

Introduction

“What’s a nice Jewish girl like you doing in a church like this?” This is a question people often ask me, when I speak in Christian churches and share my experience with Judaism, as well as my faith in Yeshua¹ (Jesus) the Messiah. *“Y’who??”* This was my first reaction when someone called Jesus Christ by His Hebrew name and title.² Like many people, I had heard of ‘Jesus’, but this ‘Yeshua’ I did not know. Thus began my spiritual journey to explore what it means to be both a Jewish woman and a follower of the Jewish Messiah. When I first started to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, I experienced an identity crisis. *“Am I a Christian or a Jew?”* It took some time for me to realize that contrary to popular opinion, there should be no discrepancy between the two. Most people consider Judaism and Christianity as two separate and distinct religions - here is Judaism on one side, and here is Christianity on the other, and ‘never the twain shall meet’. In fact, some people consider Christianity as anti-Jewish, and many Jewish people fear and/or hate the very word ‘Christ’ or Christian, because of the long and bloody history of persecution of Jewish people by the ‘church’.

In Edith Schaeffer’s book, ‘Christianity is Jewish’, she writes,

How odd of God
To choose the Jew,

1 Yeshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. It means ‘salvation’ or ‘God saves’.

2 Messiah is a title for ‘anointed one’. Christ comes from a Greek word ‘Christos’, Messiah comes from Hebrew word ‘Mashiach’.

But not so odd
As those who choose
The Jewish God
and hate the Jew.

This polarization intensifies when Jewish and Christian holidays coincide around the same dates, such as Christmas and Chanukah. The entire month of December seems permeated with the symbols of Christmas: evergreen trees ride in the back of pickup trucks, wreaths hang on doors, malls are packed with shoppers, Christmas carols play in every elevator and public building. Yet I remember that as a child, Christmas gained no entrance into our lives. It remained a foreign, Gentile celebration that had nothing to do with my world. Never did I feel cheated of anything special. Our family gathered together for eight nights around a Menorah or Hanukkah, a special candle holder, choosing just the right colors for the candles out of the special little box, making sure we put them in on the correct side, and lit them in the right order; arguing over who would receive the honor of lighting which candle. Often, we lit our own, homemade menorah, crafted in Hebrew school out of clay and bottle caps. We sang Chanukah songs, and played with the spinning tops we called dreidles (or s'vivon) to win candies. The highlight of the first night of Chanukah was the gift giving. (After a while, the family grew so large that we started to pick names out of a hat for who would give to whom, but each child always received a gift from each relative.) The mountain of brightly wrapped presents turned into a frenzy of unwrapping and exclamations, then a dive in for the next one. We were always careful to avoid the 'Christmas wrap' of red and green, holly, and Santas, although there were always a few who seemed to run out of Chanukah or even neutral wrapping paper and then had to resort to birthday or wedding paper much to their embarrassment. Anything, it seemed, was better than Christmas wrap! And of course, a Jewish celebration is never complete without food! In

fact, there is no Jewish activity under the sun, it seems, which is complete without food - even a shopping trip to the mall necessitates a stop at the food fair! At Chanukah time, we feasted all week on potato latkes (a kind of oily pancake), bagels with lux (thinly sliced smoked salmon) & cream cheese, and soofganiyot (jelly-filled bismarks or donuts). A highlight of my education at the Hebrew Talmud Torah School was starring in the epic video production of “The Maccabees”. In this drama, we grade five students re-enacted the story of the defeat of the great Greek-Syrian army by the brave band of Jews called the Maccabees led by Yehudah (Judah) himself. Our hero saved the Jewish people from assimilation into the Greek polytheistic culture and religion. How could this “Jewish holiday” of Chanukah ever relate to my faith in Yeshua the Messiah? I was soon to find out!