



Church of God Ministries
Spanish Fort, Alabama

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your question about observing **Hanukkah**, (Festival of Lights, or Feast of Dedication).

We read the following in the Gospel of John: John 10:22-23 *“At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the porch of Solomon.”*

Firstly, which of the Biblical Jewish festivals was the Feast of the Dedication? It turns out it actually wasn't a Biblical feast.

The Jewish calendar was marked by three annual pilgrimage festivals: the Feast of Passover (Heb: “Pesach”) – Deut 16:1-8, the Feast of Weeks (Heb: “Shavuot”) – Deut 16:9-12, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Heb: “Sukkot”) (Deut 16:13-15)

These feasts were kept at specific times of the year: Passover in the month of Abib – March/April. The Feast of Weeks 50 days later – May/June, and the Feast of Tabernacles after the harvest – Sept/Oct.

The Festival of the Dedication, given its celebration during winter, couldn't have been any of the feasts listed above – Why? Because it was not a Biblical feast. As most Study Bibles or Bible Dictionaries will tell you, the Feast of the Dedication was what is more commonly called “Hanukkah”- celebrated in December.

The Feast of Hanukkah celebrates the purification and re-consecration (or dedication) of the Temple in Jerusalem in 165/164 BC after its desecration and transformation into a pagan cult center a few years earlier. Under Judas Maccabeus the Jews revolted against their Hellenistic ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, regained the Temple, and rededicated it. It is a fascinating story of history.

One legend claims that when the Jews regained the temple they found just enough undefiled oil to keep the lampstand burning for a day, and that by a miracle it burned for 8 days. According to the Babylonian Talmud:

b. Shabb. 21B “For when the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they made all of the oil that was in the sanctuary unclean. But when the rule of the Hasmonean house took hold and they conquered them, they searched but found only a single jar of oil, lying with the seal of the high priest. But that jar had enough oil only for a single day. But there was a miracle done with it, and they lit the lamp with it for eight days. The next year they assigned these days and made them festival days for the recitation of Hallel psalms [Ps. 113–118] and for thanksgiving.”

These events of the revolt and rededication of the Temple are recorded in the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, (a helpful historical resource even though not part of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament) which records events of this tumultuous period.

1 Mac 4:59 Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

By the time of Christ, the Jews were again a subject people—this time to the Romans—and they were again looking for a leader, the Messiah, to deliver them. Important to note, is that *it was during this very festival that the Jewish leaders asked Jesus if He was that promised Deliverer!*

So, yes, Christ here is recorded as attending a feast not commanded to be observed in the Bible. This feast also celebrated a miracle that most Christians would not accept. This was also a feast that celebrated the operation of the Temple, a concept that Christ came to bring to an end.

The next verse in John explains why he was there: John 10:24 *“So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”*

Christ was there that day because that’s where the people were – and the people wanted to know about Messiah. Even if what was being celebrated was a non-Biblical feast, He was there taking advantage of the opportunity presented.

Another notable fact, is that the Festival of Lights was a national holiday of the Jewish people. It was a sort of Independence Day for the Jews in the time of the

Maccabees (164 B.C.) when Judea was under the heavy hand of the Greek Empire which had banned the worship of the true God of the Bible. Specifically, it is a day of remembrance and thanksgiving for the Jews -- and *not the other tribes*. It is similar to American Independence Day, Guy Fox Day (Britain), and Bastille Day (on the 14th of July in France), etc. Even some gentile nations pay certain homage to what they know of God for His intervention in their tribal or national histories.

Hanukkah commemorates important events in the freedom of the Jewish people. They (many of them) sought to thank God for his blessing of national independence (if even for a while until the Romans took over). However, again, there is no biblical command for even the Jews to keep it as a holy day.

So, should Christians therefore observe this national holiday of the Jewish people?

Here's a similar question: Why should people of other nations keep America's Independence Day (the Fourth of July), or Bastille Day for the French, or Guy Fox day for England, etc.? Hanukkah or The Festival of Lights is not a biblical holy day. It is not commanded by God. It is simply a national day of joy and appreciation of the Jewish people for God's intervention and blessing at a critical time in their history.

People in other nations and/or cultures often have similar national holidays to commemorate important times in their histories. In modern times, Hanukkah has morphed for many into a sort of "Jewish Christmas". However, God gave His Church the list of holy days we should observe and keep.

That Christ noted the national Jewish holiday by His presence does not automatically make it a commanded observance for Christians. Note the modern reasoning of some that "the more Jewish I am, the more like God I am." In actual fact, the more truly and humbly obedient to God we are, the more Godly (in the true and humble sense) we are. God's Church today strives to not mix the world's form of Christianity or other religions with the truth that Jesus Christ inspired and taught.

If we may be of further help, please let us know.