



Thanksgivukkah 5774

The Hanukkah story begins with soldiers from Syria and Greece seizing the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 168 BC. In 164 BC, the Maccabees triumphed over the soldiers, and took back the Jerusalem temple for the Hebrew people.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

1) 1 Maccabees 1:20-24 (New Revised Standard Translation)

After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. Taking them all, he went into his own land.

Putting aside what you might know about Hanukkah, how would you describe Antiochus' motives?

2) 1 Maccabees 1:41-42 (New Revised Standard Translation)

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the *sabbath*.

After reading this text, do you still agree with your original answer to Antiochus' motivation?

3) 1 Maccabees 2:19-22 (New Revised Standard Translation)

But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, every one of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left."

Keeping text 2 in mind along with text 3, what is the issue with wanting everyone to be the same?
What are the challenges with different people in a community having different traditions?

4) Pilgrims Fled Religious Persecution (<http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/ushistory/pilgrims1.htm>)

Above all, the Pilgrims wanted to be free.

They disagreed with the religious teachings of the Church of England. In fact, the Pilgrims were members of a group of people called Separatists. These people had different beliefs than the rest of the English people. In 1606, they formed their own church in a small village called Scrooby.

At this time, the Church of England was the same as the Government of England. In other words, King James I was the head of both the country and the church. Not belonging to the church meant not obeying the king. This was treason.

So the Pilgrims left England, in search of a safe place to practice their religion.

Thinking about texts 3 & 4, when do you feel pressure to conform to what others around you are doing?
Have you ever felt persecuted because of your religion?

PUTTING THE “THANKS” IN “THANKSGIVING”

5a) 1 Maccabees 4:52-55 (New Revised Standard Translation)

Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Kislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them.

5b) The Pilgrims' celebration (http://www.scholastic.com/scholastic_thanksgiving/feast/)

The English colonists we call Pilgrims celebrated days of thanksgiving as part of their religion. But these were days of prayer, not days of feasting.

Our national holiday really stems from the feast held in the autumn of 1621 by the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag to celebrate the colony's first successful harvest.

What traditions of giving thanks do you have on Thanksgiving?
Would any of these translate over to Hanukkah (even when it's NOT Thanksgiving)?

6) “Al HaNissim” Paragraph from Hanukkah Evening Service

עַל הַנְּסִים, וְעַל הַפְּרָקוֹן, וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת,
וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת, וְעַל הַמְּלַחְמוֹת,
שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזְמַן
הַזֶּה.

We thank You for the miraculous deliverance, for the heroism, and for the triumphs in battle of our ancestors in other days, and in our time.

בַּיָּמִי מִתְּתִיָּהוּ בֶן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל,
חֲשׂוֹנָאֵי וּבְנָיו, כְּשֶׁעָמְדָה מַלְכוּת יוֹן
הַרְשָׁעָה עַל עַמְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשְׁכִּיחַם
תּוֹרָתְךָ, וּלְהַעֲבִירָם מִחֻקֵּי רְצוֹנְךָ, וְאַתָּה
בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים עָמַדְתָּ לָהֶם בְּעֵת
צָרָתָם, רַבֵּת אֶת רִיבָם, דָּנַת אֶת דִּינָם,
נִקְמַת אֶת נִקְמָתָם, מִסְרַת גְּבוּרִים בְּיַד
חַלְשִׁים, וּרְבִים בְּיַד מְעֻטִים, וּטְמֵאִים
בְּיַד טְהוֹרִים, וּרְשָׁעִים בְּיַד צַדִּיקִים,
וְזָדִים בְּיַד עוֹסְקֵי תּוֹרָתְךָ. וְלָךְ עָשִׂיתָ
שֵׁם גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ, וְלַעֲמֶךָ
יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשִׂיתָ תְּשׁוּעָה גְּדוֹלָה וּפְרָקוֹן
כִּהְיִים הַזֶּה. וְאַחֲרַי כֵּן בָּאוּ בְּנֵיךָ לְדַבֵּר
בְּיַתְדְךָ, וּפְנּוּ אֶת הַיְכָלְךָ, וְטָהְרוּ אֶת
מִקְדָּשְׁךָ, וְהִדְלִיקוּ נְרוֹת בְּחֻצְרוֹת קֹדֶשְׁךָ,
וְקִבְעוּ שְׁמוֹנֵת יָמֵי חֲנֻכָּה אֵלַי, לְהוֹדוֹת
וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל.

In the days of Mattathias son of Yochanan, the Hasmonean high priest, and in the days of his sons a cruel power rose against Israel, demanding that they abandon Your Torah and violate Your mitzvot. You, in great mercy, stood by Your people in time of trouble. You defended them, vindicated them, and avenged their wrongs. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the corrupt into the hands of the pure in heart, the guilty into the hands of the innocent. You delivered the arrogant in to the hands of those who were faithful to Your Torah. You have wrought great victories and miraculous deliverance for Your people Israel to this day, revealing Your glory and Your holiness to all the world. Then Your children came into Your shrine, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your sanctuary, and kindled lights in Your sacred courts. They set aside these eight days as a season for giving thanks and reciting praises to You. (Sim Shalom, p219)

In what ways, if any, was the plight of the pilgrims similar to those of the Jews?

7a) Psalm 113

הַלְלוּיָהּ, הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי יְיָ, הַלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם יְיָ.
יְהִי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבָרָךְ, מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם.
מִמְזָרְחַ שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבוֹאוֹ, מֵהֶלֶל שֵׁם יְיָ.
רֵם עַל כָּל גּוֹיִם יְיָ, עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבוֹדוֹ.
מִי כִּי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַמְּגִבִּיָּה לְשַׁבָּת.

Halleluyah. Sing praises, you servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time now and forever. From the rising of the sun until it sets the Lord's name is to be praised.

הַמְשַׁפִּילִי לְרֵאוֹת, בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.
 מְקִימֵי מַעַפָּר דָּל, מֵאֲשַׁפֵּת יְרִים אֲבִיוֹן.
 לְהוֹשִׁיבֵי עִם נְדִיבִים, עִם נְדִיבֵי עָמוֹ.
 מוֹשִׁיבֵי עֲקָרַת הַבַּיִת, אִם הַבְּנִים
 שְׂמֵחָה, הַלְלוּיָהּ.

The Lord is high above all nations, God's glory is above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, that is enthroned on high, that looks down low upon heaven and upon the earth? Who raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the needy out of the rubbish heap; That God may set him with princes, even with the princes of God's people. Who makes the barren woman to dwell in her house as a joyful mother of children. Halleluyah.

7b) Psalm 115:1-11

לְנוּ, יְיָ, לֹא לָנוּ, כִּי לְשִׁמְךָ תָּנוּ כְבוֹד, עַל
 חַסְדְּךָ עַל אֱמֻנָתְךָ. לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם,
 אֵיךְ נָא אֱלֹהֵיהֶם. וְאֵלֵהֵינוּ בְּשָׁמַיִם, כֹּל
 אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ עָשָׂה. עֲצָבֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב,
 מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי אָדָם. פֶּה לָהֶם וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ,
 עֵינַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְאוּ. אֲזָנַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא
 יִשְׁמְעוּ, אֵף לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְחוּן. יָדֵיהֶם
 וְלֹא יִמְשֹׁנוּ, רַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִהְלְכוּ, לֹא
 יִהְיוּ בְּגִרוֹנָם. כְּמוֹתֵם יִהְיוּ עֲשִׂיהֶם, כֹּל
 אֲשֶׁר בָּטַח בָּהֶם. יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּטַח בְּיְיָ,
 עֲזָרָם וּמִגְנָתָם הוּא. בַּיִת אֱהָרֹן בָּטַחוּ בְּיְיָ,
 עֲזָרָם וּמִגְנָתָם הוּא. יִרְאֵי יְיָ בָּטַחוּ בְּיְיָ,
 עֲזָרָם וּמִגְנָתָם הוּא.

Not for us, Oh Lord, not for us, but for Your name give glory, for Your mercy, and for Your truth's sake. Why should the nations say: 'Where is their God?' Our God is in the heavens; whatsoever pleased God, God has done. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak; they have eye, but cannot see; They have ears, but cannot hear; noses, but cannot smell; They have hands, but cannot feel; feet, but they cannot walk; neither can they speak with their throat. Their makers shall be like them, all that trust in them. Let Israel, trust in the Lord! God is their help and their shield! Let the house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! God is their help and their shield! You that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! God is their help and their shield.

8) Sukkot=Thanksgiving, but Sukkot=Hanukkah?

American Thanksgiving had a close affinity to biblical Sukkot. Both holidays included the theme of giving thanks for a bountiful harvest. It's likely that the pilgrims who linked their migration and experience with the ancient Israelites learned to thank God for their harvest from the stories they read in what they called the Old Testament.

And Sukkot, in turn, was very much linked to Hanukkah. In fact, Hanukkah may have actually been Sukkot. The Second Book of Maccabees records that after the Maccabees cleansed and rededicated the Temple, "the sanctuary was purified on the twenty-fifth of Kislev (Hanukkah). The joyful celebration lasted for eight days. It was like Sukkot, for they recalled how only a short time before they had kept the festival while living like animals in the mountains, they observed the joyful celebration, which lasted for eight days. And so they carried lulavim and etrogim and they chanted hymns to God, who had so triumphantly led them to the purification of the Temple."

So Hanukkah was probably a delayed Sukkot, with its theme of Thanksgiving spilling over from the harvest into the cleansed and rededicated Temple. The overlap of American Thanksgiving with the Sukkot/Hanukkah Thanksgiving, then, is not a calendrical oddity, but a calendrical tour de force.

Read more: <http://forward.com/articles/187288/lets-celebrate-the-convergence-of-thanksgiving-and/>

9) The Bill of Rights

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.