

Hanukkah Suggestions

From Diane Warner 12/2015

Even though Hanukkah is over for this year, now is a great time to begin thinking about next year. If you've never celebrated Hanukkah at home, or if you are not quite sure how to do it from a Christian perspective, I want to share with you the nuts and bolts of how Tim and I celebrate. We believe that everything we do should be a testimony to God's love and faithfulness to His people, pointing to God's plan through the ages and Jesus' coming Kingdom. It should also encourage us to emulate the faithfulness displayed by the Maccabees. Symbolism is a very important and powerful teaching tool both for children and adults. This is why God used the festivals in the first place – as symbolic teaching tools. So, my first suggestion is that you try to think of creative ways to symbolize the meaning of Hanukkah. This will require that you first have a good handle on the story of the defilement of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanies, the struggle of the Jews to remain faithful to God under tremendous persecution, and the final victory given by God – the cleansing of the Temple from idolatry. You should also be familiar with the symbolism of “light” representing the knowledge of God that has been brought to man in each millennium. Watching the Hanukkah videos and reading through Tim's 'readings' and explanations for each of the eight nights will help you understand the full implications of this wonderful holiday season and be able to translate that into great ideas for using symbolism in the details of your Hanukkah celebration.

Hanukkah is not necessarily 'Jewish.' It has great meaning for all of God's children, otherwise John would not have recorded in his Gospel that Jesus Himself went to the Temple for the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah).¹

I hope these suggestions will help generate ideas for you and your families. This article describes how I prepare for Hanukkah. You may come up with some very different ideas that are just as meaningful for your family. In any case, 'family tradition' is very important, particularly when it is a learning experience and brings the family together around wholesome principles, and unity in the excitement of what God has done, and will do.

¹ John 10:22,23

1. The Menorah

You need a menorah. You can't celebrate Hanukkah without one! We bought a nine-candle menorah with the servant candle in the middle as opposed to some modern menorahs that have it on one end. Having the servant candle in the middle is important because of its significance (symbolizing Christ Himself and His entrance into creation at the proper time – between the fourth and fifth millennium).

We chose to get a good-sized menorah (ours is about a foot high without any candles or lamps installed). They can be expensive, some are over \$100.00. For us, the little menorahs with 'birthday candles' say that we are not really invested in the celebration. The ones with electric lights really lose the symbolism of the miracle of the oil. If you buy a menorah, try not to get one with the "Star of David" on it. That was originally a pagan symbol and has been used by the occult and Masons long before the Jews chose to adopt it as a symbol for their flag and the modern state of Israel. The ancient symbol of Israel was not the six-pointed star, but the seven-branch menorah of the Temple. It is also a good idea to avoid this symbol on anything you buy for your celebration.

Your choice of candles or oil lamps for your menorah can make a difference. Candles are a lot cheaper and require a lot less preparation. But we like the symbolism of using oil. We use glass oil tapers, so our menorah burns using real oil like the temple menorah. Being able to see the oil through the glass reminds us of the miracle. Of course, wax candles work fine, but lose some of the symbolism.

I purchased [10" glass oil tapers](#) online for about \$36 (3 sets of 3). The candle-shaped glass comes with a little rubber sleeve that is supposed to help the candle fit snugly in your holder, but it was still loose in ours, so I just wrapped masking tape around the bottom of the taper until it set in there without wiggling. There are many different heights and shapes to suit your menorah or preferred style. Our menorah is not gold-colored, like the one in the temple, but pewter. Simple folks who couldn't travel to celebrate the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem had simple hand-made menorah's in their homes that were made out of many things, including wood.

Make sure to buy 99% pure paraffin lamp oil. Standard 'lamp oil' smokes a lot and will drive you out of your house! Olive oil doesn't work very well and also smokes. If the oil has any color at all, don't buy it! The 99% paraffin oil is clear like water and doesn't smoke or stink (unless your wicks are too high). There's nothing like a smoke detector going off during your feast to ruin the ambience. A communion cup filler (from

your local Christian bookstore or CBD.com) works great to fill your glass candlesticks without the mess. We learned that the candles burn best when the oil is filled to about 1" from the top. Pull the wicks out about 1/8" above the wick holder that sets on the top. It is a good idea to give your menorah setup a trial run to break in your wicks and to adjust the wick height before you begin the celebrations so that smoke, a huge or tiny flame, or a flame that goes out prematurely doesn't become a distraction. You don't want to stop in the middle of your celebration to make adjustments.



During the eight-day celebration, I light the Servant candle in the middle with a lighter. The other candles are lit from the Servant candle (right to left). Jesus is the Servant of all and He stands above all as the Light of the world, giving all believers charge to be light in our little worlds.

2. The Meals

Should you prepare eight elaborate feasts or just one? I decorate and set the table for all eight days and we enjoy every meal during Hanukkah in a beautiful setting. We choose to have one night when I go all out and make a very special meal with dessert. Which night has the big feast depends on when it fits in our schedules or works with people we want to invite to share it, or where the weekend fits into the eight days. When we are in Tampa, that special feast night is held with our Oasis family in the church and we all step it up with the dishes we bring to share.

Make the menu your own. You can have a "traditional" meal or change it up from year to year. This year for us was braised brisket, latkes with applesauce, sour cream and chives, green beans sautéed in butter mixed with almond slices, challah bread (representing the showbread), sparkling grape juice, and for dessert, cinnamon scones and cheesecake. I chose the brisket and latkes because they are traditional Hanukkah foods, but to be honest, I don't think I'll do those next year. Not a fan. I'm thinking roast turkey or a beef roast with gravy and baked potatoes (reg and sweet). I got to thinking after the fact that just because "it's all about the oil" doesn't mean we have to EAT so

much oil! We never eat pork during Hanukkah because that was considered unclean during the time of the temple dedication.

3. The Table

Because the miracle happened during the temple dedication, we chose to use gold-colored decorations since so much of the temple was overlaid with gold. This is what the overall finished product looked like when we took it all to our daughter's house and set it up to celebrate with her family.



Here are some of the elements of our decorations:

- Gold tablecloth with a smaller cream-colored tablecloth covering the top of the table. The temple Menorah lamps were made to look like branches so I chose a cream-colored tablecloth that has subtle branches of leaves woven into it.



- Wide gold crinkly ribbon runner, two lengths side by side, with a smaller ribbon that has gold hearts on it. The ribbon with hearts reminds us of the faithful love God has for His people.



- An oil hurricane lamp sits in the center, though the number can adjust for the

length of your table. At our house we put two on the table, one for each of us. This reminds us of the parable of the 10 virgins and how we desire to be ready and alert when the King of Kings (our bridegroom) returns to establish His throne in the Kingdom temple.

- Flowers on the table to adorn it are a subtle reminder of the almond petals that adorned the Menorah and of all the open flowers that were carved in wood.

- Gold chargers are placed under my everyday cream-colored Corelleware, though I may order plastic ones from smartyhadaparty.com for next year. BTW, this is a GREAT site for inexpensive decorations. Oasis Tampa uses this site as the go-to place for table settings and tablecloths, including the leaf plates we use for Passover.



- Plain gold cloth napkins with Menorah napkin rings.



- I made charms for my water goblets using large hoop earrings and beads from Michaels. I have the gold and silver for my temple theme and one purple bead on each one. Purple is the color of royalty and there's only one King of Kings.



- One Ferrero Rocher candy at each place setting. It's a gold-foil wrapped treat symbolizing God's goodness to us in sending His Son, Jesus. Ferrero is the name of the man who created the candy, but Rocher means "Rock." *"Behold, I lay in Zion (the future Kingdom in Jerusalem) a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."* I Peter 2:6



- Though you can't see it in any of our pictures, we have ultra-slim mini LED light sets (WalMart) behind the tops of the window curtains so they look like stars. This reminds us that we are heirs according to the promise God made to Abraham and his seed *"as numerous as stars in the sky."* Gen. 26:4.



- Near the feast table sits a special table for the Menorah. The Menorah sits atop a round mirror that reflects the light from the candles. This symbolizes the reflection that we are to be in the world of Jesus' everlasting Light and Life. We have another hurricane lamp that sits to one side with a Bible resting in front of it, God's Word which is *"a lamp unto to my feet and a light unto my path"* Ps. 119:105.



- On the other side of the Menorah is another vase with flowers, honoring the day when we will enter God’s temple, which will be more beautiful than anything we can imagine. *“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God,’”* Rev. 21:2,3.

4. The Daily Celebration

Each night as we sit down at the table for dinner, I light the Servant candle, then use that candle to light the candles that are indicated for that day. After dinner, we briefly review what each candle we’ve lighted so far symbolizes, then one of us reads the Scripture for that day. Usually we talk about it, then close by reading the prayer for the day together. The updated readings are on the website.

5. Family Activities

We do not exchange gifts, since this practice seems to carry over from Christmas. I find it better to give a gift to each family member unexpectedly at different times of the year.

- Play the dreidel game. Each of the 4 Hebrew letters on a Dreidel (nun, gimmel, hey, and shin) stand for “Nes Gadol Hayah Sham” which means, “A Great Miracle Happened There.” It’s interesting to note that it says “there” on the dreidels we use. If we lived in Jerusalem, we would play with a dreidel that has nun, gimmel, hey, and pey, standing for “Nes Gadol Hayah Poh” which means, “A Great Miracle Happened Here.”
- I made [Dreidel game cards](#) for each person that reminds them of what the letters mean and how to play the game. We use M&Ms to play with and use them for game pieces and points. We do not use money as we do not want to associate it with gambling, just fun competition. After the game we eat all the leftover M&Ms, so it doesn’t actually matter who wins the most. Click for directions to play [the dreidel game](#).



- Have members of the family act out the story of Hanukkah. It could be a well-rehearsed mini-play or randomly assigning different people to parts and acting out the story as a narrator reads it.
- Pantomime or play Pictionary using key words relating to Hanukkah.
- Sing worship songs together.
- Watch the 28 min. Animated Hero Classics on the Maccabees for free on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1RF57xI5Uk>. Talk about it afterwards (ask which parts they think the people who made the video made up to make it more interesting to watch). If you order the DVD online you can also order the activity book that goes with it that is legally reproducible. It has coloring pages, word searches, etc.
- Children make their own [menorah using egg cartons](#). There is a plethora of children's crafts and activities online, but I would strongly caution you to weigh the value of everything you do in light of the true meaning of Hanukkah and the celebration of God's miracle and faithfulness.

Here are some ideas that we may incorporate in our celebration next year:

- Find an old hammer and place it somewhere to represent Judah Maccabee (Maccabee comes from the root of the Hebrew word for "hammer")
- Purchase a [model of the temple](#) to make with our grandsons (10 & 13 yrs. old) to display during Hanukkah
- Give our family or guests a copy of the [Tabernacle pamphlet: Symbolism in the Tabernacle](#)
- Pomegranates somewhere, as the temple pillars had carved pomegranates on them
- Cedar branches in the flower arrangements and cedar coasters made from the cedar trees on our property: the temple walls were lined with cedar

I hope these suggestions help your family develop your own meaningful traditions.