

## Fascinating Facts-Chanukah

As the Persian empire fell to Alexander the Great and his Greek armies, so did Israel. Alexander entered Israel peacefully and for the Jews the Persian era ended and the Greek era began. Many Jews were enamored with the new Greek culture that Alexander brought to Israel and adopted it. They became known as Hellenists. After Alexander died his empire was divided in three parts. One part was Egypt ruled by the Ptolemeys, and another was Syria, ruled by the Selucids. For many years Israel was under Ptolemaic rule but around the year 200 BC the Selucids wrested control of Israel from the Ptolemeys.

In 174 BC Antiochus IV assumed the Selucid throne. Antiochus IV was dedicated to unifying his kingdom through the medium of common religion and culture. This meant bringing the Jews into the Greek world. To accomplish this, he allied himself with the Hellenist Jews. Antiochus IV replaced the righteous Kohen Gadol Yochanan with his Hellenist brother Joshua or Jason as the Greeks called him. Subsequently Meneleaus, who may not have even been a Kohen made a better offer and Antiochus deposed Jason in favor of Meneleaus. While off fighting in Egypt a rumor spread that Antiochus had been killed. Jason seized the opportunity, attacked Jerusalem killing many Jews and forced Meneleaus to flee Jerusalem. However, the rumor was false. As Antiochus was about to conquer Egypt the nascent Romans, mindful of a potential shift in the balance of power exerted their political muscle and forced Antiochus to withdraw. Antiochus returned to Jerusalem seething at the Romans for thwarting his plans only to find that Jason had deposed Meneleaus in his absence. Antiochus went berserk. He restored Meneleaus to power, killing some 40,000 Jews in the process. He looted the Temple and offered hogs on the holy altar. He issued harsh decrees against the Jewish religion outlawing circumcision, Shabbos observance and the Jewish calendar. Women caught with circumcised children were executed. Public slaughtering of pigs to Greek gods was instituted. Refusal to partake carried the death penalty. Jerusalem became totally Hellenised and then Antiochus turned his attention to the countryside.

Modi'in was a small town located about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Matisyahu and his family had fled there in the hopes of avoiding Greek persecution. When Greek soldiers assembled all of the Jews of Modi'in in the town square to participate in the pig offering Matisyahu realized that you can run but you cannot hide. He attacked and killed the Greek soldiers. Matisyahu cried out Mi La Hashem Elai, whoever is for Hashem join me. He then fled for the hills. The revolt had begun.