

Messianic Rabbi: 5 Things I Love and Hate About Hanukkah

5 Things I Hate About Hanukkah

1. **Hanukkah is the celebration of the Jewish victory over assimilation that is now celebrated largely by assimilated Jews.** Hanukkah is actually a feast that commemorates the victory of the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire. It's about the cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple. The revolt was in response to religious persecution and forced assimilation.
2. **Hanukkah has been allowed to become the Jewish alternative to Christmas.** Unfortunately, especially in the West, we have allowed Hanukkah to become secularized. For many Jews, it is no longer about a supernatural victory similar to the Exodus from Egypt; rather, it is simply an eight-day version of the commercialized Christmas many of our Gentile neighbors celebrate.
3. **Hanukkah is no longer about dedication and re-dedication.** It is about gifts, latkes and dreidels. For many of us, we light the Hanukkiah and mention the legend of the oil lasting eight days, but we leave out the historical physical battle against the Seleucid Empire and the spiritual battle against assimilation into pagan culture and religion.
4. **Hanukkah has become more about the Menorah than the Temple.** While I am not against the Hanukkiah or Hanukkah Menorah and will be lighting one in my home, I do think we focus more on the Hanukkiah than the cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple itself. They could not have lit the Menorah if they had not first cleansed the Temple.
5. **We now play dreidel (a game played with a spinning top)**

instead of studying Torah. The dreidel game used to be played so we could study Torah. We are taught that under Seleucid rule, the study of Torah was outlawed. So, our people had to hide in order to study Torah. When the soldiers would search for those studying, the students would hide their books and begin to play dreidel to conceal their studies. When the soldiers left, the students would return to their study of Torah.

5 Things I Love About Hanukkah

- 1. Hanukkah is the celebration of the Jewish victory over assimilation that is now celebrated largely by assimilated Jews.** Every year when we prepare to celebrate Hanukkah, we should be reminded that, like the Maccabees, we can be a part of an army that through the power of the Spirit of G-D can help lead people away from assimilation and the ways of the world. I can be part of the army fighting for revival.
- 2. Hanukkah has been allowed to become the Jewish alternative to Christmas.** Part of the battle against assimilation is to share with our Jewish and non-Jewish friends that Hanukkah isn't the Jewish alternative to Christmas, but rather it is the Jewish alternative to assimilation. We get to teach my friends that many people gave their lives so that we could worship in Spirit and in truth. We especially get to remind our Christian friends that if it was not for the victory we celebrate on Hanukkah, they would not be celebrating the birth of the King of the Jews.
- 3. Hanukkah is no longer about dedication and re-dedication.** It is about gifts, latkes and dreidels. While it is true that Hanukkah has lost its true meaning to many and has become focused on gifts, food and games, we get to be a part of a small but growing voice speaking out about the true meaning of Hanukkah and once again reviving the call to reject assimilation.

4. **Hanukkah has become more about the Menorah than the Temple.** For many families, while the celebration of Hanukkah focuses upon the Menorah, I love that we can help them to zoom out their view to remember and see that the Menorah is but one piece of furniture in the Temple. While it was important, it was not singular. The victorious Maccabean army didn't only dedicate the Menorah; they dedicated the entire Temple. The Bible doesn't say that we are the Menorahs of the Holy Spirit; it says we are the Temple. The Menorah provides the light that allows us to see the beauty of a clean and re-dedicated Temple.
5. **The dreidel game was played (a game played with a spinning top) so we could study Torah.** Now we play dreidel instead of studying Torah. We get to remind people that there was a time when we were unable to legally study the Torah under penalty of death. We also get to remind them there are still people in many nations around the world who cannot legally study the Word of G-D. Hanukkah reminds us of our blessings, but we still are fighting the same battle that was being fought thousands of years ago.

There is one more thing I love about Hanukkah—the only biblical reference to it is in the writings of John 10:22-23 (TLV): “Then came Hanukkah; it was winter in Jerusalem. Yeshua was walking in the Temple around Solomon's Colonnade.”

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