

# Judah and the (More) Real Story of Hanukah

## PART 1—Meeting Judah

Long ago in the times of the bible, when the Temple still stood in Jerusalem, in a small town called Modi'in, there lived a boy named Judah. Judah loved the land Israel and the stories of the Jewish people more than anything else. Every chance he got he would spend his days wandering through the hills and valleys around Modi'in, searching out the places he heard about in the Torah.

Judah's father was not always happy that Judah spent so much time exploring the land around Modi'in. He worried that Judah would get lost in one of the many caves among the hills, or not be able to find his way home one night and have to sleep out in the harsh landscape of the valleys. But Judah was a smart and responsible boy, so his father did not scold him when Judah told him, "No!"

"Judah, do not take the sheep so far into the hills where they could get lost in the caves," said Father.

"No!" said Judah. "I know every cave there is around here. There is no where the sheep could go that I could not find them."

"Judah, do not wander so far with your friends before dark. You could get lost among the valleys and have to stay outside over night with no water," Father would say.

"No!" said Judah. "My friends and I have mapped every stone in these valleys. We know where all the tiny streams are. We could find water in the dark, even if the new moon was in the sky!"

But one time that Judah never said, "No!" was when it was time to go to Jerusalem to visit the Temple where the High Priests served. Judah loved going to the Temple even more he loved exploring the land.

He loved to look at the High Priests in their colorful robes and magnificent jewelry. He loved to wander through the crowds at the Temple and listen to the Jews recite their prayers of thanks to God.

Sukkot was Judah's favorite time of year. His family and all the families of Modi'in and the surrounding towns would gather the fruits of their harvests and carry the most perfect examples of each crop to the Temple in Jerusalem. For eight days, Jews from all over the land would gather around the Temple rejoicing and giving thanks to God for their bountiful harvest. It was an exciting time and Judah got to see and hear many new and fascinating things as he moved among all the people there.

One year, however, the buzz around the Temple was not as joyous as it usually was. Judah heard people talking about terrible arguments which had been taking place between the High Priests of the Temple. Judah was surprised to hear this, because the job of the High Priest was always passed down from father to son. Judah knew that sometimes he argued with his father and brothers, but the arguments were never as bad as these sounded.

The more he walked through the crowds, the more he heard about what had been happening in the Holy Temple. First, one of the brothers from the family of the High Priests had taken the position from his older brother. Then, other Jewish men from outside the family of the High Priests said they wanted to be in charge of the Temple, and they began fighting over who would be High Priest. But the worst thing Judah heard, was that these men did not want the job because they were more honorable or because they knew more about the laws of the Torah, they wanted the job because it put them in charge of the money that the city of Jerusalem collected from the farmers surrounding the city.

Judah did not enjoy himself as much that Sukkot, and he came home feeling sad about what was happening at the Holy Temple. As the year went on, Judah did not think so much about what he had heard at the Temple on Sukkot.

*Bringing Israel to the Early Childhood Classroom Using Biblical and Talmudic Stories*  
Written by Laura Tinter, Concept by Orly Kenneth

He went back to helping his father tend to the sheep and exploring the land around Modi'in with his friends and he forgot about what had happened in Jerusalem.

Soon Sukkot approached again, and Judah remembered all he had seen and heard last year around the Temple, and he wondered what Sukkot would be like this year. Unfortunately, Sukkot was even worse this year than the year before. Now it was not just the High Priests fighting among themselves, but the Jewish people of Jerusalem had begun to fight with each other as well.

"I think Jason should be the High Priest!" called one man from the crowd.

"No, Menelaus has been appointed by King Antiochus himself!" called another.

And soon there was more yelling and screaming and pushing and shoving among the Jews gathered at the Temple. It was no longer a holy place to offer prayers of thanks to God, and Judah and his family left Jerusalem early that year and thanked God for their bountiful harvest at home.

Several years passed this way, and the fighting in Jerusalem got worse and worse. During this time, Judah grew from a young boy to a young man, and while he still loved to explore the land around his home, he also grew more concerned about what was happening to the holy Temple of his people.

Finally, word reached Modi'in that something bad had happened to the Jewish people. King Antiochus, the Syrian Greek King who ruled over the land of Israel, had gotten fed up with the fighting in Jerusalem and had decided to put a stop to it. Antiochus was not Jewish, and he did not understand how important the holy Temple was to the Jewish people. All Antiochus saw was that the Jews were fighting over control of the Temple, so if he wanted to stop the fighting, he would have to take over the Temple himself.

King Antiochus brought his soldiers to Jerusalem and sent Jason and Menelaus out of Jerusalem for good. He told the Jewish people that the Temple was now his and he was going to put a statue of himself inside it and post Greek guards outside its entrance. The Jewish people would not be allowed inside to light their holy menorah or to pray to their God. "If you can't go into the Temple without fighting over it, then I won't let you in the Temple at all!" Antiochus told the Jewish people.

This was too much for Judah and his family to bear. Judah remembered his days as a boy when he would look forward to seeing the High Priests in their colorful robes and magnificent jewelry. He remembered how much he loved to wander through the crowds at the Temple and listen to the Jews recite their prayers of thanks to God.

It was time to say "No!" again. It was time to say "No!" to King Antiochus and put the Temple back into the hands of the Jewish people. Judah and his family knew that the Jewish people had not always behaved very well around the Temple, but they were still the only people who knew how to use it properly, and to keep it holy for God.

Judah gathered his family, his father and brothers and all of his friends and came up with a plan to get their Temple back.

*Written by Laura Tinter*

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## PART 2—Fighting the Syrian Greeks

Judah's family and friends wanted to help him fight to regain control of their holy Temple, but they were afraid. They looked to him for leadership and encouragement.

"The armies of King Antiochus and the Syrian Greeks are very powerful," said Judah's brother Jonathan. "They have conquered entire nations, won't their strength defeat us?"

"No!" said Judah. "They may be strong, but we have faith in God and God will provide us with the strength to win our fight!"

"But what about the numbers, Judah?" asked Shimon "They have thousands and thousands of men to send into war, we do not have that many. Won't they outnumber us so much that we are sure to lose?"

"No!" said Judah. "They do have more men than us, but they do not know the land of Israel like we do. They are used to fighting on flat coastal lands, where they can line up their many soldiers like a wall and move as one big group. The mountains and valleys of our land will force them to break into smaller groups; we will be able to use our knowledge of the caves and hillsides to surprise and defeat these smaller bands of men."

"They have better weapons than us, Judah," said Elazar, "and elephants! They will use these to crush us!"

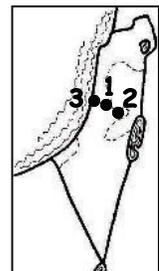
"No!" said Judah. "We will turn these strengths against them. We will cause the soldiers and their elephants to follow us into the narrow valleys of our land where the elephants will get trapped between the rocky walls of the mountainside. Once the elephant has blocked their path forward, they will have to go back, and there we will be waiting to capture them!"

"This will be a long and difficult battle," Judah told his men. "But if we make a smart plan and stick to it we can send the Greeks out of Israel for good! We will use our knowledge of the land to fight from behind trees and rocks and from inside caves. We will lead the Greek soldiers into the dangerous valleys and fight them from the higher ground of the hillsides. We will keep them away from the small secret waterways around the land; their soldiers and their elephants will not be able to find water to quench their thirst and they will flee from our land!"

And that is just what they did. Judah and his men did not give up when they saw how many Greek soldiers King Antiochus sent to fight his battle in Israel; they did not lose hope when they saw how powerful these soldiers were; and they stuck to their smart plan, even when Antiochus's weapons and elephants looked sure to beat them. And sure enough, Judah was right, and something good happened to the Jewish people, King Antiochus and his soldiers cried out, "Judah and his soldiers pound on us like a hammer! It is too much trouble to rule over the land of Israel and these Jewish people!" So, Antiochus took his soldiers and left Jerusalem and left Israel for good.

*Written by Laura Tinter*

**Map Location: MODI'IN, JERUSALEM, JAFFA, THROUGHOUT** The Maccabees had superior knowledge of the land around the Judean Hills, Modi'in (1) and Jerusalem (2). Greek soldiers were accustomed to fighting on flat plains and had developed a formidable fighting style for that terrain. The Greeks probably came ashore with their armies at the ancient port of Jaffa (3). As they advanced through the Judean Hills, they were unable to adapt effectively to the new topography.



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### PART 3—Rededicating the Temple

The Syrian Greeks were gone, but the holy Temple still needed to be returned to the Jewish people. The statue of King Antiochus still stood inside and Greek soldiers had made quite a mess. The armies of Judah the Maccabee were tired, but they knew their work was not yet done.

“The fighting is over! Can’t we return to our homes and families?” asked one of Judah’s friends.

“No!” said Judah. “Soon,” he added. “First, we must clean the holy Temple and restore it as a place worthy of the worship of God. Then, when it is ready, we must rededicate it to God by re-lighting the *ner tamid*, the eternal light that always burns inside to remind us that God is always with us. God stayed by our side during our battles, and we are not done until we have made the Temple a place for God again.”

And that is just what they did. Judah and his men worked day and night to make the holy Temple worthy of God again. The statue of King Antiochus was destroyed and the books and scrolls were cleaned and restored to their proper place. The floors were swept and the altars were cleaned. Everything was in order again, and it was time to re-light the *ner tamid*.

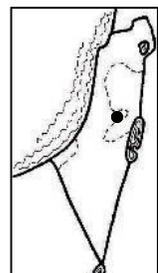
The Maccabees had a problem, a High Priest should be present when the *ner tamid* was kindled and the Temple was re-dedicated to God. But the family of the High Priests had let the Jewish people down by quarreling over who would control the Temple, and by letting greed instead of faith rule their hearts. Judah and the Jewish people did not fight so hard against the Syrian Greek soldiers to give the Temple back to the Jews who had started all this trouble in the first place! They needed to be sure the Temple was controlled by the *right* Jewish people—Jews that had faith in God and that stood up for what was right. The High Priest should be someone who loved the land of Israel and the stories of the Jewish people more than anything else, someone who spent every chance he got exploring the stories he read in the Torah. The Jewish people knew that the High Priest should be someone from Judah’s family.

This time, Judah did not say, “No!” The family of Judah, the Hashmonaim, agreed to take control of the Temple as the Jewish people had requested. The Hashmonaim agreed to rule over the land of Israel with a strong and just hand, and to follow God’s rules as they are written in the Torah. Finally, it was time to re-dedicate the holy Temple to God and to re-light the *ner tamid*.

The Hashmonaim wanted all of Israel to join in this re-dedication. Letters were sent from Judah the Maccabee to Jewish people all over the world inviting them to celebrate in their communities a joyous Festival of Lights! For eight days, the Jewish people and their new family of High Priests celebrated their victory over those who had tried to change the holy ways of the Temple. And we still celebrate this story today, each year beginning on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, when we light the candles of the hanukiah on the eight nights of Hanukah.

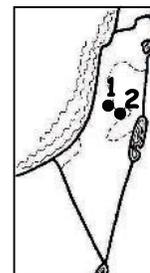
*Written by Laura Tinter*

Map Location: JERUSALEM and THROUGHOUT Judah and the Maccabees now must clean the Temple in Jerusalem so that it can be rededicated to God. Jews are invited to celebrate with their newly appointed family of High Priests, the Hasmoneans.



## Judah and the (More) Real Story of Hanukah

Map Location: MODI'IN and JERUSALEM Modi'in (1) is a small town not far outside Jerusalem (2) in the Judean Hills. For Sukkot, Judah and his family traveled with their crops to the Temple in Jerusalem (2).



### Adult Talking Points for Parts 1, 2, and 3:

- While this may not be the story that you are used to hearing about Hanukah, it is, in fact, more accurate according to our own sources (Maccabees I and II) and corroborating period sources (Josephus *Wars of the Jews*). Our goal in telling children this version of the Hanukah story is to delve deeper into the story more often told: The Jews live happily together, the Greeks come in and mess things up, we fight the Greeks, we gain control of Israel, we all live happily together again. The reality, as we read in the Book of Maccabees, was much less black and white. The High Priests were influenced by Greek culture and were assimilating to Greek ways. The position of High Priest stopped being passed from father to son and was being “purchased” using the taxes collected from the poor farming class which surrounded Jerusalem. Corruption enters the high priesthood. The struggle in the Hanukah story was not simply Jew versus Greek, but mainly an internal struggle about the identity of the Jewish community. In this struggle we find a split in the Jewish community between rich city Jew/high class/High Priest and poor rural Jew/lower class/local priest (see next point).
- Judah’s father, Matthias, is not mentioned in our story. Matthias was a “local priest.” That is, he was not a Priest of the Temple, but a priest of the town. Like our modern day Rabbis, Matthias was a learned Torah Jew to whom local citizens came with ethical problems or for ritual/spiritual advice. Thus, his sons were from a highly religious, strict Torah family and would be suitably appalled by what was happening in the Temple.
- As the story continues, we will see that after the Greeks became involved in the conflict and were defeated, the High Priesthood did not return to the families who previously held the position. These families had not served the Jewish people well. In the true sense of a social revolution (which the real Hanukah story reveals), new leaders were put into positions of power to better represent the Jewish people. In this case, the new leaders were selected from Judah’s own family, the Hasmoneans.
- The story of Hanukah is about a revolution. Unfortunately, many of our Jewish holiday stories are speckled with violence—we are doing our students a disservice by *completely avoiding* this fact. **Copy and send this story home to parents before you use it in the classroom**, open a discussion with them about the language of the story and the message we are trying to convey. Educate and involve the parents in this process ahead of time to avoid complications of telling this story more “like it is.” (For a great short story on this topic, read *Stabbing an Elephant* by Max Apple). Our story is written for young children. The Maccabees don’t ambush the Greek soldiers, they capture them. The Greeks are not killed or annihilated, they flee from or leave the land. Yes, this story could open up war and weapons talk among the children and you have to decide how to handle this possibility. If children mention guns and bombs, simply explain to them that those things had not been invented yet, and try to leave it at that.
- No, we do not mention the little jar of oil (and interestingly, as noted on page 48, none of the children seemed to miss it). The first time we hear the story of the jar of oil is in the Babylonian Talmud, written approximately 600 years after the events of the Hanukah story took place. None of the Israeli sources written at the time of the revolt mention the jar of oil. It is possible that the story of the oil was written to take the focus of the Hanukah story off the military victory and turn it to the role of God in the story. We can talk about God in this story without magical jars of oil. The Maccabees believed the Temple should remain a holy place for God, not a place where men bicker and fight about money. The Maccabees had faith in God and believed that God would give them the strength and courage to stand up to the Greeks and the corrupt High Priests. When the Maccabees regained control of the Temple, the first thing they wanted to do was to rededicate it to God.

# How Was This Book Created?

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This book is a product of three courses taught during the 2005-2006 school year by **Orly Kenneth**, Educational Shlichah of the Jewish Agency to the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. The participants in these courses were Early Childhood educators from the Greater Washington DC community.

The three courses explored the idea of teaching Israel to young children using Bible and Talmud stories. Orly brought texts and stories to the class, while the educators brainstormed on various ways to use the stories in the classrooms.

At the end of the process, all of the materials were given to one of the participants in the class, **Laura Tinter**. Laura, an experienced Early Childhood Educator in our community, arranged the stories, summarized the conversations held by the educators in the adult talking points, and also added teachers' aides gleaned from her professional experience: maps, ideas, references, etc.

Before the book came out, **Mara Bier**, Director of Early Childhood Services at the Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning checked that the material presented was age appropriate and approved its pedagogical quality.

The book is accompanied by a CD-ROM that was created by **Orly Kenneth**.

We hope that you will enjoy the book and use it, together with your own ideas, to enhance the Israel education in your classrooms.