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Week #7

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Write a one-page essay on the festival of Hanukkah. Explain its role in Jewish history. Is it a Christian observance. Explain why or why not.

Hanukkah is one of the few Jewish holidays not mentioned in the Bible. Hanukkah, which means “dedication”, is the festival that commemorates the purification and rededication of the Temple following the defilement caused by the Greeks during their occupation of the Holy place. One story of how Hanukkah came into existence is contained in the books of Maccabees 1 and 2, which are not part of the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Bible. Under the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Jews were not allowed to celebrate the holiday of Sukkot at its proper time in early autumn. With the Maccabees victory of the vicious ruler, they decided that Sukkot should be celebrated once they rededicated the Temple, which they did on the 25th of the month of Kislev, in the year 168 B.C.E. Since Sukkot lasts eight days, this became the time frame adopted for Hanukkah. Upon the return of the Maccabees to the Temple to reclaim it from the

Greeks, they immediately relit the ner tamid, which burned constantly in the Temple. They also found a single jar of oil, which was sufficient for only one day. The messenger who was sent to secure additional oil took eight days to complete his mission, and miraculously, the single jar of oil continued to burn until his return. The rabbis of the Talmud attributed the eight days of Hanukkah to the miracle of this single jar of oil. About 250 years after these events, Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote a separate account of the origin of Hanukkah. He referred to the holiday as the festival of lights.

Christians are not bound by law or tradition to celebrate Hanukkah, even though Christian faith is tightly rooted in Hebraic tradition. If Christians learn nothing else about Hanukkah, they should learn that it is a holiday that commemorates a rejection of false worship and an affirmation of worship of the one true God. There is much about Hanukkah that Christians can learn from, appreciate, and claim as a piece of their own heritage. But we cannot do so without respecting Hanukkah for what it is for the Jewish people and for what it means to them.