

# The Traditional Festivals

containing:

Tisha B'Av  
The Feast of Dedication  
Holocaust Averted  
Four Fasts -- Four New Years  
The Holidays of Israel

by  
Dean & Susan Wheelock

You shall have a song  
As in the night *when* a holy festival is kept,  
And gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute,  
To come into the mountain of the LORD,  
To the Mighty One of Israel.  
*Isaiah 30:29*

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PO Box 400  
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PO Box 400


Lakewood, WI 54138

715-757-2775

E-mail: [Contact@HebrewRoots.net](mailto:Contact@HebrewRoots.net)

## ~ Introduction ~

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very nation has holidays that are special to its people. In the United States of America we observe a number of special, non-religious, national holidays such as Memorial Day, The Fourth of July, Labor Day and Veterans Day.

In ancient Israel, seven special days with religious significance were given by God to the Israelite people. However, these days were not called the holidays of Israel but rather "**...the feasts of the LORD,...**" (Lev. 23:2). The word 'feasts' is translated from the Hebrew word *moed* (mow'-ed) which is Strong's #4150 and is defined as:

"an *appointment*, i.e. a fixed *time* or season; spec. a *festival*; (as convened for a definite purpose); technically the *congregation*; by extension, the *place of meeting*..."

Most of our readers are familiar with these special days. They include the first and last days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day. These are called "holy convocations" and are considered to be high Sabbath days, similar to the weekly Sabbath, during which no servile work is to be done.

However, there are several other days that were anciently (and many continue to be) observed by the house of Judah, or as we know them today, the Jews. These holidays are not commanded by Scripture, but many of them do have religious significance. One is quite familiar to most all the world, and that is *Hanukkah*, the Feast of Dedication, or Festival of Lights.

Another festival of the Jews, that is somewhat familiar to many non-Jews, is the Feast of *Purim*. It is based on the book of Esther and is held one month before Passover, usually early to mid-March. It is a festival that is primarily directed toward children. *Tisha B'Av* (the 9th of *Av*) is a day to remember the destruction of both the first and second Temples (as well as other catastrophes that have occurred in the history of the Jewish people).

In addition, there are four special fast days mentioned by the prophet Zechariah, and there is a traditional practice to observe four New Year's days. Then there are the national memorials for the modern state of Israel.

In all, there are quite a number of special days of which an observant Jew will take note. This booklet is directed towards the traditional days of observance. For information on the commanded Festivals of Leviticus 23, see our other booklets in this Festival Series.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom,  
February, 2013

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## ~ Tisha B'Av ~

(The Ninth of Av)

Alas!  
Lonely sits the city  
Once a great people!  
She that was great among nations  
Is become like a widow;  
The princess among states  
Is become a thrall.  
*Lamentations 1:1*



The story of *Tisha B'Av* (the 9th of Av) begins during the second year of the Exodus. It is told in the book of Numbers:

"And the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>2</sup> 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.' ...

<sup>17</sup> Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, ...

<sup>25</sup> And they returned from spying out the land after forty days. <sup>26</sup> Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup> Then they told him, and said: 'We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this *is* its fruit. <sup>28</sup> Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land *are* strong; the cities *are* fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there.' ...

<sup>30</sup> Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.' <sup>31</sup> But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they *are* stronger than we.' <sup>32</sup> And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone as spies *is* a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it *are* men of great stature.' ...

"So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup> And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!' ...

<sup>4</sup> So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.'"

(Num. 13:1-2, 17, 25-28, 30-32; 14:1-2, 4.)

In the midst of all of this wailing and moaning by the children of Israel against God:

" ... Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel."

(Num. 14:5)

"But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;* <sup>7</sup> and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying:

"'The land we passed through to spy out *is* an exceedingly good land. <sup>8</sup> If the LORD [YHVH] delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, "a land which flows with milk and honey." <sup>9</sup> Only do not rebel against the LORD [YHVH], nor fear the people of the land, for they *are* our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD [YHVH] *is* with us. Do not fear them.'

<sup>10</sup> And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the LORD [YHVH] appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel."

(Num. 14: 6-10)

At this point in the story we have a remarkable scene that takes place between Moses and the LORD. God is angry and is ready to wipe out all of the children of Israel except for Moses himself. In their place God promises to use Moses to father a nation of chosen people:

" ... and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

(Num. 14:12)

Moses, however, again proves himself to be the humble type of the future 'suffering servant' Messiah (Isa. 52:13-53:12) and does not seek self aggrandizement but rather, asks God to fulfill His original plan using the children of Israel.

In the end, God sentenced the children of Israel to wander in the wilderness:

" ... 'forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. <sup>34</sup>According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection.'"

(Num. 14:33-34)

This decree is said to have occurred on *Tisha B'Av* (the 9th day of the month of Av). According to tradition, over 15,000 men died each year on *Tisha B'Av* beginning with this second year of the Exodus. Thus, (when you include the men that died in other uprisings such as Korah's rebellion) over a period of thirty-nine years, all of the 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60 died during the Wilderness Wanderings. According to tradition, on the eve of *Tisha B'Av* each condemned man dug his own grave and rested in it during the night. All of those who had reached the age of 60 that particular year died in their self prepared graves. However, also according to tradition, on *Tisha B'Av* of the fortieth year, an amazing thing happened. The men dug their own graves as usual but in the morning they discovered that none of the remaining rebels had died. They thought they must have calculated the date incorrectly so they continued to return to their graves each night for the next six days. When they saw the moon was full on 15 Av they realized that God, in His mercy, had lifted His decree. This caused 15

*Av* to also become a special day of celebration for the children of Israel, called *Tu B'Av* (more on this later in the booklet).

According to tradition, God's rejection of the children of Israel (because they believed the spies report) had also affected Moses' relationship with the LORD, in that during those thirty-eight years God did not speak to Moses face to face as He had in the past. Rather, God communicated to Moses through an angel, through the *urim* (oo-reem') and *thummim* (thoo-meem') of the High Priest, or through visions. However, to Moses' great joy, God reinstated him to his former estate on that final 15 *Av*.

There were some groups of people that were not affected by the death decree:

- ◆ Joshua and Caleb. (Because they brought a good report.)
- ◆ All of the women. (Because they did not participate in the sin.)
- ◆ The men older than sixty. Two examples are Machir and Jair who were children of Manasseh the son of Joseph) and who are mentioned later as living in the land. (Num. 32:40-41)
- ◆ Males under the age of twenty.
- ◆ The members of the tribe of Levi. According to tradition they did not participate in any of the sins of the children of Israel except for those who died in Korah's rebellion.

#### ~ Tisha B'Av in Jewish History ~

The foe has laid hands  
On everything dear to her.  
She has seen her Sanctuary  
Invaded by nations  
Which You have denied admission  
Into your community.  
*Lamentations 1:10*

As you can see, *Tisha B'Av* did not get off to a very auspicious beginning in the lives of the children of Israel. But there was much more to come. The next major event to take place on or near that day was the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 BCE. The scriptures seem to differ on the exact day:

**"And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> He burned the house of the LORD [YHVH] and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire."**  
(II Kings 25:8-9)

**"Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> He burned the house of the LORD [YHVH] and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of**

**the great, he burned with fire. <sup>14</sup> And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around."** (Jer. 52:12-14)

This seeming discrepancy is explained by placing the entering of the troops onto the Temple grounds on the 7th. of *Av*, while the Temple fire was started on the 9th and did not finish burning until the 10th. Whatever the case, the tradition of the Jews is that the destruction of Temple took place on the 9th of *Av*. As a result of this destruction, the Jews developed a tradition of fasting and lamenting while reading the book of *Lamentations* every year on the 9th of *Av*.

The next major event to take place on this date is (incredibly) the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE by the Roman general Titus. Thus we find the second Temple was also being destroyed at the precise time the Jews in the Diaspora were reading the book of *Lamentations* (in 70 CE) and mourning over the destruction of the first Temple.

This event is described in detail by the Jewish historian Josephus in his book *Wars of the Jews*. The fighting was fierce, with many casualties on both sides. After heavy fighting on the 9th of *Av*, during which the Romans breached the Temple compound, the Jews locked themselves in the Temple that night. On the next day, 10 *Av*, the fire was started that resulted in the complete destruction of the Temple as had been prophesied by *Y'shua*, forty years before:

**"Then Jesus [Y'shua] went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup> And Jesus [Y'shua] said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'" (Matt. 24:1-2)**

Before the Temple was completely burned, Titus went into the Holy Place, that is, the outer sanctuary of the Temple. Because Titus was an uncircumcised gentile, this was a further desecration of the Temple in the eyes of the Jews.

One might ask; how could a building built entirely of stone burn? While the walls and floor were of stone, much of the building was overlaid with wood. Also, the roof was constructed of wood and the curtains were of woven material, all of which was flammable. In fact, the Temple was often called "Lebanon" by the Jews because of the cedar wood that came from Lebanon for its construction. A passage found in the book of Zechariah was considered, by the sages, to be a prophecy of the destruction of the Temple:

**"Open your doors, O Lebanon,  
That fire may devour your cedars.  
<sup>2</sup> Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen,  
Because the mighty trees are ruined.  
Wail, O oaks of Bashan,  
For the thick forest has come down." (Zech. 11:1-2)**

What about the stones being thrown down? Much of the Temple wood was also overlaid with gold. The heat of the fire melted the gold and some of it ran down between the cracks in the stones. The Roman soldiers moved every stone in order to reclaim the gold. By the time the entire operation was over there was not one stone remaining in proper order on top of

another, thus fulfilling Y'shua's prophecy. Later on many of the stones were removed by other inhabitants and used for the construction of other buildings.

But the story of *Tisha B'Av* does not end here. On this very day, in 130 CE, the Romans plowed up the site of the Temple so that all trace of the Jewish Temple would be removed. It was then converted to a Roman colony and renamed *Aeilia Capitolina*.

In 133 CE the last Jewish revolt against Rome took place. It was led by a Jew who became known as Bar Kochba. A famous Jewish sage of that time, Rabbi Akiva, proclaimed Bar Kochba to be the messiah. This was the final straw in any relationship between the Jewish Believers in Y'shua and Jewish nonbelievers. The Believers could not accept Bar Kochba as the messiah but, rather, considered him a false messiah. They refused to fight the Romans and were thereafter considered traitors to Judaism by those non-believing Jews who did not accept Y'shua as Messiah. Bar Kochba's last outpost, *Betar*, fell to the Romans on 9 Av in 135 CE.

There are some other events that occurred on this day that have special significance to the Jews:

On *Tisha B'Av*, 1290 King Edward I of England ordered that all Jews be expelled from the British Isles.

In 1492, Spain was in the throws of its infamous inquisition. On April 30, 1492 a decree expelling the Jews from Spain went forth. This was the same day Christopher Columbus was given a royal commission to equip his fleet for a voyage to discover a new route to the Orient. On the 9th of Av Columbus made his final preparations for departure. On the 10th of Av, as Columbus sailed out of the harbor, he made note in his journal about the thousands of Jews who were in boats trying to leave Spain rather than convert to Catholicism.

Some historians have speculated that Columbus was himself a Jew and that he had several, if not many, Jews as crew members. It is interesting that many of the Spanish Jews (known as Maranos) ended up immigrating to the Spanish controlled New World. Most of them made conversions to Catholicism, some of which were false. Many years ago, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an extensive article about the unknown Mexican Jews. Many, of Spanish/Mexican descent have discovered that old grave stones, of their supposed good Catholic ancestors, were found to have small engravings of the Star of David, a menorah, or a Torah scroll. Apparently many of these Jews went to Mass every Sunday but still held to their Jewish traditions in secret. It has been said that Hispanics, whose last name ends in the letter 'z', may be of Jewish descent.

Other events that occurred on *Tisha B'Av* include:

- 1.) The ghetto of Florence, Italy was inaugurated in 1571;
- 2.) *Shabbetai Tzevi*, a pseudo-messiah, was born in Smyrna, Turkey in 1626. When the Muslims captured him they gave him the choice of converting to Islam or dying. He converted, much to the consternation of his followers.
- 3.) In 1648 three thousand Jews perished in Konstantynow in what were known as the Chmielnicki massacres.
- 4.) The last group of Jews were forced to leave Austria in 1670.

5.) In 1882 the Turkish government, which then controlled the Holyland, barred immigration of Russian and Romanian Jews and also banned the sale of land in Palestine to Jews.

6.) World War I broke out in 1914.

7.) A decree went forth expelling all Jews from Hungarian Ruthenia in 1941.

### ~ A More Recent Happening ~

On *Tisha B'Av* in 1994 another remarkable event occurred. It was on that day when the first of twenty-one mountain sized parts of a comet collided with the planet Jupiter. Some believe this was one of the "signs in the heavens" prophesied to occur prior to the return of Y'shua:

**"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; <sup>26</sup> men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.' <sup>29</sup> Then He spoke to them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. <sup>31</sup> So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.'" (Luke 21:25-31)**

Today, the world is unquestionably in a high degree of distress, especially in the Middle East. Political and military signs are apparent of a breakdown taking place in many countries -- a tendency toward nationalism, fragmentation, and Islamic fundamentalism. But to say that the comet colliding with Jupiter is a direct fulfillment of the above prophecy is probably stretching it a little. However, looking back over these many years, it could well have been an early wake up call for those who study prophecy -- for the Jupiter bombardment was dramatic and also proved that earth itself is not immune from such a disaster in the future, unless God provides protection.

### ~ The Message of *Tisha B'Av* ~

All Scripture is given for the training and edification of those who are following the God of Israel:

**"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."**

(II Tim. 3:16-17)

*Tisha B'Av* is no exception. It is all explained clearly by the prophet Zechariah when, after the Second Temple had been rebuilt, the people inquired as to whether they still needed to keep the fast of *Tisha B'Av* as well as the other fasts related to the destruction of the First Temple:

**"Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass that the word of the LORD [YHVH] came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Chislev, <sup>2</sup> when the**

people sent Sherezzer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD [YHVH],<sup>3</sup> and to ask the priests who were in the house of the LORD [YHVH] of hosts, and the prophets, saying,

"Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?" (Zech. 7:1-3)

God made it clear, through the prophet, that what they were asking was the wrong question. Instead of asking if they should still fast as a remembrance of the destruction of the First Temple, He told them they should have been fasting to discover why those events took place -- and what they should be doing to prevent a repeat in the future:

"Then the word of the LORD [YHVH] of hosts came to me, saying,

<sup>5</sup> 'Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests:

""When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me -- for Me? <sup>6</sup> When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? <sup>7</sup> Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD [YHVH] proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?""

(Zech. 7:4-7)

Here is what God wants of His people everywhere and at all times:

"Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts:

"Execute true justice,

Show mercy and compassion

Everyone to his brother.

<sup>10</sup> Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless,

The alien or the poor.

Let none of you plan evil in his heart

Against his brother."" (Zech. 7:9-10)

There will come a time, when Messiah *Y'shua* rules the earth, which will be a time when true justice and truth will go forth from Jerusalem. Then there will no longer be a need for the House of Judah (or anyone else) to fast on *Tisha B'Av* or the other three fast days mentioned:

"Thus says the LORD [YHVH]:

'I will return to Zion,

And dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth,

The Mountain of the LORD [YHVH] of hosts,

The Holy Mountain.'

...

<sup>13</sup> 'And it shall come to pass

That just as you were a curse among the nations,

O house of Judah and house of Israel,

So I will save you, and you shall be a blessing.

Do not fear,

Let your hands be strong.'

...

<sup>16</sup> 'These are the things you shall do:

Speak each man the truth to his neighbor;

Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;

<sup>17</sup> Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor;

And do not love a false oath.

For all these are things that I hate,'

Says the LORD [YHVH].'

<sup>18</sup> Then the word of the LORD [YHVH] of hosts came to me, saying,

<sup>19</sup> 'Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts:

""The fast of the fourth month,

The fast of the fifth,

The fast of the seventh,

And the fast of the tenth,

Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts

For the house of Judah.

Therefore love truth and peace.""

(Zech. 8:3, 13, 16-19)

So much of Scripture seems to boil down to the same message. God wants His people to love one another, to promote true justice, and to live at peace with his neighbor. Once mankind has come to that point in its history -- then these solemn fast days will become days of feasting and rejoicing -- for *Y'shua* will then be dwelling in Jerusalem and the *Torah* will go forth from Zion:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days

That the mountain of the LORD'S [YHVH's] house

Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

And shall be exalted above the hills;

And all nations shall flow to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many people shall come and say,

'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD [YHVH],

To the house of the God of Jacob;

He will teach us His ways,

And we shall walk in His paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

And the word of the LORD [YHVH] from Jerusalem."

(Isa. 2:2-3)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## ~ The Feast of Dedication ~ (Hanukkah)

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem,  
And it was winter.  
And Jesus [Y'shua] walked in the temple,  
In Solomon's porch.  
John 10:22-23



One of the festivals which the Jewish people celebrate, that is not explicitly commanded to be observed by the Scriptures, is *Hanukkah* חֲנֻכָּה (Hah'-new-kah). The Hebrew word *Hanukkah* means; "initiation, consecration or dedication," and our Savior, *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah), was at the Temple during its celebration on at least one occasion:

**"Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus [Y'shua] walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch.** (John 10:22-23)

And what a celebration it would have been, for *Hanukkah* was the major festival observed by the Jewish people during the late fall or early winter months. But more important than the festivities was the fact that *Hanukkah* marked the anniversary of the cleansing of the Temple after it had been desecrated by the great enemy of the Jewish people, Antiochus Epiphanies.

*Hanukkah* is celebrated for eight days beginning on the 25th day of *Kislev*, the ninth month on the Hebrew calendar. *Kislev* corresponds with the Roman calendar months of November/December.

While *Hanukkah* is a well known Jewish festival, the question remains, does it have any relevance for Believers in *Y'shua*? Why was *Y'shua* at the Temple during its observance? Are there important lessons to be learned from its observance? Is it permissible for Believers to observe this festival? These are questions which need to be answered honestly. It is clear that *Hanukkah* is not a 'commanded' festival, like those found in Leviticus 23, but it does have relevance to an understanding of the person and ministry of *Y'shua*.

### ~ A Brief History of Hanukkah ~

It is impossible to understand the festival of *Hanukkah* properly without at least some knowledge of the rich history and tradition that surrounds it.

### ~ The Babylonian Captivity ~

The captivity of the house of Judah came about because they had forsaken the knowledge of their one true and eternal God, and how to properly worship Him. It had all been prophesied beforehand:

**"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.  
Because you have rejected knowledge,  
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;**

**Because you have forgotten the law of your God,  
I also will forget your children."** (Hosea 4:6)

Originally, it had been one of the duties of the Priests and Levites to train the people in how to properly worship the Eternal God and how to conduct their lives according to *Torah*:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Aaron, saying:**

**"9 'Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, <sup>10</sup> that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, <sup>11</sup> and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD [YHVH] has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."** (Lev. 10:8-11)

Because of the fact that God saw fit to destroy the Temple and take the people (especially the leaders) into captivity, it is obvious the Priests and Levites failed in that charge.

### ~ The Return From Babylon ~

About the year 538 BCE (Before the Common Era), the Jewish people began returning to Jerusalem and its surrounding territories from their captivity in Babylon. In the process of time they began work on the rebuilding of the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, in 586 BCE. Among those who returned were *Zerubbabel*, *Ezra*, and *Nehemiah*, though not all at the same time.

It was *Ezra*, (who did not return until 457 BCE) who really set the tone for Judaism for the next 500 plus years. Being both a Priest and a Scribe, he organized the Great Assembly (the forerunner to the Great Sanhedrin), founded the local synagogue system, and was primarily responsible for determining which of the ancient writings should be designated Holy Scripture. *Ezra* also had a profound effect on how worship was to be conducted in the Temple and how study was to be organized in the synagogue.

*Ezra*, and the other religious leaders of that time, recognized that the house of Judah had been taken captive, and Solomon's Temple destroyed, for two primary sins; breaking the Sabbath and idolatry. It was understood by the sages of *Ezra's* day, that both of those grievous sins were a result of lack of proper training and understanding on the part of both the priests and the people. They had fallen into these two sinful patterns because they were not properly trained in the Scriptures, especially the *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible. *Ezra* himself was a Priest, so he knew it was his obligation to properly instruct the people, otherwise he would be rejected by God just like his predecessors. Therefore, *Ezra* set about to make sure that never again would the children of Israel have to suffer rejection by God because they had fallen into idolatry as a result of improper or inadequate instruction. \*

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\* The Jewish sages teach that the first Temple was destroyed for idolatry and Sabbath breaking, while the second Temple was destroyed because of lack of love or "senseless hatred."



For this reason, *Ezra* began what is today known as the Synagogue system. Synagogues were established in each community to be centers for *Torah* instruction. An observant Jew would go to the Synagogue in order to learn how to worship God and how to properly obey the instructions of the *Torah*. However, when one wanted to worship God in fullness, an observant Jew would go to the Temple.

For Jews who resided too far away from Jerusalem to make pilgrimage to the Temple for worship on a regular basis, the Synagogue did also become a center for local worship as well as study. So it was, that the local synagogue became the very center of Jewish life in Diaspora communities (in the areas of the world to which Jews had been dispersed). The synagogue not only established a place for instruction in the *Torah*; it also provided a school for the children, a place of worship, and a social center for the people of the community.

### ~ The Coming of the Greeks ~

The Synagogue system served the Jewish people well for quite a long time. But in 336 BCE a new element was introduced into the Middle East. A twenty year old man named Alexander, the son of Philip of Macedonia, began a series of conquests that would, in just a few years time, make him ruler of the known world. During his conquests, Alexander stopped over in Jerusalem and visited the Temple. It is said that Alexander was impressed by the Jewish people, by their Temple, and especially by their laws, which made for a well ordered and civil society. He was very generous with the Jews, not bringing any destruction upon their nation and, as a result, many Jewish boys began to carry the name Alexander in honor of this 'great' man.

However, Alexander was to have a very short life. He died in 323 BCE, still in his early thirties, having no more nations to conquer. Knowing that he was going to die, Alexander made provision for his empire to be divided into four parts, giving rule for each division into the hands of each of his four most trusted generals. Judea found itself right between two of those divisions; Egypt, ruled by the Ptolemy family, and Syria, ruled by the Selucids. The land of the Jews was first given to Egypt but later (about 200 BCE) was transferred over to the Syrians. All during this time, the direct governance of the province of Judea was under the High Priest.

Needless to say, after a period of time, the four divisions of Alexander's empire began to war with one another. As a result, Judea and Jerusalem often found themselves in the middle of armed conflict between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Selucids of Syria.

### ~ The Hellenization of an Empire ~

In ancient times, Judea and the Galilee sat astride a major highway of the world called the *Via Maris*. This was the route by which all commerce between Egypt and the eastern nations (Babylonia, Persia, Parthia, etc.) passed. The Jewish people were in constant contact with the movers and shakers of that day, all of whom had adopted Hellenism, the refined culture of the Greeks. This new culture proved to be a greater threat to Jewish culture than did the vast armies of Greece.

Greek Hellenism had great appeal, especially to those who wished to break out of their cycle of poverty and join the growing middle class. To many, Hellenism seemed far superior to the culture of the nomadic tribes of the desert or the empires of the east. As a result, many of the more educated Jews were attracted to Hellenism. They began to abandon their own culture and to give up their peculiar form of worship of the one true God, as set forth in the Scriptures.

Greek became the universal language, and truly educated people felt compelled to learn it. Once a person knew the Greek language it opened up a whole new world of thought, for the Greeks were very proud of their 'philosophic' traditions, their literature, music, and drama. Likewise, the rich Hellenists began to collect works of art, patterned after Greek art and sculpture. One of the favorite forms of sculpture emphasized the beauty of the human body, without clothes.

### ~ Jewish Leadership Drifts Toward Hellenism ~

Perhaps the ultimate rejection of the religion of the Jews came when many of the young men began to frequent the gymnasium. This was a building dedicated to the male human body in which competitive games were devised that required much training. All of the games were played in the nude. Some of the young Jewish men were embarrassed to participate, not because they were required to participate in the nude, but because their male organ carried the distinct feature of having been circumcised. The Greeks looked upon circumcision as a barbarous practice. They felt it disfigured the human body, which they worshipped. Because of this attitude, many of the young Jewish Hellenists underwent a very painful operation (called *epispasm*) to remove their circumcision, thus casting aside the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, one of the major tenets of their faith.

Even at the Temple itself, many of the priests and Levites began to accept the Hellenistic culture. The High Priest *Joshua* had his name changed to *Jason*, the Greek form. A gymnasium was built near the Temple and, over a period of time, became more popular than Temple worship. Once again, many of the Jewish people were turned away from God and followed after their own lusts, this time drifting into a Hellenistic form of idolatry.

### ~ Some Hold Firm to YHVH~

In the great overall scheme of God's plan it really does not matter whether the leadership of a nation (or church for that matter) rejects God or falls away from true worship. The fact of the matter is, the Eternal God will always keep at least a remnant of people to himself who have not allowed themselves to be polluted. Elijah had to learn this lesson when he was running from King Ahab:

**"Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."** (I Kings 19:18)

In Judea and the Galilee, during the second century BCE, there were still thousands of Jews who rejected this new culture, who wished to maintain the old ways and the righteous

practices they had learned in the synagogues and performed at the Temple. Yet it was difficult to withstand the onslaught of new ideas. After all, the entirety of the world was being caught up in this new way of thinking and acting, and it seemed so good on the surface.

One could say, in retrospect, that the synagogue system which Ezra had established did serve the Jewish people well. For it was out of those many local synagogues that an army was eventually gathered to fight this internal disease called Hellenism.

### ~ When Wickedness Reigns ~

In 176 BCE Antiochus IV ascended the throne of the Selucid empire in Syria. He proclaimed himself a god and called himself *Ephiphanes* which means, "God made manifest." (Later on his detractors came to call him *Epimanes* which means "crazy one" or "deluded one.")

Jason (formerly *Joshua*), the High Priest of the Temple, went to Antiochus and promised a complete Hellenization of the Jews if Antiochus would grant him full power in Judea. However, a war broke out between Syria and Egypt and Jason went over to the Egyptian side. Antiochus won the war and replaced Jason with another priest named Menelaus. It was Menelaus who gave Antiochus most of the Temple treasury and permitted him to enter the Holy of Holies.

Once again war broke out between Syria and Egypt. This time Rome intervened to stop it and Antiochus turned back from Egypt a very angry man. He took his anger out upon the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. Despite the encroachment of Hellenism, the Jews would still, if attacked, not defend themselves on the Sabbath day. Antiochus, knowing this, chose that very day to enter Jerusalem and butcher thousands of Jewish men, women and children. He tore down the city walls, and determined that he was going to ram Hellenization down their throats.

It was during this terrifying event that Antiochus entered the Temple compound and had a statue of *Zeus* placed in the Temple Court. He also demanded that other gods in the Greek pantheon be worshipped, especially *Athena* and *Dionysus*. Then he ordered that pigs be sacrificed on the altar of the Temple, clearly an abomination to both God and the observant Jews. The day this catastrophic event took place was on the 25th of *Kislev* in the year 167 BCE.

Upon the suggestion of Menelaus, Antiochus forbade the study of *Torah*, Sabbath observance became a crime, and circumcision was forbidden -- all upon penalty of death. It is said that when babies were discovered to have been circumcised, the Syrian soldiers would kill the child and hang him around the neck of his mother. Often times a Jew, who insisted on continuing in traditional observance, would be taken to the edge of the Temple wall and cast down to his death.

It was not only Jerusalem that was destined to suffer, for neither was the rest of Judea or the Galilee spared. A decree went out that a heathen altar was to be erected in every town. All Jews were required to prostrate themselves before a pagan god and to offer swine's flesh. Refusal was punishable by death. If these edicts had been fully carried out, it would have

meant the end of the Jewish religion in the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### ~ The House of Hasmon ~

Just as God raised up Elijah, when his prophecy and leadership were needed, so God raised up a family of brave and stalwart men to be used by Him to cleanse the land. Their family name was *Hasmon* (Has-mohn'). They lived in a small community west of Jerusalem called *Modin* (Mow-deen'). The father's name was *Mattathias*. He had five sons who were named: *John*,\* *Shimon*, *Judah*, *Eleazar*, and *Yochanan*.\*

Mattathias was a descendant of Aaron, so all of these men were of the Priestly line, although not of the line of *Zadok*, the righteous priest appointed by King David. (All High Priests were supposed to come from the lineage of *Zadok*.) The family of *Hasmon* had not taken up with the Hellenistic ways which many of their brother priests had embraced. They remained faithful to the *Torah* and thereby faithful also to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### ~ The Abomination ~

The next part of the story begins when a Syrian official came to the city of *Modin* and had a pagan altar erected. He commanded the men of the town to come forward and sacrifice the flesh of a pig on the altar to show their allegiance to Antiochus Ephiphanes, to the Greek Empire, and to Hellenistic culture.

The entire story is recounted in the Apocryphal books of *I and II Maccabees*. Since the Jews have never considered these books to be a part of Holy Scripture, the original Hebrew versions have been lost. The only ancient copies remaining are in the Greek language and they have been preserved as a part of the Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, if it had not been for the Catholic Church these 'Jewish' books may well have been lost entirely:

"And Mathathias said: 'Woe is me, wherefore was I born to see the ruin of my people, and the ruin of the holy city, and to dwell there, when it is given into the hands of the enemies? The holy places are come into the hands of strangers: her temple is become as a man without honor. The vessels of her glory are carried away captive: her old men are murdered in the streets, and her young men are fallen by the sword of the enemies. What nation hath not inherited her kingdom, and gotten of her spoils? All her ornaments are taken away. She that was free is made a slave. And behold our sanctuary, and our beauty, and our glory is laid waste, and the Gentiles have defiled them. To what end then should we live any longer?'

"And Mathathias and his sons rent their garments, and they covered themselves with haircloth, and made great lamentation."  
(I Macc. 2:7-14)

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\* *John* and *Yochanan* are really the same name, so both may have been named *Yochanan*. This was not uncommon at that time. Consider all of the many *Miriam*s or *Mary*s in the gospel accounts.

### ~ Showdown at the Altar ~

The Syrian official had all of the people of *Modin* assemble before the altar. He invited the men to come forward and make the pig offering to the pagan god *Dagon*. The official began by turning to *Mattathias*, the priest and leader of the community, saying:

"... 'Thou art a ruler, and an honorable, and great man in this city, and adorned with sons, and brethren. Therefore come thou first, and obey the king's commandment, as all nations have done, and the men of Juda, and they that remain in Jerusalem: and thou, and thy sons shall be in the number of the king's friends, and enriched with gold, and silver, and many presents.'

"Then Mathathias answered, and said with a loud voice: 'Although all nations obey king Antiochus, so as to depart every man from the service of the law of his fathers, and consent to his commandments, I and my sons, and my brethren will obey the law of our fathers. God be merciful unto us: it is not profitable for us to forsake the law and the justices of God; we will not hearken to the words of king Antiochus, neither will we sacrifice and transgress the commandments of our law [*Torah*], to go another way.'"

(I Macc. 2:17-22)

This defiant speech of Mattathias was not accepted by all the people of the town, for one of the local men proceeded to come forth to the altar for the purpose of performing the idolatrous sacrifice as the king had commanded:

"And Mathathias saw and was grieved, and his reins trembled, and his wrath was kindled according to the judgment of the law, and running upon him he slew him upon the altar. Moreover the man whom king Antiochus had sent, who compelled them to sacrifice, he slew at the same time, and pulled down the altar, and showed zeal for the law, as Phinees did by Zamri the son of Salomi.

"And Mathathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: 'Every one that hath zeal for the law [*Torah*], and maintaineth the testament, let him follow me.'

"So he and his sons fled into the mountains and left all that they had in the city. Then many that sought after judgment and justice, went down into the desert, and they abode there, they and their children, and their wives, and their cattle: because afflictions increased upon them."

(I Macc. 2:24-30)

An army was formed by Mattathias and his sons. Also, a very important decision was made. The observant Jews of Jerusalem had been slaughtered without resistance because the Syrians attacked them on the Sabbath day. They believed the *Torah* forbid them to fight on the Sabbath. However, Mattathias and his sons took counsel and determined that it was not forbidden to defend one's self on the Sabbath, for the law of life takes precedence over the law of the Sabbath. Therefore, the *Hasmoneans* decided to defend themselves if attacked on the Sabbath, but determined they would not initiate any attacks of their own on the seventh day.

A number of battles followed. The *Hasmoneans*, knowing they were outnumbered, would lure the Syrian soldiers out of the open desert and into the mountain passes. There, they fought a guerrilla war and were able to prevail against their enemy. However, they were not able to recapture any cities.

### ~ Mattathias Dies ~

Mattathias, the father of the clan, was an old man. He did not have the strength to continue leading an army that had to live in the mountains and the desert. As he came to the point of death, realizing that the success of their venture rested solely in the hands of God, Mattathias gave a stirring call to action:

"Now therefore, O my sons, be ye zealous for the law [*Torah*], and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers. And call to remembrance the works of the fathers, which they have done in their generations... And fear not the words of a sinful man, for his glory is dung and worms. ... You therefore, my sons, take courage and behave manfully in the law [*Torah*]: for by it you shall be glorious."

(I Macc. 2:50-51,62,64)

### ~ Judah the Hammerer ~

Mattathias did not chose his firstborn son to replace himself as leader of the army. Rather, he chose Judah, whose surname was Maccabee, to become the leader. There is some disagreement about the origin of the name 'Maccabee.' The most common explanation is that it means: "hammer," and that Judah was chosen to be the leader because of his strength in both body and character. However, another explanation has the word Maccabee being an acronym for a scripture they had written on the banner they carried into battle:

**"Who is like you, O Lord, among the mighty?"**

(Ex. 15:11)

A transliteration of this Hebrew phrase reads as follows: "*Mee khamokhah ba-elim YHVH*" The first letter of each Hebrew word in this phrase spells Maccabee.

Judah Maccabee proved to be every bit the leader that his father had hoped for. He led the army into numerous battles that finally culminated in the retaking of Jerusalem. As they entered Jerusalem they found the city, and especially the Temple itself, in terrible straits:

"And they saw the sanctuary desolate, and the altar profaned, and the gates burnt, and shrubs growing up in the courts as in a forest, or on the mountains, and the chambers joining to the temple thrown down." (I Macc. 4:38)

The army of the Maccabees were men of action. They did not lament long, but set to work repairing the Temple and the altar. They found that the altar itself had been profaned by the blood and fat of burning pig flesh, so they took counsel and decided to tear it down. They stored the stones of that altar in a single place, until a prophet should come that could give them an answer as to how they were to be cleansed or disposed of properly. It is believed these stones still exist where the Maccabees put them -- awaiting the day when Messiah will come and decide what to do with them.

"Then Judas ... chose priests without blemish, whose will was set upon the law [*Torah*] of God. And they cleansed the holy places, and took away the stones that had been defiled into an unclean place." (I Macc. 4:41-43)

Then they took new stones and built a new altar, patterned exactly after the one that had been dismantled:

"...and they built up the holy places, and the things that were within the temple: and they sanctified the temple and the courts.

"And they made new holy vessels, and brought in the candlestick, and the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. And they put incense upon the altar, and lighted up the lamps that were upon the candlestick, and they gave light in the temple. And they set the loaves upon the table, and hung up the veils, and finished all the works that they had begun to make." (I Macc. 4:48-51)

The priests, appointed by Judah Maccabee, then performed a dedication ceremony in the newly cleansed Temple for an eight day period. This corresponded in length to the dedication of the first Temple in the days of Solomon. (See I Kings 8.)

### ~ The Origin of Hanukkah ~

According to the book of I Maccabees, the lighting of the *Menorah* (the seven branched candlestick) took place on the 25th day of *Kislev*, exactly three years to the day that Antiochus Ephiphanes had desecrated the Temple by erecting the statue of *Zeus*:

"And they arose before the morning on the five and twentieth day of the ninth month (which is the month of Casleu [*Kislev*]) ... And they offered sacrifice according to the law upon the new altar of holocausts which they had made. According to the time, and according to the day wherein the heathens had defiled it, in the same was it dedicated anew with canticles, and harps, and lutes, and cymbals. And all the people fell upon their faces, and adored, and blessed up to heaven, him that had prospered them.

"And they kept the dedication of the altar eight days, and they offered holocausts with joy, and sacrifices of salvation, and of praise." (I Macc. 4:52-56)

Thus began the custom of celebrating this eight day festival, beginning each year on the 25th day of the ninth month, *Kislev*.

"And Judas and his brethren and all the church of Israel decreed, that the day of the dedication of the altar should be kept in its season from year to year for eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month of Casleu, with joy and gladness." (I Macc. 4:59)

### ~ The Miracle of the Lights ~

What is not told in either of the books of Maccabees is the story about the sacred oil for the lighting of the *Menorah*. They were not permitted to use just any old oil that might be on hand for burning in the Temple *Menorah*, it had to be specially

prepared and approved by the High Priest. According to tradition, the seal of the High Priest had to be affixed to each cruse of oil. If the seal was missing or broken, any oil remaining in that cruse was considered to be defiled and could not be used in the *Menorah*:

**"And you shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually. <sup>21</sup> In the tabernacle of meeting, outside the veil which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening until morning before the LORD [*YHVH*]. It shall be a statute forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel."**

(Ex. 27:20-21)

According to tradition, when the priests had everything cleansed and prepared to begin the eight day rededication ceremony, they could only locate one cruse of oil that still had the seal of the former High Priest in place. This meant there was only enough oil to burn for one day. It would have taken eight days to properly prepare pure oil that had the required sanctity to be used in the Temple *Menorah*.

Rather than waiting, the priests decided to step out on faith. Just as Judah Maccabee and his ragtag band had called upon God to defeat the Syrian army, even so the priests called upon God to honor their commitment to begin the rededication process. They poured all of the oil (only enough for one day) into the receptacles in the *Menorah* and lit the lamp. It is believed to have miraculously burned for the full eight day period.

### ~ The Hanukiah ~

Because of this beautiful story, about the rededication of the Temple, and the one day cruse of oil that burned for a full eight days, it has become the custom in Jewish synagogues and homes to light a *Hanukkah Menorah* during these days each year, as a symbol of remembrance of this awesome event. The *Hanukkah Menorah* is known in Hebrew as a *Hanukiah* (Hah-new-key'-ah).

The *Hanukiah* is not the seven branched *Menorah* that was prescribed for the Temple. Rather, it is a *menorah* that has eight branches, one for each of the eight days of rededication, plus an additional holder. This ninth candle holder is called the *shamesh* (shay'-mehsh) or 'helper candle.' Its purpose is to provide the original source of light to the other eight candles.

### ~ Y'shua In Hanukkah ~

The story of *Hanukkah* is fascinating, and the celebration can be great fun; but where does one find our Savior, *Y'shua HaMashiach*, in all of this? That is a very legitimate question. The answer may surprise you.

To begin with, it is necessary to establish some approximate dates for the birth of *Y'shua*. Most Christians believe that He was born on December 25th. However, most scholars will tell you that is simply not true, and that winter is the one time of the year that *Y'shua* could not have been born, for the shepherds would not have been in the fields with their flocks at night during the winter rainy season. The key to this

mystery has to do with the conception and birth of *Yochanan* the Immerser (John the Baptist).

**"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah."**  
(Luke 1:5a)

Zacharias was on duty in the Temple when an angel came and announced that his aged wife, Elizabeth, would conceive and bear a son. Each priest served at the Temple for two weeks out of the year, plus all of the priests served during the three pilgrimage festivals; Passover (Unleavened Bread); Pentecost (*Shavu'ot*); and Tabernacles (*Succoth*). Thus, every priest served a total of five weeks each year, the rest of the time they spent serving the needs of the people in their local community.

Is it possible to determine when Zacharias was on duty and when the angel appeared to him? For the following reasons, we believe that it is.

Each priest belonged to a 'division,' and was required to serve during the assigned time of that division. These divisions had been established during the time of king David.

**"Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. ...**

**"Thus they were divided by lot, ...**

**"...the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, ..."**

(I Chron. 24:1, 5, 10)

According to Luke 1:5, Zacharias belonged to the **"...division of Abijah"** which was the eighth division (sometimes called a "course"). The first division began its service the week following *Succoth*, and again the week following *Pesach* (Peh'-sock = Passover). Thus, the division of Abijah would be in service the eighth week after either of those two major festivals. That would place Zacharias' service at the midpoint of the month of *Kislev*, and again the week following *Shavu'ot* in the month of *Sivan*. *Yochanan* the Immerser (John the Baptist), can be expected to be conceived the week following one of these two dates. That would place his birth, some nine months later, during the fall festival season, or the Passover season.

Tradition has it that Elijah the Prophet was born at Passover, and, by tradition, he is expected to reappear again at a future Passover. That is why a place is set for Elijah at the Passover Seder each year. Since *Yochanan* came in the spirit of Elijah, it is reasonable to suspect that he was conceived some time after *Shavu'ot* and born about the time of Passover:

**"And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?'**

**"<sup>11</sup> Jesus [*Y'shua*] answered and said to them, 'Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. <sup>12</sup> But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.'**

**"<sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist."**  
(Matt. 17:10-13)

It can also be understood, from the scriptures, that *Y'shua* would have been born about six months after the birth of *Yochanan*. The angel Gabriel told *Miriam* (Mary):

**"Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren."**  
(Luke 1:36)

**"Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, <sup>40</sup> and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.**

**"<sup>42</sup> Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.'"**  
(Luke 1:39-44)

Thus we see that *Miriam* conceived *Y'shua* at the time when Elizabeth was six months pregnant. This means that *Y'shua* would have been exactly six months younger than *Yochanan*. If *Yochanan* was born during the Passover season, then *Y'shua* would have been born during the fall festival season.

Going on the theory that *Yochanan* was born at Passover time and *Y'shua* was born in the fall, let us now see if the festival of *Hanukkah* might shed any light on this scenario. Using the traditional Jewish calendar as it has come down to us (as a part of the "oracles of God" -- Rom. 3:1-2 -- that was given to the Jews), let us do some simple calculations.

Like the Roman calendar, commonly used today, the Hebrew calendar has two different types of years, common years and leap years. However, there is quite a difference between the leap year on the Roman calendar and that of the Hebrew calendar. The Roman year adds one day to a leap year, while the Hebrew calendar adds one whole month to their leap years. Also, on the Roman calendar a leap year occurs once every four years, but on the Hebrew calendar, there are seven leap years that occur during each nineteen year time cycle. The reason is so that the lunar year (based on the cycles of the moon), upon which the Hebrew months are based, is ten, eleven, or twelve days short of a solar year (based on the orbit of the earth around the sun). Thus, an extra month must be added every two or three years so that at the end of a nineteen year time cycle both the lunar and solar calendars come back into sync.

On the Hebrew calendar, a year (whether common or leap), can have different numbers of days. The normal common year has 354 days. However, during some years (due to the fact that the moon's cycle is between 29 and 30 days long) there will be only 353 days. Such a year is called a "defective year." (Not because there is anything wrong with the year, it just does not have the normal number of days.) Occasionally there will be a common year that has 355 days. These years are called; "excessive years."

It is common medical knowledge that a "perfect" pregnancy should last forty weeks (the number of trial and testing) or 280 days. If one begins to count from the first day of *Hanukkah*, during a defective common year, the 280th day will fall exactly on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. Doing

the same count on a regular year or an excessive year would result in the 280th day falling one or two days before *Yom Kippur*, during the Days of Awe.

Many students of the Scriptures have come to believe that *Y'shua* was born on the first day of *Succoth* (Feast of Tabernacles), and was circumcised on *Shemini Atzeret* (the Eighth Day). Consider for a moment that *Hanukkah* is an eight day festival. It would be quite possible that *Y'shua* was conceived on the fifth, sixth, or seventh day of *Hanukkah*, thus allowing for a "perfect pregnancy" and bringing His date of birth to the first day of *Succoth*.

Some have taught that *Y'shua* was conceived on December 25th, the day now celebrated as Christmas. (E.W. Bullinger, in Appendix 179 of his *Companion Bible*, makes this claim.) However, December 25th, a Roman calendar date, has absolutely no relevance to Scripture, whereas *Hanukkah*, being observed on the Hebrew calendar, does have great relevance. The point of all this is that it seems most likely that *Y'shua*, who is the light of the world, was conceived during *Hanukkah*, the festival that is also known as the "Festival of Lights." As Believers, we need to recognize that fact, and learn what this important festival has to teach us.

### ~ The Light of the World ~

**"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. <sup>9</sup> That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world"** (John 1:6-9)

Not everyone wishes to walk in the light. Some prefer the darkness of night, so their evil ways might be hidden from view:

**"Now as *Jesus [Y'shua]* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'**

**"<sup>3</sup> *Jesus [Y'shua]* answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup> I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."** (John 9:1-5)

Thus, *Y'shua* confirmed John's initial statement that He was the light of this world. He said that his disciples should also be lights to the world, once they have been lit by *Y'shua*:

**"Then *Jesus [Y'shua]* spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."** (John 8:12)

**"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."** (Matt. 5:14-16)

**"And *Jesus [Y'shua]* said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.'**

**"<sup>40</sup> Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?'**

**"<sup>41</sup> *Jesus [Y'shua]* said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, "We see." Therefore your sin remains.'" (John 9:39-41)**

It was the expressed purpose of *Y'shua*, the Light of the World, to bring men out of darkness into light. What a beautiful expression of this characteristic is the Festival of Lights, *Hanukkah*. The *Shamesh*, or helper light, represents our 'Helper,' none other than *Y'shua HaMashiach*. All of the other candles receive their light from the *Shamesh*, just as each Believer receives his light from *Y'shua*. Also, each night an additional candle is added, just as, over time, other new Believers are joined into the "Light of the World." In this way, we all are to become lights and the total "light" increases.

It is a *Hanukkah* custom to set the *Hanukiah* in a window by the street so that all the world passing by can see that the family is celebrating the Festival of Lights. For us, as Believers, this can be a symbolic reminder that we too must let our light shine so that others can see our good works; not so that we will receive praise, but so that men will see our light and praise our Eternal Father in heaven and our Lord and Savior, *Y'shua HaMashiach*, for the good light that emanates from us.

In the very beginning of the book of Genesis, we read about God's first act of creation, after the initial forming of the heavens and the earth:

**"Then God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness"** (Gen. 1:3-4)

It is an ancient Jewish understanding that the 'light' mentioned in these verses is none other than the Messiah. Thus, the very first example given in Scripture is the dividing and the difference between light and darkness:

**"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of *Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach]*. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."** (II Cor. 4:6-7)

No matter how hard we may try, we simply cannot, of ourselves, emanate God's light from within ourselves. Rather, the light that emanates from us can only be the light of Messiah, shining in us through the Holy Spirit which indwells us. For the light of the natural man is as darkness to God:

**"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of *Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach]* His Son cleanses us from all sin."** (I John 1:5-7)

## ~ The Feast of Dedication ~

The other name for *Hanukkah* is the actual meaning of the word; Feast of Dedication. *Hanukkah* is not only a time to recognize that we must allow the Light of the World to shine in us, it can also be a time for personal rededication. The Feast of Dedication commemorates the rededication of the Temple during the time of the Maccabees. However, it also points backwards to the time of the original dedication of the First Temple, in the time of Solomon, and to the dedication of the Second Temple in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Likewise, *Hanukkah* looks forward to the time in the future when the Temple of the Messiah, as described in the book of Ezekiel, will be dedicated.

## ~ Temple Dedication ~

However, there is still another Temple that needs to be dedicated and rededicated each time it is fouled by uncleanness:

**"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."** (I Cor. 3:16-17)

As Believers in *Y'shua HaMashiach*, as our Lord and Savior, each of us is a Temple unto God. Like every one of the physical temples mentioned in scripture, we too must be dedicated to holiness. When we become defiled through sin, we too must go through a cleansing process and be rededicated. This process must go on continually throughout the year, whenever we sin, and not just at the time of certain festivals. On the other hand, each festival is set in place to teach and instruct us in certain principles. While *Hanukkah* is not a commanded festival, it can be very helpful in teaching us lessons about the dedication and rededication of our lives (our temples) to the service of Almighty God, since it is incumbent upon us to do a work of 'cleanliness' by keeping ourselves from becoming polluted by the world:

**"For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:**

**'I will dwell in them  
And walk among them.  
I will be their God,  
And they shall be My people.'**

**<sup>17</sup> Therefore**

**'Come out from among them  
And be separate,' says the Lord.  
'Do not touch what is unclean,  
And I will receive you.**

**<sup>18</sup> I will be a Father to you,  
And you shall be My sons and daughters,  
Says the LORD [YHVH] Almighty."**

(II Cor. 6:16b-18)

A Temple that is not dedicated to the Almighty Creator God is no better than a heathen temple. Therefore we need to learn some things about the dedication process so that we can

be assured that our temples will be properly dedicated to the One who gives us life and breath. For this reason, we believe it is important to study the examples given in the Scriptures.

## ~ The Tabernacle ~

The very first house that was entirely dedicated to God was the Tabernacle that was constructed and transported throughout the wilderness by the Levites. The instructions for constructing the Tabernacle were given by God directly to *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses). The bare outline of those instructions are preserved for us in the book of Exodus. The details of that design were not written down, but were communicated both visually and orally by God, to *Moshe* and to the workmen:

**"And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. <sup>9</sup> According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."** (Ex. 25:8-9)

This is a direct confirmation that there really was some type of 'Oral' *Torah* (instruction) that was given to *Moshe*. Building the Tabernacle, from the instructions written down for us in the book of Exodus would be like trying to construct a house based upon a description of it in a letter from a friend. One needs to either have seen it, or have detailed information on how it is to be constructed (blueprints). In this case, *Moshe* saw what God had in mind and set about to have it replicated.

All of the items necessary for the Tabernacle were prepared by the workmen, including all of the clothing and vessels required for sacrificial worship. It was completed and set up on the first day of the first month, 1 *Nisan* (a.k.a. *Aviv*) of the second year of the Exodus:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> 'On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.'" (Ex. 40:1-2)**

The Tabernacle was erected, and the accouterments were set in place. Then *Moshe*, Aaron and Aaron's sons washed their hands and feet with water from the laver. At that point in time something absolutely magnificent happened:

**"Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD [YHVH] filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD [YHVH] filled the tabernacle. <sup>36</sup> Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. <sup>37</sup> But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. <sup>38</sup> For the cloud of the LORD [YHVH] was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys."** (Ex. 40:34-38)

## ~ Solomon's Temple ~

Many centuries later King David desired to build a permanent building for *HaShem*. However, God would not let David build it because he was "a bloody man." Nevertheless, God did give the blueprints for the first Temple to David, to be

passed on to his son Solomon who was to succeed him. It was left to Solomon (king of *shalom* or peace -- from which his name is derived) to do the actual construction.

It took many years, and an enormous amount of money and effort, to complete the Temple of Solomon -- said to be the most beautiful building of its time and categorized as one of the "seven wonders of the ancient world." Upon its completion, a great dedication ceremony was planned, but before the dedication could take place, they had to bring up the Ark of the Covenant from the Tabernacle of David (which was over the *Gihon* spring in the city of David) and place it in the Holy of Holies. This was done at the beginning of "the feast" of the seventh month. (Unless stated otherwise, whenever "the feast" is spoken of in scripture, it means *Succoth* -- The Feast of Tabernacles.):

**"Therefore all the men of Israel assembled with King Solomon at the feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> So all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. <sup>4</sup> Then they brought up the ark of the LORD [YHVH], the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up. ... <sup>6</sup> Then the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD [YHVH] to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the Most Holy Place, under the wings of the cherubim."**

(I Kings 8:2-4, 6)

Then a most fantastic event occurred, the *Shechinah* (Sheh-kee-nah' = the presence of God) came into the Temple:

**"And it came to pass when the priests came out of the Most Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without keeping to their divisions), <sup>12</sup> and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets -- <sup>13</sup> indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD [YHVH], and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD [YHVH], saying:**

**"For He is good,**

**For His mercy endures forever,'**

**that the house, the house of the LORD [YHVH], was filled with a cloud, <sup>14</sup> so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD [YHVH] filled the house of God."** (II Chron. 5:11-14)

Following this event, Solomon proceeded to give a short talk to the people, and then knelt before all the assembled Israelites to offer a prayer to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. First of all, Solomon quoted God as saying:

**"Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel.**

**'Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there; and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.'"**

(II Chron. 6:5-6)

God chose the Temple mount in the city of Jerusalem to be the very place where He would dwell with the children of Israel, and where He would place His name.

It is also instructive to look at the manner in which Solomon prayed this public prayer:

**"Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD [YHVH] in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands <sup>13</sup> (for Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and he stood on it, knelt down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven); ..."**

(II Chron. 6:12-13)

During the course of the prayer, Solomon made repeated reference to the idea that if the children of Israel should sin (and as a result of that sin be punished for their sins through war, captivity, drought, etc.); they would need to go to the Temple to pray. If they were away from Jerusalem, they would need to pray facing the direction of the Temple. Solomon asked that if the children of Israel were to pray in this manner, that God would hear their prayer and forgive them:

**"... 'whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows his own burden and his own grief, and spreads out his hands to this temple: <sup>30</sup> then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, ...'"** (II Chron. 6:29-30a)

**"... 'and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been carried captive, and pray toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name: <sup>39</sup> then hear from heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You.'"**

(II Chron. 6:38-39)

Some people in the western world, object to the idea of facing east, toward Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, when praying. Their objection is based on a Scripture found in Ezekiel:

**"Then He said to me, 'Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these.'**

**"<sup>16</sup> So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's [YHVH's] house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD [YHVH], between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD [YHVH] and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east."**

(Ezek. 8:15-16)

The problem here was not that the men were facing east. The problem was twofold: they had their backs toward the



Temple and they were worshipping the sun. If a person lives in India he would turn west in order to face the Temple. In Moscow a person would face south, and in Africa north. It just so happens that in North America one must face east or southeast in order to turn towards Jerusalem and the Temple area.

At the conclusion of Solomon's prayer another most amazing event occurred:

**"Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD [YHVH] filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD [YHVH], because the glory of the LORD [YHVH] had filled the LORD's [YHVH's] house. <sup>3</sup> When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD [YHVH] on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD [YHVH], saying:**

**"For He is good,  
For His mercy endures forever." (II Chron. 7:1-3)**

This celebration continued for seven days, all during the festival of *Succoth* (Feast of Tabernacles). On *Shemini Atzeret* (the Eighth Day), they concluded this great Temple dedication festival. That final day was truly a day of 'New Beginnings.'

It was after this dedication celebration that God appeared to Solomon once again to confirm the covenant and let Solomon know that what he had done was acceptable in God's sight:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: 'I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ...**

**"For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.'" (II Chron. 7:12,16)**

The Temple had been built, the ark of the covenant had been set in place, the sacrifices had begun, and God had accepted all of it and agreed to dwell there in the presence of His people. However, God also let Solomon know that if the children of Israel rebelled, He would destroy this beautiful Temple so that it might be a visible sign to all the world that God does not tolerate His people turning away from *Torah* (righteous instruction):

**"But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them, <sup>20</sup> then I will uproot them from My land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.'" (I Chron. 7:19-20)**

This is exactly what happened in the sixth century before *Y'shua's* day, when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple and carried away the house of Judah captive.

## ~ The Second Temple ~

*YHVH* is a God of His word, so when the children of Israel rebelled, and followed after pagan gods, *HaShem* first punished the House of Israel by divorcing them (Jer. 3:8) and sending them into captivity by the hand of the Assyrians. He did not allow them to return except in very small numbers. Some time later He called upon Nebuchadnezzar to come from Babylon, destroy the Temple, and take the House of Judah captive.

But God was also true to the second part of His promise, for God brought the people of Judah back to Jerusalem after they had repented of their wicked ways. (The return of the House of Israel is yet to occur.)

There were actually three returns of the House of Judah from Babylon to Jerusalem. The first was led by Zerubbabel c. 538 BCE, when work was begun on the rebuilding of the Temple. However the work was discontinued about two years later and not resumed again until c. 520 BCE. The Temple was finally completed in 515 BCE, seventy years after the full term of the captivity had taken place.

In c. 457 BCE there was a second return to Jerusalem led by Ezra, the Scribe and Priest. It has been said that Zerubbabel rebuilt the physical Temple, while Ezra rebuilt the spiritual Temple.

The third return was led by Nehemiah, the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia. His return took place c. 444 BCE. Nehemiah was responsible for the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem in a brief fifty-two day period.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah are central figures in the spiritual rejuvenation of the House of Judah, and although the completed Second Temple had been standing for about fifty-eight years by the time Ezra arrived, and a full seventy-one years before Nehemiah appeared, there had never really been a true return of the hearts of the people to their God, until their time.

## ~ Two Dedications ~

There were two dedication ceremonies for the Second Temple. The first one took place in 515 BCE once the physical structure had been completed. The second, a spiritual rededication, did not take place until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah in the year 444 BCE, some seventy-one years later.

### \* The First Dedication \*

**"Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius." (Ezra 6:15)**

It is unclear whether the dedication ceremony took place in the month of Adar (the twelfth month on the Hebrew calendar) or if it actually took place during the Days of Unleavened Bread, for the description of that festival follows directly upon the mention of the dedication ceremony:

**"Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication [*Hanukkah*] of this house of God with joy."**

(Ezra 6:16)

**"And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth *day* of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; ...**

**"And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD [YHVH] made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."** (Ezra 6:19 ,22)

Although the Scriptures mention the joy and celebration of the people, there apparently was no visible manifestation of the *Shekinah* entering into the Temple as had occurred during Solomon's time.

#### *\* The Second Dedication \**

Now we come to the time of the spiritual dedication, some seventy-one years later. Ezra and Nehemiah were both there, the Second Temple was standing, the city walls had been rebuilt, the priests and Levites had been identified and set in their divisions, and the people had been numbered. All was in preparation for the fall festival season:

**"Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD [YHVH] had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup>So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ...**

**"<sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD [YHVH], the great God. Then all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD [YHVH] with their faces to the ground."** (Neh. 8:1-2, 5-6)

Apparently the people in Jerusalem had once again been deprived of hearing the *Torah* read on a regular basis, for they seemed not to be aware that the Feast of Tabernacles was to be celebrated in the seventh month:

**"And they found written in the Law [*Torah*] which the LORD [YHVH] had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, ...**

**"And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day *there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.*"** (Neh. 8:14,18)

Because the *Torah* was read every day during that eight day festival, the children of Israel became convicted of their sins. The outcome of this learning experience was a day of fasting and repentance, which was held immediately following the Feast.

**"Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup> Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their**

**fathers. <sup>3</sup> And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD [YHVH] their God *for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD [YHVH] their God.*"** (Neh. 9:1-3)

There is no indication in Scripture that the *Shekinah* (the Presence of God) returned at this time either, although Jewish tradition does teach that it did dwell in the Second Temple up until about forty years before its destruction. That would place the disappearance of the *Shekinah* at about the time of *Y'shua's* crucifixion.

There is, however, a tradition about the miracle of the fire which is supposed to have taken place at this time. It is believed that the fire from the altar of the First Temple was taken by Jeremiah and hidden in a cave. The location of the cave was to remain a secret until the time when God would redeem His people and bring them back to Jerusalem. Nehemiah sent Priests to find the cave and bring back the "celestial fire." When they located the cave they found it full of thick water. They brought the water back to the Temple, and Nehemiah sprinkled it on the wood which was placed on the altar. When the sun came out the wood ignited into a great fire. This event was likened to the "celestial fire" that had come down to claim the sacrifice at the dedication of Solomon's Temple.

#### *~ Judah Maccabee's Rededication ~*

It is in the context of these dedications (*Hanukkah* = dedication) of the first and second Temples, that Judah and his fellow priests conducted the rededication on *Kislev 25* in the year of 164 BCE.

Because they had been unable to properly celebrate *Succoth* (The Feast of Tabernacles) that fall due to the desecration of the Temple, they seem to have patterned the *Hanukkah* (dedication) after that festival. This was in keeping with the *Succoth* dedication of Solomon's Temple as well as the Passover dedication of the Second Temple.

Also, it must be remembered that, in a cleansing ceremony, the "eighth day" is a symbol of a 'new beginning.' There are a number of seven day purification ceremonies described in the *Torah*; the eighth day being when full cleansing is accomplished and the individual or object declared fully clean.

The sages also saw the connection between the miracle of the heavy water igniting on the altar during Nehemiah's time and the burning up of the offering at the dedication of Solomon's Temple. They equated these two events with the lighting of the *Menorah* at *Hanukkah*, which was accomplished by striking two stones together to create a spark.

#### *~ Ezekiel's Temple ~*

Beginning in chapter 40 of Ezekiel, God gives us a description of a Temple that will stand during the Millennium; the one thousand year reign of Messiah *Y'shua*. Once again, we have a description which does not have sufficient detail for this edifice to be constructed just by using the Scriptures. It will take further revelation from the Father or *Y'shua* to make this building a reality.

Nevertheless, there is a description of what will happen when the dedication ceremony of this Temple takes place:

**"Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. <sup>2</sup> And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.**

...

**<sup>4</sup> And the glory of the LORD [YHVH] came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. <sup>5</sup> The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD [YHVH] filled the temple.**

**<sup>6</sup> Then I heard Him speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me. <sup>7</sup> And He said to me, 'Son of man, *this is* the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places. <sup>8</sup> When they set their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost by My doorpost, with a wall between them and Me, they defiled My holy name by the abominations which they committed; therefore I have consumed them in My anger. <sup>9</sup> Now let them put their harlotry and the carcasses of their kings far away from Me, and I will dwell in their midst forever.'** (Ezek. 43:1-2, 4-9)

Ezekiel was commanded to describe the Temple of the Messiah to the house of Israel so that they will abandon their idolatry (spiritual harlotry) and return to their Creator God:

**"And the man said to me, 'Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you *were* brought here so that I might show *them* to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see.'** (Ezek. 40:4)

**"... 'Write it down in their sight, so that they may keep its whole design and all its ordinances, and perform them. <sup>12</sup> This *is* the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the mountaintop *is* most holy. Behold, this *is* the law of the temple.'** (Ezek. 43:11-12)

As in the previous Temple dedications, this one will also last for eight days:

**"Seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it, and so consecrate it. <sup>27</sup> When these days are over it shall be, on the eighth day and thereafter, that the priests shall offer your burnt offerings and your peace offerings on the altar; and I will accept you,' says the Lord GOD."** (Ezek. 43:26-27)

This will indeed be the real 'New Beginning.' In Jewish teaching the Eighth Day represents infinity, for the entirety of the universe was created in seven days.

## ~ Hanukkah In Prophecy ~

In addition to the *Y'shua* connection to *Hanukkah*, there may also be a prophetic connection. Consider what is written in Daniel:

**"Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, 'My lord, what *shall be* the end of these things?'**

**<sup>9</sup> And he said, 'Go *your way*, Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end. <sup>10</sup> Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. <sup>11</sup> And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice* is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there shall be* one thousand two hundred and ninety days. <sup>12</sup> Blessed *is* he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. <sup>13</sup> But you, go *your way* till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.'**

(Dan. 12:8-13)

Many have puzzled over the 1290 days and the 1335 days. Numerous interpretations have been expounded, some dealing with literal days, others using the day for a year principle. Given the fact that Scripture can often be understood at more than one level, it is possible that some of these interpretations may be valid.

However, consider that when the daily sacrifice was taken away, during the time of Antiochus Epiphanies, he set up a statue of *Zeus* in the Temple court and offered pigs on the altar. It was only a three year period, or 1080 prophetic days (assuming 360 days in a prophetic year), before the sacrifices were resumed, and there is no record that anything phenomenal happened on the 1290th day or the 1335th day.

Consider also *Y'shua's* own words concerning the same type of desecration taking place all over again, just before His return as King of kings and Lord of lords:

**"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place' (whoever reads, let him understand), 'then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.'"**

(Matt. 24:15-16)

Without going into further detail let us look at another way of counting these days.

If the False Messiah is truly going to be a counterfeit, then he is going to have to look enough like the real Messiah to be able to fool people. *Y'shua* rode into Jerusalem and was proclaimed King of Israel on 10 *Nisan*:

**"The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus [*Y'shua*] was coming to Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup> took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:**

**"Hosanna! 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD [YHVH]!' The King of Israel!'" (John 12:12-13)**

Let us assume, for a moment, that the False Messiah will duplicate this event on 10 *Nisan* in some future year. By counting 1260 days (again using 360 day prophetic years) it

brings us to *Yom Kippur* (10 *Tishri*) some three and one-half years later.

Let us also assume, for the sake of this scenario, that a Temple or, at least, a Tabernacle is standing when the fulfillment of Matt. 24 comes about, for there must be a 'Holy Place' in order for the 'Abomination that makes Desolate' to be set up and daily sacrifices to cease.

Let us also assume that *Y'shua* may return with His Bride on this very same *Yom Kippur* that occurs 1260 days after the revealing of the False Messiah. Thirty days after His arrival would bring us to 10 *Cheshvan*, the eighth month on the Hebrew calendar. Could it be that the cleansing of the desecrated Tabernacle will begin on this day? A possibility.

Now count another forty-five days. That will bring us to the 1335th day shown to Daniel. *Cheshvan* usually only has 29 days, but in some years it has 30 days. If the year in question happens to be one in which *Cheshvan* has thirty days, then the 1335th day will fall exactly on the first day of *Hanukkah*, *Kislev* 25.

Coincidence? Probably not. It may well be that the Tabernacle cleansing process will take forty-five days, and that another eight day 'Rededication' of the Tabernacle or Temple will be initiated on that very special day.

(Credit for this prophetic scenario goes to Joseph Good of *Hatikva Ministries*.)

### ~ Observing Hanukkah ~

If you decide to observe *Hanukkah*, the important thing to remember is that it is supposed to be a festival of celebration. It is not necessary to observe all of the rituals that are common to the Jewish tradition, but on the other hand, it certainly is not wrong to do so. Sometimes it is good to begin the observance of a festival that is new to you in the manner that others have developed. After you have followed their lead a couple of times you can begin to add your own touches, making it a more personal family type of festival.

The first requirement for a modern celebration of *Hanukkah* is to acquire the special *Menorah*, called the *Hanukiah*. If you wish, you can make your own. The traditional method of lighting the *Hanukiah* is to begin after the sun is down but before traffic has ceased passing on the street. Place one candle in the 'helper' position, plus one candle for each day of *Hanukkah* that has transpired. (On the first day there would be the *Shamesh* plus one other candle on the far right side of the holder. On the second day place the *Shamesh* plus two other candles in the holder; the third day, the *Shamesh* plus three, etc.)

1.) Begin by lighting the *shamesh*.

2.) In a Jewish setting a blessing is then said that goes something like this:

"Blessed are You Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah light.

"Blessed are You Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has wrought miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

"Blessed are You Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."

(From: *Hanukkah In the Home of the Redeemed*, by Ariel and D'vorah Berkowitz, p. 15.)

3.) Then, use the *Shamesh* to light the other candle(s).

Each night the proper number of candles are placed in the *Hanukiah* beginning at the right and proceeding to the left. However, when they are lit, the lighting begins on the left (the one representing the current day) and proceeds to the right.

After the candles have been lit, it is customary to sing, celebrate with a nice meal, and play some games, especially if there are children present. In more modern times it has become customary in Jewish homes to give a small gift to each child on each evening of *Hanukkah*. Some feel this practice developed because of the pressure Jewish families felt from the Christian holiday of Christmas and its massive gift giving traditions.

### ~ Traditional Scripture Readings ~

It is always good to support the celebration of festivals by reading Scriptures that will enhance the family's understanding of the meaning of the days. Each family is encouraged to find Scriptures that speak about the days in a meaningful way to their own hearts. Psalm 30 and Psalm 44:2-9 are two traditional passages commonly read in the Jewish community. In addition, if you have access to the books of I and II Maccabees, it might be well to read some of the passages from those books which relate to the cleansing and rededication of the Temple, or you could use some of the quotes found in this article.

To help you in this endeavor we have prepared a booklet entitled *Hanukkah Readings for the Believer*, which contains suggested readings, from both the Old and New Testament, for each day of *Hanukkah*.

### ~ Summary ~

We pray that you have found this information to be both interesting and useful. As Believers, many of us have had the truth of the Festivals kept from us by well meaning Bible teachers, who themselves have swallowed the teachings concerning the so-called "Christianized" pagan festivals. True Christianity is not about trees that are brought into the house, or eggs and bunnies. True Christianity is about the Festivals of Leviticus 23, about the Sabbath and about all the other instructions found in the *Torah*, God's instruction book for our lives.

It is quite true that *Hanukkah* is not a 'required' festival. It is not listed in Leviticus chapter 23, or anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures. One reason for this omission is that the sages had already determined the canon of the Old Testament prior to the advent of *Hanukkah*. Yet *Hanukkah* is mentioned in the New Testament, and we have *Y'shua's* example of being at the Temple during its celebration. Given the context of that particular passage in the gospel of John, there is really no reason for *Hanukkah* to even be mentioned. It appears to have

been placed there to tell us that it is perfectly all right, and very possibly a good deed, to observe it.

There is much more that could be said about *Hanukkah*. About *Hannah* and her seven sons, all of whom refused to sacrifice on the pagan altar, bow before an idol, and eat pork. Because they stood up for the *Torah*, *Hannah* and all of her seven sons were put to death. Nor have we told the story of Judith, another book from the Apocrypha, which is traditionally read during the festival of *Hanukkah*. Neither have we studied the Jewish prayers for *Hanukkah* and what they teach, and how they may relate to the conception and birth of *Y'shua*.

We encourage you to look deeply into the season of *Hanukkah*. Part of the beauty of any religious festival is that it can help to kindle a desire to know more fully both the Father and the Son, thereby bringing our families into a closer relationship with God. *Hanukkah* is one of those seasons where a good share of scriptural truth can be woven into eight days of fun and games. It is a season to rejoice. In traditional Jewish homes it is forbidden to fast or mourn during this time.

If you do decide to celebrate *Hanukkah*, be sure you bring *Y'shua* into your celebration in full measure, for He is without a doubt the "Light of the World." *Y'shua* is represented by the *Shamesh*, the helper candle through which all the other candles (Believers) obtain their light.

It is light that allows us to see. During the night, when it is dark, we cannot see where we are going. But when the sun shines bright, when the "Daystar" arises (another symbol of *Y'shua*) then we can see where we are going -- we can see the road that leads into the fullness of the Kingdom of God and eternal life:

**"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.**

...

**"<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> 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.  
The zeal of the LORD [YHVH] of hosts will  
perform this."** (Isa. 9:2, 6-7)

All of us have "walked in darkness" in times past. But now, like the blind man that *Y'shua* healed, just prior to the *Hanukkah* season, it is our prayer that all of our readers can say with us:

**"...One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."** (John 9:25b)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## ~ Holocaust Averted ~

(Purim)

On the day that the enemies of the Jews  
Had hoped to overpower them;  
The opposite occurred,  
In that the Jews themselves  
Overpowered those who hated them.  
*Esther 9:1b*



History is full of stories about the persecution of the Jewish people, some of them being recorded in the Scriptures themselves. One story in particular stands out above all the others by offering hope with a happy ending. This story, where the Jews triumph gloriously over their enemies, is found in the book of *Esther*.

Some scholars believe that the events found in the book of *Esther* never took place. They point to several difficulties, including the fact that the kings of Persia were required to marry only within seven high ranking families of Persia. They say that for this reason Ahasuerus could not have taken an unknown Jewish woman to be his queen. However, the actual validity of this story is not really important, for the book of *Esther* is of great significance to all generations because of what it teaches. This story could well be a *Midrash* (Meed'-rahsh); a story that is intended to teach a great moral lesson. If that is the case, then the details become secondary and, because of its moral teaching, the story is considered to be true. This is another one of those "Hebrew things," which people born and reared in Western culture often find confusing, if not incomprehensible.

To clarify, in this particular story we find the classic tale of good versus evil. Good is represented by Mordecai and Esther, two players from God's Chosen People (the Jews), who suddenly find themselves in positions of leadership and importance. What they do; how they react, whether they conduct themselves within the framework of the *Torah* instructions, and therefore within the will of *HaShem*, is of the utmost importance.

Haman, on the other hand, is the complete embodiment of evil. His entire nature reeks of evil, as he goes to great lengths to destroy the Jewish people, making them odious in the eyes of the king, describing them as:

**"...a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain."** (Est. 3:8)

~ A Commanded Festival? ~

The Feast of *Purim* פורים (Poor-eeem') celebrates the story found in the book of *Esther*. In fact, a command is issued in the last chapter of *Esther* which instructs the Jewish people to

celebrate *Purim* each year on the anniversary of this great victory over their enemies:

**"So they called these days *Purim*, after the name *Pur*. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them,<sup>27</sup> the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time,<sup>28</sup> that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of *Purim* should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that the memory of them should not perish among their descendants."** (Esther 9:26-28)

So, according to Scripture, the Jewish people are commanded to keep this festival every year at the prescribed time. But an invitation, to celebrate *Purim*, is also given to all those who have a love for the Jewish people.

#### ~ What Does Purim Mean? ~

The word *Purim* is the plural form of the word *pur* (poor) which is said to mean 'lot' in Aramaic, the language of the Persian Empire. Thus, in English, this festival would be known as the Festival of Lots. The reason for this designation is because *Haman*, the villain of the story, cast lots to determine the most auspicious time for the empire to commit genocide against its Jewish residents.

Many writers point out the similarity between the word *Purim* and the Hebrew word for the Day of Atonement, *Kippur*. *Yom Kippur* is considered to be the most solemn holy day of all the festivals, while *Purim* is the most rowdy and raucous. Thus, they stand at the opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to the character of the day. However, one similarity is the fact that the casting of lots is intimately connected with both festivals. In the case of *Purim* it was done with the destruction of the Jews as its purpose, while on *Yom Kippur* the lots were cast to identify which of the Atonement goats was to be for the LORD and which was for Azazel.

#### ~ When Is Purim Celebrated? ~

*Purim* is celebrated throughout the world on the 14th day of the month of *Adar*, except in Shushan, the former capital of Persia, and in Jerusalem, where it is the custom to celebrate *Purim* on the 15th. The reason for this difference is because it took two days for the Jews of Shushan to complete the work of destroying their enemies, while in the outlying territories it only took one day. Thus, the complete victory in Shushan was not gained until 15 *Adar*. The celebrations are set to occur on the days following these respective victories.

One other question that arises has to do with the fact that in seven out of every nineteen years, the Hebrew calendar contains two months named *Adar*. They are called *Adar I* and *Adar II*. The reason for the dual months is because the Hebrew calendar follows the lunar cycle, rather than the solar. Therefore, there can be only twenty-nine or thirty days in a

month. Thus, each lunar year is from nine to eleven days short of the 365 day solar year. To keep the lunar calendar from retrogressing backwards (where eventually, the first month of the year, *Nisan*, would end up in the fall instead of the spring), thirteen month leap years are added every two or three years. When this occurs, the thirteenth month is called *Adar II*.

A question arises: When *Adar II* is added, in which *Adar* should *Purim* fall? The sages have determined that during leap years, *Purim* should occur in *Adar II* so that it always occurs one month before Passover.

#### ~ The Story of Purim ~

The full story of *Purim* is found in the book of *Esther*. It is the practice of the Jewish people to read this entire book on the day of *Purim*. The book of *Esther* is called a *Megillah* (Meh-gehl'-lah) in Hebrew, a word which means 'scroll.' There are five books of the *Tanakh* that are designated with the term *Megillah*, and taken together they are called the *Megillot* (plural form). Each is read on one of the festivals. These books are: *The Song of Songs* (Passover); *Ruth* (Shavu'ot); *Lamentations* (Ninth of Av); *Ecclesiastes* (Sukkot) and *Esther* (*Purim*). It is said that on *Purim* one is to read the 'whole *Megillah*,' that is the entire book.

#### \* Captivity \*

The story begins in the sixth century BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, took the nation of Judah captive:

**"In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. <sup>6</sup> Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away."** (Est. 2:5-6)

Most English translations render this verse to say the one carried away captive was 'Kish.' However, the Hebrew text is unclear since it literally says "... **who had been carried away** ..." not "**Kish** had been carried away ..." So in reality we cannot be absolutely sure who was taken captive, 'Kish,' or Mordecai himself. It seems most likely that it was Mordecai who was taken captive, probably about the same time as was Daniel. It also seems likely that the real purpose of this list of names is to establish that Mordecai is from a very famous Judean family. Kish was also the name of the father of King Saul, and Shimei is the name of a family member of Saul. (He was the one who threw stones at King David when he was fleeing from Absalom during the rebellion.) While Mordecai is probably not a direct descendant of King Saul, he is from the same family line.

It must be remembered that quite often the Scriptures do not include all of the ancestors of a particular individual. Only enough men or women are listed to show the important lineage of the person in question. Since there were about five hundred years between the life of King Saul and Mordecai, it was important to only list the key ancestors which tie Mordecai back to the family of King Saul. This was done through the

family patriarch, *Kish*. In the following passage, *Shimei* was said to be the son of *Gera* (his actual father) "of the house of Saul." Since both Saul and *Shimei* were from the same house, they would both be descended from the original *Kish*, as was Mordecai:

**"Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. <sup>6</sup> And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men *were* on his right hand and on his left.**

**<sup>7</sup> Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: 'Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! <sup>8</sup> The LORD [YHVH] has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD [YHVH] has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you *are caught* in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!'"** (II Sam. 16:5-8)

David refused to allow his general to kill Shimei, for he said:

**"It may be that the LORD [YHVH] will look on my affliction, and that the LORD [YHVH] will repay me with good for his cursing this day."** (II Sam. 16:12)

Little did King David know that one day Mordecai and Esther, descendants of this cursing man from the family of Saul, would be key players in saving the Jewish people, probably including some of David's own descendants, from total annihilation.

Mordecai had charge over a young woman whose Hebrew name was *Hadassah* חַדַּסָּה (Hah-dah'-sah = Myrtle). However, her Persian name was *Esther* אֶסְתֵּר (Ehs'-tehr = star). Most writers identify Mordecai as Esther's uncle but the Scriptures indicate that he was actually a cousin. In any event, the Scriptures tell us that Mordecai was responsible for her care and upbringing:

**"...for she had neither father nor mother. ..."**

(Est. 2:7)

*\* A Queen Rebels \**

At that time a man called Ahasuerus was king over all of the Persian Empire. Apparently the Persians had already captured Babylon since his kingdom was said to encompass an area extending from India to Ethiopia, which included 127 provinces.

Many feel that the word Ahasuerus was not a name but a royal title, like premier, king, or pharaoh. This leads to much discussion as to who the actual ruler might have been. Some conclude that the Persian king Cyrus (558-529 BCE) was the Ahasuerus of this story; however the evidence is far from conclusive. Other scholars (and at least one Jewish tradition) place the story in the 485-465 BCE time frame.

As the story opens, Ahasuerus was giving one big party for all of his officials. This festive season lasted 180 days and was culminated in a final seven day feast. On the last day of the

feast, when King Ahasuerus "was merry with wine," he sent for his wife, Queen Vashti:

**"... to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she *was* beautiful to behold."** (Est. 1:11)

Some traditions hold that what King Ahasuerus really asked her to do was appear before his guests wearing her crown and nothing else. But Queen Vashti refused, and the King was greatly incensed:

**"But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him. "** (Est. 1:12)

This created an uproar among Ahasuerus' counselors, for they felt if Vashti was allowed to get away with refusing the king's command, and word got out to the women of the realm, the men would have nothing but trouble with all of the women of the empire. One of his advisors recommended issuing a decree that the Queen no longer be allowed to come into the presence of the king. Thus, it became necessary to find a new queen:

**"After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. <sup>2</sup> Then the king's servants who attended him said: 'Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; <sup>3</sup> and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given *them*. <sup>4</sup> Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.' This thing pleased the king, and he did so.** (Est. 2:1-4)

*\* And the Replacement Is... \**

A great search took place to find a suitable replacement for Vashti. Of course, the winning candidate was none other than Esther, the beautiful (and as the *Tanakh* puts it shapely) young Jewish virgin. So Esther became Queen in Vashti's stead, but did not reveal to Ahasuerus that she was Jewish:

**"... for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal *it*."**

(Est. 2:10)

Because of her new position, Mordecai began to visit the palace gates on a daily basis, in order to maintain contact with Esther. There he was able to communicate with her, either in person or through one of Esther's trusted servants. One day, while sitting at the palace gates, Mordecai overheard two of the king's eunuchs planing to assassinate Ahasuerus. Mordecai immediately relayed this information to Queen Esther who told the king. An investigation was held, the information was discovered to be true, and the men were hanged. The details of this event were:

**"...written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king."**

(Est. 2:23)

*\* A New Chief of Staff \**

**"After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who *were* with him."**

(Est. 3:1)

Haman's genealogy is also very important to the story, since he is said to be an "Agagite." A trace of His ancestry turns up a story involving King Saul. After Samuel had anointed Saul king of Israel, he instructed him to wage war against the Amalekites:

**"Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup> Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"**

(I Sam. 15:2-3)

It is clear that God was very angry with the people of Amalek for what they did to the Israelites during their trek in the wilderness:

**"Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. ...**

**"So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."**

(Ex. 17:8, 13)

In fact, God was so angry He swore that He would blot them out of existence at some future time:

**"Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.'**

**"<sup>15</sup> And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD [YHVH]-Is-My-Banner; <sup>16</sup> for he said, 'Because the LORD [YHVH] has sworn: the LORD [YHVH] will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'"**

(Ex. 17:14-16)

The destruction of Amalek was supposed to take place once the children of Israel had come into the promised land:

**"Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, <sup>18</sup> how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you *were* tired and weary; and he did not fear God. <sup>19</sup> Therefore it shall be, when the LORD [YHVH] your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.'"**

(Deut. 25:17-19)

King Saul was chosen by God to be the destroyer of the Amalekites. At that time, the king of the Amalekites was none other than Agag, the ancestor of Haman. Saul did wage a vicious war against the Amalekites and, because God was behind the whole affair, King Saul prevailed over them.

However, he did not fully obey the decree given by God through the judge, Samuel:

**"But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all *that was* good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed."**

(I Sam. 15:9)

This brought on big trouble for King Saul, for it was this act of incomplete obedience which caused God to take the kingship from the family of Saul and give it to David. Saul defended himself by saying that they took the livestock in order to offer them to God. However, God's reply through Samuel is straightforward and to the point:

**"Has the LORD [YHVH] as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,**

**As in obeying the voice of the LORD [YHVH]?**

**Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,**

**And to heed than the fat of rams.**

**<sup>23</sup> For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,**

**And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.**

**Because you have rejected the word of**

**the LORD [YHVH],**

**He also has rejected you from *being* king."**

(I Sam. 15:22-23)

Apparently one of the results of King Saul's disobedience was the escape of some of the Amalekites, including descendants of King Agag, himself. It was because of this indiscretion that the Jewish people were nearly forced to suffer genocide at the hands of Haman, in the far off land of Persia, many centuries later. However, it was members of the family of King Saul -- Mordecai and Esther -- whom God used to be instruments in the removal of this reproach.

It must be remembered that the forces of good and evil have always existed in the world, from the time that the serpent deceived Eve in the garden until this very day. And those forces will continue to war against one another in this world until the day that Messiah brings peace by fully establishing the Kingdom of God on this earth.

*\* Meanwhile Back at Shushan... \**

The cause of all the trouble was over Mordecai's refusal to 'kneel or bow low' before Haman as the second in command over all the realm. This defiant act threw the power hungry Haman into a rage:

**"But he [*Haman*] disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus -- the people of Mordecai. ...**

**"<sup>8</sup> Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, 'There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws *are* different from all *other* people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. <sup>9</sup> If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of**



silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries.'" (Est. 3:6, 8-9)

A note in the *Open Bible* (NKJV) states this amount of silver as being worth \$3,840,000,000 in 1983 dollars. Now 3.8 billion dollars sounds like a lot of money, but when one considers the expense that Adolf Hitler went to in his efforts to exterminate millions of Jews, as well as other so-called undesirables, this figure does not look so large.

*\* The King's Decree \**

Ahasuerus accepted Haman's suggestion and delegated his authority to Haman to deal with the matter:

**"So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. <sup>11</sup> And the king said to Haman, 'The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you.'"** (Est. 3:10-11)

Once the genocidal decree had been issued in the king's name there was an additional problem for the Jews. It was the law of Persia that the king's decree could not be rescinded, even by another decree from the king himself. The decree of genocide was written on 13 *Nisan*, just before Passover, and letters were subsequently sent over the entirety of the realm; all 127 provinces, instructing the enemies of the Jews to:

**"... annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions."** (Est. 3:13)

How was the date of 13 *Adar* determined? By Haman's casting of lots:

**"In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar."** (Est. 3:7)

*\* Mordecai Springs to Action \**

**"When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. <sup>2</sup> He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. <sup>3</sup> And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.**

**"<sup>4</sup> So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them.**

**"<sup>5</sup> Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was.**

**"<sup>6</sup> So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate. <sup>7</sup> And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. <sup>8</sup> He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people."** (Est. 4:1-8)

When Esther received Mordecai's message she sent word back to him that his request placed her in a very dangerous situation. She had not been invited into the presence of the king for the past thirty days, and if she were to go into his presence uninvited she would be put to death; unless he extended his golden scepter to her, in which case she would be allowed to live and to make her request.

But Mordecai was not to be dissuaded. His reply is classic, and should serve as a beacon of light to all Believers:

**"And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: 'Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. <sup>14</sup> For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'"**

(Est. 4:13-14)

Upon hearing Mordecai's reply Queen Esther sent word of her decision:

**"Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai:**

**"<sup>16</sup> 'Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!'**

**"<sup>17</sup> So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him."** (Est. 4:15-17)

Brave Queen Esther began her fast during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and on the third day entered the king's chambers uninvited. Esther found favor in the eyes of the king and he extended his golden scepter to her and asked for her request. He then promised her anything she asked up to one-half of his kingdom. What Esther requested was that Haman and the king attend a banquet that she had prepared for them, on that very day.

The king called Haman and they immediately went to the banquet. Once again the king asked Esther what she wanted and, in response, she asked that the two of them attend another banquet the very next day. The King agreed and Haman was ecstatic, for he believed that he had made great inroads to power by the fact that the Queen had invited only the king and himself to the two banquets.

*\* Haman Seeks Counsel \**

However, one thing still gnawed at Haman, for that Jew, Mordecai still refused to bow down to him:

"So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. <sup>10</sup> Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. <sup>11</sup> Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king.

"<sup>12</sup> Moreover Haman said, 'Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. <sup>13</sup> Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.'" (Est. 5:9-13)

Their advice was clear:

"Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet."

"And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made." (Est. 5:14)

*\* YHVH Answers Prayer \**

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD [YHVH],  
Like the rivers of water;  
He turns it wherever He wishes." (Prov. 21:1)

There are only two books in the entirety of the Bible which do not mention God or the name of God within their pages. One is the *Song of Songs* the other is the story of *Esther*. Nevertheless, the hand of God is apparent in this next section, as YHVH answers the prayers of His chosen people:

"That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. <sup>2</sup> And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

"<sup>3</sup> Then the king said, 'What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?' And the king's servants who attended him said, 'Nothing has been done for him.'

"<sup>4</sup> So the king said, 'Who is in the court?' Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. <sup>5</sup> The king's servants said to him, 'Haman is there, standing in the court.' And the king said, 'Let him come in.'

"<sup>6</sup> So Haman came in, and the king asked him, 'What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?' Now Haman thought in his heart, 'Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?'

"<sup>7</sup> And Haman answered the king, 'For the man whom the king delights to honor, <sup>8</sup> let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. <sup>9</sup> Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'"

"<sup>10</sup> Then the king said to Haman, 'Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken.'" (Est. 6:1-10)

One can only imagine the seething mortification that Haman must have felt as he personally led Mordecai through the streets of Shushan proclaiming to all that this was the man, his most hated enemy, whom the king wished to honor:

"Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. <sup>13</sup> When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, 'If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him.'" (Est. 6:12-13)

*\* The Second Banquet \**

Despite his mortification, Haman still felt optimistic, for he had been invited to attend the second of the Queen's private banquets. Of course, he did not know that Queen Esther and Mordecai were closely related and Esther had not revealed that she was Jewish. It was at this banquet that Esther played her hand, and once again the king asked for her request:

"Then Queen Esther answered and said, 'If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. <sup>4</sup> For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss.'" (Est. 7:3-4)

The King demanded to know who dared to do such a thing:

"And Esther said, 'The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!'" (Est. 7:6)

At this point Haman was beside himself with fear. When the king:

"... arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; ..." (Est. 7:7a)

Haman took the opportunity to plead with Esther that his life be spared:

**"...for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king."** (Est. 7:7b).

Finally, he collapsed on Esther's bed.

*\* Haman Is Condemned \**

**"When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, 'Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?' As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face."** (Est. 7:8)

One of the eunuchs pointed out the fifty cubit gallows that Haman had erected for Mordecai:

**"...then the king said, 'Hang him on it!' So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided."** (Est. 9b-10)

The king then elevated Mordecai to Haman's position as second in command of the realm, and Queen Esther put him in charge of Haman's property.

*\* The Jews Still Had a Problem \**

The problem was that the decree that Haman had issued, in the king's name, could not be rescinded. However, the date set for the killing of the Jews was eleven months away, so time was on their side. They approached the king with a plan to counteract the evil decree of Haman:

**"... If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. <sup>6</sup> For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?"**

**"<sup>7</sup> Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, 'Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. <sup>8</sup> You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke.'**

**"<sup>9</sup> So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. <sup>10</sup> And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds.**

**"<sup>11</sup> By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives**

**-- to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, <sup>12</sup> on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. <sup>13</sup> A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. <sup>14</sup> The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel."** (Est. 8:5-14)

This provided a twofold solution to the problem. The first decree would flush out into the open all of the anti-Semites so they could be identified. The second decree would allow the Jews to prepare themselves so they could purge the entire realm of anti-Jewish sentiment. As a result of these events, not only did the Jewish people rise to a position of power in Persia, many of the gentile people of the empire converted to Judaism:

**"The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. <sup>17</sup>And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them."**

(Est. 8:16-17)

*Adar* 13 came, and the Jews were victorious over their enemies. The final act was to take Haman's ten sons and hang them on the gallows:

**"So the king commanded this be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons."**

(Est. 9:14)

So 14 and 15 *Adar* were proclaimed a festival day, to be celebrated by Jews throughout the world. And such is the case to this day.

*~ A Footnote ~*

During the early 1940's a terrible holocaust took place in eastern Europe. Over six million people died in Hitler's death camps; the vast majority of them Jewish. After the war, the victorious Allies (United States, Great Britain, France, and the USSR) set up a military tribunal to bring the surviving Nazi leaders to justice for the war crimes they had committed. These trials took place in Nuremberg, Germany, and have become known as the Nuremberg Trials.

The main trial was conducted for twenty-two of the Nazi German leaders. On September 30, 1946 (during the Days of Awe, between *Rosh HaShannah* and *Yom Kippur*), twelve of the defendants were sentenced to death. One of them, Martin Bormann had escaped and was tried in absentia. Another, Hermann Goering, committed suicide in his cell by swallowing a capsule of poison. That left ten Nazi leaders who were scheduled to be executed: Joachim von Ribbentrop, Wilhelm Keitel, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Alfred Rosenberg, Hans Frank, Wilhelm Frick, Julius Streicher, Walther Funk, Fritz Sauckel, and Alfred Jodl.

Execution was scheduled for the early morning hours of October 16, 1946, during the night portion of the last day of *Succoth* (Feast of Tabernacles). This day is also known as *Hoshana Rabbah*, the "Great Day of the Feast:"

**"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus [Y'shua] stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.' <sup>38</sup> He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."** (John 7:37-38)

It is important to note that *Hoshana Rabbah* is also known as the "Day of the Beating of the Willows." During *Succot*, the *Torah* instructs that observers gather four species of plants:

**"And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD [YHVH] your God for seven days."** (Lev. 23:40)

In Jewish practice the four species are said to be:

- ◆ A citron or etrog - a citrus fruit that represents the "fruit of beautiful trees."
- ◆ A palm branch - "branches of palm trees."
- ◆ A myrtle branch - to represent the "boughs of leafy trees." (The myrtle is called *Hadassah* which is Esther's name in Hebrew.)
- ◆ A willow branch - for the "willows of the brook."

Each of these four species represents a certain type of person.

- ◆ The etrog (citron) has both good taste and good smell. It represents people who have knowledge of the Scriptures and also perform good deeds.
- ◆ The palm branch is from a tree that has good fruit but no smell. It represents those people who know the Scriptures but do not do good deeds.
- ◆ The myrtle (*Hadassah*) is from a tree that has good smell but does not produce fruit. It represents people who do good deeds but do not know the Scriptures.
- ◆ The willow is from a tree that has neither good smell or good fruit. It represents people who neither know the Scriptures nor do good deeds.

It is said that all four species are found represented within the Jewish community, and that those who have no knowledge of Scripture, and do not perform good deeds, must be nurtured in the faith so they will produce good fruit.

On *Hoshana Rabbah*, the seventh or "Great Day of the Feast," a great water pouring ceremony would take place at the Temple. First the priests led a procession of worshippers to the pool of Siloam to draw water. Then they returned to the Temple where they performed the *Water Pouring Ceremony*. This involved taking the vessel of water, plus a vessel of wine, and pouring them out together on a corner of the Altar. As they performed this ceremony, the worshippers circled the Altar one time singing "Hosanna," which means; "Save us now!" This ceremony was performed on each of the intermediate days of

the Festival. On the seventh day of the Feast they circled the Altar seven times. As they did so, they beat the willows on the ground until all of the leaves fell off and were trodden underfoot.

One traditional understanding of the 'Beating of the Willows' ceremony, is that it represents the destruction of the wicked of the world; those who do not know God, and are opposed to His ways and His people. For this reason, it seems significant that the ten Nazi war criminals were executed on the "Day of the Beating of the Willows."

#### \* The Execution \*

Nine of the ten Nazi war criminals went to the gallows peaceably. One of them, Joachim von Ribbentrop, seemed repentant as he spoke his last words. "God protect Germany, God have mercy on my soul. My last wish is that German unity be maintained, that understanding between East and West be realized and that there be peace in the world."

However, Julius Streicher (the most virulent Jew hater of the lot) had to be dragged out of his cell kicking and screaming. They brought him up the thirteen steps to the gallows and placed the noose around his neck. He refused to give his name and shouted at the executioner, Sergeant John Woods from Texas; "The Bolsheviks will hang you one day!"

As they placed the black shroud over his head he cried out: "Purim Festival, 1946!" Then the trapdoor was opened and he dropped to his death. Thus, the ten wicked henchmen of Hitler were hanged on the gallows, just as the ten wicked sons of Haman had been, some 2500 years earlier.

**"That which has been is what will be,  
That which is done is what will be done,  
And there is nothing new under the sun."** (Eccl. 1:9)

#### ~ Celebrating Purim ~

The festival of *Purim* is not a commanded festival such as those found in Leviticus chapter 23. However, it is commanded for the Jewish people, and those who love the Jewish people are invited to join them in this great celebration. We believe that, as Believers in Messiah *Y'shua*, we can come to know our Creator God in a more intimate way by participating in its celebration.

The celebration of *Purim* is to be a totally festive occasion. It has become a tradition to emphasize it as a day that is especially fun for the children. On *Purim* it is customary to dress up in costumes that depict the various characters found in the story: King Ahasuerus, Queen Vashti, Mordecai, Esther and, of course, the wicked Haman.

It is tradition to read the entire book of *Esther* on this day. Various people, in costume, commonly read the lines for the various parts. Every time Mordecai and Esther have their name mentioned everyone present cheers, while the mention of 'Haman' elicits loud boos and noise from a variety of noisemakers. The purpose in doing this is to obey the command to blot out the memory of Amalek from the earth. Of course, food, games and music are also an integral part of the celebration. Above all, it is supposed to be a rather raucous affair and lots of fun.

*Purim* plays are also a popular attraction. A children's play, in costume, using lines right from the book of *Esther* can be a delight for both children and parents.

A favorite food for this day is the *mohntaschen*. These are three cornered cookies filled with *mohn* or poppy seeds. They are said to depict the three cornered hat that Haman wore as prime minister.

It is customary to give charity to the poor on *Purim* so that all can enjoy the festivities. Presents of food are often sent to friends in the community, but the gift of charity to the poor is considered more important.

The main thing to remember, if you decide to join your Jewish brethren in the celebration of *Purim*, is that you are to read the book of *Esther* and have a lot of fun.

### ~ The Meaning of Purim ~

What does all of this mean?

The Jewish sages have said that one day all of the other festivals would cease, but that the celebration of *Purim* would never cease. This is quite an amazing statement when one considers the fact that *Purim* is currently considered to be a 'Minor Festival' on the Jewish calendar.

We can make sense of this statement when we understand that all of the seven major festivals listed in Leviticus 23 are celebrated as rehearsals for events that have either already taken place, or are yet going to take place in the plan of God for His people on this earth. Once that plan reaches complete fruition, there may no longer be a need to celebrate them. But the victory of good over evil will be an eternal cause for celebration.

Another aid in understanding this day is knowing the relationship between *Yom Kippur* and *Purim*. The formal name for the Day of Atonement is *Yom Hakippurim*. The sages have taken this name and reworked it into *Yom Haki-purim* which means "a day that is like *Purim*."

How are *Yom Kippur* and *Purim* alike? It has already been mentioned that both involve the casting of lots. On *Purim* lots were cast to determine the most propitious day on which to destroy the Jews. On *Yom Kippur* lots were cast to determine which goat was sacrificed and which one was sent into the wilderness.

*Y'shua* addressed the principle of time and chance in a person's life:

**"There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.**

**"<sup>2</sup> And Jesus [*Y'shua*] answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'"**  
(Luke 13:1-5)

In other words being in the right place at the wrong time can lead to personal disaster. But, just like in the book of

*Esther*, God is involved whether He is directly identifiable as a player or not. *Y'shua* said that we will all perish, unless we repent. However, even with complete repentance, we all must physically die eventually, but when we are under His protection, through the blood of *Y'shua HaMashiach*, we have the wonderful hope of the resurrection to carry us through the troublesome times. As Arthur Waskow puts it in his book *The Seasons of Our Joy*, p.125; "There is absurdity in the world, but the world is not absurd. Do *Purim* and *Yom Kippur* both teach us that we must expect the unexpected, cope with the unpredictable -- by tuning our responses to a sense of ultimate harmony and order?"

Good question! Our answer is an unqualified yes.

### ~ Conclusion ~

It is difficult to sum up the festival of *Purim*. It has deep and traumatic undertones, yet it is set in a rather humorous fashion, somewhat like the early silent movies where the villain ties the young girl to the railroad tracks, only to be saved at the last minute by the hero. Only in this story the hero turns out to be a heroine instead.

In any event, Scripture does invite non-Jews to observe this festival if they so choose:

**"So they called these days *Purim*, after the name *Pur*. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, <sup>27</sup> the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time, <sup>28</sup> that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of *Purim* should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that the memory of them should not perish among their descendants."**  
(Est. 9:26-28)

Perhaps all we can say in conclusion is that sometimes the only alternative to despair is a good hearty laugh!

May God bless your festival of *Purim* with laughter, joy and merriment.

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## ~ Four Fasts ~ ~ Four New Years ~

The fast of the fourth *month*,  
The fast of the fifth,  
The fast of the seventh,  
And the fast of the tenth,  
Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts  
For the house of Judah.  
*Zechariah 8:19*



In Scripture, there is only one commanded Fast Day, that of *Yom Kippur*:

**"Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day [Yom] of Atonement [Kippur]. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD [YHVH]."**  
(Lev. 23:27)

The Day of Atonement fast is for the entire day, beginning the evening before at sundown:

**"It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath."**  
(Lev. 23:32)

The term "afflict your souls" is understood to mean a total and complete fast. This concept is made apparent from a passage out of Isaiah where God condemns the Israelites for fasting with an attitude of wickedness instead of humbleness:

**"Why have we fasted," they say, "and You have not seen?**

***Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?"***

**"In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers.**

**<sup>4</sup> Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness."**

(Isa. 58:3-4)

Fasting, with the proper attitude, is presented in Scripture as being an integral part of the lives of those who wish to serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. *Y'shua* said that fasting would be important to His followers after He had gone back to the Father:

**"Then they said to Him, 'Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?'**

**<sup>34</sup> And He said to them, 'Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? <sup>35</sup>But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.'"**

(Luke 5:33-35)

Fasting was common in the days prior to *Y'shua*. That is evident from the approximately 80 times fasting is referenced in the Hebrew Scriptures. Fasting, in those days, was often accompanied by wearing sackcloth and placing ashes or dust on one's head. The prophet Daniel gave us an example:

**"Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes."**  
(Dan. 9:3)

The traditional purposes for fasting included:

- ◆ To avert or terminate a calamity.
- ◆ As a means of winning divine forgiveness.
- ◆ As preparation for communing with God.

## ~ The Four Fasts ~

The book of Zechariah mentions four specific fast days that are said to be for the House of Judah (the House of Israel had already been taken captive and dispersed so they are not included). What was the purpose and meaning of these specific days?

First of all, they were not commanded to be kept as "Feasts to the Lord," nor were they "holy convocations." Only the Festivals listed in Leviticus 23 carry those designations:

**"And the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD [YHVH], which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'"**  
(Lev. 23:1-2)

The *Four Fasts* are part of a tradition of the House of Judah, which was established during their exile in Babylon. They are said to have been established by the Prophets. All of the *Four Fasts* were initiated because of the destruction of the First Temple (built by Solomon). Since the prophet Zechariah recognized them, they gained a certain amount of Scriptural legitimacy:

**"Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts:**

**'The fast of the fourth month,**

**The fast of the fifth,**

**The fast of the seventh,**

**And the fast of the tenth,**

**Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts**

**For the house of Judah.**

**Therefore love truth and peace."**

(Zech. 8:19)

These are days on which the people of the House of Judah afflict their souls by fasting, even unto this day. But Zechariah made it clear that a day is coming when these days will instead become "cheerful feasts." In fact, tradition indicates that the *Four Fasts* were not observed during the time of the Second Temple -- but were reinitiated after its destruction in 70 CE.

## ~ The Fast of *Tevet* ~

As already mentioned, the *Four Fasts* are all related. The first in the series is the *Fast of Tevet* (called *Asarah B'Tevet* in Hebrew) -- observed every year on 10 *Tevet* (the tenth month

on the Hebrew calendar -- which falls in December or January on the Roman calendar). 10 *Tevet* marks the day on which the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, first laid siege to Jerusalem -- thus beginning the campaign which eventually led to the destruction of Solomon's Temple:

**"Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. <sup>2</sup> So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah." (II Kings 25:1-2)**

Rabbinic Judaism added two other "sorrowful events" (as they call them) which are said to have occurred near 10 *Tevet*. The first was the death of Ezra the Scribe on 9 *Tevet*. The second was the translation of the *Torah* into Greek on 8 *Tevet*. This second event (which was the beginning of bringing the Hebrew Scripture to a worldwide audience) was considered, by the Sages, to be calamitous for the Jews because it blurred the Hebrew Scripture's uniqueness, giving the impression that "anyone can engage in it." This attitude, that the *Torah* is only for Jews, still prevails, even in certain portions of today's Messianic Movement.

#### ~ The Fast of *Tammuz* ~

The second among the *Four Fasts* is the *Fast of Tammuz* (called *Tzom Tammuz* in Hebrew) -- observed every year on 17 *Tammuz* (the fourth month on the Hebrew calendar -- which falls in June or July on the Roman calendar). 17 *Tammuz* is said to mark the day on which both Nebuchadnezzar (586 BCE) and the Roman general Titus (70 CE) broke down the walls of Jerusalem. However, the date for the breach in the walls by Nebuchadnezzar is given by Jeremiah as occurring on 9 *Tammuz*:

**"In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was penetrated." (Jer. 39:2)**

The Sages who compiled the Babylonian Talmud (c. 400-500 CE) accepted Jeremiah's date for this first event, but they considered the destruction of the Second Temple as being more important. Therefore, the modern date for the observance of the *Fast of the Fourth Month* is set as 17 *Tammuz*.

There are four other calamities which are said to have occurred on this date. The first was the worship of the *Golden Calf* by the children of Israel -- and the subsequent breaking of the tablets:

**"And he [Aaron] received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"**

**"So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD [YHVH].'"**

**"<sup>6</sup> Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." (Ex. 32:4-6)**

This led to *Moshe* breaking the first set of tablets which had been prepared by God and written on by the finger of God:

**"Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets."**

...

**"<sup>19</sup> So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. <sup>20</sup> Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it." (Ex. 32:16, 19-20)**

According to tradition, a second calamity occurred during the Second Temple siege. Up until 17 *Tammuz*, the Romans had supplied the Temple priests with lambs to be used for the twice daily *Tamid* offering -- considered to be the most important part of the Temple service. (This seems unusual since the Romans had Jerusalem under siege and it would seem logical they would not help the Jews in their worship under such circumstances.):

**"Command the children of Israel, and say to them, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.'"**

**"<sup>3</sup> 'And you shall say to them, 'This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD [YHVH]: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular [*tamid* = continual] burnt offering [*olah*]. <sup>4</sup>The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, ...'" (Num. 28:2-4)**

It was on 17 *Tammuz* when the Romans ceased supplying the priesthood with lambs for the *tamid* offering.

The third and fourth calamities, of 17 *Tammuz*, are said to have been the burning of a *Torah* scroll by a wicked Roman officer named Apostomus. He is also believed to be the one who erected an idol in the Temple.

Whether all of these events occurred on 17 *Tammuz* is somewhat unclear. However, the basic reason the Sages chose this date for the *Fast of the Fourth Month* was the actual breaching of the walls of the Second Temple by the Roman armies.

#### ~ The Fast of *Av* ~

This brings us to third and most important of the *Four Fasts* -- the *Fast of Av* (called *Tisha B'Av* in Hebrew) -- observed every year on 9 *Av* (the fifth month on the Hebrew calendar -- which falls in July or August on the Roman calendar). 9 *Av* is covered in some detail in the first chapter of this booklet so it will not be addressed here. Suffice it to say that *Tisha B'Av* is the second most important fast in Judaism after *Yom Kippur*. *Tisha B'Av* is a fast day of mourning and lament because of the destruction of the two Temples. *Yom Kippur*, on the other hand, is a fast day for personal introspection.

Between the *Fast of Tammuz* and the *Fast of Av* are three weeks of intense mourning. In Orthodox Judaism, during this period, weddings and parties are forbidden.

### ~ The Fast of *Tishri* ~

A casual reader of Scripture usually mistakes the *Fast of Tishri* as being *Yom Kippur* -- which falls on 10 *Tishri*. However, the *Fast of Tishri*, mentioned in Zechariah 8, is called *Tzom Gedaliah* in Hebrew. It is observed every year on 3 *Tishri* (the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar -- which falls in September or October on the Roman calendar). In English it is called the *Fast of Gedaliah*. It laments the assassination of Gedaliah, the last governor of Judea. He was appointed governor by the Babylonians after they had destroyed the first Temple in 586 BCE. The story is told in Jeremiah 40 and 41.

A man named Ishmael was sent by the Ammonites to assassinate Gedaliah. The Ammonites were bitter enemies of Judah and wanted to complete the annihilation which had been initiated by the Babylonians. A report preceded Ishmael's arrival (as to the purpose of his mission), but Gedaliah refused to believe it and did not take necessary precautions, but instead invited Ishmael to break bread with him:

**"Now it came to pass in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family [of the Ammonites] and of the officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together in Mizpah. <sup>2</sup>Then Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, arose and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. <sup>3</sup> Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with him, that is, with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war."**

(Jer. 41:1-3)

This event was said to have taken place on 3 *Tishri*, although some Sages believed he was actually killed on 1 *Tishri*. However, because that is the Festival of *Yom Teruah* (Feast of Trumpets) a.k.a. *Rosh HaShannah*, the Sages postponed the *Fast of Gedaliah* until the third day of the month so as not to interfere with the celebratory nature of *Yom Teruah*.

### ~ Other Fast Days ~

There are two other minor fast days which are observed in Orthodox Judaism. The first is the *Fast of the Firstborn* (*Ta'anit Bechorim* in Hebrew). It occurs on 14 *Nisan*, the Day of the Passover Sacrifice. It applies only to firstborn males and commemorates the firstborn being saved from the last plague against Egypt.

The second is the *Fast of Esther* (*Ta'anit Esther* in Hebrew). It occurs on 13 *Adar*, the day before *Purim*. It commemorates the fasting of the Jews prior to Esther approaching king *Ahasuerus* to circumvent the plot of *Haman* to destroy all the Jews living in Persia (see chapter 3).

In addition, there are what are called *Fasts of the Righteous Ones* (*Ta'anit Tzaddikim* in Hebrew). These are optional fasts, to be observed at the discretion of the individual, in memory of outstanding persons of Scripture who were faithful to God. Some of these fasts include:

- The Fast of Miriam - 10 *Nisan*
- The Fast of Aaron - 1 *Av*
- The Fast of Moses - 7 *Adar*
- The Fast of Joshua - 25 *Nisan*
- The Fast of Samuel - 28 *Iyar*

Only *Yom Kippur* and *Tisha B'Av* are (considered by the Sages to be) full twenty-four hour fasts with no liquid or food being allowed. The other fasts are generally only observed during the daylight hours, although individuals do sometimes make them full fasts.

It is our opinion that Scripturally only *Yom Kippur* is a required fast for the physically healthy\* Believer in *Y'shua*. However, as noted above, He did say that His disciples would fast after He was gone from earth. The context of that passage seems to indicate that such fasts would be for spiritual reasons -- not to remember the destruction of the Temple, or famous people of the past. Nevertheless, it is perfectly fine to fast on any of the days mentioned in this chapter, if one feels that God is calling one to do so.

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\* A word of caution to those with seriously compromised health. Fasting is not required if it may cause illness or is life threatening. Life takes precedence over fasting.

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## ~ Four New Years ~

Not only are there *Four Fasts*, Orthodox Judaism recognizes *Four New Years Days* as well. Two of these are familiar to the average Messianic Believer, especially *Rosh HaShannah* on 1 *Tishri*. Each of the *Four New Years* has a different purpose. Two are identifiable from Scripture, the other two were established by Rabbinic decree, but for the purpose of fulfilling a *Torah* obligation.

It should not seem unusual to have more than one New Year on the calendar, for the same is true today. The normal New Year's Day on the Roman calendar is January 1st. However, many corporations do not use the calendar year to determine their fiscal year, but have a fiscal calendar that starts on the first day of a different month. For example, the United States federal government begins each fiscal year on October 1st.

### ~ 1 *Tishri*: The Civil New Year ~

Most non-Jews are somewhat familiar with the "Jewish" New Year that occurs on 1 *Tishri*, the first day of the seventh month. (Why it is called the first day of the seventh month will be covered in the next section.) 1 *Tishri* is commonly called *Rosh HaShannah* which means the "head of the year." However, its Scriptural name is *Yom Teruah*, which means "day of blowing:"

**"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: "In the seventh month, on the first [*echad*] day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing [*teruah*] of trumpets, a holy convocation. <sup>25</sup> You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD [*YHVH*].""** (Lev. 23:24-25)

The only other information given about this day tells us what special offerings were required at the Tabernacle/Temple:

**""You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to the LORD [*YHVH*]: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish.""** (Num. 29:2)

Some Messianic Believers do not like to use the term *Rosh HaShannah* (head of the year) for 1 *Tishri* because it is not used in Scripture, but prefer to call it *Yom Teruah* (Day of Blowing). However, the month of *Tishri* is indicated as being the "Head of the Year" (*Rosh HaShannah*) by the prophet Ezekiel, where he specifically tied it to *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) which falls in the month of *Tishri*:

**"In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning [*Rosh*] of the [*ha*] year [*Shanah*], in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of the LORD [*YHVH*] was upon me, and brought me thither."** (Ezek. 40:1)

There is other evidence to indicate 1 *Tishri* does mark the beginning of a civil New Year:

- ♦ It is during the month of *Tishri* when the *Sabbath Rest Year* begins -- the seventh year when all agricultural land is to lie fallow:

**""Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; <sup>4</sup> but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the LORD [*YHVH*]. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.""** (Lev. 25:3-4)

These two verses, by themselves, do not specifically state when the *Civil New Year* begins or ends, but only that every seventh year the land must be allowed to rest. However, the following part of the passage makes it clear that the *Sabbath Rest Year* begins during the month of *Tishri*, because after seven *Sabbath Rest Years* there occurs the year of *Jubilee*, which definitely begins in the month of *Tishri*:

**""And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. <sup>10</sup> And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family.""** (Lev. 25:8-10)

Since the *Jubilee Year* begins in the month of *Tishri*, therefore, each *Sabbath Rest Year* also begins in the month of *Tishri*. The Sages understood that the New Year begins on 1 *Tishri*, but the announcement, or proclamation, of the *Jubilee Year* did not occur until 10 *Tishri*, on the day of *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

- ♦ Because 1 *Tishri* begins the *Sabbath Rest Year*, it is the custom to count years using this date. Thus, 1 *Tishri* of 2012 began the Hebrew calendar year 5773, while 1 *Tishri* of 2013 will begin the year 5774.
- ♦ According to tradition, 1 *Tishri* is the anniversary of the creation of the world. Therefore, it is said to be the New Year for "years in relation to the seasons."

Thus, 1 *Tishri* marks the traditional beginning of the *Civil New Year* for the children of Israel. (For more information on *Rosh HaShannah* (*Yom Teruah*) write for the special publication booklet *Fall Festivals: The High Holydays* (SPFHH).

### ~ 1 *Nisan*: The Religious New Year ~

The *Religious New Year* begins in the spring on 1 *Nisan* (also called *Aviv*):

**"Now the LORD [*YHVH*] spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, <sup>2</sup> 'This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.'"** (Ex. 12:1-2)

The month of *Nisan* contains the Festival of Passover and the seven Days of Unleavened Bread -- commemorating the birth of the people of Israel as a nation. Although 1 *Nisan* is the beginning of the *Religious New Year*, the first significant event of *The Religious New Year* does not take place until the 10th day of the month:

**"Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: "On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.""** (Ex. 12:3)

Just as the month of *Tishri* had a Pilgrimage Festival celebration beginning with a Holyday on the 15th of the month (*Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles), so the month of *Nisan* has a Pilgrimage Festival that also begins with a Holyday on the 15th of the month. The Passover Lamb was to be slaughtered on the afternoon of 14 *Nisan*, and eaten after sundown at the beginning of 15 *Nisan*, after the first Holyday had begun:

**"Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. <sup>7</sup> And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. <sup>8</sup> Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.""** (Ex. 12:6-8)

Although the years of the Hebrew calendar are counted from 1 *Tishri* (*The Civil New Year*), the months are numbered from 1 *Nisan* (*the Religious New Year*). Thus the expression "the fourth day of the third month" would indicate 4 *Sivan* not 4 *Kislev*. *Kislev* is considered to be the ninth month (counting from *Nisan* -- not the third month (counting from *Tishri*). Thus, *Tishri* is considered to be the seventh month -- even though it is the month which initiates the increase of the numbering of the year.

#### ~ 1 *Elul*: The New Year for Animals ~

1 *Elul* marks the beginning of the sixth month on the *Religious Hebrew Calendar*, and was considered to be the *New Year for Animals*. According to Scripture, there had to be a tithe paid to the Levites on the increase of animals that occurred during each one year period. If a herdsman had an increase of ten or more new born animals during that year, each tenth one was given to the Levites as part of their physical support, so they could spend their time serving in the Tabernacle and teaching the people *Torah* rather than raising crops or herding cattle for a living:

**"And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD [YHVH]."** (Lev. 27:32)

Thus, there had to be a designated time during the year after which new born animals would be considered to be part of the following year's flock for the purpose of tithing. By setting the date as 1 *Elul* (the sixth month), it gave the Levites time to take possession of the animals without it interfering with their duties in relationship to the Fall Festivals, which began with *Yom Teruah* on 1 *Tishri* (the seventh month).

Since there is no Tabernacle or Temple existing at this time, tithing on agricultural products is not practiced in Israel. Therefore, the *New Year for Animals* is not currently being observed. It is understood that, at some point, it will be re-instituted when the next Temple is rebuilt and functioning.

Another 1 *Elul* custom which developed over time and is still practiced today, is that it begins a forty day period of intense introspection leading up to *Yom Kippur* (said to be the final day of judgment). This forty day period is called *Teshuvah* (Teh-shoe'-vah) and it means to repent and return to God's way of life.

#### ~ 15 *Shevat*: The New Year for Trees ~

The final one of the *Four New Years* is 15 *Shevat* (the 11th month which falls during January or February on the Roman calendar). It is called *Tu B'Shevat* in Hebrew and is the *New Year for Trees*. Once again, the establishment of this event is based upon a Scriptural need. In this case, it was to define the cutoff date for the age of trees so the owner would know when it was permissible to begin eating the fruit from new trees and also in which year fruit was to be tithed:

**"When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. <sup>24</sup> But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the LORD [YHVH]. <sup>25</sup> And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God.""**

(Lev. 19:23-25)

According to this passage, all of the fruit which a new tree might produce during the first three years of its life cannot be eaten by anyone. During the fourth year, the fruit is holy to God and would have constituted a Firstfruits offering and therefore would have been given to the Levites. Not until the fifth year could the owner of the tree begin to eat the fruit.

Once again, since there is no Temple and no functioning Levitical priesthood, there is no one qualified to receive the fourth year fruits. *Tu B'Shevat* is the day on which tithes were calculated for the fruit of the trees. Some of the Sages said that 15 *Shevat* is the *New Year* for tithing on fruit trees and 1 *Tishri* for determining the age of the tree.

Today, *Tu B'Shevat* is a minor holiday in Israel. It has become a kind of *Arbor Day* on which people plant trees to help reforest the land of Israel. During the reign of the Ottoman Turks (up until c. 1917) there was a tax on trees, so that the Promised Land was almost devoid of trees of any kind. However, since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, thousands of trees have been planted and the forests are returning to Israel. Also, large orchards have been established and Israeli fruit is known throughout Europe as being some of the finest.

It is customary, on 15 *Shevat*, to eat a fruit from the new season. In Ashkenazi communities in Europe, it was a custom to eat 15 different kinds of fruit on *Tu B'Shevat*.

## ~ Two Other Special Days ~

There are two other special days found on Israel's calendar which do not fit into the above categories.

The first is a Rabbinic observance called *Lag B'Omer*. It falls on the 33rd day of the *Omer Count* between the festival of *Pesach* and *Shavu'ot*. Traditionally, the forty-nine days of *Counting the Omer* is considered to be a time of "partial mourning" when weddings, parties, and dancing are avoided. This is because of a tragedy that is said to have occurred during the time of Rabbi Akiva, when 24,000 of his students died from a divinely sent plague because they did not show proper respect to one another. On the 33rd day of the *Omer* count (*Lag* means 33 in Hebrew) this partial ban is lifted to signify a break in that plague. Some men will not get a haircut during the *Counting of the Omer* except on *lag B'Omer*.

The second special day is called *Tu B'Av* and occurs on 15 *Av* just six days after the fast of *Tisha B'Av* on the 9th. According to Scripture, during the wandering of the children of Israel in the wilderness, all the men of that generation were to die and not be allowed to enter the Promised Land:

**""The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. ...<sup>31</sup> But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised.<sup>32</sup> But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.""**

(Num. 14:29, 31-32)

According to tradition, each *Tisha B'Av*, during the *Wilderness Wandering* (the anniversary of the bad report by the spies), 15,000 men (who had reached the age of 60) would dig their own graves, lie down in them and die during the night. However, on the very last *Tisha B'Av*, before entering the Promised Land, the final 15,000 men laid down in their self-prepared graves to die, but woke up the next morning still alive. They thought they had miscalculated the date, so they continued to sleep in their graves for six nights. Finally, on 15 *Av* (*Tu B'Av*) they realized that God, in His merciful love, had decided not to kill them. Thus, *Tu B'Av* originally became a day devoted to the love of God.

Today, in Israel, *Tu B'Av* has become a national holiday of love. Many Israeli couples are married on this day. Some people liken it to Valentine's Day in America.

## ~ Summary ~

The House of Judah has a rich tradition of Biblical Festivals, traditional festivals, and national holidays. As can be seen from *The Holidays of Israel* chart on page 34, hardly a month goes by without some kind of celebration, fast day, or memorial day.

As Believers in Messiah *Y'shua*, it is important to realize that we are not obligated to keep many of these days -- only the **"Feasts of the LORD"** are required by *Torah* commandment. However, it is also good to understand that it might be well to join with brother Judah on some of their more important special

days -- such as *Hanukkah*, *Purim*, and *Tisha B'Av* -- to show our solidarity with them.

Whatever we, as Messianic Hebrew Believers, do -- it needs to be done for the glory and honor of our Father in heaven and His Son *Y'shua* our Savior. Observances should not be performed with a negative attitude of necessity for salvation. The greatest joy we can bring to our Father in heaven is to love Him and have a burning desire to please Him by observing His carefully thought out commandments. Therefore, we need to rejoice that He has expressed His love so fully that He has given us the *Instruction Book for Life* (the Scriptures) and that He has given us the blood of His very own Son *Y'shua* for those times when we fall short:

**"Behold, God is my salvation [yeshuah],**

**I will trust and not be afraid;**

**'For YAH, the LORD [YHVH], is my strength and song;**

**He [Y'shua] also has become my salvation [yeshuah].'**

**<sup>3</sup> Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.**

**<sup>4</sup> And in that day you will say:**

**'Praise the LORD [YHVH], call upon His name;**

**Declare His deeds among the peoples,**

**Make mention that His name is exalted.**

**<sup>5</sup> Sing to the LORD [YHVH],**

**For He has done excellent things;**

**This is known in all the earth.**

**<sup>6</sup> Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion,**

**For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!'"**

(Isa. 12:2-1)

**"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; <sup>13</sup> but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's [Messiah's] sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."**

(I Pet. 4:12-13)

Shalom!

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## ~ Holidays of Israel ~

The following chart lists the commanded Biblical Festivals, festivals established by the Rabbis, and national holidays of Israel:

<u>Hebrew Dates</u>	<u>Festival or Holiday</u>	<u>Date Range</u>	<u>Hebrew Dates</u>	<u>Festival or Holiday</u>	<u>Date Range</u>
♦ 1 Tishri	<i>Rosh Hashanah</i> (Civil New Year)	Sept./Oct.	♦ 14 Nisan	<i>Passover Sacrifice</i>	March/April
♦ 3 Tishri	<i>Fast of Gedaliah</i>	Sept./Oct.	♦ 15-21 Nisan	<i>Hag HaMatzot</i>	March/April
♦ 10 Tishri	<i>Yom Kippur</i>	Sept./Oct.	♦ 27 Nisan	Holocaust	
♦ 15-21 Tishri	<i>Sukkot</i> (Tabernacles)	Sept./Oct.		Remembrance Day	April/May
♦ 22 Tishri	<i>Shemini Atzeret</i> (Eighth Day)	Sept./Oct.	♦ 4 Iyar	Fallen Soldiers	
				Remembrance Day	April/May
♦ 25 Kislev -			♦ 5 Iyar	Independence Day	April/May
2 Tevet	<i>Hanukkah</i>	Nov./Dec.	♦ 33rd Day of the		
♦ 10 Tevet	<i>Asarah B'Tevet</i>	Dec./Jan.	Omer Count*	<i>Lag B'Omer</i>	April/May
♦ 15 Shevat	<i>Tu B'Shevat/</i> (New Year for Trees)	Dec./Jan.	♦ 28 Iyar	Jerusalem Day	April/May
			♦ Flexible (6-13 Sivan)**		
♦ 13 Adar or				<i>Shavu'ot</i>	May/June
13 Adar II	<i>Fast of Esther</i>	Feb./March	♦ 17 Tammuz	<i>Tzom Tammuz</i>	June/July
♦ 14 Adar or			♦ 9 Av	<i>Tisha B'Av</i>	July/Aug.
14 Adar II	<i>Purim</i>	Feb./March	♦ 15 Av	<i>Tu B'Av</i>	July/Aug.
♦ 1 Nisan	<i>Religious New Year</i>	March/April	♦ 1 Elul	<i>New Year for Cattle</i>	Aug./Sept.
♦ 14 Nisan	<i>Fast of the Firstborn</i>	March/April	♦ 1 Elul	<i>Teshuvah</i>	Aug./Sept.

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\* The Pharisees always celebrate *Lag B'Omer* on 18 Iyar.

\*\* The Pharisees always celebrate *Shavu'ot* on 6 Sivan.

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