joseph was promoted from prison to palace; his life was transformed suddenly from darkness to light.

Photo by Liat Nesher

A Great Light



The Hebrew prophet Isaiah, wrote of a 'Great Light' which would one day come to lift people out of the gloomy darkness: "**Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed … The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined**." (Isaiah 9:1-2)

Who is this 'great light' of which Isaiah prophesied? The Light would come in the form of a child, a son who would be destined to carry the very names of the Almighty God and eventually to rule the nations in righteousness and justice, seated on the throne of His father, David, for all eternity.

"**For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice, from that time forward, even forever."** (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah) said, "**I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** (John 8:12)

Chanukah is a celebration of light. This joyous festival commemorated the salvation of the Jewish people from the oppression of the Greeks. It was both a physical salvation and a spiritual one, since the Jews were not only rescued from persecution; but also liberated from an enforced Hellenistic religion. They fought for freedom to worship the one true God and keep His commandments as written in the Torah.

WWJD ?

Did Yeshua celebrate Chanukah? As a Jew, he likely kept the festival. Yeshua is mentioned in the gospel of John, as walking in the courts of the Temple during Chanukah: "**Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch."** (John 10:22-23)

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Zechariah returned from Babylonian exile when Cyrus gave his permission for the Jewish people to return to their Land. Although the people had attempted to rebuild the Holy Temple, due to disasters and intense opposition, the people had become discouraged and the re-building operation had come to a halt.

The Prophet Zechariah, however, roused the people out of their despondency with a reassurance that God would help them.

"Not by might (chayil), nor by power (ko'ah), but by My Spirit (Ru'ach), says YHVH Tz'vaot יהוה צבאות (Lord of Hosts)." (Zechariah 4:6)

This is God's message to us today, as we look at the daunting task of bringing restoration and healing to our broken-down and defiled 'temples': **"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;"** (1 Corinthians 6:19)

When we survey the damage wrought against these 'temples of the Ruach Hakodesh (Holy Spirit), due to the defilement and destruction of the enemy of our souls (and even our own sin), we can only sink into depression and discouragement. But Haftorah Chanukah, through the

Hebrew Prophet Zechariah, reminds us to look to God's Spirit for restoration and not our own limited power.

Chanukah is the anniversary of the re-dedication of the Temple after its defilement by the Greco-Syrian armies. By all rights, it should have been a clear-cut defeat for the Jews; they were completely outnumbered. But God…..

This is the lesson of all Jewish history and it can become our history as well if we will allow God's spirit to have free reign in our lives, rather than relying upon our own abilities. For with man these things may be impossible; but with God all things are possible.[1]

"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, says Adonai." (Zechariah 2:14)

Haftorah Chanukah II (1 Kings 7: 40-50)

King Solomon's Prayer of Dedication is read on the first and the eighth days of Tabernacles (Sukkot) as well as during Chanukah, which is the story of the Re-dedication of the Temple (as told in the First Book of Maccabees).

It is a wonderful story of heroism, of miracles, of courage, and of Light. These Jewish warriors were prepared to fight – to the death if necessary – in order that the Light of Torah may not be extinguished.

Yeshua is called the 'True Light'; He is the Living Torah (Word) that brings light to all humankind. King Antiochus and his forces attempted to extinguish the Light.

"And (Antiochus) entered proudly into the sanctuary, and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof." (1Maccabees 1:21)

His armies burned the Torah scrolls with fire and forbid the Jews to keep God's commandments, upon penalty of death. But they did not prevail against God and His people. If God be for us, who can be against us?

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

[1] Matthew 19:26

The prophetic message of Chanukah is not about power; it is about the transformational work of God's spirit in our lives. Chanukah is a festival of Lights – the Light that dispels the darkness.

When a woman lights the Sabbath candles in her home on Friday evening at sundown, she brings light, and all it symbolizes into her home. Just as the priests kindled the menorah in the Temple, the lighting of the candles on Shabbat reminds us of God's presence.

"**God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.**" (1John 1:5)

In Proverbs 31, we read of '*Eshet Chayil'* אשת חיל (woman of valor), whose 'ner' (light, lamp or candle) never goes out at night (verse 18). The 'Eshet Chayil' is strong – not with brute strength – but with the qualities of gentleness, kindness, generosity and chessed (grace).

"If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday." (Isaiah 58:11)

Hannah lighting Shabbat candles at home

Chayil חיל is a Hebrew word that can mean a soldier (chayal), or can refer to bravery, might, or capability. It can also mean 'wealth' as in the Lord gives us the ability to make wealth (chayil).

Many would say that the woman – wife or mother – is the 'backbone' of the family; but her strength is given and inspired by God of whom it is said, "His gentleness has made me great."[2] The humility of the eshet chayil voluntarily takes the lowly position of a servant in order to elevate the people around her, especially in her family.

Our collective mission, as God's people, is to help bring light, peace, love, joy and truth into the world. We will have the strength to fulfill our destiny, not in our own might or power, but once we are filled with the fullness of God's Spirit.

Our 'chayil' will be used for good once we choose to serve others, with sacrificial love, as did Adoneinu (our Lord) Yeshua Hamasiach (the Messiah) – the True Light of the World. Only then will we become a reflection of His Light.

"You are the light of the world… Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14)

[2] Psalm 18:35

HAPPY CHANUKAH

חנכה שמח

Avi-ad lighting Chanukah candles in Israel 2003

About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She made aliyah (immigrated to Israel) and is now teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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