

# Hanukkah: The Battle for the Hearts of Humanity

By Rabbi Chanoch Oppenheim,  
Charlotte Torah Center

About 2,500 years ago the Land of Israel was invaded by the most significant empire of its era. Greece had prowess not only in its army but also in capturing the minds of men. The Greeks brought philosophy, literature, poetry, art, and drama to the world in such a significant way that their influence is still exerted today. Officially, they declared war on Jews, but their real target was Judaism, the *raison d'être* of the Jews. Why would such a powerful nation be concerned with the ideology of one tiny group amidst its vast empire?

Polytheism, the belief in many gods, was the reigning religion of the ancient world. Fighting, jealousy, and a host of other human traits were common to the many gods, who were, after all, human creations. For this reason, when Greece (and its successor, Rome) conquered a territory and demanded that its gods be placed in temples and their religion incorporated in the defeated land, the local populace never rebelled. Because there were so many gods anyway, adding a few more presented no difficulty. Man created gods to serve his needs; if accepting these new gods meant peace and good living there was no reason to reject them.

The Jews were unlike any nation or culture that the Greeks had encountered. They were the first nation to espouse the concept that the world and all its forces have one Creator. This truth was so real to them that they were willing to give up their lives for it. In the ruling empire, "religion" meant man's concept of gods, but for Jews it meant God's guidebook for man. Judaism's theological divergences created what would later become a historical precedent: Hanukkah was the world's first war over ideology.

Jerusalem was the antithesis of Athens. The former saw itself as trying to make God's world a better place and her citizens viewed themselves as ultimately being accountable to Him. The ancient Greeks (no connection to modern Greeks due to war and population shifts) created their gods to achieve their vested interests. The only accountability was to the intellect. If something was logical, even if it caused another person to suffer, the intellect would be the ultimate moral arbiter. Moral conscience as we know it today might have been a concept, but it was not implemented.

One compelling example of this is found in Aristotle, one of ancient Greece's most influential thinkers, who argued in his *Politics* (VII.16) that killing handicapped children was essential to the functioning of society. He wrote: "There must be a law that no imperfect or maimed child shall be brought up. And to avoid an excess in population, some children must be exposed [i.e. exposed on the trash heap to die]. For a limit must be fixed to the population of the state." Aristotle was not saying, "I like killing babies," but he was making a cold, rational calculation: over-population is dangerous; this is the most expedient way to keep it in check. That was ancient Greece: rational thought, even if it meant killing innocent babies. When a person has no barometer by which to check his morality, even pure logic won't save him/her from committing heinous crimes. Without an ultimate God given standard of morality and accountability, anything goes, even murder. The chronicles of history sadly corroborate this point.

The battle wasn't merely between two nations: it was a confrontation between two doctrines, two views, two civilizations capable of molding opinions, training

and educating those who until this very day compete for mastery of the world. The inherent potential of Jewish ideology threatened the Greeks whose analysis was much later proven correct: Judaism and Christianity, as well as our American constitution, are based on the monotheistic model. This ideology that has influenced billions of people continues to exist

today, whereas ancient Greece has been relegated to an academic topic.

Hanukkah is a time to ask yourself: whose side am I really on and do my actions reflect it? Am I trying to turn the world into a better place or am I trying to manipulate it for my needs? Jerusalem or Athens, you choose. ☆



COMING SOON!

## DOWN HOME

Can you imagine what it must have felt like to travel through an unmarked countryside, not knowing the language, carrying a 100-pound pack on your back, and with hunger gnawing at your gut, wondering where and when you'll eat again? The first Jewish immigrants to North Carolina, peddlers selling pots, pans and sundries, did just that. They were economic pioneers in the purest sense - seeking freedom, opportunity, and a new life in a new land. And North Carolina, for the most part, gave them just that.

Learn about the remarkable stories of Jewish life in North Carolina from its earliest pioneering settlers to the diverse communities of today.

The *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* documentary film will bring this poignant history to life. You won't want to miss it!

Contact Will Grossman today to reserve gala tickets! (919) 668.5839 • [wgrossman@jhfnc.org](mailto:wgrossman@jhfnc.org) Or buy online at [www.jhfnc.org](http://www.jhfnc.org)

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR FILM PREMIERE GALA EVENT!

CHARLOTTE • SUNDAY, FEB. 22, 2009 • 5:30 pm

Gala reception at The Levine Museum of the New South followed by film screening at *ImaginOn* McColl Theatre

General admission tickets also available (film and post-screening reception only)

## WOMEN'S NEWS

### Last Chance to Mail in Your Hadassah Blue Form

Miracle of miracles, Hadassah provides you immediate access to members of the Jewish community in the greater Charlotte area. Help us to include you in the 2009 Hadassah Directory of the Charlotte Area Jewish Community and assure the accuracy of your information by returning your blue directory form this week.

If you are new in town and haven't received your blue form or misplaced it, visit our website at [www.charlottehadassah.org](http://www.charlottehadassah.org) or pick up your copy at the JCC reception desk.

Hadassah thanks those of you who have mailed in your forms. Our returning patrons and advertisers as well as our new supporters have recognized the miracle of supporting Hadassah by participating in the Hadassah Directory. Last year, we raised \$26,000 for medical research.

There are still a limited number of opportunities for firms who want to promote their goods and services to the Jewish community. In this challenging economy, the Hadassah Directory provides you with a full year of exposure at very reasonable rates.

If you have any questions, contact Tess Berger at 704-708-4857, Judy Kaufmann at 704-847-1022 or Ivy Saul at [isaul@carolina.rr.com](mailto:isaul@carolina.rr.com) please put Hadassah in the subject line). ☆



\* JEWELRY \* WALL ART \* STUDIO & FUNCTIONAL \* FURNITURE \*

# CITY·ART·WORKS

The Best of Everything,  
From Jewelry to Judaica!

630 E. WOODLAWN RD. CHARLOTTE, NC 28209 704.527.1300

\* UNIQUE LIGHTING \* GIFTS \* STEAMWARE \* AND MUCH MORE \*

FUNCTIONAL ART • SERVING PIECES • MIRRORS • FLN TIMES

ELEGANT TABLETOPS • FURNISHINGS • SMILING FACES • ART