

The Chanukah Story, Two Ways

Contributed by [Custom & Craft](#)

Source: Tamar Fox

THE CLASSIC STORY...

Way back in 167 BCE, the Jews were living in the land of Israel, and were ruled by a Syrian Greek king named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus wanted the Jews to assimilate into Hellenistic culture, so he outlawed three core Jewish commandments: circumcising male babies, observing the Sabbath, and studying Torah. He also desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. A Jewish priest named Mattathias and his five sons-- collectively known as the Maccabees, which means "hammers" -- led a revolt against Antiochus, and though they were heavily outnumbered, they ultimately succeeded in driving out the Syrian Greeks and rededicating the Temple to God.

When the Maccabees were cleaning the Temple for rededication, they discovered that the oil used to light the huge lamp had almost all been desecrated. There was only enough oil to light the lamp for one night, but when they lit the lamp, the oil miraculously burned for eight days and nights.

To commemorate this miracle we light a nine pronged candelabra, adding one candle each night. We also eat greasy foods, because oil was part of the Chanukah miracle.

AND THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY...

The real Chanukah story is a little more complicated. Some Jews were happy to assimilate into Hellenistic culture, and the Maccabees declared war on those Hellenized Jews as much as on the Syrian Greeks. The Maccabees used guerilla warfare tactics in a bloody war that went on for years, and only one Maccabee survived to see the end of the war in 164 BCE. That year the war prevented the Jews from being able to celebrate the autumn festival of Sukkot, so they decided that Sukkot should be celebrated once they rededicated the Temple, which they did on the 25th of the month of Kislev. Sukkot lasts seven days plus one extra day for the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, so the new holiday of rededication (Chanukah) became an eight day holiday.

So where did the oil story come from? About 600 years later, the Talmud tells the story of the oil miraculously lasting for eight days to explain why it's forbidden to fast on Chanukah. Many scholars believe that the story of the miracle was a later addition.