

A GREAT MIRACLE HAPPENED THERE

Hanukkah (or Chanukah), the Feast of the Dedication celebrates events that happened around 168-165BC between the end of the Hebrew Bible and the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. The story is told in the first book of Maccabees chapters 2-4. The two books of Maccabees are in the Apocrypha, which contains several documents that are not considered by Jewish people and most Protestant Christians to be Holy Scripture, but important, nonetheless. Much of the Apocrypha is read in the Anglican/Episcopal Daily Lectionary.

The Festival is referred to in John's Gospel chapter 10 verses 22-24: *"Then came the Feast of the Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'" So, Hanukkah is the one festival that Jewish people celebrate that is not in their Bible but is in the Christian's Bible!*

Hanukkah is a celebration of the victory God gave to the Jewish freedom fighters under the command of Judah the "Maccabee" – "the Hammerer" – who overcame the huge army of the Greeks. The Greeks had desecrated the temple and were attempting to suppress faith in Yahweh. When the Jews came to rededicate the temple, they could only find one cruise of the special oil for the seven-branch lampstand that represented the presence of the LORD. This was only enough for one day, and it took eight days to prepare more oil. According to tradition, they

went ahead and lit the Menorah, and the one cruise of oil lasted the full eight days! So, the focus of the Festival is the lighting of a nine-branched menorah called a "Hanukkiah".

One branch is called 'the Servant Light' and represents the one cruise of oil. The Servant Light is used to light the other eight branches for the eight days. On the first day of the Festival one branch is lit from the Servant; on the second, two are lit; etc., till all eight are lit on the eighth day. Thus, the joy is increased each day. In Jesus' day, there would have been a huge Hanukkiah in the temple courtyard, and so the temple would have been ablaze with lights. The Festival, therefore, became known as "The Festival of Lights" and "The Feast of the Miracle of the Oils".

The eight-day Festival celebration begins on the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev – this year, December 10-18. (Because the Jewish calendar is lunar, it does not coincide with the same day in our solar calendar.) It is appropriate this Festival of Lights is celebrated around the time that Christians celebrate the birth of Him who came to be the "Light of the world". The theme of a children's game played at Hanukkah with *dreidels* – spinning tops – is that "A great miracle happened there – in Jerusalem." Indeed, the greatest miracle happened there – in Bethlehem.

The Savior of the world was born for us! Hallelujah!

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