

חנוכה Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication)

Hanukkah literally means Dedication.

We celebrate the dedication of the re-conquered and cleansed Temple Mount from the defilement of the Greek-Syrians, which occurred during the years 168 - 165 B.C.E. In those years, the people of Israel could not follow Torah or observe the holidays because the Syrian-Greeks had control of the Land, the Temple, and of their lives in general. On the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, usually at the end of November or in December, Jewish homes are filled with songs and laughter and the flickering lights of the Menorah candles. This is the celebration of Hanukkah. The word means “dedication” and we read about Yeshua celebrating this feast in Yochanan (John) 10:22. It is also referred to as the “Festival of Lights”. Hanukkah celebrates a great victory of the Jewish people and honors the brave men and women who gave their lives for the right to worship in their own way.

The History:

After the division of Alexander the Great’s empire, in the year 168 B.C.E., the Greek-Syrians ruled the country of Judea. King Antiochus was an evil man who hated the Jews because they worshiped Adoni and obeyed His laws, while he worshiped Greek idols and lived a pagan and sensual, ungodly lifestyle. He decided that all his subjects should worship and live the way he did. Antiochus sent his soldiers into the Judean cities and villages to burn the Jewish holy books and erect a huge statue of the Greek G-d, Zeus, right over the altar of burnt-offering the temple in Jerusalem. They vandalized the temple and made it unclean. He made a law that Jews were not allowed to pray in the temple or study Torah, or celebrate their holidays.

Some of the Judeans did as commanded by the King, but others, under the threat of death, worshiped Adoni and studied Torah secretly. While studying Torah, children kept a little square top called a dreidl on the table, so that if the soldiers came they could pretend they were just playing a game. The top had four Hebrew letters written on its four sides. נ ג ה ש Nun נ meaning “nothing”, gimel ג meaning “all”, hey ה meaning “half” and shin ש meaning “add”. Each player put several candies, nuts or raisins into the center of the table. Then each in turn spins the dreidl, and depending upon which letter comes up, they either add to, get nothing, half or all.

There are stories of torture and martyrdom. Many Jewish people chose to be faithful to Adoni and to die if they could not pray to their own G-d.

Next, Antiochus ordered the erection of heathen altars in every part of Judea and the offering of unclean sacrifices. At Modin an aged priest named Matityahu refused to offer the sacrifice. A cowardly villager then stepped forward to perform the duty. Matityahu became angry and seized a sword from a nearby soldier and killed the villager. When the soldiers tried to stop him, he fought them off until his strong sons came to his rescue. Soon, after a terrible battle, all the King’s men lay dead.

Miraculous Victory: Having led the way for rebellion, Matityahu gathered the people of Modin around him and challenged them to fight for Adoni. They fled to the mountains and hid in caves. Many other villagers joined them. Strengthened by their faith in Adoni, they became a small band of brave fighters who launched surprise attacks on the Syrian soldiers. One of Matityahu’s sons, Yehudah or Judah, became such a fierce fighter that he became known as Judah the Maccabee. מַכַּבֵּי Maccabee means “hammer” in Hebrew. He became the leader of the Judean revolt and his followers became known as the Maccabees. After three years of fighting, Judah and the Maccabees defeated the Syrian generals in battle and entered Jerusalem, praising G-d for deliverance. They had stood firm and prevailed and thus fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 11:32 where he spoke of this wicked ruler.

Judah and the Maccabees destroyed all the Greek gods in the Temple and ground to dust the statue of Zeus. Next they cleansed and restored the Temple and built a new altar. They dedicated the Temple back to the true worship of Adoni. The Hebrew word for dedication is **הַנִּסְּחָה** Hanukkah, so this became a yearly celebration called the Festival of Dedication, or Hanukkah.

Another Miracle: When the priests went to light the Temple menorah for the dedication, they could only find one small vase of the pure, specially made olive oil which was needed. It was only enough for one day, and it took eight days to prepare the special oil. They lit the menorah with what they had, and a miracle is reported to have happened. It burned not for one day only, but for eight days! The people rejoiced with singing and dancing.

The Traditions:

Some of the practices the Judeans established in the victory celebration were a late celebration of the holiday of Sukkot, and all its rejoicing, which they had just missed a few months previously since Antiochus had forbidden it. This has come down to us as the candles of Hanukkah, which can be understood to represent the torches used in the worship dances of the last day of Sukkot. Alternatively, the candles could also commemorate the miracle of the multiplied lamp oil. The miracle of the burning menorah is remembered every year at Hanukkah, by lighting a nine-candle menorah called a Hanukkiah. Eight of the candles represents the eight days the oil burned in the Temple menorah. The ninth candle called the Shamash, which means “servant”, is used to light the other candles. At dusk, on the first night, the Shamash is lit and a special Hanukkah blessing is recited, then the candle on the right is lit. On the second night, after lighting the Shamash, two candles on the right are lit. On the third night, after lighting the Shamash, three candles on the right are lit, and so on for eight nights until all eight candles are burning.

And now the dreidl top has a new meaning for the four letters: **ש ג ה נ** They make an acronym **נֶס גָּדוֹל הָיָה שָׁמַיִם** *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham* which means, “A great miracle happened there.” In modern Israel the wording is revised to read “A great miracle happened here.” The letters are modified to **פ ג ה נ** for **נֶס גָּדוֹל הָיָה פֶּה**

The Food:

And what is a celebration without food? Therefore, in commemoration of the oil miracle, foods fried in oil have become a Hanukkah tradition. Latkes, or fried potato pancakes, with a garnish of sour cream or applesauce, is a holiday specialty.

Doughnuts continue to be a best-seller in Israel. Known in Hebrew as sufganiyot, 80% of Israelis are reported to partake in some 6-7 of the holeless-donuts during the eight-day holiday. The most popular filling continues to be jelly, followed by butterscotch and chocolate.

The Messiah:

Hanukkah is sometimes described as the Festival of Lights. It was during Sukkot that Yeshua proclaimed, “I am the Light of the world. Yeshua, G-d’s only Son came to take the punishment for our sins and give us victory over haSatan, our enemy. He died as the atoning blood sacrifice for our sins and rose again so that we could have eternal life and not walk in darkness. In Isaiah 42:1-4 we read the prophecy about God’s chosen servant (Shamash), who would come and bring justice according to truth. In Matthew 12:17 we read how Yeshua fulfilled that prophesy. He came as a servant to bring light and salvation to all who believe. Therefore, Hanukkah can have special joy to us, as we celebrate the Maccabean victory, and Yeshua’s light and victory for us and in us. When we light the menorah candles, starting with the Shamash, we are

constantly reminded how Yeshua, the Servant, came to bring light into the world and how He miraculously lights one “candle” at a time.