

Hanukkah - Festival of Lights - II

Lead: Each year in December, Jewish families around the world celebrate their heritage and deliverance from persecution during Hanukkah - the Festival of Lights.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Taking advantage of a split in Jewish society between Hasidean traditionalists and pro-Greek reformers, in 168 BC Seleucid emperor Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Jerusalem. He garrisoned the City with Syrian troops, and set up a statue

of the Greek god Zeus in the Temple, thus desecrating the holiest place in the world of Judaism.

Horrified by this sacrilege, Hasidean opposition began to break into the open. Mattathias, a priest from a rural village not far from Jerusalem, set off violent resistance when he killed a Jew preparing to offer a sacrifice to the new gods and also struck down one of the Syrian troops standing nearby. This act began guerilla warfare against Antiochus, but also a Jewish civil war between traditionalists and those who chose to collaborate with the Greeks. Mattathias escaped to the hills formed a native army and at his death was

succeeded by his third son Judas Maccabeus.

The war was bitterly fought, with much loss of life on all sides, but after three years Judas began to prevail, defeating much larger and heavily equipped Syrian armies. Antiochus was expelled, Jerusalem was recaptured in 164 BC and the Temple rededicated. Talmudic tradition dating from the first century BC remembers that at the time of the rededication only one cruse of undesecrated oil could be found for burning in the Menorah, the seven branched Temple candelabrum, yet this small amount was said to have burned for eight days until new oil could be obtained.

Each year in December, adherents of Judaism around the world remember these events during Hanukkah, the Festival of the Lights when gifts are exchanged, and children play holiday games. The eight days of Hanukkah are a reminder of the Maccabean victory, the rededication of the Temple, the miracle of the oil, and the brief period of hard-earned Jewish independence before the arrival of Roman rule.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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Resources

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Eddy, S.K. *The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism 334-31 BC.* (1961).

Farmer, William R. *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period.* (1956).