

What Is Hanukkah?

Info you need about Chanukah

Hanukkah (Chanukah) is the Jewish eight-day, wintertime “festival of lights,” celebrated with a nightly menorah lighting, special prayers and fried foods.

The Hebrew word Chanukah means “dedication,” and is thus named because it celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple (as you’ll read below). Also spelled Hanukkah (or variations of that spelling), the Hebrew word is actually pronounced with a guttural, “kh” sound, kha-nu-kah, not tcha-new-kah.

When Is Chanukah?

Chanukah begins on the eve of Kislev 25 and continues for eight days. On the civil calendar, it generally coincides with the month of December. Chanukah 2025 runs from Dec. 14-22.

What Chanukah Celebrates

In the second century BCE, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks), who tried to force the people of Israel to accept Greek culture and beliefs instead of mitzvah observance and belief in G-d. Against all odds, a small band of faithful but poorly armed Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth, drove the Greeks from the land, reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it to the service of G-d.

When they sought to light the Temple's Menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum), they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination by the Greeks. Miraculously, they lit the menorah and the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity.

To commemorate and publicize these miracles, the sages instituted the festival of Chanukah.

How Chanukah Is Observed

At the heart of the festival is the nightly menorah lighting. The menorah holds nine flames, one of which is the shamash (“attendant”), which is used to kindle the other eight lights. On the first night, we light just one flame. On the second night, an additional flame is lit. By the eighth night of Chanukah, all eight lights are kindled.

On Friday afternoon, care must be taken to light the menorah before Shabbat candles are lit, and the following evening they are to be kindled only after Shabbat has ended.

Special blessings are recited, often to a traditional melody, before the menorah is lit, and traditional songs are sung afterward.

A menorah is lit in every household (or even by each individual within the household) and placed in a doorway or window. The menorah is also lit in synagogues and other public places.

In recent years, thousands of jumbo menorahs have cropped up in front of city halls and legislative buildings, and in malls and parks all over the world.

We recite the special Hallel prayer daily, and add V'Al HaNissim in our daily prayers and in the Grace After Meals, to offer praise and thanksgiving to G-d for “delivering the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few ... the wicked into the hands of the righteous.”

Since the Chanukah miracle involved oil, it is customary to eat foods fried in oil. The Eastern-European classic is the potato latke (pancake) garnished with applesauce or sour cream, and the reigning Israeli favorite is the jelly-filled sufganya (doughnut).

Dreidel games and chocolate coins

An Idea of works and standing up for what is right.

To the average Jew today, Hanukkah is a joyous, eight-day Festival of Lights celebrating miraculous survival and dedication, blending themes of religious freedom, rededication to faith, and Jewish identity, marked by lighting the menorah, eating oil-fried foods (latkes, donuts), playing dreidel, and giving gifts, often as a family-focused holiday coinciding with winter. It's a personal and communal way to connect with Jewish history, especially the Maccabean rededication of the Temple and resistance to assimilation, bringing hope through small flames in the darkness.

Freedom & Identity: Hanukkah celebrates freedom from oppression and the right to religious expression, serving as a powerful symbol of Jewish resilience against assimilation

A Shoe in for the one world religion!

David Guzik's Notes

A little horn which grew exceeding great: This was fulfilled in one of the four successors to Alexander the Great. Since the dominion of this horn was extended toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land, we can identify the historical fulfillment of this little horn in Antiochus IV Epiphanes who ruled over Syria and Israel's land under the Seleucid dynasty.

i. Israel's land was fought over between the dynasties of Seleucid and Ptolemy, but the Seleucids gained power over the region in the days of Antiochus III (198 B.C.).

ii. Antiochus IV gained the throne by murdering his brother, the former king Seleucus Philopator. The son of Philopator was the rightful heir to the throne, but Antiochus IV had him held hostage in Rome. Antiochus IV legitimized his rule mainly through flattery and bribery.

iii. Antiochus IV assumed the title “Epiphanes” meaning, “illustrious” and alluding to deity. The Jews turned it into “Epimanes” meaning, “madman.”

Antiochus Epiphanes is an accurate and dramatic fulfillment of this prophecy in history - so much so that critics insist that the Book of Daniel *must* have been written *after* his time.

- Antiochus Epiphanes exerted his dominion **toward the south, toward the east, and toward the** land of Israel
- Antiochus Epiphanes murdered other rulers and persecuted the people of Israel (**cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes blasphemed God and commanded idolatrous worship directed towards himself (**exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes put a stop to temple sacrifices in Jerusalem (**by him the daily sacrifices were taken away**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple (**the place of His sanctuary was cast down**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes opposed God and seemed to prosper (**he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered**)

He died at Isfahan in 164 BC

For two thousand three hundred days: Literally, Daniel heard a holy one say “two thousand three hundred mornings and evenings.” Bible students debate if this means 2,300 days or 1,150 days. 2,300 days is almost seven years.

- i. Either understanding is possible, but it is more likely that this means 2,300 days. The date when the temple was cleansed is well established as December 25, 165 B.C. If we count back 2,300 days from then, we come to the year when Antiochus Epiphanes began his persecution in earnest (171 B.C.).
- ii. However, if we take it to mean 1,150 days it can refer to the time the temple was actually desecrated. Philip Newell makes this case: “For a duration of time during which 2300 daily sacrifices would ordinarily have been offered, one at evening and one in the morning, as specified in Exo 29:38-43. Since there are two of these daily, the actual time period involved is 1150 days, or slightly over three years. This, in fact, was

the time of the Maccabean tribulation, 168-165 B.C., at the end of which the sanctuary was 'cleansed' by Judas Maccabeus in his restoration of the evening and morning sacrifices (2Ma 10:1-5)."

1 Maccabees 1

After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated^a King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) ² He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. ³ He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. ⁴ He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him.

⁵ After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. ⁶ So he summoned his most honored officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. ⁷ And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died.

⁸ Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. ⁹ They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their descendants after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth.

Antiochus Epiphanes and Renegade Jews

¹⁰ From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.^b

¹¹ In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." ¹² This proposal pleased them, ¹³ and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, ¹⁵ and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

Antiochus in Egypt

¹⁶ When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. ¹⁷ So he

invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet.¹⁸ He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell.¹⁹ They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt.

Persecution of the Jews

²⁰ After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year.²¹ He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force.²¹ He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils.²² He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off.²³ He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found.²⁴ Taking them all, he went into his own land.

He shed much blood,
and spoke with great arrogance.

²⁵ Israel mourned deeply in every community,

²⁶ rulers and elders groaned,
young women and young men became faint,
the beauty of the women faded.

²⁷ Every bridegroom took up the lament;
she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning.

²⁸ Even the land trembled for its inhabitants,
and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame.

The Occupation of Jerusalem

²⁹ Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force.³⁰ Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel.³¹ He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls.³² They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock.³³ Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel.³⁴ They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position;³⁵ they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace,

³⁶ for the citadel⁴¹ became an ambush against the sanctuary,
an evil adversary of Israel at all times.

³⁷ On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood;
they even defiled the sanctuary.

³⁸ Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled;
she became a dwelling of strangers;
she became strange to her offspring,
and her children forsook her.

³⁹ Her sanctuary became desolate like a desert;
her feasts were turned into mourning,
her sabbaths into a reproach,
her honor into contempt.

⁴⁰ Her dishonor now grew as great as her glory;
her exaltation was turned into mourning.

Installation of Gentile Cults

⁴¹ Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, ⁴² and that all should give up their particular customs. ⁴³ All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. ⁴⁴ And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, ⁴⁵ to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, ⁴⁶ to defile the sanctuary and the priests, ⁴⁷ to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, ⁴⁸ and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, ⁴⁹ so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. ⁵⁰ He added, ⁵¹ “And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.”

⁵¹ In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. ⁵² Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; ⁵³ they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

⁵⁴ Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year,⁵⁵ they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, ⁵⁶ and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. ⁵⁷ The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. ⁵⁸ Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to

the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. ⁵⁸ They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. ⁵⁹ On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. ⁶⁰ According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, ⁶¹ and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

⁶² But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. ⁶³ They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. ⁶⁴ Very great wrath came upon Israel.

2 Maccabees 10:1-9

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.

⁹ Such then was the end of Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes.