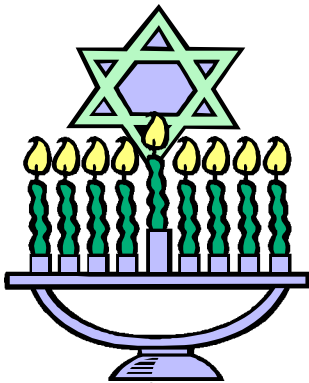


What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah is the celebration of a miracle that happened to Jewish people over 2,000 years ago. At one time the Jewish people were forced to worship Greek gods under the rule of Antiochus, a powerful Pagan ruler. He brought a Syrian army into Jerusalem to destroy the Jewish religion and force the Jews to worship Greek gods. He also took over the holy Temple and laid it to ruin.

The Jews fought back but were outnumbered. However, a man named Judah Maccabee came to their rescue. He led a small band of farmers against the Syrian army. They are known to have deceived the troops using clever facades and secrecy rather than brute force. They won back the city.



However, the Temple was damaged and other structures were in need of repair; cleaning was needed to make the Temple pure once again. Part of purification process was the lighting of a seven branched menorah that had to remain lit all the time. When the elders found the oil necessary to light lamp, they realized that it was only enough for one day. They lit the menorah and a miracle occurred—the oil burned for eight days.

The Temple was finally “rededicated,” or made holy again on the 25th day of the Hebrew month *Kislev* in the 165 B.C. On this day, Judah Maccabee declared a holiday, which he named “Hanukkah,” the Hebrew word for rededication. That mark of lasting light has come to symbolize Hanukkah.

Every year Jews celebrate Hanukkah for eight days. They light a special eight-branched menorah (plus one branch for the *shamash*—the candle used to light all the others) to symbolize the eight days that the oil lasted. One candle is lit on the first night, two on the second night, and so on until all eight have been lit. It is also a custom to exchange presents during these eight days. Often one receives one per day for the first seven days, and then many gifts on the eighth day.

Another Hanukkah tradition is the giving of gelt, or money, to children and charities. Coin-shaped chocolates or candy is given out. The legend is that one of the first things changed after the Temple was restored was the introduction of new coins for the Jewish people.

Hanukkah is a time where everyone participates in the celebration by eating, playing games, and socializing. One fun Hanukkah game uses a dreidel playing piece. Symbols on the dreidel defined the rules of the game.

Hanukkah is also known as the “Festival of Lights” because of the lighting of candles during the celebration. The lasting light stands for the freedom and determination of the Jewish people to practice their religious beliefs.