

Hanukkah

A celebration of faith and freedom

HANUKKAH, THE FESTIVAL of lights, commemorates the first struggle in recorded history for religious freedom and personal liberty. It also serves to keep alive the memory of a miracle in which oil, which under normal circumstance could have lit the temple of Jerusalem for only one day, stretched to eight days and eight nights.

This year, Hanukkah begins on Sunday, Dec. 8.

In 175 B.C. Antiochus IV became king of Syria, the land to which Israel had been annexed. An admirer of Greek civilization, he tried to force all of his subjects to worship Greek gods. He wanted to forge a nation with one culture and one religion. The Jews refused to acquiesce to his demands that they forsake their own religion and culture.

IN ANGRY response, Antiochus decreed that any Jew caught observing the Sabbath, or possessing either a Torah or Five Books of Moses or maintaining any separate customs would be killed.

Vastly outnumbered by the Syrians, the Jews nonetheless resisted. In the small town of Modin, northwest of Jerusalem, a man named Mattathias, along with his five sons, rallied the Jews across the land to join in a guerilla movement against the Syrians.

On his deathbed, Mattathias asked his son, Judah Maccabee, to continue the fight for religious and personal freedom. His name, Maccabee, has many meanings.

"Maccabee" is the Hebrew word for hammer and symbolizes Judah and his followers as the hammer of the Lord. In addition, Mattathias' rallying cry had been, "Whoever is for God, follow me." In Hebrew the first letters of those words spell "Maccabee."

Between 168-165 BC, Judah Maccabee and his small band resisted the Syrians and managed to win a series of military victories. Their struggle culminated in a victory at

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