

MESSIANIC

WINTER HOLIDAY HELPER

MESSIANIC HELPER series

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WINTER HOLIDAY HELPER

edited by Margaret McKee Huey

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Messianic Winter Holiday Helper

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edited by Margaret McKee Huey

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	ix
1 The Holidays.....	1
<i>by Jane McKee</i>	
2 The Christmas Challenge.....	3
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
3 “Christmas is Pagan”!? How to Offend Family and Alienate Friends.....	13
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
4 The Importance of Chanukah.....	19
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
5 A Summarization of Chanukah Traditions.....	29
<i>by Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee</i>	
6 Why We Should Celebrate Chanukah.....	37
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
7 The Message of Daniel.....	43
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
8 The Message of 1 Maccabees.....	61
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
9 The Message of 2 Maccabees	87
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
10 The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism.....	121
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
11 The Forgotten Past.....	149
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
12 A Restoration of Israel—Without the Jews?.....	157
<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
13 Handling the Holidays.....	167
<i>by Mark Huey</i>	
14 Being Messianic in a Post-Christian World.....	173
<i>by Mark Huey</i>	

15	Chanukah and Encountering Worldly Philosophies.....	181
	<i>by J.K. McKee</i>	
16	Celebrating Chanukah Today.....	187
	<i>by Margaret McKee Huey</i>	
	FAQs on the Winter Holiday Season.....	193
	Kosher Your Plate for Chanukah.....	209
	LITURGICAL RESOURCES.....	221
	The Role of Liturgy.....	223
	Kindling the Chanukah Lights.....	225
	Blessing After Meals for Chanukah.....	227
	Hallel for Chanukah.....	230
	The Dreidel Game.....	234
	About the Editor.....	235
	Bibliography.....	239

Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that 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.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	Ger: German
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	GNT: Greek New Testament
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	Grk: Greek
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
Ara: Aramaic	HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	Heb: Hebrew
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	KJV: King James Version
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	LXX: Septuagint
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	m. Mishnah
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	MT: Masoretic Text
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	

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*
NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*
NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*
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
orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
OT: Old Testament
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*

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*
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
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
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

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 that 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 that we have experienced as we have become thoroughly Messianic. We often find that our extended family and friends can be confused or perplexed about our changing Christmas celebration to *Chanukah* observance, just as they are about our 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 would encourage families of Messianic Believers to invite others into their homes during the Winter holiday season, and partake of the wonderful things that 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 that discuss how to deal with the Winter holiday season. We have included articles that have come from our Virtual Winter holiday series, 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 a practical guide 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 Yeshua. This broad array of material should not only assist you in interacting with others during this time of year, but will also be quite informative in learning about the critical lessons that the account of the Maccabees teaches us.¹

¹ 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 that will often include an edition of the Apocrypha are the Revised Standard Version,

Messianic Winter Holiday Helper

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 Messianics, how can we act like such behavior is 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 told us that people would know that we are His disciples by the love that we 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 we know about walking like the Messiah. Then 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, celebrating *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 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 brethren to salvation (Romans 11:11). While Jewish people are often perplexed at why a non-Jew would want to celebrate *Chanukah*, seeds that 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

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.

-1-

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 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 that 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*.

The story of the Maccabees and the miracle of the rededication of the Temple are wonderful to hear. The Festival of Lights can hold much delight for us. There is much fun in celebrating this event in Jewish history. Yet, we cannot forget who the Light of the World is. **We cannot forget Yeshua.**

When we say to family and friends that we do not celebrate Christmas, we must be careful to let them understand that we are primarily talking about Santa Claus and the Christmas tree. With our non-Messianic family, we have had to make it clear that we still very much believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, Bethlehem, and the baby who was born to save us from our sins.

Messianic Winter Holiday Helper

However, our holiday time now centers on *the Temple*—Yeshua, the Light of the World—the Temple who needs no cleansing and the Temple who can never be destroyed!

The same principles hold true with Easter and Passover. When you tell others that you do not believe in Easter, be very careful that you let them know that you are talking about the name Easter, the bunnies, eggs, and candy—not the Lord’s resurrection. My family never did the bunny thing! In the early 1980s, my late father Kimball McKee introduced the Passover *seder* to our local church, even though we did not fully understand then that the Passover celebration was not an option for us, but a commandment for all generations of God’s people to remember (Exodus 12:14).

Today, we no longer have our Easter ham and yeast rolls to commemorate the day, but in the celebration of Passover, we are very careful *not* to leave out the essential element of who the Messiah is. We must remember who conducted the Last Seder and what the Cup of Redemption means.¹

Yeshua is the Passover Lamb. The Passover is not just a remembrance of the Ancient Israelites being set free from Egypt; it is an illustration of Yeshua setting us free from the bondage of sin. He died for us and was raised from the dead!

As we go forth as Messianic Believers, we must never forget in our celebrations of *Chanukah*, Passover, and others, about Yeshua. For it is He who makes us set-apart, and it is He who makes us Messianic.

¹ For a further discussion, consult the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.

-2-

The Christmas Challenge

J.K. McKee

No matter who you are or what religious ideology you hold to, the Winter holiday season involving Christmas will be a challenge.¹ It is first a challenge to non-Believers as they are continually presented with the message of the birth of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) into a world that is lost in sin. Secondly, the Christmas holiday is a challenging time for many Christians who seek to remember the birth of our Savior, but at the same time all too often indulge themselves in overly frivolous gift-giving. And thirdly, the Christmas season is a challenge to Messianic Believers, as we choose not to celebrate this holiday.

The Reformation certainly did a great deal of work eliminating many non-Biblical Roman Catholic traditions and theologies from the faith. Today, Protestants believe in salvation by grace through faith and in the priesthood of all Believers, rejecting the claim that the pope is the “vicar of Christ” on Earth. Many evangelical Believers recognize that if something is primarily Catholic, it should be tested against the inspired Word of God to see if it is truly Biblical. The Bible does not tell us to pray to saints or confess sin to a priest to be forgiven. Scripture does not teach transubstantiation. Furthermore, Scripture does not tell us that Mary, the mother of our Lord Yeshua, is the so-called “Mother of God,” for our Creator has always been and ever will be (cf. Micah 5:2-3).

Many Protestants pride themselves on being *Sola Scriptura*—Scripture Only. However, it is an unfortunate reality that many Protestants today still adhere, unknowingly, to some non-Biblical Catholic tradition. There are various practices and traditions among Christians today that can neither be

¹ This article was originally written for J.K. McKee, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2003).

Messianic Winter Holiday Helper

found in Scripture, nor find their origins in Scripture, but rather on customs established long since the death of the Apostles and early Believers.²

All too often, it has been our unfortunate observation that many in the Messianic community strongly and vehemently criticize our evangelical brothers and sisters during the Winter holidays. Statements along the lines of "Christmas is a pagan holiday!" are all too commonplace. This turns many away from hearing the origins about a holiday that cannot be specifically found in the Bible, but is seemingly good. Many Christians believe that when you denounce Christmas, you are denying the Biblical reality of the virgin birth of our Lord and Savior. Certainly, Luke ch. 2 is a part of our Holy Scriptures, and the miracle of the birth of Yeshua is a sacred Biblical event. In an effort to stress balance, grace, and understanding during the Winter season among both Christians and Messianic Believers, we offer our analysis of "the Christmas challenge."

A Brief History of Christmas

Why is it asserted among many contemporary Christians that if there are those who do not celebrate Christmas, then obviously such people cannot be true Believers? Are we dangerous cultists who do not believe in the virgin birth of the Messiah?

Obviously, Luke ch. 2, which fully details the miraculous birth of Yeshua the Messiah, the Savior of the world, is something that none of us should ever deny or consider unimportant. If Yeshua had not been born, He would not have grown up to become the perfect sacrifice for our sin. We would be unable to have His blood covering us and have no hope for permanent forgiveness of sin.

But what of the holiday we now call "Christmas"? Where did it come from? If its celebration is not specified in Holy Scripture itself, then how did we get it?

Author Susan E. Richardson makes some interesting observations in her popular book *Holidays & Holy Days*:

"During the Roman Empire, people usually celebrated the birthdays of rulers and other outstanding people, though not necessarily on the exact date of their birth. The early Christians' desire to honor Christ's birth may come from the fact that they gave him the title and other honors that pagans gave to the 'divine' emperors. These Christians lived in a culture

² J. Theodore Mueller, "Christmas," in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 117; Ronald V. Huggins, "Christmas," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 240; Brett Scott Provance, *Pocket Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), pp 37-38.

where the birth of a ruler was a major celebration. What could be more natural than celebrating the birth of the King of Kings?

“Despite the logic of this, Christmas has long been surrounded by controversy. In A.D. 245, Origen wrote that even to consider observing it was a sin. Early Christians in Armenia and Syrians accused Roman Christians of sun worship for celebrating Christmas on December twenty-fifth.”³

It is witnessed from ancient Christian history, that commemorating the birth of the King of Kings, is something controversial. Still, the birth of the Messiah is a recorded event in the Gospels. Typological connections are undoubtedly intended to be made between the birth of Yeshua, and the birth of Moses seen in Torah reading *Shemot* (Exodus 1:1-6:1). However, we should find serious problems remembering Yeshua’s birth at a time which has historically been associated with the honoring of pagan deities, as Richardson later comments that “pagan celebrations held on December 25 included Mesopotamian celebrations for Marduk, Greek ones for Zeus, and Roman *Saturnalia* in honor of Saturn.”⁴ In their textbook *History of the World Christian Movement*, which I had to use for Church History I at seminary (Summer 2005), Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist summarize,

“Prior to the year 300 there had been no consensus among Christians concerning the date on which to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Some argued for a spring date, but others suggested December 25. That latter date was the day celebrated in honor of the Invincible Sun, who had grown in imperial favor through the third century. Through the course of the fourth century most Christians came to accept December 25 as the celebration of the birth of Jesus, integrating elements of this solar monotheism with Christianity.”⁵

The celebration of the Messiah’s birth on December 25 came as a result of generations of Christian people, long after the death of the Apostles, employing syncretism to evangelize pagans. The original intent was to reinterpret local religious holidays with Biblical meanings, in an effort to share the gospel. Without any doubt, the motives of some were sincere, as they wanted to “adapt their faith” for the pagans around them, and use Biblical overtones of their holidays to spread the good news. However, such adaptations came at a time after the destruction of Jerusalem when anti-Semitism was at a serious high in the Roman Empire, and the Believers in

³ Susan E. Richardson, *Holidays & Holy Days* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 2001), 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 164.