



Jewish Studies Initiative
of North Texas

www.JewishStudiesInitiative.org

Presentation on Hanukkah

December 13, 2012

Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabat, page 21b

What is [the reason of] Hanukkah? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Hanukkah, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.

'These Lights' (prayer recited immediately upon lighting the Hanukah lights)

We light these lights for the miracles and the wonders, for the redemption and the battles that you made for our forefathers, in those days at this season, through your holy priests. During all eight days of Hanukkah these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make ordinary use of them except for to look at them in order to express thanks and praise to Your great Name for Your miracles, Your wonders and Your salvations.

First Book of the Maccabees, chapter 2

[15] In the mean while the king's officers, such as compelled the people to revolt, came into the city Modiin, to make them sacrifice.

[16] And when many of Israel came unto them, Mattathias also and his sons came together.

[17] Then answered the king's officers, and said to Mattathias on this wise, Thou art a ruler, and an honourable and great man in this city, and strengthened with sons and brethren:

[18] Now therefore come thou first, and fulfil the king's commandment, like as all the heathen have done, yea, and the men of Judah also, and such as remain at Jerusalem: so shalt thou and thy house be in the number of the king's friends, and thou and thy children shall be honoured with silver and gold, and many rewards.

[19] Then Mattathias answered and spake with a loud voice, Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away every one

from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments:
[20] Yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers.
[21] God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances.
[22] We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or the left.
[23] Now when he had left speaking these words, there came one of the Jews in the sight of all to sacrifice on the altar which was at Modiin, according to the king's commandment.
[24] Which thing when Mattathias saw, he was inflamed with zeal, and his reins trembled, neither could he forbear to show his anger according to judgment: wherefore he ran, and slew him upon the altar.
[25] Also the king's commissioner, who compelled men to sacrifice, he killed at that time, and the altar he pulled down.
[26] Thus dealt he zealously for the law of God like as Phineas did unto Zambri the son of Salom.
[27] And Mattathias cried throughout the city with a loud voice, saying, Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me.
[28] So he and his sons fled into the mountains, and left all that ever they had in the city.
[29] Then many that sought after justice and judgment went down into the wilderness, to dwell there:

First Book of the Maccabees chapter 4

[36] Then said Judah and his brethren, Behold, our enemies are discomfited: let us go up to cleanse and dedicate the sanctuary.
[37] Upon this all the host assembled themselves together, and went up into mount Zion.
[38] And when they saw the sanctuary desolate, and the altar profaned, and the gates burned up, and shrubs growing in the courts as in a forest, or in one of the mountains, yea, and the priests' chambers pulled down;
[39] They rent their clothes, and made great lamentation, and cast ashes upon their heads,
[40] And fell down flat to the ground upon their faces, and blew an alarm with the trumpets, and cried toward heaven.
[41] Then Judas appointed certain men to fight against those that were in the fortress, until he had cleansed the sanctuary.
[42] So he chose priests of blameless conversation, such as loved the law:
[43] Who cleansed the sanctuary, and bare out the defiled stones into an unclean place.
[44] And when as they consulted what to do with the altar of burnt offerings, which was profaned;
[45] They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them,

because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down,
[46] And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them.
[47] Then they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the former;
[48] And made up the sanctuary, and the things that were within the temple, and hallowed the courts.
[49] They made also new holy vessels, and into the temple they brought the candlestick, and the altar of burnt offerings, and of incense, and the table.
[50] And upon the altar they burned incense, and the lamps that were upon the candlestick they lighted, that they might give light in the temple.
[51] Furthermore they set the loaves upon the table, and spread out the veils, and finished all the works which they had begun to make.
[52] Now on the five and twentieth day of the ninth month, which is called the month Kislev, in the hundred forty and eighth year, they rose up betimes in the morning,
[53] And offered sacrifice according to the law upon the new altar of burnt offerings, which they had made.
[54] Look, at what time and what day the heathen had profaned it, even in that was it dedicated with songs, and citherns, and harps, and cymbals.
[55] Then all the people fell upon their faces, worshipping and praising the God of heaven, who had given them good success.
[56] And so they kept the dedication of the altar eight days and offered burnt offerings with gladness, and sacrificed the sacrifice of deliverance and praise.
[57] They decked also the forefront of the temple with crowns of gold, and with shields; and the gates and the chambers they renewed, and hanged doors upon them.
[58] Thus was there very great gladness among the people, for that the reproach of the heathen was put away.
[59] Moreover Judah and his brethren with the whole congregation of Israel ordained, that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season from year to year by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month Kislev, with mirth and gladness.

Second Book of the Maccabees chapter 10

[1] Now Maccabeus and his company, the Lord guiding them, recovered the temple and the city:
[2] But the altars which the heathen had built in the open street, and also the chapels, they pulled down.
[3] And having cleansed the temple they made another altar, and striking stones they took fire out of them, and offered a sacrifice after two years, and set forth incense, and lights, and showbread.
[4] When that was done, they fell flat down, and besought the Lord that they

might come no more into such troubles; but if they sinned any more against him, that he himself would chasten them with mercy, and that they might not be delivered unto the blasphemous and barbarous nations.

[5] Now upon the same day that the strangers profaned the temple, on the very same day it was cleansed again, even the five and twentieth day of the same month, which is Kislev.

[6] And they kept the eight days with gladness, as in the feast of the tabernacles, remembering that not long afore they had held the feast of the tabernacles, when as they wandered in the mountains and dens like beasts.

[7] Therefore they brought branches of myrtle, and boughs of willow, and palms also, and sang psalms unto him that had given them good success in cleansing his place.

[8] They ordained also by a common statute and decree, That every year those days should be kept of the whole nation of the Jews.

Rabbi Moses Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Purim and Hanukah, chapter 3, laws 1 - 3

In [the era of] the Second Temple, the Greek kingdom issued decrees against the Jewish people, [attempting to] nullify their faith and refusing to allow them to observe the Torah and its commandments. They extended their hands against their property and their daughters; they entered the Sanctuary, wrought havoc within, and made the sacraments impure.

The Jews suffered great difficulties from them, for they oppressed them greatly until the God of our ancestors had mercy upon them, delivered them from their hand, and saved them. The sons of the Hasmoneans, the High Priests, overcame [them], slew them, and saved the Jews from their hand.

They appointed a king from the priests, and sovereignty returned to Israel for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Second Temple.

When the Jews overcame their enemies and destroyed them, they entered the Sanctuary; this was on the twenty-fifth of Kislev. They could not find any pure oil in the Sanctuary, with the exception of a single cruse. It contained enough oil to burn for merely one day. They lit the arrangement of candles from it for eight days until they could crush olives and produce pure oil.

Accordingly, the Sages of that generation ordained that these eight days, which begin from the twenty-fifth of Kislev, should be commemorated to be days of happiness and praise [of God]. Candles should be lit in the evening at the entrance to the houses on each and every one of these eight nights to publicize and reveal the miracle.

These days are called Chanukah. It is forbidden to eulogize and fast on them, as on the days of Purim. Lighting the candles on these days is a Rabbinic mitzvah, like the reading of the Megillah.