

The Winter holiday season is frequently a conflicted time of year for many people in today's Messianic movement. On the one hand, most Messianic people do not celebrate the holiday of Christmas on December 25, due to some of its pre-Christian origins and questionable traditions. On the other hand, the birth of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is a Biblical event which we all must acknowledge in some way. Furthermore, during this same Winter season, the Jewish community commemorates the Festival of Dedication or *Chanukah*. What is a Messianic Believer to do?

The *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* is a valuable compilation of resources designed to assist you, your family, and your Messianic fellowship for this season. We have included a selection of articles summarizing the holiday of Christmas, and how Messianic Believers need to have a proper attitude toward our evangelical brothers and sisters. We have included a variety of teachings on *Chanukah*, common traditions associated with it, and how this can be a blessed time of spiritually rededicating ourselves to God and to each other. Information on the time period of the Maccabees in Second Century B.C.E. Judea, the wars which they fought, and the long term impact they left on subsequent generations, has been provided. A few FAQs on the Winter holidays are also offered.

Do not let the Winter holiday season be a difficult time for you any more. The *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* can assist you greatly in making this a very special time for you and your family!

MESSIANIC

WINTER HOLIDAY HELPER

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edited by Margaret McKee Huey

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Messianic Winter Holiday Helper

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
Ger: German
GNB: Greek New Testament
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: King James Version
Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)

LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)

LXX: Septuagint

m. Mishnah

MT: Masoretic Text

NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)

NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)

NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*

NEB: New English Bible (1970)

Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*

NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)

NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*

NIV: New International Version (1984)

NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)

NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)

NKJV: New King James Version (1982)

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)

NLT: New Living Translation (1996)

NT: New Testament

OT: Old Testament

REB: Revised English Bible (1989)

RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)

t. Tosefta

Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament

Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition

v(s). verse(s)

Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

Vul: Latin Vulgate

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

Introduction

During the Winter holiday season, many of us in the Messianic community are faced with the annual dilemma of how we are to handle the holidays with our Christian family and friends. How do we tell people, who celebrate Christmas, that we do not celebrate it anymore? How do we share with our friends that we now look to Yeshua as our example in **all things**? How do we share that we are now enjoying the Feast of Dedication, known in Hebrew as *Chanukah*, something which is written about in John 10:22?

I do not know about you, but our family has been dealing with the Winter holiday dilemma since 1996. It is just one more of the changes which we have experienced as we have become thoroughly Messianic. We often find that our extended family and friends can be confused or perplexed about changing Christmas celebration to *Chanukah* observance, just as they often are about us having changed Sunday Church to *Shabbat* rest! They simply do not understand why we have changed. But rather than mercilessly beat them over the head with some kind of "Christmas is pagan" stick, as has been too frequently encouraged by some, we instead believe it is best for us to **present a positive testimony of change to them**. We encourage families of Messianic people, to invite others into their homes during the Winter holiday season, and to partake of the wonderful things which we fully believe our Heavenly Father is restoring to His people.

To help you and your family, this *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* has included a variety of articles which discuss how to deal with the Winter holiday season. We have included articles which have come from our Virtual Winter holiday series (2003, 2005), which relate to the history of *Chanukah*, the non-Biblical practice of Christmas, insights on how to handle the holidays with our family and friends, and practical approaches to observing *Chanukah* with your family and/or Messianic fellowship. We have also included teachings on the ancient Maccabees, who were stirred by the Lord to oppose the pagan Seleucid Greeks, and whose influence greatly affected the Jewish community into the time of

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Yeshua. This broad array of material should not only assist you in interacting with others during this time of year, but should also be quite informative in learning about the critical lessons which the account of the Maccabees teaches us.ⁱ

Our family believes that the Winter season is a very special time of year! It is a time when most people of Christian faith generally and genuinely want to reach out to others in the love of the Messiah. *As Messianic people, how can we act like such behavior is somehow wrong or evil?* We cannot! We, who are to walk as Messiah Yeshua walked, must likewise reach out to others in His love at this time of year **more than ever**. Yeshua taught that people would know that His followers were His disciples by the love that they would have for one another (John 13:35).

I strongly encourage you to love your family and friends in such a special way, that during the Winter holidays the Holy Spirit will be able to draw them to what you have to share. Dear friends, it is only through our unconditional love, that one day your Christian family and friends will want to know what today's Messianic people know about walking more like Yeshua. Only then will they will honestly want to know why we have put aside the celebration of Christmas and are remembering *Chanukah*, and how we are actually walking more like Jesus and not less. One day—should we demonstrate the right example to them—they will want to know why we have become thoroughly Messianic, and what we can teach them about their Hebraic and Jewish heritage from the Scriptures. So, let us reach out in love and show them a better way.

Similarly, only by demonstrating Yeshua's love, will anyone of us be able to demonstrate who the Messiah is to a Jewish person, who is often seen remembering *Chanukah* without the knowledge of the Light of the world who delivers us from darkness. When you go to purchase any of your *Chanukah* celebration resources: your *menorah*, candles, traditional foods for the season, etc., a non-believing Jewish person might see you

ⁱ In order to follow much of the material in this publication, you will need to have a Bible with the Apocrypha included, where the historical Books of 1-4 Maccabees are found. Modern translations which will often include an edition of the Apocrypha are the Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Revised English Bible, and most recently the English Standard Version. Sir L.C.L. Brenton's *Septuagint With Apocrypha* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), includes both his English translation and parallel Greek text.

Introduction

in the store. You will have the opportunity to wish him or her a Happy Chanukah! If you yourself are non-Jewish, you will certainly have the ability to fulfill the Apostle Paul's mandate of the nations provoking his kinsfolk to salvation (Romans 11:11). While Jewish people are often perplexed at why a non-Jewish person would want to celebrate *Chanukah*, seeds which can later germinate in them coming to salvation in the Jewish Messiah can certainly be planted!

May you enjoy your Winter holiday time within your own family, rejoicing in the history and drama of *Chanukah*!

Chag Sameach!

Margaret McKee Huey

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The Holidays

Jane McKee

The Winter holiday season is supposed to be one of love, joy, peace, and “good will toward men” (Luke 2:14, KJV). However, many of my Messianic friends have shared with me that the Winter holiday season is hard for them. Many of them have stopped celebrating Christmas, are now celebrating *Chanukah*, and are trying to feel comfortable with all of the changes. Many of these people have asked me for my personal view on Christmas versus *Chanukah*, and how we should approach what happens in December.

This can be a wonderful, yet difficult time of year for many of us. I believe that we must keep a balanced view of the holiday season, and not be unkind toward anyone who does not (yet) see things the way which we now do. I was raised as an evangelical Christian, and I used to celebrate Christmas. But in my family, Christmas was not about presents, Santa Claus, or a tree; it was about the miraculous virgin birth of the Messiah (i.e., Isaiah 9:2-7).

In the mid-1990s, our family stopped celebrating the traditions around Christmas. When our family sends us Christmas gifts, we send them holiday gifts. When our friends send us Christmas cards, we send them holiday cards. In stopping the traditions of Christmas, we have been careful as we steadily replaced them with the various traditions of *Chanukah*.