



Venture into Hanukkah



The Hanukkah Story

For 2-4 year olds:

A very long time ago, a king who was not Jewish wanted to make everyone believe what he believed. He said all his soldiers had to go break the Jewish Temple, which was the most important place for the Jews. The king also said the Jews could not celebrate any of their holidays.

But! The Jews put together an army called the Maccabees and they fought back. Even though there weren't very many of them, they beat the king's soldiers. It was a miracle!

When the Jews went back to the Temple to clean it up, they found out that they did not have enough oil to light the lamp. It took eight days to get more oil, but the small amount of oil they had lasted the whole time they were waiting for more oil to arrive! That was a miracle, too!

Now, we celebrate Hanukkah for 8 days to celebrate the miracle of winning the battle and the miracle of the oil lasting for 8 days.

For 5-9 year olds:

The story of Hanukkah has been told in different ways. This is one of them. A very long time ago, a king named Antiochus Epiphanes (An-TAY-uh-kiss Eh-PIF-a-neeZ) wanted to stop Jews from practicing Judaism; he wanted to make them all worship Greek gods instead of their god. He sent his soldiers to destroy the Temple, the most sacred place for Jews. Antiochus also said Jews could not observe Shabbat or any of the holidays.

But the Jews fought back, led by a family named the Maccabees (MACK-ah-beez) and even though there were many more Syrians than Maccabees, the Maccabees won!

Winning the battle is one of the miracles we talk about when we talk about Hanukkah. The other is the miracle of the oil.

As the story goes, The Maccabees went back to the destroyed Temple to clean it up, but they found only a single jar of oil, which was just enough to keep the flame going for one day. A messenger was sent to get more oil and it took the messenger eight days to return, but miraculously, the one single jar of oil continued to burn!

The story says that Hanukkah lasts 8 days because of the miracle of this single jar of oil lasting 8 days.

For ages 10+

There have been different versions of the Hanukkah story told over the years. This is one of them.

In the year 168 B.C.E. (which means "Before the Common Era"), the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes (An-TAY-uh-kiss Eh-PIF-a-neeZ) sent his soldiers to Jerusalem. The Syrians destroyed the Temple, the holiest place for Jews at that time. Antiochus also said practicing Judaism was no longer allowed. Jews could not observe Shabbat or any of the holidays. Instead, he said everyone had to worship the Greek gods. He said Jews could either stop being Jews or they would be killed.

On the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev in 168 B.C.E., the Jewish Temple was renamed for the Greek god Zeus, but the Jews fought back, led by a family named the Maccabees (MACK-ah-beez) The head of the family, Mattathias, was very old, so his son, Judah, led the fighters against Antiochus. Even though there were many more Syrians than Maccabee fighters, the Maccabees miraculously won two major battles, defeating the Syrians.

Winning these battles, even though the Syrian army was much bigger than the Maccabees, is one of the miracles we talk about when we talk about Hanukkah. The other is the miracle of the oil.

Did you know that the first story of Hanukkah did not include anything about oil or the miracle of it lasting 8 days? Hanukkah is an 8-day festival because it was supposed to be like the 8-day celebration of Sukkot. Only many, many, many years later did the story of the oil show up in the Talmud (a book of rabbinic writings and debate about the Torah.)

In *that* story, when the Maccabees entered the destroyed Temple after they won the battles, they immediately relit the *ner tamid* (Neer TA-meed) which means "eternal light" and is a flame that had burned constantly in the Temple before it was destroyed. (If you've been inside a synagogue, you've probably seen a *ner tamid* there; although, most of them nowadays are an electric light and not a flame.) In the Temple, the Maccabees found a single jar of oil, which was only enough to keep the flame going for one day. A messenger was sent to get more oil and it took the messenger eight days to return, but miraculously, the one single jar of oil continued to burn! The rabbis in the Talmud argued that Hanukkah lasts 8 days because of the miracle of this single jar of oil, which is why we celebrate it as we do.