



November 2013

"O Lord my God, I will give
thanks to You forever."
(Ps. 30:12)

Dear Mishpocha,

Thanksgiving / Hanukkah 2013!

Something very unusual will occur this year as Jews in America celebrate Thanksgiving. Their mashed potatoes will be replaced by potato *latkes* (pancakes), a traditional Hanukkah treat. Why? For the first time ever, the first day of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, falls on Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 2013!

Thanksgiving Day is always the fourth Thursday in November. The latest it can be is 11/28. The earliest Hanukkah can be is 11/28. According to the Jewish calendar, the last time the two holidays coincided was 1861. However, Thanksgiving was not formally established until 1863 (by President Lincoln). Thanksgiving and Hanukkah will never coincide again because the Jewish (lunar) calendar is very slowly getting out of sync with the solar calendar, so that eventually the earliest Hanukkah can be is 11/29. The last time Hanukkah falls on 11/28 is 2146, which happens to be a Monday. (The two holidays will converge again in the year 79,811.) So...This is a special year! Some are even calling the event "Thanksgivukkah."

Hanukkah History

We were sure that God had a message for His children in all of this. He is Lord of the calendar; times and seasons are in His hands. We researched Hanukkah extensively, sensing that this holiday held the key. It does. But first, we want to give some background about the holiday.

Most people are unaware that Hanukkah is an ever-evolving holiday in Judaism. It is not found in the Torah. There is no *haggadah* to direct its celebration. It is not an obvious mitzvah or commandment from God, and it made heroes of a dynasty that eventually produced some of Israel's cruelest kings. Therefore, the rabbinic sages who wrote the Talmud in Babylonia (300-400 years after the Maccabees) and who created the Judaism we know today, debated among themselves about the true meaning of Hanukkah.

The rabbi's solution was to center the celebration on the "miracle of oil," focusing on God's intervention in keeping the eternal light of the Temple burning. Unfortunately, there is no historical basis for this, but it is a lovely tradition. We follow it, but add an absolute truth to it - that Yeshua, our Messiah, is the Divine Servant, the Light of the world, who lights up our lives. The only staples of a traditional Hanukkah celebration are an eight branched menorah with a ninth servant (*shammash*) candle, a couple of blessings, songs and short prayers.

Life Lessons from Hanukkah

The true story of Hanukkah contains a number of lessons for us as Messianic believers. First of all, Antiochus IV, the Syrian-Greek ruler in control of Judea in 165 B.C., had himself called Antiochus Epiphanes, which means "God Manifest." He was a madman who saw himself as a god. Antiochus is a type of the anti-Messiah. Antiochus was defeated; the anti-Messiah will ultimately be defeated as well.

Humanism ruled at the time of the Maccabees. Even the priesthood was corrupt. There was only

a small remnant—the Hasidim—who stood for righteousness and Torah. Taking any kind of stand for God was not politically correct. In fact, the penalty was death. We're not there yet, but we are definitely living in a post-Christian nation.

Hanukkah originally began as an internal conflict between Hellenizers and Hasidim. Then, it became a rebellion against a foreign ruler. The Hasmonean guerilla fighters, led by Mattathias, and later his son, Judah, were known as the Maccabees. Their song of victory was taken from Exodus 15:11, *"Mi khamokha ba'elim Adonai"*—"Who is like You, Adonai, among the other gods?" This needs to be our motto as well. *"Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall tread down our enemies."* (Ps. 60:12; Ps. 108:13) The rabbis of the Talmud decided to focus on the divine intervention aspect of Hanukkah (miracle of the oil), using Zech. 4:6 as a theme verse: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit..." This is a great verse for Messianic Jews in all seasons!

The Connection

The unusual, but very probable, connection between Thanksgiving and Hanukkah is **Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles**. As we write this letter, we have just finished celebrating Sukkot, the "Season of our Rejoicing," a harvest festival, a festival of thanksgiving. We were able to put up a sukkah on our common condominium patio once again, and had twenty-four neighbors join us as we celebrated the holiday. We gave each one a handout with a teaching from the Tanach and the Brit Hadasha. Everyone thanked us!

Back to Sukkot: A very obvious connection is that the Pilgrims modeled the first Thanksgiving after the Jewish feast of Sukkot—thanking God for the harvest. It is very possible, according to many Jewish scholars, that the first Hanukkah was actually a "make-up" or second Sukkot. There are many reasons for this. First of all, the Hasmoneans (Maccabees) had been unable to observe Sukkot at its proper time on account of the war. When they rededicated the Temple that the Syrians had desecrated, they marched around with the lulav and the etrog! They celebrated the rededication of the Temple for eight days (like Sukkot). Solomon's Temple had been consecrated and dedicated during Sukkot, which also could have served as a model for the holiday, since it too was an eight day dedication.

Quoting from 2 Maccabees 10: "The sanctuary was purified on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev... This joyful celebration went on for eight days; it was like Sukkot, for they recalled how only a short time before they had kept the festival while living like animals in the mountains; and so they carried *lulavim* and *etrogim*, and they chanted hymns (*Hallel*) to God who had triumphantly led them to the purification of His Temple..."

The Hallel: the Key

The Hallel, הללה , a recitation of Psalms 113-118, is said as a unit on joyous occasions in Judaism—notably on Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, and Hanukkah. The Maccabees set aside these eight days of Hanukkah, as expressed in the "Al ha-Nissim" (for the miracles) prayer, to GIVE THANKS and to praise God's great name.

THANKSGIVING TO GOD—OUR OBLIGATION TO OFFER THANKS TO OUR REDEEMER—IS A MAJOR ASPECT OF HANUKKAH! Hanukkah is supposed to be more about THANKING GOD than about the Maccabees, dreidels, latkes, or even the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days. Some verses from the Hallel:

"Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise the name of the LORD!" Ps. 113:1

"But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!" Ps. 115:18

"I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD." Ps. 116:17

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." Ps. 118:1

Giving Thanks: the Jewish Root

This Hanukkah, the LORD wants us to focus on "thanksgiving!" To thank in Hebrew is *lehodot* להודות. Thank you is *todah* תודה. Thankfulness is *hakarat todah* הכרת תודה. Thanksgiving is *hodayah* חודייה. Thanksgiving Day is *Chag HaHodayah* חג ההודייה.

Thanksgiving to God is foundational in the Torah. There were Levites appointed to give thanks to the God of Israel (1 Chron. 16:4). There were special offerings which were a "*sacrifice of thanksgiving*" (Lev. 22:29). There were "*thanksgiving choirs*" (Neh. 12:31), and "*thanksgiving psalms*" (Neh. 12:8).

According to Hebrew scholar David Bivin, and many traditional Jewish scholars, Deuteronomy 8:10 is the sole basis in the *Torah* for the many blessings that an observant Jew (up to 100 per day) says daily, "*When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God...*" How about doing this on Thanksgiving/Hanukkah 2013?! Say grace **after** your Thanksgiving dinner. Thank the LORD by reading verses from the Hallel, Psalms 113-118. You will be celebrating both holidays at once!

Orthodox Rabbi Naftali Hoffner makes some interesting observations in his little booklet, Guide to Blessings: "Gratitude is one of the foundations and fundamentals of Judaism. To be truly civilized, each person must overcome the arrogant attitude that pleasure and happiness are coming to us, and that our fellow man and the world are here to serve us. A selfish, arrogant or self-centered person cannot be a true servant of God. A Jew is a person who has the maturity to be constantly aware of the fact that all we are, and all we have, is a gift of love from our Creator." We think Yeshua would agree with his statements, and wish that all our Jewish people would be as the Rabbi describes.

The Jewish way to thank God is through *b'rakhot*, brief prayers that honor God as the source of every good thing. A *b'rakhah* is even more than a "thank you," since it includes a sense of wonderment at how praiseworthy God is. 1 Chron. 29:10-13 is used by the rabbis as a model *b'rakhah*:

"Therefore David blessed the LORD before all the assembly; and David said: 'Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name.' "

A formula for Jewish *b'rakhot* is credited to Ezra the Scribe, and includes the same six Hebrew words: *Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech haOlam*, "*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe...*" God is thanked throughout the day, with blessings for every occasion.

Biblical Basis of Thanksgiving

There are many who celebrate Thanksgiving (or Hanukkah) without knowing "who" to thank—or why they should thank him. The Book of Psalms tells us both who and why. The same words are used in the following verses: Ps. 106:1, 107:1, 118:1, 118:25 and 136:1. The words are, "*Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.*" הודו ליהוה כי טוב== כי לעולם חסדו.

God's **Goodness** and **Mercy** are at the core of our giving thanks. Our faith and trust in these aspects of His nature enable us to thank Him even in the most painful circumstances of life. A Good God watches over us, and never gives us more than we can handle. A Merciful God doesn't give us what we deserve (death because of our sin) but instead, gives us what we don't deserve (pardon through the sacrifice of Yeshua).

God is Good. He always has our best interests at heart. As Moses instructed the children of Israel before they entered the Promised Land: "*And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, **for our good always**, that He might preserve us alive, as [it is] this day*"

(Deut. 6:24). God's desire is always to do us good in the end. (See Deut. 8:16.) Thanking Him, in the midst of trials, is believing the best of Him. This blesses His heart.

Can we thank Him for His mercy? *"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."* (Lam. 3:22). A merciful God made a way for our sins to be blotted out so that we might have an intimate relationship with Him. We should be forever grateful for His sacrifice of love.

In Everything Give Thanks

God's will is for us to have a perpetual attitude of gratitude. *"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua for you."* (1 Thes. 5:18) Surely Paul made this statement in the light of the *b'rakhot* or blessings—a *b'rakhot* or thank you to God—IN everything, if not FOR everything.

One of the first choruses that we learned as baby believers was about thankfulness: "Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. I just want to thank You. I just want to thank You. I just want to thank You, Lord!" To this day, Neil lives in a spirit of thankfulness. Almost daily, he expresses how thankful he is that we were able to downsize and move to our condominium apartment. He thanks God that we never got caught up in being celebrities, and that we would not be embarrassed if Yeshua came to visit and saw how we live. Neil is thankful that, at seventy-seven, he is still working and ministering to those God sends his way. He also says how thankful he is for a wife that keeps life exciting.

Me? I'm thankful most of all for having received such great love throughout my life—from my parents growing up, from my loving husband, from our sons and our friends, and most of all, from my adoring Father in heaven, and soon-coming Bridegroom / King. I agree with what Sarah Young says about thankfulness in *Jesus Calling*: "I (Yeshua) am training you to cultivate a thankful mind-set. This is like building your house on a firm rock, where life's storms cannot shake you."

We have found that the joy of the Lord is directly related to giving thanks. Giving thanks is always an act of faith, more difficult in trying times, but always pleasing to God. It makes a way for the joy of the Lord to be present, despite adverse circumstances. We know! The joy of the Lord is our strength, and the strength of the Lord is our joy. Make a habit of saying "Thank You, Yeshua" as you go throughout the day, even when you don't feel like it. Your heart will begin to change. Thank God if your name is written in heaven. Great joy awaits you there. Yeshua is saying to you, "Giving thanks in all circumstances is a joyous discipline; it empowers you to lift up your soul and live close to Me." AMEN!

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers." (1 Thess. 1:2)

*Love in Messiah,
Neil (*Jamie)*

P.S. We will give a full report on our 2013 Mercy Mission to Israel next month (Our faith verse: Is. 51:3).

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MON 10:00 PM	FL	Tampa/St. Pete.	WCLF TV 22
THU 11:30 AM	FL	Miami/Ft. Laud.	WHFT TV 45
SUN 1:30 PM	FL	Tallahassee	WVUP TV 45
SAT 10:30 PM	FL	West Palm Beach	WFGC TV 61
SUN 2:30 PM	GA	Columbus	WYBU TV 16
SUN 1:30 PM	IA	Dubuque	KFXB TV 40
THU 6:30 AM	ID	Twin Falls	KJCY TV 38
SUN 1:30 PM	MO	New Bloomfield	KNLJ TV 25
THU 8:30 AM	NC	Goldsboro	WHFL TV 43
SUN 4:00 PM	NJ/NY	NYC/New Jersey	WMBC TV 63
THU 5:30 AM	OR	The Dalles	KRHP TV 14

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MON 11:30 PM Ch. 371 - Church Channel

Dish Network

MON 8:30 PM Ch. 376 - CTN (Christian Television Network)
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