

# חֲנֻכָּה

## *Hanukkah - The History*

The story of Hanukkah begins way back with Alexander the Great, who conquered the Ancient Near East by defeating the Persians in 353 BCE. After Alexander died, his kingdom was divided among his four generals, eventually governed by two families: the Ptolemys and the Seleucids. Eventually the Ptolemys gained power and ruled over Israel. They appointed the High Priests as their ruler over Israel, so the High Priest was more of an appointed governor than a priest.



In 199 BCE the Selucids defeated the Ptolemys and Antiochus III (who also called himself “Great”) became ruler over the whole region. The next ruler, Antiochus IV gave himself the title “Epiphanies” which means “god manifested.” He put himself in God’s place. He appointed Jason to be High Priest, and Jason was very mean toward the people, making them pay very high taxes, and beating them, sometimes even killing them if they did not pay. In 169 BCE Jason turned on his own people and began killing many of them because they were not paying their taxes. Antiochus heard about it, but thought that Jason was fighting to take over Jerusalem for himself. So Antiochus came with his armies and attacked Jerusalem, killing over 40,000 of the Jews.

In order to bring full control over the Jews, Antiochus decided that it was time to make Jerusalem and the Jewish people who lived there into true Greek citizens. He built a gymnasium just outside of the Temple walls. He ruined the Temple and made it into a pagan Greek Temple. He even sacrificed pigs on the altar. He forced the people to eat non-kosher and to sacrifice to idols.

In one town, Mo’din, a priest was about to offer a pig in the name of the idol god when his fellow priest, Mattitayhu the Hasmonean struck him down. This started the war between the Jews and Antiochus. Antiochus sent 47,000 soldiers to put down the uprising. Mattitayhu had about 4,000 men. During the years that followed, Mattitayhu died, and his son, Yehudah the Maccabee became the leader of the armies. They fought for nearly 3 years, and by a miracle from God, they won! The Temple was cleansed, and the worship of God re-established. The re-dedication of the Temple by burning the menorah for 8 days commemorated the miracle that God did for our people when the few had victory over the many.