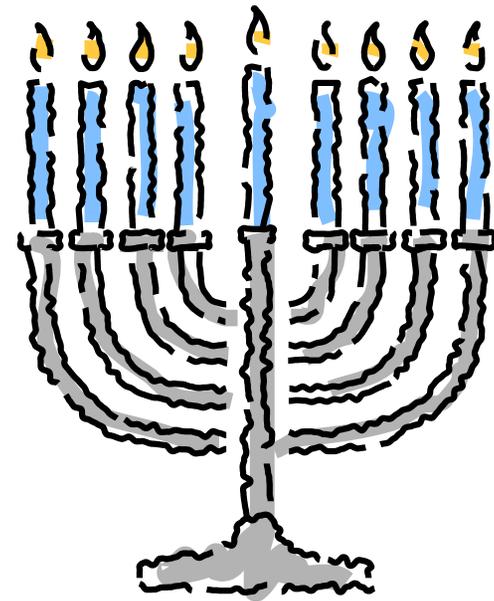

Light of the World

□ Hanukkah Devotional for Jesus Followers



by Rev. Ron Shirley

Scotland United Church of Christ
Scotland, South Dakota



How to Play the Dreidel Game

One of the fun traditions of Hanukkah is the Spin the Dreidel game. A dreidel is a four-sided spinning top that families play with on Hanukkah. Each side is imprinted with a Hebrew letter. These letters are an acronym for the Hebrew words נס גדול היה שם (Nes Gadol Haya Sham), "A great miracle happened there", referring to the miracle of the oil that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem.

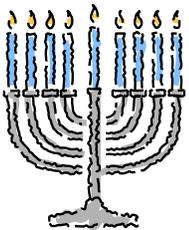
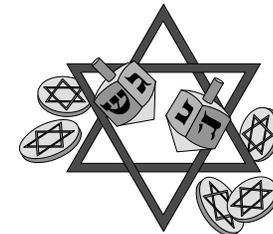
The dreidel game is played to commemorate the time when Judaism was outlawed by King Antiochus from 168- 165 B.C. and the reading and teaching of Scripture was forbidden. Yet, legend has it that faithful Jews continued to teach God's Word in small groups. When Greek soldiers would pass by, the Jews would hide their Torah scrolls and begin spinning the dreidel so that it would appear that they were gambling and not studying Scripture.

The game is played using a dreidel and chocolate coins (gelt). Each player starts out with 10 or 15 coins and places one coin in the "pot." The first player spins the dreidel, and depending on which side the dreidel falls on, either wins a coin from the pot or gives up part of his stash. The code is as follows:

- Nun—"none"—the player gets none and the next player spins
- Gimel—"all"—the player gets all the coins in the pot. Each player then puts one coin in to replenish the pot.
- Hey—"half"—the player takes half of the pot, rounding up if there is an odd number
- Shin—"put one in"—each player puts one coin in the pot

Play continues until one player wins the entire pot of coins. After the game is over, all the coins are divided up evenly so each player has their own chocolate coins to enjoy.

Dreidels can be purchased online at www.bargainjudaica.com.



Light of the World

A Hanukkah Devotional for Jesus Followers

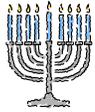
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Resource Section

Suggested Songs for Hanukkah Celebration

Here is a listing of Jewish and Christian praise songs that are appropriate for Hanukkah worship and celebration. All of the songs are available on iTunes for use on your iPod, etc.. Most of the songs are also available on CD as well.

Jewish Hanukkah Songs

“Candlelight” by Maccabeats from the single *Candlelight*. 2010.

“Eight Candles” by Malvina Reynolds from the album *Chanukah at Home*. 1998.

“Kindle a Candle of Light” by Dan Crow from the album *Chanukah at Home*. 1998

“Rock of Ages (Maoz Tsur)” traditional from the album *Chanukah at Home*. 1998.

Christian Praise Songs

“Better Is One Day” by Matt Redman from the album *Blessed Be Your Name*. 1995.

“Give Us Clean Hands” by Charlie Hall from the album *It Is Well*. 2009

“God of This City” by Chris Tomlin from the album *Hello Love*. 2008.

“Here I Am to Worship” by Tim Hughes from the album *Here I Am to Worship*. 2001.

“Hear Us From Heaven” by Ross Parsley from the album *I Am Free*. 2005.

“Mighty to Save” by Ben Fielding & Reuben Morgan from the album *Mighty to Save*. 2010.

“Open The Eyes of My Heart” by Paul Baloche from the album *Open the Eyes of My Heart*. 2000.



Introduction

Rediscovering the Biblical Festival of Hanukkah

“It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah. He was at the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon’s Colonnade.”
(John 10:22-23, NLT)

Don’t you just hate it when you lose things? You know, like your car keys, your cell phone, etc. Lost items just make you feel, well...lost! Something is missing in your life. You feel as if you’ll never have possession of that item ever again. Yet, should you find that item again, you get all excited at the chance to claim it and use it once more.

Hanukkah is an example of one of those things that has been lost and now is found. Hanukkah? You mean that Jewish holiday that takes place around Christmas? How is it lost to me? I’m a Jesus follower. We’ve never celebrated Hanukkah! That’s true. Most Christians have never celebrated Hanukkah, thinking that it was a Jewish holiday and taboo for Christians. The truth is, Hanukkah is a biblical holiday that’s been lost to the Church for centuries, and it’s about time that followers of Jesus not only find it, but reclaim it and celebrate it as part of our own living faith heritage.

Hanukkah originated in 165 B.C., the period between the times that the Old Testament and New Testament were written. It celebrates the victory of Judah Maccabees and a group of Jewish freedom fighters who beat the occupying Greek army, freed Jerusalem, and cleansed and rededicated the Temple for worship of the Lord our God.

Barney Kasdan, author of *God’s Appointed Times*, recounts that “Of particular importance to them was the broken menorah, symbolizing the light of God. They restored it and attempted to light it, but there was a problem.

Jewish tradition recounts that as they searched for some specially prepared oil, they found only enough to burn for one day. The priests knew it would take at least eight days for new oil to be produced. What to do?

They decided it was better to light the menorah anyway; at least the light of God would shine forth immediately. To their amazement, the oil burned not only for one day, but for eight days until additional oil was available.”

Every year afterwards, the Jewish people celebrated the re-dedication of the Temple with the eight day festival of Hanukkah. Jesus, being a devout Jew, made at least one trip during his ministry to the Temple for the Hanukkah

celebration (John 10:22-23). Acts 2:46 records that the Early Church continued to worship regularly at the Temple in Jerusalem, so one can assume that they would also have celebrated the annual Hanukkah (Festival of Dedication) festival for a number of years before Christianity and Judaism parted ways.

So how did we lose Hanukkah? Well, as the Church became more Gentile, Christians over time jettisoned a lot of Jewish customs and holy days to avoid persecution by the Romans. You see, Jews in the Holy Land revolted against Rome in A.D. 70. Things ended badly. Jerusalem was burned. The Temple was destroyed, and Jews began to be persecuted all around the Roman Empire. Christianity, then a Messianic Jewish sect, tried to avoid the scrutiny of the Roman authorities, downplaying all things Jewish to make the Christian faith more acceptable to Roman society.

So, Hanukkah, and other biblical holidays like Purim, Yom Kippur, etc. along with most of Christianity's Jewish roots gradually got tossed aside. As the Church became increasingly Gentile (non-Jewish) in membership, the biblical holidays were nearly forgotten altogether. Over time, people began to think of Hanukkah as being a Jewish holiday and not a part of Christian faith and practice. Jews, meanwhile, continued to celebrate this holiday as part of their religious heritage.

The funny thing is, since Hanukkah originated after the Old Testament was written, Jews don't have scriptural reference for it. Barney Kasdan notes "The people who normally celebrate this holy day, the Jewish people, have scant biblical reference for it; yet the people who do not normally celebrate Hanukkah have the most explicit reference to it, in the New Testament!"

The purpose of this booklet is to give the Church a resource to help reclaim and celebrate Hanukkah as a biblical holiday once again. Jesus celebrated Hanukkah. You can too! We've lost part of our biblical heritage for too many years. Now is the time to bring it back.

Included in this booklet are eight devotionals that you and your family can use together each night of Hanukkah (like all Jewish holidays, Hanukkah is celebrated after sunset) when you light the menorah. Make it a special time of family worship together. Read the Scripture provided. Light the appropriate number of candles on the menorah for the evening. Then read the devotional and prayer. Finally spend a few minutes either listening to or singing praise songs appropriate for the Hanukkah celebration. Afterwards, spend quality time together having fun playing the Dreidel game and eating fried doughnuts.

I've included instructions on how to light the Hanukkah menorah, a list of songs (both Jewish and Christian) that would be appropriate for the season, along with directions on how to play the traditional Dreidel Game that has become such a popular part of the holiday through the years.

Note: this booklet offers ways to celebrate Hanukkah from a Christian perspective. It incorporates both Jewish and Christian elements into the celebration, not to rob Jews of their holiday, but as a way for Christians to reclaim part of our biblical heritage that has been lost for way too long. Hanukkah belongs to both of us, Jew and Christian alike. May you be blessed in celebrating a part of your faith tradition that has been found!



Resource Section

How to Light the Hanukkah Menorah

The central observance in Hanukkah is the lighting of the nine candle Hanukkah menorah at sundown. The menorah, which symbolizes the one in the Jerusalem Temple, is lit one candle at a time for eight nights to celebrate the eight nights during the Temple's re-dedication that God caused one day's supply of oil to burn for eight days straight. Psalm 27:1-6 is a great Psalm to read during Hanukkah to remind you of God's light and salvation.

At the center of the Hanukkah menorah is a ninth candle lifted above the others, called the "Servant Candle," that is used to light the other eight candles. Messianic Jews claim the "Servant Candle" represents Jesus the Messiah who came as a servant "who gives light to all who allow themselves to shine for God" (Matthew 20:28, John 1:9, John 8:12)

Candles are placed on the menorah from right to left according to the number of nights that one is currently at during the eight day festival. For example: on the first night of Hanukkah only one candle is lit in addition to the "Servant Candle." On the second night, two candles are lit, and so on, and so on.

Candles are lit from left to right, using the "Servant Candle," so that the newest day's candle is lit first. Then the previous nights' candles are lit afterward.

A wide selection of Hanukkah menorahs and candles are available for purchase on ebay.com or bargainjudaica.com.

Festive Hanukkah Foods

It is a custom to eat foods either cooked or fried in oil during the eight nights of Hanukkah as another way to remember how the one jar of purified oil, found in the Temple after it was liberated by the Maccabees, was used to relight the menorah and by a miracle of God the menorah lights kept burning for eight days until new oil could be made.

Traditional Hanukkah foods include potato pancakes called "latkes" that are fried in oil and home made doughnuts, deep fried in oil, that are dipped in cinnamon and sugar.



Eighth Night of Hanukkah

A Light For All to See

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”
(Matthew 5:14-16)

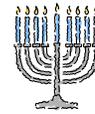
One of the Jewish traditions of Hanukkah is to place their Hanukkah menorah near the windows of their homes. That way when they light the menorah each night during Hanukkah, people passing by can be reminded of the miracle of God’s light and salvation. This Hanukkah tradition is reminiscent of Jesus’ words from Matthew 5:16, “...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

The light of Christ that we have received is not for us alone. To keep God’s light and salvation all to ourselves is to squander God’s gift. Jesus instructs us not to hide His light or keep it a secret from others. Instead, he instructs us to let his light and our faith shine so that “it gives light to everyone in the house,” and to everyone who passes by at school, at work, at the grocery store or the shopping mall. We are to be “the light of the world” and let God’s love shine through us everywhere. How brightly is your light shining this evening? Who’s seen it shine this past week? Who needs to see it? How will you continue to kindle the flame of God’s love in the days ahead?

So here we are, on the last night of Hanukkah. As you kindle the final candle on the menorah, pause and remember, the faith of the Maccabees so many years ago, what cleaning it takes to make our “temples” fit for God’s light to shine, the joy that comes when we let God shine in our lives, that this light cannot be extinguished, and that Jesus has come not only as our Messiah, but as the Light of the World. Because of this, we have choices to make. Will we walk in the light? Will we open ourselves to become a living “temple” for the LORD and will we let our lights shine for all to see?

These eight nights of Hanukkah are an important season of reflection. Yet, these nights of Hanukkah are only the beginning. Your “temple” needs regular inspection, cleansing and rededication to allow God’s light to shine in you throughout the year. May the lessons of Hanukkah enable you to begin a deeper faith walk with Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for these eight nights of Hanukkah. Help me, I pray, to let your light shine in my life for all the world to see. Open my eyes to see people who need Your amazing grace and challenge me to shine, even in dark places, so that Your light might give life and hope to everyone. Amen.



First Night of Hanukkah

My Light and Salvation

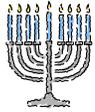
“The LORD is my light and salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon the rock. Then my head will be exalted above my enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.”
(Psalm 27:1-6)

At the core of Hanukkah is this simple truth: God is our light and salvation. When we trust in God, David writes in Psalm 27, there is nothing to fear. Even when we find ourselves up against impossible odds, we can be assured that our God will be with us and see us through.

Judah Maccabees understood this when he led a band of Jewish freedom fighters against the Greek armies of King Antiochus who not only had taken control of Judea and Jerusalem, but who was enacting laws that abolished expressing faith in the LORD our God. He saw how the Greeks tried to strip his people, his culture of their God-given faith and identity. The last straw came when the Greeks dared to place an idol of the Greek god Zeus in the Temple of the Lord. That’s when it happened, Judah led the revolt. He would not let God be deleted from his world! Judah reminded the Jewish people of the God who stood at their side in this conflict. “Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. Remember how our fathers were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them.... [For in our victory] all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel” (1 Maccabees 4:8-11). Judah believed in God’s light and salvation. We light the first candle of Hanukkah this evening proclaiming that same faith.

Dear God, re-light the flame of faith in my life, so that I might trust in Your strength and salvation when I find myself up against impossible odds. I need You in my life. I need a Redeemer and Savior in my life today. Help me trust in You like the Maccabees. In your Holy Name I pray. Amen.



Second Night of Hanukkah

Cleaning Out Your Temple

“Then said Judah and his brothers, ‘Behold our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.’” (1 Maccabees 4:36)

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you have been bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

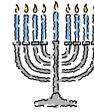
Hanukkah is about cleaning. After Judah Maccabees and his band of Jewish freedom fighters won their freedom from the Greek occupation of Judea, their first priority was to go to Jerusalem and rededicate the Temple of the LORD so that it might become a sacred space to worship God once more. The only problem was it needed cleaned first. The Temple of the LORD had been defiled by the Greeks and left in shambles.

The book of 1 Maccabees records that, “they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket... They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. Then they rent their clothes, and mourned with great lamentation, and sprinkled themselves with ashes. They fell face down in the ground, and sounded the signal on the trumpets, and cried out to Heaven.” (1 Maccabees 4:38-40).

Why did the state of the Temple upset the Maccabees so much that they mourned as if family member had died? They grieved because they knew that there was no way they could worship God with such filth and clutter. God deserved better. His House shouldn’t be treated that way. His Temple is meant to be a holy place not a garbage dump. To make it fit for God’s light to shine again, it had to be cleansed of the filth and clutter.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that as followers of Jesus, we are to be living “temples” in which God’s Spirit might dwell and shine. The problem is, too often, we let our “temples” get cluttered with so many things that we often crowd God out of our lives. How can God’s light shine through us when we don’t leave room for God to live in us? Hanukkah reminds us that we too need to clean out the garbage from our “temples” if we want Jesus to live in our hearts. What clutter do you need to toss out to make God #1 in your life today? What garbage will be the hardest to remove?

Lord Jesus, I’m sorry for the way I let my “temple” get over run with so much clutter. As I light the candles tonight, help me cleanse my life of the filth and the grime so that Your light might shine through me again. Amen.



Seventh Night of Hanukkah

Light Glowing Inside of Me

“No one has seen God; but if we love one another; God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” (1 John 4:12-14)

While Hanukkah is a festive holiday celebrating light, faith and hope, it is also a holiday that is celebrated with a tinge of sadness as well. The Temple in Jerusalem, that the Maccabees liberated and rededicated and in which Jesus our Lord celebrated the festival during his ministry, was destroyed by Rome in A.D. 70. With the Temple gone, some wonder, why celebrate Hanukkah at all.

We celebrate Hanukkah today for one simple reason. We have become the living “temples” of the LORD. The Apostle Paul reminds us that we, who have accepted Jesus in our hearts, have become “a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you...” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Just as the candles were lit in the Temple by the Maccabees, to show the world that God’s light and love were alive in Jerusalem, we light these candles of Hanukkah tonight to remind us that, if God lives in us, then our lives need to become a place where the light of the LORD burns brightly.

Your life has been liberated by Jesus the Messiah and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb so that you might become a living “temple” of the LORD, where His Holy Spirit dwells. As a sanctuary of the LORD, you are called to be the holy place where God’s light and love shine brightly in this dark and troubled world. Hanukkah reminds us, that just as the Temple in Jerusalem needed to be rededicated for God’s light and glory to dwell, so too we need to daily rededicate our lives to Jesus so that the Light of the World might brightly burn within our souls. Is the Holy Spirit glowing inside of me? Have I taken the time to kindle the light of His love in my life? Do people see the light of Christ glowing in me, and does that light cause them to worship Him? These are important questions for all of us to ask during these nights of Hanukkah.

Lord Jesus, as I light the candles of Hanukkah this evening, I do so with joy, for I want to be Your living sanctuary, where Your Spirit and glory dwells. Like the candles lit by the Maccabees so many years ago, I want to shine as a miracle, of what life can be like, when Your love lives in someone like me. So, Lord Jesus, I give You my heart and life this evening. Come live inside of me. Shine through me, and my love, so that others might be drawn to You, worship You, and give their lives to You, This is my prayer. Amen.



Sixth Night of Hanukkah

Are You Walking in the Light?

“...God is light; in him there is not darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

(1 John 1:5-7)

Folks in Jerusalem had a tough choice to make after King Antichous made laws that forbade God’s people from worshipping Him and living out their faith in their everyday lives. Should they give in to the king’s demands, give up their faith and fit in? Or should they stand up for the LORD no matter what? This was a tough choice. Breaking the law could lead to imprisonment or death. Giving up one’s faith meant a life lived in peace and quiet.

We face those same choices today when media and pop culture ridicule people for having faith in God. Some find it easier to fit in. They may go to church on Sunday, but hide their Jesus follower identity the rest of the week so they don’t get harassed by peers at work or in school. The only problem with that is when we “walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth” (1 John 1:6). Covering up our faith to fit in means, in essence, that we extinguish the Light of Christ from our everyday lives.

So how did God’s people handle this choice in the time of the Maccabees? Legend has it that some of God’s people chose to gather and study the Scriptures even though it was illegal. They’d gather in groups to study the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), but when Greek soldiers passed by, they’d hide their Torah scrolls and spin dreidels, so that it looked like they were gambling. This was an act of defiance even if it was done in secret. Others, like Judah Maccabees, lived their faith “in the light” and refused to give in to peer pressure at all. They chose to walk in the light no matter the cost. Hanukkah celebrates the defiant faith of God’s people who choose to walk in the light of the LORD.

How do you handle this tough choice of faith? Do you choose to walk in the light or to hide your faith identity when peer pressure gets too strong? Think about those choices during these days of Hanukkah.

Lord Jesus, as I light these candles tonight, I realize that I am faced with a choice. It’s a tough choice. I thank God for the example of the Maccabees who chose to “walk in the light” even when it was unpopular. Lord, I want to be a bolder disciple in my world today. Light a flame of boldness in my life so that Your light shines forth everyday and everywhere. Amen.



Third Night of Hanukkah

Turning on the Light

“Then they...lighted the lamps on the lamp stand, and these gave light in the temple.”

(1 Maccabees 4:50)

“You are my lamp, O LORD; the LORD turns my darkness into light.”

(2 Samuel 22:29)

Don’t you just hate it when the power goes out at night. Suddenly, rooms that are so familiar and cozy become foreign to us as we fumble through the darkness in places that we would walk confidently when the lights are on. Those stormy nights when the lights go out seem as if they last forever. And then, just when we wonder how long we must suffer in the darkness, the power is restored, the lights come back on, and we can go back to living out our normal routines. What a difference it is to have the lights turned back on!

The Jewish people living in Greek occupied Jerusalem must have felt like they were living through a power outage. King Antichous intended to extinguish the light and faith of the conquered Jewish people when he passed laws forbidding them from worshipping the LORD our God. Yet, even in total darkness God’s Word remained “a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105). God’s people remained faithful to Scripture. It helped keep their hope and faith alive until God raised up heroes who would stand up for the LORD and fight for His name.

What a day it must have been when Judah Maccabees and the people gathered at the Temple, following their triumph over the Greeks and the time they spent cleaning and repairing the House of the Lord. When the priests relit the Temple menorah, the light of faith turned back on. The people realized, that just as God had not given up on Moses, David and Elijah, He too was with them also, and no one could extinguish the light of the LORD our God from the earth. Darkness ended. The Light prevailed. God is light and in Him there will be no darkness that can have the final victory.

Tonight as you light the candles on the menorah, remember this simple truth of Hanukkah: Our faith cannot be extinguished even in the darkest of nights, because the Light of the World will always shine through the darkness.

Lord God, I thank you for the faith of those who relit the candles in the Temple so many years ago. It took courage to stand up for the truth and the light of Your Word. May these glowing flames remind me tonight, that in You there is light and victory. Strengthen me with Your living Word during the dark times, when faith gets extinguished., so that I can live in the light. Amen.



Fourth Night of Hanukkah

A Light That Will Not Go Out!

“So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days...”
(1 Maccabees 4:56)

“The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.”
(John 1:5)

Everyday holds the possibility of a miracle. This isn't just some glib saying for positive thinkers. This is gospel truth. God can and does work miracles in our lives. Yet not every miracle is a made for Hollywood moment like when God helped Moses part the Red Sea during the Exodus. Some miracles may seem insignificant and get overlooked. Yet, when the Lord's fingerprints are seen in those moments, we ought to pause and stand in awe of God's holiness.

Hanukkah celebrates one of those minor everyday miracles. The big miracle was the way God helped to free His people from religious persecution. Then, came the small miracle. The one that seems almost too insignificant to mention, and yet remains central to celebrating the eight nights of Hanukkah is this: the lights in the Temple did not go out!

Legend has it that when the priests relit the candles of the menorah at the rededication of the Temple in 165 B.C., that there was only enough purified oil to keep the menorah lit for one day. (It would take eight days to produce an adequate supply to keep the flame going indefinitely) Yet, the priests yearned so much for the Light of God to be re-kindled in the Temple and in people's lives, they relit it anyway. Then it happened. God's fingerprints were made visible in the simple and the ordinary. The menorah's flame didn't die out at the end of the first day, or the second, or the third or the fourth. In fact, it remained lit for eight days until new oil could be produced. This allowed the people to celebrate God's victory, their salvation, and the Temple's rededication for eight days.

It was a simple miracle. Yet it's truth remains vital for us today as John writes in his gospel, “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.” Today we don't just celebrate candles in the Temple, but the Light of the World in Jesus Christ our Lord. Like the candles of Hanukkah, the Light of Christ cannot be extinguished. The cross and empty grave prove that. His light continues to burn brightly in the lives of his followers like you and me.

Lord Jesus, as I light the candles this evening, open my eyes to see Your miracles in the everyday and the ordinary. May these simple flames remind me that Your light will shine forever and not go out. Amen.



Fifth Night of Hanukkah

Looking For a Hero

“It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah. He was at the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. The Jewish leaders surrounded him and asked, ‘How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’”
(John 10:22-24, NLT)

“Then Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”
(John 8:12)

Jesus was at the Temple for the Festival of Hanukkah when it happened. The religious leaders surrounded him and asked, “How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” They were looking for a hero. Only 195 years after the Maccabees had liberated Jerusalem from the Greeks, the country was now under Roman occupation. Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication, was a time when people looked for a Messiah, a Savior, to come and set them free. Could Jesus be the one? Could he really?

Jesus stood in the same Temple that Judah Maccabees had cleansed and rededicated back to the worship of the LORD our God. This was where the miracle had occurred so many years ago. People were looking for a new miracle, a new hero, a fresh anointing from God for today. So are we. Our world clamors for a hero, for light to pierce through the darkness and bring rescue in these troubled times. The exciting news of Hanukkah is that our hero, our deliverance has already come!

Jesus proclaimed to the crowds, “I am the light of the world.” He is the miracle sent from God to free the captives from a darkness greater than Roman occupation: the darkness of sin and death. Jesus came to bring light and life to all who would believe on his name. He is the hero for which we seek. Messianic Jews note that every Hanukkah menorah has a ninth candle, raised above the rest, that lights the rest of the candles each night. That candle is called the Servant Candle. That candle represents Jesus the Messiah, who came like a servant (Philippians 2:7), and gives us the light of God's salvation. Celebrate Him, and His saving grace, when you light the candles this evening.

Lord, Jesus, I just want to thank You during this Hanukkah season, for coming as the Light of the World. Thank You for giving all of us the “light of life.” Help me, Lord, to share Your light with those looking for heroes to dispel the darkness of our present age. In Your name I pray. Amen.