

Experiential Chanukah Story

Scene and Backdrops:

- The Temple in Jerusalem
- The Judean Hills with stacks of boxes in front on the floor

Characters:

- Judah Maccabee
- Mattathias
- Antiochus
- Several Jews/Maccabees
- Several Syrian Greek soldiers
- Elephants



Costumes and Props

- *Children are invited to bring in a stuffed animal to be used when Temple is “desecrated.”
- *Each class will fashion a Menorah (7 branches) to bring
- Maccabee costumes (Robes and head coverings)
- Beard for Mattathias
- Syrian Greek armored costumes with hats
- Shields for Jews/Maccabees
- Shields for Syrian Greeks
- Elephant masks
- Baskets of plastic fruit
- Ladder to use to climb the mountains (One or two)
- “Mountains” Boxes of various sizes that can be stacked about 5’ high
- 8 battery operated candle flames
- Small table for candles
- Small flask for oil

Script to be implemented by teacher. The teacher is the “speaker” for all parts.

Narrator: “Chanukah was first celebrated a very long time ago...about 2,000 years ago. At that time, the Jews lived in Israel, which was called Judea, and the one big and beautiful Temple was in Jerusalem. Each Shabbat the Jews would come there to pray and they would bring beautiful baskets of fruit to place at the Temple.” (*Jews bring baskets of fruit to Temple and sit in front.*)

Narrator: The Jews of Judea were ruled by the King of nearby Syria and for a long time they were free to pray to their ONE God, celebrate their holidays and learn from the Torah. But... one day, a mean king named Antiochus came to power and changed everything!” (*Antiochus stands up.*)

Antiochus: (*Make a mean face.*) “I want everyone to pray to idols the way I do. I like the way the Greek people pray and I want to pray to MANY gods! Each god has a special job like making the sun shine or causing it to rain. We will make statues called idols to look like these gods and we will pray to them and bow down to them!”

Jews: (*Angry faces*) “We believe in ONE God whom we cannot see! We’re not going to build statues and pray to them!! We will NOT follow the Greek people!”

Antiochus: “I expect everyone to follow my orders! You need to put idols in your Temple. You need to put idols in your homes! If you don’t, you will be punished! Soldiers, take these idols and put them in the Temple! (*Syrian Greek soldiers put the stuffed animals near the Temple.*)

Narrator: “Many of the Jews ran away to small villages in the Judean Hills so they wouldn’t have to pray to idols. (*Jews, including Mattathias, move from the Temple area to an area near the Judean Hills.*)

Antiochus: (*Talking the soldiers*) “Now, go to the village of Modi’in near Jerusalem and put idols in the middle of the town! Anyone who doesn’t bow to the idols will be punished!”

Syrian Greek Soldiers: (*Soldiers take idols and bring them to the Maccabees.*) “You Jews need to bow down to these idols!

Mattathias: (*Stands up and turns to the other Jews.*) “We will continue to believe in ONE God! We will not bow down to idols! Follow me to the mountains. We need to make a plan to get rid of the king and his army of soldiers!” (*Jews move closer to the backdrop of the Judean Desert.*)

Narrator: “Unfortunately, Mattathias was old and sick, He laid down and asked his 5 sons to come near him.”

Mattathias: “I want to give you a blessing to be strong and brave, Chazak v’amatz. Judah will be your new leader. He is strong like a hammer, like a Maccabee! You will all be called Maccabees!”

Judah: “We need to form an army to fight the Syrian soldiers. But, we are farmers, not soldiers. We don’t have army uniforms or weapons!”

Narrator: “The Maccabees weren’t soldiers and they didn’t have weapons...but they did know the hills, caves and countryside of Judea. Most important they were fighting for their freedom to remain as Jews. This gave them lots of courage.”

Judah: “We need to make a plan! We can hide in the hills and wait for the Syrian soldiers to pass by. We’ll scare them and their elephants. We’ll scare them away!” (*The Maccabees hide behind the “rocks.” Syrian soldiers and elephants line up near the mountains.*)

Narrator: “One night, as the Syrian soldiers were passing through the mountains with their elephants, the Maccabees came out from hiding and “banged on the rocks” and scared them away. The Maccabees kept doing this until all of the Syrians left Judea.”

Judah: “Let’s go back to Jerusalem to pray at our Temple. Follow me!” (*The Maccabees follow Judah back to the Temple area, Walk around the room a little!*)

Maccabees: “Oh no! The Temple is a mess! We need to clean it up and take out the animals and idols.”

Narrator: “The Jews worked very hard cleaning, polishing and building the Temple.” (*Use cloths for make believe cleaning.*)

Judah: "The Temple is ready to use again after 3 long years. It is a miracle that our little army of Maccabees was able to scare away the big Syrian army. We need to light the Temple menorah and celebrate." (*Teacher brings the Menorah, that was fashioned in class, and places it in the Temple. Children are invited to place 7 lit "candles" on small table in Temple.*)



Narrator: "There is a legend, a story, that helps explain why we celebrate Chanukah for 8 days. The story is told that the Jews were cleaning the Temple and wanted to light the menorah, They found a container of special oil but there was very little left. They lit the menorah with the oil and that tiny bit lasted 8 days! It was a miracle! It was just enough time to get more of the special oil. The lamp NEVER went out!"

So, each year we celebrate Chanukah for 8 days. Chanukah means to "rededicate", to start over again. We remember the miracle of the oil and the miracle of the brave Maccabees."

Suggested discussion questions for young children. Choose what is most appropriate:

- What does it mean to be free?
- How does it feel if someone makes fun of you or is mean to you?
- Why were the Syrians being mean to the Jews?
- Do you think the Maccabees did the right thing by fighting back?
- What would you do if someone was being mean to you or hurting your feelings?
- It was a miracle when the small group of Maccabees scared away the powerful Syrian soldiers. How would you describe a miracle?
- What toy do we play with on Chanukah that spins around? Can you spin like a dreidle?
- The Chanukiah that we light on Chanukah is a little different than the menorah that was in the Temple long ago. Can you tell the difference?