

## Hanukkah

The story of Hanukkah is the story of a struggle for religious freedom and of a miracle. Hanukkah is the Jewish Festival of Lights. It is celebrated over eight nights and commemorates the victory of the Jewish people over Syrian invaders more than 2,000 years ago. It is called the Festival of Lights because the Jewish people were able to make a small quantity of oil last for eight nights to keep the candles burning in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

The story goes like this: At one time, the Syrians ruled the Jews, and they tried to force the Jewish people to bow down to an image of the Syrian leader. But the Jews were forbidden by their religion to bow to statues or idols. So the Maccabees, a group of Jewish rebels, led the Jews in a revolt against their foreign rulers. Unfortunately, even though the Maccabees won, the Temple suffered a great deal of damage.

After the Temple had been cleaned, the Jewish people wanted to rededicate it to the service of God. In order to do so, they needed clean oil to light the lamps. However, inside the Temple chambers, they found only a very small amount of oil – enough to last only one night. Even though it would take them eight days to make more oil, they lit the Temple lights. Miraculously, the oil lasted for the eight days it took them to make more, and they were able to rededicate the Temple. They called that celebration the first “Hanukkah,” which is the Hebrew term for “dedication.”

There are eight days of Hanukkah to correspond with the legend of the oil in the Temple. On the first night, a candle is lit; another candle is added each night until the final night, when all eight candles are glowing. As part of the lighting ceremony, prayers are said and songs are sung. The candles stand in a special candelabrum called the “menorah.”

