

חֲנֻכָּה

Hanukkah Means "Dedication"

The story of Hanukkah recounts the history of a battle between the Jewish people and the ruling powers of the region of Israel in the 2nd Century BCE. The miracle that we celebrate is that God gave to the very few a victory over the many. Israel had only 4,000 soldiers, and Antiochus had 47,000, yet God gave Israel the victory.



But in another way the battle was being fought, not on the battlefield, but in the hearts of the Jewish people. Antiochus wanted the Jews to stop being Jewish. He wanted all of the Jewish people to quit worshiping God and to start worshiping the idols of the Greek people. He wanted the Jews to give up the Torah and to stop living according to the customs of Moses.

There were a lot of reasons why it would have been easy for the Jews to become like the Greeks. First, they were a minority. Most of the people that lived around them were not believers in God but worshiped idols. The whole culture was pagan, and most of the holidays and events focused on the idols of the land. Someone who did not participate was therefore considered odd or outcast. It was difficult to always be different.

Second, the rulers were making it more and more difficult to live as a Jew. The Jews were ridiculed and mocked, and their businesses were shunned. You can imagine that the Jewish children were laughed at and made to feel embarrassed for their religion. For some Jews it became too difficult and they began to do whatever they could to stop being Jewish, and to live and look like the Hellenistic culture that surrounded them.

Third, many Jews no longer lived in Israel, but had moved away into foreign lands. Many Jews decided that the best thing to do was simply to leave Jerusalem and to get away from the people who were making life difficult.

Fortunately, many Jews realized how important it was to remain faithful to the Torah and to the worship of the One true God. They were willing to die to do what was right. Hanukkah, then, reminds us that we must dedicate ourselves to obeying God no matter how much it costs us personally. Even as the altar was rededicated at Hanukkah, so we must rededicate ourselves as servants of God to do whatever He asks us to do.