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Hanukkah



Picture

A girl lights menorah candles to celebrate Hanukkah

Hanukkah <<HAH nuh kah>> , also spelled *Hannuka* or *Chanukah*, is the Jewish Feast of Lights. It is also called the Feast of Dedication. Hanukkah begins on the night before the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. This usually happens in December. Hanukkah lasts eight days.

During Hanukkah, many people exchange gifts. They also give money to the poor. Each night of Hanukkah, one candle is lit on a special candle holder called a menorah or hanukkiyah.

Hanukkah honors the time when ancient Jews purified the Temple of Jerusalem after the Syrians had worshiped idols there. While purifying the Temple, the Jews found only a little oil to light their menorah. But by a miracle, the oil lasted eight days.

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Hanukkah

Hanukkah, «*HAH nu kah*», is the Jewish Feast of Lights or Feast of Dedication. The Hebrew word *hanukkah* (also written *Hannuka* or *Chanukah*) means *dedication*. The Hanukkah holiday begins on the eve of the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev (approximately December) and lasts eight days.

During Hanukkah, gifts are exchanged and contributions made to the poor. On the first evening, one candle is lighted in a special eight-branched candelabrum called a *menorah* or *hanukkiyah*. Beginning on the second night, one candle is added every night until the total reaches eight on the last night. The candles are lighted by a separate candle called a *shamash*.

The two books of Maccabees in the Apocrypha tell the story of Hanukkah (see [Bible](#) [Development of the Christian Old Testament]). In 165 B.C., after a three-year struggle led by Judah Maccabee, the Jews in Judea defeated the Syrian tyrant Antiochus IV. They held festivities in the Temple in Jerusalem, and dedicated it to God.

According to the Talmud, written many centuries after the event, when the Jews cleaned the Temple of Syrian idols, they found only one small *cruse* (bottle) of oil with which to light their holy menorah. But miraculously, the cruse provided them with oil for eight days. Other sources tell of a torchlight parade in the Temple, which may also have contributed to the tradition of lighting candles on Hanukkah.

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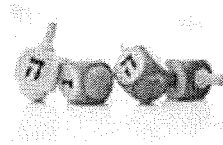


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Hanukkah



**Dreidels are toys
that young children
often play with
during Hanukkah.**

Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that lasts for eight days. It falls on different dates each year, but is usually in December.

In 168 BCE the Syrians ruled the Jews. The Syrian king made the Jews worship Greek gods. A Jewish priest named Matthias and his five sons would not obey.

One of Matthias's sons, Judas Maccabee, was brave. Other people followed him. None of them did what the king said, so the king sent soldiers after them. The Jews fought back and won.

Then the Jews returned to their temple. They found the temple destroyed and the light that should always stay burning had gone out. There was just enough oil left for the light to burn one more day. It would take eight days to make more oil. Still the Jews lit the oil. That little bit of oil burned for eight days!

Every year Jews around the world remember this miracle. They light a new candle every day for eight days using the menorah. The menorah is a candleholder that holds nine candles. The center candle sits higher than the rest. This is the candle used to light the other eight candles.

Hanukkah begins at sundown. Families say blessings. Then they light candles on the menorah. Afterward they eat and have fun together. Relatives and friends often get together. Some people give gifts.

During Hanukkah children play with dreidels. These are four-sided tops. Each side has a Hebrew letter on it. To play, each child begins with a small pile of pennies, raisins, nuts, and chocolate gelt (candy coins wrapped in gold paper). Everyone puts one thing in the center pot. Then they take turns spinning the dreidel. When it lands, the letter facing up tells the child whether to take treats out of the pot or put them in.

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