

Lesson 11 – Feast of Dedication – Hanukkah / Lights

Observed: 25 Kislev–2 Tevet (9th & 10th Months - November / December)

The Origins - *The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) celebrates the cleansing, restoration, and rededication of the temple by the Maccabees in 165 B.C. The story behind the modern observance of the feast comes from many sources:*

2 Maccabees 10:1–8 (NRSV) – See Also 1 Maccabees 4:36-61

¹ Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; ² they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. ³ They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. ⁴ When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. ⁵ It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the **twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev**. ⁶ They celebrated it for **eight days** with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. ⁷ Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. ⁸ They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that **the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year**.

Books of Maccabees from the Apocrypha - The *Apocrypha* is a collection of books written in the four centuries between the Old and New Testaments. Some of these books are included in the scriptural canons of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians, but not Protestants.

***Bibliotheca Historica* by Diodorus Siculus** – Diodorus was an ancient Greek historian, and this work was written in the **first century B.C.** It contains details regarding Antiochus' actions in the Jewish temple.

***Antiquities of the Jews (XII.5.4)* by Flavius Josephus** – Written in the **late first century A.D.**, it contains the history of the Jewish people from creation through the first Jewish-Roman war.

Megillat Antiochus – This work was likely written in the **second century A.D.** and recounts the story of Hanukkah and the history of the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Empire.

Babylonian Talmud - The central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and theology. The term *Talmud* normally refers to the writings specifically called the “Babylonian Talmud” (an earlier collection is called the “Jerusalem Talmud”). This text is comprised of the both the Mishnah (Oral Traditions – 2nd Century A.D.) and the Gemara (Rabbinical commentary and analysis – **late 5th Century A.D.**).

Key Figures

Antiochus III The Great – King of the Seleucid Empire (Greek) who took control of Judea around 200 B.C. He allowed the Jews to continue practicing their religion.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes – Son of Antiochus III who rose to power around 175 B.C. Unlike his father, he outlawed the Jewish religion and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods. He attacked Jerusalem around 168 B.C. killing thousands of Jews and erecting an altar to Zeus in the temple. He also sacrificed a pig on the altar and poured blood on the temple scrolls.

Mattathias ben Johanan – Jewish priest who, along with his five sons, began a large-scale rebellion against Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Seleucid monarchy in 167 B.C.

Judas Maccabeus – Third son of Mattathias, who took over the lead of the revolt upon the death of his father in 166 B.C. He was called Maccabeus, which is Aramaic for “Hammer.” Ultimately his followers would come to be known as the “Maccabees”. Within two years Judas had successfully driven the Seleucids out of Jerusalem and had cleansed, restored, and rededicated the temple in Jerusalem. This rededication was celebrated for eight days beginning on the 25th day of Kislev in 165 B.C. (**1 Maccabees 4:36-61; 2 Maccabees 10:1-8**).

Miracle of the Oil

According to the Talmud (**Shabbat 21b**), Judas Maccabeus and his fellow Jews witnessed a miracle during the restoration. Even though there was only enough pure olive oil to keep the menorah’s candles burning for a single day (**Ex 25:37; 27:20-21; Lev 24:2; Num 8:2-3**), they remained lit for eight nights, leaving them time to find a fresh supply of oil. This was the reason for the eight-day celebration. Note that the books of Maccabees make no reference to the miracle of the oil. This is the reason why Hanukkah is sometimes called the **Festival of Lights**.

New Testament Observance

John 10:22–23 (ESV) - At that time the **Feast of Dedication** took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.

Modern Observance



Menorah (9 Candles) – Today, Hanukkah is a family celebration centered around the lighting of a nine-candle menorah called a **hanukkiyah**. Each night another candle is lit with the center candle, which is called a **shammash** or servant candle.

Gifts - Perhaps because Hanukkah falls close to Christmas, it is now traditional to give presents, often one per night after the candles are lit.

Food - Holiday foods include latkes (potato pancakes) and donuts fried in oil; the oil is a reminder of the miracle of the oil.



Games - Children play dreidel games with a top that reminds them of the great miracle of God’s deliverance from the Greeks. Each side of the dreidel has a Hebrew letter. According to folklore, all four together form an acronym standing for “a great miracle happened there.”

Source Texts

1 Maccabees 4:36–61 (NRSV)

³⁶ Then Judas and his brothers said, “See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.” ³⁷ So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. ³⁸ There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. ³⁹ Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes ⁴⁰ and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

⁴¹ Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. ⁴² He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, ⁴³ and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. ⁴⁴ They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. ⁴⁵ And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, ⁴⁶ and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. ⁴⁷ Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. ⁴⁸ They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. ⁴⁹ They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. ⁵⁰ Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. ⁵¹ They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

⁵² Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, ⁵³ they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. ⁵⁴ At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. ⁵⁵ All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. ⁵⁶ So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. ⁵⁷ They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. ⁵⁸ There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

⁵⁹ Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

⁶⁰ At that time they fortified Mount Zion with high walls and strong towers all around, to keep the Gentiles from coming and trampling them down as they had done before. ⁶¹ Judas stationed a garrison there to guard it; he also fortified Beth-zur to guard it, so that the people might have a stronghold that faced Idumea.

2 Maccabees 10:1–8 (NRSV)

¹ Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; ² they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. ³ They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. ⁴ When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. ⁵ It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. ⁶ They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. ⁷ Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. ⁸ They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.

Antiquities of the Jews (XII.5.4) - "he [Antiochus] got possession of the city by treachery; at which time he spared not so much as those that admitted him into it, on account of the riches that lay in the temple; but, led by his covetous inclination, (for he saw there was in it a great deal of gold, and many ornaments that had been dedicated to it of very great value,) and in order to plunder its wealth, he ventured to break the league he had made. So he left the temple bare, and took away the golden candlesticks, and the golden altar, and table, and the altar; and did not abstain from even the veils, which were made of fine linen and scarlet. He also emptied it of its secret treasures, and left nothing at all remaining; and by this means cast the Jews into great lamentation, for he forbade them to offer those daily sacrifices which they used to offer to God, according to the law. And when he had pillaged the whole city, some of the inhabitants he slew, and some he carried captive, together with their wives and children, so that the multitude of those captives that were taken alive amounted to about ten thousand. He also burnt down the finest buildings; and when he had overthrown the city walls, he built a citadel in the lower part of the city, for the place was high, and overlooked the temple; on which account he fortified it with high walls and towers, and put into it a garrison of Macedonians. However, in that citadel dwelt the impious and wicked part of the multitude, from whom it proved that the citizens suffered many and sore calamities. And when the king had built an idol altar upon God's altar, he slew swine upon it, and so offered a sacrifice neither according to the law, nor the Jewish religious worship in that country. He also compelled them to forsake the worship which they paid their own God, and to adore those whom he took to be gods; and made them build temples, and raise idol altars in every city and village, and offer swine upon them every day. He also commanded them not to circumcise their sons, and threatened to punish any that should be found to have transgressed his injunction. He also appointed overseers, who should compel them to do what he commanded. And indeed many Jews there were who complied with the king's commands, either voluntarily, or out of fear of the penalty that was denounced. But the best men, and those of the noblest souls, did not

regard him, but did pay a greater respect to the customs of their country than concern as to the punishment which he threatened to the disobedient; on which account they every day underwent great miseries and bitter torments; for they were whipped with rods, and their bodies were torn to pieces, and were crucified, while they were still alive, and breathed. They also strangled those women and their sons whom they had circumcised, as the king had appointed, hanging their sons about their necks as they were upon the crosses. And if there were any sacred book of the law found, it was destroyed, and those with whom they were found miserably perished also."

Talmud Shabbat 21b - The Gemara asks: **What is Hanukkah**, and why are lights kindled on Hanukkah? The Gemara answers: **The Sages taught in *Megillat Ta'anit*: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Hanukkah are eight. One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them.** What is the reason? **When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary** by touching them. **And when the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest,** undisturbed by the Greeks. **And there was sufficient oil there to light the candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit the candelabrum from it eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *hallel* and special thanksgiving** in prayer and blessings.

The Menorah in the Tabernacle / Temple

Exodus 25:37 (ESV)

³⁷ You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.

Exodus 27:20–21 (ESV)

²⁰ "You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn. ²¹ In the tent of meeting, outside the veil that is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a statute forever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel.

Leviticus 24:2 (ESV)

² "Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.

Numbers 8:2–3 (ESV)

² "Speak to Aaron and say to him, When you set up the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand." ³ And Aaron did so: he set up its lamps in front of the lampstand, as the LORD commanded Moses.

New Testament

John 10:22–23 (ESV)

²² At that time the **Feast of Dedication** took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.

Dreidel Games

Each player begins with an equal number of game pieces (usually 10–15). The game pieces can be any object, such as [chocolate gelt](#), pennies, raisins, etc.

- To start the game, every participant puts one game piece into the center "pot". Every player also puts one piece into the pot when the pot is empty or there is only one game piece in the pot.^[19]
- Each player spins the dreidel once during their turn. Depending on which side is facing up when it stops spinning, the player whose turn it is gives or takes game pieces from the pot:
 - If נ (*nun*) is facing up, the player does nothing.
 - If ג (*gimel*) is facing up, the player gets everything in the pot.
 - If ה (*hei*) is facing up, the player gets half of the pieces in the pot. If there are an odd number of pieces in the pot, the player takes half the pot rounded up to the nearest whole number.
 - If ש (*shin*) or פ (*pe*) is facing up, the player adds one of their game pieces to the pot (sometimes accompanied by the chant "shin, shin, put one in"^[20]). In some game versions a *shin* results in adding three game pieces to the pot, one for each stem of the letter *shin* (ש).
- If the player is out of pieces, they are either "out" or may ask another player for a "loan".^[21]

These rules are comparable to the rules for a classic four-sided [teetotum](#), where the letters A, D, N and T form a [mnemonic](#) for the rules of the game, *aufer*(take), *depone* (put), *nihil* (nothing), and *totum* (all). Similarly, the Hebrew letters on a dreidel may be taken as a mnemonic for the game rules in Yiddish. Occasionally, in the United States, the Hebrew letters on the dreidel form an English-language mnemonic about the rules: *hei* or "H" for "half"; *gimel* or "G" for "get all"; *nun* or "N" for "nothing"; and *shin* or "S" for "share".¹

¹ Wikipedia contributors. (2023, May 17). Dreidel. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 19:29, June 16, 2023, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dreidel&oldid=1155315826>