



## LIBRARY COPYRIGHT NOTICE

[www.huc.edu/libraries](http://www.huc.edu/libraries)

### Regulated Warning

See Code of Federal Regulations, Title 37, Volume 1, Section 201.14:

The copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.



The Meaning of Chanukkah in Rabbinic Literature

by

DAVID ROBINS

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish  
Institute of Religion  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
March, 1959

Referee:  
Professor Petuchowski

## DIGEST

The holiday of Chanukkah was instituted by the Hasmoneans as result of the recapture of the Temple from the Selencid foe. This annual eight day celebration which had been accepted by the Jewish populace had no sanction on the basis of any biblical injunction. The problem faced by the Pharisees was that of justifying the existence of the holiday while minimizing the activity of the Hasmoneans who had become leaders in the Sadducean movement.

II Maccabees, a Pharisaic work, attempts to answer the problem by casting the holiday within the framework of Tabernacles, by associating the fire ritual, celebrated on the festival, with the fire of purification in the days of Moses and Solomon, and by stressing God's intercession in the combat against the Selencids thus diminishing the importance of the Hasmoneans. That the Pharisees failed is manifested by Josephus who knows of the Hasmonean affiliation with the celebration in his day as "lights".

The Tannaim, inheriting the problem of their predecessors, were forced to accept the motif given to the holiday by the Hasmoneans; however, these scholars expounded on the dedication -- Chanukkah -- which could be traced back to the time of Moses. They attempted to establish a biblical precedent even if they could not show a definite statement calling for the institution of a holiday known as Chanukkah.

It was the Amoraim who succeeded in producing the verification of the annual eight day period. They were unable

to substantiate the holiday directly from the text, but they provided sanction, textually, for the rabbinic institution of the holiday of Chanukkah.

Throughout the Tannaitic and Amoraic eras there was the development of rites and liturgy in connection with Chanukkah; the Hasmoneans were rarely mentioned. And the middle ages show comparatively little change from the approach taken in the preceding centuries except for the appearance of midrashic tales where the Hasmoneans are involved. However, since the personalities of the Hasmoneans and others were invoked as illustrations of observant Jews through whom God acts, the tenor of the holiday was not contravened by references to the family.

The goal toward which the scholars devoted their efforts was the development of a sanctioned, God-centered holiday. They achieved their purpose; this was how the holiday was regarded until the rise of nationalism in the modern period.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Digest	201
Chapter One: Origins of Chanukkah	1
A. Pagan Origins	2
B. An Assessment of the Arguments for Pagan Origins	5
C. The Holiday in the Early Sources	9
Notes	15
Chapter Two: The Tannaitic Period	18
A. Megillat Taanit	18
B. The Mishnah	22
C. The Liturgy	24.
Notes	27
Chapter Three: The Amoraic Period	28
A. The Talmud	28
B. The Midrash	31
C. The Liturgy	35
Notes	40
Chapter Four: The Middle Ages	42
A. The Codes	43
B. The Midrash	47
C. The Liturgy	59
D. Customs	62
Notes	65
Chapter Five: Chanukkah in Review	70
Notes	75
Bibliography	76

## Chapter One: The Origins of Chanukkah

One would not be amiss in assuming that a holiday which has roots in antiquity will undergo new interpretations with the passing of years. An historical experience can provoke a generation to invest greater significance in the celebration. Similarly, where nothing which would be vaguely reminiscent of the holiday occurs, the occasion can be shorn of its original tone emotionally and intellectually so that it remains as an out-moded memorial -- a witness to some hardly recollectible event.

The present day popularity of Chanukkah attests to the fact that Jewish experience, pleasant or otherwise, has been good to it. The exchange of gifts, the latke parties, the elaborate home decorations, and the general recognition of eight festive days celebrating a national liberation belie the fact that it took centuries for the rabbis to develop this period as a meaningful religious holiday. It may prove a surprise to many that the Festival of Dedication was not always known by this name.

If what has already been stated has the implication that the development of Chanukkah and its significance provide problems, it is because this was the intended impression. And we might be tempted to proceed with the direct examination of sources leading to a comprehension of the holiday's meaning were it not for the serious doubt that the festival is indigenous

to the land of our ancestors. The number of scholars who proclaim that the holiday and its rites are foreign intrusions is plentiful; and, prior to any determination of what it meant, one should investigate and attempt to understand the origins of Chanukkah.

#### A. Pagan Origins

What gives impetus to the theories of alien roots is the novel practice which is associated with Chanukkah in its early stages: the ritual of the lights at the doorposts. How is this to be explained?

In an introductory page of his book, The Origins of the Festival of Hannukah, Reverend Oliver Shaw Rankin offers a digest of his thesis:

In the following chapters, the festival appears in the circumstance of its origin and in the transformation of the rites it inherited from its pagan predecessor, as forces of the religious history and theological thought of Judaism in the period of the Hellenic domination, an experience which in the national life is only surpassed by the Exile. Hannukah is represented as a Jewish conversion of Hellenistic rites, as interpretation, in accord with the national genius, of the cult of Kronos-Helios (Bel-Samin), and in particular of Dionysian and Apolline ritual attaching to that cult.<sup>1</sup>

The                      Mr.

The conclusions that <sup>Mr.</sup>Reverend Rankin draws are based upon a number of considerations. His attention to the problem stems from the dissimilarities between Chanukkah and the Festival of Booths. For though II Maccabees seems to emphasize the festival as Sukkoth, Rankin notes that a



difference issues from "the circumstance that, as the locus of the lighting at Hanukkah was not the temple, neither was the celebration confined to Jerusalem."<sup>2</sup> Here, the author refers to the ritual lights which, he feels, stem from a cult form and concept of *diety* which Epiphanes sought to compel as a practice among the Jews.<sup>3</sup>

To draw the complete line from the Iranian-Chaldean tradition through Hellenism to Judaism, Rankin states that the Nehemiah tradition of new fire to which II Maccabees refers has its roots in Babylonian, and more particularly Iranian thought.<sup>4</sup> In substantiating this concept, one's attention is focused on the ordinance in Lev. 6:13, stating that the fire should be kept burning continually on the altar and that it never be permitted to go out; this, apparently, was a prescription fundamental to Iranian practice, and its inclusion in the Jewish work was a result of exilic and post-exilic experience of Iranian-Chaldean rites.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it would seem that even earlier than the days of Judah, the influence of Iranian fire-worship had penetrated Judaism.<sup>6</sup>

Having established earlier influences, Rankin indicates that the offering on the altars at the doors of houses was a practice associated with the cult of Apollo, the patron *diety* of the Seleucid house.<sup>7</sup> Utilizing passages from Hippolytus and Valerius Maximus, who agree on the picture of the Hellenized-Jew, he shows that these Jews possessed private altars which were street altars also, and he finds that these

door altars provide the archetype which is most apt to explain the ritual of the light set at the door of the house, outside, on the days of the festival.<sup>8</sup> And, here, in the Apolline rite, is the final step from Irania to the Hellenic religion to Judaism; through an inscription which Antiochus placed at Nimrud Dagħ there is seen a "Thorough syncretism of Iranian and Hellenic religion. Here Mithras is equated with Apollo; an identification which, though they have other characteristics in common, is certainly made on account of both being Light-Gods."<sup>9</sup>

Of course, there are others who, while not necessarily agreeing with all that Rankin offers, would agree with the contention that the holiday is essentially a pagan one. Elias Bickerman depicts part of the conflict of the Hasmonean revolt as set against a background of internecine strife among the Jews concerning the question as to how much Hellenistic practice was to be accepted.<sup>10</sup> With regard to the institution of a new holiday, he contends that it is:

... an innovation without precedent. On the other hand, it was in complete accord with the usage of the Gentiles. Among the Greeks it was usual for a generation, when it regarded an event in its own history as important, to believe it should be commemorated for all time. Thus Judah imitated the practice of his enemies, but at the same time incorporated it into Judaism. This was the first step along the path which was to constitute the historic mission of the Hasmoneans -- the introduction of Hellenic usages into Judaism without a sacrifice of Judaism. No one any longer celebrates the Greek festivals that served as Judah's example. But the eight-branched candelabrum, a symbol, again, that imitates a pagan usage, is lighted on Kislev 25 the world over...<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Julian Morgenstern, arguing also for the pagan origin, connects the celebration with a pre-exilic Asif-festival in honor of deities who were thought to control the sun, rainfall and fertility of the land.<sup>12</sup> He states that an important Syrian festival was observed in Jerusalem and Judah upon the 25th of Kislev and upon the various number of days linked with that day.<sup>13</sup> The fire rites and the re-kindling of the lamps in the Temple are:

... closely similar to, and even practically identical with, the rites in the streets and at the doors of the houses in the folk-celebration of the Syrian festival and in the folk-celebration of the Asif-New Year's Day Festival in Jerusalem and the cities of Judah in Jeremiah's day.<sup>14</sup>

One cannot take leave of the proposals urging an outside impact on the celebration without mentioning the school which supports the concept of the winter-solstice. Rankin summarizes the thought when he states:

When Wellhausen, Meyer, Gressman, Norden, and Kittel, following Ewald hold that the Jewish "festival of lights" to be a transformation of a heathen winter-solstice festival, they do so on account of two features -- the 25th of Kislev and the lighting of lamps.<sup>15</sup> Their contention is embellished by the parallel the Jewish holiday seems to provide in comparing it to the Egyptian Kronia, the Roman Saturnalia, and the Alexandrian Kikellia.<sup>16</sup>

#### B. An Assessment of the Arguments for Pagan Origins

That rites associated with fire may originally find their sources in older pagan ceremonies is conceivable; it is one thing, however, to demonstrate common elements or parallels

among certain customs and quite another to prove satisfactorily that the impact of one civilization upon another leaves the latter with traditions which are mere transferences.

The symbolic use of fire is not peculiar to any one locale or any one religious group. That it has a rather universal appeal is attested to by ancient rituals in India,<sup>17</sup> Germany,<sup>18</sup> China,<sup>19</sup> and Japan.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this is the factor which prevents one from asserting that the burning bush and the fire which led the children of Israel by night are also borrowed idioms; and this, too, is within the realm of possibilities.

By no means are we attempting to attack the idea that the Jews did borrow and transform other cultic practices. What we are investigating and questioning is that the Hasmonians or their descendants adopted a pagan practice. From the facts available, it would appear, as shall later be indicated, that the times were anything but propitious for such an adoption or adaptation.

Rankin, who has summarized the position of those advocating the transference of a winter-solstice festival, provides arguments against such a proposal. He clarifies a possible confusion of dates by an admission that the 25th of December -- the "Birthday of the Sun" in the Calendar of Antiochus -- and the 25th of Kislev do not necessarily correspond.<sup>21</sup> With regard to the various solstice festivals to which Chanukkah is compared, he dismisses them with a reminder that the exact

date of the Kikellia is not known,<sup>22</sup> that the Kronia and Saturnalia were celebrated on the 17th of December and were not even concerned with the winter-solstice.<sup>23</sup>

To support the dismissal of any connection between Chanukkah and winter-solstice celebrations, Solomon Zeitlin declares:

The Jewish calendar, at the time of the Maccabees, was not a solar one but lunar-solar, i.e., the months were according to the moon, while the years were according to the sun... Having in mind the Jewish calendar at the time of the Second Commonwealth, we know that in some years the twenty-fifth of Kislev was weeks preceding the solstice.<sup>24</sup>

Unquestionably, there was inner conflict among the Jews; but, the assertion by Bickerman that civil strife was primarily a matter of how much Hellenization was admissible requires more specific information than he has offered. This is especially true when one reviews the circumstances which affect the altar rites. For while lights may be reminiscent of pagan custom, there are a few considerations which would question the logic of the Rankin and Bickerman thesis that the Jewish practice was transferred from the Hellenistic rite.

One might suspect that a foreign cultic expression such as was forcibly imposed by the foe<sup>25</sup> would not too likely find the populace well disposed toward its continuation once the enemy had been deposed. The Hellenized-Jews may have sought to continue these sacrifices, but we discover that those combatting Hellenization opposed this system of sacrifice.

Mattathias and his friends pulled down the altars;<sup>26</sup> Judah did the same.<sup>27</sup>

What may serve as better proof against the likelihood of syncretism is the remission addressed to Lysias by Antiochus' successor:

As for our Jewish subjects... we understand that they object to our father's project of bringing them over to Hellenism, preferring their own ways of life and asking permission to follow their own customs... the subjects of the realm should live undisturbed and attend to their own concerns... give them back their temple and to permit them to live after the manner of their ancestors.<sup>28</sup>

If it is true that the ritual was not inherited from the adversary, how can we explain the appearance of such a custom and its association with the holiday? Here, any conjecture must remain as but a construction of the possibilities that are available; with the facts as we know them, nothing can be offered with assurances of absolute certainty. But, after having been occupied with the problem, one can hardly avoid nibbling the bait of hypothesis.

We do know that Antiochus had defiled the Temple,<sup>29</sup> had enforced abominable sacrifices on the altar in the sanctuary,<sup>30</sup> and, as has been previously discussed, forced the erection of altars at the doors and sacrifices upon them. These were practices despised by Jews loyal to their tradition. Naturally, one of the first things to be done when the Temple was re-captured would be its purification and the restoration

of the kindling of the lights -- that symbol which verified God's residence in the sanctuary. However, if a popular expression of victory and defiance were to be sought, what better way to do so than by replacing the abominable rite at the doors with a symbol of God's supremacy over the heathen deities? Just as the sanctuary was dedicated anew by restoring the lights of the lamp, so, too, could the home be re-devoted to God's service by lighting a fire at the site of the defilement.

### C. The Holiday in the Early Sources

Our object is to discover the meaning of the celebration of Chanukkah in Jewish life and particularly in rabbinic literature. That such an endeavor confronts problems is evident from the discrepant reports our earliest sources relate.

I Maccabees records that after the Syrians had defiled the sanctuary and made it as "desolate as a wilderness,"<sup>31</sup> Antiochus issued an edict directed at the Jews proclaiming:

... that they should cease the (sacrifice of) whole burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and drink offerings in the sanctuary and that they should profane the Sabbaths and feasts. And pollute the sanctuary and those who had been sanctified.<sup>32</sup>

Following this, on the 25th of Kislev in the 145th year the Syrians "sacrificed upon the altar which was upon the altar of burnt-offering."<sup>33</sup>

After the first battle with Lysias, Judah decided to cleanse the Holy place and rededicate it.<sup>34</sup> He and the

priests cleansed the Holy place and pulled down and removed the profaned altar of burnt-offerings.<sup>35</sup> Having rebuilt the Holy place and having finished refurnishing it, the Jews;

...rose up early in the morning on the twenty-fifth [day] of the ninth month, which is the month Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year and offered burnt-offerings with gladness, and sacrificed a sacrifice of deliverance and praise. And Judas and his brethren and the whole congregation of Israel ordained, that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season year by year for eight days, from the twenty-fifth [day] of the month of Chislev, with gladness and joy.<sup>36</sup>

In recounting the events after the recapture of the Temple, II Maccabees states:

Now Maccabaeus and his followers, under the leadership of the Lord, recaptured the temple and the city. And pulled down the altars erected by the aliens in the market-place, as well as the sacred inclosures. After cleansing the sanctuary, they erected another altar of sacrifice, and striking fire out of flints they offered sacrifices after a lapse of two years, with incense, lamps, and the presentation of the shew-bread. This done, they fell prostrate before the Lord with entreaties that they might never again incur such disasters, but, that, if ever they should sin, He would chasten them with forbearance, instead of handing them over to blasphemers and barbarous pagans. Now it so happened that the cleansing of the sanctuary took place on the very day on which it had been profaned by aliens, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which is Chislev. And they celebrated it for eight days with gladness like a feast of Tabernacles, remembering how not long before, during the feast of Tabernacles they had been wandering like wild beasts in the mountains and the caves. So bearing wands wreathed with leaves and fair boughs and palms, they offered hymns of praise, to Him who had prospered the cleansing of His own place. And also passed a public order and decree that all the Jewish nation should keep these days every year.<sup>37</sup>



While a contrast of the quoted material from the two books discloses variations which have to be reconciled, there is some further information in II Maccabees which may put the deviations into sharper focus and, yet, help resolve them. In the introductory chapters which are addressed in the form of a letter to the Egyptian-Jews, the following statements appear:

But we besought the Lord, and were heard; we offered sacrifice and made the meal offering, we lighted the lamps, and set forth the shew-bread. See that ye keep the days of the feast of Tabernacles in the month of Chislev...<sup>38</sup> Whereas we are now about to celebrate the purification of the temple in the month of Chislev, on the five and twentieth day, we deem it our duty to inform you, that you too may keep the feast of Tabernacles.<sup>39</sup>

Shortly after these words, a connection is made between the purification and fire on this particular celebration with the miraculous fire which descended from heaven during the days of Moses and Solomon.<sup>40</sup>

Leaving aside the minor problem of the one year difference between the two accounts as to how many years after its defilement the sanctuary was cleansed and purified -- a problem settled by Zeitlin in his book Megillat Taanit -- the chief difficulty is how each book regards the holiday. I Maccabees refers to it as a dedication; the other specifically likens it to the feast of Tabernacles and calls upon the Egyptians to celebrate it as such in Kislev. Since both versions do announce that the new holiday was to be celebrated yearly for eight days,

it does not appear logical that Tabernacles in Kislev would be called for as a yearly practice; the re-acquisition of the Temple would certainly mean that Sukkoth, which could not be observed while the enemy possessed it, would once again be celebrated in its appointed time. And what is the reason for alluding to ancient associations with fire and purification?

Perhaps it would be advisable to search the different approaches taken by each narrative to present its case. We note that I Maccabees while glorifying the Hasmonean family never includes the word God or Lord;<sup>41</sup> on the other hand, II Maccabees, with the exception of Judah, completely ignores the entire dynasty of the Hasmoneans.<sup>42</sup> It evinces a dislike of the priesthood,<sup>43</sup> makes a number of references to bodily resurrection,<sup>44</sup> and shows God, the guiding force of the combat, miraculously saving people.<sup>45</sup> II Maccabees, then, has signs which point to a Pharisaic viewpoint.

Written after the breach with the Hasmoneans,<sup>46</sup> the Pharisees were obviously faced with a tremendous problem; the people were in possession of a popular yearly celebration which the Pharisees were hard-pressed to support. For even if they were interested in eliminating any elements reflecting glory on the Hasmoneans, they had no biblical tradition which they could utilize as a basis<sup>5</sup> for the new institution. But with or without antecedent precedent, there was nothing to prevent drawing a framework which would promote a

biblical casting of the holiday.

In their endeavor to provide this biblical hue, the Pharisees evidently touched two different avenues. Since from its inception the joyful period lasted eight days, and Sukkoth could hardly have been observed prior to the recapture of the Temple, why not re-cast the beginnings as the festival of Tabernacles and encourage its continuance as a second yearly form of this biblical institution? Again, since the people marked this occasion with a fire ceremony which was reminiscent of the fire of purification in Moses' and Solomon's time, why not refer to the holiday as a purification? This is exactly what the second book of Maccabees does in the letter to the Egyptian community:

Seeing therefore that we are about to keep the purification; we write thus to you. You will do well, then, to keep the days [of the festival].<sup>47</sup>

Thus, by referring to the institution as either Tabernacles or purification two things were accomplished; the holiday of dedication conceived by the Hasmoneans was obviated, and a celebration with traditional, biblical overtones could be espoused by the Pharisees.

The success or failure of this venture can best be answered by the testimony of a later writer, the historian Josephus, who declares:

Now Judah celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days; and omitted no sort of pleasure thereon; but he

feasted thereupon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honoured God, and delighted them, by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so glad at the revival of their customs, when after a long time of intermission they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate the festival and call it lights. I suppose the reason was because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival.<sup>48</sup>

Josephus records the holiday as the festival of lights; he knows nothing about a festival of Tabernacles or purification. The fact that he hazards a guess as to why it is known as it is should be sufficient evidence that the meaning of the celebration is lacking. Josephus knows the rite and its duration. He, and consequently the Jews, know of no biblical associations, but they do know of the historical situation and the Hasmonean beginnings which prompted the holiday.

Obviously, the Pharisees had failed.

## NOTES

1. Rankin, Rev. O.S., The Origins of the Festival of Hanukkah. Edinburgh, 1930. p. vi.
2. ibid., p. 102.
3. ibid., p. 139.
4. ibid., p. 69. Pages 69 through 74 provide a full discussion of the Nehemiah-tradition and its Iranian roots.
5. ibid., p. 73.
6. ibid., p. 69.
7. ibid., p. 140.
8. ibid., p. 142.
9. ibid., p. 144.
10. Bickerman, Elias. The Maccabees. New York, 1947.
11. ibid., p. 44.
12. Morgenstern, Julian. "The Chanukkah Festival and the Calendar of Ancient Israel." Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XX, Philadelphia, 1947. p. 47.
13. ibid., p. 5.
14. ibid., loc. cit.
15. Rankin, op. cit., p. 191.
16. ibid., loc. cit.
17. Reinach, Salom<sup>o</sup>n, Orpheus. New York, . p. 54.
18. ibid., p. 134.
19. ibid., p. 160.
20. ibid., p. 161.
21. Rankin, op. cit., p. 193.
22. ibid., p. 194.
23. ibid., p. 195.

23. ibid., p. 195.
24. Zeitlin, Solomon. "Hanukkah" Jewish Quarterly Review Vol. 29. Philadelphia, 1938-1939. p. 7.
25. I Mac. 1:51-55., provides a description of the public sacrifices and the altars which Antiochus forced upon the Jews.
26. ibid., 2:46.
27. ibid., 5:68.
28. Bickerman, op. cit., p. 49.
29. I Mac. 1:37.
30. ibid., 6:4.
31. ibid., 1:39, 43.
32. ibid., 1:45-46.
33. ibid., 1:59.
34. ibid., 4:36.
35. ibid., 4:42-44.
36. ibid., 4:52-54.
37. II Mac. 10:1-8.
38. ibid., 1:8-9.
39. ibid., 1:18.
40. ibid., 2:1-12. The writer here traces fire and purification through several biblical personalities.
41. "Maccabees, Books of" in The Jewish Encyclopedia. New York and London, 1906. Vol. 8, p. 239.
42. Zeitlin, op. cit., p. 24.
43. II Mac. 5.
44. ibid., 7:9, 11, 14, 36; 14:16; 12:43-45.
45. ibid., 3:24.

46. Rankin, op. cit., pp. 86-87. The author presents the views of Höchtel who holds II Maccabees to be a work written after the breach between the Pharisees and the Hasmoneans.
47. II Mac. 2:16.
48. Josephus. Antiquities. Bk. XII, Ch. VII, Paragraph 7.

## Chapter Two: The Tannaitic Period

The Tannaim were the scholarly heirs of a popular holiday which had no literary authority. There was nothing in the canonical books which validated an eight day period of festivities such as was accepted by the populace. The earlier, Pharisaic attempt to convert the festival into some form of Tabernacles or to cloak the practice of the lights with a purification akin to biblical references had not met with success. People still recalled the Hasmonean celebration and its circumstances, and the yearly commemoration was held despite the lack of traditional, legal sanction. How to provide for its authorization without accrediting too much to the Hasmoneans, who had eventually become Sadducees and, consequently, the foes of the Pharisees,<sup>1</sup> is the task toward which the teachers of the Torah addressed themselves.

### A. Megillat Taanit

An early source of information in the direction of Tannaitic transition with regard to the holiday is the collection, Megillat Taanit. Accorded great authority by the Tannaim,<sup>2</sup> accredited as the work of Hananiah b. Hezekiah<sup>3</sup> who lived at about the time of the destruction of the second Temple, Megillat Taanit has the following entry:

ON THE TWENTY-FIFTH DAY THEREOF IS THE DAY OF CHANUKKAH; EIGHT DAYS IT IS FORBIDDEN TO MOURN... Because when the Greeks entered the temple they defiled all the oil to kindle in the sanctuary,



and when the royal house of the Hasmoneans prevailed and were victorious over them, they searched but did not find oil except for one cruse that was left undefiled with the seal of the High Priest. And it contained an amount sufficient for only one day. But a miracle was wrought with it and from it they lit the lights for eight days. On the next year they fixed eight days with praise and with thanksgiving. And why did they make an eight day dedication, for was not the dedication that Moses made in the wilderness only seven days? As it is said, "And ye shall not go out of the tent of meeting seven days." (Leviticus 8:33). And it says, "And he that presented his offering on the first day," etc. (Numbers 7:12) "And on the seventh day on the Sabbath Ephraim offered." And similarly do we find, concerning the dedication of Solomon the King which he made for only seven days, as it is said, "for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days." (II Chronicles 7:9). But why did they make this dedication eight days? Only that in the days of the Greek kingdom, the Hasmoneans entered the temple and built the altar and whitewashed it with lime and prepared for it the ministering vessels, and they were busy with it for eight days. And with what did they kindle the lights? In the days of the Greek Kingdom, the Hasmoneans entered the Temple, and they had eight iron lances in their hands, and covered them with wood. They kindled the lights with them, and all eight were occupied with this. And why did they complete the Hallel? Only to teach you that for every salvation which the Holy One, Praised be He, does for them, for Israel, they present themselves before Him with Hallel, song, praise, and thanksgiving, according to the matter as is said, "And they answered in praise (Hallel) and with thanksgiving unto the Lord; 'For He is good,'" etc. (Ezra 3:11). And it says, "Salvation belongs to the Lord; Thy blessing be upon Thy people. Selah." (Psalms 3:9). The precept of the light of Chanukkah is one light for a man and his house-hold; and the exacting, one light for each person; and the extremely exacting -- Beth Shammai says on the first day he lights eight lights and thereafter he gradually reduces; Beth Hillel says on the first day he lights one and thereafter increases. Two old men were in Sidon. One did in accordance with the words of Beth Shammai and the other in accordance with the words of Beth Hillel. Each gave his reason for the matter. One said (it is) to correspond to the bullocks of the festival, and the other said it is because they ascend in holiness and do not descend. The precept of

lighting is from sundown until the foot ceases from the street. And the precept is to place it on the doorpost of one's house, outside; and if one dwells in an upper chamber, he places it at the window closest to the street. But if one fears scoffers he places it on the inner doorpost of his house; and, in the time of danger, he places it on his table, and it is sufficient.<sup>4</sup>

The material underlined in the section has been so designated to indicate that at least one source feels that the information contained in the Scholion is greatly indebted to the discussion in the Talmud.<sup>5</sup> Even though the Talmud, in discussing the material Lichtenstein would omit, utilizes phraseology which would seemingly refer to an older, accepted authority, one would best be cautious in accepting this as valid. The information concerning the oil and the miracle,<sup>6</sup> the appropriate method of lighting,<sup>7</sup> and where the lamp should be placed<sup>8</sup> are all preceded in the Talmud by the words, "Our Rabbis taught" -- words pointing to an earlier tradition. The recitation of the Hallel<sup>9</sup> and the period during which the light is to be lit<sup>10</sup> are likewise included within this scope. Whether or not the lines Lichtenstein questions are originally the work of the Scholiast is of less importance in our deliberations than the fact that the concepts with which we shall deal do belong to the Tannaitic era.

There are several noteworthy elements in the quoted entry from Megillat Taanit. The holiday of eight days, beginning on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, is called Chanukkah -- the name which was given it in I Maccabees.<sup>11</sup> Other attempts at providing a name and surrounding it with a biblical aura had failed;

now, it seemed, that it would be advisable to meet the holiday on the basis of its connection with the popular mentality. The part the Hasmoneans played in the restoration of the Temple and the rather recent genesis of the celebration had not been forgotten, so the Tannaim were forced to argue the case on the grounds of common familiarity and still accomplish the goals of minimizing the Hasmonean association as well as demonstrating biblical origins. This is what they proceed to do.

They could not omit the Hasmoneans from a description of the festival, but they found no difficulty in reducing the family's importance. It was not the victory over the Greeks which was of such significance; the crucial point hinged on the matter of fact duties the family performed in repairing and preparing the Temple. Any connection between a human agent and the victory was omitted. Though not specifically mentioned in what authorities agree would be the original wording of the Scholion, there is room, tacitly at least, for the idea that it was God who had been responsible for the events leading to restoration and dedication.

The dedication itself was nothing unique. It could be traced back to the precedent of Moses and Solomon. Yet, while establishing the canonical plank for Chanukkah, the Tannaim faced a tradition which held that the earlier models endured for seven days; why, then, did the holiday last for eight days? If the fact that it took exactly this amount of time for the Hasmoneans to set the Temple in order was not a satisfactory answer then another was provided. The Hasmoneans had eight

lances when they entered the Temple, and all eight of these lances were used in lighting the lamps. The eight days then represent the eight lances. One could choose one or both of the possibilities offered.

If the words in the Scholion could be shown to be independent of the Talmudic discussions several other elements could be stressed. The miracle of the lights would indicate more conclusively God's participation in the events and the characterization of the Hasmoneans as His agents. Too, another explanation for the eight day celebration would have been made available. The material could also indicate the beginnings of rabbinic sanction of custom and procedure. The fact that the question of what is original in the Scholion is debatable dictates that we deal only with what is certain.

### B. The Mishnah

The codification of Tannaitic regulations could not have included much material on the holiday. There certainly could not be a tractate devoted to it since there was no biblical declaration which called for this yearly celebration. Thus, the rabbinic burden was to interpret the material so that the festival would have some basis in tradition. If the earlier Tannaim had given indication as to the trend of their thought, the Mishnah should certainly reflect a continuation of this construction if the effort met with any success.

Examining the Mishnah to test the fortune of the Tannaitic deliberations, we find the following entries:

... while from the Feast [of Tabernacles] until the [Feast of] the Dedication he may bring them [first fruits] but he may not make the Avowal. R. Judah b. Bathyra says: He may do both.<sup>12</sup>

Because of six New Moons do messengers go forth [to proclaim the time of their appearing]... because of Chislev, to determine the time of [the Feast of] the Dedication;<sup>13</sup>

They may not decree a public fast on the first day of a month or during [the Feast of] the Dedication...<sup>14</sup>

... at all these times they break off [from the set order in the reading of the Law]: on the first days of the months, at the [Feast of the] Dedication...<sup>15</sup>

At the [Feast of the] Dedication [they read the section] "The Princes"...<sup>16</sup>

On the first days of the months and at [the Feast of] the Dedication and at Purim they may sing lamentations and clap their hands; but during none of them may they wail. After the corpse has been buried they may not sing lamentations or clap their hands.<sup>17</sup>

... If a camel laden with flax passed by in the public domain and its load of flax entered into a shop and caught fire from the shopkeeper's light, and so set fire to a large building, the owner of the camel is culpable; but if the shopkeeper left his light outside, the shopkeeper is culpable. R. Judah says: If it was a Hanukkah light he is not culpable.<sup>18</sup>

The references elicit certain obvious conclusions. The holiday was by now definitely recognized as Chanukkah - Dedication. It had been invested with legal status, and the rite of a light at the doorpost, outside, was a duty which would absolve the person who kept it from liability in case of an accident. However, what was of essence in these considerations, was the insertion of a biblical section which supported both the concept of a dedication and the length of the celebration. The import of the Torah reading starting

with "The Princes" will be made manifest in the following presentation.

### C. The Liturgy

Along with the growth of the meaning of the holiday as a dedication and the appearance of legislation affecting rites and procedures associated with Chanukkah, there is the augmentation of a liturgy. By the end of the Tannaitic era, there were two ceremonies -- one of which we can speak of with certainty -- with regard to worship. A possibility was the recitation of the Hallel; the scriptural reading on the Sabbath during Chanukkah was certain.

That the Hallel was recited during this particular period can be verified from the question: "And why did they complete the Hallel?" in Scholion to Megillat Taanit.<sup>19</sup> In fact, it may have been in vogue at a very early date. S. Stein feels that it may have been a practice which the Hasmonean dynasty reigned, and he suggests this is so when he equates the Greek words in I Maccabees 4:24, humnein and enlogein eis to ouranon with the Hebrew expression פנעס שם שם ה' ואלהינו.<sup>20</sup> He even suggests that the "Great Hallel" may have been known by the time of II Maccabees.<sup>21</sup> Though these possibilities may actually have been the case, we can report with certitude only that Hallel was known to the Tannaim. There is no strong indication that the "Great Hallel" had as yet been specified.

The setting of the Torah portion to be read on the Sabbath coming during Chanukkah is vital in the development of a

\* But not, if the scholion turns out to be post-Tannaitic.

biblical basis for the holiday. For, though the portion, Numbers 7:1-89, emphasizes the very necessary<sup>r. iden</sup> of holiness 22/11/14 during Moses' lifetime, the particular feature that this reading adds is an answer to the problem of eight days. The answer provided was an oblique one. Once Moses had completed the tabernacle and the altar, the celebration of the dedication lasted for twelve days during which a prince of a tribe, on its appointed day, presented an offering for the dedication. Here, at least, there was a precedent which went beyond the seven day period.

Homiletically, the passage chosen was put to excellent use. A midrashic collection<sup>also</sup> containing the sermonic thoughts of Tannaim -- ~~it also contains~~<sup>although mainly contains</sup> Amoraic material -- stresses the themes of God's presence, the importance of the person of Moses in the building of the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and the association with fire.<sup>22</sup> Not a word is contained concerning the Hasmoneans; there is no reference to the combat with the Seleucid House or the dedication associated as a result of this conflict.

The selection of this Torah portion and the expressed views of the Tannaim manifest the purpose underlying their deliberations. The emphasis on ecclesiastical institutions so evident in the midrashic sources, the ~~hearkening~~<sup>harking</sup> back to the occasion when these institutions were conceived, a formula in praise of God, the legitimation of ritual -- all these point toward a concentrated effort to establish a purely

religious festival.

The Tannaitic celebration was in honor of the initial dedication rejoiced in the wilderness. The worship of God and the importance of the altar, the tabernacle and its accoutrements were the reasons for the commemoration of Chanukkah. Human action in association with a dedication was of no real significance. And if one had to pay attention to the human agent, what personality other than Moses, who labored at the first dedication, deserved the accolades of the people?

The holiday the Tannaim sponsored was a religious centered period having nothing to do with a victorious uprising of Jews led by the Hasmoneans.



## NOTES

1. Schauss, Hayyim, The Jewish Festivals. Cincinnati, 1938. p. 229. The author tells of the bloody wars waged by the later Hasmoneans against the Pharisees.
2. Zeitlin, Solomon, Megillat Taanit. Philadelphia, 1922. p. 2.
3. Talmud Babli, Tractate Sabbath, p. 13b.
4. <sup>ed</sup> Grossberg, Menasseh, Megillat Taanit. Lwow, Poland, 1903. pp. 26-28. My translation.
5. Lichtenstein, Hans, "Megillat Taanit" in Hebrew Union College Annual, Philadelphia, 1932, Vol. VII-IX, pp. 341-342.
6. Talmud Babli, op. cit., p. 21b.
7. ibid.,
8. ibid.
9. ibid.
10. ibid.
11. I Mac. 4:54, 56, 57.
12. Mishnah, Bikkurim 1:6.
13. ibid., Rosh Hashanah 1:3.
14. ibid., Taanith, 2:10.
15. ibid., Meggillah, 3:4.
16. ibid., 3:6.
17. ibid., Moed Katan, 3:9.
18. ibid., Baba Kamma, 6:6.
19. Megillath Ta'anith  
Grossberg, op. cit., p. 54.
20. Stein, S., "The Liturgy of Hanukkah and the First Two Books of Maccabees." in Journal of Jewish Studies, 1954. Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 154.
21. ibid.

22. Buber, Solomon, ed. Pesikta de Rav Kahana. New York,  
1949, pp. 1-5.

### Chapter Three: The Amoraic Period

The pattern for a religious celebration of Chanukkah had been prescribed by the Tannaim. And it should come as no surprise to learn that those who assumed the mantle of rabbinic leadership following the codification of the Mishnah continued to pursue the motifs chosen by their teachers. That this was the vein chosen by the Amoraim can be verified or challenged by studying those efforts which were recorded.

#### A. The Talmud

The Talmud provides a list of regulations concerning the rites which are to be observed during the celebration of Dedication. The following is a summary of these rules:

1. In answering the question as to whether or not it is permissible on Chanukkah to use wicks and oils forbidden for kindling the Sabbath lights, the rabbis hold that one may so use them.<sup>1</sup>
2. The observance of the ritual of kindling the lights is to be performed from the period between "sunset until the foot ceases from the street."<sup>2</sup>
3. How many lights should be lit? "One for a man and his household; the zealous light one for each person in the house; the extremely zealous follow either Beth Shammai (eight lights the first night and reduce gradually after that) or Beth Hillel (one light the first night and increase gradually thenceforth)."<sup>3</sup>
4. Where is the Chanukkah lamp placed? It should be placed on the door of one's house on the outside; a person dwelling in an upper chamber was authorized to place it at the window nearest the street, in times of danger one was to place it on the table.<sup>4</sup>
5. For the use of light another lamp is required.<sup>5</sup>

6. The Chanukkah lamp must be placed within ten handbreadths from the ground.<sup>6</sup>
7. If the lamp is placed twenty cubits above the ground it is unfit.<sup>7</sup>
8. The lamp should be placed within the handbreadth nearest the door on the left side.<sup>8</sup>
9. One may light from one Chanukkah lamp to another.<sup>9</sup>
10. The lighting of the Chanukkah lamp is obligatory for women since they were also concerned in the miracle.<sup>10</sup>
11. The precept of the Chanukkah lamp is incumbent upon a guest.<sup>11</sup>
12. On the first day, he who lights the lamp pronounces three blessings, and he who sees this must pronounce two; thereafter, he who lights pronounces two blessings, while the spectator pronounces one.<sup>12</sup>
13. If one's house is situated at a courtyard so that it has two doors on different sides, he is required to have two Chanukkah lamps.<sup>13</sup>
14. A lamp with two spouts is credited to two people; where one fills a dish with oil, surrounds it with wicks, and places a vessel over it, it is credited to many people.<sup>14</sup>
15. The house light [the Sabbath light] takes precedence over the Chanukkah light; in a choice between the Sanctification of the Day [the Friday night Kiddush] and the Chanukkah lamp, the latter takes priority.<sup>15</sup>

The quoted passages are indicative of the strides earlier customs had made. What Megillat Taanit had reported and supported as proper procedure had now become law. But the halachic process had gone beyond the initial stages; new regulations had been formulated by the Amoraim so that the holiday achieved a ritual which was in keeping with religious usage. By the time the Talmud was written, the Chanukkah ritual of lighting the lamp superseded the Sanctification of the Day, [the Friday night Kiddush].

The only references to the particular event which promoted the yearly observance of Dedication are two: the Hasmonean victory over the Greeks which led to the miracle of the oil<sup>16</sup> -- a word for word copy of the report in Megillat Ta<sup>3</sup>anit;<sup>17</sup> and the fact that women "were involved in the miracle."<sup>18A</sup> Other than these two specific cases, there is nothing relating the holiday to the dedication of the Temple during the Hellenistic period.

This much, however, is significant in the presence of two allusions regarding the Hasmonean festival. The emphasis of the miraculous manifests the fact that the Jews still recalled the history of the event. For if it were possible to link the participation of women on the premise that they were beneficiaries of all that the institution of the Temple represented, the Amoraim could have done so by mentioning that women, too, profited by the dedication which Moses and the tribes celebrated in the wilderness. Certainly, this is what the scholars would have done if they were completely free to do so.

Yet, the rabbis had no choice. The ritual of the lamps was associated with no dedication other than that of the Hasmoneans. The word "miracle" could refer to no occasion other than the Hasmonean celebration when this term was used within the context of Chanukkah; the sages themselves had seen to that. Hence, the familiarity with the miracle -- and it is reasonable to suppose that the decisions and discussions recorded in the Talmud were set down in language that the

people could understand -- shows that there was likewise a familiarity with the events giving rise to the marvelous burning of the oil.

But, if it was true that rabbinic procedure was to avoid any possible mention, direct or tacit, of that which gave the holiday impetus, why was it necessary to mention the inclusion of women at the time? Just as earlier custom surrounding the ritual of the light had been given the status of law, so, too, must the teachers have found it necessary to validate that which was no innovation; it is likely that the Jewish society was accustomed to woman's participation in the lighting. Providing sanction on the premise that God's intervention with the cruse of oil -- the religious reason for the rite -- was an act intended to benefit women as well as men would help vitiate the importance of the human agent -- the Hasmon-eans -- in what occurred.

#### B. The Midrash

The homilies which are traceable to Amoraic roots share the same general schema of their predecessors. The importance of the tabernacle, the relationship of the latter and the Shechina receive due emphasis:

Rabbi Joshua b. Levi said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, made stipulations with Israel while it was still in Egypt that He would not take them out of there but on condition that they would make a Tabernacle for Him; and His Divine presence resided among them, as it is written..."<sup>18</sup>

In a similar vein, Rabh is quoted as stating that only when the Tabernacle was established did God take up residence on earth.<sup>19</sup>

While there are quite a few statements which follow the Tannaitic trend, there are two noteworthy innovations in the sermonic briefs. The first is the introduction of ritual matters as material worthy of congregational discussion. Such problems included the question of making use of the Chanukkah light,<sup>20</sup> and whether or not one makes mention of Chanukkah in the musaf prayer should the new month fall on a Sabbath during the holiday.<sup>21</sup>

The other, and more salient, aspect of the novel approaches comes in the justification of rabbinic authority. On the theme of Ephraim, the younger brother, receiving his grandfather's blessing before Manasseh, Pesikta Rabbati states:

Let no man say, "I shall not fulfill the precepts of the elders since they are not in the Torah." To him, the Holy One, blessed by He, said, "No, my son, whatever they derive for you fulfill;" as it is written, "According to the law which they shall teach thee" (Deut. 17:11).<sup>22</sup>

On the same theme, Rav Tanchuma expounds:

The words of the wise are as goads (Eccles. 12:12) What is meant by "as goads" ( שולל את הע"ז )? But just as a spur directs the cow in plowing its furrow, so do the words of the sages direct man in the paths of the Holy One, blessed be He.<sup>23</sup>

R. Berechia continues:

When the sages enter into study and are occupied with Torah (or law), one gives his opinion, and the other gives his opinion. One states one reason, and the

other gives another reason. And the words of both are all given through Moses...<sup>24</sup>

These homilies based upon the words "on the eighth day Gamaliel of Pedahzur, prince of the children of Manasseh,"<sup>25</sup> taken from the Torah portion read on Chanukkah, answer two possible questions which would be pertinent to the celebration. One query might have challenged the rabbinic right of establishing rules for the celebration. At least the first quotation, coming within the framework of a discussion on what should be done with any excess oil, might leave us with the impression that this is the reason for designating the biblical justification of the sages' action.

However, the last two Midrashic statements, are not confined to any formulation of ritual; they appear as direct comments stemming from the theme of the sacrifice on the eighth day. In all likelihood, the sermons were the response to a more basic question -- one which had never been answered before. The fact that there were dedications in biblical times had been shown satisfactorily. Yet, nothing had ever been advanced to demonstrate that a yearly celebration of Chanukkah had been biblically called for. What, then, was the justification for such a practice?

The Amoraim could not supply a direct answer, but they could verify what they had done -- howbeit indirectly -- by <sup>restoring</sup> ~~restoring~~ to scriptural passages. And the fact that Manasseh, the first born, had been represented after, rather than before, his younger brother, Ephraim, served as an excellent point of



departure. By the accepted custom of primogeniture, the tribe of Manasseh should have been privileged in presenting its offerings on the seventh day. The fact that this was not done, however, substantiated Jacob's action of recognizing the younger before the older when he blessed Ephraim first. Just as Jacob's deed eventually led to a new, authorized exercise, so, too, could the habits of the elders occasion practices which merited ratification.

In case of any doubt about the correctness of this assumption, the rabbis could, and did, point to biblical authority: "According to the law which they shall teach thee" (Deut. 17:11). Why? So that even for me did they decree, as it is said, "And thou shalt decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee" (Job 22:28).<sup>26</sup> Similarly did they utilize, "The words of the wise are as goads" (Eccles. 12:12).

In their midrashic endeavors, the Amoraim never mentioned the Hasmoneans or the dedication connected with the family. Having taken the example from their teachers, the Amoraim were loyal to the traditions they received. Nevertheless, they outdistanced their predecessors in at least one very important direction. Through their labor, they were able to provide biblical sanction for the holiday. They had established an eight day celebration of the rabbinic institution, Chanukkah.

### C. The Liturgy

! If in the areas of defining and expanding rites as well as in establishing the canonical platform of a yearly celebration the Amoraim proved successful, they were no less assiduous and able in the increased growth of the liturgy associated with Chanukkah. The Talmud records a number of developments. An important report is the following:

R. Hiyya b. Ashi said: He who lights the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing; while R. Jeremiah said: He who sees the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing. Rab Judah said: On the first day, he who sees must pronounce two, and he who lights must pronounce three blessings; thereafter, he who lights pronounces two, and he who sees pronounces one. What is omitted? -- The 'season' is omitted. Yet let the 'miracle' be omitted? The miracle holds good for every day.

What benediction is uttered? This: Who sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to kindle the lights of Hanukkah. And where did He command us? R. Avia said: from "thou shalt not turn aside (from the sentence which they shall show thee)" (Deut. 17:11). R. Nehemiah quoted: "Ask thy father, and he will show thee; thine elders, and they will tell thee" (Deut. 32:7).<sup>27</sup>

From this quotation, it is certain that three blessings were formulated to accompany the kindling of the lights on the first night; thereafter, the blessing concerning the season is not repeated. However, beyond the fact that each particular blessing can be identified, the exact wording of the benedictions of the season and the miracle are not given. Only the first is quoted in its complete form.

The fascinating facet of the Talmudic passage is the

challenge and answer included. Here, the rhetorical question calls to task the supposition that the kindling of the lights on Chanukkah had really been commanded by God. The answer, gleaned from the Bible, supports the position of the elders. Naturally, the biblical word is God's utterance, and He had given the sages the authority to show the people His way.

Continuing with additions made for liturgical purposes, the Talmud states:

The scholars propounded: Is Hanukkah to be mentioned in grace after meals? Since it is a Rabbinical (institution), we do not mention it; or perhaps it is mentioned to give publicity to the miracle? Said Raba in R. Sehora's name in R. Huna's name: It need not be mentioned; yet if one comes to mention it, he does so in the "Thanks" (benediction). R. Huna b. Judah chanced to visit Raba's academy (and) thought to mention it (Hanukkah) in (the benediction) 'he will rebuild Jerusalem'. Said R. Shesheth to them (the scholars). It is as the Prayer: Just as (it is inserted in) the Prayer in the (benediction of) 'Thanks,' so (is it inserted in) grace after meals in the (benediction of) "Thanks".<sup>28</sup>

TEFILLAH

In this portion of the Gem<sup>a</sup>ra, we discover the insertion of a special Ch<sup>u</sup>anukkah prayer in the second benediction of grace and in the eighteenth benediction of the Amidah. This prayer, the first step in the formulation of the Al Ha-nissim,<sup>29</sup> receives sanction, but its wording is not transmitted. We learn, too, that this prayer was also inserted in the abbreviated Sabbath Amida.<sup>30</sup>

With regard to Sabbath worship we learn:

On Chanukkah (we recite the Torah portion) "The Princes" and one concludes with the "Lights of

Zechariah;" and if two Sabbaths occur (during the Chanukkah period), on the first (one concludes with) the "Lamps of Zechariah" and on the second with the "Lamps of Solomon."<sup>31</sup>

The selection of 1 Kings 7 -- the "Lamps of Solomon" -- which describes the building of the Lord's House is noteworthy in its association with the holiday because of its description of the work involved. The emphasis of the Talmudic reference to lights, however, indicates that the Haftorah was selected for two purposes: first, the importance of the building, and, consequently, the dedication could be traced back to Solomon; second, and perhaps of greater significance at this time, the intimate relationship of lamps -- mentioned in 1 Kings 7:49 -- and the Temple could be demonstrated. Lamps, or lights, were, then, nothing unusual or novel in the celebration of dedication.

The Haftorah for the first Sabbath which happens to fall on Chanukkah contains several interesting points which suggest meaningful associations. The opening sentences are:

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of thee; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee.<sup>32</sup>

Undoubtedly, these words were intended as a message of hope and encouragement for those who heard them. Yet, there is the strong possibility that these words were utilized, not only as a prediction for what the people living in Aramaic times

were to expect, but also to indicate that in past events these words were fulfilled -- at least, partially. For the implication that it is God who chooses to return and dwell in Jerusalem seems to be substantiated in the sentence:

And the Lord shall inherit Judah as His portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again.<sup>33</sup>

That God chooses and brings about His return, that it is He who is responsible for vanquishing the foe and restoring Jerusalem is strongly supported by the following verse taken from the prophetic section:

Then he answered and spoke unto me saying: "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."<sup>34</sup>

The intimation here is that what does come about is not a result of man or his battles; rather, God's intent and will brings things to pass. And these words, read on Chanukkah, can mean that God's residence in Jerusalem, the restoration of the city, and the dedication of the Temple are His work. He and no one else is responsible for the holiday.

Though this prophetic reading does lend itself easily to interesting interpretations, there can be little question that the primary and original reason for its choice was the mention of the candlestick.<sup>35</sup>

In recapitulating the strides made by the Amoraim, we discover that they were successful in extending the groundwork laid by their teachers, the Tannaim. The latter had groped with the problem of minimizing a dedication which

gave rise to the yearly celebration imposed by the Hasmoneans. They sought to relate the holiday to ancient precedent and, thus, give biblical sanction for Chanukkah. Their students, the Amoraim, provided precedent also. More than that, they proved from biblical texts that the eight day festival of lights was authorized.

## NOTES

1. Talmud Babli. Sabbath, 21a-21b.
2. ibid., 21b.
3. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. ibid.
6. ibid.
7. ibid., 22a.
8. ibid.
9. ibid., 22a-23a.
10. ibid., 23a.
11. ibid.
12. ibid.
13. ibid.
14. ibid., 23b.
15. ibid.
16. ibid., 21b.
17. Grossberg, Manasseh, Megillat Taanit. Lwow: 1903, p.26.
- 18a. Talmud Babli, op. cit., p.23a.
- 18b. Friedmann, Pesikat Rabbati. Viena: 1880. Ch. 5, p.18. My translation.
19. ibid.
20. ibid., Ch. 9, p.28.
21. ibid., Ch. 4, pp.12-13.
22. ibid., Ch. 3, p.7. My translation.
23. ibid., p.8. My translation.
24. ibid., p.9. My translation.

25. Numbers 7:54.
26. Friedman, op. cit., Ch.3, p.7.
27. Talmud Babli, Sabbath, p.23a.
28. ibid., p.24a.
29. Stein, S., "The Liturgy of Hanukkah and the First Two Books of Maccabees," in Journal of Jewish Studies. Vol. 5, No. 4, p.148.
30. Talmud Babli, op. cit., p.24b.
31. ibid., Megillah. 31a. My translation.
32. Zech. 2:14-15.
33. ibid. 2:16.
34. ibid. 4:6.
35. ibid. 4:2.



## Chapter Four: The Middle Ages

By the end of the Amoraic period, Chanukkah was firmly established as a religious festival. Originating as a result of the victory over the Seleucid House, the holiday had been entrenched within the framework of biblical authorization. The celebration, its duration, and its rite had been commanded by God.

The human achievements which were responsible for the inception of a yearly dedication had been minimized. The chief feature in the Hasmonean event was the miraculous work of God who was both zealous and jealous for His sanctuary. For, after all, this structure was more than a mere symbol of Jewish religious thought; it was the actual realization of God's immanence. His presence on earth was the reason for the dedications which were celebrated in the days of Moses and Solomon. And these celebrations were the biblical precedent for the more recent festival.

However, the rabbinic task was not confined to delineating proper canonical sanction for Chanukkah. The rituals associated with it required development and authorization consistent with a religious motif. This led to the specific rules governing the lighting of the lamps and the growth of a properly oriented liturgy.

The initial problems which the Pharisees had seen were the same difficulties which confronted their successors. The goal of providing religious meaning for the holiday --

unsuccessfully attempted by the Pharisees -- was realized through the efforts of the Tannaim and the Amoraim.

What the Middle Ages did with the holiday, whether these centuries proved <sup>ided</sup> a change in meaning or held fast to the lines set by the earlier scholars are considerations to be discussed in this chapter.

#### A. The Codes

Whereas the pertinent material for Chanukkah had been inserted almost incidentally in the earlier works of the Mishnah and the Gemara, the summaries of laws and regulations which were written later devote at least a chapter to the holiday.

Maimonides, in the Mishnah Torah, opens his discussion of Chanukkah by providing a brief review of the affair during the days of the second Temple. Relating the difficulties the Jews faced under the heavy rule of Antiochus' forces, Maimonides claims:

God was compassionate upon them and delivered and saved them from their hand. And the Hasmoneans, the High Priests, prevailed and killed them and delivered Israel from their hand, And they set up a king from the priests, and the kingdom returned to Israel for two hundred years until the second destruction.<sup>1</sup>

He continues his account by informing the reader of the date of the victory and the miracle of the cruse of oil;<sup>2</sup> he implies that it was the combination of the two factors -- the victory and the miracle -- that induced the sages to ordain eight days

of Chanukkah from the twenty-fifth of Kislev as "days of joy and thanksgiving and lights."<sup>3</sup>

Having provided the background of the holiday, Maimonides proceeds to list the practices -- most of which stem from the Talmud -- concerning the rites and the liturgy, the following is a resumé:

1. Where the lamps are to be placed.<sup>4</sup>
2. One is not allowed to mourn or fast during Chanukkah; this practice being similar to the one observed during Purim.<sup>5</sup>
3. One who is obliged to read the Megillah is also obliged to kindle the lights.<sup>6</sup>
4. The three benedictions for the lights, who says them and when.<sup>7</sup>
5. Each day the Hallel is recited and a blessing is made before the recitation.<sup>8</sup>
6. How the Hallel is divided and the proper timing of congregational response.<sup>9</sup>
7. How many lights are lit during Chanukkah. Here, Maimonides paraphrases the talmudic discussion on the same topic, but he does specifically mention that the custom in Spain was to kindle one light on the first night and to continue by adding one more light on each succeeding day.<sup>10</sup>
8. He repeats the talmudic material about the efficacy of two wicks and covering a dish over the oil.<sup>11</sup>
9. The time for kindling the lights is restricted to a half hour period, and if it goes out one cannot relight it.<sup>12</sup>
10. All wicks and oils are permitted.<sup>13</sup>
11. The particulars as to the proper placing of the lamp are given; it should be outside, on the left hand side of the door, and not more than ten cubits high. In times of danger, one could have it on a table inside.<sup>14</sup>

12. Only one who is obligated to light it makes the kindling valid. It is not valid if a fool, a minor, or a non-Jew light the lamp.<sup>15</sup>
13. One must not light it in one place and move the lamp to another place. One must light it in its place.<sup>16</sup>
14. One may light from one candle to another.<sup>17</sup>
15. If there are two doors on two different sides, one must place a lamp at each door.<sup>18</sup>
16. A guest in whose home lights are kindled for him does not need to kindle the light in the place where he is a guest. However, if no one does kindle any lamps for him at home, he must kindle the lamp where he is a guest, and he joins the household as a partner in the oil.<sup>19</sup>
17. The light of Chanukkah takes precedence over the sanctification of the day [the Friday night Kiddush].<sup>20</sup>
18. The light of the house takes precedence over the light [the Sabbath light] of Chanukkah.<sup>21</sup>

As one might have anticipated, the list which Maimonides recorded shows practically no deviation from a summary one, of his own accord, could draw up from the Talmudic sources. Yet, in reading Maimonides' code one notices an element which is suggested in the Talmudic section Megillah 14a; this one element is the intrusion of a comparison between Purim and Chanukkah whether for similarity or contrast. For in addition to the remark that one is not allowed to mourn or fast, a custom similar to the one observed on Purim,<sup>22</sup> Rambam mentions that the kindling of the lights, like the reading of the Megillah, is a rule supplied by the scribes<sup>23</sup> and that the reason Hallel is omitted on Purim is because the reading of the scroll constitutes the thanksgiving.<sup>24</sup>

Why both Chanukkah and Purim are suddenly found confronting each other is a problem <sup>which</sup> will be approached in the latter sections of this chapter.

Both the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch show little variation with the collection of laws found in the Mishnah Torah. The notable exceptions in the Tur are the following:

1. It opens with וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַשְּׂמִיטָה and repeats the first line of Megillat Taanit.<sup>25</sup>
2. It is permissible to work on Chanukkah though women shouldn't do so while the lights are being kindled.<sup>26</sup>
3. The light is lit at sunset and must last for a half hour. If more oil than is necessary to meet this requirement is used, one may extinguish it or make use of the light.<sup>27</sup>
4. One can kindle the lights in the house as long as people in the house are awake.<sup>28</sup>

The Tur also has several important additions which come under the category of prayer. These will be mentioned in the section dealing with the liturgy.

The only major difference in the Shulchan Aruch is the rule concerning the placing of the lamp; it must be placed above three handbreadths and below ten, though if one should place it above ten handbreadths it is still valid.<sup>29</sup> The importance of the material found in this code is the commentary inserted by Isserles. What he noted is of special interest in the addition of custom as well as in the transitions of prior practice. Some of these changes were:

1. It was customary to eat cheese on the holiday in memory of the milk Judith fed the enemy.<sup>30</sup>
2. One does not fast during Chanukkah even if one's mother or father dies.<sup>31</sup>
3. The custom is to light the light inside.<sup>32</sup>
4. One lights it in the synagogue between mincha and ma'ariv.<sup>33</sup>
5. Since the custom is to light the lamp inside, it is not necessary to kindle it after no one is in the street.<sup>34</sup>

Other than the minor changes reported in the Shulchan Aruch -- and these were still within the range of the intention of the earlier regulations -- there was no great transformation of or deviation from the procedures formulated by the scholars of the Talmudic era. This, of course, is to be expected; the codes were but the extracts of Talmudic halachoth. Nevertheless, the fact that it was necessary to organize the material pertinent to the Chanukkah celebration is positive testimony that the holiday and its rites -- as developed and interpreted by the rabbis -- were <sup>firmly</sup> ~~popular~~ <sup>fixed</sup> as part of accepted tradition.

#### B. The Midrash

The early years of the Middle Ages saw no great departure in the tenor of midrashic exposition of the holiday. The dedication of the Hasmoneans is supported as but one of the number that have been witnessed and are yet to appear, and the Pesikta Rabbati records the following number of dedications:

1. That of the creation of the world. (Gen. 2:1)<sup>35</sup>

2. The dedication in Moses' day. (Ex. 6:1)<sup>36</sup>
3. The dedication of the Temple. (Ps. 30:1)<sup>37</sup>
4. The dedication of the second Temple. (Ezra 6:17)<sup>38</sup>
5. The dedication of the wall. (Nehemiah 12:27)<sup>39</sup>
6. That of the Hasmoneans.<sup>40</sup>
7. The dedication of the world to come.<sup>41</sup>

With the <sup>event</sup> work of the Chanukkah in question, however, the Pesikta indicates God's active concern in a manner not heretofore mentioned:

What does "and it was completed" mean? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said "I must complete it."  
 What did the Holy One, blessed be He complete?  
 The dedication of the House of the Hasmoneans.<sup>42</sup>

Naturally, the lights are emphasized, and an interesting aspect of their importance is that they are of consequence in the world to come. Speaking of that world to come, the Midrash states:

For even here there are lights as it is written, "And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and light of the sun shall be sevenfold... (Is. 30:26)<sup>43</sup>

There is virtually nothing novel in the <sup>approach</sup> ~~fact~~ taken in the collected sermons. The biblical origins of the dedication and the significance of the lights are the main themes to which the rabbis addressed their words. However, there is one deviation which proves to be of some value for later generations; this is the utilization of scripture to show that what occurred

in the Hasmonean struggle was but fulfillment of prophecy. And this trend is given clearly when, in the repetition of the miraculous event of the oil, the Hasmoneans defeat the Greeks. "As it is said (Zech. 9:12), "And I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons O Javan."<sup>44</sup>

A transition in the contents of the Midrashim is a feature of the Middle Ages. For some reasons to be explained later, there is a development where the human personality is central in a story concerning the struggles between the Jews and the Greeks. The two basic stories from which others stem are "The Story of Judith" and "The Scroll of Antiochus."

"The Story of Judith," of which two versions are known, is based upon the longer earlier Apocryphal <sup>work "THE</sup> "Book of Judith". While the latter cannot be identified with any historical setting or period, the Midrashic work specifically relates to the holiday of Chanukkah. The following is a summary of the lengthier story:

During the days of Holofunes, King of Greece, a report was given him that the people of Israel refused to practice his laws. He, therefore, prepared to do battle with the Jews and to capture Jerusalem. However, one king of the countries which Holofunes had under control forewarned him because the God of Gods is with Israel. Holofunes punished this king by delivering him to the gateway of Jerusalem. Holofunes could not conceive of any power capable of delivering an object from his hands.

The Jews, fearing for their lives, went to the sanctuary of God and prayed for deliverance. All the people protested to Uzzayahu, the Nasi, for they preferred to die by the sword, immediately, rather than die of thirst in the besieged city. Having listened to their complaints, Uzzayahu asked them to wait for five days during which period God may have relented; if this was of no avail, they were to surrender to Holofunes.



The widow Judith, daughter of B'ari, aware of what has happened, chastized the priests for setting a limit in which God was to show His mercy. She prayed for them and asked God to fulfill the plan which she devised. She then took her handmaid and was given permission to enter the enemy camp after she convinced the guards that she sought the king because she knew that he would be victorious in his fight against the Jews.

The king, smitten by her beauty, allowed her to stay. Then, one night when he had imbibed excessively, Judith drew a sword and severed his head. She and her handmaid returned to Jerusalem where she spurred the people to go out and defeat the enemy.<sup>45</sup>

The abbreviated version confines itself to the immediate activities of the heroine and omits personalities and events found in the other word. The brevity, however, is not the only feature which distinguishes the two stories: the shorter one identifies the heroine only as a "young" woman from the daughters of the prophets";<sup>46</sup> the king is given no name; in fact, no person, appearing in the tale, is specifically identified.

In both accounts, there is the acknowledgment that the God of Israel is the source from whom all things, including victory or defeat, come. In the first, a few quotations manifest the idea:

Cease, O king, from the God of the world, the God of Israel, the God of Gods, the Lord is mighty in battle, ruling the world with His might; His eyes look upon the nations who rebel to fight with His people...<sup>47</sup>

And now, O Lord our God, deliver us, we beseech Thee, from his hand; pour Thy wrath on the nations who do not know Thee and on those kingdoms which

do not call upon Thy name, for Thou wilt not forsake those who trust in Thy name... 48

But God, Father of mercy, pity Thy people and Thine inheritance and do not deliver the children of Thy covenant into the hands of the people who do not know Thee... 49

Hand in hand with the concept of God as the source of aid, is the certainty that Israel's suffering is a result of ~~the~~ ~~iniquity~~ of its iniquity:

We have sinned with our fathers, we have been iniquitous, we have committed evil to God... 50

And now let us go and return to the Lord, for He is patient, and we shall ask forgiveness and atonement from Him for this iniquity... 51

Naturally, the second and smaller account of the activity of Judith cannot begin to have as many quotations the other provides; yet, we do find the same motif of God as the source of help:

Perhaps the Holy One, blessed be He, will make me a sign and a wonder that I may slay this unbeliever so that Israel may be saved through me. 52

Blessed be the Lord who has delivered him into your hands and has saved you from his hand... 53

A highly significant aspect of the stories is the stress of piety: Judith made a special room in the upper chamber of her house so that <sup>s</sup>he would have a place to pray; 54 she prays three times a day; 55 in both accounts, she practices the ritual bath; 56 she prays prior to killing the king, 57 and after returning to Jerusalem 58 as well as on other occasions.

The medieval pseudo<sup>e</sup>apigraphic work, the Scroll of Antiochus, |

appears both in Hebrew and in Aramaic. In the latter case, the work is known as Megillat Javanit<sup>ye</sup>. Resembling the account of the Hasmonean struggle recorded in the Apocryphal books, the Maccabees, it varies sufficiently so that correspondence to the original sources do not appear to have been important concerns. A brief summary provides the following content:

In the twenty-third year of Antiochus' reign, he decided to make the Jews desist from their covenant with God by forcing them to break the Sabbath, new moon, and circumcision. His ire had been aroused because they persisted in following their customs rather than his. Because of this, he sent Nicanor against Jerusalem where there was a great slaughter of Jews and when the Greeks subsequently built a high place in the sanctuary. On this altar they slaughtered pigs.

Jochanan the son of Mattathias, the High priest, became incensed when he heard about the evil which had been wrought, and he devised a plan to take vengeance on Nicanor. Jochanan appeared before the latter as if he sought to be his ally. Nicanor asked the priest to slaughter a pig on the high place, to dress in the royal clothes of the Seleucid government, and to ride on one of the king's horses. Jochanan asked for privacy from others, and when he and Nicanor were left alone he killed Antiochus' general. This action spurred the priest to do combat with and slay thousands of his foes.

Antiochus then sent Bagris against Jerusalem, and there he killed many Jews and issued a decree against observing the Sabbath, new moon, and circumcision. But the Jews remained faithful; two parents were killed before their son for having circumcised him; a woman, having circumcised her son, hurled her son and herself to death from the walls of Jerusalem as an act of defiance; a thousand men and women perished in a cave rather than break the Sabbath.

Then the five sons of Mattathias, Jochanan and his brothers, fought and drove the enemy out. Bagris fled by ship and reported to Antiochus and requested that all the soldiers in the provinces be gathered and elephants in armour be sent so that another attack might be made against Jerusalem.

When the brothers Judah, Simon, Jochanan, Jonathan and Eliezer heard about the reinforcements, they decreed a fast and a period of prayers to God. They then went out to fight, but in slaying their thousands, their brother Judah perished.

Mattathias then joined his sons, and they were victorious. They then proceeded to go to the sanctuary, repaired it, and found one cruse of oil from which a miraculous burning of eight days ensued. Therefore, the Hasmoneans proclaimed eight festive days during which lights were to be kindled. It was also forbidden to fast and lament during those days.<sup>59</sup>

Similar to the stories of Judith, this scroll accents God as the help of the people:

My, God, and God of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, do not deliver me into the hand of this uncircumcised one for if he slays me... <sup>60</sup>

... for they trusted in the Lord, the God of the heavens.<sup>61</sup>

And God of the heavens delivered all the mighty ones of the nations in their hand.<sup>62</sup>

And like the characters in "The Story of Judith", the heroic personalities in "The Scroll of Antiochus" often pray to God.

While we are interested in the fact that there are several anachronisms in the medieval report of the Hasmonean struggle -- for example, the elevation of Jochanan as the leader in the fight, the death of Judah prior to the dedication -- the reason for the appearance of these popular tales during the Middle Ages is of extreme pertinence. The appearance of Apocryphal material in poetry, Midrash, Yasippon and other Hebraic works from the eighth century on is a subject which requires more effort than has as yet been devoted to it.<sup>63</sup>

However, though we may not be assured of certitude, the motifs supplied by the literature previously discussed may help answer why these works were written and why the material, and "The Story of Judith" in particular, was based upon the Jewish struggle with the Greeks.

From the portrayal of heroic figures, it appears reasonable to suspect that these stories were developed during some period when Jewish life was threatened. The desire for security gave rise to the hope that some individuals would lead the Jews over the troublesome barriers. Yet, the leaders would emanate only from an orientation in consonance with Jewish teachings. Judith was a pious, God-fearing woman; the Hasmoneans put their confidence in the Lord. In fact, the hope of the Jews lay in their loyalty to God, and this could be demonstrated by the observance of those practices which He had commanded.

What had occurred so that these works had become necessary? Certainly, some distressing situation threatening the security of Judaism prompted literary efforts along the order indicated. And while each era can provide sufficient occasions which would serve as springboards for the rise of heroic religious tales, there is a strong possibility that the dissolution of the Sassanian society when all life and institutions were threatened was the specific goad.

Nevertheless, there had to be some religious celebration around which didactic stories could be based. Among the possibilities which offered an opportunity to demonstrate

heroism and martyrdom <sup>as</sup> ~~so~~ well as right religious observance were the popular holidays of Purim and Chanukkah. Both were similar in the fact that they depicted a Jewish victory over forces which attempted to stifle them. However, Purim had its literature; as part of the canon, its story was familiar to the people. This was not the case with Chanukkah.

The events of the holiday of Dedication were not too well known by the Jews. The fact that they even remembered that at least one dedication came as a result of a conflict was not due to any literature which had been fully accepted by Judaism. Yet, two things may have contributed to the knowledge that the Jews <sup>had</sup> <sub>^</sub> about the Chanukkah of the Hasmoneans: the first was the Talmudic reference in answer to \_\_\_\_\_; the other is the canonical acceptance of the books of Maccabees by the Church. The latter's preservation of books at least made the records available to those who would pursue them.

Megillat Antiochus evinces a lack of historic accuracy but retains a certain familiarity with the events. Regardless of the fact that this pseud<sup>c</sup>igraphic work can "ultimately be traced back to Maccabees", <sup>64</sup> there can be little question that its contents were slanted toward instruction rather than toward the transmission of accurate detail.

At least the account in Megillat Antiochus does reflect actual events which were associated with a Chanukkah. But what could have prompted the tie of "The Story of Judith" with this celebration? The fact that the original Apocryphal

work could not be pinpointed historically with any accuracy did not serve as a deterrant for later utility. If heroic figures, right religion, and proper observance were the important factors, what better story could serve <sup>AS A</sup> ~~and~~ model than "The Book of Judith" of which it was written:

The story is clearly intended for edification, to encourage the people in some time of trial, and to point out the true way to deliverance by showing that Israel's troubles are due to sin, that salvation comes through trust in God and obedience to Him, and that God uses the weak things to confound the strong. But obedience to God, which is righteousness, consists in the strict observance of the law.<sup>65</sup>

All that was required to set this within the framework of Chanukkah was to add a few specifics.

That both Purim and Chanukkah were equated by the scholars of the medieval period can be accounted by the purpose they served. Both were popular celebrations which rejoiced over the victory of the right religion against stronger, idolatrous foes. Both held out the promise that Jewish loyalty would prevail. Each indicated the probability that some person -- a pious Jew -- would initiate a drive which would ultimately lead to victory and security. But, whereas Purim had its literature, Chanukkah had none. The task, successfully met, was to create a message of religious hope.

The other collections of midrashim based on Chanukkah share the same elements of heroic personalities, martyrdom, and piety. Indeed, there is much repetition and paraphrasing of material contained in both Megillat Antiochus and "The Story of Judith": Jochanan ben Mattathias killed Nicanor;<sup>66</sup>





God worked a great salvation.<sup>77</sup>

The Lights of Chanukkah are given particular significance in explaining God's miracle. The story which makes this manifest opens when a convert from Judaism tells the Greeks:

They have one religious commandment for which if they do not perform it they will perish from the earth, and this is the kindling of the light of the sanctuary; as it is written, "to burn an everlasting light," and concerning it it is written, "Give a portion for seven and also for eight." Give a portion for seven -- as long as there is one who has a portion in the seven lights which shine always in the Temple and also in the eight days of the Festival, no creature can put an end to them.

They arose and profaned all the oil in the Temple, and only one cruse of oil remained for they did not know that it lay under the altar. And a miracle was wrought, and from that small cruse they lit for eight days. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, arose and set for them eight days of Chanukkah which was not an appointed season until such time. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "You thought to uproot the seven lights and the eight days and seven Hasmoneans who destroy you from the world. You said that whoever would mention my name would be pierced by the sword; I set praise for my name for the eight days of Chanukkah."<sup>78</sup>

In this account both the lights and the eight days are God's will.

God as the source of aid while the human being is but the agent of His works is stressed in these later midrashim:

I am confident that the Holy One will perform a miracle through us.<sup>79</sup>

... and if you do not perform a miracle through us, they will say, "he has no counsel"...<sup>80</sup>

Let me go out, perhaps God will perform a miracle through me.<sup>81</sup>

Chanukkah, in the middle ages, was of sufficient religious significance that it could serve as a model from which didactic tales could be drawn. The Chanukkah of the Hasmoneans was possible because of the loyalty and piety of the people of Israel. The problems which other generations of Jews encountered could be solved by the same proclivity to religious institutions that their ancestors had shown.

### C. The Liturgy

Prior to the medieval centuries, we know that there were accepted practices affiliated with worship during Chanukkah. There were benedictions to be said upon lighting the lamps, the recitation of Hallel, an insertion for both the Amida and the benediction after a meal, the Torah portions for one or both Sabbaths falling within the holiday, and appropriate Haftorahs. Excepting the first benediction and the <sup>biblical selections</sup> ~~Torah readings~~ — ~~whether from the Five Books or otherwise~~ — the exact wording or ritual had not yet been determined.

Concerning the recitation of the Hallel, the Tractate Soferim prescribes the following practice:

And they complete the Hallel all eight days of Chanukkah. In the first three parts one does not answer, and it is not necessary to speak or greet; in the latter two they greet because of fear and because of honor. And these are the first three; "When Israel went forth," "I love". The last two are, "O praise ye the Lord," "O give thanks unto the Lord..." "And it is necessary to make a benediction and to recite it with pleasantness. 83

*Melody.*

The procedure for how the recitation of ~~how~~ the Hallel is broken and when the people respond with "Hallelujah" are also included in this passage and subsequently supported by Maimonides.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding the benedictions for the lights Mase<sup>khet</sup>chat Soferim states:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, ~~how~~ hast sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to kindle the lamp of Chanukkah." And he recites and says, "These lights we kindle because of the salvations, miracles, and the wonders which Thou hast done for our fathers through Thy holy priests, and throughout the eight days of Chanukkah. These lights are holy, and we have permission to use them only in order to give thanks to Thy name because of Thy wonders, Thy miracles, and Thy salvations." And he says, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who hast sustained us," and he says, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who has done miracles..."<sup>84</sup>

Other than the recitation which follows the first blessing, the passages do not give us a full formulation of the benedictions. The first had been set out for us in Sabbath 23a. It does specifically refer to the other two, and these are first encountered in their traditional form in the Siddur of Rav Amram.<sup>85</sup> Both the Mishnah Torah and the Tur state the benedictions at length, but the latter code changes the practice given in Tractate Soferim so that the recitation "These lights" comes after the benedictions are said.<sup>86</sup>

The Al ha-nissim insertion mentioned in Sabbath 24a is first quoted in its shortest form in Mase<sup>khet</sup>chat Soferim.<sup>87</sup> As given there, the prayer reads:

And according to the miracles of wonders and salvations of Thy priests which Thou hast wrought in the days of Mattathias, the son of Jochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, do miracles and wonders also with us O Lord our God. And we shall give thanks to Thy name forever; blessed art Thou O good Lord.<sup>88</sup>

The first full source for the Al ha-nissim prayer is, again, the Siddur of Rav Amram.<sup>89</sup> And in regard to this insertion, the Shulchan Aruch reports that if one has forgotten it in the benediction after a meal when he come to MF 72 he says, "May the All Merciful do miracles and wonders just as Thou has done for our fathers in this time in the days of Mattathias."<sup>90</sup>

An interesting position taken in relation to the development of the liturgy is S. Stein's contention that the later prayers indicate an acquaintance with the original sources. He finds the prototypes of the third blessing for Chanukkah in II Maccabees 8:27;<sup>91</sup> the fact that the Al ha-Nissim insertion concludes with the purification of the sanctuary, with the kindling of the lights in it, and with the ordinance of the eight days of Chanukkah in order to thank and praise God's name is, in <sup>Dr.</sup> ~~Mr.~~ Stein's opinion, an almost exact quotation of I Maccabees 4:37, 43, 50 and 59...<sup>92</sup>

Stein also notes that there has been a shift in the theological position of the material concerning the holiday:

In the books of Maccabees, especially in the first, but also in the second, Mattathias and his sons fight with unfailing courage, one might say, in the certainty of God's help: in the Gemara they hardly act at all. Theologically, our Al ha-Nissim insertion

stands in the middle between the two. The heroes are not mentioned individually, but covered by the general introduction bime mattitkyahu... 93

The fact that he finds this shift helps maintain our thought that the need for some hero was conditioned by events that threatened Jewish life. That these figures could be found in the didactic stories stemming from the Chanukkah celebration is surely a positive sign of how important this occasion had become in the religious thought of the people.

The discussion of liturgy would <sup>Must include</sup> ~~not be complete without~~ some mention of the hymn Ma'oz Tsur. An acrostic which has the signature of Mordecai, it seems to have been written some time in the thirteenth century.<sup>94</sup> While its contents are not germane to the question of an emphasis on the human personality -- the hymn extols God -- it is interesting in that it alludes to biblical passages.<sup>95</sup>

The midrashic work Megillat Antiochus became part of the liturgy of the Italian synagogue in the 13th century; on the holiday it was read in public.<sup>96</sup>

#### D. Customs

The picture of Chanukkah during the middle ages would not be complete without mentioning some of the traditions which were developed in celebrating the holiday. The Jewish tradition of matching festivity with gastronomic joys, thus placating both Godly gifts of body and soul, was not minimized. While cheese and milk predominated, garlic and a type of

oriental stew were encouraged even if the latter items were restricted to the first day.<sup>97</sup>

Singing was also encouraged. In fact, the Jews in Venice observed the quaint practice of embarking on gondolas, rowing through their districts, and greeting each illuminated house with a benediction and a merry Hebrew chorus.<sup>98</sup> During this period, spirited hymns and table songs were specially written for the occasion.<sup>99</sup>

While it was customary to discourage house to house begging, on Chanukkah the poor were allowed to collect doles from every household.<sup>100</sup> This round about method of attaining gifts was matched by the direct practice of a present for the teacher as well as the exchange of gifts between the father of a betrothed maiden and the bridegroom elect.<sup>101</sup>

Games were also a popular custom during these days. Riddles, acrostics, arithmetic puzzles, and gematrias were the usual outlet for the people.<sup>102</sup> However, the fifteenth century found cards invading the home, and this form of amusement superseded all others.<sup>103</sup> The use of the dreidl, practiced during the medieval period, was a custom which was known to the Greeks and Romans.<sup>104</sup>

The commercial aspects of the holiday were not neglected. Goldsmiths applied their skills to the art of the construction of ornate Chanukkah lamps.<sup>105</sup> Beside the usual Hebraic emblems one might expect to see on the lamps, there were those decorated with classical mythological emblems -- one

was adorned with a Medusa head.<sup>106</sup><sup>7</sup>

Obviously, Chanukkah in the middle ages was a popular holiday. The expansion of customs associated with the holiday attest to the significance of the celebration in the lives of the Jews. The specific formulation of prayers, the right religion and the right observances, themes in the midrashim about the dedication, manifest the importance of Chanukkah as a religious holiday.

## NOTES

1. Maimonides, Mishnah Torah. New York: Feldheim, 1953. Book 3, p. 370.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. ibid.
6. ibid.
7. ibid., p. 371.
8. ibid.
9. ibid., p. 372-373.
10. ibid., p. 374.
11. ibid.
12. ibid.
13. ibid.
14. ibid., p. 375.
15. ibid.
16. ibid.
17. ibid.
18. ibid.
19. ibid., p. 376.
20. ibid.
21. ibid.
22. See Note 2, p. 44.
23. Maimonides, op. cit., p. 370.
24. ibid., p. 371.



25. Tur. Or<sup>A</sup>ch Chayim. Warsaw: Ergebrand, 1882. p.361a.
26. ibid.
27. ibid., p.362b.
28. ibid., p.363a.
29. Karo, Joseph. Shulchan Aruch. Or<sup>A</sup>ch Chayim. Lemberg: 1876. p.184b.
30. ibid., p.184a.
31. ibid.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.
34. ibid., p.185b.
35. Friedmann, Pesikta Rabbati. Vienna: Kaiser, 1880. p.7.
36. ibid.
37. ibid.
38. ibid.
39. ibid.
40. ibid.
41. ibid.
42. ibid., p.24.
43. ibid., p.7.
44. ibid., p.4.
45. Adolph <sup>id.</sup>Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrash. Leipzig: Nies, 1853. Vol. 2, pp.12-22.
46. ibid., Vol. 1, p.130.
47. ibid., Vol. 2, p.12. My translation.
48. ibid., p.13. My translation.
49. ibid., p.14. My translation.

50. ibid. My translation.
51. ibid., p.15. My translation.
52. ibid., Vol. 1, p.130. My translation.
53. ibid., p.131. My translation.
54. ibid., Vol. 2, p.15.
55. ibid., p.18.
56. ibid., p.18 and Vol. 1, p.130.
57. ibid., Vol. 2, p.19.
58. ibid., p.20.
59. Eisenstein, J. D., Ozar Midrashim. New York: Eisenstein, 1915. pp.185-189. Both the Hebrew and Aramaic versions appear on these pages.
60. ibid., p.186. My translation.
61. ibid., p.187. My translation.
62. ibid., p.188. My translation.
63. Stein, S., "The Liturgy of Hanukkah and the First Two Books of Maccabees." Vol. 5, No.3. Journal of Jewish Studies. 1954. p.103.
64. ibid., p.101.
65. Charles, R.H., The Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha of the Old Testament. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon, 1901. p.247.
66. Jellinek, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp.137-138.
67. ibid., p. 139.
68. ibid.
69. Eisenstein, op. cit., p.190.
70. ibid., pp.189-190.
71. ibid., p.189.
72. ibid.
73. ibid.

74. An interesting aspect of the mention of the *ius primae noctis* is that Rashi, in commenting on the talmudic words "since they were also concerned in the miracle" (Sabbath 23a) specifically relates that the women were subject to this practice. It is possible that "The Story of Judith" became associated with the holiday as a more exalted version of how women were involved.
75. ibid., p. 190.
76. ibid., p. 189.
77. ibid.
78. ibid., p. 190.
79. Jellinek, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 134-135. My translation.
80. ibid., p. 135. My translation.
81. ibid.
82. ibid., p. 133.
83. Higger, Michael ed, Masekheth Soferim. New York: Ginsburg, 1937, p. 347. My translation.
84. Maimonides, op. cit., pp. 372-373.
85. Higger, op. cit., pp. 343-344. My translation.
86. Stein, op. cit., Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 149.
87. Tur, op. cit., p. 364b.
88. Stein, op. cit., Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 149.
89. Higger, op. cit., p. 34b. My translation.
90. Stein, op. cit., Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 151.
91. Karo, op. cit., p. 190a. My translation.
92. Stein, op. cit., Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 149.
93. ibid., p. 155.
94. ibid., p. 150.
95. Hertz, Joseph H. ed., Daily Prayer Book. Revised edition. New York: Bloch, 1952. p. 950.

96. Baer, Isaac ed., Abodath Israel. Rodelheim: Lehberger, 1868. p. 440. The footnotes explain the allusions to biblical quotations.
97. "Megillat Antiochus," Jewish Encyclopedia. New York: Funk & Wagnall, 1906. Vol. II, p. 638.
98. Abrahams, Israel, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages. London: Goldstone, 1922. p. 150.
99. ibid., p. 146.
100. ibid., p. 140.
101. ibid., p. 151.
102. ibid.
103. ibid., p. 152.
104. ibid., p. 153.
105. ibid., p. 154.
106. ibid., p. 147.
107. ibid., p. 148. For a fuller treatment of the development of the Chanukkah lamp, one should read Dr. Franz Landsberger's study in the Hebrew Union College Annual Vol. XXV, 1954.

## Chapter Five: Chanukkah in Review

The faith of the father, transmitted to the Maccabees, instilled in them the needed fervor in their hatred of wickedness. Unity of God, care for fellow men, social justice, personal integrity -- this was the covenant and the law which they learned from Mattathias, their faith by which they wanted to live and which became the basis for their piety.<sup>1</sup>

The preceding words, taken from a sermon, would be strange indeed to the teachers who, from the inception of Chanukkah through the middle ages, tried to give the holiday a particular meaning in keeping with rabbinic thought. They would have been hard pressed to recognize who the Maccabees were; their literature knew the family by the surname, Hasmonai. Yet, should they have been able to identify the group to which the speaker referred, the glowing description would have promoted great confusion. That the Maccabees were such paragons of virtue was a thought which could create open-mouthed ~~incredulity~~ <sup>incredulity</sup> ~~incredulity~~ <sup>incredulity</sup> among our rabbinic ~~ancestors~~ <sup>ancestors</sup> ~~forebearers~~.

As we have seen, the Pharisees had found themselves in the uncomfortable position of trying to justify a holiday imposed by their enemy, the Sadducean Hasmoneans. The Jewish populace had accepted the holiday of Chanukkah as an annual eight day festival in celebration of their victory, under Hasmonean leadership, over the Sele<sup>u</sup>uids and the consequent dedication of the Temple. How to verify the continuance of this festival on the basis of tradition while eradication<sup>00</sup> the

importance of the Hasmoneans in instituting the celebration was the task the Pharisees had taken upon themselves.

II Maccabees, a Pharisaic endeavor, indicates how these teachers attempted to achieve their purpose. Casting the human effort during the conflict within the framework God's handiwork, the holiday ~~was~~ purported to be a kind of second celebration of Tabernacles; the fire ritual which was associated with the holiday was but symbolic of the purification by fire which could be related back to the days of both Solomon and Moses.

It is Josephus who provided proof that the Pharisaic plan failed. He recorded that there was an eight day festival initiated by Judah and celebrated by some sort of fire rite. The historian reported the holiday as a festival of lights and guessed it was given this name because of the unexpected liberty which was achieved.

When the Tannaim entered the picture, they inherited the problem of their predecessors; however, there was one concession they had to make, and this was the acceptance of the motif which had been given to the occasion by the Hasmoneans. They took the theme of dedication and expounded on the biblical precedent, the dedication of the altar in Moses' time, thus giving the holiday a biblical casting.

These scholars could not disassociate the ritual of the lights with the events in the Hasmonean conflict. Nevertheless, in keeping with the example of their teachers, they minimized

the importance of the human element by highlighting a story concerning a miraculous burning of the lights for eight days. By emphasizing God's intervention and the biblical antecedents of a dedication, the Tannaim hoped to establish a sanctioned religious Chanukkah.

The Amoraim continued the earlier efforts of the Tannaim. They helped establish and create regulations guiding the correct procedure in dealing with the lights. But the chief accomplishment of the Amoraic period in dealing the problem of proper authorization of Chanukkah, was the biblical sanction of the holiday. It is true that this could not be <sup>done</sup> directly but the rabbinic right in establishing a yearly eight day festival could be upheld by confirming the rabbinic privilege to do so. The words "according to the law which they shall teach thee," taken from Deut. 17:11 were sufficient in providing the basis for authority.

The labors of the Tannaim and Amoraim reached fruition. They had successfully developed the rabbinic celebration of Chanukkah with its customs and liturgy. The Hasmoneans were rarely referred to except in connection with the event wherein God had wrought the miracle of the lights -- and here they were but the Lord's agents.

The Middle Ages saw no remarkable change. For the most part, the customs associated with the holiday and its liturgy had already been set. There were a few changes, of course. But nothing developed which was out of keeping with the pattern produced by the earlier scholars.

The fact that midrashic tales paying attention to human personalities including the Hasmoneans became current during these ages did not alter the fact that the holiday was regarded as a God-centered one. The vicissitudes of Jewish experience gave rise to the hope for human leaders who would help them out of distress; the stories provided such a hope. There would be men and women through whom God would act in answering the Jewish plea for aid. But the individuals, agents of the Lord, would be those who engaged in the correct religious practices. These midrashim, then, were in keeping with the tenor of the holiday. The themes of God's handiwork, human agency and correct religious practice were all to be found within the earlier rabbinic framework.

History, however, is noted for its ironic turns. And it provides such a touch in the development of Chanukkah. Gone is the miracle of the burning of the oil:

But the true miracle was the triumph of a tiny people's determination to survive although surrounded on all sides by unfriendly foes.<sup>2</sup>

God as actor in human affairs is, likewise, gone. Man is the answer:

The Maccabees have a lesson for us. No one was confronted with a task which, on the face of it, seemed so foredoomed to failure. Yet the Maccabees persevered. They had faith in their cause.<sup>3</sup>

The holiday has changed in many respects. Kindling the lights, a duty of adults, is now usually delegated to the children.



The hero is not God, but the Maccabees. The miracle of the lights is a tale primarily told to amaze the child. Chanukkah, dedication, recalls the victory of the Jews over their Greco-Syrian rivals; most people could not have forgotten the earlier dedications -- it is doubtful that they have ever been taught about them.

What the rabbis sought to do has been undone. They would be shocked to discover that the Chanukkah we celebrate commemorates the Maccabees and their victory -- the very things that they tried to obliterate.

But the change in meaning for the modern Jew is not beyond comprehension. The reason for the present view of the holiday can be found in these words:

In the last decades, the resurgence of Jewish self-consciousness and, in a more pronounced way, the Jewish national idea led to an added meaning of the festival and to various functions in Jewish Organizations with a purpose of serving the idea of the festival... 4

Obviously, the rise of nationalism spurred the hopes of Jews. And just as other peoples had shattered the bonds of oppression so could they. The Italians had Garibaldi who led them to liberty, the Americans had their Washington. The Jews, however, had yet to find that leader who would restore them to national unity. They needed someone who, like the Maccabees, would free the people from adversaries who had deprived them of both land and rights.

## NOTES

1. Smoller, Rabbi Phineas. "The Maccabean Contribution," A Set of Holiday Sermons. Cincinnati: Commission on Public Information About Jews and Judaism, 1942.
2. Zuckerman, Rabbi Arthur. "The Maccabees and We," A Set of Holiday Sermons, op. cit., 1943.
3. Regner, Rabbi Sidney L. "Accomplishing Miracles," A Set of Holiday Sermons, op. cit., 1943.
4. Joseph, M., "Chanukka," Judisches Lexikon. Berlin: 1927. Vol. I, p.1328. /

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abodath Israel, Isaac Baer, editor. Rodelheim: Lehberger, 1868. /
- Abrahams, Israel. Jewish Life in the Middle Ages. London: Goldstone, 1932.
- Bet ha-Midrash, Adolph Jellinek, editor. Vols. 1 and 2. Leipzig: Nies, 1853.
- Bickerman, Elias. The Maccabees. New York: Schocken Books, 1947.
- Charles, R. H. The Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha of the Old Testament. Vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901.
- Daily Prayer Book, Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, editor. Revised Ed. New York: Bloch, 1952.
- The Holy Scriptures, Vols. 1 and 2. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955.
- Jewish Encyclopedia. New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906. Vols. I, 8, and 11.
- Joseph, M. "Chanukkah", Jüdisches Lexikon, Vol. 1. Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1927. /
- Lichtenstein, Hans. "Megillat Taanit," Hebrew Union College Annual. Philadelphia, 1932. Vol. VIII-IX. //
- Maseketh Soferim, ed. Michael Higger. New York: Ginsburg, 1937.
- Megillat Taanit, ed. Menasseh Grossberg. Lwow: A. Salat, 1903.
- Mishnah, Herbert Danby, editor. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Mishneh Torah, New York: Feldheim, 1953.
- Morgenstern, Julian. "The Chanukkah Festival and the Calendar of Ancient Israel," Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XX, 1947.
- Ozar Midrashim, ed. J. D. Eisenstein. New York: Eisenstein, 1915.
- Pesikta de Rav Kahana, ed. Solomon Buber. New York: OM Publishing Co., 1949. /
- Pesikta Rabbati. ed., M. Friedmann. Vienna: Joseph Kaiser, 1880. /

- Rankin, Rev. O. S. The Origins of the Festival of Hanukkah.  
Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930.
- Regner, Sidney L. "Accomplishing Miracles," A Set of Holiday Sermons. Cincinnati: Commission on Public Information About Judaism, 1947.
- Reinach, Solomon. Orpheus. New York: Liveright Inc., 1930.
- Schauss, Hayyim. The Jewish Festivals. Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1938.
- Shulchan Aruch. Lemberg: A. J. Madfes, 1876.
- Smoller, Phineas. "The Maccabean Contribution," A Set of Holiday Sermons. Cincinnati: Commission on Public Information About Judaism, 1942.
- Stein, S. "The Liturgy of Hanukkah and the First Two Books of Maccabees," Journal of Jewish Studies. Vol. 5, Nos. 3 and 4., 1954.
- Talmud Babli. Wilna: Ross, 1908.
- Tur. Warsaw: Ergebrand, 1882.
- The Works of Flavius Josephus. ed. William Whiston. New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1855.
- Zeitlin, Solomon. "Hanukkah," Jewish Quarterly Review. Vol. 29, 1938-1939.
- Megillat Taanit. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922.
- Zuckerman, Arthur. "The Maccabees and We," A Set of Holiday Sermons. Cincinnati: Commission on Public Information about Judaism, 1943.