

STUDY NOTES FROM KAREN HOERDEL'S "JEWISH FEAST STUDIES" TEACHING SERIES

Hanukkah = Dedication The Feast of Dedication The Feast of Lights

**Takes place on the 25th of Kislev (November or December)
75 days after Yom Kippur**

Hanukkah lasts for eight days and recounts the victory of the Jewish people over the pagan Greek Syrians who aimed to eradicate Judaism in 164 B.C.

The festival is not mentioned in the Old Testament (Hanukkah is mentioned, however, in the New Testament in John 10:22-23) because this historic event occurred during the 400 year period between the two Testaments referred to as the "Four hundred silent years"; called "silent" because during that time God gave no new revelation to His people. From Malachi to John the Baptist the prophetic voice in Israel was silent. There were no prophets, no visions, and no angelic visits. However, prophetic silence did not indicate that God had forgotten His people. Many significant events in Israel's history occurred during those four centuries - the development of the synagogue, the rise of the Sadducees and Pharisees, and the domination by Rome. Perhaps none were more important than the events that gave occasion to the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

The holiday celebrates the rededication of the Temple to the Lord after it was desecrated by the Gentiles. (Hanukkah is the Hebrew word for "dedication"). The Hanukkah story preserves the epic struggle and the heroic exploits of one of the greatest Jewish victories of all times - war for independence from Syrian oppression in 164-165 B.C. The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees are the earliest historical record of Hanukkah. They are part of the 15 books of the Old Testament Apocrypha, a collection of Jewish writings between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D.

In 171 B.C. Antiochus IV ruled in Syria. He referred to himself as Antiochus Theos Epiphanes (Antiochus, the visible god), or just Antiochus Epiphanes. We see in Antiochus, who placed a statue of Jupiter resembling himself in the Temple above the altar, a prototype man of lawlessness who sets himself up in God's Temple, proclaiming himself to be God. (II Thessalonians 2:3-4) Daniel prophesied of him, Daniel 8:11-14; 9:27.

Antiochus desired to "hellenize," or impose Greek language, thought and religion upon his subjects in an effort to unify his rule. Antiochus ordered his general to destroy Jerusalem. Houses were burned, the walls of the city were breached, and tens of thousands were killed or sold into slavery. He then turned his attention to the Temple on Mount Zion. Syrian soldiers hacked and smashed the porches and gates. They stripped the Temple of its golden vessels and treasures. On Kislev 15, 168 B.C. (December), Antiochus erected an idol of Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greek pantheon, on the holy altar in the courtyard. Not surprisingly, it bore his image. In Kislev 25, Antiochus offered a pig on the altar to Zeus. The pig was the ultimate abomination to the Jewish mind, strictly forbidden by the law of God. Antiochus sprinkled its blood in the Holy of Holies

and poured its broth over the holy scrolls before he cut them to pieces and burned them. The Sanctuary of the Most High had been polluted and profaned. It had been desecrated and defiled. The Temple was converted to a shrine to Zeus, and only swine were permitted for sacrifice.

Furthermore, Antiochus issued an edict forbidding the practice of Judaism on pain of death and enforced it by house searches. If the Sabbath was observed or dietary laws kept, or circumcision performed, or scrolls of the law found, the whole family was put to death. Dark days followed with terror and persecution. The faithful fled to the wilderness or to the Judean hills to live in caves. Syrian detachments were dispatched throughout the nation to enforce the diabolical plan of Antiochus. One such detachment came in the tiny village of Modin (about 17 miles northwest of Jerusalem). There they built a pagan altar to Zeus. The townspeople were assembled, and an aged priest named Mattathias was singled out of the crowd. He was ordered to offer a sacrificial pig to the Greek gods in honor of Zeus. "Never," he replied with defiance. At that moment an apostate priest approached the altar and requested permission to offer the pig. Indignation stirred in the heart of Mattathias and erupted into violence as Mattathias ripped the sword from the hand of a Syrian officer and killed him. His five sons simultaneously engaged and slew the remaining soldiers. Quickly, they pulled down the altar.

And so the revolt began; an uprising against the enemies of the One True God.

Each day the faithful band grew as the word of the rebellion spread. They engaged in guerilla warfare, attacking Syrian outposts and destroying pagan altars. When Mattathias died, leadership was passed to his son Judah. He was called the Maccabee, believed to be from the Hebrew word *makkevet*, meaning "hammer." For three years the revolt raged. Hiding in caves and lying in ambush, the Maccabees gradually frustrated and wore down the Syrian occupation. Finally the freedom fighters met the enemy in open battle. They secured stunning victories.

When they returned to Jerusalem, the gates of the Temple were burned, weeds grew waist high in courtyards and above it all loomed the hideous Zeus idol with the face of Antiochus. The liberators immediately began to cleanse the Sanctuary. They removed the defilement and the Greek idol. They rebuilt the altar and on Kislev 25, 165 B.C., exactly three years to the day from its defilement, they rededicated the altar of the Lord.

According to Jewish tradition, the Maccabees found only one small cruse of unpolluted oil in the Temple which still bore the unbroken seal of the high priest. It was but one day's supply for the golden lampstand. Miraculously, it burned for eight days until a new supply of oil could be consecrated. Hence, the tradition explains why Hanukkah is held for eight days.

Scripture teaches that the events of Hanukkah were merely a shadow of events at the end of this age. Daniel prophesied that Israel would again enter into a covenant with a Gentile ruler (Daniel 9:27). This seven year covenant would start the clock ticking for the period known as the Seventieth Week of Daniel. In their blindness and apostasy, Israel will turn to the false messiah instead of the true One. At midpoint, three and one half years later, the Antichrist will be revealed for who he is: he will declare himself to be god and demand the worship of the world (II Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:15). Like Antiochus Epiphanes, he will desecrate the Temple with his idolatrous image. Jesus said in reference to this: "When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation,

spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place...Then let them who are in Judea flee into the Mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16).

Hanukkah stands as a heroic reminder of courageous and enduring faith in God; and more importantly, God's faithfulness to His promises.

Hanukkah is a great opportunity to make sure that we are putting God first and that our hearts are clean places for the Holy Spirit to dwell. It is a time to ask Y'Shua to come in and clean our temples, to remove our idols. It is a good time to see if there are any "pigs" on our "altars." For we are the Temple of the Living God (I Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:18-19; II Corinthians 6:16; Romans 6:12-13; I Peter 2:5-11). We can ask God to cleanse us and help us be rededicated and we will be filled with His oil (Holy Spirit) and His Light. As the menorah lampstand is lit during the time of Hanukkah, it represents the True Light, Messiah (Isaiah 60:1-3) Jesus is the Light (John 3:18-21; John 8:12).

Our candles are lit when the Light of the World comes and lives in our hearts.

"For Thou wilt light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness." (Psalm 18:28).