

THE STORY OF CHANUKAH

BY RABBI SAMUEL SILVER

The Jewish holiday of Chanukah commemorates history's first struggle for religious freedom.

The war took place 165 years before the time of Jesus, in the land of Judea.

That country was part of a kingdom which came under the control of a Greco-Syrian King named Antiochus.

Like Russia, today the regime permitted its conquered people to live, but banned any kind of worship except that prescribed by the monarch.

His brand of paganism called for the worship of idols; one of the idols was of himself.

Every nation under Antiochus acquiesced except the Judeans.

Enraged, Antiochus sent his armies to Jerusalem and planted his images in the holy temple in Jerusalem.

Against this desecration, a hardy group of rebels arose. They were led by Mattathias, a Jewish priest and his five sons, who came to be known as the Maccabees.

For three years the battles raged. The fighting Jews held off the mightiest armies then existent. At first there were only a handful, but then the Jewish resistance army grew.

Miraculously, the Jews were victorious. They routed the enemy and repaired to the temple where they conducted a ceremony of rededication.

Chanukah is the Hebrew word for rededication.

Ever since, the Jewish people have celebrated the holiday for eight days. Worship services and sermons in the synagogue glorify the idea of religious freedom, the Maccabean gift to posterity.

In the home (and in the synagogue) a candelabrum (Hebrew: menorah) is the centerpiece of the celebration. On the first night, a candle is lit, amidst prayers thanking the Almighty One for inspiring spiritual heroes to make sacrifices for a noble cause. On each night thereafter, an additional light is kindled. The crescendo of light symbolizes the enlargement of forces engaged in a sacred endeavor.

Chanukah is a gift-giving holiday. But, as at all Jewish festivals, gifts are also to be given the poor. Contributions to charity are a fixture for all Jewish observances.

Sometimes called the "Jewish Christmas," because Chanukah comes in December, the Jewish holiday is unrelated to the Christian holiday, except that both of them feature the

kindling of lights which in prehistoric times, at the season was primitive man's way of signalling to the gods above that he was apprehensive about the dwindling of light.

In 1981 Chanukah will be at sundown Sunday, December 20th. The Jewish religious calendar is lunar - solar and swings within the orbit of the solar calendar which we use in the West. So, as is the case with Easter, the holiday comes at various times in our calendar.

When the Christmas season effervesces, Jews

are caught up in the spirit of good will which permeates our society. Christians might have good reason to rejoice over Chanukah, too, for had not the brave Maccabees sacrificially risked their lives to keep the flame of monotheism alive, would that little country of Judea have given birth to its daughter faith some 160 years later?

The Chanukah saga is recorded in several books of that post-Biblical literature known as the Apocrypha. The Books of the Maccabees describe in detail the way in which the weak overcame the strong. It is a story which has been duplicated other times as well. Witness the triumph of a handful of colonists under George Washington against the British. Witness the incredible way a handful of British aviators held off the Nazi hordes. Witness the victories of the modern Maccabees in the resurrected state of Israel, against forces which outnumbered them 200 to 1. The story of the Maccabees (also known as the Hasmoneans) has also been corroborated by archeological finds. In the tenth chapter of the Book of John, in the New Testament, we read about Jesus' observance of Chanukah, which is also known as the Feast of Lights.

Christians and Jews will join, as they observe their separate holidays, in prayers that the Holy Land and its environs will at long last enjoy the blessings of permanent peace.

SCOTT NEUBAUER HAS BAR MITZVAH

Scott Harris Neubaer, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jerome Weiss, was called to the Torah and became a Bar Mitzvah during services at Temple Beth Shalom, 1600 E. Oakley Blvd., on Saturday morning, December 12, 1981.

Rabbi Kalman Appel, Spiritual Leader of the Temple, officiated and conducted the

services. Cantor Simon Bergman chanted the liturgy.

The parents of the Bar Mitzvah hosted the congregation to a Kiddush in the Temple's Entratter Social Hall after the conclusion of services.

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WOMAN RABBIS ON THE MOVE

For the first time women rabbis have begun to find employment as leaders of their own congregations, according to Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, president of the seminary that pioneered the ordination of women rabbis ten years ago.

Within the last several months six women have been hired to lead Reform Jewish congregations in New York, New Jersey, Virginia and Massachusetts, reported Rabbi Gottschalk, who heads Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion.

Dr. Gottschalk said that entry-level positions as assistant rabbis have been readily available to the 37 women ordained since 1972. But there

had been concern about whether women rabbis would be given equal opportunity to become congregational leaders in their own right.

Now that some of them have completed three to five years as assistant rabbis, it was normal for women rabbis to begin looking for their own congregations to lead. According to Rabbi Neil Kominsky, chairman of the Task Force on Women in the Rabbinate created by the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, "every one of the women who aspired to be a solo rabbi and who was entitled to it by experience, found an opportunity" in recent months.

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