

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL
SESSION 13 | THE FEAST OF DEDICATION

HANUKKAH: WHAT IS REMEMBERED

- Other than a brief mention of the feast of dedication, which we will see later, Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Scriptures.
- Everything we know about Hanukkah we know from the books of 1 & 2 Maccabees as well as oral history.
- After the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek kingdom divided. The two strongest kingdoms were the Ptolemies (mostly in Egypt) and the Seleucids (Greece, Turkey, Syria).
- Eventually, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215-164 BC) became the King of the Seleucid empire. Antiochus IV was the “King of Hellenization.” He started a brutal campaign to make all the world Greek, in its thinking, architecture, philosophy, religion, dress, and just about every conceivable way.
- His chosen name is after the capital city *Antioch* and the self-appraised title *Epiphanes* (the manifestation of God). He was so unusual in his habits that the people called him *Epimanes*, which means *mad* or *out of his mind*.
- Around 168 BC a group of rebel Jews known as the Maccabees revolted against the Seleucid Empire. Things did not go well at first, going from “bad to worse” for the Jews.
 - The revolt fostered battles between Jewish factions, especially traditionalists -vs- Hellenists.
 - The revolt led Antiochus IV to ban Jewish religious practices and to desecrate the Temple, setting up the worship to Zeus, and even sacrificing a pig on the altar.
 - Antiochus IV set up a gymnasium just outside the Temple in Jerusalem. While this seems irrelevant in modern standards, the gymnasium was the center of Hellenistic life and thinking.
 - It was the place of Greek philosophical education.
 - It was the place where the community’s problems were discussed and solved.
 - It was a place that honored (and almost worshiped) human ability, beauty, and skill.
 - All of these were diametrically opposed to Jewish ways of thinking. For all practical purposes, the Greek gymnasium was to Greek culture what the Synagogue is to Jewish culture.
 - One should consider the ancient gymnasium to be more of a place of worship than of athletic competitions.
- In 164 BC, however, things began to get better for the Maccabean-led revolt, and they re-captured Jerusalem and its Temple.
- The rededication of the Temple from the Greeks took place on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. The rededication involved lighting the Temple menorah. According to tradition, there was only enough consecrated oil for one day. The priests, however, were able to use this oil for eight days until a new batch of consecrated oil could be produced.
- The books of Maccabees do not give this account of the oil, only that an eight-day celebration took place. See 1 Maccabees 4:52-59.

- The result was the only period of sovereignty the Jewish nation had from the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar through 1948. This sovereignty lasted from 140-37 BC.

HANUKKAH: HOW IT IS REMEMBERED

- Like Purim, Hanukkah is a nationally instituted holiday, not a God-ordained holiday.
- It is designed to elicit remembrance of the most successful Jewish revolt in history.
- Because it is a joyful remembrance, the holiday is, like Purim, a wholly joyful experience.
- The holiday is among the least significant holidays *religiously*, being almost a totally secular holiday. However, it has become one of the most significant holidays *socially*. Much (if not most) of this is due to the influence of Christmas worldwide, and the fact that Hanukkah is always in the Christmas season.
- The only matter that is rabbinically prescribed for Jewish observance of Hanukkah is the lighting of the Menorah.
 - A Hanukkah Menorah has nine candles, unlike a traditional seven candle menorah. Orthodox Jews believe that a traditional Menorah can only be used in the Temple.
 - Eight of the candles represent the eight days of the original oil.
 - The middle candle is called the *shamash* and is the “servant candle.” It is used to light the other eight.
- Other traditions have developed for Hanukkah, from traditional foods to games and songs.

HANUKKAH: JESUS REMEMBERED

- In John 10:22, Jesus went into the Temple on the Feast of Dedication. This is the only mention of Hanukkah in the Bible.
- It is on this occasion, that the leaders of the Temple asked Jesus to plainly state whether He was the Messiah (Jn. 10:24).
- It was also on this occasion, because Jesus gave an affirmative answer (see v. 30), that the Temple leaders attempted to kill Jesus then and there, for blasphemy (vv. 31-33).