

# THE CHOSEN PEOPLE



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**JESUS: THE HOPE OF HANUKKAH**



Photo by Evgeni Tcherkaski from Pixabay



FROM THE PRESIDENT,  
MITCH GLASER

# HANUKKAH: JESUS IS OUR HOPE

Dear friend in the Messiah,  
Shalom in His peace, Merry Christmas, and a very Happy Hanukkah!

Most of what we know about Hanukkah comes from the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees, which Jewish people and Christians view as history, not Scripture.

Though Hanukkah is not one of the major festivals listed in Leviticus 23, it was a recognized Jewish holiday when our Messiah walked the earth. The apostle John explicitly mentions the Feast of Dedication—Hanukkah—in John 10:22. Jesus celebrated the holiday and used it as the occasion for one of His most straightforward statements of His deity, “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30).

## THE HANUKKAH STORY

Allow me to present a brief summary of the holiday story.

We begin with the role of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Syrian Greek ruler of the Holy Land during the second century BCE. He persecuted Jewish people, trying in every way to turn the children of Israel into Hellenists and worshipers of the pantheon of false Greek gods. His nickname among Jewish people was Antiochus the Madman, and he did not win many popularity contests in Israel at the time!

He sent representatives to towns throughout Israel, demanding Jewish people bow to his statue as an expression of their political and religious loyalty. As with similar pagan leaders, Antiochus presented himself as a god and not as a mere mortal.

The Jewish citizenry in the little town of Modi’in, still a vibrant city today in modern Israel, refused to bow to the pressure of idolatry. They killed the emissaries of Antiochus and began three tough years of guerilla warfare led by the Levitical priest Mattathias and his sons, whom we know as the Maccabees. They won the war and overthrew Antiochus’ rule over Israel.

However, the Maccabees discovered Antiochus had commanded his soldiers to slaughter a pig on the holy altar within the Temple. This desecration was tragic and infuriated Judah Maccabee and his small cadre of priestly warriors.

Judah and his brothers considered cleansing the altar but tore it down to the last stone and built a replacement altar instead.

## THE MIRACLE OF THE OIL

In Jewish tradition, there is another story of a miracle taking place at the same time. It seems the Maccabees only had enough olive oil to fuel the eternal light in the Temple for one day, and it took eight days to crush the olives and cure the oil to make a new batch. The great miracle of Hanukkah is the one day of oil lasting for eight, which is why we celebrate Hanukkah for eight nights. This tale is wonderful and charming, but since this miracle does not appear in the Bible, we cannot be sure it really happened. Nevertheless, I grew up enjoying this story as it became the basis for receiving eight presents during the holiday—one for each night!

Soon after becoming a believer in November 1970, I began to ponder the relationship between Hanukkah, the holiday with which I was raised, and Christmas, a holiday brand new to me. The holidays were just around the corner, and as a new Jewish believer, I felt I had to choose between the two. Often, our friends and family who do not know the Lord believe the holidays identify whether you are a Jewish person or a Christian when we know we can be both! We have a saying I like, “Christmas is really a Jewish holiday,” which celebrates the birth of the Jewish Messiah and Savior of the world.

## PARALLELS BETWEEN HANUKKAH AND CHRISTMAS

Some of my brothers and sisters might differ on the date and details of Christmas and various traditions associated with the season. Yet, we all agree Jesus—or Yeshua (His Hebrew name)—was born of a Jewish virgin, as Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 7:14).

He is God in the flesh, and the deliverance we experience through Him is greater than the deliverance Jewish people experienced at the first Hanukkah. Our salvation brings the gift of eternal life and enables us to overcome slavery to sin and death. The national deliverance celebrated during Hanukkah commemorates the deliverance of Jewish people from Greco-Syrian rule and a return to self-governance.

Both are wonderful, but there is no comparison between the two, as Jesus Himself said, “*So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed*” (John 8:36).

These two great holidays are “joined at the hip,” yet the bonds go much further than giving presents, lighting candles, and even the wonderful family togetherness we enjoy during this season.

The most profound linkage is this . . . *if it were not for Hanukkah, there would be no Christmas*. Had Antiochus destroyed all Jewish people during the first Hanukkah, the Messiah could not have been born to a Jewish virgin, as promised.

## GOD PRESERVES HIS PEOPLE

We might also look at the continued existence of the nation of Israel as another Hanukkah miracle! Every year, Hanukkah reaffirms our belief in God’s faithfulness to His covenants and promises (Genesis 12:1–3 ff.). The Lord will keep His covenant with Israel—His chosen people will never be destroyed (Jeremiah 31:35–37; Romans 11:29).

We can never forget what happened to innocent Israelis on October 7, 2023. Hamas terrorists crossed into Israel with the sinister purpose of destroying human life in the most gruesome ways. They came to kidnap, rape, and slaughter—in effect, trying to burn Israel to the ground. The attacks were inhuman!

The hatred of Jewish people we see today is part of the devil’s plot to destroy Jewish people, embarrass God, and prevent Israel from fulfilling her role in the plan of God!

Jewish people have been the object of Satan’s ire for millennia, and the evil one has used complicit nations to attack His chosen people. We know the battle will be over one day as our one true and all-powerful Messiah, the son of David, will ascend His rightful throne to reign as King over a redeemed and renewed earth.

The Lord promised to preserve His people:

*Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: “If this fixed order departs from before Me,” declares the Lord, “then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.” Thus says the Lord, “If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done,” declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 31:35–37)*

We need to remember the future is glorious, according to the prophets of Israel. Isaiah wrote, “*The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will designate. You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God*” (Isaiah 62:2–3).

## HOPE DURING WAR!

We have hope for tomorrow, but we also are grateful for all He is doing today during the difficult and dark days of war. The staff of Your Mission to the Jewish People in Israel is providing love and comfort, meeting both the physical and spiritual needs of those Israelis suffering during the war.

We are serving Israelis who are displaced and evacuated from their homes active soldiers who need blankets, toiletries, food, and more. We are also serving the elderly by providing nourishment and spiritual comfort. So many of them cannot even make it to bomb shelters. They are alone and scared and desperately need our prayers and the comfort that only God can give.

I recently heard from one of our staff serving the Lord in the North, where they are under attack from Hezbollah operating in Southern Lebanon.

*Here in Nahariya, we are in a war and waiting for the fighting to spread. Nahariya is a massive military base, and the IDF has set up fighting points on the beaches and main highway. There are armed soldiers all over the place.*

*The artillery fire on the border six miles away can be seen and heard almost every day. Surprisingly, there have only been two red alerts in the past two weeks. I am reminded we are at war, and the artillery is a harsh reminder.*

*Pierre and I have been out giving away our soldier gift bags, which have been well received. We are preparing a second wave of gift bags. Or HaGalil Congregation is holding regular meetings and trying to encourage one another.*

## HOPE FROM HEAVEN

Israelis are now looking for hope beyond this world. Our missionaries are bringing the message of Jesus to Israelis person to person and heart to heart. God will use your support to help our staff help those hurting and grieving in Israel today and tomorrow. Our staff is what our Mission is all about.

Thanks so much for your faithful prayers and very generous support. Israel will survive. God’s work among the Jewish people will continue until He returns, so please help us this holiday season when we think about His gifts to us and our gifts to others!

Israelis will need our new Tel Aviv Messianic Center more tomorrow than today, considering the growing spiritual openness of Israelis due to the suffering of the last few months. The world has changed, Israel has changed, and Israelis are changing. Help us meet the needs of those suffering, especially the spiritual needs of Israelis, young and old, who are now seeking answers to life beyond politics and are more open to God’s help for earthly problems than ever before.

Thank you for standing with us and for caring!

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah!

In Him,



Mitch

# Highlights of the Messianic Community in Israel Today



Without question, the present growth and maturing of the believing community in Israel is the work of God. As we consider the history of ministry in Israel, we can learn some important lessons about how the Holy Spirit works. Since the rise of the modern Messianic movement in the 1970s, many faithful servants of God have sacrificially spread the gospel across the Holy Land.

Ministry to children and youth has especially built up the church in Israel. To appreciate the scope of ministry in Israel today, we spoke with a few key leaders who have their hands on the pulse of the state of the Messianic community in Israel today. They lead children's camps, disciple young adults, and have provided war relief to hundreds of people in Israel over the past several months.



approach to the camps, staffing them with local Israeli believers. This approach went on to shape many ministries in Israel. Until the 1990s, these Messianic camps were the only national camp program in Israel. In 1999, Jeannie and I became the camp directors. These Messianic camps are still going strong and, with the ongoing support of the Messianic Assembly, continue to enrich the ministries in Israel.

**Tell us a few stories of young adults who went to camp as children but today are serving the Lord in very fruitful ways.**

When we took over leadership of the Messianic camps, the missionary stepping down from the position told us we would know we were successful when we saw people we met at camp as children grown up and serving the Lord. We have now been leading the camps long enough to see a whole generation grow up. Many of those kids are now serving the Lord in different ways. One man who attended camp as a child had a vision to start a youth ministry. This outreach to youth is now the largest one in the country! We also know a young woman who now works with Chosen People Ministries' Israeli backpacker ministry in New Zealand.

**How should we pray for the camps in Israel today?**

Great question! Please pray:

- for the Lord to raise up people to minister to this generation of children because camps are growing
- there will continue to be love for camps
- the number of children and youth ministries will continue to grow
- for God to provide wise and capable leaders
- for the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts and minds of Israeli children and youth to fully embrace the Messiah and become future gospel servants

## THE START OF CHILDREN'S CAMPS

Efraim and Jeannie Goldstein serve on our staff in Israel. God has honored their work running children's camps for years and years in partnership with the Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem. These camping programs have been instrumental in fueling the current movement of the Spirit we see in Israel today. What God has done through them to help shape a new generation of Israelis for the Lord should encourage us all.

**Efraim and Jeannie, can you tell us more about the Messianic camps in Israel?**

The first Messianic children's camp in Israel was held in 1972. I [Efraim] was sports director. Less than a dozen kids attended. The Messianic Assembly underwrote the camp. They did not turn kids away if their families were unable to pay. If we needed anything, the Assembly would supply it, and they were available if we needed any help. They took a grassroots





## CAMPS FOR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

Another key person who has led camping programs for children in Israel is Maxim Katz. He and his wife Slavna have done an incredible job, especially reaching new immigrant children who have come over from war-torn Ukraine, and even some from Russia.

### Can you tell us how you started doing camping programs among the new immigrants?

They started around 2002 through our ministry in Messianic congregations. The kids were mostly new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. It was very difficult for them to be part of a new culture, and going to camp in Hebrew would have been especially difficult. About eight years ago, we shifted to doing camps in Hebrew with Russian and Ukrainian translation as needed. By then, we had older kids who lived in Israel for five or ten years and found Hebrew easier. In the past two years since the war started, we have done several smaller camps throughout the year for new immigrant children, allowing us to address the spiritual and psychological challenges these young people face. Our smaller camps have about twenty to twenty-five kids each, while our main camps have 100 to 120.

### What are some stories about young children finding the Lord?

There are many stories! I remember one girl, now twenty-six years old, attended camp when she was twelve. She came from an unbelieving family, but the third year she came to camp with us, she decided to be baptized. She told us, “Last night, something happened to me, and I really want to be baptized.” Since then, she started to go to a congregation in the north and is still there today.

One boy, who is now in the army, was invited to our camp by a friend. He was from an unbelieving family too. After camp, he invited his family to our congregation. The whole family came to faith after six months!

### Since you have been doing these camps for years among Israeli children, would you tell us about some of the young people who went to camp and are now serving the Lord in Israel?

On several occasions, I have run into people who told me they remembered me from camp and said how much camp meant to them. One man, who now is a congregational leader, said camps were very helpful to him. Another time, I met someone on a worship team who caused problems at camp as a child. It was very encouraging for me to see him serving the Lord as an adult.

## SERVING GOD AND ISRAELIS IN WARTIME

Over the past couple of months, our staff in Israel have been hard at work faithfully serving God and Israelis during this difficult time. Since Israel is such a small country—and the Messianic community even smaller!—they all know people who have died, are mourning immediate family members, or are serving in the military. In the midst of their own trauma and grief, they do all they can to assist those in need and proclaim the gospel. They could not do it without the grace of the Holy Spirit and your support. Here is what our workers on the ground in Israel have to say about how we can bless Israel during wartime.

***Do not underestimate the power of prayer!*** We know a worship leader in Sderot, one of the southern cities terrorists attacked on Saturday, October 7. He was in a prayer meeting and reports they did not hear a single gunshot or missile during that time. As soon as they finished, the violence resumed. Though Israel is in a complicated situation, we trust God can do more than we can imagine.

So please persevere in prayer for us and for Israel. Pray for our staff, as we are all under immense stress trying to help others while grappling with our own grief. Please pray God will protect innocent lives caught in this conflict. Above all, we pray many in Israel will come to believe in Jesus our Messiah. Many organizations are helping Israelis in need, but it is a privilege for us to bring what others do not bring—the message of eternal and abundant life in Jesus.

## DISCIPLING YOUNG ADULTS

Israel has many dedicated leaders, pastors, evangelists, and other servants of God. Some have done a marvelous job preparing younger Israelis before they go to the army so they can not only survive the challenges of military life but also have a witness to their fellow Israeli soldiers. This witness is especially crucial now as Israel mobilized hundreds of thousands of reservists for the war. Chosen People Ministries—Israel has done a lot of this discipleship, but we also partner with others who do such wonderful work among younger people.

Joel Goldberg, who leads a terrific ministry among youth, has this to say about the way God is moving among young adults today:

Today, the Messianic youth in Israel are bolder, more confident, and more direct about their faith than ever before. They are open and willing to talk about their faith in Yeshua in their schools and into their military years. It takes courage, faith, and understanding to be willing to risk what they work so hard to obtain and every person needs—acceptance and belonging. Praise God for supportive communities, solid teaching, and the growth of the body of Yeshua in the Land.

We are seeing tremendous gospel fruit in Israel unlike anything we have seen since the days of the early church. May these testimonies encourage you and spur you to continue to pray with us for Israel. These are only a handful of the stories we have collected. There are dozens—or hundreds more—testimonies of how the Lord is calling His people to love Him and follow Him!

# The Greatest Day in Jewish History



If the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) truly talk about a coming Messiah, then one would anticipate the greatest day in Jewish history—and in the history of the whole world—being the day Messiah became flesh and tabernacled among us. If this is true, the greatest day in Jewish history is what we celebrate today as Christmas! The Bible does not say Jesus was born on December 25—and many people believe He was born another time of the year—nevertheless, He came to us as a newborn baby boy. Whenever it was, both Jewish people and the Gentile nations should consider it the best day ever!

What exactly does the Old Testament tell us about the Messiah? First, it tells us how the Messiah would come. Isaiah 9:6 says, *“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.”* This verse reveals God would become part of humanity by being born into this world (also called the Incarnation). Isaiah 7:14 gives us additional information about His birth by telling us it would be miraculous: *“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.”*

Second, the Hebrew Scriptures refer to where the Messiah would be born. Micah 5:2 says, *“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.”* This verse foretells the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judah (as opposed to another Bethlehem located in northern Israel). This passage

also speaks of a ruler *“from the days of eternity,”* which refers to Messiah’s eternal existence.

Third, the Old Testament alludes to when the Messiah would come in Daniel 9:26. It says the Messiah will be *“cut off”* (speaking of His death), and then *“the city and the sanctuary”* (Jerusalem and the Temple) will be destroyed by *“the people of the prince who is to come.”* We have the luxury of looking back at history to realize this prophecy refers to the Temple’s destruction by Rome in 70 CE. Daniel said the Messiah must have come before Rome demolished the Temple. This passage is so meaningful to our ministry. Our founder, Hungarian rabbi Leopold Cohn, began his spiritual journey of coming to faith in Jesus after studying the prophecy in Daniel 9. His journey led him to the streets of New York City, where he soon heard the gospel preached in Yiddish, the language of his homeland. He eventually accepted Jesus as his Messiah and established our ministry in 1894.

Finally, we must answer the ultimate question, *“Why did the Messiah come?”* The answer to this question is in Isaiah 53:5: *“But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.”* The One who would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE came to die for our sins and be our Savior. As the angel Gabriel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21, *“She [Mary] will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”* If you misunderstand this fact, you miss the reason for the Christmas season—Jesus.

The who, what, where, when, why, and how all converge on the day Messiah was born—the greatest day in Jewish history. May this season bring you everlasting hope and joy through Jesus.



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

# NEWS BRIEFS FROM ISRAEL

## MINISTRY IN WAR-TORN SOUTHERN ISRAEL

On the tenth day of the war, our staff arrived with humanitarian aid in Moshav Sapir, about eighty miles north of Eilat (the southernmost tip of Israel). The government transported 2,500 people from areas bordering Gaza to this small settlement. Our staff discovered they had a significant need for basic necessities and helped with those needs as much as they could. In addition to the physical work, our team engaged with people who had been on the front lines and offered support. Some asked for prayers (they all knew our staff were believers in Jesus).

Our staff heard the story of Tal\* and her two sons. They are from the city of Sderot, one of the cities Hamas brutalized on October 7. Tal showed a video of terrorists heading toward her house. She said she had never been able to fathom the horrors of the Holocaust until she witnessed firsthand what occurred in her neighborhood. Tal expressed feeling like Anne Frank as she hid in her home for hours, praying they would not be discovered and harmed. Her eldest son, who is nine years old, experienced the trauma so deeply he stopped talking. Her eyes welled with tears when our staff informed her of many Christians worldwide who are praying for and supporting Israel and Jewish people. Please keep Tal and her children in your prayers for healing and salvation.

## HIGH SCHOOL FRIENDS REUNITE IN ISRAEL, DISCUSS BELIEF IN JESUS

One of our missionaries in Tel Aviv, who grew up in the United States, reunited with a high school friend who comes from a secular Jewish family and was very upset when his sister became a believer in Jesus. "I felt she betrayed our people, and I was not willing to hear anything she wanted to share," he said. He gradually became more observant of Jewish religious practice and moved to Israel, where he had heard his high school friend had also moved.

When our staff member told him she also became a follower of Jesus, he felt more comfortable asking her about it. She explained how she sees Jesus as the promised Jewish Messiah, showed some prophecies, and described how Jesus has drawn her closer to the God of Israel.

One Friday evening, the man got stuck in Tel Aviv, missing the last bus to Jerusalem before the Sabbath began. Our missionary invited him to a Sabbath gathering at the Tel Aviv Messianic Center. Though hesitant, he was curious. "I do not know what I was expecting, but I was delighted to find a vibrant group

of Israelis lighting the candles for the Sabbath and sharing delicious kosher food. The joy of the Sabbath was very present." Most of the people he met at the dinner believe in Jesus as Messiah, and someone told a short story of how Jesus changed her life. "We then sang Sabbath songs and some other songs of praise. It changed my idea of Messianic Jews. I realized their love for the Scriptures and for community."

He went home and, after the Sabbath, called his sister to ask her why and how she came to believe in Jesus. This special time helped restore his relationship with his sister. While he still has many spiritual questions and is seeking answers, he is thankful for his Sabbath experience at the Tel Aviv Messianic Center.



## BELIEVERS IN ISRAEL FIND ENCOURAGEMENT AT THE TEL AVIV CENTER

We have received numerous testimonies of believers in the Messianic community in Israel expressing their gratitude for the Tel Aviv Messianic Center and its impact on their lives. Many said they appreciated gathering with fellow believers in a safe, loving environment where they could explore and express their belief in Jesus through various community events. To some, it feels like home.

Others told how their time at the center led them to grow in their knowledge of God and His Word. They were looking forward to spending more time with fellow believers. It is especially meaningful and important for them to connect with other believers since Israel's believing community is much smaller than in the United States. They can experience God's power as they pray for and encourage one another, even through difficult times. The center offers worship nights, Sabbath meals, Bible studies, game nights, and many other opportunities for fellowship. The Tel Aviv Messianic Center is a tremendous blessing to the body of Messiah in Israel.

\*Names changed

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**Donate Appreciated Stocks or Property.** When you donate appreciated assets—such as stocks or real estate (including vacant land, a rental property, or an unneeded vacation home)—your generosity helps reveal the hope of Messiah to Jewish people in an even greater way and also provides tax benefits for you:

- You receive a charitable giving tax deduction for the fair market value of the asset (up to 30 percent of your adjusted gross income) if you have owned the asset for more than 12 months.
- You will likely avoid the capital gains tax you would pay on the appreciation if you sold the asset.
- With the stock market being up for most of this year, now is a good time for many to donate appreciated stock.

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



*Israel, the Church, and the Middle East*—PRICE: \$14.95<sup>US</sup>

In recent years, the traditional pro-Israel stance of evangelicals has come under fire by those who support the Palestinian cause. *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East*, by Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser, respectfully addresses a number of the divisive issues raised by those critical of Israel. The book is directed toward Christian leaders, theological students, and well-read lay Christians who are actively seeking guidance and resources regarding the Middle East conflict.



*Israel's Glorious Future*—PRICE: \$8.95<sup>US</sup>

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