

Chanukah: was everything they taught you wrong?

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Maoz Tsur:

The Greeks gathered against me, in days of the Hasmoneans.
They broke down the walls of my towers, and defiled all the oils.
But from the last remaining flask a miracle was wrought for the Jew.
Therefore the sages of the day ordained these eight for songs of praise.

Al Hanisim:

"In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will ... then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name."

Chronology from Alexander the Great to the end of the Maccabean Revolt:

333	• Alexander the Great.
323	• Alexander dies - his empire splits apart - Ptolemies rule Egypt, Seleucids rule Asia, Judea in between, nominally Seleucid but taken over by Ptolemies.
200	• Battle of Panium - Antiochus III (Great) defeats Ptolemies and regains Judea for Seleucid Empire – he grants Jews religious freedom.
187	• Seleucus IV - supposedly defrays all Temple expenses, but at prompting of a Jew calls Simon who fell out with the High Priest Onias III (son of Simon II – the Just) sends Heliodorus to seize Temple treasury in 178 • Heliodorus fails. Legend says he was expelled by three angels. Heliodorus returns and assassinates Seleucus.
175	• Antiochus IV Epiphanes eventually succeeds (he was younger son of Seleucus IV - the rightful heir Demetrius was held hostage in Rome). • Onias denounced for Ptolemaic sympathies by the same Simon who had prompted Seleucus IV to seize the treasury – he either was called or voluntarily went to Antioch to convince Antiochus of his loyalty. His brother Jason (originally Joshua) takes the opportunity to buy the High Priesthood from Antiochus. Onias III is kept in Antioch. • Jason builds gymnasium in Jerusalem and starts hellenizing.
172	• Menelaus (Simon's brother) outbids Jason and becomes High Priest, backed by a garrison sent by Antiochus – Jason flees after a battle. Menelaus raids temple treasury, and sends sacred vessels to Antiochus. Menelaus has Onias III assassinated
170 - 168	• Ptolemy VI demands Judea back - Antiochus defeats Ptolemy. • Antiochus decides to conquer Egypt but the Roman Consul Popilius draws a line in the sand and forbid him to proceed so Antiochus withdraws. Rumour that Antiochus killed reaches Jerusalem - Jason makes surprise attack on Jerusalem, deposes Menelaus. • Antiochus returns from Egypt - Menelaus asks for help. Antiochus attacks Jerusalem in a rage, restores Menelaus, and between them they begin the anti-Jewish measures.
167	• Maccabean Revolt begins.
164	• Maccabees enter the temple and rededicate.
163	• Antiochus IV dies; 9-year old Antiochus V succeeds. Confirms religious freedom for Jews. Round about this time, the Seleucids themselves kill Menelaus because he was the cause of all their trouble. Judas still carries on fighting.
162	• Demetrius (son of Seleucus IV) escapes from Rome, kills Antiochus V and becomes King; appoints Alcimus High Priest. Judas does not accept him. Alcimus expelled.

161	Alcimus returns with Syrian army led by Bacchides. Death of Judas. Jonathan takes over as leader.
159	Death of Alcimus.
152	Alexander Balas claims throne; appoints Jonathan High Priest.
150	Death of Demetrius.
145	- Battle of Antioch; Death of Alexander Balas; Demetrius II becomes King. - Jonathan confirmed as High Priest.

Maccabees 1 Chapter 1

11 In those days went there out of Israel wicked men, who persuaded many, saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles that are round about us: for since we have departed from them we have had much sorrow. **12** So this device pleased them well. **13** Then certain of the people were so forward herein, that they went to the king, who gave them licence to do after the ordinances of the nations: **14** whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the customs of the Gentiles: **15** and made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the Gentiles, and were sold to do mischief

Maccabees 2 Chapter 4

1 This Simon now, of whom we spake afore, having been a betrayer of the money, and of his country, slandered Onias, as if he ha terrified Heliodorus, and been the worker of these evils. **2** Thus was he bold to call him a traitor, that had deserved well of the city, and tendered his own nation, and was so zealous of the laws. **3** But when their hatred went so far, that by one of Simon's faction murders were committed, **4** Onias seeing the danger of this contention, and that Apollonius, as being the governor of Celosyria and Phenice, did rage, and increase Simon's malice, **5** He went to the king, not to be an accuser of his countrymen, but seeking the good of all, both publick and private: **6** For he saw that it was impossible that the state should continue quiet, and Simon leave his folly, unless the king did look thereunto. **7** But after the death of Seleucus, when Antiochus, called Epiphanes, took the kingdom, Jason the brother of Onias laboured underhand to be high priest, **8** Promising unto the king by intercession three hundred and threescore talents of silver, and of another revenue eighty talents:

23 Three years afterward Jason sent Menelaus, the aforesaid Simon's brother, to bear the money unto the king, and to put him in mind of certain necessary matters. **24** But he being brought to the presence of the king, when he had magnified him for the glorious appearance of his power, got the priesthood to himself, offering more than Jason by three hundred talents of silver. **25** So he came with the king's mandate, bringing nothing worthy the high priesthood, but having the fury of a cruel tyrant, and the rage of a savage beast. **26** Then Jason, who had undermined his own brother, being undermined by another, was compelled to flee into the country of the Ammonites. **27** So Menelaus got the principality: but as for the money that he had promised unto the king, he took no good order for it, albeit Sostratis the ruler of the castle required it:

32 Now Menelaus, supposing that he had gotten a convenient time, stole certain vessels of gold out of the temple, and gave some of them to Andronicus, and some he sold into Tyrus and the cities round about. **33** Which when Onias knew of a surety, he reprov'd him, and withdrew himself into a sanctuary at Daphne, that lieth by Antiochia. **34** Wherefore Menelaus, taking Andronicus apart, prayed, him to get Onias into his hands; who being persuaded thereunto, and coming to Onias in deceit, gave him his right hand with oaths; and though he were suspected by him, yet persuaded he him to come forth of the sanctuary: whom forthwith he shut up without regard of justice. **35** For the which cause not only the Jews, but many also of other nations, took great indignation, and were much grieved for the unjust murder of the man.

Lawrence Schiffman: Historical perspectives on Dissent and Disobedience: Jews against Jews, in Tolerance, Dissent and Democracy (Aronson 2002):

“It is probable that at this time, foreign deities were introduced into the Temple, creating further friction. The Jewish Hellenizers, Menelaus and his party, saw these gods as equivalent to the God of Israel. To them, this was not really foreign worship. They regarded the ancestral God of Israel as simply another manifestation of the supreme deity known in Syria as Baal Shamin (Master of Heaven) and in the Greek world as Zeus Olympius. In this way they rationalized their behavior.”

“In effect, we have to face the reality that these great struggles, generally assumed to be part of the heroic history of the Jewish people, were to a great extent inner Jewish struggles in which revolutionaries fought the Jewish ruling classes—the establishment—who were allied with the foreign interests.”

Numbers:

Chapter 25 verse 11: “Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake among them, so that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. Wherefore say: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace; and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his G-d, and made atonement for the children of Israel.”

Rachel Elior: The Three Temples (Littman, 2005)

“The scrolls reveal an alternative memory exceeding the biblical tradition and yet based profoundly on its foundations. This alternative memory was created, for the most part, in a time of persecution and struggle against the perceived illegal and unholy seizure of power, the unlawful dethronement of those maintaining the legitimacy of the High Priesthood and their banishment. The Seleucid conquest and persecutions (175 -164 BCE) including the dethronement of the High Priest of the family of Zadok, and the nomination of the Hasmonaean dynasty to High Priests and local rulers (152 -37 BCE) by the Seleucid kings, generated a profound resentment in the deposed priestly circles, that defined themselves in historical terms substantiated by the Biblical tradition, as the Priests from the dynasty of Zadok, and in mystical terms as Sons of Light.”

“The Zadokite priests and their supporters lost the hegemony in 175 BCE – they never served again in the holy place on Mount Zion. With the banishment of the traditional priestly circles the pre-calculated permanent holy solar calendar of 364 days divided to 52 Sabbaths, commencing in the Spring celebrated together with the angels, also disappeared, never to return, after Onias III, the last High Priest from the dynasty of Zadok, refused to install the Seleucid lunar calendar of 354 days, that which commenced in the autumn, in the Jerusalem Temple, and was thus deposed by Antiochus IV.”

Daniel:

Chapter 7 verse 25: “And he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time.”

Pirke Avot:

1:1 “Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly.”