

As the Israelites traveled away from Egypt, eventually toward Canaan, the presence of God was shown by the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night – “God with us” – when He showed his presence above and in a tent, just like they lived in a tent. So, the meaning of the fall harvest also took on the remembrance of traveling in tents, totally reliant on God for sustenance and protection as He was present with them. Leviticus 23:33-43 describes this festival, and verses 39-41 say this is a time to celebrate and rejoice. We recently celebrated Sukkot.

Chanukah [חֲנֻכָּה] means dedication or inauguration - today we call it a grand opening. Solomon was in charge of building the Temple [1 Kings 6:1,37-38] - it took seven years. When it was finished, Solomon had the dedication at the time of Sukkot [1 Kings 8:2-6].

2 Chronicles 5:11-14 [summary] When the priests and the singers made themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify YHVH, accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of YHVH, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand up to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of YHVH filled the house of God.

The tabernacle and the temple were visible proof of the relation between Israel and God - He is their God, and they are His people - God with us. It is a living personal relation - not slavish submission to a demanding ruler like false gods.

The background of the occasion which we usually call Chanukah is more complex than the dedication of the first temple. Some history is needed to put it into perspective.

After 490 years of not performing shmita (the sabbatical years), God sent the Jews out of the land until those 70 years were completed (490/7).

2 Chronicles 36:20-21 He exiled to Babylon those who had escaped the sword and they became slaves to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia - in fulfillment of the word of YHVH by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had paid back her Shabbat rests - for as long as it lay desolate - the Shabbat rest was kept till 70 years were complete.

Jeremiah 25:11-12 "So this whole land will be a desolate ruin, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. Then it will come to pass, when 70 years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation," declares YHVH, "the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, and I will make it ruins forever."

Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says YHVH: "After 70 years for Babylon are complete, I will visit you, and fulfill My good word toward you - to bring you back to this place."

"Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed Jerusalem in his 18th year (587 BCE), and a later deportation occurred in Nebuchadnezzar II's 23rd year (582 BCE)." Most Jews were deported to Babylon, and there they managed to survive - like stories from Daniel and Ezekiel and Esther.

Later the Medes and Persians take over Babylon, and the Jews are even allowed to prosper.

538 B.C.E.	Edict of Cyrus (first return from Exile).
<i>Isaiah 44:28</i>	while saying of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd, and he shall fulfill all My purpose;" while saying to Jerusalem, "You will be built;" and to the Temple, "Your foundation will be laid."
<i>Isaiah 45:1-3</i>	Thus says YHVH to His anointed, Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him, to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him so that gates may not be shut. I will go before you and make crooked places straight. I will shatter bronze doors and cut through iron bars. I will give you treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, so you may know that I am YHVH, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.
<i>Isaiah 45:13</i>	"I stirred Cyrus up in righteousness and I will level all his roads. He will build My city and set My exiles free, with no price or bribe," says YHVH-Tsva'ot.
<i>2 Chronicles 36:22-24</i>	Now in the first year of King Cyrus of Persia - fulfilling the word of YHVH by the mouth of Jeremiah - YHVH stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing, saying: "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia 'YHVH, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build Him a House in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever among you of all His people may go up and may YHVH his God be with him.'"

520-515 B.C.E.	Jerusalem ("Second") Temple rebuilt.
520 B.C.E.	Judean Prophet Haggai.
450-400 B.C.E.	Reformation led by Ezra and Nehemiah.

This was also the time of the book of Esther.

438 B.C.E.	Achashverosh becomes king of Persia.
426 B.C.E.	First decrees by Haman; fast ordered by Esther, Haman's downfall and execution.
425 B.C.E.	Haman's ten sons executed; Purim celebration.
424 B.C.E.	Megillah recorded.

The prophecies of returning to Zion are linked to Cyrus (the first one). Some Jews did return, in three different migrations. Eventually a temple was built - not nearly as grand as the one Solomon built, but still a working temple - see the stories in Ezra and Nehemiah and Haggai.

333/331 B.C.E.	Alexander the Great conquers the Land of Israel.
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Alexander (the Great) met the high priest who came out to welcome him - it was a complex political move of pledging troops to Alexander after turning away from both Persia and Egypt. The story is in the [Jewish Antiquities](#) of Josephus. The priests and others from Israel had come out in their best dress - no weapons - and impressed Alexander so much the he blessed God and greeted the high priest. Alexander had a dream about this meeting, and that the troops from Israel would help Alexander in conquering Persia. He granted them political and religious freedom because of this, and they did need not pay tribute every seventh year.

After Alexander died, his generals divided Alexander's conquests into three kingdoms - Greece and the area around it, Asia Minor and Syria, and Egypt. The Ptolemy rule in Egypt clashed with the Seleucid rule in Syria over who should rule the area we now call Israel. Eventually Ptolemy won, and allowed Israel the same freedoms as Alexander promised. Later the Seleucids won, and initially did the same for Israel. Both rules extended Greek culture (Hellenism) into the area, but not forcing it. When Antiochus died, his descendant Antiochus Epiphanes took over, and he had strong desire for all his subjects to completely convert to Hellenism. This did not go well in Israel. Hiding the Torah and masquerading as obedient subjects was not enough for the truly dedicated believers, so they revolted.

At first the Hellenized Jews went along with the new royal proclamations to shut down worship of other religions and only honor the gods of Greece; they were met with fierce resistance by fundamentalists, who continued to live by the Torah. During this time Epiphanes attempted to defeat the Ptolemy rulers in Egypt, but when he arrived, he discovered that the Romans had allied with Egypt, so he returned. At that time, a rumor came that he had died in the conflict - not true, but the fundamentalists took advantage and removed the Hellenists from power by tossing them over the Temple walls to the canyon one hundred feet below. Epiphanes was furious, and retaliated by killing 10,000 Jews in Jerusalem, and then declaring Greek worship a requirement and anything else punishable by extreme measures. In the village of Modin, and old priest was shocked when a fellow Jew went forward to make a sacrifice on the Greek altar, so Mattathias killed that Jew and the Syrian officer superintending the event. The sons of Mattathias, from the Hasmonean family, continued the rebellion after their father died. They were known by the nickname Maccabees (hammer). The war surprised the Hellenists, who were shocked at the extreme measures of the government, but they still continued their pagan ways, so the fundamentalists fought fellow Jews as well as Syrian military.

When the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem and the Temple, they were faced with a problem. The Hellenistic Syrian polytheists (who had taken over the Temple for the previous three and a half years) had polluted and desecrated the Temple mount and the Temple by the pagan rituals that had been performed there. Thus, for a fourth year, in the month of Tishrei, Jews had refused to go on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot, because the Temple was still unclean. Now that the Temple was under Jewish control again, the people began cleansing the Temple mount, and then completed the purification of the Temple. The (re)dedication of the restored temple happened one year after the Syrians (under Greek leadership) had desecrated the temple. It took one year to clean up everything. Thus, for a fourth year Jews had refused to go on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot, because the temple was desecrated. Now that the Temple was theirs again, their first act was to ***belatedly celebrate Sukkot, ten weeks later***, in the month of Kislev. They marched around the Temple altar seven times and sang the Hallel Psalms as on any ordinary Sukkot, celebrating for eight days. They also participated in the Sukkot torchlight processions, and enjoyed the large golden oil lamps burning in the Temple Courtyard which lit up the entire city of Jerusalem. (Mishnah Sukkah 4:9-5:5) There was insufficient oil for the Temple menorah and these other lamps, so that may be how we got the story of the miracle of the oil, reminding us of the story of Elisha and the widow's oil.

The purpose of the book of Second Maccabees is clearly stated in the two letters that open the book, urging the Jews of Alexandria to adopt this new festival, which they were slow to accept. The author claims that his source for the history of the Maccabean war was a (now lost) larger five-volume history by one Jason of Cyrene.

2nd Maccabees 10:1-8 describes the purification of the Temple as follows:

Judah the Maccabee and his men, under the Lord's leadership, recaptured the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. ... After purifying the Temple, they made a new altar... a new fire and ... offered sacrifices and incense ... lit the lamps. ... On the anniversary of the very same day on which the Temple had been defiled, the 25th of Kislev, they now purified the Temple. And they kept **eight days** with joy, **after the manner of the Feast of the Tabernacles (Sukkot)**, *knowing that (a few months before) on Sukkot they had (been unable to celebrate at the Temple) and had spent the festival (hiding) like wild animals in the mountains and caves. Therefore they now carried boughs, and green branches, and palms for Him that had given them good success in cleansing His place, and sang hymns of praise (Hallel), to the One Who had given them the victory that had brought about the purification of His Temple. By a vote of the community they decreed that the whole Jewish nation should celebrate these festival days every year.*

The Festival of Chanukah is the celebration of the purification and rededication of the Temple as a late Sukkot, so Chanukah repeats most of the rituals of Sukkot - the eight days, the recital of Hallel Psalms, the lights brightly glowing (eventually in every Jewish home).

You can see the importance of the proper oil for all the lamps, and especially for the menorah in the Temple, for all 8 days of Sukkot.

Thus Chanukah, which started as a delayed Sukkot harvest pilgrimage festival, became an additional holiday on which we can give thanks to God, not just for the fruits of the land, but even more important, for the fruits of attaining freedom to worship according to our own religious principles.