THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

125 YEARS

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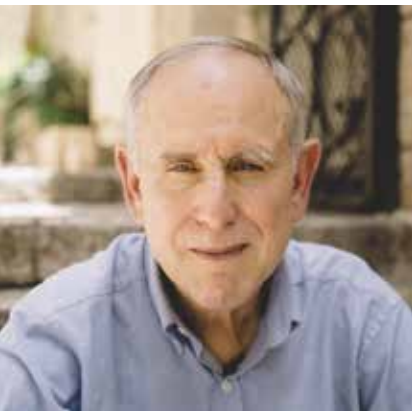
CELEBRATING MESSIAH, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

HANUKKAH | THE PROMISE OF A KING | TRUTH OR HERESY? | GOD CAME IN THE FLESH | HEBREWS BIBLE STUDY

FROM THE PRESIDENT



HANUKKAH

The Messiah is the Light of the World

Shalom dear friend in the Messiah,

'Tis the Hanukkah–Christmas season! It is a time of good cheer when, generally speaking, Jewish people are celebrating Hanukkah and Christians are celebrating Christmas. Though I must admit, even in New York, there are quite a few "Hanukkah bushes" (a Christmas tree decorated for Hanukkah) displayed in homes throughout the area.

It goes without saying that there are many differences between the holidays, but through the years I have discovered many parallels as well.

Bus Stop at Christmas by Stevan Dohanos. ***The Saturday Evening Post,*** December 13, 1952 © SEPS. Licensed by Curtis Licensing

One of the most obvious similarities is that both Hanukkah and Christmas are observed the same time of year. The precise date of the Messiah's birth is a bit controversial in some circles, but what is absolutely clear from the New Testament is that the God of Israel became man, dwelled among us, died for our sins, and was raised to life in fulfillment of the plan of God's redemption detailed in the Bible.

This year, Hanukkah, which is an eight-day celebration, and Christmas overlap once again. This creates a natural tension between the two festivals, especially in Jewish communities. I grew up believing that one of the ways you could tell a Jew from a Christian was by the holidays he or she celebrated. For that reason, celebrating Hanukkah was viewed as a symbol of loyalty to the Jewish people. My family and other Jewish people who know that I believe in Jesus as my Messiah often ask me which holidays I celebrate. The underlying question being so subtly asked is whether or not I still view myself as Jewish now that I believe in Jesus!

In case you are unfamiliar with Hanukkah, let me give you a brief overview of the celebration.

Hanukkah celebrates the great victory of the Maccabees, a family of Levitical priests, over the armies of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian Greek general whom the Jewish people nicknamed "Antiochus the madman"! He tried to destroy the Jewish people by turning them into Greeks, but failed.

Hanukkah is also called the "Festival of Lights." According to Jewish tradition, when the Temple was recaptured from Antiochus, there was only enough oil to keep the menorah in the Temple lit for one day. However, a miracle happened, and the eternal light of the Temple menorah lasted for eight days, the time it took for the ceremonial olive oil to cure and keep the lights perpetually burning. Jewish people see this as a great dual miracle—that God gave the Jewish people a humanly impossible military victory and marked the event by ensuring the lights lasted the full eight days. That is why we light a candle each night as part of the eight-day festival.

The lights provide an obvious bridge between Hanukkah and Christmas. When my kids were small, I used to take them through parts of Brooklyn during the Christmas season just to see the homes decorated with lights in the most magnificent ways. Some neighborhoods looked like they belonged in Rockefeller Center or Times Square at New Year's!

The tradition of giving presents is also important for both holidays. Jewish people give one gift to their kids each night of Hanukkah, and the tradition of giving presents on Christmas, in the tradition of the magi at Jesus' birth, continues until this very day. Of course, both holidays are often over-commercialized, but in my opinion, *there is never a bad time to give presents, as long as you are focused on the real reason for this season.* Jewish people are thankful to God for preserving the nation and express this thanksgiving by giving presents to one another. This is similar to Christmas, as we show our gratitude to God for sending His only Son to die for our sins by giving presents.

This is a great time of the year to show your gratitude to God and to the Jewish people by giving an end-of-year gift to Chosen People Ministries that will be used to reach Jewish people for Jesus!

And then there are the wonderful and delicious traditional holiday foods! Jewish people eat potato pancakes (*latkes*) and jelly donuts (*sufganiyot*). These are all cooked in oil and eaten to remind us that God enabled a day's worth of oil to miraculously last for eight days. Christmas, depending on where you come from, is replete with wonderful and different types of food as well. From Christmas cookies to Norwegian *pinnekjøtt* (lamb or mutton rib) to delicious Italian panettone, the holiday foods are an essential part of our celebration.

What I like best about both Hanukkah and Christmas, though, is the focus on family. It is one of the reasons why this holiday season can be so sad for those who have lost loved ones or do not have a family, either physical or spiritual. Enjoying the holiday with family, whether relatives or "congregational family," is truly beautiful. I pray that, if you have lost a loved one recently, God will give you a full measure of His grace and joy during this season of the year.

A Messianic Jewish Perspective

As a Messianic Jew, I am always looking for deeper links between the festivals and believe there is an absolutely amazing parallel that I want to share with you.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 10, we see that Jesus celebrated Hanukkah, also called the Feast of Dedication. (The Hebrew word *Hanukkah* literally means "dedication.") The festival also served as a platform for Jesus to make one of His most profound statements about His person and ministry recorded in the New Testament.

It is this one statement that I believe brings Hanukkah and Christmas together in the most dramatic and profound way.

> *At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one"* (John 10:22–30).

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When asked if He was the Messiah, Jesus did not give a simple yes or no. Rather, He revealed His true nature to the Jewish leaders and declared that He and His Father were one. This declaration affirms the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah who predicted that, one day, God would take on human flesh, dwell among us, and reveal the character of our heavenly Father in the most tangible of ways.

Isaiah wrote, "*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*" (Isaiah 7:14).

It is only fitting that Jesus made this declaration on the Feast of Dedication, which reminds us of the great miracle of the Incarnation and revelation of God's glory and light. This parallels the symbolism found in the menorah in the Temple as God Himself is the true light that illuminates our hearts and souls. As Jesus said earlier in John's Gospel, ***"I am the Light of the world;*** *he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life*" (John 8:12).

The real link between Hanukkah and Christmas is Jesus Himself. He is God in the flesh; the light of the world who dispels our personal darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of His Son. As Isaiah predicted and Jesus fulfilled,

> *"But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them"* (Isaiah 9:1–2).

And Paul adds,

> *"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son…"* (Colossians 1:13).

I hope you have great joy in this marvelous deliverance! I also pray you have a wonderful season of joy and that the light of your personal testimony of God's grace and victory will shine brightly among Jews and Gentiles during this special season of the year!

Your brother in the Light of the World,

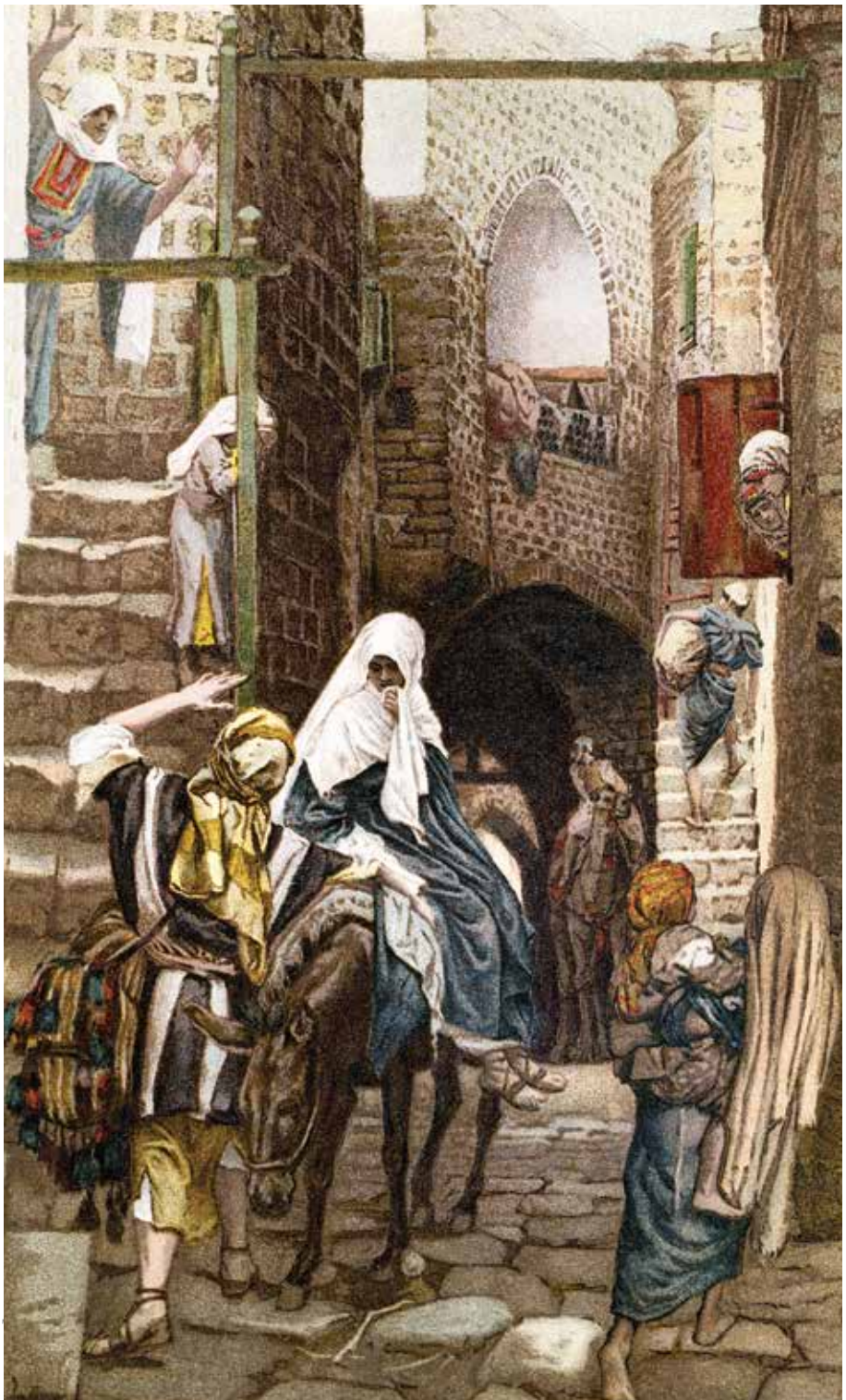
Mitch

P.S. We are now beginning our 126th year as a ministry among the Jewish people. Thank you for your faithful prayers and support. We are excited about 2020. Stick with us!

CHRISTMAS THROUGH JEWISH EYES: **THE PROMISE OF A KING**

Christmas reminds us that God is faithful to His promises. The prophecy that the Messiah will be born of a virgin was spoken by the great prophet Isaiah in these words: *"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"* (Isaiah 7:14). God fulfilled this promise by sending His only Son to be the Savior for both Jews and Gentiles. Yet, the Bible teaches us that He is not finished yet! There is more to come and more to be fulfilled.

Although everyone loves cute babies, we must never forget that the little baby Yeshua in the manger is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. One of the great prophecies linking His first and second comings is found in Isaiah 9:6–7. The prophet tells us that the character of the divine baby born of the virgin will be revealed through a number of different names. He will be called *"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace"* and sit on the throne of King David forever! When Messiah comes, He will establish His throne, fulfill His covenant with King David, and deliver and rule over all those who embrace Him as their Savior and Sovereign Lord.



Saint Joseph Seeks a Lodging in Bethlehem, by James Tissot / Brooklyn Museum © duncan1890 | ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

The Great Hallelujah

George Frederic Handel, the beloved German composer, understood these promises of God as well. The reason *The Messiah* concludes with the "Hallelujah Chorus" is because the first coming of the Messiah cannot be separated from His second coming. He was born to die and will return to rule. His atoning work is finished, but His plan and purposes for the Jewish people will continue until He fulfills every last promise He made by covenant to His chosen people.

The Jewish people were central to His first coming and will also be critical to His second coming as the Bible teaches that the end-time remnant of Jewish people will repent and turn to Jesus the Messiah. This turning will coincide with His return as *"they look on [Him] whom they have pierced"* (Zechariah 12:10). God cannot allow His Jewish people to be destroyed because He cannot break His promises to His chosen people whom He loves.

Christmas gives us hope because He will be faithful in fulfilling the promises tied to His second coming. His return will be the ultimate moment of deliverance for the Jewish people when they cry out and receive Jesus as their Messiah and King. The babe from Bethlehem will one day stand on the Mount of Olives, which will be split in two, and His full glory and majesty will be revealed. At that time, the enemies of God and of Israel will be destroyed. Jesus the Messiah will rule (Zechariah 12:10) and fulfill His promise to Abraham that, through him, the nations of the world will be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

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THE INCARNATION & VIRGIN BIRTH: **TRUTH OR HERESY**

The chasm between Judaism and Christianity goes beyond the unfortunate and sometimes bloody history between the two faiths. There are some deep theological divides as well. For example, Jewish people traditionally find it very difficult to understand the idea of the Incarnation—that Jesus is both fully man and fully God. So how can a Jewish person possibly come to believe that Jesus is God in the flesh when their community and heritage is so opposed to this belief?

Jewish people affirm that God is one; He is singular and not three. One of the core prayers of Judaism, referred to as the ***Shema,*** is based on Deuteronomy 6:4: *"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"* This is often viewed as a religious rallying cry within the Jewish community and recited almost every time Jewish people gather for prayer. The idea that God is three-in-one is viewed as non-Jewish and heretical by almost every Jewish person in the world, apart from Jewish believers in Messiah!

Jewish people also do not believe God can become a man and are taught that worshiping God in any form—be it flesh, wood, or stone—is idolatry. Therefore, to believe that God became a man and to then worship this individual would be viewed as antithetical to the Jewish faith. Resistance to the idea that God became a man is woven into the Jewish soul.

It is only when a sincere Jewish seeker studies the Old Testament—and sees that the possibility of what has been taught for ages might not sync with what was revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures—that he or she can consider the essential truth of the Incarnation. The Bible presents the Incarnation as a finishing touch on the promise God made to Abram in Genesis 12:1–3. In this fundamental passage, God promises to bless Abram and transform his descendants into a great nation and to bless the nations of the world. The blessing of the world was accomplished through the writing and preservation of the Bible and in the first coming of the Messiah.

Christmas—the celebration of His Incarnation—and Hanukkah point us to the One who was faithful in the past and will be faithful in the future. His promise to the Jewish people did not hit a dead end at the cross. The Bible teaches us that there is so much more to come when He returns. His chosen people have a vital and continuing role to play. Jesus, our resurrected King and Messiah, was born of a Jewish virgin, lived among the Jewish people, died and rose in Israel, and will shelter the Jewish people until the day He comes to reign over His kingdom.

WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT THAT **GOD CAME IN THE FLESH?**

One of the most well-known passages indicating the marvelous truth of the Incarnation is found in Isaiah 9:6–7:

> *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. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.*

In this passage, Isaiah uses four different names for the coming Messiah, two of which indicate that this future son of David would be God in the flesh. The son predicted earlier in Isaiah 7:14 would be God with us (Immanuel) as well as the "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father." The other two Hebrew terms in 9:6–7 indicate that He will be royalty since He will be both a "Wonderful Counselor" (a wise King) and the "Prince of Peace," promoting peace throughout the regions of His reign.

This Messianic King who suffered and died will one day reign on the throne of His forefather David and rule over the promised earthly kingdom. This is confirmed in verse 7 when the Messiah will sit on the throne of David His forefather forever! In that day, injustice, unrighteousness, and all the marks of sinful earthly kingdoms will be removed and transformed by the Son of David who will bring in a new and holy order of earthly government. It will be a kingdom no longer tainted by sin.

A second passage that also speaks of the divine character of Messiah was penned by a contemporary of Isaiah, the prophet Micah. In Micah 5:2, the prophet describes the coming Messiah, the ruler in Israel, as follows: *"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."*

The ruler in Israel would be born in Bethlehem, which is further defined by the word Ephrathah as referring to the Bethlehem located a few miles from Jerusalem. This was the ancestral home of David and the birthplace of Jesus the Messiah. This ruler is described as again being eternal in nature. We understand the passage in this way because the two Hebrew phrases translated "from long ago" and "from the days of eternity" when used elsewhere in the Old Testament most often refer to God.

All of these passages indicate that the promised Messiah, who would reign on David's throne forever, would be God in the flesh. Jesus literally had to be "God with us" in order to be the Savior of the world. We are surrounded during this season of the year by hints of the truth well expressed by C.S. Lewis: "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God."

Dr. Rich Freeman, D. Min. serves as the Vice President for Church Ministries and Conferences with Chosen People Ministries and lives in South Florida with his wife, Julia.

Hebrews 12:25-29
A FINAL WARNING AGAINST APOSTASY

Hebrews 12:18–24 focused on the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. The writer concludes chapter 12 with a warning section, beginning in verse 25: *"See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking."* "Him who is speaking" refers to God, who was warning the Jewish believers of His day not to turn away from their faith in Messiah Jesus.

"For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven" (v. 25). The author reminds his Hebrew readers that their ancestors had previously rejected God's warnings "from earth" at Mount Sinai. In essence, those living **under the Law did not escape the consequences of disobeying the Law.** Just as God held the Israelites accountable to keep the word He had spoken to them, He also holds believers accountable now for the revelation given to them "from heaven."

HEBREWS 12:25-29 NASB

25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. 26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." 27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Describing the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, he writes in verse 26, *"And His voice shook the earth then."* Quoting Haggai 2:6, he then anticipates the coming Messianic age: *"Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."* The shaking of the earth on Mount Sinai symbolized the future, final shaking of the earth and heaven at the coming Messianic Kingdom. Haggai's prediction of the coming Messianic age—associated with the second shaking of the earth and heaven—signifies that the old Mosaic order, which was established with a shaking of the earth at Mount Sinai, would eventually be done away with.

The writer of Hebrews clearly anticipated a final, future judgment of God, one in which He will shake the heavens and the earth prior to the Messiah's second coming. He also wrote that all things that are shakeable and temporary will be removed: *"This expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain"* (v. 27). Only those things which are unshakable, permanent, and eternal will remain.

The author wrote during the time when Rome would soon destroy the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. Since keeping the Mosaic Covenant was Temple-dependent, he told the Hebrew believers that the existing Mosaic order was a temporary arrangement that ultimately would be shaken and replaced with a permanent, eternal, and unshakable arrangement may be instituted. He was implying that if his Jewish readers attempted to find refuge from persecution and affliction, they would be returning to that which ultimately would cease. They would find no permanent peace or rest in a temporary system about to be judged and shaken by God.

The writer states his conclusion in verse 28, *"Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude."* He reminded Jewish believers who were suffering because of their identification with Messiah Jesus that they have the promise of "a kingdom which cannot be shaken," one that is permanent and eternal. This reality should cause them to "show gratitude," literally to "have grace."

The author harkened back to Hebrews 4:16, where he reminded them they have access to the throne of grace where they *"may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* In light of that grace, they can now *"offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe"* (12:28).

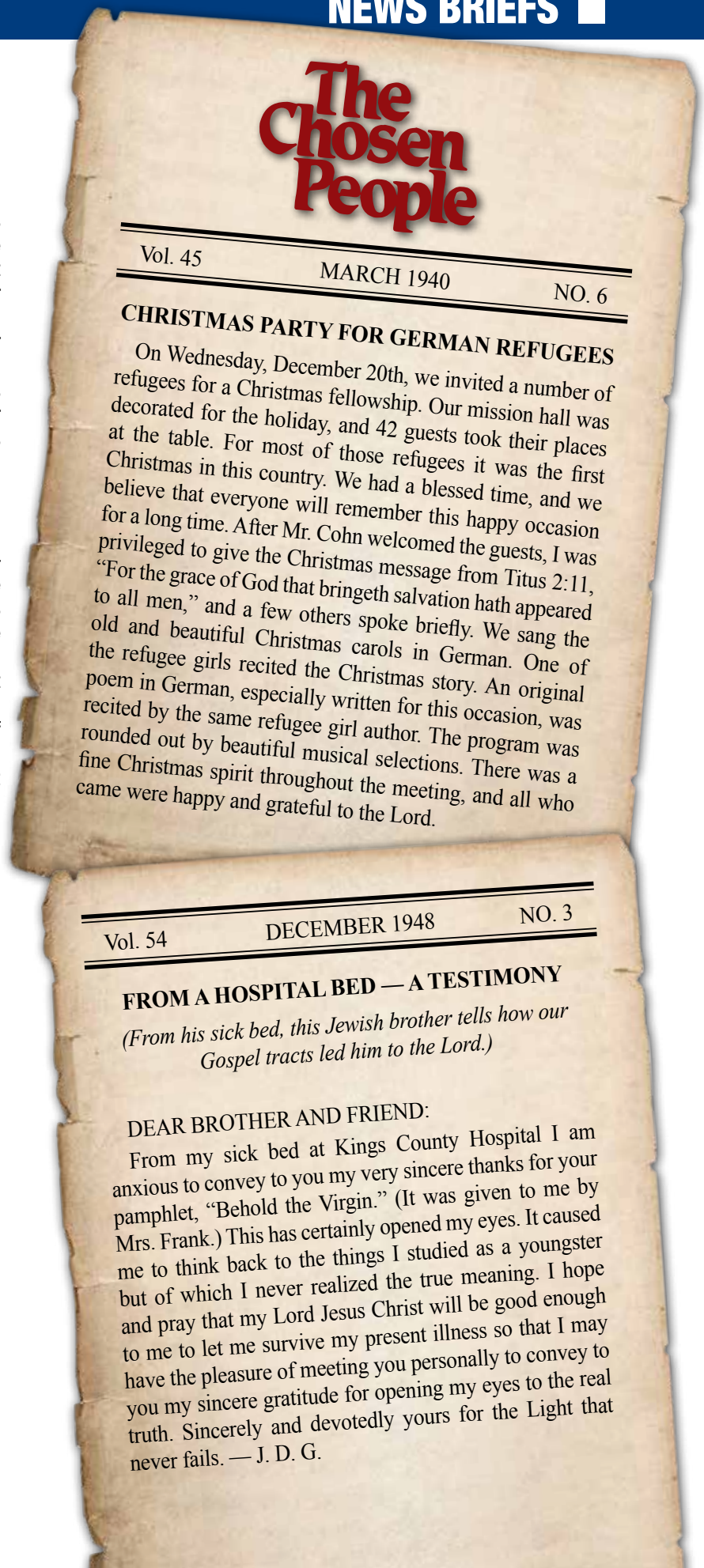
Why was it so critical for these Jewish believers to respond in this way? Because "our God is a consuming fire" (v. 29), the author wrote, quoting Deuteronomy 4:24. If these Jewish believers refused to return to God's grace, they would subject themselves to God's consuming judgment of 70 AD and eternal judgment. Refusing to offer God His due praise, offered by faith through Jesus the Messiah, results in divine judgment.

CHRISTMAS WITH ISRAELIS IN BRAZIL!

This month, we will have holiday events in Brazil to welcome Israelis to hear about the Messiah. After their army service, it is a tradition for young Israelis to travel, and Brazil is one of the popular spots for thousands of Israelis to gather. While traveling, Israelis are often searching for answers to the big questions of life and very open to hearing the gospel. Outreach Brazil is a three-week trip, December 21–January 8, for young believers, ages 18–30, to share the gospel with Israelis while exploring beautiful sights in Rio de Janeiro. The team will hike with Israelis in the world's largest urban rain forest, host Sabbath dinners, and have conversations about the Jewish Messiah at the foot of the famous statue of Christ the Redeemer. This team will be led by Chosen People Ministries staff members and is the very first outreach trip to Brazil! Please pray for the young team members to step out in faith, have meaningful encounters with Israelis, and grow in their faith through this experience!

PERSIAN JEWISH WOMAN HEARS ABOUT PEACE

Recently, Toby, a Brooklyn staff member, met Esther,* an Iranian Jewish woman, during street evangelism. The theme of that day was, "I Found Shalom," so Toby wrote, "Do you have peace in your life?" on the whiteboard display. Esther was walking by the table and the question caught her attention. After some introductions, Esther shared that she had lost two close family members within the past year. She was struggling with her loss and it made her think about life and what our purpose is while we are here on earth. Toby told her that he was so sorry to hear about her family member passing and that it must be a very difficult season for her, then offered to pray for her, which she accepted. Afterwards, Toby, asked if he could give her a Bible and if she was interested in following up with a female missionary. Esther accepted the Bible even though she said she was not very religious and provided her contact information so someone could follow up with her. Please pray we have a fruitful follow up with Esther and that she will be open to hearing more about the gospel!



The Chosen People

Vol. 45 MARCH 1940 NO. 6

CHRISTMAS PARTY FOR GERMAN REFUGEES

On Wednesday, December 20th, we invited a number of refugees for a Christmas fellowship. Our mission hall was decorated for the holiday, and 42 guests took their places at the table. For most of those refugees it was the first Christmas in this country. We had a blessed time, and we believe that everyone will remember this happy occasion for a long time. After Mr. Cohn welcomed the guests, I was privileged to give the Christmas message from Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," and a few others spoke briefly. We sang the old and beautiful Christmas carols in German. One of the refugee girls recited the Christmas story. An original poem in German, especially written for this occasion, was recited by the same refugee girl author. The program was rounded out by beautiful musical selections. There was a fine Christmas spirit throughout the meeting, and all who came were happy and grateful to the Lord.

Vol. 54 DECEMBER 1948 NO. 3

FROM A HOSPITAL BED — A TESTIMONY

(From his sick bed, this Jewish brother tells how our Gospel tracts led him to the Lord.)

DEAR BROTHER AND FRIEND:

From my sick bed at Kings County Hospital I am anxious to convey to you my very sincere thanks for your pamphlet, "Behold the Virgin." (It was given to me by Mrs. Frank.) This has certainly opened my eyes. It caused me to think back to the things I studied as a youngster but of which I never realized the true meaning. I hope and pray that my Lord Jesus Christ will be good enough to me to let me survive my present illness so that I may have the pleasure of meeting you personally to convey to you my sincere gratitude for opening my eyes to the real truth. Sincerely and devotedly yours for the Light that never fails. — J. D. G.

To the Jew First

In an exciting new campaign, your Mission to the Jewish People will focus on three areas in 2020: Israel, Digital Evangelism, and Training the Next Generation. Your year-end support for this yields a great tax benefit, too!

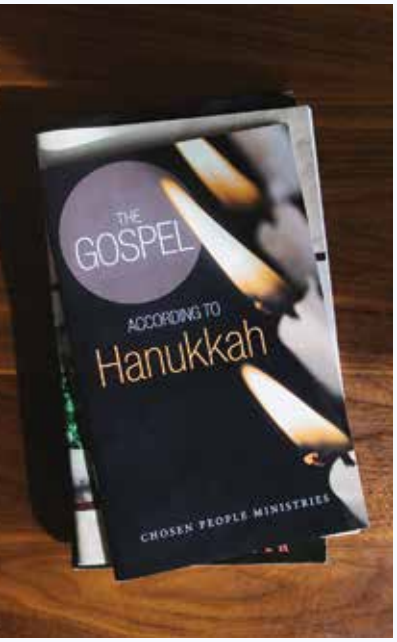
Thank you for faithfully sharing the Messiah with Jewish people everywhere. We are grateful that you appreciate the importance of the Apostle Paul's declaration …

> *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first …"* (Romans 1:16).

This Scripture is the basis for the launch of our 125th anniversary **To the Jew First** campaign. As you consider supporting this important effort with your year-end giving, you will bless multitudes of Jewish people with the message of their Messiah—and reap tax benefits, too. Some options for strategic giving by December 31:

1. If you donate appreciated assets, such as stocks or property that you have held over a year, you will receive a charitable giving deduction for the fair market value of the asset, and will often avoid capital gains tax, too.
2. People 70-1/2 years of age or older who are required to take a distribution from their IRA may donate up to $100,000 without paying any taxes on the distribution.
3. The maximum allowable deduction for 2019 charitable contributions is up to 50 percent of your adjusted gross income. Remember that your gift must be dated and postmarked or given online by midnight December 31, 2019 to qualify for this year's taxes.
4. If you have a Donor Advised Fund (DAF), this is a perfect season to distribute grants to ministries you care about.

For more information about these and other tax-wise ways to give at year's end, contact Cindy Forbes today at 212-223-2252 or cforbes@chosenpeople.com. Thank you!



MESSIANIC RESOURCES
for Hanukkah and Christmas

$2.95US • The Gospel According to Hanukkah
The eight-day Jewish celebration known as Hanukkah, or Chanukah, commemorates the rededication during the second century B.C. of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, where according to legend Jews had risen up against their Greek-Syrian oppressors in the Maccabean Revolt. ***The Gospel According to Hanukkah*** is another opportunity to see and study the gospel during God's appointed feasts and holidays.

$7.95US • Christmas Through Jewish Eyes
How the birth and celebration of Messiah Jesus is viewed through Jewish eyes…it's not what you thought.

For phone orders call 1-800-333-4936 in the U.S.
For more resources, visit us online at chosenpeople.com/store.

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

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