



How to Make Hanukkah Special at Your Church or Bible Study

Many Christians don't realize that Hanukkah holds great significance for them, as well as for Jewish people. If the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV had succeeded in destroying Judaism in the second century B.C., we would have no Savior. The Jewish triumph over persecution, oppression, and assimilation preserved the nation through which God brought the Lord Jesus Christ. It also preserved for us a heritage of devotion to the one true God in the midst of a corrupt and heathen world.

Today Christians around the globe face horrendous persecution. Many are being tortured and murdered for remaining true to their faith in Christ, just as Jews were tortured and murdered under Antiochus IV. This handout is being made available in hopes that your church or Bible study will teach about Hanukkah in light of the growing evil that threatens both Jewish people and Bible-believing Christians. And as Jewish people celebrate their ancient triumph over Antiochus, we look to the day when we will celebrate our final victory over Satan and death through Messiah Jesus, our Savior.

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Historical Background

After the fall of Babylon (539 B.C.) and then Medo-Persia (331 B.C.), the new power in the world became Greece under Alexander the Great who conquered much of the then-known world. When he died, his kingdom was divided between his four generals: Ptolemy, Cassander, Seleucus, and Lysmachus. Seleucus created an empire that included all of Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, and today's Turkmenistan and Pamir. It also included parts of India, Turkey, Armenia, and Georgia. Ptolemy carved out a dynasty for himself in Egypt.

So Israel was sandwiched between two great powers that were vying to dominate this strategic area. An evil, powerful ruler arose over the Seleucids named Antiochus IV. He called himself Epiphanes, which means "the visible god." Those who knew him well called him Epimanes, meaning "madman."

Antiochus attempted to assert his power over the Ptolomies but failed. Angry and humiliated, he began to assert it over the Jewish people, forcing them to abandon their faith and embrace the Greek system and culture. As part of this Hellenization, he stormed Jerusalem in 167 B.C., desecrated the Jewish Temple by sacrificing a female pig on the altar and erecting an image of Zeus (also called Jupiter) in the Holy of Holies. Because of these abominations and his savage persecution of the Jewish people, he is considered a type of the Antichrist who will desecrate the future Temple and claim that he is God (2 Th. 2:4).

Antiochus sent his soldiers, town by town, to enforce his new edicts that forbade all Jewish practices, including circumcision and Torah study. At the town of Modi'in, an elderly priest named Mattathias rebelled and killed the soldiers who came to force the Jewish people to assimilate. This began the Hasmonean revolt. Mattathias soon died, but his sons (most notably, his son Judah) continued the rebellion. As they fought guerilla-style against their oppressors, they became known as Maccabees, from the Hebrew word for "hammer," to symbolize their hammer-like attacks on their enemies. Ultimately, in 164 B.C., they won and reclaimed the Temple on the 25th of Kislev. That is the day on the Jewish calendar when Hanukkah begins.

The Legend of the Oil. Jewish tradition says that when the Temple was cleansed, only one small cruse of consecrated oil was found. It was enough to keep the Temple menorah burning for only one day. But it took eight days to consecrate new oil. Legend says the Jewish people lit the menorah anyway; and the miracle of Hanukkah is that the single cruse of oil lasted a full eight days, long enough for new oil to be prepared.



Message Outline

I. The Horror of That Time

History of Hanukkah

II. The Heroes of That Time

The Maccabees

III. The Hope for All Time

(A) Jewish people were being persecuted and forced to convert or die. Today Christians around the world face the onslaught of radical Islam and its policies regarding those who hold other beliefs. Islam's precepts are the same as those of Antiochus: convert or die.

(B) The Jewish people were faithful during persecution and destruction, as believers need to be today.

(C) In the days of the Maccabees, Satan was attacking the only true biblical system in the world. Today he actively seeks to destroy the only true way to learn about the Lord and His Word.

(D) Think about this: God raised up Judah the Maccabee and his clan to defeat Antiochus IV to prevent Satan from destroying Judaism and achieving his evil goal of dethroning the Most High God (Isa. 14:12–15). In so doing, God preserved the Jewish people, the vehicle through whom He had promised to bring the Jewish Messiah and Savior into the world. Ironically, Antiochus died in 164 B.C., in what is today Iran (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Satan's tools have not changed. He used assimilation and murder then, and he uses it today. It is up to us to remain faithful.

Following the message, you may like to adjourn to the gym or fellowship hall for the rest of the Hanukkah celebration. There are special songs to sing, special foods to eat, and even a game the children can play. It's potato latke time!



Traditional Hanukkah Practices

SPECIAL DECORATIONS. To prepare for a Hanukkah “party,” you may like to decorate your gymnasium, fellowship hall, classroom, or home in blue and white. These are the traditional colors of Israel. Such items as chocolate coins, often referred to as *gelt* (Yiddish for “money”), and *dreidels* (special spinning tops) make wonderful decorations.

THE MENORAH. The Hanukkah menorah is a nine-branched candelabra, also called a *hanukkiah*. There is one candle for each of the eight days of Hanukkah, plus an extra candle (often in the center) to hold the *shamash* candle. The *shamash*, which means “servant,” is lit first and then used to light all the other candles.



The candles are placed in the *hanukkiah* from right to left. Every night another candle is added. The first night, you would light the *shamash* and use it to light one candle. On the second night, you would light the *shamash* and use it to light two other candles. Each night this pattern is repeated until, on the final night, all nine candles are lit.

Menorahs and candles are easily purchased at party supply stores, many grocery stores, or chains like Bed, Bath and Beyond. The one at the left was found online at Zionjudaica.com, which also sells *dreidels* and many other Hanukkah supplies, particularly for children.

You may also like to contact your local synagogue gift shop. This may open up a wonderful opportunity to build a relationship with your Jewish neighbors. You can even invite them to your event!

THE BLESSINGS. It is Jewish tradition to recite a blessing when lighting the candles. After the servant candle is lit, but before lighting the others, the following blessings are recited:

Blessing 1

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by His commandments, and has commanded us to kindle the lights of Hanukkah.

Blessing 2

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who wrought miracles for our fathers in days of old, at this season.

Blessing 3

This blessing is recited only on the first night or the first time one kindles the Hanukkah lights.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has kept us alive, and has preserved us, and enabled us to reach this time.

THE DREIDELS. Tradition holds that the origin of the *dreidel*, called a *sevivon* in Hebrew, is found in Eastern Europe. During one of many periods in Jewish history when the rabbis and sages were forbidden to study the Torah and their other sacred books, they developed the *dreidel* game as a decoy for Torah study. When authorities burst into Jewish homes, the Jews appeared to be playing a simple game that involved gambling for small coins. But in reality, they were studying the Torah and praying to God.

Some Jewish people have taught that the Hebrew letters on the *dreidel* (*nun*, *hey*, *gimmel*, *shin*) represent the four major Gentile powers that tried to destroy the Jewish people and that dominated the land of Israel: *nun* for Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon), *hey* for Haman (Medo-Persia), *gimmel* for Gog (Greece), and *shin* for Seir (Rome).

More traditional, however, is this explanation: The letters *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, and *shin* stand for the words *nes gadol haya sham*, Hebrew for “a great miracle happened there.” In Israel the *shin* is replaced with the letter *pey* to represent the Hebrew word for “here”: “A great miracle happened here.”



Playing the *dreidel* game is simple. Each player begins with 10 nuts, coins, pieces of candy, gelt, etc. Everyone puts in one item. One person spins the *dreidel*. When the *dreidel* stops spinning, one side will land face up, displaying a letter. The Hebrew letters carved or painted on each side correspond to what the player must do: *nun* (do nothing), *hey* (take half of the pot), *gimmel* (take the entire pot), and *shin* (put one in the pot). Traditionally, play continues until one person has won everything.

PLEASE NOTE: We DO NOT condone gambling. This little game is intended only to teach some of the traditions and practices associated with the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah Songs

THE SONGS. Here are three traditional, fun songs sung during the eight days of Hanukkah. These songs can be purchased on iTunes for 99 cents per song. Then you can play the music and have your congregation sing along. Or all three can be purchased for \$2.97 on the *Kidz Bop* Hanukkah album.



I Have a Little Dreidel

I have a little dreidel
I made it out of clay
And when it's dry and ready
Then dreidel I shall play!

(Chorus)

Oh dreidel, dreidel, dreidel
I made it out of clay
And when it's dry and ready
Then dreidel I shall play!

It has a lovely body
With legs so short and thin
And when my dreidel's tired
It drops and then I win!

(Chorus)



Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah

Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah, come light the Menorah
Let's have a party, we'll all dance the hora
Gather round the table, we'll all have a treat
Dreidels to play with, and latkes to eat.
And while we are playing
The candles are burning bright
One for each night, they shed a sweet light
To remind us of days long ago.
One for each night, they shed a sweet light
To remind us of days long ago.

Maoz Tzur—Rock of Ages

(Hebrew transliteration)

Maoz tzur yeshua-si
Lecha na-eh li-sha-beyach
Tikone bais ti-fee-lasi
Vi-sham todah ni-za-beyach.
Li-ase ta-chin mat-beyach

Mee-tzar ham-na-beyach
Az eg-more vi-sheer meez-mor
Chanukas ha-meez-beyach
Az eg-more vi-sheer meez-mor
Chanukas ha-meez-beyach.

(Translation)

Rock of Ages let our song
Praise Thy saving power.
Thou amidst the raging foes
Wast our shelt'ring tower.
Furious they assailed us
But Thine arm availed us.
And Thy word broke their sword
When our own strength failed us.
And Thy word broke their sword
When our own strength failed us.

Hanukkah Recipes

One of the best things about Hanukkah is the foods it incorporates. All the recipes use oil to remind the Jewish people of the miracle of the single cruse of oil that burned for eight days. In Israel, jelly doughnuts called *sufganiyot* are extremely popular.

Of all the foods eaten at Hanukkah, however, potato *latkes* (pancakes) are the most well-known. They are delicious, easy to make, and can be made in batches to feed the multitudes. To keep them warm, just put them in the oven and cover them with foil. Then serve them with applesauce and/or sour cream. Here is a tasty recipe. But remember, you have to work fast to keep the potatoes from turning brown.



Potato Latkes

12 large potatoes, grated
3 medium onions, grated
4 eggs, beaten lightly
5 Tbs. matzoh meal or flour
3 tsp. salt
1 tsp. pepper
Oil for deep frying

Grate the potatoes in a food processor. The key to great *latkes* is to squeeze out as much liquid as possible from the potatoes once they've been grated. Mix all the ingredients together. Pour oil into a heavy skillet and heat until sizzling. Form individual pancakes by hand and fry in the oil until nicely browned on both sides. Remove with a spatula and place on paper towels or a wire rack to drain the excess oil. Serve warm.

Sufganiyot (Israeli jelly doughnuts)

These are so popular in Israel that just about every bakery in Jerusalem makes them. Since the recipe is a little more complicated than *latkes*, we recommend you log onto the Internet and find the recipe that suits you best. Or just buy jelly doughnuts at the store!