

HANUKKAH

By Ruth Hickman

If you live in an area with a Jewish population, you will notice that stores will have potato latkes (pancakes), jelly doughnuts and boxes of Hanukkah candles. This holiday begins this year on the evening of November 29 and lasts 8 days. What is it and is it in the Bible?

The only mention of Hanukkah in the Bible is John 10:22-23. "Now it was the Feast of Dedication [Hanukkah] in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the Temple in Solomon's porch." Jesus was there to celebrate and to declare His divinity. Read John 10:27, 30, 37-38.

Hanukkah means "dedication" and refers to the rededication of the Temple by Judah Maccabee and his army on the 25th day of Kislev in 165 BC after they had defeated the Syrian-Greek Army of the King Antiochus Epiphanes.

The Temple in Jerusalem had been defiled for three years. Pigs had been slaughtered and idols had been worshipped on its altars. When the Maccabees reclaimed and cleansed the Temple, they found enough Holy oil to kindle the flame of the Eternal Light (Menorah) for one day. Yet, miraculously it burned for eight days until new oil could be found and consecrated. For this reason, Jewish people light eight candles at Hanukkah to celebrate God's many miracles.

The Hanukkah Menorah (candelabrum) is nine-branched, instead of seven branched (like that in the Temple). There are eight candles to light, and a servant candle (tallest or separate) known as the "shamash". The ninth candle lights the other eight. On the 1st night one candle is burned and on each of the other nights another candle is added.

Special foods are eaten at this time - usually foods fried in oil. Another tradition is to spin a top known as a dreidel. It was a game used to help children study Torah without being discovered. The modern dreidel is inscribed with a letter on each side, a Nun, Gimel, Hay, and Shin. This stands for the Hebrew words - "A great miracle happened there" (the oil lasting for eight days). The dreidels in Israel have the last letter Peh which would mean "a great miracle happened here".

A Jewish song or anthem celebrating the end of tyranny and the emergence of freedom is sung. The words by Mordecai Ben Isaac are: "Rock of Ages, let our song Praise Thy saving power: Thou, amidst the raging foes, Wast our sheltering tower. Furious, they assailed us, But Thine arm availed us, And Thy word Broke their sword, When our own strength failed us."

For Christians, this celebration is a good time to search our own lives and repent of any idolatry. Let's rededicate ourselves, the Temple of the Living God and allow our lamp to burn brightly, bringing glory to God.

Happy Hanukkah!!