

# Chanukkah

## The Festival of Dedication

by Sandra Warmoth

G-d has performed many miracles for His children when the odds were stacked against them and they stepped out in faith. Chanukkah is a time we rejoice in some of those miracles. It is a time to reflect on how G-d's Presence has blessed and protected us; hence, it is a time of dedication and renewal.

The word Chanukkah means dedication or inauguration, as Chanukah celebrates the "Chanukat Hamizbe'ach," the re-inauguration of the altar in the Holy Place by the Maccabees after it had been defiled by pagans. It is also referred to as the Festival of Lights, as the rabbis teach that fire consists of two powers - the power to burn and the power to illuminate. Fire was used to sear and eradicate the impurity that the Greeks had caused in the Holy Place, and the fire of Torah was used to light up the Beis Hamikdash - the Holy Temple - once it had been re-sanctified. Lighting the Chanukia during the eight nights of Chanukka is done progressively, where we begin with one candle or light and the shamash, or the servant candle, and end up with eight candles or lights and the shamash. This is done to emphasize that light triumphs over darkness, for the greater the light, the more power it has to eradicate darkness. Yeshua, the Greatest Light this world has ever known, was seen teaching in the Temple court during Chanukkah, as John 10:22 tells us. His Light shone then, but it will shine even brighter when He returns, and He, indeed, will eradicate all that is dark in this world so that His Father's Kingdom would be firmly established on this earth.

The Jews and Chanukkah go back more than 2165 years. In order to capture the full essence of this festival, we must remember G-d's Covenant with Abraham, who was the first Hebrew: About 3900 years ago, G-d Promised to make Abraham the father of many nations. In fact, all of the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham, the Bible tells us. As a sign of obedience to this everlasting covenant, Abraham and the males of his future generations had to get circumcised. The covenant was confirmed through Abraham's son Isaac and grandson, Jacob. So the Jews became a holy nation, set apart for G-d's Redemptive Purposes. Some time after the covenant was made, G-d gave Israel instructions for holy living. He also provided the Ten Commandments so that all mankind would understand how we could live in a way that would be altogether pleasing to Him. G-d placed a special importance on keeping the Sabbath. Other peoples who covered the earth worshiped man-made gods and the physical realm was their reality. For the Jew, however, his whole life was to be focused on G-d and being a holy priesthood. This required separation from the things of the world that oftentimes contaminate its pilgrims.

The Greeks, who were considered world class in ancient days, thought that the Jewish People were merely philosophers who worshiped the sky. When Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia and Greece, conquered the Near East, he spurred hellenization - the embracing of the Greek ways. He loved the Greek lifestyle and so he wanted it to take hold in his newly acquired territories. It worked out fine for him and most of his subjects because it united his kingdom and brought the people up to par with the rest of the world. To be hellenized was to be a part of the "in" crowd because the Greek lifestyle offered a variety of worldly trappings. Emphasis was placed on vastly developing one's intellect, physical strength and beauty.



*This self-gratification fostered pleasure-seeking and a continual quest for power, which the Greeks believed their pagan gods granted them.*

*Today, we see hellenization all around us. The task that the Jews had back then to be holy in the midst of their polluted surroundings is the same task that Jews and Christians have today. Every child of G-d is responsible for being a light in the midst of the darkness, and that Light which abides in us should grow ever so brighter.*

*It is always a struggle, however, trying to be that lit vessel, but G-d was with the Jews back then, as He is with us all now. Hellenistically speaking, the pressure to conform to the world was great. However, when Alexander took control of Israel, he was kind to the Jews and granted them whatever they wished. Most of the Jews just wanted to be allowed to continue worshiping G-d in the manner in which He prescribed and without hindrance. This kingly kindness was a miracle wrought by G-d, which was recorded by the Jewish historian, Josephus, who was a son of a priestly family.*

*God had given Alexander a vision regarding what would be his great military conquest in Asia. In that vision, He also showed Alexander a man named Judah. During one of Alexander's military campaigns, he wrote to the Jewish high priest for help, but was turned down. Alexander promised to take revenge on the high priest and his people. When the time came to make good his promise, the mighty Alexander and his vast army stormed toward Jerusalem with his fiery wrath. The terrified Jewish high priest and his community prayed to G-d. G-d answered the high priest in a dream with instructions on what to do. Obediently, and with great rejoicing, the high priest marched out of the city under G-d's banner with a procession of priests in white robes. Alexander immediately recognized the high priest as the man Judah who was in his vision. Upon seeing the priest, he saluted him and was welcomed into Jerusalem.*

*This was a time of peace for the Jews. When Alexander died, however, and his empire split, Israel became a battleground between Egypt and Syria. For a while, Egypt ruled over Israel, and then Syria took firm control over the land. A cruel king named Antiochus IV came to power. He called himself Antiochus Epihanes, which means, "god manifest." He was totally bent on hellenizing the Jews because he wanted a unified Greek empire. And in an effort to control the Jewish community, he even hired his own Jewish high priest - one who had already embraced hellenism. But the priest couldn't hellenize the Jews fast enough, so Antiochus replaced him with a ruthless leader who robbed the Temple. During this time, there was much unrest and 40,000 Jews were killed under the hand of Antiochus. He banned all Jewish observances and burned the Holy Books. Then he forced the Jews to eat the flesh of swine or they would be killed.*

*The soldiers did not realize, however, that they would soon meet their match. They built an idol in the marketplace in a town called Modi'in, about 13 miles from Jerusalem. The town's leader and high priest, Mattathias, refused the soldiers' promises of wealth and great position, which were to be given in return for their pledges of allegiance to Antiochus. They tried to get Mattathias to sacrifice a pig and eat it because they wanted him to set an example to the Jewish villagers. Mattathias refused hands down. But a villager, tempted by the lure of riches, stepped up to the high altar to sacrifice a pig to the pagan god Zeus. Mattathias was enraged and he killed the traitor. Then the high priest killed a soldier and destroyed the altar. He told the villagers to follow him if they were on G-d's side. Mattathias fled to the mountains with his five sons and*



other followers and started a guerrilla war against Antiochus' soldiers, who were sent by the king to destroy them. When Mattathias died, his son Judah the Maccabee took charge of the guerrillas. Although his men were small in numbers, they were mighty in Spirit. This small, untrained band of freedom fighters, under Judah "the hammer," as he was called, clobbered the Syrian soldiers.

After the battle was won by the Maccabees under G-d's direction, they triumphantly marched into Jerusalem on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, 165 B.C.E. That date marked exactly three years from when Antiochus first plundered the Temple. The Jews had quite a restoration task at that time. There was much work to be done in purifying the Temple before they could celebrate the victory over the heathens. They rebuilt the altar, planted new trees, hung new curtains for the Ark of the Covenant, scrubbed the stone walls, and tore down all of the pagan idols. Then they re-lit the menorah with one purified flask of olive oil that was found untainted in the Temple area. Jewish tradition teaches that this one flask of oil, which was only meant to keep a flame burning for one day, miraculously lasted to keep eight days of lights burning.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 17 Christians are told that we are G-d's temple and that His temple is sacred. As followers of a Jewish Messiah, we need to see that the Light that is within our temple keeps burning brightly. 1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Chanukkah reminds us that G-d's children must sweep out the hellenization from our lives so that we could be renewed in our Spirit, which will enable us to be fully dedicated to the L-rd.