**Miracle of Hanukkah**

Pastor Greg Stone, December 1, 2017

**Introduction:**

The Hebrew Torah never mentions Hanukkah, so if we are going to read any scripture about Hanukkah, we have to read the Gospel of John.

**Yeshua and Hanukkah –** John 10:22-23 (TLV) – 22 Then came Hanukkah; it was winter in Jerusalem. 23 Yeshua was walking in the Temple around Solomon’s Colonnade.

**Chag Sameach.**

Apparently, Yeshua went to Temple on Hanukkah. He went to church on Hanukkah.

Now, if Yeshua went to Temple on Hanukkah, it must have been significant in life.

Obviously, it was significant to Yeshua culturally because His country celebrated it. But it ***might*** also have had a personal significance to Him. Why?

Today, the vast majority of scholars freely admit that Yeshua was probably not born on December 25th. (I’m not engaged in some kind of an anti-Christmas-jihad. My family celebrates Christmas. We’ll celebrate Yeshua any day of the year.)

But, if you were with us for our Sukkot service (on October 6) you heard me explain why I believe that Yeshua was probably born on Sukkot – otherwise known as the Feast of Tabernacles.

John 1:14 (TLV) – And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

That seems like an obvious reference to the Feast of Sukkot which in English is “The Feast of Tabernacles.”

Now, if Yeshua was actually born on Sukkot, then He would have been conceived 9 months earlier. That would put His conception right around Hanukkah.

Friend,

* If you believe that life begins at conception, then the miracle of the incarnation is not the birth but the conception.
* With that in mind, I’d like to focus on the **miracle** of Hanukkah.
* Because, Hanukkah is a holiday that celebrates the miraculous.

We celebrate Hanukkah with the dreidel.

A dreidel is a spinning top, with four sides, each marked with a different [Hebrew letter](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/culture/2/Literature/Hebrew.shtml)

*Nun, Gimmel, Hey & Shin*

*"Nes Gadol Hayah Sham" —* "a great miracle happened there"

It is the story of a great miracle.

* Have you ever ***seen*** a miracle? Do you need a miracle?
* Do you need a miracle of **protection**? Hanukkah is the story of miraculous protection.
* Do you need a miracle of **provision**? Hanukkah is the story of miraculous provision.
* Do you need a miracle of **restoration**? Hanukkah is the story of miraculous restoration.
* Do you ***need*** a miracle of **healing**? That’s a miracle of restoration.
* Suppose G-d were to say to you, “Tell me one miracle that you would like me to do for you.” How would you answer that?

**There are 3 things that I have noticed about miracles, and we can see them all in Hanukkah.**

The first is that they often have to do with

1. **Protection.**

How many miracles involve God protecting His people? From Moses’ 10 Plagues to the story in 2 Kings 19 where the Angel of the Lord that killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. Many of the miracles are about protection.

Hanukkah is the story of a miracle of protection.

The **pre**-story of Hanukkah begins with a warrior-King by the name of Alexander the Great. Under Alexander’s leadership, Greece conquered the known the world. Then, Alexander unexpectedly died.

Since he had no sons, his kingdom was divided up by his four generals.

* One General (Lysimachus) got **Turkey** and Thrace.
* Another General (Cassander) got **Greece** and Macedonia.
* General Ptolemy got **Egypt**.
* General Seleucus became the King of **Syria**.
* Of course, the generals fought among themselves. Most significant for Israel were the battles between Syria and Egypt.
	+ Syria was to the north of Israel.
	+ Egypt was to the south.
* **Alexander died in 323 BC.**
* 152 years later, Antiochus IV became the 7th King of Syria (in the year 171 BC).
* Antiochus was a proud, evil man. He called himself Antiochus Theos Epiphanies – “Antiochus, the visible G-d.”
* We Jews called him “Antiochus Epimanes” – “madman.”

**In the 4th year of his reign,** (in 167 BC)**, he led an invasion against Egypt.**

* The Egyptians expected the attack. So, they had cut a deal with a new, rising power: Rome.
* When Antiochus showed up in Egypt, he and his army were met by a Roman Legate and his army.
* The Roman asked Antiochus, “Do you want peace or war with Rome?”
* When Antiochus stalled in his answer, the Roman Legate took out his sword and drew a line in the sand around Antiochus. He told Antiochus, “If you step out step outside that line without telling your army to withdraw from Egypt, my army will kill you.”
	+ The message was clear. “Everyone else may escape, but today you will die!”
* Antiochus ordered his army to withdraw.
* This is:
	+ Where we get the phrase, “a line in the sand.”
	+ The moment that marks the rise of the Roman Empire.
* Antiochus was humiliated. He led his army back home which took them through the Promised Land. When he entered Israel, the madman took his frustration out on the Jews.
* As Antiochus entered Jerusalem, he destroyed much of the city.
* He burned the city, sacking the Temple.
* He slaughtered and enslaved tens of thousands of men, woman and children. Babies were hung around mother’s necks as they were thrown from the city walls.
* He set up an idol to Zeus in the Temple courtyard.
* On the 25th day of the 12th month he sacrificed a pig on the altar and sprinkled the blood in the Holy of Holies.

**The Syrians fully forbid the Jews from practicing their faith.**

* They forbid **circumcision** – the sign of Abraham’s covenant.
* They forbade the keeping of the **Sabbath** – the sign of Moses’ covenant.
* Jews were forbidden to keep **kosher** under pain of death – they were forced to eat unclean food.
* They forbade our people from teaching Torah to our children. Scrolls were confiscated and burned.

**The Syrians came to the tiny village of Modin – 17 miles northwest of Jerusalem.**

* There they built an altar to Zeus and ordered an old priest by the name of Mattathias to sacrifice a pig on it.
* When Mattathias refused, another priest offered to do it.
* Mattathias was passionately enraged. He ripped a sword from a Syrian. He killed the soldier and the apostate priest.
* Mattathias had 5 sons who also erupted in anger. They killed all the Syrian soldiers in that outpost.
* They became known as “The Maccabees” which means the “Hammer.” They had one stunning victory after another.
* One of the most significant victories was on the road from Emmaus to Jerusalem. Many will recognize that name – “Emmaus.”

Luke 24:13-14 (NIV) – 13Now behold, two of them on that very day were traveling to a village named **Emmaus**, a distance of about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14They were speaking with one another about all the things that had been happening. 15While they were talking and discussing, *Yeshua* Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.

17Then He said to them, “What are these things you are discussing with one another as you are walking along?”

They stood still, looking gloomy. 18Then the one named Cleopas answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that happened there in these days?”

19*Yeshua* said to them, “What kind of things?”

And they said to Him, “The things about *Yeshua* from *Natzeret*, who was a Prophet, powerful in deed and word before G-d and all the people— 20how the ruling *kohanim* and our leaders handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they executed Him. 21But we were hoping that He was the One about to redeem Israel. Besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.

**You know the story. Yeshua revealed Himself as the resurrected Savior to those 2 disciples.**

* But, why did the Yeshua reveal Himself on the road from Emmaus to Jerusalem?
* It was on that same road that Judah the Hammer had miraculously defeated the Syrians.
* So, after His resurrection, on the Road from Emmaus, Yeshua showed His nail-scared hands and revealed Himself to 2 disciples as the Hammer Who has defeated death, hell and the grave.
* Well, after the Maccabees celebrated their victory at Emmaus they came to Jerusalem.
* It was exactly 3 years after Antiochus had defiled the Temple – the 25th day of the 12th month. The timing was miraculous.

They found:

* The Temple had been burned.
* And, they saw the idol to Zeus.

**So, they set out to rededicate the Temple.**

* It takes 8 days to make the oil for the lamp. But, they only had enough oil that would last for 1 day.
* They thought, “What can we do? We’ll use what we have.” Miraculously, the oil lasted 8 days.
* On each of those 8 days, the Jews sang Psalms 113-118. These are the Psalms that are sang at Passover. Those Psalms are called “The Hallel” – the Praise.
* Our people waived palm branches were the equivalent of the national flag.

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| ebrew IDI*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam*Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe |
| ebrew*asher kidishanu b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu*Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us |
| ebrew*l'had'lik neir shel Chanukah. (Amein)*to light the lights of Chanukkah. (Amen) |

Romans 15:8-9 (NIV) – 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy

Hanukkah was a miracle of protection. No doubt, human effort was involved, but there was no way that human effort alone could have worked that military victory.

It was like the miraculous victories of **Samson** – of **Gideon** – of **Barak** and **Deborah** – of **Jephthah** – of **Moses** and the 10 Plagues.

* So, Hanukkah is a story celebrating victory over tremendous persecution.
* More than victory over persecution, it is also a story about provision.
* That the second thing that I have noticed about miracles: they are often about provision.
1. **Provision.**

Hey, let’s be clear on this. Miracles of protection and provision usually only happen in the most dire circumstances.

Last June, a team of 12 of us went to Israel to minister to Holocaust Survivors. Every one of those survivors has a miracle story. **Yefsa** stood between 2 walls behind a toilet for 3 days with his sister. For water, they licked moisture off the wall. He survived. Unfortunately, his sister did not. He is a believer in **Yeshua**. When our team left his home, he stood outside up on the balcony and waived down **hugs** and **kisses** to us.

We are going again to minister to survivors in May 2018. The time is getting short to sign up. I unashamedly encourage everyone of you: go online tonight and sign up. Those miracle stories will cause your **head to spin like a top** and they change you.

* It is a miracle that Yefsa survived.
* The story of Hanukkah story is the story of a miracle of provision – like the water that Yefsa drank off the wall.
* Holocaust Survivors in Israel are quick to recognize that G-d used the tragedy of the Holocaust to bring forth the nation of Israel.

Think about the miracles of the Bible. Many of them are about *protection* and *provision* that followed a desperate need.

* Abraham was 100-years old. Sarah was 90. They had no child. And, then miraculously, Sarah’s barren womb forth a baby.
* In a similar miracle, a young Jewish girl by the name of Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Yeshua. That sounds like a **Jewish** **Messiah**.
* We Jews believe that it was on Rosh Hashanah that G-d provided Abraham with a ram as a ***substitute*** offering for His Son (Isaac) on Mt. Moriah.
* And, we messianic Jews believe that G-d provided His Son, Yeshua, as a ***substitute*** for us. And, He took our punishment on that tree. *That sounds like a Jewish story.*
* In **Exodus 14**, **Moses** split the **Red** **Sea**.
* In Matthew 14, **Yeshua** walked on **water**.
* In **1 Kings 13**:4, when the wicked King Jeroboam was splitting the northern and southern Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, a Jewish prophet withstood Jeroboam. Jeroboam ***pointed*** at the prophet and said, “Arrest him!” And, when he did, the King’s hand withered.
* In Luke 6, Yeshua told a man with a withered hand, “Stretch out your hand.” And, when he did, the man’s hand was restored. *That’s a Savior!*
* In 1 Kings 17, the Jewish prophet Eli**j**ah raised a **widow’s** **son** from the **dead**.
* Similarly, in Luke 7, **Yeshua** raised a **widow’s** **son** from the dead. *That sounds like a Jewish miracle.*
* In **2 Kings 5**, the Jewish prophet Eli**s**ha miraculously healed the **leper** (Naaman).
* Similarly, in Matthew 8, Yeshua miraculously healed a leper.
* In **2 Kings 6**:20, the Jewish prophet Eli**s**ha healed the blind Syrians.
* In Matthew 8, Yeshua healed blind men.
* In **2 Kings 13**:21, Elisha raised a man from the dead.
* Similarly, in John 11, Yeshua raised Lazarus from the dead.

I could have given so many more Jewish miracles that Yeshua did, but I’ll just mention one more –

* There is the story of **Jonah**. He ran from G-d. He found himself being swallowed by a fish. He was a dead man – rotting in the stomach acid of a fish for 3 days. I’d call that “dead.” But, after 3 days, that fish had a serious case of acid reflux and vomited Jonah out alive onto the shore.
* And, although Yeshua’s body laid in that grave for 3 days, it did not rot. He arose!

**Some might be wondering: did G-d really raise Yeshua from the dead?**

There’s a great book written by a traditional Jew called,

“The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective” by Pinchas Lapide (1982).

* Lapide was no lightweight. He was a Jewish Theologian and Israeli historian – and the Israeli Diplomat to Milan for 18 years.

Chapter Three is called, “The Must of the Resurrection.”

“According to my opinion, the resurrection belongs to the category of the truly real and effective occurrences.” (Pinchas Lapide, page 92)

* The essence of Lapide’s argument is: “What’s so hard to believe that G-d would raise a good Jew from the dead?”

Pinchas Lapide is not alone!

*Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 31, 2017

32 days ago, on October 31, 2017, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (not a messianic organization) reported a new study that found

* 28 percent of American Millennial Jews **now** “see [Jesus] him as a **rabbi** or **spiritual** **leader**, but not G-d.”
* More shocking than that, 32 days ago, they reported that 21% of American Millennial Jews **now** believe Jesus was “G-d in human form who lived among people in the 1st century.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* After I asked Yeshua to lead my life, I did not meet another Messianic Jew for 11 years.

**Friend, this Hanukkah we remember that G-d has miraculously given the whole world hope through the conception and resurrection of a Jewish Messiah – Yeshua.**

* Miracles are about **provision**.
* Miracles are about **protection**.

The third thing that I have noticed about miracles is that God often requires great passion before they happen. That’s one of the reasons that miracles are such fun stories. Miracles are stories that grip the heart. So number 3 –

1. **Passion.** (passion, not necessarily faith; example crippled man, Jn 5:13)

The story of Hanukkah story is a story of passion.

The Hanukkah story is full of passion.

* It is the story of a **passionate** priest by the name of Mattathias who *passionately* ripped a sword from a Syrian soldier.
* It is the story of his 5 *passionate* sons – “the Maccabees” – the Hammers.
* Three years of *passionate* battle passed. One victory after another.

I have come to believe that godly passion is a key to the miraculous.

Exodus 2:23 (NKJV) – Then the **children of Israel** groaned because of the bondage, and they **cried out**; and their **cry came up to G-d**.

Exodus 3:7-8 (NKJV) – 7The L-rd said: “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have **heard their cry** because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8**So I have come down to deliver them**.

Judges 6:7-8 (NKJV) – 7 And it came to pass, when the children of **Israel cried out to the L-rd** because of the Midianites, 8that the L-rd sent a prophet to the children of Israel.

**G-d raised up Gideon.**

In the Book of Judges, 5 times the Bible says that the children of Israel **cried** **out** and God sent them a **deliverer**.

* **Deborah** (Judges 4)
* **Gideon** (Judges 6)
* **Jephthah** (Judges 10-11)
* A **couple** other **minor** Judges whose name you may not remember
* **Othniel** (Judges 3:9)
* **Ehud** (Judges 3:15)

Judges 3:9 (NKJV) – When the children of Israel **cried out to the L-rd**, the **L-rd raised up a deliverer** for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.

Judges 3:15 (NKJV) – When the children of Israel **cried out to the L-rd**, the L-rd **raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud** the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

Judges 4:3 (NKJV) – And the children of **Israel cried out to the L-rd**;

**G-d raised up Deborah.**

In Judges 10, Israel cried out to G-d. So, in Judges 11, G-d raised up Jephthah to deliver them.

James 5:16-18 (KJV) – 16Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. 17Elias was a man subject to like **passions** as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. 18And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

* Perhaps if we were a little more passionate – a little more willing to talk about our needs together, we would see more miracles.
* Now, there’s a reason to join a small group.

Mark 11:24 (KJV) –**What things soever ye desire**, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.

**Testimony:**

Mark 11:22-24 (NKJV) – 22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, **Have faith in God. 23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.**

Psalm 37:4 (NKJV) – **Delight yourself** also in the L-rd, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

God is looking for the kind of passion that will rip a sword from the enemy and kill him.

Hanukkah is the story of a miracle that is marked by games like dreidels, and foods like chocolate candy, and fire – all symbosl of passion.

What about you? What about your need for a miracle? How’s your passion?

* Have you ever had a Doctor ask you, “On a scale of 1 – 10, what’s your pain level?”
* Okay friend, on a scale of 1 – 10 (with regard to your need for God do to do a miracle), what’s your passion level?

I’m not the One asking that question.

**1 Kings 3:5 (NKJV) – Ask! What shall I give you?”**

**Altar Call.**

**How do you play “Dreidel”?**

There are different rules, but the rules are based on the meaning of the acronym formed by the letters. For example, here are the general rules.

Every time it’s your turn you spin the dreidel once, depending on the outcome you give to or get pieces from the pot. If you get “Nun” (for “Nischt” meaning Nothing) then you do nothing. If you get “Gimmel” (for “Gantz” meaning “**Everything**”) then you **get the entire pot**. If you get “Hey” (for “Halb” meaning “Half”) then you get half the pot. If you get “Shin”(for “shtetl”) it means **add a piece** to the pot.

<http://www.kidzworld.com/article/27693-how-to-play-dreidel>

<http://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah/article_cdo/aid/597253/jewish/How-to-Play-Dreidel-Sevivon.htm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2zep40_RgA>

In this set of directions, the Shin means to put in 2 coins.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6yTapEcJYQ>

**What is the origin of the dreidel?**

There are different views. Here is a synopsis.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel>

Different theories on its origin exist.

One states that the dreidel comes from the book of [Esther](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esther). It is shaped similarly to the die or the "pur" [Haman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haman_%28biblical_figure%29) used as a way to ascertain the most auspicious day of the week to kill the Jews. As the scripture of Esther progresses, Esther and [Mordecai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mordecai) (her uncle, but also her father figure) save the Jews from their horrible fate. They turn the thirteenth day of [Adar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adar), the day that Haman planned to kill all the Jews, into a day where the Jews overcome, and take revenge over those who were planning to annihilate them. The die or the "pur" represents the good day that the Jews gained from Esther and Mordecai. It is a joyous day, that is written as a Decree in the [Persian empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_empire), that Jews celebrate this day of saving.[[*citation needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)]

Another more recent theory is that the dreidel developed from an Irish or English top introduced into Germany known as a [*teetotum*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teetotum). The teetotum was inscribed with letters denoting the Latin words for “nothing,” “half,” “everything” and “put in.” In German this came to be called a *trendel*, with German letters for the same concepts. Adapted to the Hebrew alphabet when Jews adopted the game, these letters were replaced by [shin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shin_%28letter%29) (=shtel arayn (put in); [nun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nun_%28letter%29) (= nit (not, i.e., nothing); [gimel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gimel), representing gants (whole/everything); and [he](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_%28letter%29) (=halb (half)). The letters served as a means to recalling the rules of the game.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel#cite_note-2)

This theory states that when the game spread to Jewish communities unfamiliar with Yiddish, the denotations of the Hebrew letters were not understood. As a result, there arose Jewish traditions to explain their assumed meaning. However, in Judaism there are often multiple explanations developed for words. Some claimed the 4 letters cyphered Babylon, Persia, Greece and the Roman Empire, the four ancient empires that tried to destroy Israel; a [gematriya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gematriya) reading yielded the number 358, identical to the value of the 4 letters used for Moshiach ([*Messiah*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah)). A third popular conjecture had it that the letters abbreviated the words nes gadol haya sham (a great miracle happened there), an idea that became attached to dreidels when the game entered into Hanukkah festivities.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel#cite_note-Kutzik-3)

A tradition exists that the game was developed by Jews who illegally studied the [Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah) in seclusion as they hid, sometimes in caves, from the [Seleucids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid_Empire) under [Antiochus IV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antiochus_IV). At the first sign of Seleucids approaching, their [Torah scrolls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sefer_Torah) would be concealed and be replaced by dreidels.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel#cite_note-4)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel#cite_note-5)The variant names goyrl (destiny) and varfl (a little throw) were also current in Yiddish until [the Holocaust](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel#cite_note-Kutzik-3) In the wake of Zionism, the dreidel was renamed sevivon in modern Hebrew, and the letters altered, with *shin* generally replaced by [pe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pe_%28letter%29). This yields the reading nes gadol haya po (a great miracle happened *here*.')[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel#cite_note-Kutzik-3)

1. <https://www.jta.org/2017/10/31/news-opinion/united-states/jews-for-jesus-commissioned-a-study-on-jewish-millennials-heres-what-it-found> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)