

Judas Maccabeus

Judas Maccabeus (died 160 BC) was the leader of a Jewish revolt against Antiochus IV, the king of Syria.

Judas received the added name Maccabeus, generally believed to mean "Hammerer," because of the hammer blows dealt by Judas and his small and Jewish army against the well-equipped and well-trained Syrian army. The Syrians were trying to get rid of Judaism and spread Greek paganism (no belief in God.) This marked the first recorded war for religious freedom.

Judas succeeded by means of surprise attacks against Syrian generals. The Jewish temple was cleaned, and the menorah (candle) was rekindled. After removing all Syrian idols from the Temple, the Jews found only one small cruse of oil which to light their holy lamps. Miraculously, the cruse provided oil for eight days. Chanukah ("Dedication"), as the festival was called, is still each year.

Hanukkah is the Jewish Feast of Lights or Feast of Dedication. The Hebrew word *Hanukkah* means *dedication*. *Hanukkah* is also written *Hannuka* or *Chanukah*. The holiday begins on the eve of the 25th day of the Hebrew Month of Kislev and lasts eight days. Hanukkah usually falls in the month of December, but occasionally can start in November.

The books of the Maccabees tell the story of Hanukkah. After three years of struggle, the Jews in Judea defeated the Syrian tyrant Antiochus. The Jewish people held festivities in the Temple of Jerusalem, and rededicated it to God.

During Hanukkah, gifts are exchanged and contributions are made to the poor. Each evening, one additional candle is lit on the Hanukkah menorah (candelabra). By the last evening, eight lighted candles stand together.