

The celebration of **Hanukkah** focuses on the lighting of the menorah. It is a special time for families and friends to spend together singing, playing, giving gifts, telling stories, and **meditating on the meaning of Hanukkah**.

Eight Days of Hanukkah

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

The True Meaning of Hanukkah The “Conception” of the Light of the World

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus (Yashua – I am Salvation, I am the Light of the World).” **Luke 1:31**

Hanukkah (day 1 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 1
Hanukkah (day 2 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 4
Hanukkah (day 3 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 7
Hanukkah (day 4 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 10
Hanukkah (day 5 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 13
Hanukkah (day 6 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 15
Hanukkah (day 7 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 18
Hanukkah (day 8 of 8) – Scripture, Prayer, Study	page 19

Hanukkah (day 1 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

Introduction:

By doing a study of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication and the feast of Light, many hidden truths concerning our Lord Jesus Christ can be discovered. The feast brings the Old and New Testaments of our Bible together in unique ways that glorify God’s son. It helps teaches us about His conception, His live birth, and His body, the church. Although the feast of Hanukkah originated many years ago, it continually points those who understand its truths to future prophetic events.

The fourfold purpose of this teaching is:

1. To describe what the Feast of Dedication is.
2. To tell the story behind its origination.
3. To connect it to our Christmas story about Jesus’ birth, and
4. To present observations about the Temple’s seven-branched golden lampstand and its light.

Let’s begin our study by remembering that Jesus attended Hanukkah (John 9-10:22-39) in Jerusalem just a few months prior to His death. And while He was at the feast Jesus actually declared Himself to be the Son of God ... the Light of the world:

I and the Father Are One

⁵ As long as I am in the world, ***I am the light of the world*** . . . ²² At that time the ***Feast of Dedication*** took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about

me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘**I am the Son of God**’? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹ Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands. **John 9:5, 10:22-39**

On the first night:

The earth was unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep . . . God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night . . .

*God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times – the days and the years; and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. **Genesis 1:2-5; 14-18***

Prayer on the first night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a Latin term that means “divine reading.” It is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a “specific word” from God. The practice was developed early in the church’s history with Origen first expressing its principles around 220 AD. The system consists of four parts: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. It may be practiced privately or in a small group setting. There are four elements to be considered in preparing for this exercise:

1. Set aside enough time to complete the exercise so that you don’t have to rush through it. Usually thirty minutes is adequate.
2. Find a quiet place free of distractions.
3. Read the Selected Passage Above of Scripture.
4. Transition from what you have been doing by calming you mind and body. This can be done by taking a few slow, deep breaths and inviting the Lord to speak to you through His word.

Reading

1. Read the passage aloud slowly a couple of times.
2. Be silent for one-to-two minutes.
3. Is there a word or phrase that is meaningful to you?
4. Repeat the word or phrase several times silently as if to memorize it.

* If in a group share it in turn. Do not elaborate simply state what it is.

Meditation

1. Read the passage again.
2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
3. Think about how the reading applies or touches your life today.

* If in a group share it in turn. Briefly state “I hear, I see, I feel . . .”

Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.

* If in a group pray quietly.

Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
3. Reflect on “I believe God wants me to _____ today/this week/etc.”

* If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study on the first night:

Jewish Name and Meaning:

The Jewish name Hanukkah means **dedication**. The word in its various forms appears many times in the Old Testament portion of our Bible. It was used to describe the first use, the initiation, inauguration or dedication of a house, an altar or a priest. The word Hanukkah was used for the dedication of the Tabernacle in the wilderness by Moses, the dedication of the altar in Solomon’s Temple, and the dedication of the Second Temple and wall around Jerusalem in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is closely associated with consecration and anointing with oil. The verb form (Chanak) of the word also means to instruct or to **train up**. In Proverbs 22:6 it says, “**Train up** a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it.”

The Feast:

The feast itself commemorates the re-dedication of the Temple and its altar to God in the year 164 BCE (BCE means “Before Common Era” and is used by Jewish people like we use BC or “Before Christ”). Hanukkah is not described in the Old Testament portion of our Bibles because that portion ended with the prophet Malachi in 398 BCE. However, there are an additional fourteen books called the Old Testament Apocrypha. These books were written during the “400” silent years between Malachi and the birth of Jesus Christ. Although the Apocrypha is not included in the canon of Scripture it can be found in the “Catholic Bible”. The historical account of Hanukkah is found in the book, 1 Maccabees 4:36-61.

Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication starts on the 25th of Kislev and lasts for **eight** days. That date varies according to our calendar from November 27th to December 27th. Hanukkah is also known as the **Feast of Light**, as God miraculously provided enough oil to keep the lamps on the seven-branched golden lampstand burning for the entire eight days of the feast.

During the **eight**-day feast period of Hanukkah, Jewish people read the book of Numbers chapters seven through eight in their synagogues. Chapter seven tells of Moses and the leaders of Israel anointing and consecrating the Tabernacle, its altars, and furnishings. Chapter eight deals with setting up the seven-branched golden lampstand and setting the Levites apart for sacred service.

The Story Behind The Feast:

During the reign of Alexander, the Great (356 – 323 BCE) the Greeks conquered the known Biblical world (The “known Biblical world” is the area around the Mediterranean Sea. It stretched from India to France.). The Grecian period of influence lasted until 44 BCE when it was replaced by the Roman Empire. During their period of rule the Greeks forced their society, which was called Hellenism, upon the conquered people. It included their language, philosophy, religion, culture and governmental structure. The **goal** of Hellenism was a one-world order.

After Alexander the Great died, the Grecian empire was divided between his four generals: Cassander ruled in Macedon and Greece, Lysimachus in Asia Minor and Thrace, Ptolemy in Egypt and Seleucus in Mesopotamia and Persia. These four generals are referred to in the book of Daniel 8:8 and 11:4 (The Kingdom of Greece as a world power is described in Daniel chapters eight and eleven.).

One on Seleucus’ descendents, Antiochus IV, ruled the Seleucid Empire (The territory included the northern and eastern portions of the Grecian Empire.) from 175 – 163 BCE. As king, he was very high on himself and even took the title “Epiphanes” which means “God Manifest.” Antiochus, the villain in the story of the feast of Hanukkah, is the “little horn” or “despicable person” spoken of in Daniel 8:9 and 11:21. He is a “type” of the Antichrist who is to come and his story and character become intermingled with the Antichrist’s in Daniel 8:9-12, 23-25, and 11:21-45. Similar events will occur at the time of Antichrist and the Great Tribulation.

Antiochus IV was the “supreme” Hellenizer and forced his one-world societal views on all of his subjects. The Hellenization of the Jews began in 173 BCE when Antiochus conspired with the Jewish High Priest at the time whose name was Jesus. This Jesus changed his name to Jason, a Greek name. Then in 169 BCE, Antiochus despoiled the Temple by taking its golden altar, lampstand, table of showbread, and the gold in the treasury to finance his campaigns.

Serious Hellenistic reform took place 167 BCE when a decree was issued for everyone in the empire to become one people by abandoning their own laws and religion. The Jews were forbidden from attending services in the Temple, participating in Sabbath and feast days, reading or possessing the Scriptures and circumcising their children. The penalty for failure to obey these laws was death!

On the 15th of Kislev in 167 BCE, Antiochus set up the “**abomination of desolation**” in the temple and built an altar on top of the existing altar of burnt offerings. No one knows for sure what this abomination was but many scholars have concluded that it was probably a statue of Zeus with Antiochus’ face on it. Antiochus’ desecration of the Temple was only a “type” of the “Abomination of Desolation” that is to come spoken of by Jesus Christ in His Olivet Discourse.

On the 25th of Kislev Antiochus sacrificed a pig on the altar and dedicated the temple to Zeus.

During this time a woman named Hannah and her seven sons were martyred for their faith. Each of the seven sons was asked in turn to bow to an idol or eat pork. Each son refused the request, professed his faith in God, and then was murdered. Upon refusal of the seventh son, both he and his mother were murdered.

A short time later, one of Antiochus’ representatives entered the town of Modin to enforce the decree upon its people. He commanded one of the Jews to make a sacrifice to a foreign God. Then a priest named Mattathias Maccabees stepped forward and killed both of them thereby initiating a revolt. He led the revolt until his death later that year. Then, Judas Maccabees (The family name, Maccabees means “hammerer”), one of Matthias’ five sons, took command of the resistance.

In a two-year span Judas won four major battles against superior Syrian forces and took control of Jerusalem in 164 BCE. He refurnished the temple with its furniture and utensils. Then he tore down the stones that covered the Lord’s altar and had them buried. On the 25th of Kislev in 164 BCE, Judas rededicated the temple to God, exactly three years after Antiochus dedicated it to Zeus. He ordered a feast for the occasion, which lasted eight days and became known as Hanukkah.

When the temple was rededicated on the 25th of Kislev, the lamps on the seven-branched golden lampstand were lit providing the only light in the temple. However, when the lamps were lit only one jar of sacred olive oil could be found that was not polluted because the seal of the high priest on it had not been broken. A jar of oil was only enough to keep the lamps burning for one day. Yet the lamps miraculously stayed burning for the entire eight days of the feast until more oil could be prepared and dedicated. That is why Hanukkah is also called the Feast of Light.

An interesting sidebar to this story is that Judas Maccabees was killed in a battle in 160 BCE and his brother assumed the leadership of Israel until 142 BCE. From the Maccabees came the Hasmonean line of rulers in Israel, who eventually became Hellenized themselves and oppressed their own people. King Herod the Great defeated them in 37 BCE and established his own line of rulers.

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” John 1:9

Hanukkah (day 2 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

On the second night:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who present darkness as light and light as darkness; who present bitter as sweet and sweet as bitter!

Woe to those who are so wise – in their own opinion; so clever – in their own judgment!

Woe to those who are so heroic – as drinkers of wine, and so valiant – as mixers of drink!

Who vindicate him who is in the wrong in return for a bride, and withhold vindication from him who is right.

Assuredly, as straw is consumed by a tongue of fire and hay shrivels as it burns, their stock shall become like rot, and their buds shall blow away like dust.

For they have rejected the instruction of the Lord of Hosts, spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 5:20-24

Prayer on the second night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”, it is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a “specific word” from God.)

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Prayer

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Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
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Study on the second night:

The Christmas Connection:

One of the unusual traditions that are celebrated at the feast of Hanukkah is that women always light the lamps on the menorah. The reason for this is that the rabbis (learned teachers) have said, “Women are obligated to light the Hanukkah lamps for they took part in the miracle.” For the basis of this tradition they cite the Apocryphal book of Judith. But can this be? Lets do a quick summary of the story.

The story takes place according to most scholars around 650 BCE, almost 500 years before the actual commemoration of the feast itself. The story indicates the Jewish people are at war with the Assyrians (Syrians). Judith, a Jewish woman enters one of their camps. The general of the Syrian army desires her so she prepares a feast of cheese for him. Since cheese makes a person thirsty, the general drinks a lot of wine to slake his thirst and consequently falls asleep. While he is sleeping Judith beheads him. In the morning the Jews attack the Syrian army with the general’s head on a pole

and the Syrians flee. It is a great story, but how does it show that a woman takes place in the miracle of the lamps being lit or staying lit? The rabbis can't explain it!

However, there is one woman who qualifies to light the menorah lamps because she took part in a miracle of light ... the Virgin Mary. She brought the true light into the world and that light has continued to burn. Its all part of what we call the Christmas Story. Most Christians are familiar with the basic storyline but we'll take a more in depth look at this miracle. Before we begin though, I'll try to explain why we celebrate Jesus' birth on December 25th.

In the first 200 years of Christian history, there is no mention of the date of Jesus' birth (The first recorded mention of Jesus' birth date is 336 CE.). During that time the early church fathers considered a person's date of death worthy of celebration in view of the way he lived his life. Therefore, the date of Jesus' death was of most worthy commemoration.

It wasn't until the 3rd and 4th centuries that the idea of fixing the date of Christ's birth came into being. And with it came heated controversy among the church leaders. Origen (185 – 254 CE) strongly recommended against such an innovation. He said, "In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into the world."

During the 3rd and 4th centuries, various groups proposed eight specific dates during six different months for Jesus' birth. These dates were: January 6th, March 28th, April 2nd, the 24th or 25th day of Pharmuthi (April/May), 25th day of Pachon (about May), May 20th, November 18th, and December 25th. The Eastern Church chose January 6th (January 6th is called Epiphany (Appearing) but was first observed as the date of Jesus' baptism.) ... a date the Greeks had celebrated as the birth of the god Dionysus and the Egyptians as the birth of the god Osiris. Pagans commonly celebrated the birthdays of their gods, however in the Bible a birthday is never celebrated to the true God, who being eternal has no birth or day of origin.

Although one of the last dates to be proposed, December 25th was the one finally accepted by the leadership of the Western Church (The Armenian Church uses January 6th and the Eastern Orthodox Church uses January 7th). It was made popular by Pope Liberius in 354 CE and became the rule in the West when the first "Christ mass" was officiated by Pope Sixtus III. December 25th coincides with the pagan feast day of *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* or "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun" which was celebrated as the birth of the god, Mithras, "the conqueror of darkness." This day fell within the Roman weeklong celebration of Saturnalia, a feast honoring the renewal of the sun at the winter solstice (The winter solstice is the shortest day of the year.).

As to the year of Jesus' birth it too is the subject of much debate. In 525 CE, Pope John 1 commissioned the scholar Dionysius Exiguus to establish a feast calendar for the Church. Unfortunately, because of insufficient historical data at the time he arrived at a date at least a few years later than the actual event. The Gospels record Jesus' birth as occurring during the reign of Herod the Great. Herod's death according to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus occurred in the spring of 4 BCE. Therefore, Christ's birth had to take place before that date.

Most current Biblical scholars using modern research methods are in agreement that Jesus' birth occurred in either the months of September or October, at or near the feast of Tabernacles in one of the years of 5 or 4 BCE. With that as a basis, the Virgin Mary would have conceived Jesus during the feast of Hanukkah in the previous year.

The four primary evidences presented in the case of Jesus' birth are as follows:

1. He was born in the years 5 or 4 BCE.
 - a. Based on the date of Herod's death (This date has been contested with some suggesting a date of January 29, 1 BCE as the date of Herod's death. The evidence for his death is based on the observance of a lunar eclipse prior to his death. There were observable lunar eclipses only in the years 5 BCE, 4 BCE and 1BCE.).
 - b. Herod's killing of children under two years of age.
 - c. Jesus' age at his baptism and the beginning of His ministry in connection with the known dates of Tiberius Caesar's reign.
 - d. Jesus death fulfilling the Passover on the correct days.
2. The census of Quirinius.
 - a. The census required everyone to travel to his own city. This would not have occurred during winter.
 - b. Since it involved taxation it would have naturally occurred near the end of the harvest season in late summer or early autumn.

3. The shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. It is generally agreed that this would never occur after October 31 due to the cold temperatures.
4. The evidence surrounding the birth of John the Baptist.
 - a. Zechariah, John the Baptist's father was a priest in the line of Abijah, which stood eighth in the order of service. Each of the twenty-four lines of priests served twice a year in their order beginning on the first day of the month AVIV (Aviv is the first month of God's calendar. It falls within our March/April time frame. The Jewish people currently call this month Nisan.). All the priests served an additional week at each of the three feasts that all the men of Israel were required to attend: Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Tabernacles.
 - b. Therefore, Zechariah would have been serving on the 10th week or about mid-June.
 - c. Zechariah and Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist after the angel spoke to Zechariah while he was serving.
 - d. It appears that John the Baptist was born at or near Passover the following year.
 - e. Each year during the Passover meal a special cup of wine (the Cup of Elijah) is set apart awaiting the return of the Prophet Elijah. This is done in accordance with the last two verses in the Old Testament from the prophet Malachi 4:5-6. They read, "*Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*"

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, he used very similar words concerning Zechariah's future son, John the Baptist. The angel said, "*And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*" **Luke 1:16-17**

On the Mount of Transfiguration, three of Jesus' disciples saw Moses and Elijah. After that they asked Jesus about the coming of Elijah. "*Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?*" And He answered and said, "*Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.*" Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist." **Matthew 17:10-13**

- f. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin was born six months prior to Jesus. Therefore, Jesus would have been born in September or October at or near the feast of Tabernacles.

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"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." **John 1:9**

Hanukkah (day 3 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

On the third night:

They have eyes but cannot see; ears, but cannot hear.

They are rebels against the light; they are strangers to its ways, and do not stay in its path.

For darkness is morning to all of them; for they are friends with the terrors of darkness.

Indeed the light of the wicked fails; the flame of his fire does not shine.

The light is his tent darkens; his lamp fails him.

They grope without light in the darkness; He make them wander as if drunk. And I will banish them from the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride, and the sound of the handmill and the light of the lamp.

All the lights that shine in the sky I will darken above you; and I will bring darkness upon your land – declares the Lord God

Listen, you who are deaf; you blind ones; look up and see! Psalm 115:5-6; Job 24:13, 17; Job 18:5-6; 12:25; Jeremiah 25:10; Ezekiel 32:8; Isaiah 42:18

Prayer on the third night:

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Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.
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Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
 2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
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- * If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study on the third night:

Why December 25th:

From the Biblical evidence presented, it appears that Jesus Christ was conceived at or near Hanukkah. So how was the date of December 25th arrived at for the birth of Jesus Christ? No one seems to know why! Most likely it was arrived at by combining several concepts.

In eastern cultures, a child’s birth is considered as having occurred at his conception rather than live birth. Those living in western cultures set birth at the moment a child takes his first breath. And it is this difference that currently fuels the abortion issue on when life begins.

As Christians most of us believe that life begins at conception. Hence, this could have led church leaders to choose a December date as being that of Christ’s conception.

It also might be worth mentioning that at the time of Christ’s birth, Israel an eastern culture was being ruled by Rome, a western culture. The conflict of birth may have been an issue. Hence, King Herod made a safe choice by eliminating all the children in the Bethlehem area under the age of two years.

The feast of Hanukkah begins on Kislev 25 of the Jewish calendar. The month Kislev is most closely associated with our month of December. Hence church leaders could have simply transposed the date from one calendar to another.

Confusion over dates and times connected with Biblical events has always been a problem for people raised in western cultures. The Jewish people use a lunar calendar and base their time references on what God told them to do. Western societies use a solar calendar and base their time references on those established by the Romans. Hence the reconciliation of the two calendars is difficult at best.

Church leaders knew that Hanukkah was an eight-day Feast of Light that began on the 25th. They also knew that the 25th was the birth date of the pagan god Mitras, conqueror of the darkness. And his birth date fell within the feast of Saturnalia, which was a weeklong celebration of the renewal of the sun at the winter solstice.

Recognizing that Jesus Christ was the true light sent from heaven to enlighten a dark world, church leaders may have considered it convenient to substitute one feast for the other since their themes were similar. That way it would be easy to explain to pagans the good news of Jesus Christ.

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"Both Mithras and Christ were described variously as 'the Way,' 'the Truth,' 'the Light,' 'the Life,' 'the Word,' 'the Son of God,' 'the Good Shepherd.' The Christian litany to Jesus could easily be an allegorical litany to the sun-god. Mithras is often represented as carrying a lamb on his shoulders, just as Jesus is. Midnight services were found in both religions. The virgin mother . . . was easily merged with the virgin mother Mary. Petra, the sacred rock of Mithraism, became Peter, the foundation of the Christian Church."

Gerald Berry, *Religions of the World*

"Mithra or Mitra is . . . worshipped as Itu (Mitra-Mitu-Itu) in every house of the Hindus in India. Itu (derivative of Mitu or Mitra) is considered as the Vegetation-deity. This Mithra or Mitra (Sun-God) is believed to be a Mediator between God and man, between the Sky and the Earth. It is said that Mithra or [the] Sun took birth in the Cave on December 25th. It is also the belief of the Christian world that Mithra or the Sun-God was born of [a] Virgin. He travelled far and wide. He has twelve satellites, which are taken as the Sun's disciples . . . [The Sun's] great festivals are observed in the Winter Solstice and the Vernal Equinox - Christmas and Easter. His symbol is the Lamb . . ."

Swami Prajnanananda, *Christ the Saviour and Christ Myth*

Mithra^{*}, known as the pagan Christ, came along into Indian/Asian culture nearly 600 years before Jesus, but only as a story of the origin of the Sun, born in a Cave, to bring inner-light into the world. It was not until the late third to late fourth century that the religion of Mithraism became popular amongst the pagan worshipers, which included a very influential leader by the name Constantine I, a Roman Emperor who ruled between 306 and 337 AD, who came into the Christian Faith, with both military and political power, beginning to single handedly change the face and doctrine of Christianity^{*}. A former pagan Sun worshiper himself, Constantine I took his former pagan ways, which included this worship of the many pagan gods, not excluding the god, Mithra, who began to evolve (The Many Faces of Mithra)^{*} into a carbon copy of Christianity, from his origin of being born from a rock in a cave, to the story developing to him being birthed from a virgin, some 800 years later.

^{*} The god is found as "Mithra" in the Indian Vedic religion (The Vedas are a collection of hymns and other ancient religious texts written in India between about 1500 and 1000 BCE.), which is over 3,500 years old, by conservative estimates. When the Iranians separated from their Indian brethren (400 years after the life of Moses).

^{*} Single handedly change the face and doctrine of Christianity, Constantine I, declared religious tolerance for Christianity in the Roman empire. He called the First Council of Nicaea in 325, which produced the statement of Christian belief known as the Nicene Creed. In regards to Public cults, Constantine I adapted to the common-day pagan cults for useful ideas and marketing strategies to advance his world dominance, including Mithraism being absorbed by the Romans, under his leadership, during their military campaigns.

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^{*} The Many Faces of Mithra: this development of gods taking on different forms, shapes, colors, ethnicities and other attributes according to location, era and so on is not only quite common but also the norm. Thus, we have hundreds of gods and goddesses who are in many ways interchangeable but who have adopted various differences based on geographical and environmental factors . . . Over the centuries, Mithraism has been compared to Christianity, revealing numerous similarities between the two faiths' doctrines and traditions, including as concerns stories of their respective godmen. Mithra has the following in common with the Jesus character:

- Mithra was born on December 25th of the virgin Anahita^{*}.
- The babe was wrapped in swaddling clothes, placed in a manger and attended by shepherds.
- He was considered a great traveling teacher and master.
- He had 12 companions^{*} or "disciples".
- He performed miracles.
- As the "great bull of the Sun," Mithra sacrificed himself for world peace.
- He ascended to heaven.
- Mithra was viewed as the Good Shepherd, the "Way, the Truth and the Light," the Redeemer, the Savior, the Messiah.
- Mithra is omniscient, as he "hears all, sees all, knows all: none can deceive him."
- He was identified with both the Lion and the Lamb.
- His sacred day was Sunday, "the Lord's Day", hundreds of years before the appearance of Christ.
- His religion had a eucharist or "Lord's Supper."

- Mithra "sets his marks on the foreheads of his soldiers."
 - Mithraism emphasized baptism.
- * The Mithraists believed that this night (December 25th) is the night of the birth of Mithra, Persian god of light and truth. At the morning of the longest night of the year the Mithra is born . . . The observation was thus provably taken over by Christianity, not as biblical doctrine but as a later tradition in order to compete with the Pagan cults, a move we contend occurred with numerous other "Christian" motifs, including many that *are* in the New Testament. (<http://www.truthbeknown.com/mithra.htm>)
- * The Virgin Mother Anahita: Unlike various other rock- or cave-born gods, Mithra is not depicted in the Roman cultus as having been given birth by a mortal woman or a goddess; hence, it is claimed that he was not "born of a virgin." (<http://www.truthbeknown.com/mithra.htm>)
- * The theme of the teaching god and "the Twelve" is found within Mithraism, as Mithra is depicted as surrounded by the 12 zodiac signs on a number of monuments and in the writings of Porphyry (4.16), for one. These 12 signs are sometimes portrayed as *humans* and, as they have been in the case of numerous sun gods, could be called Mithra's 12 "companions" or "disciples". (<http://www.truthbeknown.com/mithra.htm>)

The Indian Mitra was essentially a solar deity, representing the "friendly" aspect of the sun; the bestower of health, wealth and food. His worship purified and freed the devotee from sin and disease. Eventually, Mithra became more militant, and he is best known as a warrior. Like so many gods, Mithra was the light and power behind the sun. By the Roman legionnaires, Mithra or *Mithras*, as he began to be known in the Greco-Roman world - was called "the divine Sun, the Unconquered Sun". He was said to be "Mighty in strength, mighty ruler, greatest king of gods! O Sun, lord of heaven and earth, God of Gods!" Mithra was also deemed "the mediator" between heaven and earth, a role often ascribed to the god of the sun. (*The Roman cult seems to have taken this existing association and developed it in their own special way.* (Gordon, "FAQ." (Emph. added.))

Mithraism, also known as the Mithraic mysteries, was a Roman mystery religion centered on the god Mithras. The religion was inspired by Iranian worship of the Zoroastrian god Mithra, though the Greek *Mithras* was linked to a new and distinctive imagery, and the level of continuity between Persian and Greco-Roman practice is debated. The mysteries were popular among the Roman military from about the 1st to the 4th century CE . . . viewed as a rival of early Christianity* . . . From this evidence we know that the cult was the last of the important mystery cults to evolve and that it thrived in the second and third centuries AD and waned in the fourth as elite patronage was gradually transferred to Christianity . . . In the 4th century, Mithraists faced persecution from Christians and the religion was subsequently suppressed and eliminated in the empire by the end of the century; . . . No written narratives or theology from the religion survive . . . Interpretation of the physical evidence remains problematic and contested.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mithraism>

* "And He said, "See to it that you be not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' ('I am the Christ') and, 'The time is at hand'; do not go after them." Matthew 24:4-8, Mark 13:5-8, Luke 21:8-11

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. For just as the lightening comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." Matthew 24:23-28, Mark 13:21-23

"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." John 1:9

Hanukkah (day 4 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

On the fourth night:

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what it brings forth, who gave breath to the people upon it and life to those who walk thereon:

I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you, and I have taken you by the hand. I create you, and appointed you a covenant-people, a light to the nations . . .

Opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create woe . . .

I the Lord do all these things.

I will lead the blind by a road they did not know, and I will make them walk by paths they never knew. I will turn darkness before them into light, rough places into level ground. These are promises – I will keep them without fail.

Isaiah 42:5-7, 45:7, 42:16

Prayer on the fourth night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”, it is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a “specific word” from God.)

1. Set aside enough time to complete the exercise so that you don’t have to rush through it. Usually thirty minutes is adequate.
2. Find a quiet place free of distractions.
3. Read the Selected Passage Above of Scripture.
4. Transition from what you have been doing by calming you mind and body. This can be done by taking a few slow, deep breaths and inviting the Lord to speak to you through His word.

Reading

1. Read the passage aloud slowly a couple of times.
2. Be silent for one-to-two minutes.
3. Is there a word or phrase that is meaningful to you?
4. Repeat the word or phrase several times silently as if to memorize it.

* If in a group share it in turn. Do not elaborate simply state what it is.

Meditation

1. Read the passage again.
2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
3. Think about how the reading applies or touches your life today.

* If in a group share it in turn. Briefly state “I hear, I see, I feel ...”

Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.

* If in a group pray quietly.

Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
3. Reflect on “I believe God wants me to _____ today/this week/etc.”

* If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study on the fourth night:

The Seven-branched Golden Lampstand and Its Light:

The common name for the seven-branched golden lampstand is **menorah**. It provided the only light in the Temple of God. And it was the one in use at the first Hanukkah feast in 164 BCE.

At the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD the Romans took the seven-branched golden lampstand as a spoil. This event is depicted in a sculptured relief on the Arch of Titus in Rome. At that point the rabbis had to make another menorah to celebrate Hanukkah. Only they could not light its lamps with the fire from the altar of burnt offerings because it had been destroyed so they devised another method. This led to the development of an eight-branched menorah.

The rabbis thinking went like this. When you look at the seven-branched golden lampstand you actually see eight branches. The staff or trunk is one branch and it supports the other seven. So, since the staff is in a supporting role we call it the “Shamash” or **servant**. Therefore, let us make the Shamash an independent branch and light its lamp first from another source. Then it in turn can be used as a servant to light the remaining seven lamps. The total number of lamps represented the eight days of the feast. Later on, the shamash became a separate lamp lighting in turn eight other lamps, which represented the eight days of the feast. And this is why the Jewish people currently use a nine-branched candlestick called hanukkiah for Hanukkah today.

God gave Moses specific instructions on how to make the seven-branched golden lampstand. The lampstand with its seven lamps burning is called the Ner Tamid or “**Eternal Light**”. The original lampstand was probably five feet tall by three and one half feet wide and represented a **tree that was on fire but not consumed** (A lighted Christmas tree is of pagan

origin but carries the same idea. It is a man-made tradition, was never ordered by God and serves as a **counterfeit** designed to keep people from the truth.). Do you remember Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (tree)?

The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."
Exodus 3:2-5

As with Moses' burning bush, the seven-branched golden lampstand serves as an indication of God's presence.

From the Scriptures we know that the seven-branched golden lampstand is the representation of an **almond** tree (the instructions for making the menorah are found in Exodus 25:31-40 and 37:17-27) with its calyx, bud and flowers. And when an almond tree is in bloom with its white and pink blossoms it has the appearance of being on fire.

There are several other allusions that can be drawn from an almond tree that tie into the Scriptures. It is the **first** tree to bloom in Israel. The almond itself has the appearance of an eye and is used this way in Jeremiah 1:11-12: "*And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' And I said, 'I see a rod of an almond tree.'* Then the LORD said to me, '*You have seen well, for I AM watching over My word to perform it.*'

The almond tree is also known as the **watching** tree in Israel because the Hebrew word for almond is shaqad, meaning to be alert. And since the seven-branched golden lampstand in the Temple is an almond tree on fire you might say it is lighted to help God see. *And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.* (Revelation 4:5) The seven lights are the seven spirits of God and when they are taken together as a whole represent the Holy Spirit. The number seven is the number of God and simply represents His fullness or completeness. So you might say that the Holy Spirit helps God see what is going on.

This ability to see is born out in another passage of Scripture in the book of Revelation 5:6: "*And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.*" Here the Holy Spirit is equated to having seven eyes.

The book of Revelation also brings the concepts of fire and eyes together when it speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. "*And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems.*" **Revelation 19:11-12**

So, it is the Holy Spirit that gives God the ability to see and **judge**. And when we, as Christians, stand before the judgment seat of Christ our works will be judged through the Holy Spirit as well. For it is written: "*Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.*" **1 Corinthians 3:13**

Most people think the Holy Spirit is in heaven but from the book of Revelation it is clearly shown that the Holy Spirit revealed through the seven burning lamps rests upon the seven-branched golden lampstand. And that lampstand is the Church.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." **Revelation 1:12-20**

Although there are seven churches listed (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea) and each appears distinct from one another, together they represent the Church as a whole. This is borne out by the fact that despite its seven branches, God commanded the entire lampstand to be made out of **one piece** of beaten gold. And being made of gold, the symbol for faith (“So that the proof of your **faith**, being more precious than **gold** which is perishable, even though tested by **fire**, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:7), the Church exists because of its faith.

At this point in the lesson I want to issue you a word of caution. Just because you are a member of the Church does not make you the Light. It only means that you uphold the Light. In fact, Jesus judges the Church and threatens to remove the lampstand of those who leave their first love and do not repent (Revelation 2:4-5). The Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans picked up this theme and language, except he used a fig tree instead of an almond tree.

*But if some of the branches were **broken off**, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich **root** of the olive tree, do not be **arrogant** toward the branches; but if you are **arrogant**, remember that it is not you who supports the **root**, but the **root** supports you. You will say then, “Branches were **broken off** so that I might be grafted in.” Quite right, they were **broken off** for their **unbelief**, but you stand by your **faith**. Do not be **conceited, but fear**; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who **fell**, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be **cut off**. Romans 11:17-22*

When we look at the seven-branched golden lampstand or an almond tree we notice one significant fact . . . that all the branches are **supported** by one branch that we call the shaft or trunk (root). This central shaft is representative of Jesus Christ. It is lower than the branches indicating that it is the first to come up and is humbled . . . supporting all the others. Jesus said, “I am the vine and you are the branches.” John 15:5

When we view the central shaft as Jesus Christ, the Son of God we can also see that He is the branch spoken of in Isaiah and it is upon Him whom the seven spirits or Holy Spirit rests. “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the **LORD** (or Spirit of Christ) will rest on Him, the spirit of **wisdom** and **understanding**, the spirit of **counsel** and **strength**, the spirit of **knowledge** and the **fear** (reverence) of the **LORD**.” (Isaiah 11:1-2) In turn this branch became a tree of which Christians are a part, being members of His body.

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” John 1:9

Hanukkah (day 5 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

On the fifth night:

Look at me, answer me, O Lord, my God!

Give light to my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death.

Darkness is not dark for You; night is as light as day; darkness and light are the same.

Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant, and to his supplications, and cause Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake.

Send forth Your light and Your truth; they will lead me; they will bring me to your holy mountain, to Your dwelling-place.

With You is the fountain of life; by Your light do we see light.

It is You who light my lamp; the Lord, my God, light up my darkness.

The soul of a human is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts.

For You have saved me from death, my foot from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

Truly, God does all these things, two, three times to a person, to bring him back from the Pit, that he may bask in the light of life. Psalm 13:4; 139:12; Daniel 9:17; Psalm 43:3; 36:10; 18:20; Proverbs 20:27; Psalm 56:14; Job 33:29-30

Prayer on the fifth night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”, it is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a “specific word” from God.)

1. Set aside enough time to complete the exercise so that you don’t have to rush through it. Usually thirty minutes is adequate.
2. Find a quiet place free of distractions.
3. Read the Selected Passage Above of Scripture.
4. Transition from what you have been doing by calming you mind and body. This can be done by taking a few slow, deep breaths and inviting the Lord to speak to you through His word.

Reading

1. Read the passage aloud slowly a couple of times.
 2. Be silent for one-to-two minutes.
 3. Is there a word or phrase that is meaningful to you?
 4. Repeat the word or phrase several times silently as if to memorize it.
- * If in a group share it in turn. Do not elaborate simply state what it is.

Meditation

1. Read the passage again.
 2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
 3. Think about how the reading applies or touches your life today.
- * If in a group share it in turn. Briefly state “I hear, I see, I feel ...”

Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.
- * If in a group pray quietly.

Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
 2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
 3. Reflect on “I believe God wants me to _____ today/this week/etc.”
- * If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study on the fifth night:

More Than A Burning Bush:

Jesus Christ and the Church, as the seven-branched golden lampstand, which has the characteristics of an almond tree also carries with it a very special designation . . . **The Tree of Life**. This revelation comes from the confirmation process God used in His selection of Aaron as High Priest and his family, the Levites as priests (Numbers 17).

The story began when the Israelites complained against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. God had Moses take the staffs (A staff might be thought of as a walking stick.) of the leaders of each of the twelve tribes of Israel, wrote their names on the staffs and put them all in the Tabernacle in the presence of God. And this is what happened! “*Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had **sprouted** (calyx) and put forth **buds** (bud) and produced **blossoms** (flowers), and it bore ripe **almonds** (fruit).*” (Numbers 17:8) To all the Israelites amazement a dead branch had become a living tree.

In like manner, God repeats this sign in the choosing of Jesus, the dead branch come to life. “*In Him was life, and the **life was the light of men.**”* (John 1:4) Jesus is the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek and we His family are members of that priesthood. As it is written: “*But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous **light.**”* (1 Peter 2:9)

The book of Hebrews goes into great depth concerning these truths but for now let it suffice that you remember that Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-20) was the King of Salem. His name means “King of Righteousness” and his title means “King of Peace”. Therefore, as members of this priesthood, Christians are to be ministering to others in regards to the areas of righteousness and peace.

The seven-branched golden lampstand also serves as a reminder and to shed light on all things pertaining to God. For example:

1. His **creation** in seven days: On the **first** day ... **light**. The sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day. And on the last day ... rest.
2. His **light** the Church: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.
3. His **oneness**: One body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One faith, One baptism, One God and Father of us all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)
4. His **appointed times** which are the Seven Feasts of the Lord: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks, Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Tabernacles.

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” John 1:9

Hanukkah (day 6 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

On the sixth night:

The Lord is my light and my help whom shall I fear?

Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord, my God, You are very great; You are clothed in glory and majesty, wrapped in a robe of light; You spread the heavens like a tent cloth.

Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path.

The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing in His heart, the instruction of the Lord is lucid, giving light to my eyes.

For the commandment is a lamp, and the Torah is a light.

Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, attach our heart to Your commandments, unite our heart to love and revere Your name. Psalm 27:1; 104:1-2; 119:105; 19:9; Proverbs 6:23

Prayer on the sixth night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”, it is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a “specific word” from God.)

1. Set aside enough time to complete the exercise so that you don’t have to rush through it. Usually thirty minutes is adequate.
2. Find a quiet place free of distractions.
3. Read the Selected Passage Above of Scripture.
4. Transition from what you have been doing by calming you mind and body. This can be done by taking a few slow, deep breaths and inviting the Lord to speak to you through His word.

Reading

1. Read the passage aloud slowly a couple of times.
2. Be silent for one-to-two minutes.
3. Is there a word or phrase that is meaningful to you?
4. Repeat the word or phrase several times silently as if to memorize it.

* If in a group share it in turn. Do not elaborate simply state what it is.

Meditation

1. Read the passage again.
 2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
 3. Think about how the reading applies or touches your life today.
- * If in a group share it in turn. Briefly state "I hear, I see, I feel ..."

Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.
- * If in a group pray quietly.

Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
 2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
 3. Reflect on "I believe God wants me to _____ today/this week/etc."
- * If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study on the sixth night:

Zechariah's Vision Of The Golden Menorah:

The seven-branched golden lampstand plays an integral part in the Prophet Zechariah's vision recorded in chapter four verses one through fourteen. It reads this way:

*Then the angel who was speaking with me returned, and roused me as a man who is awakened from his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side." Then I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." Then he answered and said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"' Also the word of the LORD came to me saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. "For who has despised the day of small things? **But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel-- these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.**" Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" And I answered the second time and said to him, "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?" So he answered me saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "**These are the two anointed ones, who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.**" **Zechariah 4:1-14***

A representation of the vision that Zechariah saw is on page 18 (The Rainbow). The oil for the lamps comes from two olive trees standing alongside the lampstand and is collected in a golden bowl at the top of the shaft. From there it flows to each of the branches. The golden bowl is part of the shaft, which is Jesus Christ, who in turn is upholding the seven branches, which are the Church. The bowl serves to connect the branches to the shaft and provides a collection place for the oil. The bowl is a representation of the heart of Christ, piping life-giving fluid to the body. In the case of the vision, it is oil to keep the lamps lit.

The two olive trees represent the sources of the supply for the oil to keep the lamps burning. These two trees are the Law and Prophets, which stand with Jesus Christ, the Word of God. Moses represents the Law in human form and Elijah represents the Prophets in human form. As Christians we know Zechariah's vision in another form: On a high mountain (Probably Mount Hermon), Jesus is transfigured before His disciples and they see Him standing with both Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-5).

These two trees can also be said to represent the following:

<u>Truth</u>	Spirit or Love
Domestic olive tree	<u>Wild</u> olive tree
<u>Israel</u>	Church
The Father	The <u>Holy</u> Spirit

In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) five of them lacked sufficient oil to keep their lamps burning and were therefore considered foolish. It appears that these are the ones who do not continually persist in getting more oil from Jesus and the Scriptures, but have become **satisfied** in what they already have. They have quit asking God for more of the Spirit. *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”* **Luke 11:13**

Although Zechariah’s vision concerns the seven-branched golden lampstand there is a major portion of the conversation within it, devoted to Zerubbabel. Who is this person and what does he have to do with the vision? Let’s take a look!

Zerubbabel, which can be translated as “one born in Babylon”, was an actual man who was born in Babylon and lived in the time of Zechariah. He was a descendant of King David and he did **lay the foundation for** and **finished the second temple** during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah about 520 BCE. *“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.”* **Zechariah 4:9**

But Zechariah had a longer-term fulfillment of the prophecy in mind when he spoke those words. He was looking forward to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the son of David who would build the Temple of God. Zechariah’s prophecy harkens back to the time that King David wanted to build a house for God. But God replied, *“When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up **one of your descendants** after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. **He shall build for Me a house**, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.”* (1 Chronicles 17:11-14) King David took this to mean that one of his sons, namely Solomon, not the Lord Jesus Christ, would build God a house. Solomon built the first Temple.

The name Zerubbabel also has another meaning, (Zerub) “seed of” (Bab El) “the gate of God”. The gate of God is God’s mouth. In other words, God spoke the word and Jesus Christ was formed in Mary’s womb. It is Christ who will build God a house. By the way, Jesus is also a descendent of Zerubbabel.

Zechariah 4:10 says, *“For who has despised the day of small things? But **these seven** will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel - these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.”*

Simply put it means that the Holy Spirit and the Church will look forward to the completion of God’s house. We find similar language in the book of Revelation concerning the man with the measuring line and the two witnesses”

*Then there was given me a **measuring rod** like a staff; and someone said, **“Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.** Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my **two witnesses**, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”* **These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.**
Revelation 11:1-4

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” **John 1:9**

Hanukkah (day 7 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

On the seventh night:

For the path of the righteous is as the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until full day.

Light is sown for the righteous, radiance for the upright.

O you righteous, rejoice in the Lord and acclaim His holy name.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light; on those who dwelt in a land of gloom light has dawned.

For all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings.

Arise, shine, for your light has dawned; the Presence of the Lord has shone upon you!

O House of Jacob! Come, let us walk by the light of the Lord. Proverbs 4:18; Psalm 97:11-12; Isaiah 9:1; Exodus 10:23; Isaiah 60:1; 2:4

Prayer on the seventh night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”, it is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a “specific word” from God.)

1. Set aside enough time to complete the exercise so that you don’t have to rush through it. Usually thirty minutes is adequate.
2. Find a quiet place free of distractions.
3. Read the Selected Passage Above of Scripture.
4. Transition from what you have been doing by calming you mind and body. This can be done by taking a few slow, deep breaths and inviting the Lord to speak to you through His word.

Reading

1. Read the passage aloud slowly a couple of times.
2. Be silent for one-to-two minutes.
3. Is there a word or phrase that is meaningful to you?
4. Repeat the word or phrase several times silently as if to memorize it.

* If in a group share it in turn. Do not elaborate simply state what it is.

Meditation

1. Read the passage again.
2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
3. Think about how the reading applies or touches your life today.

* If in a group share it in turn. Briefly state “I hear, I see, I feel ...”

Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.

* If in a group pray quietly.

Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
3. Reflect on “I believe God wants me to _____ today/this week/etc.”

* If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study on the seventh night:

The Rainbow:

When you look at the shape of the seven-branched golden lampstand it should remind you of something else. If you continue the pattern of the lampstand with its light in an upward arc it produces a **rainbow**. Light itself contains the whole spectrum of color and when you view light through water it forms a rainbow. The six spaces between the branches represent the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. These colors are the three primary and three secondary colors from which all other colors are made.

When viewed from earth a rainbow is a semi-circle but when viewed from the air it forms a complete circle. Often people who fly observe this phenomenon. This gives us cause to think about what happens if we turn the lampstand upside down. Another truth is revealed! Even though the lampstand is on earth with its branches pointing upwards, the truth is that it is a representation of what is in heaven.

God told Moses to make it according to the pattern in heaven. Therefore, the lampstand's base is in heaven and the true light comes down from heaven to earth. The oil from the olive trees, which are the Law and the Prophets flow through the branch (staff), which is Jesus Christ, the Word of God. In turn it is displayed as light to the world through the branches, which are the churches. And since the base of the lampstand of which we are a part is in heaven then we should always remember that heaven is our true home and that we are just passing through giving our light to a dark world.

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world." John 1:9

Hanukkah (day 8 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

On the eighth night:

I want to close this Celebration with a Scripture passage that many Jewish people read of the eighth and last night of Hanukkah. Just as the number eight marks a new beginning in something God will do and serves as the sign for eternity this Scripture looks forward to a new heaven and a new earth in which the glory of the Lord will be its light:

Behold, there will come a time!

And the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall become sevenfold, like the light of the seven days, when the Lord binds up His people's wounds and heals the injuries it has suffered.

In that day, there shall be neither sunlight nor cold moonlight but there shall be a continuous day, of neither day nor night, and there shall be light at evening time.

No longer shall you need the sun for light by day nor the shining of the moon for radiance by night; for the Lord shall be your light everlasting, your God shall be your glory.

Your sun shall set no more, your moon no more withdraw; for the Lord shall be a light to you forever.

Cause a new light to shine upon Zion and soon may all of us be worthy to enjoy its light. Isaiah 30:26; Zechariah 14:6-7; Isaiah 60:19-20

Prayer on the eighth night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina ("Divine Reading", it is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a "specific word" from God.)

1. Set aside enough time to complete the exercise so that you don't have to rush through it. Usually thirty minutes is adequate.
2. Find a quiet place free of distractions.

3. Read the Selected Passage Above of Scripture.
4. Transition from what you have been doing by calming you mind and body. This can be done by taking a few slow, deep breaths and inviting the Lord to speak to you through His word.

Reading

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Meditation

1. Read the passage again.
 2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
 3. Think about how the reading applies or touches your life today.
- * If in a group share it in turn. Briefly state "I hear, I see, I feel ..."

Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.
- * If in a group pray quietly.

Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.
 2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
 3. Reflect on "I believe God wants me to _____ today/this week/etc."
- * If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study/Review on the eighth night:

The Christmas Story:

Based on my knowledge of Scripture, historical facts, the Biblical calendar and Jewish tradition I would like to present the following Christmas story as a plausible way in which the events surrounding Jesus' birth occurred.

It is Saturday night, Kislev 25, in the Jewish year 3755. It is the first night of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication and the Feast of Light, December 4, 6 BCE. The angel Gabriel comes to the Virgin Mary with a message from God. She will conceive in her womb, bear a son and name him Jesus (Yashua – Joshua – "I AM SALVATION"). The Holy Spirit will come upon her, and the power of the Most High will overshadow her; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.

Mary appropriately Hanukkahs (dedicates – first use for a holy purpose) her body to be the temple of God by saying, "*Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.*"

*The Holy Spirit impregnates Mary. She now has the Word of God, eternal life and the light of men dwelling in the darkness of her womb. As it is written: In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was **life**, and the **life** was the **light** of men. And the **light** shines in the **darkness**, and the **darkness** did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5)*

Interestingly, on the first night of Hanukkah many Jews quote this passage of Scripture, "*In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth. And the earth was **formless** and **void**, and **darkness** was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "**Let there be light**"; and there was light.*" (Genesis 1:1-3)

Coincidentally we are reminded by the Scripture in John 9-10:22-39, that Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God on Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication and Light in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Forty weeks (40 weeks is the period of human gestation) after His conception Jesus is born. It is Friday night, Elul 9, in the Jewish year 3756. This corresponds to our Gregorian calendar date of September 9, 5 BCE. It is the beginning of the weekly Sabbath. The Jewish people have a particular name for every Sabbath and they read specific passages of Scripture on those Sabbaths. The one on which Jesus is born is called KiTeitzei, "When you go out". On that Sabbath night Jesus goes forth from the womb. And the next morning in the Temple and in every synagogue **Isaiah 54:1-10** is read. It begins this way:

"Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman," says the LORD.

On the following Sabbath, being the eighth day Jesus is circumcised. The Jewish people call this particular Sabbath, KiTavo, "When you enter". On that day Jesus entered into the Mosaic Covenant through His circumcision. And in the Temple and every synagogue the prophet **Isaiah 60:1-22** is read. It begins this way:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you.

And in verse six of that passage of Scripture it prophesies the coming of the Magi to see Jesus. It reads this way:

A multitude of camels will cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba will come; they will bring gold and frankincense, and will bear good news (myrrh - a sweet smelling aroma) of the praises of the LORD.

Mary waited the prescribed 40 days for her purification (Read Leviticus 12:1-4) from the blood of childbirth before presenting her son, Jesus at the Temple. It was Thursday, Ethanim 21 (Ethanim is the seventh month of God's calendar. It falls within our September/October time frame. The Jewish people currently call this month Tishri.), of the Jewish year 3756 or our October 20, 5 BCE. The Jewish people call the day Hossana Rabba or "The Great Day of Salvation". It is the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (In Hebrew the feast is called Sukkoth, which is translated as tent, hut, tabernacle or booth and indicates a temporary dwelling.) (Sukkoth).

The Feast of Tabernacles is the most joyous feast of the year for Israel and it has four major themes associated with it. Let's see how these four themes are linked to Jesus' first appearance at the Temple.

The first theme is the **ingathering of various tree branches**. Jesus, "the **Branch**" spoken of by Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 11:1-10) concerning the messiah is brought into Jerusalem during the feast. It was written of Him: *"Then a **shoot** will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a **branch** from his roots will bear fruit."*

Jesse was King David's father. Therefore, the messiah had to be a descendent of King David, which Jesus was according to the genealogies. The **shoot** or **branch** in the prophecy can also be rendered from the root Hebrew word **Nazir** meaning "**unpruned vine**" from whence we get the word **Nazarene**. This is why the Bible references Jesus as the **Nazarene** or Jesus from **Nazareth**.

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

Nazarene/Nazareth: the word is used to translate two related terms that appear in the Greek New Testament: *Nazarēnos* (Nazarene) and *Nazōraios* (Nazorean). The phrases traditionally rendered as "*Jesus of Nazareth*" can also be translated as "*Jesus the Nazarene*" or "*Jesus the Nazorean*", and the title "*Nazarene*" may have a religious significance instead of denoting a place of origin. Both Nazarene and Nazorean are irregular in Greek and the additional vowel in *Nazorean* complicates any derivation from Nazareth.

The Gospel of Matthew explains that the title Nazarene is derived from the prophecy "*He will be called a Nazorean*", but this has no obvious Old Testament source. Some scholars argue that it refers to a passage in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1), with "**Nazarene**" a Greek reading of the Hebrew *ne-tser* (branch), understood as a **messianic title**. Others point to a passage in the Book of Judges which refers to Samson as a Nazirite, a word that is just one letter off from Nazarene in Greek.

The Greek New Testament uses "*Nazarene*" six times (Mark, Luke), while "**Nazorean**" is used 13 times (Matthew, Mark in some manuscripts, Luke, John, Acts). In the Book of Acts, "**Nazorean**" is used to refer to a follower of Jesus, i.e. a Christian, rather than an inhabitant of a town. "**Notzrim**" is the modern Hebrew word for Christians (*No-tsri*, נוצרי) and one of two words

commonly used to mean "Christian" in Syriac (*Nasrani*) and Arabic (*Naṣrānī*, نصراني) . . . many languages employ the word **Nazarene** as a general designation for those of the Christian faith.

Ne-tser (נֶצֶר, n-ts-r), meaning "branch", "flower", or "offshoot". Jerome (c. 347 – 420) linked "**Nazarene**" to a verse in the Book of Isaiah, claiming that "**Nazarene**" was the Hebrew reading of a word scholars read as *ne-tzer* (branch). The text from Isaiah 11:1 is: "*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a **Branch** shall grow out of his roots.*" Here **Branch/Nazarene** is metaphorically "*descendant*" (of Jesse, father of King David). In Acts, Paul of Tarsus is called, "*a ringleader of the sect of the Nazoreans,*" thus identifying Nazorean with Christian. Although both "Christianios" (by Gentiles) and "Nazarenes" (by Jews) appear to have been current in the 1st century, and both are recorded in the New Testament, the Gentile name "Christian" appears to have won out against "Nazarene" in usage among Christians themselves after the 1st century.

The apostles who were before us had these names for him: "*Jesus, the Nazorean, Messiah*", that is, "*Jesus, the Nazorean, the Christ*". The last name is "*Christ*", the first is "*Jesus*", that in the middle is "*the Nazarene*". "**Messiah**" has two meanings, both "*the Christ*" and "*the measured*". "*Jesus*" in Hebrew is "*the redemption*". "**Nazara**" is "*the Truth*". "**The Nazarene**" then, is "*the Truth*". "**Christ**" has been **measured**. "**The Nazarene**" and "**Jesus**" are they who have been **measured**.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene_\(title\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene_(title))

The second theme of the feast is **God comes to tabernacle or dwell with His people**. For the past week, all the Jewish people had been living in temporary dwellings or booths made out of tree branches. It was meant to remind them of the Exodus, when God's presence was manifest among His people, leading and protecting them day and night. Jesus arrives among the people as **Immanuel ... "God With Us"** to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. "*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*"

The third theme of the feast is **the salvation of God's people**. The angel commanded Joseph to name the child, Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. In Hebrew, Jesus' name is Yashua or Joshua, which means, "**I AM salvation**". God told Moses to tell the Israelites that "I AM" (Exodus 3:14) had sent him to deliver them from the Egyptians. In today's world we just hear a person's formal name and it has no particular meaning to us. But in Jesus' day peoples name were actual statements. So every time Jesus introduced Himself, the people heard the statement, "**I AM salvation**".

The fourth theme of the feast is **great joy**. While the people were rejoicing in God outside the Temple, Jesus was presented before God, in the Temple, as was the custom. At that time old Simeon and Anna were filled with the **joy of the Holy Spirit** and began prophesying because they had seen the consolation of Israel.

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

Where was the Birth Place of the Lord Jesus?

Tradition, not the Bible, says that Jesus' birth place was in a cave over which the Basilica of the Nativity was built in Bethlehem. Roman Emperor Constantine, built a Basilica over this cave in the 4th Century at the request of his mother, Helena. It was destroyed and the present basilica was built by Emperor Justinian in 530 AD. **Origen of Alexandria* (185 - 254 AD) wrote that it was generally accepted that Jesus was born in a cave at Bethlehem which could be visited in his day.**

* Origen of Alexandria, "Against Celsus" in Volume 1, Chapter 51. "In regards to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, if anyone, after studying Micah's prophecy and the history recorded in the sacred writings by the disciples of Jesus. If needing to have additional sources of evidence, let him be aware that the Scriptures are confirmed and the Gospel involving his birth, for there can be seen the cave located in Bethlehem where He was born and the manger where He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. And this site is talked about with great interest in all the surrounding countries. Even among the enemies our faith it is being said that in this cave Jesus was born, the One who is worshiped and revered by the Christians."

Clearly the city of Jesus' birth was Bethlehem as **Micah 5:2** prophesied:

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.*

. . . and as the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John confirm (Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4, 15; John 7:42). Luke proclaims the birth place as Bethlehem, "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*" 1 Samuel 17:15, confirms Bethlehem as the City of David, "*But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.*" **But where in Bethlehem was Jesus born?** The fact is that the New Testament does not mention the exact place in Bethlehem of where Jesus was born. **Nowhere does the Bible record that Jesus was born in stable attended by donkeys, chickens, and cows as many nativity scenes present.** In the past it was speculated that because there was no room for Joseph and Mary in the Inn, and that he was born in the stable behind the inn where the animals were kept. This conjecture is false and is a good example

that shows us we should not apply speculation to God's word. All the New Testament specifically says is that Jesus was laid in a manger in Bethlehem.

The popular conception that the word "manger" refers to a trough where animals were fed may be accurate. However, it could mean simply a stall. The Greek word which is translated in our English Bibles "manger" is *Yatnh phat-ne* (pronounced fat'-nay). The definition of the word is of a "stall" where animals are kept and in Luke 13:15 is translated as such. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) the word means a stall or a crib (See Proverbs 14:4). The question is what kind of "stall" or "manger" is the New Testament referring to and what kind of animal was fed or housed there.

Although the New Testament does not tell us where in Bethlehem Jesus was born, the Old Testament does. **Micah 4:8** states:

"And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." Thus, the Old Testament clearly states that the Messiah would be born at the "**tower of the flock**" (Hebrew: *Migdal Edar*).

The phrase "**tower of the flock**" is the Hebrew phrase "*Migdal Edar*" [(mig-dawl) ay-der] and means a "**watch tower of the flock**". In ancient times this was a military tower erected to view into the valley on the edge of Bethlehem to protect the city. Several of these military towers are recorded in the Old Testament (See Judges 8:71, 9:46, 9:51; 2 Kings 9:17, 18:8; Nehemiah 3:1). The tower at Bethlehem is first mentioned in **Genesis 35:21**, "*And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar*" ("**tower of Edar**" - Migdal Edar). After Jacob left Bethel, he came to **Edar** (*the tower*) and there Rachel began hard labor and as she delivered Benjamin she died and was buried there in Ephrathah which is Bethlehem" (**Genesis 35:19**). After burying Rachel, Jacob moved his flocks beyond the **tower of Edar**. This would pinpoint the location as being near to what is present day Bethlehem. Clearly, this establishes that **Migdal Edar, "the tower of the flock"** was in Bethlehem in Bible times.

The oldest tradition, based upon **Genesis 35:16-20; 48:7**, points to a place one mile north of present-day Bethlehem and 4 miles from Jerusalem. We do not know what were the bounds of ancient Bethlehem when Christ was born there, but we know the area called Bethlehem was larger than it is today. The references to present day **Migdal Edar** are in reference to present day Bethlehem and not the Bethlehem of biblical times which was certainly greater. **Genesis 35:19** and **48:7** both state that Rachel was buried at "**Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.**"

*"And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to **Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.**"* **Genesis 35:19**

*"And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the **way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.**"* **Genesis 48:7**

It must be noted that Ephrath or Ephrathah was the ancient name for the area that later was called Bethlehem. According to **Genesis 35:19**, after Jacob buried Rachel, he "*moved his flocks beyond the tower of Edar*" or "*Migdal Edar*". The location of Rachel's tomb today is outside, on the outskirts of present-day Bethlehem, but clearly it was not when Jacob, buried his wife there. Clearly the area which is called Bethlehem in biblical times covered a greater area than does present day Bethlehem and the Tower of the Flock was in that city.

*This watch tower from ancient times was used by the shepherds for **protection from their enemies and wild beasts.** It was also the place ewes were safely brought to give birth to the lambs.* In this sheltered building/cave the priests would bring in the ewes which were about to lamb for protection. **These special lambs came from a unique flock that was designated for sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem.**

Rabbi Short states, "According to Edersheim in *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*", in Book 2, Chapter 6, states, "This **Migdal Edar** was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks" that pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but it lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage from the Mishnah* (Shekelim 7:4) leads to the conclusion that "*the flocks which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices.*" In addition, **Migdal Edar** is also mentioned by the Jewish Targums* and is translated "**The Anointed One of the flock of Israel**".

* The Mishnah was the first recording of the oral law of the Jews or its Rabbinic Judaism. The word means "repetition" which means it was memorized material. It is the major source of rabbinic teachings of Judaism. Next to the Scriptures the Mishnah is the basic textbook of Jewish life and thought, and is traditionally considered to be an integral part of the Torah revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.

* The Targum is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible (Tanak) which was written during Israel's seventy-year captivity in Babylon. Aramaic is one of the Semitic languages, an important group of languages known almost from the beginning of human history and including also Arabic, Hebrew, Ethiopic, and Akkadian (ancient Babylonian and Assyrian).

Thus, Targum Yonatan, cited by Rabbi Munk, paraphrases Genesis 35:23 and **Micah 4:8**, "***He spread his tent beyond Migdal Edar, the place where King Messiah will reveal Himself at the end of days.***" What are we to make of all of this information from the writings of the rabbis? First, we know that **Migdal Edar** was the watchtower that guarded the Temple flocks that were being raised to serve as sacrificial animals in the Temple. These were not just any flock and herd. **The shepherds who kept them were men who were specifically trained for this royal task.** "*They were educated in what an animal, that was to be sacrificed, had to be and it was their job to make sure that none of the animals were hurt, damaged, or blemished.*" **These**

lambs were apparently wrapped in “swaddling clothes” to protect them from injury and also were used to wrap the Lord Jesus.

Thus, with the establishment of Temple worship in Jerusalem, *the fields outside of Bethlehem became the place where a special group of shepherds raised the lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. Being themselves under special Rabbinical care, they would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean stable for a birthing place. **The Tower of the Flock was used for birthing ewes, and the surrounding fields were where these shepherds grazed their flocks.*** These shepherds customarily kept their flocks outdoors twenty-four hours a day every day of the year, *but brought the ewes in to deliver their lambs where they could be carefully cared for. It was to this place that Joseph took Mary. **It was in this special place at “Migdal Edar” that Christ was born!*** How do we know? *Micah 4:8 tells us so!:*

*And you, O tower of the flock,
hill of the daughter of Zion,
to you shall it come,
the former dominion shall come,
kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.*

Prophetically, “Migdal Edar” is the exact place in Bethlehem for Christ to be born. *Micah was God’s prophet* who was warning Israel of the coming captivity. *He used the authenticating prophecy of the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom (soon to occur when he foretold it) to serve as a reminder to Israel of God’s promised Kingdom.* God wanted them to know that even though they would be taken from their land because of their disobedience that He would restore them in time. **Micah 4:7** establishes the context of the passage and clearly is a Messianic prophecy of the coming of the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ will reign over Jerusalem forever. “. . . **LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even forever.**” In other words, God was assuring Israel that He would fulfill His promises to them of the Kingdom. In **Micah 4:8** the word is rendered “**tower of the flock**” (marg., “Edar”), *and is used as a designation of Bethlehem, which figuratively represents the royal line of David as sprung from Bethlehem.*

In this setting, **Micah (Micah 4:8) uses the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom as a pledge to guarantee (authenticating prophecy) of the birth of Christ at “Migdal Edar” at Bethlehem which is exactly where it took place! Micah prophesied that as surely as Assyrians would soon carry away Israel in the North, so the Messiah would come and establish His kingdom,** the “*first dominion, the kingdom shall come to Jerusalem.*” *The verse states that as surely as Babylon would carry away the tribe of Judah, in the South, into captivity, so the Messiah would arrive at the Tower of the Flock.* This prophecy was one other evidence that later proved that Jesus was the Messiah, but one that Israel ignored in rejecting Him as their Messiah.

Who were the shepherds who first received the news of the birth of the Messiah? **Luke 2:8-18** records that there were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their sheep by night. **Who then were these shepherds?** Without question these were shepherds who resided near Bethlehem. **They were none other but the shepherds from “Migdal Edar” who were well aware that the Targum hinted and many of the rabbis taught that Messiah might well be announced from “Migdal Edar” at Bethlehem. The angels only told the shepherds that they would find the Babe wrapped in “swaddling cloths and lying in a manger”.** **There was no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birth place because they already knew. These were the men who raised sacrificial lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go, as Luke 2 indicates, for the sign of “a manger” could only mean their manger at the tower of the flock!** You cannot explain the meaning or direction of the sign they were given or their response unless you have the right manger and the right shepherds!

Typically, “Migdal Edar” (the tower of the flock), *at Bethlehem is the perfect place for Christ to be born. He was born in the very birthplace where tens of thousands of lambs, which had been sacrificed to prefigure Him. God promised it, pictured it, and performed it at “Migdal Edar”.* *It all fits together, for that’s the place the place where sacrificial lambs were born!* Jesus was not born behind an inn, in a smelly stable where the donkeys of travelers and other animals were kept. **He was born in Bethlehem, at the birthing place of the sacrificial lambs that were offered in the Temple in Jerusalem which *Micah 4:8* calls the “tower of the flock.”**

John the Baptist in **John 1:29** proclaimed of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Jesus is presented in the Bible as being “in type” as a *sacrificial lamb*. It was not by chance but by choice that Christ identified His death with the time of the observance of the Passover. Peter spoke of our redemption as wrought by the “*precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Peter 1:19); and Paul told us that “*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Even the *first fulfilled type by which Christ is to be revealed in Heaven is as the Lamb (Revelation 5:6-13).*

The site has a long history as the place of the birth of Christ going back to Origen of Alexander in the 2nd Century who said that Jesus was born in a cave located in Bethlehem.

It is entirely possible that this cave or grotto was used to keep sheep and that this is where the **tower of the flock** was located, but it has not been proved. Others have purported the location of the **“tower of the flock”** in another location in the vicinity which has not been thoroughly excavated. The **tower of the flock** being a tower built of stones does not exist today and archaeology has not found its ruins. However, based on biblical record, **Micah 4:8**, and other evidences we must conclude that it was not the stable of an inn where donkeys and other animals were kept was not a tower.

God’s word tells us that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, of Judah in the city of David at a place called the **“tower of the flock”**.

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Galatians 4:4-5

by Cooper P Abrams III

<http://www.bible-truth.org/BirthPlaceofJesus.html#2>

The True Meaning of Hanukkah The “Conception” of the Light of the World

*“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name
Jesus (Yashua – I am Salvation, I am the Light of the World).” Luke 1:31*

