

## 26.1 Hanukkah, A Rebellion to Tyranny

Thomas Jefferson purportedly said:

**“When tyranny becomes law, rebellion becomes duty.”**

This is a theme that runs throughout the history of man. In general, no one wants to be enslaved to others. This includes enslavement to individuals, companies, and governments. It seems that God has placed certain emotions in us that are like His, including the desire for Liberty.

This desire is shared among all people. During what Christians often call the “Intertestamental Period” between Malachi and Matthew in the English Bible, the Jewish people fought for Liberty. As the season of Hanukkah is upon us, let’s consider its origins. It is a story, not of mere gift-giving but of defiance against tyranny and the drive for freedom.

Until a few years ago, I knew very little of Hanukkah. I only knew it was Jewish and that it lasted longer than Christmas, although both are celebrated in the same time of the year. As a kid I was envious that Jewish kids got gifts for eight days instead of just one. Here is an article that I found that explains the holiday.<sup>1</sup>

Hanukkah commemorates an historical event that took place in Jerusalem in the 2nd century BCE, when the Seleucid Greek Empire was the ruling power. In 168 BCE, the king Antiochus IV Epiphanes outlawed Jewish practice and defiled the Jewish Temple in the city by installing an altar to Zeus and sacrificing pigs.

A small army of Jews, known as the Maccabees, rebelled against this religious persecution. They regained control over the Temple, removed the symbols of Zeus and built a new altar so they could once again offer sacrifices in keeping with Jewish law.

According to a legend recounted in the Talmud, a miracle occurred at this time. There was only enough oil to keep the Temple’s menorah, one of its most important ritual objects, burning for one day. But the flame stayed lit for eight days, until a new supply of oil could be found - the basis for the eight-day celebration of Hanukkah.

This is an oversimplified version of the story, History is more involved. I wanted you to see some things from the story of this holiday. First, there was the element of tyranny. The Jews had been under the tyrannical control of Gentiles and the Hellenistic lifestyle was permeating their culture.

In the second place, rebellion became the order of the day. The Maccabees led an army of freedom fighters against the invaders. These fought a guerilla style of combat and won.

Third, following their victory they were able to restore and rededicate the temple. They also were able to rededicate the nation to God, at least for a time.

Hanukkah is also referred to as the *Festival of Lights* and the *Feast of Dedication*. In **John 10:22-24** (ESV), we read of Jesus attending this feast:

**<sup>22</sup>At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. <sup>24</sup>So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://theconversation.com/the-story-of-hanukkah-how-a-minor-jewish-holiday-was-remade-in-the-image-of-christmas-127620>

In **John 6** Jesus fed the 5000. In **John 8** He referred to Himself as the “*Light of the world.*” The people began connecting the dots. They asked Him if He was the Messiah of God essentially and He would answer them in His typical rabbinic style.

What is interesting to me is that Jesus often attended non-scriptural functions of the Jews. Synagogues are not in the Bible, but Jesus attended and even taught there. The Feast of Dedication or Feast of Lights was also not a scriptural holiday, but Jesus was there. Perhaps He merely wanted to be with the people. Maybe when He could, He participated in things that were not anti-scripture or opposed to the will of God.

I also think His participation says that He opposes tyranny and seeks the rededication of men to God. One of the many negatives about tyranny is that it inevitably blocks a person’s relationship with God. The tyrant always wants to take the place of God and decide who has what rights, depending on his mood swings. We see it in scripture with Daniel and his friends. We see it in history with tyrannical kings and Communist dictators.

Jesus did not lead an armed rebellion against the oppressors of His day. I think that was one of the confusing things for His cousin, John the Baptist and is why he sent word to Jesus to identify himself in **Matthew 11** and **Luke 7**. I think John knew of the justice the Messiah was to bring but all he saw from Jesus was grace and mercy.

On the first trip to earth, Jesus came to save. The next time He comes He will bring justice, not mercy. Listen to **2 Thessalonians 1:7-10** (ESV):

**“...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”**

We don’t conform to tyrants. We conform only to God. That faithful conformity IS rebellion to tyrants who want to replace God.

Keep The Light of True Rebellion to Tyranny Burning!