

Who Really Are Abraham's Heirs?

The Torah portion (in Judaism there is a yearly calendar for reading the Torah) from a few weeks ago focused on Isaac. The Lord speaks to him in Genesis 26:

“For I will give to you and all your descendants all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of the heavens and will give your descendants all these lands. By your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” (Gen. 26:3b-5).

In this promise to Isaac, the Lord affirms, that the promise to Abraham of the physical land of Israel, is meant for Isaac's physical descendants, whom he declares will be as numerous as the stars of the sky, adding that through them, all nations on earth will be blessed.

In last week's Torah reading, God affirms these promises to natural Israel to Jacob, Abraham's grandson:

“The Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie, to you will I give it and to your descendants. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and in your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 28:13-14).

This is very significant for several reasons:

One man can't be as many as the stars in the sky. Those who embrace Fulfillment Theology (a more polite version of Replacement Theology) claim that *all* the promises to Abraham

were fulfilled in the person of Yeshua on the cross. In other words, according to one of their leading theologians, the land promises are no longer to the Jews, but to all believers. And they no longer refer to Israel, but the whole world.

There is no argument that Abraham has spiritual children—believers in the Messiah from all nations—and that the most precious fulfillment of Abrahamic promise is in Yeshua and His followers. But the promises we see here are to Abraham's physical son and grandson and to his physical seed—which would be like the stars and spread out through the east, north and south, meaning it was not merely to one person, Yeshua, as Fulfillment theologians claim—and it clearly refers to the physical land of Israel and multiple recipients.

To Abraham, the Lord promises to make his seed “as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.”

The DNA is in—Jews are Jews. These passages also confirm that Israel will remain a significant nation in the future. Why is this important? Because there are many who claim that present day Israelis are not really Jews. The theory is that a massive group of Europeans called Khazars converted to Judaism.

The story is that the ruling class of the Khazars, who formed Southern Russia empire in the eighth century, converted to Judaism. According to this myth, the entire community of Khazars converted and their descendants now make up what we know as Ashkenazi or European Jewry—like me.

The first problem here is that only about half of Israelis are European Jews. The other half come from all over the Middle East and Africa. What's more is that scientists have now proved through DNA tests that 75 percent of all European Jewish men come from the Middle East—*not* southern Russia. And biblically, Jews must still be in Jerusalem when Yeshua returns (Zech. 12:10, 14:1-4).

How can they be in Israel as Zechariah says, if the land of Israel is not promised to them and those possessing today are imposters? In Matthew 23:39, Yeshua says that the Jews will see Him again when they confess, "Blessed is He (Yeshua) that comes in the name of the Lord." How can that happen if they don't exist?

In addition to the dozens of promises where God says He will bring the Jews back into their own land (Ez. 36:24ff, Jer. 30) he affirms with Isaac the physical land of Israel as a gift from God: "To you and your descendants I will give all these lands."

So the idea that the supernatural return of Jews from all over the world is really just an elaborate hoax or amazing coincidence in which God had no hand is absurd. It would have to mean that there is another identifiable Jewish group out there that has yet to claim the land—not possible.

If only the boycotters were to truly boycott. And lastly, the Replacement/Fulfillment camp claims that the Jewish people were a blessing to the world by bringing forth the Messiah and therefore, I guess, have fulfilled their purpose and are no longer needed. Another reason, as some claim, is because of Jewish rejection of Jesus (which wasn't as widespread as some think). God has cursed Israel and cast them aside. It is true that the most powerful fulfillment of the prophecy to be a blessing to the nations was through Yeshua, however God continues to use Israel to bless the world in so many other ways.

In fact, Israel is the leading nation in the world (per capita) providing technological breakthrough in communications and medicine. Fifteen percent of all Nobel Peace Prize winners were Jewish, despite making up only .03 percent of the world's population. After decades of worrying yearly if we would have enough rainfall, Israel now desalinates seawater and many of our cities use this for drinking water.

If all of those calling for a boycott against Israel were to truly stop using products that Israel profits from they would need to get rid of their cellphones, stop using instant messaging and should go homeopathic, because it is unlikely that receiving medical attention would be completely *Judenfrei*—free from Jewish influence.

You see, Paul said that that God's calling on ethnic Israel is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29), and that was *after* Yeshua died and rose from the dead. Yet Fulfillment Theology says that all the promises to Abraham were fulfilled in full on the cross. Clearly Paul did not agree with this view as he affirms several times in Romans 9-11 of God's continued love and calling on natural Israel. He even predicts in Romans 11 that the future church would seek to erase Israel's from God's plan. And that has happened.

No Place for Pride

Often when I write on this topic some wrongly assume that I am claiming Jewish superiority. God forbid. This is not at all about Jews being better than those from the nations—called Abraham and His descendants *because* of His desire to reach the nations. This is about God's faithfulness. God's hand on Israel is not because of Jewish obedience or righteousness, but for God's glory.

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For the original article, visit [.](#)

Here's Some HELP for Resisting an Old Temptation

Snowflake-shaped sugar cookies, coal-black chocolate cupcakes, Rudolphins made of Tootsie Rolls and Reese's—halls everywhere seemed to be decked with more havoc-wreaking holiday treats than holly!

As a CrossFit coach and health writer, I hear a common refrain throughout this festive—or should I say *feastive*—Christmas season, one that isn't part of a classic carol or heartwarming hymn. It goes like this:

"I can't stop overeating!"

The temptation to overeat has been around long before gingerbread and figgy pudding. (And if you know what the latter is, please fill me in.) We can look back through the pages of history for evidence of this. Take, for example, Eli, the high priest of Shiloh and judge over Israel 900 years before Christ's birth. First Samuel 4:18 seems to attribute his ample weight to the sudden cause of his death:

"When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years" (NASB).

Henry VIII, who reigned in England from 1509 to 1547, is also remembered as a corpulent fellow. His waist measurement was recorded as 54 inches. He was so large, in fact, that he relied on mechanical inventions to help him move around. He died at the age of 55.

On this side of the pond during the 1920s, President William Howard Taft was known to have obstructive sleep apnea due to his 350 pounds. He also had severe hypertension with a systolic blood pressure of 210. Within a year of leaving the presidency, however, he shed approximately 80 pounds, which caused his systolic blood pressure to drop significantly. Without a doubt, this drastic weight loss helped extend his life. With renewed vim and vigor, his love for the outdoors was restored, leading him explore and enjoy the final frontier of Alaska.

According to research conducted by the Barna Group, 55 percent of Americans today struggle with the temptation to overeat. And while I can't say for certain how that percentage rises between Thanksgiving and the New Year, I'm sure it does so like a tidal wave! In this article, I'm going to offer four tips, some "HELP," for resisting the age-old temptation to eat one more slice of ham or apple pie than you know you should.

H—Have a plan. "If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it" (Prov. 25:16, ESV).

I often equate Christmas parties and heavily decked out homes (mostly homes of grandparents who spoil their grandkids too much!) with Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory: filled from floor to ceiling with all things edible and utterly irresistible. And just like Mr. Wonka's wondrous candy land, negative repercussions occur if we don't rein ourselves in from the taffy trees and chocolate rivers.

Before you walk into your next Wonka-like environment, form an offensive battle plan so that you're prepared to face those innocent, adorable, delectable-looking foes awaiting you. The first thing to decide is whether or not you're going to indulge in dessert. If the answer is no, then resolve to politely decline when your host or hostess offers you a tasty truffle or gooey fresh-baked brownie. (See tip No. 4.)

If the answer is yes, then tell yourself you'll only have a small plate occupied by your must-haves and that you won't go back for seconds. Researchers at Cornell University concluded that when people are given smaller portions of snack foods, including chocolate chips, apple pie and potato chips, they feel just as satisfied as individuals given larger servings. And if you have the choice, make it a white plate. Spanish researchers found that participants who ate desserts from white plates found their sweets more satisfying. The researchers reasoned that white complements the colors of vibrant foods, making them seem even easier to enjoy and savor.

No matter the size or color of your plate, the key to victory in Wonka factories is self-control. Like Solomon wrote, "Eat only enough for you." The emotional weight of guilt and the physical weight of added pounds during the holidays simply aren't worth a second trip through the dessert buffet.

E-Enlist encouragers. "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17, ESV).

According to the Barna Group, most of the ways people say they resist temptation are fairly individualistic; only 4 percent of people say they talk to or call someone else when they are tempted and a mere one percent say they seek the company of others or attend a meeting. Many times, relying on our own willpower just isn't enough when it comes to resisting temptation.

Whether you've set a weight-loss or maintenance goal for yourself or perhaps struggle with food addiction and binge eating, now is the time to ask close friends and family members to keep you accountable. Keep a daily food journal and email or text it to a friend. Before an event, let your friend know what your game plan is, then ask him or her to check in with you to ensure you stuck to it. When you feel tempted to eat the left-over cookies from last night's Christmas party,

call another enlisted encourager to go for a stroll with you, hit the gym, or grab coffee instead.

It's much more difficult to deviate from your plan when someone who cares about your success as much or more than you do is cheering you on.

L-Lean on the Lord. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9, ESV).

As I mentioned earlier, the temptation to overeat is a major weakness for 55 percent of Americans. With 160,000 fast food restaurants serving 50 million customers daily throughout the nation, that fact is hardly astonishing. Research from the Barna Group shows that most Americans (59 percent) don't do anything specific to avoid the tempting situation, whether it's overeating or viewing pornography. However, practicing Protestants and practicing Catholics stand in contrast to this trend. A majority of both groups indicate they attempt to stand up to temptation. The most common way they claim to do so is by praying and asking God for strength.

Jesus Christ invited His followers to come to Him when we feel weary and heavy-laden. First Peter 5:7 tells us to cast all our anxieties upon God because He cares for us. It doesn't matter how trivial or insignificant our weaknesses and worries seem. There is not a minimum weight requirement that needs to be met before Jesus can carry our burden. He longs to help us have victory over all things, including the food we eat.

James 4:2 says we don't have what we want because we don't ask God for it. Perhaps what's missing in your battle plan is a meeting with your Commanding Officer. Ask Him to grant you the weapons, fortitude and back-up needed to overcome any of life's temptations, including tiny ones dipped in chocolate or

topped with sprinkles. You will be amazed at how faithfully He provides a way out.

“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Cor. 10:13, ESV).

P—Pass it up for the glory of God. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31, ESV).

This verse says it all. There is no gray area when it comes to glorifying God. Either it does or it doesn't. Therefore, every time you stick to one serving of “honey,” as Solomon wrote, you're glorifying God. Every time you pray and ask the Lord to give you the strength to stick to your plan, your success pleases and exalts Him. Knowing that even these seemingly minor acts of obedience magnify our Maker can make temptation easier to resist.

However, when you've made a firm decision to lose weight or even alter your eating habits to become a bit healthier, you may find it tough to say no to your grandma's famous broccoli and cheddar casserole or your mother-in-law's lasagna. Sometimes it seems that those closest to us can be the most unhelpful. “Have another helping. I insist!” “I made plenty! Take these left-overs home with you!”

I read this quote recently: “‘No’ is a complete sentence. It does not require justification or explanation.” Other than perhaps adding a “thank you” to the end of that sentence, I wouldn't change a thing about that statement. Often when we try to explain why we don't want another brownie or heaping helping of lasagna, we open the door for arguments, even discouragement if the person pressuring us finds our goals silly or our efforts futile.

Politely saying “No, thank you” is all you need to say to keep

the peace and banish the temptation.

Stay fit, stay faithful.

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For the original article, visit [creationhouse.com](#).

Top 6 New Christmas Songs of 2014

'Tis the season to sing of the King who came to Earth as a humble babe. To help us get in the festive and God-glorifying spirit, many of our favorite Christian music artists have released Christmas albums and singles.

This year's collection of new songs offers a few standouts that will warm your heart and bless your soul. From Chris August's upbeat holiday fare to Aaron Shust's moving melody, each song on this list is worth a listen.

Here's our list of the top six new Christmas songs of 2014 (counting down to No. 1):

6. "I Want Christmas Back" – Everfound, from: *Resolution* (Christmas EP)

5. "Tell Me What You Want for Christmas" – Chris August, from: *The Christmas EP*

4. "A Christmas to Believe In" – Matthew West, *2014 Christmas

single

3. **“Tell Me the Story of Jesus – Kim Walker-Smith**, from: *When Christmas Comes*

2. **“Sanctuary” – Aaron Shust**, from: *Unto Us*

1. **“Almost There” – Michael W. Smith** (ft. Amy Grant), from: *Michael W. Smith & Friends: The Spirit Of Christmas*

Lifetime’s ‘Designing Spaces’ to Feature Family Christian Stores

Award-winning home improvement show *Designing Spaces* will feature Family Christian Stores in a holiday edition Thursday, Dec. 25, at 7:30 a.m. (ET/PT) on Lifetime Television. The special is part of the “Getting Ready for the Season” programming line-up.

Rochelle Traub from Family Christian will show viewers a wide array of the chain’s gift selections, including nativity sets, Christmas-themed books and music, and will share how the nonprofit retailer gives back to charities.

“We’re thrilled to welcome back Family Christian to our ‘Designing Spaces–Holiday’ edition,” said Scott Moss, director of programming of *Designing Spaces*. “We appreciate their mission to help others in need that is supported by the great faith-inspired gifts they offer.”

Designing Spaces () is now entering its 11th year on air.

“We value and appreciate the solutions *Designing Spaces* offers its viewers,” said Amy Garrigan, vice president creative & brand for Family Christian.

Hillsong United Celebrates RIAA Platinum Status for ‘Oceans’

Hillsong UNITED continues to make an impact with their No. 1 single “Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)” as the song has received RIAA Platinum status. Hillsong was included also in 10 of Billboard’s End of Year charts topping five of the charts: Top Christian Artists, Hot Christian Songs, Hot Christian Songs Artists, Christian Airplay Artists and Christian Digital Songs. As the group wraps up an incredible 2014 with awards and sales recognition, UNITED looks forward to 2015 as they will release new music with a full-length studio album.

In addition in April 2015, Warner Bros. and Alcon Entertainment will release nationwide the film, *Let Hope Arise – the Hillsong Movie*.

“The last couple of years have been an expectation-busting-juggernaut of pure grace and madness,” Hillsong Creative Director and Worship Leader Joel Houston said. “It’s been beyond what any of us could have thought, and we’ve chosen to not take a moment of it for granted. The last 12 months have been spent throwing ourselves into this next project and season like it’s all we’ve got, and we’re simply trusting that the same mysterious breathe that got us this far will take us deeper all over again.”

Since the release of UNITED's 2013 album "Zion," which was their most successful and fastest selling album to date, the band has continued to grow their international reach. Zion produced UNITED's No. 1 hit, the Platinum-selling and multiple-Dove winning single, "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)."

This was the group's first No.1 radio single, cracking the longest reign on Billboard's airplay/sales/streaming-based Hot Christian Songs chart. The lyric video for "Oceans" has a staggering 22.4 million views.

Most recently, UNITED was award five GMA Dove Awards including the coveted Artist of the Year and Song of the Year for "Oceans." They were also nominated for their first American Music Award earlier this year.

Interactive B&H Bible Storybook Tops CBA List

B&H Kids' *The Big Picture Interactive Storybook Bible* is No. 1 on the CBA best-sellers list for December in the Children's category. It also landed at No. 22 on the overall book list.

The storybook Bible's complementary versions in the Big Picture Interactive Bible brand—*Bible Stories for Toddlers New Testament*, *Bible Stories for Toddlers Old Testament* and *Bible Stories in 5 Minutes*—were Nos. 2, 4 and 6, respectively, on the list this month. *The Big Picture Interactive Bible* also ranked second on the Children's Bible list.

In addition, B&H Kids landed two of the top five Young Adult titles for December as recognized on the list: *Teen to Teen Devotions for Girls* and *Teen to Teen Devotions for Boys*.

The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook features 146 stories and full-color illustrations that interact with a newly upgraded free Augmented Reality app that is available for download from the Apple or Android app stores. When scanned with the app, each image digitally “pops up” and an audio narration about the story is played. Narrations by Jenna Lucado pull readers in to the story as illustrations jump off the page. Eighteen QR codes are also included in the book and connect readers to Bible story videos.

“We are humbled that a year after we released this ambitious project, we are seeing children’s ministers and parents use these resources to impact lives of so many children,” B&H’s Kids Publisher Dan Lynch said. “This book was the first to use this amount of technology with over 160 interactive elements—we love being on the cutting edge of technology. We continue to look for ways to engage this ‘connected’ generation of kids with the gospel message.”

The Big Picture Interactive Bible Storybook is also a major companion to LifeWay’s *The Gospel Project for Kids* curriculum and features “Christ Connections” that connect the story of Christ from Genesis to Revelation. Each story also features a “Big Picture Question” and “Big Picture Answer” for additional discussion.

It Didn’t Look Like Christmas

It was 1957, Christmastime. Elvis was my favorite singer. And Christmas was my favorite holiday—except for this year. Daddy’s job with the Santa Fe railroad had moved our family—Daddy, Mother, my two younger sisters and me—from our small, friendly town in Kansas to a strange, dusty town in the

southwestern desert.

Instead of celebrating a white Christmas with the typical warm and fuzzy sights, sounds and smells I had known each year at Grandma and Grandpa's big festively decorated house, I was thrown into a strange brown land with neighborhoods of small row houses near the train tracks and neighbors who spoke little English.

There were other things I missed—Christmas Eve and hearing Grandpa recite the passage of Luke 2:7: "And she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in strips of cloth, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Adding salt to the wound of "Christmas not looking at all like Christmas" was the missing tree. Daddy had called to say that he would be arriving home late and wasn't sure he would be able to get a tree.

In the late afternoon of Christmas Eve, Mother was at the kitchen sink, halfheartedly chopping dates for her annual Christmas pudding, when there was a loud knock at the door. It was our neighbor who introduced herself as Señora Sanchez. She asked if we had any *masa*. "Or—how you say—corn mixture?"

"No, we have no *mesa*," Mother answered. "I mean, no *masa*—but we *do* have an *automobilo*!"

Cocking her head with a puzzled look, Señora Sanchez asked, "Is it you mean *car*?"

Within minutes, Mother and I were driving Señora Sanchez in our *car/automobilo* to help her find more ingredients for the *masa* that was part of her family's traditional Christmas Eve meal—tamales.

That year, I was introduced to a new vision of Christmas. Absent were the snow and familiar aromas of baked pies and

cookies and the presence of Grandpa and Grandma, aunts, uncles and cousins. In their place were Señora and Señor Sanchez and eight kids—my age and younger—who, along with their love and kindness, shared their delicious dinner of corn tamales and, for dessert, heavenly sweet caramelized tamales.

Daddy came home without a tree, but it didn't seem to matter. That night, as the moon rose above the Arizona desert, two railroad families, sitting only a few feet away from the tracks, shared a Christmas unlike any they had ever experienced. It was a celebration of Mexican tamales blended with English date pudding and the off-key sounds of broken English and Spanish as two families joyfully sang Christmas carols under the stars.

A curious thing happened to me on that Christmas. I realized that the celebration of the birth of the babe in the manger was not limited to location, familiar environments or cultures. The babe was God's "indescribable gift" (see 2 Cor. 9:15) for the redemption of all mankind—a gift of unconditional love for any of us to receive as Savior (see John 3:16).

From our house to yours, be comforted this Christmas. Regardless of where you are, what your background or what you eat (or don't eat), the Spirit of the Lord is with you, inviting you to celebrate His birth.

Merry Christmas and Feliz Navidad!

Prayer Power for the Week of December 22

Pray that God will use you to share His love during this Christmas season and help you to be sensitive to those who might not be spending a picture-perfect Christmas. Pray for those in shelters and hospitals to experience His loving, healing presence. Pray for military families separated from each other this Christmas, and for the persecuted church around the world. Continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem,

the protection of our own leaders and nation, revival here and around the world and for His kingdom to spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thank Him for His “indescribable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15; John 3:16; Is. 9:6).

How to Make Christmas Memories With Your Kids

How are those Christmas plans coming, dad? You have a couple weeks left, and as a leader for your family, you need to make the most of the holidays.

So what does this mean for you as a dad? Is it the time to start stressing about money or run everyone ragged with activities? Or maybe just drift through the holidays like a zombie? I don't want to add more stress, but I know many men are notorious for *not* being good planners when it comes to social activities, and the holidays are all about that.

Really, a lot of your plans should be well underway, but would you allow me to add a few more ideas? (You can even have some of these throughout the end of the year)

One great idea: in addition to buying *gifts* for your family members—or maybe *instead* of that—think in terms of giving a special experience. Like a sleigh ride or hike in the woods. A holiday concert by a well-known singer or a concert in your own living room. Maybe ask your kids for ideas. Do something that makes a lifelong memory.

Related to that, this is a good time for a daddy-daughter date. Get dressed up and do something special with your little girl—even if she isn't so little anymore.

Same with your sons. You probably don't have to dress up, but figure out something silly or fun to do together. Think active and outdoors, and chances are your boys will love it.

Also, make arrangements to bless someone else by being generous with your money, time and energy. Do it as a family. And this can definitely be one that stretches into the New Year.

Here's one for single dads in the area of planning: Double-check the custody schedule. Be well aware of your dates and times to be with the kids, so it doesn't catch you off guard. You have the ability to decrease the stress and last-minute drama, if you respectfully and cordially confirm all the details with your children's mom well in advance.

Finally, stop and consider: Is your family's holiday celebration reinforcing your most important values? In the midst of all the activity, focus on whatever you treasure most about the season, and make sure that doesn't get lost in the shuffle—your faith, family traditions and so on.

The holiday season will come and go. How will you make it memorable? Again, we have to be intentional about this. If you just let things happen, too often they don't.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Watch a classic holiday movie with popcorn, hot chocolate or whatever the kids enjoy.
- Have a family board game night (And remember that the biggest "prize" is time with your kids).
- Are any of your kids not with you for the holidays? Mail them gifts and other necessary items, and then "celebrate together" via Skype.

What ideas would you add? How do you make holiday memories with your kids? Please let us know in the comments below.

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization seeking to improve the lives of children and establish a positive fathering and family legacy that will impact future generations by inspiring and equipping fathers and father figures to be actively engaged in the life of every child.

For the original article, visit [.](#)

Here's Why Christians Should Celebrate Hanukkah

A common understanding of the December holiday season is that Christmas is the holiday for Christians and Hanukkah is the holiday for Jews.

Few Christians relate to Hanukkah since it is not one of the biblical feasts of Israel. But, the fact that Jesus celebrated Hanukkah should make Christians curious enough to investigate the possible importance of the festival to their faith.

It is no exaggeration to say that had it not been for Hanukkah, there could have very well not been a Christmas. Hanukkah prepared the way for the birth and ministry of Jesus. Therefore, Christians may want to not only wish the Jewish community a Happy Hanukkah, but also celebrate it themselves!

God Gives the Victory

The story of Hanukkah begins during the period between the Old and New Testaments, when Antiochus IV Epiphanes became the ruler of the Greek empire. While the Hellenization of the area already threatened the survival of the Jewish religion,

Antiochus seemed obsessed with ensuring the demise of the Jewish faith and thereby, the future of the Jewish people.

He not only murdered the High Priest, Onias III, but he slaughtered 40,000 inhabitants of Jerusalem. All sacrifices, the service of the Temple, and the observance of the Sabbath and of feast days were prohibited. The Temple was dedicated to Zeus, the Holy Scriptures were destroyed, and the Jews were forced to take part in heathen rites.

In his attempt to destroy every trace of the Jewish religion, the final assault was the slaughter of a pig on the sacrificial altar of the Temple, thereby desecrating it. The Maccabean family, from the priestly line of Aaron, led a revolt against this evil ruler and miraculously experienced victory after victory over the mighty Greek forces, until at last the Temple could be purified and its services restored.

This rededication of the Temple to the God of Israel is celebrated during Hanukkah, originally known as the Festival of Dedication. Hanukkah is a Hebrew word derived from the word "to dedicate."

The defeat of the Greek forces by this small band of Jewish zealots was nothing short of a miracle. God had once again demonstrated His steadfast love and faithfulness to His people by saving them from the threat of extinction. This in itself is cause enough for celebration.

The story goes on to claim that when the Jews re-entered the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, there was only enough of the special oil to light the Temple menorah and keep it burning for one day. But the oil miraculously burned for eight days while more was being brought from Galilee—an eight-day trip there and back.

The story of the miracle oil is nowhere found in the inter-Testamental writings, therefore it is largely believed to be a legend, however, the very first Hanukkah was indeed celebrated

for eight days, and the festival was called the festival of lights as early as the first century. Perhaps archeology will one day uncover a clue to the story's authenticity.

A Turning Point in History

The events leading up to the Maccabean revolt were prophesied in vivid detail in the Old Testament book of Daniel. In chapter 8, the Angel Gabriel described to the prophet Daniel the coming abomination of a king who would put a stop to sacrifices and desecrate the sanctuary.

The fact that it was prophesied some 250 years before it occurred indicates how serious the threat was to the Jewish people. The Maccabean revolt was a turning point in history that saved the Jewish people and their religion from the threat of extinction.

This story, and the various archeological finds that support it, provide further proof as to the existence of the Temple in Jerusalem. So, while Israel's modern-day enemies attempt to rewrite history and distort fact by denying the Temple ever existed in Jerusalem, the celebration of the Hanukkah story takes on new meaning.

Jesus and Hanukkah

In John's Gospel, chapter 10, Jesus entered the Temple during the Feast of Dedication. He would have surely known the story behind the Feast and that the Temple He stood in would not have been in operation without it.

Christians today would also do well to remember the faithfulness of God to the Jews on that first Hanukkah. Had Antiochus succeeded to annihilate the nation of Israel, there would have been no Jewish woman named Mary to become the mother of Jesus Christ.

There would have also been no Temple for the beginning of the

Christmas story. Luke 1 starts the nativity story in the Temple with an angel announcing to the priest Zechariah that his wife would give birth to John the Baptist. It is no coincidence that God chose to begin the Christmas story in the Temple, the heart of Jewish life and faith at the time.

Without Hanukkah, the celebration of Christ's birth could very well have not been possible. So as you wish friends and family Merry Christmas this year, you might also like to wish them Happy Hanukkah!

Susan Michael is the U.S. Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem .

9 Ways to Understand What Your Wife Is Really Saying

Yes, my wife and I both speak English. But after 25 years of marriage, I've determined that Susan (and most other women) have a double secret female code that they completely understand and we men don't.

I've determined that it's time to decode it. In order to do so, I've confidentially spoken with several female informants who have helped me to decipher just some of their secret code. Those informants have asked to remain anonymous out of fear that other wives will shun them for disclosing what has remained a mystery for all these years.

So, for all the men out there who thought it was impossible to understand women, here is a key for decoding wife's words:

1. "I'm fine" means **"I'm not fine, but I'm not ready to talk**

about it." This is a classic line that most husbands have heard. The instant you hear it, you know that everything is certainly *not* fine. And even though you may want to work it out right away, sometimes it's best to just give her some time and space. Be sure to let your wife know that you're sorry if you hurt her feelings in some way and that you're ready to talk when she is.

2. "Didn't you go out with your friends last weekend?" means **"I know for a fact that you went out with your buddies last Friday night, and I want to spend time with you this weekend."** Your wife is very aware of how you spend your time. And where you invest your time is one important sign of what you value. She wants to be valued and cherished. So sure, spend time with your friends, but let her know she's always No. 1.

3. "How was your day?" means **"I want to reconnect with you."** Most couples don't spend all day, every day together. There are jobs and kids and things to be taken care of. So when your wife asks about your day when you get home, this is her way of trying to reconnect after being in different worlds. Instead of a one-word answer, give her a story or two that will make her feel close to you again.

4. "What are you doing today?" means **"I've got some things that I want you to do."** It's Saturday morning and your wife asks the question, "So what are you doing today?" What she's saying to you is: If you don't have any really important plans, don't make any because I've got a lengthy honey-do list that you need to get done.

5. "Do you need some help with that?" means **"I want to be a part of your team."** Let's take the time you were trying to fix the TV. In the midst of the tangle of cords and your growing frustration, your wife asks if she can help. You immediately assume she must be questioning your abilities and doubting your skills. But she may simply be trying to love you well by offering her help. So rather than push her away, let your wife

support you with what you're doing.

6. "Let's talk about this some more" means ***"I don't agree, but I want to understand and support you."*** Life is full of decisions—from small, daily ones to huge, life-changing ones. A big part of marriage is being able to make choices together with your spouse. So when your wife wants to discuss a decision, it's important to recognize that she isn't automatically disagreeing. Her intention is to be wise and find a compromise that you can both agree to.

7. "We should go out this weekend" means ***"I want you to take initiative and make the plans."*** I can't put enough emphasis on the importance of continuing to date your spouse all through your marriage. While some couples have a weekly date night, Susan and I found that a date every other week was more realistic when our kids were growing up. So when your wife mentions the coming weekend, this is a very planned comment. She is trying to give you a clue that she wants to feel special and loved by going out with you. So take the hint and plan something romantic for the two of you. For some creative date ideas, check out my blog, "8 Outside-the-Box Date Ideas."

8. "Is there something you're forgetting?" means ***"There's definitely something you're forgetting."*** Your wife knows there are certain days when you have a busy schedule ahead of you and are more apt to overlook things. So when your wife specifically asks if you're forgetting anything, the answer is most often a big "Yes!" Whether it's your lunch on the counter or a goodbye kiss for her, be sure to stop and pay attention when your wife mentions this.

9. "You don't have to get me anything for my birthday" means ***"I do want something, but I want you to put time and energy into picking it out."*** The important thing to realize is that all thoughtfulness and specialness is taken away the moment your wife has to tell you what to get her for her birthday. Instead, a gift is a great way to show her how well you know

her and love her. So put some thought and energy into giving your spouse a present she won't forget. If you have no idea what to get, try asking one of her friends.

While there is so much more to decode, I hope this helps you to better understand your wife. And, by the way, please don't let her know that you know some of the secret code.

What are some other words wives use that you can decode for us? Please share your comments below.

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