



ASSIMILATE? Chanukah is for Christians, too!

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The days are getting shorter and our thoughts are turning ahead to the winter holidays to come. For those who keep the Biblical Feasts from Leviticus 23, we have just finished the Fall Feasts, our celebration of Messiah's Birth and the anticipation of His soon return as our Conquering King and Bridegroom for the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. This time of year, in my Lutheran background, we were gearing up for Thanksgiving and making preparations for the celebration of Christmas, which is when we understood to celebrate His birth.

Now after Thanksgiving, we anticipate Chanukah, also called the **Feast of Dedication** or the **Festival of Lights**. If they have any impression of Chanukah, most Christians seem to associate it with a "Jewish Christmas" and leave it at that—that is, if they ever even think of it, which my family and church did **not**. While not anti-Semitic in any conscious way, even singing "*O come, O come, Emmanuel ... and ransom captive Israel,*" we really didn't know much of the history of our God Who is the God of Israel and His chosen people. Truthfully, Chanukah doesn't have anything at all to do with Christmas! Instead, it is a part of the history of Israel and all those who are grafted in by faith to the family tree of the God of Israel. It was a time in which God's people were strong armed into being assimilated into the culture.

Spiritually speaking, Chanukah is a time of rededicating our whole selves to the service of our Elohim and His Messiah after especially difficult persecution. Whether a Jewish Believer or a Gentile, both are grafted in by faith and both recognize that life's trials and challenges tend to take the proverbial bloom off the rose of our joy in serving Him! Yet throughout history and in what is foretold to come, there are times of intense persecution that go far beyond our current trials, for Jews and Christians alike.

In a faith community that is interested in discipleship and maturity, Set Apart Ministries wants to be able to stand firm. Chanukah is an important time for us to reflect on ways we have lost our “first love” or have let our commitment to God slip. Doing the right thing even when it’s hard or unpopular demonstrates strength of character, which is especially necessary as we walk out our lives in the midst of people who want us to be like them.

Chanukah is an “extra-Biblical” celebration. It WAS kept by our Messiah Yeshua and His disciples (*John 10:22-23*). He DID refer to it in connection with persecution and what to expect as we near the time of His return: Matthew 24 and Mark 13 both record Messiah Yeshua’s reference to the prophet Daniel, warning of the “abomination of desolation” to come. In Daniel’s time his country’s leaders persecuted those who followed the God of Israel, but through steadfast, confident faith in Him, he and his comrades were a great testimony to the authority and power of our God.

This experience is thematically connected with the events that occurred later in Israel’s history during what is called the Intertestamental time of the Maccabees and ultimately at the end of the age. Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek ruler, persecuted those who honored the God of Israel. He wanted them to be assimilated into his empire. (*For “trekkie” fans, you will remember the Borg: **Assimilate! Resistance is Futile!***) He knew them by their behavior, putting those who circumcised their children, kept the dietary laws or honored the *Shabbat* to a public, humiliating, torturous death. It was easy to tell the difference between those who honored YHWH’s ways and those who walked in accordance with pagan gods.

Ultimately, one priestly family, the Maccabees, stood up and resisted, which led to years of guerilla warfare until the power of Antiochus was broken. **Resistance was NOT futile!** When they finally reclaimed the Temple, they found that the Greeks had defiled the building and altar. You can read the whole story in 1 and 2 Macabees in a Catholic Douay Bible or online. Though it is unclear if it is legend or fact, the story is that there was only enough sanctified oil left for one day of the eight-day cleansing process, but it burned for the entire time necessary to rededicate the altar.

This is the basis for there being another eight day festival, and for the modification of the God-given seven-branched menorah/candle stand to the nine-branched chanakiah which is often used during the feast. If you are not familiar with this, note that the menorah as described in Scripture has 7 branches with the central branch being known as the *Shumash*, or servant candle. We see this as a reference to Messiah Yeshua upon Whom all the Spirits rest (*Isaiah 11:1-2*) Since it isn’t clear whether or not this is fact or legend, and since YHWH has told us in the Word NOT to add or subtract from it, we are no longer comfortable here using the 9 branched chanakiah in a daily lighting ceremony. We DO remember the event and recall the

faith of our brothers and sisters, praying that we, too, will be strong in Messiah should such persecution come in our lifetime.

Someone once said: *"If Christianity were a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"* The main point of Christian teaching for centuries has been of the need for people to recognize their sin and to acknowledge, seek and receive forgiveness and eternal life through the salvific work of Yeshua in His death and resurrection. Those who have addressed this question...and there are many which you will see if you Google the phrase as I did...are most concerned about evidence of their salvation to convict them. Though we certainly agree that salvation is the primary concern, we also see a need for evidence of obedience to the whole Word of God which leads to being seen as "different," NOT assimilated! (*Lev. 20:7, 1 Peter 1: 15-16, John 3:22 KJV*) Our Messiah is coming back soon for a Bride who has made herself ready, with the white linen which is the righteous deeds of the saints and being without spot or blemish, which has to do with growing through coming more and more fully submitted to Him.

She is to be perfect and blameless which daunts many people. The Hebraic concept of "perfect" is different than our English understanding. The English position makes it sound unattainable, which has left many people thinking it is impossible to be "perfect" in this life so clearly there can be no performance standard. This has matched well with the idea that the "Torah is done away with" and that the faith was changed after Messiah's resurrection. Instead, the Hebraic concept behind "perfection" does mean to be complete and full, to have attained maturity. Rather than never making any mistakes, being perfect means that one is humbly in submission to our God and able to return to Him whenever a sin occurs.

Contrary to traditional teachings within the Christian Church, we see no indication that YHWH changed any of His teachings on righteousness, so we do believe that what was established first at Creation, then written on stone at Mount Sinai and later to be written on our hearts of flesh remains today as the standard for believers. While we are not under the penalty of the law of sin and death because of Messiah's atonement, we ARE still to be walking within the righteous teachings, Torah or Law. For years I have said that His grace is for when we fall short of His standard, not for when we aim short. If we reject the Torah I think we are aiming short.

The assimilation process that began already in the first century has led to the addition of many pagan practices into what is called Christianity. Constantine's efforts to incorporate Believers into his empire by making them less "different" than others has taken deep root. Christians today often believe that the Torah is no longer valid and thus see no need to observe the ways of our God. They are taught that "being saved" is the end goal, losing sight of the many instructions throughout all of Scripture that encourage us to mature and grow in our faith to become more like our Messiah; in short, the discipleship process. It is this discipleship process that is arduous and seen as too much trouble, if it is even acknowledged. As long as one

doesn't know too much, he can continue happily where he is. The blended practices of the church are not seen as a problem. We see that this assimilation is really quite desirable to many because they are then able to have their faith in God but also walk comfortably with others who practice similar holidays.

While we do not see walking out Torah as a salvation issue, because whosoever calls on the Name of the Messiah Yeshua will be saved (Romans 10:13, Acts 2:21; 1 Cor. 1:2) we do see it as an issue of obedience and heavenly rewards.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:19

We understand that those who are called "least" ARE still in heaven! But we see a connection then with the parable of the 10 virgins. The 5 wise ones who had their oil ready were those who took the time to learn and walk in the ways of their Husband to be. Those who did not have the oil ready, the 5 foolish ones, knew their Husband was coming but were content to stay where they were, betrothed but not necessarily learning His ways. Therefore, we ARE concerned that not only will those who do not stand firm on the Whole Word of God will most easily fall in a time of pressure to assimilate, so are we also concerned for their eternal circumstances. Those who aren't ready will be left outside when Messiah says He doesn't know them! This doesn't have to refer to "hell" but at least at somewhat of a distance, removed from His direct Lamb Light!

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Mathew 7:21-23

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

Mathew 7:24, 25

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Luke 6:46

When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are:

Luke 13:25

The Hebrew word here for “know not” refers to intimate knowledge and not just to knowing them by name for surely, He does recognize all of us! While those foolish virgins are saved, they will not be able to fully enter into relationship with Messiah but will be outside of the immediate Light of His Presence.

We see this zeal and love for our Elohim in the willingness of the Maccabees and fellow believers to be obedient and set apart even in the face of death rather than to be assimilated. Oh, that we will be like them in similar circumstances!

To be “**set apart**” is the functional definition of the Hebrew word “*kadosh*,” which is often translated as “**holy**.” Being “holy” is an abstract concept that comes from Greek, but the Hebrew understanding presents a concrete picture of “holy”: being set apart for a special purpose, **specifically different than others**. We still see keeping the Sabbath as being a sign of God’s covenant promise with us, of having circumcised hearts as well as in the flesh, (*Deut. 30:6, Romans 2:29 KJV*) and walking in the footsteps of our Messiah, through His cycle of annual Feasts, rather than those later added to the faith.

We have been warned that there would be an apostasy, a great falling away, in the days prior to Yeshua’s return. If possible, even the elect will be deceived. (***Assimilated?***) The church at Ephesus was convicted of having lost their first love. Many associate Laodicea with the church of today, neither even realizing they are poor, blind, and naked.

Chanukah is a remembrance of an intermediate fulfillment of apostasy and one that our Messiah indicated we could learn from. We know that Christians keep much of the Word of God, but also that they reject the covenant sign of Shabbat observance and the command to honor His set apart days and His dietary laws. This is understood to be evidence of the assimilation that has already occurred, preparing people for that final falling away.

Outside of specific faith practices there is also a serious problem. We know through various research reports and polls that it is often very difficult to distinguish church people from unchurched ones: perhaps the best-known statistic being that the divorce rate is now higher among believers than it is for those in “the world.”

In light of this, Chanukah is a reminder of God’s call to be set apart in deed as well as by word.

The remembrance of Chanukah provides an opportunity to consider anew:

- Have you left your first love?
- Will there be enough evidence to “convict” you of belonging to Him?
- Are you strong in Him to stand for what is right?

May we all rededicate ourselves to the Light of the World during this Festival of Light!