

The Festival of Lights (Chanukah – Pronounced: “Hanukkah”)

“CHANUKAH” or the Festival of Lights commemorates the historic victory of the Maccabees (Orthodox Jews loyal to God and the Torah) following a three-year uprising to overthrow the heathen ruler Antiochus.

Antiochus ruled Jerusalem with the help of traitor Hellenist Jews (Jews who favored Greek culture) and the self-appointed High Priest, Jason.

Antiochus determined to remove all traces of orthodox Jewish faith:

- The identified Jehovah God with Jupiter
- Erected a pagan idol on the altar of the Temple of God and offered swine on the altar.
- He refused the right of circumcision, Sabbath worship, or the celebration of Jewish holidays under penalty of death.
- Copies of the Holy Scriptures were ordered destroyed.
- The pagan laws were enforced with great cruelty.

In the village of Modin the devout aged priest Mattathias was called to offer a pagan sacrifice, he refused. Instead, he stepped forward and slew both the weak Jew who stepped forward to do it for him and the representative of Antiochus. His five sons joined Mattathias immediately, destroyed the pagan idol sitting on the altar of God, and then fled to the hills. Mattathias soon died.

His third son Judas (Hebrew – Judah), known as “the Maccabee” (meaning “the hammer”) formed guerilla forces to “hammer” away at the pagan occupation forces for three years.

- He recaptured Jerusalem in 165 BC, cleansed the Temple of God, and restored traditional Jewish service.
- All this was done with a very small military force and the supernatural help of God. Many stories of miracles are told during the eight-day celebration. They relate the wonders of God imparted to Jews both to suffer and die nobly for God and supernaturally win the victories.

The Maccabees were able to reclaim the Temple and rededicate it back to God.

Hanukkah means dedication. Jesus attended the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem in **John 10:22**.

When Judas, “the Maccabee”, and his soldiers entered the Temple they wanted to light the large “MENORAH” (meaning-light), or lampstand, but there was no container of oil bearing the seal of the High Priest. The Menorah was to never go out and symbolized the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people. The Jewish soldiers poured other oil on the tips of eight spears found lying outside the Temple. They lit them and used them as light for the altar. (The light was a symbol of life.)

Someone later found enough oil to light the Menorah for one day. After it was lit, the oil supernaturally burned for eight days. At the end of the eight-days, enough oil had been produced to keep the Menorah on the altar burning continually.

During Hanukkah the Jews celebrate the wonderful miracle of the menorah burning for eight days on enough oil to last one day. The first night one candle on the menorah is lit and blessings are said. The second night two candles are lit with blessings. The third three, and so on, until the eighth night when all eight are lit. Blessings are spoken or sung, and the children receive presents each night for eight nights.

How is Christ Jesus seen in this wonderful Jewish celebration?

The Menorah on the altar of the Temple was a sevenfold lamp.

Revelation 1:12-18; “Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” (NASB)

Jesus the Light

During the eight-day Hanukkah celebration every candle is lit with **the SHAMMASH**, a special candle which “**Lights**” the others.

It is placed near the others if individual candles are used. On a traditional menorah used in a Jewish home it is the one in the middle slightly elevated above the others. It is the **SHAMMASH** (this special candle lights all the others) that sets the other candles a flame. The candles are lit each night after dark (except on the Sabbath) and **placed near a window for all to see.**

- God promised in **Isaiah 42:6-8** that the Messiah would be a light to us. “**A light to the Gentiles.**”

- On His day of dedication Simeon prophesied over Christ calling Him “**a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.**” **Luke 2:32**

- **John 1:6-9** tells us that John the Baptist came to testify about “**The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.**”

-**John 8:12** When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**”

As Christ Jesus is the Light ... We Dedicate Ourselves to Let Our Light Shine!

Matthew 5:14-16 “**You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**”

Jesus the Servant

The SHAMMASH, a special candle that “**serves**” the others.

- Jesus is referred to as God’s Holy Servant. **Acts 4:30** **Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.**”

Matthew 20:26-28 ... **Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”

As Christ Jesus is the Servant ... Let us Serve Others!

1 Peter 4:10 **Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms**

Other Interesting Facts: The Dreidel. During the celebration of Hanukkah, children play a game with a four-sided top called a dreidel. There is a different Hebrew letter on each side. The letters stand for the words: “*A Great Miracle Happened There.*”

Maoz Tzur. A traditional song of praise sung for the rededication of the Temple. Sung after the candles are lit. Maoz Tzur is translated “*Rock of Ages.*” or “*The Rock of Salvation.*”

Let’s let the flame of God burn bright within us, with the oil of the Holy Spirit and let us rededicate ourselves a new today **to be a light to the word and a servant to all.**