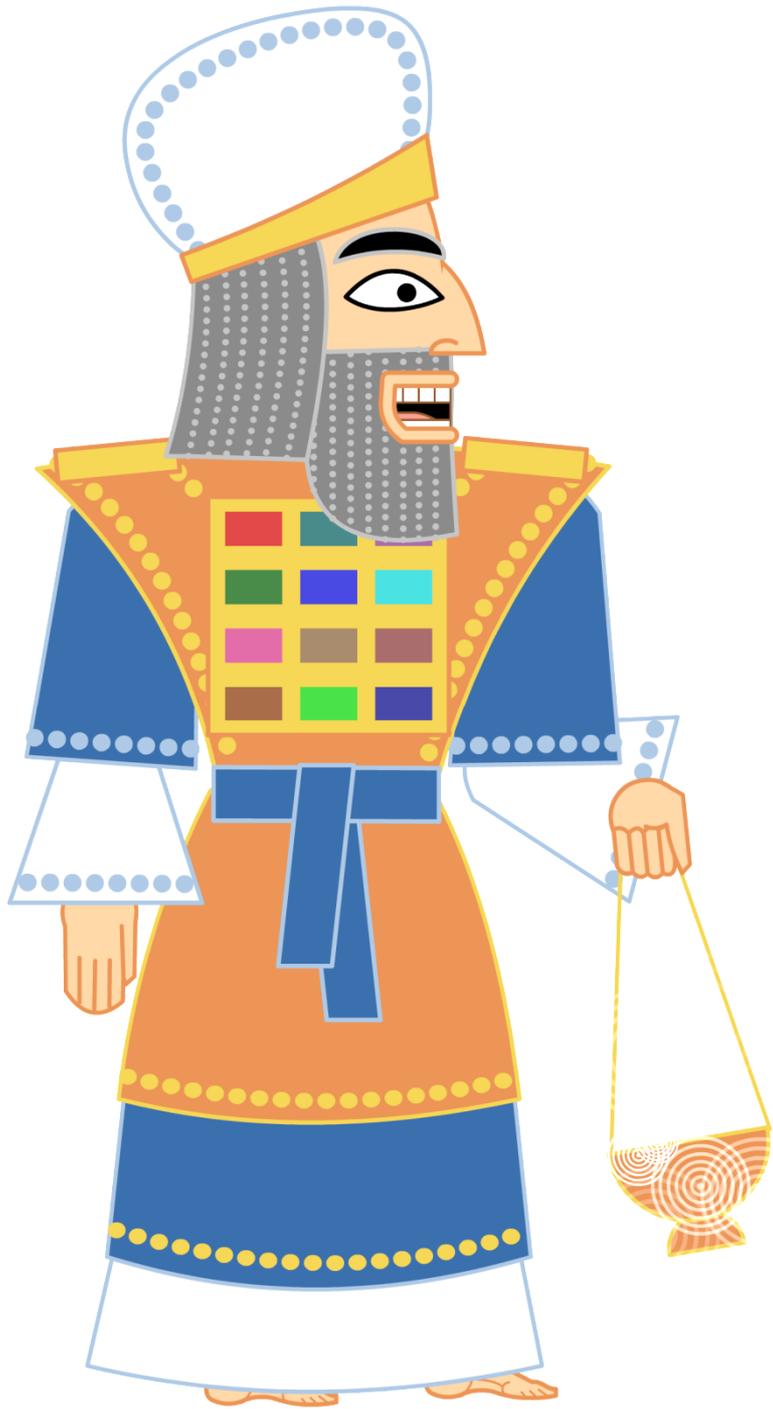


YLJC Judaism 101

**THE TRUE
STORY/IES OF
CHANNUKAH**

Study pack


GW 13.12.18





TELLING THE STORY: THE (SORT OF) BIBLICAL WAY

After Alexander the Great had defeated the King of Persia and Media, he succeeded him as king. When he perceived that he was dying, he summoned his most honoured officers and divided his kingdom among them. From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of
5 King Antiochus. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, “Let us go and make a covenant with the gentiles around us.” So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and
10 removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

Antiochus went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the Temple and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. Taking them all, he went into
15 his own land.

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned Shabbat. The king ordered that they were to make themselves
20 abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, “And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.”

But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to
25 profane the holy covenant; and they did die.

In those days Matisyahu, a priest, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modi'in. He had five sons, including Judah, who was called ‘Maccabee’. He saw the blasphemies being committed in Jerusalem, and said, “Alas! Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people? Why should we live
30 any longer?” Then Matisyahu and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.

Matisyahu and his friends said to each other, “If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the gentiles for our lives and for our laws, they will quickly destroy us from the earth.” So they made this
35 decision that day: “Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on Shabbat; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places.”

Then there united with them a company of Chasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly to maintain Israelite law. They organised an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and

40 renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the gentiles for safety. And Matisyahu and his friends went around and forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. They rescued the law out of the hands of the gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

45 After Matisyahu's death, his son Judah Maccabee took command. All who had joined his father helped him; they gladly fought for Israel.

[Skipping over some extensive but not especially riveting fight scenes, during which the Maccabean armies vanquished the Greeks,] Judah and his brothers said, "See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it." So all the army assembled and went up to
50 Mount Zion. There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled
55 themselves with ashes and fell face down on the ground.

Then Judah chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, so
60 that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. They made new holy vessels, and brought
65 the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

Early on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, 148, sacrifice was offered on the
70 newly reconstructed altar. On the anniversary of the day of its desecration by the gentiles, on that very day it was dedicated with hymns of thanksgiving, to the music of harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people prostrated themselves in worship and gave praise to Heaven for prospering their cause. They celebrated the dedication of the altar for
75 eight days; there was rejoicing as they brought sacrifices.

Judah, his brothers and the whole congregation of Israel decreed that, at the same season each year, the dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning on the twenty-fifth of Kislev.

1 Maccabees (very abridged)

TELLING THE STORY: THE RABBINIC WAY

What is Channukah? The Sages taught: the days of Channukah are eight. One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them. What is the reason? When the Greeks entered the Temple they defiled all the oils by touching them. When the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest, undisturbed by the Greeks. And there was sufficient oil there to light the menorah for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit the menorah from it for eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days as holidays.

bShabbat 21b

TELLING THE STORY: THE ACADEMIC WAY

One of the first manifestations of terrorism can be traced back to the 2nd century BCE. It occurred during Hellenistic rule in ancient Israel. Those who often refer to this historical period are contemporary Jewish terrorists who admire the heroism of the ancient Jewish militants and aspire to follow their example.

The most prominent Jewish group to use organized violence in this era was the Hasmonean family. The foremost incident of terrorism to be carried out by the Hasmoneans was the murder of Apelles, a Hellenistic envoy. He had been sent to Modi'in to ensure that the assimilation policy of Antiochus Epiphanes, who sought to impose a Hellenistic lifestyle on the Jews, was carried out according to the letter of the law.

Hellenism had far-reaching social implications. The urban and more established Jewish classes found the Hellenistic way of life and novel cultural richness to their liking. The fact that many of them willingly assimilated brought them into closer political favour with the authorities and turned them into an elite with unique privileges. In this fashion, a new empire-sponsored Jewish aristocracy came into being that sought to instate a series of reforms in the lifestyle of all Jews in Israel.

The new social structure led to great frustration among rural Jews, who were alienated by the Hellenistic practices and felt that the new elites had brought about forced changes in their way of life, including a decline in Orthodox Judaism.

The story of the Hasmoneans became a founding myth of the Jewish nation throughout history and ultimately became one of the cultural cornerstones of the renewed Zionist movement.

Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger: 'Jewish Terrorism In Israel', 2009

TELLING THE STORY: THE HISTORIC WAY

The Second Book of Maccabees describes the events that followed the desecration of the Temple and concludes, “And now, you must observe a Feast of Tabernacles in the month of Kislev.”

Sukkot in Kislev, not in Tishri?

The explanation seems to be that during the Maccabean struggle Sukkot could not be celebrated in the normal way and was postponed until after the fighting.

So the observance of Chanukah was highly reminiscent of Sukkot – and not only in general terms but in a number of specific features:

- Chanukah became an eight-day festival, emulating the eight days between Sukkot and Simchat Torah.
- The Hallel psalms are recited in full throughout both festivals.
- Both festivals celebrate light – in the case of Sukkot, through the tradition of water-drawing, when Jerusalem was lit up with torches.
- Both festivals require that they are publicised – in the case of Sukkot, Leviticus 23:45 ordains “that your generations shall know”.
- Both occasions promote hiddur mitzvah, ‘beautifying the commandment’. The Talmud recommends a beautiful sukkah and lulav; it also speaks of how the those who kindle the Chanukah lights are referred to as ‘beautifiers’.
- Both festivals are connected with the dedication of the Temple. The building of the sanctuary began just before Sukkot. By 25 Kislev, which was later the date of Chanukah, the project was completed. The enemy chose to desecrate the Temple in Kislev in order to insult the Jews and undermine the anniversary of the dedication of the Temple. No wonder that there was such great Jewish rejoicing when the rededication took place on the same date that had always been so important in the Jewish calendar.
- Both are messianic festivals. Chanukah stands for the freedom to believe and worship; Sukkot yearns for all to sit together in one messianic sukkah.

Rabbi Raymond Apple

