

## Rabbi's Column

I thought I would begin with a quick review of the background of Hanukkah. After Alexander the Great conquered a lot of territory, he died. Nobody could run the entire empire, so it was split up into a few sections.

The section which was in charge of the area that included Israel was based out of Syria. The chief bad guy of the moment is named Antiochus. As it turns out, there are at least 12 leaders of the Seleucid dynasty with that name, some of whom are actually good guys. Our bad guy is Antiochus Epiphanes. For various reasons, he found it appropriate to outlaw Judaism, specifically observing Shabbat, performing circumcisions and teaching / learning Torah.

On top of this, in an effort to drag the Jewish people into proper Greek modes of behavior, the Temple was required to display all idols and be used for sacrificing to all gods, whatever that god approved of as a sacrifice.

This was not universally liked, and the leaders of the rebellion were the Maccabees (which is a Hebrew acronym for "who is like you among gods, YHVH"). The family leader is Mattityahu and the best known of his children is Judah. The very few good guys are able to militarily beat back the armies of the bad guy far enough geographically that they can rededicate the Temple for its proper usage.

Over the years that family decided to become secular rulers as well as religious leaders, which led to some very bad historical outcomes. This led to a tension concerning Hanukkah between the Rabbis and the people. The Rabbis would have been happy for Hanukkah to have been forgotten, and the people just continued to observe it.

Every holiday contains lessons. During the centuries when the Jewish people had no territory of their own, the main lesson was that with God's help, miracles happen which help the Jewish people survive. With the rise of the State of Israel, one other lesson emphasized is that intelligent application of the resources available is essential in achieving limited military victories.

There are some other lessons that I think can be learned from the historical development of Hanukkah.

A small group can sometimes succeed in attaining limited objectives even if blocked by a larger group.

Coercion by secular authorities concerning religious issues often backfires in the long run.

When a person tries to lead in too many arenas, one of them will wind up being sacrificed.

You can act as an individual, or you can be a public persona. A public persona represents every group of which they are a member.

It is very difficult to be certain whose side, if any, God is actually on.

The meaning of a historical event can change over time, depending upon the needs of the community to whom that event matters.

The last lesson is to enjoy life and be kind to each other, as the sun returns again.