

## Hanukkah

The eight day festival of Hanukkah celebrated by the Jews is not their answer to our Christmas. Though as far as the celebrations are concerned, it has similar trappings such as gifts. Hanukkah commemorates the victory of the Maccabees and their men over native and foreign (Greco-Syrian) armies in Judea during the second century BC. The Maccabean revolt, which is described in the apocryphal book of Maccabees, was led by a priest named Mattathias and his five sons, of whom the best known was Judah. The Maccabees revolted against the forced process of assimilation of Jews into Greek culture. In the year 169 BC, a Greek city was established in Jerusalem, opposite the Temple mount. The Greeks also instituted religious practices: including pig sacrifices and pagan cultic worship in the Holy Temple. Their scheme was to destroy the heart of Jewish spirituality - the Temple worship. And to make the picture complete, they forbade Jewish religious practices, such as the study of the Torah, observance of the Sabbath and circumcision. The resisters were given a choice: paganization or martyrdom. But under the leadership of the Maccabees they chose to revolt instead. After three years of struggle the Jews recaptured the 'temple mount, purified and rededicated the temple. The rededication ceremonies lasted for eight days. According to Jewish tradition, they could find only one small cruse of oil to rekindle the eternal light (a feature of the temple). As the story goes, the oil miraculously burned for eight days, and that is why Hanukkah became the eight day celebration of the miracle of light.

Hanukkah has also its importance for Christians. If the Maccabees had failed in their revolt, the Jews would have been swallowed up by Greek culture. The Jewish religion would have been wiped out. If not for Hanukkah, there would have been no Christmas. But God kept His covenant. He controls men and events. He used a small group of revolutionaries, the Maccabees, so that "when the time had fully come", God sent "His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full right of sons" (Ga1.4:4,5).

In our recessionary, volatile, times, the story of how God used the Maccabees to fulfill His purposes, is encouraging news. Christmas-the Lord is in control. He sent His son into the world for our salvation according to His perfect time schedule. Joy to the world Christ has come!

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