

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE



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The Christmas-Hanukkah Connection



OMAN

JESUS CELEBRATED HANUKKAH | MESSIAH IN PROPHECY

JESUS CELEBRATED HANUKKAH



THE DEITY OF JESUS

The Incarnation forms the bridge between Hanukkah and Christmas.

Shalom,

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah! I love this season of the year: lights, joy, lots of presents, and the ability to freely focus on our faith in Jesus—the reason for the season. When I say the reason for the season, I am including Hanukkah, not just Christmas!

There is an amazing connection between the two holidays. It is a bit hidden, but I am sure that, once you see it, you will be as thrilled about it as I am. We find this extraordinary link in John 10:30, where Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one.*”

We know from the gospel that the events in John chapter ten occurred during the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22–23), also called Hanukkah. The Hebrew word *hanukkah* means “dedication.” It is still the most often used name for this great holiday.

Jesus Celebrated Hanukkah!

Curiously, the only biblical mention of Hanukkah is in the New Testament. The origin of Hanukkah is in the intertestamental literature, particularly in the First and Second books of Maccabees, which many people consider significant records of Jewish history.

The story of Hanukkah serves as the stunning backdrop to the words of Jesus, particularly in John chapter ten and especially in verse thirty.

The saga begins with a well-known historical figure—Alexander the Great.

Upon his death in 323 BC, Alexander’s kingdom was divided among four of his generals. Eventually, the lands that included Israel came under the control of Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC. His name alone tells the story—the word *epiphanes* means “revealed” or “manifestation” and refers to the Greek gods who often took on human form. In this instance, Antiochus probably had Zeus in mind as he desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by sacrificing to Zeus (1 Maccabees 1:54; 2 Maccabees 6:2).

Antiochus demanded loyalty from the Jewish people to Greek culture and the Greek gods. He sent his emissaries with a statue of himself to

each village in Israel and made them bow down to it. According to Jewish tradition, the emissaries entered the town of Modi’in and demanded that the Jewish people bow down and worship the Greek gods and their representative, Antiochus.

But a family of Levitical priests was living there. Mattathias and his five sons refused to bow and began a revolt. Mattathias cried out, “Let everyone who has zeal for the Law and who stands by the covenant follow me!” (1 Maccabees 2:7). His call is one of the grand statements of loyalty and unity that every young Jewish child learns at his mother’s knee.

His family and followers fled to the Judean foothills and waged guerrilla warfare against the Syrian Greeks for the next three years, between 167–164 BC. When Mattathias died, Judah became the leader of the rebel forces.

During that time, Antiochus perpetrated one of the most heinous acts against the Jewish people recorded in all of history. After defeating Antiochus, the Maccabees discovered that he had sacrificed a pig on the altar in Jerusalem, one of the holiest sites in Israel. The Maccabees retook Jerusalem and wanted to cleanse the Temple. However, when they realized that a pig’s blood had defiled the altar, they took it apart and stacked the stones off to one side. In a very intriguing tradition recorded in 1 Maccabees, they left the rocks for someone more powerful to do the cleansing (1 Maccabees 4:46).



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They built a new altar, and according to Jewish tradition, only had one day of oil left in the Temple’s eternal light (the seven-branched menorah), although it took eight days to cure olive oil to keep the light shining. The miracle that took

place, according to tradition, was that the oil lasted for eight days, which allowed the Maccabees to prepare the oil needed and prevented them from being extinguished.

This legend provides the rationale for why we celebrate Hanukkah over eight days and why the symbol of light is so important. It reminds us that the *ner tamid*, the ceremonial light that shone in the Temple, must never be extinguished. Of course, the physical Temple was destroyed in AD 70 when the Romans conquered Jerusalem. Many Jewish people fled, and the Romans took the remaining Jewish people as captives. The

menorah and other holy implements were looted and brought to Rome by the armies of Titus. To celebrate the victory, the Romans engraved these historical events inside the Arch of Titus, which you can still see today in the Roman Forum, near the Roman Colosseum.

The Declaration of Divinity

Jesus made His declaration of divinity in John 10:30 amid the grand traditions observed during the magnificent Hanukkah celebrations at the Second Temple. These traditions are described in the Mishnah, a collection of rabbinic commentaries on the Bible.

The story of Hanukkah, which would have taken place fewer than two hundred years earlier, was well-known by the Jewish people at that time. The average Jewish person living in Israel would have known that Antiochus Epiphanes, also called “Antiochus the Madman,” had declared himself to be a god. The Jewish people were commanded not to have any other gods but the Lord and were forbidden to worship idols (Exodus 20:3–4).

Indeed, the order to bow down and worship a statue would have been especially repugnant to the Jewish people. To this day, Jewish resistance to incarnation is rooted in the Jewish rejection of idolatry and the belief that God cannot be corporeal.

Resisting the claim that Jesus is God in the flesh has been viewed as a testimony of Jewish loyalty throughout the centuries. The fact that any Jewish person can overcome thousands of years of Jewish faith and tradition and accept Yeshua’s deity is a miracle.

The Deity of the Messiah Is Rooted in the Hebrew Bible

I was raised in a modern Orthodox Jewish home and taught to reject this possibility out of hand, not only for Jesus but for anyone.

I remember when I was thinking about becoming a believer in Jesus and was confronted with the idea that Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh. After reading the Gospels and seeing the way Jesus acted and spoke, I concluded that if anybody was God in the flesh—it would be Him. I am so glad that the Lord worked in my heart and enabled me to accept this glorious and fundamental truth—that Jesus is God, fully divine and fully human.

If Jesus was just a very bright and articulate itinerant Jewish rabbi, then you and I are still walking in our sins and face judgment on the last day. But because He is God in the flesh, His death provides a perfect atoning sacrifice for our sins, allowing you and me to receive forgiveness of sins and stand in the presence of the Lord forever.

I came to realize that the Hebrew Scriptures actually did teach that God could appear in the flesh. Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6–7, and several other prophetic passages in the

Old Testament teach that God would take on flesh one day.

I understand why the Incarnation rubs Jewish people the wrong way. We were raised celebrating Hanukkah and taught that bowing to any corporeal God is idolatry.

I would agree that the Bible teaches against idolatry. Isaiah wrote with a combination of anger and humor, it seems, concerning how idolators worship:

Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, “Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire.” But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god.” (Isaiah 44:16–17)

Yet, we do not worship a God made of wood or stone but one who became a man while fully retaining His divine nature—a glorious mystery!

There is no stipulation against the true God taking on flesh. Without the Incarnation, Jesus would not fulfill the Messiah’s prophetic description and qualify as the Savior of the world. There is no other way to be the Messiah as no human being could accomplish what the Bible prophesied the Messiah would achieve. The deity of the Messiah is essential to His Messianic role in the story of redemption.

With this background, we understand that Jesus’ declaration that He and the Father are one was a declaration that He is God in the flesh. There is no other. Antiochus Epiphanes was a fraud; the statue was merely an image that was eventually destroyed.

Jesus is not an idol made of wood or stone, nor is He just a man or a great rabbi or miracle-worker. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies that teach us that the true Messiah and Savior of the world would be God in the flesh.

Dear friend, it is the Incarnation that forms the magnificent bridge between the holidays. I cannot tell you how happy I am that our Messiah Jesus chose Hanukkah to declare Himself God in the flesh. What could be more appropriate? What could be more Jewish?

I hope you enjoy the additional teaching on this great topic in this newsletter.

I also hope you are able to send a generous gift to Your Mission to the Jewish People during this Christmas season. It is a time for giving, and we are busy giving the gospel to His kinsman according to the flesh in the United States, Israel, and around the globe.

We are so grateful for your prayers and sacrificial support!

Blessings and Merry Christmas,



Mitch

Messiah in Prophecy



But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Micah 5:2

There were two Bethlehems, one in the south of Israel and one in the north. The adding of Ephrathah indicates that this is the Bethlehem that is approximately five miles south of Jerusalem and is the ancestral home of Ruth and King David (Ruth 1:1–2; 4:11; 1 Samuel 17:12).

Micah alluded to the passage in Genesis 49:10 where Jacob predicted that the ruler of Israel would come from the tribe of Judah: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” Judah was the fourth son of Jacob, not the first. So, God is apparently upsetting the usual order of inheritance by telling the Jewish people that their ultimate ruler would come from the descendants of the fourth son of Israel.

Genesis 49:10 and Micah 5:2 both make the point that this ruler would profoundly impact the Jewish people since he would rule the Jewish people forever (2 Samuel 7:13ff). Micah used two terms to indicate the duration of his reign. The first word “*mikedem*” may be translated as “from ancient times,” and the second term “*olam*” as “eternal,” which often describes the everlasting character of the God of Israel (Psalm 25:6; 90:2; Habakkuk 1:12). The combined use of these terms speaks of the eternity of the coming ruler which was fulfilled in the person of the Messiah Jesus, the eternal Son of David, spoken of in the New Testament.

The eternal nature of the promised ruler would reach forever into the past and extend forever in the future. This can only be describing the eternal God. Whoever this ruler is would be God in the flesh!

Matthew indicates that Jesus is the promised ruler. He is the son of David from the tribe of Judah who was born in the traditional Davidic homeland, and He will prove Himself to be the *eternal* Son of God and Messianic King through His perfect character and miracles. The “bread of life” would be born in Bethlehem (which means “house of bread”), as He would be both the bread of life and the ultimate sacrifice for our sin—born to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:6-7

In this passage, the prophet Isaiah used four different names for the coming Messiah, two of which indicate that this future son of David would be God in the flesh. Names in the Hebrew Bible often indicate character, and these names (especially when the two verses are taken as one unit) speak to the very nature of the Davidic king.

The opening phrase of this passage indicates that the child being spoken of would be an actual baby, born of a woman. However, this would not be just another

baby. This baby would be called by all four names that follow. What child, in that time or any other, could live up to the name Eternal Father, *avi-ad* in Hebrew, not to mention Mighty God, *El-Gibbor*? How could an earthly king be “Mighty God”? Literal readings of the Hebrew reveal that the titles describe the King Himself.

In Isaiah 10:21, the title “mighty God” is reserved for God alone. Isaiah 9:6–7 predicts that David’s descendant would be born of a woman, a descendant of David the king, yet fully God. A common theme running throughout the Old Testament (and the New Testament as well) is the expectation of an eternal reign of King David. In 2 Samuel, God made a covenant with King David. The Lord says: “*When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom*” (2 Samuel 7:12).

The Hebrew word translated in 2 Samuel 7:12 as “your descendant” is *zarakha*, which is from the root *zarah* meaning “seed” or “offspring.” Verse thirteen continues to describe the eternal kingdom of this descendant, and verse fourteen tells us that the Lord Himself says, “*I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me.*”

There were many Davidic kings in the generations following David’s death; however, only one person could fulfill this prophecy. He would have to be born as a human baby, live a human life, yet be the eternal God and everlasting Father at the same time. He would have to rule as King and establish an eternal peace as the Prince of Peace. The only individual ever to fit this description is Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, who was both God and man.



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. Isaiah 7:14

In Isaiah’s day, two enemies were conspiring against Judah: Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel (the northern kingdom). Isaiah comforted the terrified people of Judah by going to King Ahaz with his aptly

named son, *Shear-jashub* (“a remnant shall return”). God will bring a remnant back to the Land. The terrorists of that day, who were mere men, would be shattered.

Ahaz was challenged to believe this prophecy. In fact, he was to ask God for a confirming sign, something really spectacular—as “*deep as Sheol or high as heaven*” (Isaiah 7:11). When he refused, God gave him a sign, even though he had exasperated the Lord. What is that sign? It is a son named Immanuel, which means “God with us.” God’s people needed His very presence when surrounded by the enemy. It was true in Isaiah’s time, and it is true today.

The son will be born to a “virgin,” said the prophet. Regardless of how one interprets the Hebrew word “*almah*,” there would be nothing spectacular about her if she were impregnated normally. Something supernatural attended this birth.

What child in Isaiah’s day “fulfills” this prophecy? We do not know. Some say the “young maiden” was Isaiah’s wife, but she already had a child, Shear-jashub, and her second child was not named Immanuel but Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isaiah 8:3). Others say she was a virgin when the prophecy was given, but she then married and had a child whose early life is described by Isaiah to show that the Syria-Israel confederacy would be defeated very soon. Neither view is too remarkable, deep, or high.

It is clear that the supernatural, spectacular component of this birth finds its fulfillment in the Person of the Messiah, born of a virgin, through the work of the Holy Spirit, before Mary and Joseph “came together” (Matthew 1:18–25). Whatever the meaning to Ahaz, which is obscure at best, the meaning to all believers around the world is that the baby who was named Immanuel was supernaturally conceived.

The virgin conception is a different miracle than the cases where God caused a barren womb to open. Whether due to old age or another reason, the manner of conception was still the union of man and woman; the child born was fully human. Rather, the result of the virgin conception is that the child would be both fully human AND fully God. The Apostle Paul affirmed this unique circumstance when he referred to Yeshua as having “*existed in the form of God*,” and “*being found in appearance as a man*” (Philippians 2:6–9).

We have been given a sign. We have been given a Son. We know Him as Immanuel. God is always with us in the Messiah Yeshua who indwells every believer and who said, “*And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

The Good Shepherd Restores Us

In Psalm 23:2–3, David tells us four things that the Lord, his shepherd, does for him, and by way of application, for us as well. In the first half of verse two, he wrote, *“He makes me lie down in green pastures.”* The shepherd brings his sheep to a place of rest. It is important to notice that David wrote, *“He makes me lie down.”* There are times that we, His sheep, are unwilling to stop and rest, and it may be that He has to strongly encourage us to do so. Lately, things have changed dramatically due to the pandemic, and many of us have been forced to stop and evaluate what it is we are doing with our lives. During this time, perhaps we need to ask ourselves, *“Is this God’s way of making us stop and rest and recharge ourselves for the future (the way a sheep lies down in green pastures)?”*

In the second half of verse two, David wrote, *“He leads me beside quiet waters.”* When sheep are thirsty, they become restless and set out in search of water to satisfy their thirst. If not led to a good water supply, they will often drink from a polluted water hole where they pick up parasites and other diseases. They do this because they do not realize that there is better water elsewhere. Our Shepherd, the Lord, knows where the quiet, still, clean, pure water is found that alone can satisfy the thirst of His sheep. Additionally, the reason it has to be beside quiet waters is that sheep are afraid of water that is moving, so no matter how thirsty they are, if the water is flowing, they simply will not drink.

In verse three, David wrote, *“He restores my soul.”* David believed that even those under the care of the Great Shepherd could need restoration. He knew what it was like to be cast down and dejected. He knew what it was like to be in deep anguish and despair. Sheep, like humans, can be “cast” down when their center of gravity is off. For example, sheep will continually go to the same spot to lie down. As they get used to being in that place, they cause ruts in the ground, deeper and deeper until the ground starts sloping. As they lay down in these ruts and lean to one side, they slowly end up on their backs. Eventually, unable to help themselves, they start flailing away and kicking their feet, and they remain that way until the blood circulation to the legs stops and a loss of feeling takes place.

The only way they can be restored back to the flock is by the shepherd himself. He must go to the individual sheep, turn it over and massage the legs

until the circulation returns. It is only then that the “cast” sheep are able to come back to the flock fully restored.

Just like the sheep, when we return to the same thing repeatedly and become too comfortable in our ways, we find ourselves in a rut. We can become cast down, dejected, and often find ourselves in deep despair, unable to get out of the rut on our own. It takes the hand of our Good Shepherd, Yeshua, to pick us up and restore us back to His flock again.

In the last half of verse three, David wrote, *“He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”* Just like sheep who trust in a shepherd to restore and guide them, as we fully trust in the Lord unconditionally, He will lead us on the path we should go. Proverbs 3:5–6 says, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”* As believers in Jesus, our lives are to be a reflection of the One we follow. As we allow ourselves to be led, our Shepherd will make sure we are exactly where we are supposed to be, with green pastures, clean waters, and His righteousness—and we will be able to rest.



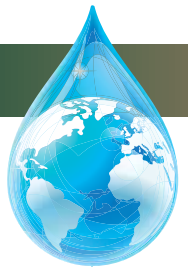
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Flock of sheep drinking water from a blue lagoon.



Dr. Rich Freeman, D. Min., serves as the vice president for Church Ministries and Conferences with Chosen People Ministries and lives in South Florida with his wife, Julia.

MINISTRY NEWS



Guests at Zula Lodge in New Zealand celebrate Christmas 2018.

YOUNG ISRAELI MEETS JESUS THROUGH CHRISTMAS PROPHECIES

Edan* was an Israeli traveler staying at the Homestead—one of Chosen People Ministries' Israeli backpacker accommodations in Dunedin, New Zealand—around Christmastime last year. As the Israelis and our staff celebrated the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), one of our staff members asked Edan if he would light the candles and say the prayers. “No!” he said emphatically. “I used to be religious, but I’ve given up!” So our staff member found another volunteer to light the candles, but he decided to follow up with Edan later in the evening. Edan was not raised religious, but he and his older brother chose to become religious because they were looking for God. “But all we found was religion!” Edan said, and so, he had given up.

Our staff member started asking Edan more questions, and the evening’s conversation began! As they continued, our staff member read to Edan the prophecies concerning the Messiah’s birth, including Isaiah 9:6, *“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace,”* and Isaiah 7:14, *“Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”*

“You mean it’s real?” was all Edan could say. When our staff member got up at 6:30 the next morning, he found Edan in the lounge talking on the phone with his brother in Israel and reading the New Testament to him! As we once again celebrate the Light of the World and the birth of the Messiah of Israel, may Edan’s story remind us to pray that Jesus, Almighty God, would be revealed in the hearts of the precious Israeli travelers who have heard this glorious good news!

JEWISH WOMAN EXPERIENCES NEW LIFE IN YESHUA

The light of Messiah is shining brightly in Nahariya, Israel, where we have an active ministry. Recently, two of our staff members baptized a new Jewish believer in Jesus. During the uncertain days of the coronavirus pandemic, they contacted Ziva,* a woman who had moved to their area as she was seeking fellowship and contact with believers in Jesus. During the next three months, our staff met with her twice weekly over Zoom congregation meetings and had private conversations with her over the phone. Ziva prayed to receive Jesus as her Messiah on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. Over the next month of lockdown and social distancing, she studied with our staff members, and they watched her grow in her faith. The next logical step in her spiritual growth was baptism, so at the end of October, on a warm afternoon, Ziva was baptized in the Mediterranean Sea! Ziva is fifty years old, has two adult children, and has had her share of hardships, so this baptism has marked a new beginning in her life! She has no idea what new adventures await her as a new Jewish believer in Jesus. Please pray for her spiritual growth and well-being as she begins her new life of faith.

RUSSIAN RADIO TALK SHOW REACHES JEWISH PEOPLE OF CHICAGO

In Chicago, a longtime staff member shares the gospel with the Jewish people through a radio program, and his ministry continues to bear fruit. After his last broadcast, he got a call from a woman who told him that she is Jewish and that the program had made a strong impression on her. She wants to learn more about God and join the online meetings. Our staff member also shares from time to time on the radio with a secular Jewish broadcaster who is a well-known doctor among Russian-speaking Chicagoans. The addition of her audience, which she has been developing for twenty years, allows even more people to hear our staff member! We pray that many Jewish people come to know Messiah through this show and that the doctor herself, who listens very carefully to the programs and asks interesting questions, will likewise come to know Yeshua. This radio program is also recorded on Facebook, which means that many more people can listen to the messages. Our staff member said, “To be honest, I could not even dream of such an opportunity!”

*Name changed.



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For answers to your questions regarding year-end giving options, contact Cindy Forbes at 212-223-2252, ext. 1208 or cforbes@chosenpeople.com today!



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