

Chag Sameach Chanukah 5771

Chag Sameach Chanukah everyone!

I would like to wish everyone the most wonderful Holiday time, and thank you for your kind and loving dedication to Torah Class.

If you would permit me, I'd like to offer a brief personal observation about Hanukkah and explain why it is that my family (and many within the Torah Class extended family) has transitioned from the traditional Christmas celebration of Messiah's birth to Hanukkah.

Yes, of course, Christ was NOT born on Hanukkah! But neither was He born on December 25th. Some claim that He was born near Sukkot, others (more recently) say Purim. In reality, none of us know and if it was terribly important to know with certainty it would have been given to us in Holy Scripture.

Christmas was always a lovely and loving time in my family. I have nothing but the fondest memories of the smell of a freshly cut fir tree, gurgling bubble lights (there's an oldie!), shiny strands of tinsel, and the occasional POP of a decorated glass ball hitting the floor and exploding into a thousand pieces. I remember leaving cookies and milk out for Santa, and not just a little time gazing up into the heavens hoping to get a glimpse of a sleigh rocketing across the sky, and hopefully soon to stop at my house.

So my reason for reconsidering Christmas was a terribly difficult one.

Sadly, every year of my life I have watched Christmas become more and more secular (goodness, pagans celebrate Christmas!). And then of course Believers who notice the same devolution leads to Pastors and other Christian leaders declaring: "Isn't it time we put the Christ back into Christmas"? But with a little study, it's not hard to discover that to go back to the "original intent" of Christmas is a dubious endeavor. It is well documented that the original intent was to find a way to get Christians to join in to the Saturnalia Festival of the Roman Empire, without suffering a meltdown of conscience! And it worked. All of the typical trappings of Saturnalia (Winter Solstice) were of course employed, but their meanings overlooked or incorporated as-is into Christmas. Wreaths, Yule logs, fir trees (a standard fertility symbol) and merry making now were meant to observe the occasion of the birth of Christ (at least for those Christians who wished to join in).

Centuries later in Europe Christmas had become a contentious issue (just as it has become so in our time). Those who took their faith seriously and wondered where in the Word of God such a celebration was ever envisioned, and would it involve celebrating using pagan symbols and using foods that would automatically exclude Jews (rather ironic considering the one who we are celebrating is a Jew), decided it was time to take a stand. But the Puritans were chastised by the Church for such a position, ostracized, and determined that for this and other reasons there was no choice but to move to a new land and try to re-establish the Religion of the Bible in the most pure way they could envision.

I think the Puritans had it right.

But what are we to do in 2010? What does a Believer who wishes to rediscover the Hebrew Roots of our faith, honor the commandments of God, and still commemorate the coming of Yeshua HaMashiach do? Do we do as the Puritans, eschew Christmas and participate in no celebration at all in regards to Messiah's birth?

As one who staunchly believes in continuing to observe the 7 Biblical Feasts, the truth is that Hanukkah is NOT a God-ordained holy day. Yet the Book of Luke clearly has Hanukkah squarely in Yeshua's life, and He is obviously observing it (and never belittled it).

I am well aware that the founding of Hanukkah is the remembrance of the Jewish rebels taking back the Holy Temple from the Syrians and cleansing the sanctuary of the pagan symbols Antiochus Epiphanes had installed in it. And, of course, of the relighting of Golden Menorah. But I also see that there is great symbolism in it that is most appropriate (and useful) in remembering the birth of our Savior.

I see the Lord victoriously winning back these defiled Temples that are our bodies, cleansing them, and placing Himself back inside.

I see the evil symbols that we harbored in our souls being replaced with God's will for our lives. I see that tall center lamp of the Menorah that is called the Shamash, or servant,

lamp that is being used to light the lamps that surround it. And this as a beautiful symbol of our Messiah who came as a servant of light glowing with the fire of purity, and only from Him are the lamps of our life lit with holy fire.

It is God's providential timing that Hanukkah always falls within days of Christmas (and sometimes overlapping). And Hanukkah tradition involves an attitude of joy, goodwill, and lighting lights and giving gifts. So for our gentile family, it was not a hard transition to put away the perhaps more secular and pagan symbols of Christmas that had distracted us from remembering the incomparable child who was born on that Silent Night in Judea, for the more appropriate and less secular symbols of Hanukkah that gave us a fresh new way to express our gratitude for Messiah.

1500 years ago, through the declaration of a Roman Emperor and a Pope, the holy was merged with the heathen and celebrated on December 25th. Believers and pagans celebrated side by side, but is that what the Lord God wants of us? What has light to do with darkness? I'd rather celebrate side-by-side with God's chosen people, who worship the God of Israel, even though most have yet to recognize their Messiah.

And what wonderful conversations I've had as Jews and gentiles have stopped and gawked at my front lawn (a few actually knocking on my door and asking what all this means) where we have a 9 foot tall Chanukkiah Menorah standing side-by-side with a Nativity scene!

God bless you all! May the Lord bestow His greatest mercies

upon you and your families, and bring you peace.

Tom and Becky Bradford