

**Disturbing and Challenging (integrity
and ethics in a sleazy world)**

Vayishlach And He sent
Torah: Gen. 32:3(4)-36:43
Haftarah: Obad. 1:1-21
Brit Chadashah: Heb. 11:11-20

Introduction

We are now one week away from the season of **Chanukah**, and there are only twelve days to **Christmas**. I cannot think of two religious festivals which have suffered more secularization (sell out) than these two. Chanukah has become the Jewish answer to Christmas, a festival of lights by heroes who refused to assimilate. A not too subtle way of getting the point across – whatever you do, nu, don't assimilate. Become a geek, but never a Greek! Whatever remaining a Jew means, have lots of fun and food, light the candles and show your neighbours your Jewish colours, not your Christmas lights.

Well, what about Christmas? It is the most popular holiday in our society today, and every year I get amused at the number of people who try and find the true meaning of Christmas, without ever talking about the obvious: John 3:16 and John 1:14 the celebration of the birth of the Messiah. in a manger - not tinsel, not turkey, not Donner, not Blitzen and most of the red noses this time of the year have got nothing to do with Rudolph.

So, where does that leave us? Bah, humbug, already, and a very merry oy gavel! Maybe. But, here, at least a little, I may be agreeing with the Rabbis who quit trying to suppress Chanukah, but with one little difference. Christians have come up with lots of catchy phrases like: keep Christ in Christmas. Why don't we come up one of our own: put Messiah back in Chanukah. But that's for next week.

This week I want to disturb you and challenge you, before you drown in turkeys, dreidels and chocolate. As a community of believers, one of the most important functions we have is to shine and to be salty, and to make sure that neither witness disappears nor diminishes. You see, every generation of believers from Adam and Eve down to us at B'nai Chayim has faced the horrible spectre of assimilation, which is a nice way of saying losing your faith and joining the world. We need to watch out and examine our ways, in every situation and in every generation, to make sure we are not beginning to wander, to dim, and to paganize.

Pagans in the sheepfold

What does it mean to paganize? I John 2:15, 16 (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life) versus John 16:8-11 (sin, righteousness and judgment). When we became believers, we made a commitment to the Kingdom which is coming. We came to the light and stopped lurking in the shadows. Sometimes we may still do some lurking, but not as a **lifestyle direction**. We made a commitment to ***biblical spirituality*** and it is our duty with one another to make sure this spirituality remains healthy, vital and free of compromise. As we enter this holiday season, how are you doing spiritually?

Santa isn't the only one who has a list, in Yeshua, it's called the Book of Life, and our Lord is checking His more than twice (I Cor. 4:5). At Rosh Hashanah we say every man's deeds bear his signature and G-d keeps a record. ***At this season we had better ask ourselves what that record***

looks like. I intend to celebrate both festivals and to spend some quality time with friends and family. I may even do a little shopping.

But for a festival which celebrates the birth of the Messiah, who came to die for the sins of a lost world, it is the best example of assimilation and paganism there is – and Chanukah ain't far behind. What do we do? Let me give you a short check list. It may be disturbing, and I hope it is challenging. I do not want you to fight the festivals and yell at people, that would be silly. **We need to examine our ways to see if we are in the faith, especially at this time of the year.** Let me ask you what may be the most disturbing question you have been asked in quite a while: have you let the Greeks of this age defile the temple of your heart and life? Are pigs being sacrificed on the altar of your life? Is the Torah a closed book for you, except at shul?

Don't stop celebrating either festival. There is nothing wrong with presents, tinsel, dreidels and blintzes, *unless, for you, that's all there is to either festival.* **As we wander through the silly season of schmaltz and greed, let's not lose sight of the spiritual realities which we stand for, and by which we will one day be judged, tested and rewarded.** Whether you have a tree, a chanukiah, lots of presents or just a quiet time with friends and family, let me share Rabbi Michael's **Holiday Wish List**, or as I prefer to call it:

A Messianic Jewish Christmas List for Chanukah

1. Is your life full of the **exalted** or the **abominable** (Luke 16:15)
2. What are you going to exchange, the **whole world** or your **soul**? (Matt. 16:26)
3. **Quenched, grieved** and **unforgiven**? Where is the Holy Spirit in your life?
4. Are you coming in **first** or **last** with G-d? (Matt. 20:16)
5. Where's your **treasure**, your **heart** - with G-d or Mammon? (Matt. 6:19-24)
6. What place is G-d's **righteousness** in your life? (Matt 6:33)
7. Is a **root of evil** choking your life? (I Tim. 6:3-11)
8. What are doing with your **money**? (I Tim. 6:17-19)
9. Are you grumpy, angry and full of **judgment**? (Matt. 7:1, 2 or John 7:24)
10. Are you living an **integrated** or a **peripheral** spirituality? (Deut. 6:4-9)

Conclusion

Messianic Judaism follows an annual cycle of festivals which call us daily, weekly, monthly and yearly to examine our hearts and lives and to keep walking with our beloved Messiah through this life, until He returns to set up His glorious kingdom over all the generations and nations of mankind. Our job as a Messianic Jewish community of Jews and Gentiles is to be **guardians of this focus**, and to challenge and disturb one another whenever anything threatens to dim the spiritual realities of this life, that is to say **the life which is to come**. Really nothing else really matters. So, nu, oy gavel, what really matters to you? No really? Are we disturbed yet?

We live on the edge of eternity, and we understand the purpose of life. We live in a world that will try and pull us away from spirituality into **functional paganism** (compromise, complacency, and carnality). In worship we stand together in His presence. One day we shall stand forever in that same presence (what's that going to look like for you?) and everything in our lives needs to point in that direction, cause one day it's going to be too late. Season's Greetings, mishpocah.

More about that next week. Let's pray.