

THE STORY OF CHANUKKAH

The story of Chanukah goes back to a time after Alexander the Great had conquered most of the known world. When he died at a very young age, his four generals divided the conquered territories between themselves. The Ptolemies took the area around Egypt, and the Seleucids took the area that is today Syria. Judea was almost a no-man's land between them, fought over by both sides. Eventually the Seleucids under Antiochus IV gained power and control over Judea. In order to secure his position, Antiochus required all the captured people to adopt the Greek way of life called Hellenism. This was not a problem in most areas because the Greek culture was very respected in those times and many of the Jews adopted it and gave up the Law and teachings of the prophets. There were, however, many die hard rebels who could not give up their worship of the one true G-d and this angered Antiochus.

When control seemed to be slipping, he commanded that everyone give up dietary laws, the sabbath, circumcision and any reference to the one true G-d. To make his point, he took over the Temple in Jerusalem, desecrated all of the fixtures in the Holy of Holies, set up a statue to the Greek god, Zeus, and sacrificed a pig on the altar. To add insult to injury, he insisted that he be called Epiphanes (God Manifest). The devout Jews, however, used a play on words and called him Epimanes (Crazy Man).

He began to spread this edict out into the countryside, forcing each village to destroy their synagogues and take part in a celebration to Zeus with a feast of pork. When they came to the town of Modi'in, they came up against an old devout priest named Mattathias and his five sons. When commanded to take part in the celebration and feast, Mattathias and his sons killed the Greek soldiers and started a revolt. His son, Judah, nicknamed Maccabee (The Hammer), quickly rose to leadership of the rebels.

Facing unbelievable odds they used guerilla tactics in their home hill country, and time after time surprised and defeated the Syrian armies sent to bring their revolt to an end. Convinced that G-d was true and faithful, the rebels pushed on to Jerusalem, drove out the Syrians, and on the 25th day of Kislev, recaptured the Temple. As they began to clean up and restore the temple compound, they found the golden candlestick or menorah, which to them symbolized the light of G-d. It had been badly damaged during the occupation, but they repaired it and looked for some of the special oil in order to light it. In one of the storerooms they found a single bottle but it was only enough to burn for one day and the procedure for making more oil took eight days. They were faced with the decision of whether to make more oil and wait eight days to light the menorah, thus giving the Syrians time to regroup and attack them, or to light it immediately and hope that the people would see that the light of G-d was once again in the Holy of Holies and perhaps join their fight.

They decided to light the lamp immediately and to everyone's amazement, the oil for one day lasted eight. By that time, local sentiment had grown to the point that the Syrians could no longer retake Jerusalem.

Much of this story was predicted in Daniel 8:21-25. Chanukah is only mentioned in the Bible in the New Covenant book of John 10:22-23, when Yeshua visited the temple during the "Feast of Dedication."

We as believers in Messiah Yeshua share this story of Jewish history and the miracle it involved but we also see it as G-d's hand preparing the temple for His Son Who would worship and teach there only 160 years later.