

# Hanukkah at the End of the Age

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Anciently, the people of God were forced to conform to the world of Hellenism. This meant that they were to give up their status as a distinct people by blending in or assimilating to the world and culture around them.

The government at that time passed laws intended to enforce these changes. These laws made it illegal for the Jewish people to keep the unique traditions given to them by God. Under the threat of death, they were commanded to give up those things that made them God's sanctified (set apart) people.

For example, they were expected to give up temple worship and the observance of the Sabbath and holy days. They were ordered to quit reading the Bible and to forget about their identity as the sons of Abraham by special covenant with the Creator. They were even expected to change their diet, their entertainment and manner of exercise in order to conform to the "global" culture of Hellenism around them.

Under these new laws, the Jewish people were expected to eat unclean animals, including the flesh of animals that had been sacrificed to idols. They were also expected to participate in the Greek forms of theater and games dedicated to the pagan Greek gods. The theater often espoused the unholy philosophy of materialistic humanism and was based upon many myths as well as lustful, selfish desires. Not only were the athletic games conducted immodestly in the nude, but also they were competitive to the point of winning at all costs - even if it meant death to your opponent.

The story of Hanukkah is about these challenges to faith and freedom that the Jewish people faced so long ago. It is about how a minority of those who remained loyal to God struggled to overcome the evil oppression of a Syrian Hellenistic king who considered himself a god of this world. That king was Antiochus IV *Epiphanes*. *Epiphanes* means "God manifest."

In 167 BC, the armies of Antiochus ravaged and profaned the temple of God in Jerusalem. They defiled the temple's holy altar with swine's blood and set up idols and images to the Greek gods. But not all of the Jewish people succumbed to Antiochus' oppression. In spite of overwhelming odds, a dedicated minority of faithful individuals and families chose to serve God rather than to conform to the pattern of this world.

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Two years later, when the Jewish patriots succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem, they cleansed the temple and set about to restore the daily forms of worship in honor of the Creator God of Israel. They built a new altar. As a part of the rededication of the temple, the priests cleansed and relit the seven-branched candlestick (menorah) that had always stood burning to provide light in the holy place; however, they could find only enough sanctified oil to last for one day.

In faith, the people lit the menorah anyway after willing it with the little oil that they had. Miraculously, the menorah burned for eight days until the priests could prepare more oil according to biblical directives. As a reminder of this miracle, Hanukkah is traditionally observed with an eight-branched menorah that also has a ninth or "servant" candle used to light the others.

Jesus observed Hanukkah, referred to as the Feast of Dedication in John 10:22. It was during this feast that Jesus revealed Himself as the Son of God, the Christ or Messiah. In observing Hanukkah, Jesus set an example for His disciples to follow. He defines God's people as His sheep, those who hear His voice and obey. At this season we should remember the lesson of the Good Shepherd: His sheep will never perish, and no one can separate them from Him because they listen to His voice and follow Him **in a way that is apart from this world.**

Hanukkah is considered to be a minor holiday because it is not listed in the Torah together with the other commanded festivals. But Hanukah commemorates events that illustrate concepts of major importance. It presents us with a significant learning opportunity. As this age draws nearer to a close, it seems even more crucial than ever that we learn to apply the lessons of Hanukkah. Observance of this eight-day festival gives us an opportunity to reflect on how to do that.

What historically happened to the Jewish people in the second century BC can serve as an example for us today as biblical believers. Our challenge is to remain faithful to the ways of God as taught by Jesus and the apostles. We are exhorted to remain uncontaminated by the world and materialistic culture around us as much as possible. It reminds us to choose holiness and maintain a separate identity apart from this world.

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## **Eight Ways for Eight Days**

Hanukkah is an eight-day festival of light that shines in a dark world. Our modern world is too often hostile to the truth and love of God. Our culture is toxic and harmful to spiritual growth and survival of children and families of faith.

Following are eight suggested areas of life in which the faithful today may choose to set apart or dedicate to God during Hanukkah. The point is that we make Hanukkah a special time to rededicate the temples that are us and our families as communities of believers. It is a time for us to live consciously in accordance with our biblical beliefs. In the face of a world enticing our conformity, we can choose spiritual victory just as the Jewish Maccabees did against their oppressors.

1. Our bodies—modesty and morality, conscientious objection
2. Our minds—entertainment and literature
3. Our children—home education
4. Our faith—in God's word, God's Son
5. Our traditions—obedience to keeping the Sabbath and holy days
6. Our home—simple living, not cluttered or materialistic
7. Our diet—healthy, natural, compassionate, sharing resources
8. Living by the Golden Rule with our neighbors, wherever we are.