

The Gables – Hanukkah Lights

Opening Story:

You may have heard that a Jewish holiday called Hanukkah started today (12/06/2015).

The holiday originated when King Antiochus Epiphanes, a descendant of Alexander the Great, sacrificed a pig on the altar in the Jewish temple. A pig was considered an unclean animal in those days, so the Jews thought it was a great blasphemy against God. Judas Macabees led a revolt against the Greek king in 165 BC.

During the time of the revolt a lamp was lit in the temple, but there was only one day's worth of oil available for it. The lamp continued burning for eight days. The Jews celebrate this miracle by lighting a menorah each year during December. A menorah is a lampstand that contains nine candles. One candle is lit per day, for eight days, in memory of the eight days the lamp remained burning in the temple. The ninth candle, known as the Shamash, is used to light the other eight candles.

Some of the Jewish traditions that accompany Hanukkah are:

- **Potato latkes** – Similar to hashbrown potatoes, they are served with applesauce, sour cream and/or smoke salmon.
- **Dreidels** – a spinning top that has four sides, each with a specific Hebrew letter on it. The Jewish children get candy if the dreidel lands on a certain side.
- **Gifts** – small gifts are given each day of Hanukkah.

This story is not contained in the Protestant Bible, but is included in the Catholic Bible. It is recorded in the books of First and Second Macabees, which are part of the apocrypha. Most Protestants don't think the apocrypha books were inspired by God.

The following websites were consulted when writing the opening story:

<http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/How-To-Light-The-Hanukkah-Menorah.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antiochus_IV_Epiphanes

There is a reference to Hanukkah in John 10:22, where it is called the **Feast of Dedication**.

Dialog:

Donna: It doesn't seem fair. The Jews get presents for eight days in a row while Christians only get presents on one day - Christmas.

Rick: Well think of the one present we are celebrating at Christmas?

Donna: What's that?

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Rick: Jesus! He was sent to earth as a baby and born in a manger. Thirty-three years later he died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

Donna: Oh yeah, that's right... But still, it must be nice getting all those presents.

Rick: Jesus is a much better present than anything you might receive that's wrapped in a box.

Donna: Yes, that's true. What do the lights on the menorah represent?

Rick: Well, on one level, they are lit in memory of the eight days that God kept the lamp burning in the temple.

Donna: OK. What's the other level?

Rick: It has to do with the word "light," which is mentioned extensively in the Bible.

Donna: Oh really? Where?

Rick: John 1:9 says, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."

Donna: What was the "true light?"

Rick: The "true light" is Jesus. In John 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Donna: What does Jesus mean when he says, "I am the light of the world?"

Rick: He means that the world is evil; it is filled with darkness. Jesus came to counteract that.

- Matthew 4:6 – "...the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned..."
- In John 12:46 Jesus says, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

Donna: Why do you say the world is filled with darkness?

Rick: The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Donna: Who is the god of this age?

Rick: Satan

Donna: How does Satan blind us?

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Rick: It's illustrated in Matthew 13, the Parable of the Sower. In the parable, the seed (which is the word of God) is sown in various places: along the path, on rocky places, in thorns, and on good soil.

Donna: What does the parable mean?

Rick: Jesus explained what the parable means in verses 18-23 of Matthew 13. Jesus is speaking:

- “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Donna: So how does all this apply to us?

Rick: John 12:36 says, “Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.”

Donna: What does it mean to “Put your trust in the light?”

Rick: It means to put your trust in Jesus.

Donna: What else are we supposed to do?

Rick: We are to be God's messengers, his ambassadors to a fallen world. In Matthew 5:34, Jesus is addressing his disciples when he says, “You are the light of the world...”

Donna: How do we become God's ambassadors?

Rick: Matthew 5:6 says, “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” When we receive Jesus as savior, we are indwelt by His Holy Spirit. We need to allow the light of God to shine through us to others.”

Donna: How do we receive Jesus as savior?

Rick: John 3:16-21 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him

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is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

The passage then continues:

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

Donna: So, that passage means that if we do something bad we don't want other people (or God) to know about it, correct?

Rick: Correct.

Donna: How do we turn away from our evil deeds?

Rick: First, we have to ask God to help us. If we didn't need God's help, Jesus would not have had to come to earth. Second, we have to repent. That means we need to agree that what we are doing is wrong and stop doing it. And third, we need to ask for God's forgiveness.

Donna: How do we do we ask for God's forgiveness?

Rick: In 1 John 1:5-10, the apostle John writes, “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

Donna: I can see now that the Hanukkah candles mean a lot more than just getting lots of presents. It means a lot more than a temple lamp burning for eight days with just a one day supply of oil.

Rick: Yes, it does.

Donna: It points us to Jesus, who is the “light of the world” (John 8:12), and who “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Rick: Yes. And when we think about Hanukkah and Christmas, what should we remember?

Donna: We should remember the real meaning of Christmas.

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Rick: And what is the real meaning of Christmas?

Donna:

- That Jesus left his home in heaven and came to earth to save us from our sins.
- Luke chapter 2 says, “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Rick: We hope you all have a Happy Hanukkah, if you celebrate it, and Merry Christmas!