

The Rabbi looks at...*The Kneset Menorah*



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the Temple in Jerusalem, so its exact design was part of the holy commandments God gave to Israel through Moses:

“Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out. . . . Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand—three on one side and three on the other. . . . Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (Exodus 25:31–32, 37–40).

The *menorah* is also a representation of the spirit and anointing of God. Zechariah, the prophet, was a messenger of God to Zerubbabel, the leader of the new Jewish nation at the time of the return to Zion from Babylon. Zechariah was shown a vision of the *menorah* and an angel said to him, “*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD*” (Zechariah 4:6).

Thus Zerubbabel was led by the Spirit of God, represented by the *menorah* with its seven lamps, for guidance and favor in building the nation of Israel. Since God is the source of all light and wisdom, the seven glowing branches of the *menorah* call our attention to God’s guidance and blessing of His people, Israel. Most appropriately, this great verse is inscribed on the *menorah* that stands outside the Knesset in Israel!



The Hanukkah Menorah

It is also fitting that we should discuss the importance of the *menorah* at this holiday season. A *menorah* plays a central role in the miraculous story of *Hanukkah*, the Jewish holiday that is familiar to many Christians because it falls so near to Christmas each year.

The miracle of *Hanukkah* begins in 165 BCE (before the Common Era) when the Macabees, a band of courageous Jews,

defeated a larger Greek-Syrian army that had invaded Israel. These enemies, led by the infamous king Antiochus Epiphanes, defiled the Temple and tried to forbid Jewish worship and forcibly impose Greek culture on the Jews.

But a small band of Jews led by Mattathias and his five sons, including Judah Macabee, organized a guerrilla army and revolted against their Greek oppressors. After three years of struggle, the Jewish fighters predominated and reestablished Jewish rule over their land.

Following the Macabees’ victory over these defilers, the Jews rededicated the Temple in Jerusalem and were able to worship God freely. The victory was considered to be a miracle because the Macabees overcame oppressors who were vastly superior in military strength.

Hanukkah also celebrates the miracle of the olive oil. Tradition says that as the Jews purified the Temple, they found only one flask of pure olive oil, enough to keep the *menorah* burning for just one day. But miraculously, the oil lasted eight days and nights until more pure oil was found.

The *menorah* that is used for the observance of *Hanukkah* contains nine branches rather than seven. The eight branches on the sides of the central stem are lit, one on each succeeding evening, during the eight days of *Hanukkah*.

It was in this same era (the second to first centuries BCE) that the *menorah* first served as a national symbol for the Jews. When the modern State of

Israel was founded in 1948, the *menorah* was chosen as the nation’s emblem, to symbolize the continuity and eternity of the Jewish people.

Kneset Menorah Design

The massive *menorah* that stands at the gates to Israel’s Knesset is *truly* unique. The subjects depicted on its reliefs are drawn from the Jewish tradition. The nation is represented as a single whole, which is made up of many links.

Israel’s spiritual contributions to the



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world, her influential personalities, and the fateful events that have befallen the Jewish people are depicted on the branches of the *menorah*. The scenes on the various branches are scattered in no particular chronological order. Every relief on a branch on the left side is complemented by one on a branch on the right side.



These are just a few of the many detailed sculpture reliefs in the arms of the Knesset Menorah that depict Israel's history and events. Left to right: Moses; The Ten Commandments; Hope of Salvation; David and Goliath; Aliyah; Pioneers of Israel.

I trust this brief summary of the Jewish *menorah* and its historical importance has been of interest and blessing to you. I continue to be grateful for the effort made by Christian friends like you to understand the beliefs and practices of your Jewish brothers and sisters to strengthen the bonds with Israel.

In these days of uncertainty and deep unrest for Israel, the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews* is playing a leading role as we help provide for the dire needs of her people through our various ministry outreach programs.



And I praise God for the way so many Christian supporters have stepped forward to help us provide essential care to Israel's neediest people. With God's help, we will continue to keep the lamp of Israel lit as a testament of God's power and a beacon of hope to the world. *Shalom!*

Israel's coat of arms incorporates olive branches along with the *menorah*.



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The Knesset Menorah

by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein



The Menorah's History

The friends who traveled with the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews* on our *Journey Home* tours to the Holy Land will recall our visit to the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Seeing the home of

Israel's government was one of many highlights on the tour.

The points of interest began even before we entered the parliament building itself. Standing in front of the Knesset gates is a massive *menorah*, the seven-branched candelabra that has long been a symbol of Judaism.

This *menorah* was designed by the Jewish English sculptor Benno Elkan, and was donated to the Knesset by the members of the British Parliament on April 15, 1956.

Importance of the Menorah

In order to understand why the *menorah* was chosen as the subject of Elkan's

work, and why the Knesset Menorah occupies such a central place at the home of Israel's national government, it will be helpful to review briefly the origin and the importance of the *menorah* in Jewish life and worship.

The *menorah*'s importance is evident in that its origin can be traced to the commands that God gave to Moses for the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

Israel had been liberated from her bondage in Egypt, and it was time to build a house of worship to the Lord.

God revealed the plan for the Tabernacle while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the *Torah*, the Law. The *menorah*'s purpose was to provide light in the Tabernacle and later in