

Hanukkah: The Light That Wouldn't Die

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It's been extinguished for a long time. Cold, dark, covered in ash. Everything Antiochus could destroy, he did destroy. It would have been easy to walk away. It would have been easy to say, "This is just too far gone." But the building was still standing. The foundation hadn't cracked. So they cleaned it. They tore down the defiled altar. They built a new one. They made new utensils. They wove new curtains.

And there's something fascinating about the duty of a priest and the mindset of holiness because once something is set apart, it's holy. You can't simply undo that which caused an issue because they can't keep using this altar to honor God when the altar has been perverted and defiled. They don't want to look at it every single time they bring the lamb in or whatever. And yeah, remember when it was a pig with this big altar? This thing is built on top of it. So they destroyed it. It's still holy. It's still set apart. It's not common. You can't just get rid of it – just throw the stones in the dump. No, they're still holy.

Stones Set Apart

So they stored them in a special room in the temple. Even during the time of Jesus, it was called the chamber of tokens back right corner. It still had all of these stones from this altar stored in a corner. I just thought that's neat. If you're ever on Jeopardy, you'll now know. And they rebuilt a new altar and dedicated it to God. The light that Antiochus thought he extinguished forever came back when they lit the menorah for the first time in three years. That's powerful. That's what Hanukkah celebrates – it's the moment when the light should have died, but it didn't.

At the Festival of Dedication

So fast forward 200 years. You have the same city, you have the same temple, and now you have the same festival. It's Hanukkah again. And there's a Jewish teacher named Yeshua. And he's walking in the temple in Solomon's colonnade. And [John 10:22-23](#) tells us exactly when this is happening. Of course, it's "Then came the Festival of Dedication. Hanukkah." It's what the word

Hanukkah means – dedication. He was at Jerusalem and it was winter and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's colonnade.

John doesn't mention that by accident. This conversation happens, of course, during Hanukkah season at the festival celebrating the light returning to the temple. That's the context. The religious leaders ask – they say, "Hey, you, how long will you keep us in suspense? If you're the Messiah, just tell us plainly." And Yeshua says in [John 10:27-30](#), "My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

The Line You Don't Cross

At the festival of dedication, Yeshua stands in the temple and he says, "I and the Father are one." Not, "I'm an amazing teacher." Not, "I'm a prophet." This was a declaration of divinity in some way, shape, or form – the embodiment of God's name and soul in human form. Of all the things you can go to the temple and shout, this is not controversial at all, right?

Imagine being ushered in on a tour into the rotunda of the National Archives in DC. Imagine it's July 4th. If you've ever been to DC on July 4th, it's a big day, right? They have extended hours. They're open from 10:00 to 7:00 p.m. and the lines wrap around the outside of the building. You have veterans, tourists, families – everybody's packed in there. The room is hushed. And the Constitution, well, it's sealed behind an extra pane of glass now. Security is really tight, especially after that whole Benjamin Franklin Gates incident in 2004.

And in that space – in that space with everyone watching – you decide to step forward and say, "This document is not the constitution. I am." The room doesn't erupt there. No one applauds. No one debates. There's no discussion. There's no thoughtful questions for clarification. There's just a collective intake of breath because everyone knows the same thing at the same time. You don't say that here. You've crossed a line that's not written down anywhere, but everyone feels it.

You're not trying to make a point about the Constitution. And you're not arguing about the Constitution. You're claiming to be the thing that gives this entire place meaning. And in that moment, the question is not, "Well, isn't that interesting, this guy?" The question is: this is madness, or did everything I thought about this just collapse? That's the moment John is describing that Yeshua does here. That's why nobody asked him follow-up questions. Oh, you and the Father are one. What does that mean? Like, in a spirit thing? Like synonymous? How

do you mean? No, they didn't ask any follow-up questions. They just picked up stones to kill him. There was no room for any other reaction.

I Am the Light of the World

"I am the light of the world" – that's what he says. And that's not the only time Yeshua tries to assume that label of light. He does it all over John. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Or [John 1](#) – it's how the book starts out: "The light shines into darkness and the darkness does not overcome it."

That's not abstract poetry. It's Hanukkah language throughout the book – throughout John's testimony. A light that should have been extinguished but wasn't. A light that survived the empire. And John is trying to portray that Yeshua is that light that keeps going. The light the Maccabees fought for. The light they died for. The light they re-lit in the temple. It was all pointing to Yeshua.

The menorah in the temple was supposed to burn perpetually the same day and night. It was a sign of God's presence inside the temple. It was the open sign. And when Antiochus desecrated the temple, he put it out again for three years. God's house is dark. There's no more lit menorah. There's no light. There's no presence. And when they dared to clean it, rededicate it, and re-lit it, the light came back.

Empires Cannot Put Out the Light

But the physical lamp kept getting extinguished as we see in the whole story of the Bible. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, and the menorah was taken as spoils of war. I think a few months ago I showed the picture of it. They have it. They documented it. The Romans – you can go to Rome and you can see them carrying away the menorah in the victory arch outside the Coliseum – because when they sacked Jerusalem, the money went to build that Coliseum. So every time they had the games, it was a celebration of the victories and spoils of war – the slaughter of the Jewish people and erasure of their memory, or attempted erasure.

But empires can destroy temples. They can steal menorahs. They can kill prophets, execute revolutionaries. They still can't put out the light of God incarnate. And again, in [John 15](#), the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. There's no past tense there. It's present tense. It's ongoing reality. Nothing can put the light out, even though the darkness keeps trying.

This is why Yeshua shows up at Hanukkah and makes these very, very, very bold claims. He's not hijacking the festival. He's simply saying, "This is what it was always about." The Maccabees fought for the presence of God. They fought for that light to return to the temple.

God Made His Tent Among Us

When John says "the word became flesh and made a dwelling among us" in 1:14, the Greek word for dwelling – again – is tabernacled. He made his tent among us. [snorts]

The imagery you're supposed to get is in the wilderness where all of Israel is traversing from the place where they were enslaved to the place of freedom. It's the liminal place where they have to learn how to trust in God. They have to learn how to journey with God. They have to learn to realize that maybe sometimes they complain too much and they need to understand who really has them and who has had them no matter what's taking place.

God made his tent among them in the encampment of a million people in the middle of nowhere. Among them, not above them. He dwells among them. And this is the image that John uses to attempt to at least get us close to realizing what is taking place with this Yeshua guy. God is here in a way that he's never been before. Accessible in a way that we never thought possible.

The Light Was Always Meant to Expand

The presence of the temple was supposed to contain that – no, it was always meant to expand beyond that. That's what Hanukkah celebrates: when the light came back. And it's confusing sometimes because with Hanukkah, it's so tempting to celebrate military victory. Well, that's part of the recipe. This is the core message.

And so what do we do with the light after the temple's destroyed? That's something the Jews had to figure out. The Sadducees couldn't do it. That's why the Sadducees kind of went away. The Pharisees were already in the line of sight of understanding that in exile we need to bring the temple to each of our homes. As we discussed last week, they already understood that they were asking the question: how do we worship God without a temple if one day the temple goes away?

And the early followers of Yeshua already had that answer because Yeshua had already said it. He already told them in John chapter 2 – John sets us up for this. He goes to the temple and he says, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days." They thought he meant the

building. But John explains right after this: "No, he was speaking about his body." Yeshua is the temple – not made of stone but made of flesh, killed, raised, and eternal.

When the physical temple falls, the light doesn't go out because the light was never dependent on the building. The light is a person. Now, this all sounds great and it's really encouraging when someone talks about yeah, be the light and have the light. But when we walk outside, sometimes we don't see light.

Sometimes we don't see light for a while. Sometimes every time we turn on the news, there's just no light. Have you ever been so submerged under darkness in your media consumption—Facebook—that you just turn your phone off? It's got to be real bad when the most addictive thing that has ever plagued the US—we can get too much. We turn it off. I'm just done with it.

Even as we hold onto hope, the darkness doesn't stop trying. And that's why the message of light and eternal light—that's why these metaphors are used in scripture—is to help encourage you now. The same way it would have helped encourage the ancient Israelites as they went into the land. The same way they would have helped the Maccabees as they fought darkness once again. It has the same effect today—that's what the scriptures, the story of God, tells us now.

The Light That Won't Go Out

Just because something surprised you doesn't mean it surprised God. Maybe there's a bigger story happening that God wants you to be a part of. Maybe you're not the main character in God's story, but maybe God wants to use you for a very special part if you're willing to trust and to endure and to fake courage until you make it.

It didn't stop after the Romans destroyed the temple. Darkness has been flexing for 2,000 years, trying to put out the light of Yeshua. Persecution, martyrdom, crusades, inquisitions, genocide, institutional corruption, apathy, secularism, Christian nationalism—all tools from the devil to try to put out the light. Every century the darkness finds a new strategy. Every generation it looks like the light might finally be snuffed out, and it doesn't.

The church gets driven underground and it spreads faster. The empires try to co-opt it and reformers call it back to its source. Dictators try to erase it and it survives behind iron curtains in secret house churches. [John 15](#) keeps being true: "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot overcome it." Not because we Christians are resilient, as much as I would love to say so. Not because the church is invincible. Lord knows we're very fragile. No, it happens because Yeshua is the light that can't be extinguished.

That's why the early Christians were so bold when they were faced with death. It's like, "What are you going to do? You're trying to defeat Yeshua by killing me. Boy, are you in for a surprise?" He's going to keep going. Man, that's the message.

Personal Darkness

Some of you may find yourself in darkness right now. And not necessarily just a metaphorical darkness—a real darkness that impacts you. Depression that makes every day feel like you're walking through mud, especially in this time of the year. Grief that ambushes you unexpectedly at random moments. Despair that whispers, "This is never going to get better. It's always going to be like this. It's only going to get worse. The endless spiraling."

And you've been lighting Hanukkah candles this week, maybe with your family, maybe alone, thinking, "This is nice." You have to put effort into Hanukkah to make it fun. That's no secret. Just light it. This is nice. But it doesn't change anything. You just light another candle. The darkness in my life is still here. I still feel it. And you're right. You're right.

Lighting a candle doesn't fix your circumstances. As much as I wish it did, if it did, it would probably be considered something that the Bible bans. It doesn't heal depression. It doesn't bring back the things that you've lost. It doesn't undo betrayal or reverse the diagnosis. But here's what I want you to take to heart and allow to enter in:

The Light You Light

The light you're lighting isn't just symbolic. It's a declaration. That's what it is. It's an act of defiance against the darkness by its nature. Every time you light a candle in the darkness, you're saying the darkness doesn't get the final word today.

And we intentionally turn off all the lights when we light our candles every night because, well, it looks cool, but there's a theological lesson to teach, right? It's really dark in the house and you see that darkness more than ever when there's one or two little candles, three candles in the corner, right? And you can see how the flicker of the candles, with their silhouettes, pushes the darkness away. If we could actually remember what that's supposed to represent when we do it, we can put power back into it.

This is my act of defiance against the darkness, because the light will never go out. The light has not been overcome—not by empires, not by persecution, not by death itself. And it won't be overcome by whatever darkness your faith is facing either.

You Are the Light

[Matthew 5:14](#) says, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden." Notice in [Matthew 5](#), it's not recorded that Yeshua said, "I am the light and you're just the audience." No, he says you're the light. But you—how? How am I the light?

Yeshua is the light. No, because we carry him. Because we carry him and we reflect him. We're the menorah that refuses to go out because the flame isn't ours, it's his. The Maccabees relit the menorah in the temple. Yeshua is the light that the menorah pointed to. And we, the congregation, are the ones who carry that light into the world. Not because we're strong, not because we're resilient, not because we have it all together, but because his light is in us and darkness cannot overcome it.

So when you walk into cynicism and you choose hope instead, that's the light. That's the light. When you sit with someone in their grief and you don't try to fix it—you just stay—that's the light. When you forgive someone who does not deserve it, that's the light. When you show up on Saturday morning, even though this week crushed you, that's defiance. That's the light.

You're not trying to be the sun. Please don't. You're just refusing to let the darkness win in the space that you occupy. Worry about your space. Start there. One candle at a time. One choice at a time. One brave act of faithfulness at a time.

The Promise

Hanukkah ends in two days—not tomorrow night, but the night after, Monday night. The eighth candle will burn and then the festival will be over. The light doesn't end because the light is not a holiday. It's about a person. And that person is still here, still present, still speaking, still inviting you to follow.

[John 8:12](#) says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

That's not a promise that your circumstances will change tomorrow. That's not a promise that the darkness will suddenly lift and your pain will disappear. But the promise—the promise is that no matter how dark it gets, you will never be walking alone. That's what this story represents. You will never be abandoned by God. There's no way, no how.

The light will never go out. And even when you can't see it, even when you can't feel it, the light is still there. And if you don't believe me, just look at the resume in your life so far of what God has done in your life. I bet you could write down a couple of times how God has surprised you.

"I didn't expect that." Yeah. This is how the God of the Bible works. He loves a little bit of drama in his entrances. That's just my experience.

You've never been alone. You've never been overtaken by something that God wasn't already fully aware of and prepared for. Just because you find yourself shaken doesn't mean God's not still there right beside you. The light is still there and it's stronger than any darkness you're facing.

An Invitation

So here's my invitation for you today. If you've been in darkness, if you've been waiting for the hiddenness of God to end, if you've been enduring life and the slowness of how you think God should respond to your circumstances, if you've been wondering if the light will ever, ever, ever come back—it already has. It never left. It already has. His name is Yeshua and he's the light that wouldn't die. Follow him.

Not because it's easy. Not because it fixes everything. Not because he's the only light strong enough to survive. Because as Christians, when we have the Holy Spirit—the same one that raised Yeshua from the dead—we should never feel alone with the illumination of God's hope in our lives. Because when you follow him, you become part of the light. It's contagious. It's an inverted COVID. The darkness can't fight it.

So light your candles tonight. Celebrate the victory of God. But also remember the faithfulness of God and remember the declaration that you are shouting to the darkness. But don't stop there. Walk in the light. Carry the light and be the light, even through small steps. And when you do that, I promise you will begin to watch the darkness lose. Amen.

Closing

Please stand as we conclude worship today. If you find yourself in a place where you need prayer today for any reason, we have a prayer team on either side of the stage that you can walk up to, and they will pray with you.

During this time, you're invited to pray, to sing, or to meditate. If you've carried something in today that maybe you've been carrying with you a long time—maybe there's a decision you've been wanting to make, to stop and drop something—because you know what? You've carried it for too long and it's just a little bit too heavy. You're ready for that change. You're ready to make that step holding on to the light.

We have a prayer team that can pray with you, or if you prefer, there's an altar area here where you can come, kneel, and lay that burden down symbolically. And you can walk away today taking that first step.

The Light's Always Been There

Avinu Malkeinu, our Father, our King. Father, we thank You for this opportunity to visit the story of You. And even though we have stories that are not in the Bible, there are still historical records of You. In times of darkness, where hope could have been lost, the light remained. And Father, we know that light to have a name, and that name is the King of Kings, the Lord of our Lords. His name is Yeshua Hamashiach, Jesus Christ, our King. May this light be coming forth from us to the world, so that even if we're scared, even if we find ourselves entertaining hopelessness, God, You would remind us: You've always been there. The light's always been there. You're never leaving us. And cause us to remember what You've done, so that we can know what to expect in the future.

Father, I thank You for the Holy Spirit within us, that You would allow it to work through us to do just that, to be the ambassadors of Yeshua and to carry that light forward. We thank You, Father. In the name of Yeshua, our King, we pray. Amen.

Be the Gardener of My Heart

> In the landscape, You don't rush through any season. > You always take Your time. > A careful hand, a gentle guide. > You take what's dead away, and You prune what's running wild. > > So be the gardener of my heart. > Tend the soil of my soul. > Break up the ground. Cut back the overgrown. > I won't shy away. I will let the branches fall, > So what You want can stay, and what You love can grow. > > Through the winter I'm still alive, > And what You planted in the dirt is ever reaching to the light. > You prepare me for darkening times. > You'll sustain what You have started, and You'll teach me to abide. > > Be the gardener of my heart. > Tend the soil of my soul. > Break up the fallow ground. Cut back the overgrown. > I won't shy away. I will let the branches fall, > So what You love can stay. What You love can grow. > Grow, grow. > > I'll remain in You. You'll remain in me. > And I will trust Your timing. > I'll remain in You. You'll remain in me, > From the start until the ending. > I'll remain in You. You'll remain in me, > And I will trust Your timing. > I'll remain in You. You'll remain in me, > From the start until the ending. > 'Cause You will know better. > > So be the gardener of my heart. > Tend the soil of my soul. > Break up the ground. Cut back the overgrown. > I will let the branches fall, > So what You want can stay. What You love can grow. > What You want, and

grow. > > I'll remain in You. You'll remain in me, > And I will trust Your timing. > I'll remain in You. You'll remain in me, > From the start until the ending. > I'll remain in You. You'll remain in me, > And I will trust Your timing. > I'll remain in You, and You'll remain in me, > From the start until... You know better. You know better. > > So be the gardener of my heart. > Tend the soil of my soul. > Break up the ground. Cut back the overgrown. > I won't shy away. I will let the branches fall, > So what You want can stay, and what You love can grow. > What You love can grow. > So what You love can grow.

May the Lord Bless You and Keep You

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you his peace, his shalom. In the name of our Sar Shalom, our Prince of Peace, Yeshua Hamashiach, we pray. Amen. And amen.

Shabbat shalom, family.

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