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/ Jewish Roots/Practices, Maccabees, and related "other" biblical lessons

/ COMPLETE LESSON SET: 1 Maccabees - The Story of Hanukkah ~ Rev. Ron Shifley

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Ron Shifley ● 👤 Board Member ☆ a Supporting Member!

1 Maccabees 4:6-59 "The Story of Hanukkah"

Below are several lesson plans that Pastor Ron Shifley wrote for his church's children's ministry.

You can find a related discussion of "at-home" celebration of Hanukkah for Christian families in our Advent Resources forum. It includes an "Advent Haggadah" script and further explanation of both the Hanukkah story and how Christians can (and should) embrace its story and themes.

Summary of all workshop lessons in this Rotation:

- **Video:** Watch "Maccabees: Story of Hanukkah (Nest Family).

- **Art:** Decorate a clay jar and make a scroll to go inside it.
- **Games & Cooking:** Watch a clip from Rugrats-Chanukah episode, learn how to play Dreidels and make fried donuts.

➡ **Note:** Ron's church uses the Workshop Rotation Model for Sunday School. Graded groups rotate to a different workshop each Sunday to learn about the same story through a different teaching medium (one workshop per week). Ron's "rotation" lessons below would cover a typical 5-week rotation. It could be adapted as a "four or five stations" children's or intergenerational event.

Unit Memory Verse: *"The LORD is my light and salvation - whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1)*

Main Idea:

The story of 1 Maccabees, recounts the origins of the biblical holiday of Hanukkah that Jesus himself celebrated at the Jerusalem Temple (John 10:22-23).

Bible Background

The Book of 1 Maccabees recounts Jewish history during the 400 year period between the times that the Old and New Testaments were written. It recounts a time when Jerusalem and the land of Judea was occupied by the Greeks under the rule of King Antiochus, following the conquest and death of the legendary Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great.

King Antiochus, who reigned from 175-163 B.C. instituted a violent anti-Jewish policy. Circumcision, Sabbath worship, teaching the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament), and observance of the commandments were all banned. Torah scrolls were burned, the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem was desecrated by idol worship, and orders were issued to erect altars to Zeus and other Greek gods throughout the countryside. Biblical faith was on the verge of being wiped out of existence.

In 168 B.C. the Jewish priest Mattathias started a revolt against the Greek oppression. Upon Mattathias death in 166 B.C., his son, Judas the Maccabee (which means "Hammer", succeeded him as leader of the revolt. [Note: Various texts use either the name Judas or Judah to designate the same person] The Book of 1 Maccabees recounts how Judas succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem and purifying the Temple. The Temple was rededicated for worship of the LORD in 165 B.C. These events gave birth to the biblical holiday, the annual eight-day Feast of Dedication, called Hanukkah, which Jesus celebrated in Jerusalem (John 10:22-23) and which continues to be observed by God's people to this day.

Even though this story takes place between the times of the Old and New Testaments, and is not included in the 66 books of the Bible, it is a vital story of how faith in God helped bring about victory for God's chosen people. 1 Maccabees draws upon God's acts in the Old Testament stories of Exodus 14:21-31 and 1 Samuel 14:1-15; 17:40-51 as inspiration to raise up a faithful remnant who would stand up for the God of Israel in their own generation. If the Maccabees had failed in their fight to free God's people from the religious suppression of the Greeks, the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob might have been extinguished and the New Testament might never have been written. The miracle of Hanukkah sets the stage for a faithful Jewish community who longed for a Messiah (an anointed one) to come as God's deliverer. That Savior is Jesus the Christ. The faith community of the New Testament would not have existed if it were not for the faith and courage of the Maccabees and God's hand of salvation that worked through them 150 years before the birth of Christ. These are important lessons to pass onto our children when we retell this story.

Read the actual text from 1 Maccabees 4:6-59 here: <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=1+Maccabees+4:6-59>

Written by Rev. Ron Shifley from Scotland United Church of Christ
Scotland, SD, USA

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1 Maccabees 4:6-59 "The Story of Hanukkah"

Video Lesson Sketch

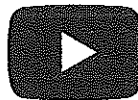
Holy Word Studio:

Materials:

- DVD Player/Projector
- Popcorn to serve in paper bags
- Video: "Maccabees: Story of Hanukkah" (Nest Entertainment, 2005) It is about 30 min. long.

Watch a preview clip of this video by Nest Entertainment from YouTube:

Animated Hero Classics: Maccabees on DVD



Teacher preparation:

1. Read the Scripture passages prayerfully, asking God to show you what He has to say to you and to those He's given you to teach.

2. Read the Biblical Explanation and Background, and think about what concepts you need to teach.
 3. Watch the DVD and review all of the interactive questions so that you are familiar with how to use them.
 4. Prepare the necessary materials.
-

Lesson Plan

Opening:

Greet the children and introduce yourself.

Open with a prayer.

Dig:

Teach about where the story of 1 Maccabees fits into the Bible (note that the story happened between the times of the Old and New Testaments), briefly describing that this story recounts the origins of the biblical holiday of Hanukkah that Jesus himself celebrated at the Jerusalem Temple (John 10:22-23). If it is past the first Sunday of this rotation, first ask the children to relate what they've already learned about Maccabees and Hanukkah in other workshops.

Watch the DVD and guide the kids through the interactive questions located on the extra features menu.

Review the memory verse with the kids:

"The LORD is my light and salvation - whom shall I fear." Psalm 27:1a

Reflection:

Close the session with prayer, thanking God for the faith of the Maccabees and asking for God to give us the boldness to live our faith for Him.

Written by Rev. Ron Shifley from Scotland United Church of Christ
Scotland, SD, USA

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Crafts Lesson Plan - 1 Maccabees 4:6-59 "The Story of Hanukkah"

Creation Station:

Materials:

- Block of self drying clay; cut apart for each student
- 1 Maccabees story scroll printed on parchment paper (precut, one for each student)
- 2 pre-cut wood dowel rods (per student) to make scroll rollers
- Nails (one for each student) to etch pictures onto sides of clay jar
- Glue
- Dry erase board
- Dry erase markers, eraser

"The Story of Hanukkah"

1 Maccabees 4:6-59

At daybreak Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men, but they did not have armor and swords such as they desired. And they saw the camp of the Gentiles, strong and fortified, with cavalry round about it, and these men were trained in war. But Judas said to the men who were with him, "Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. Remember how our fathers were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. And now let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us and remember his covenant with our fathers and crush this army before us today. Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel."

When the foreigners looked up and saw them coming against them, they went forth from their camp to battle. Then the men with Judas blew their trumpets and engaged in battle. The Gentiles were crushed and fled into the plain, and all those in the rear fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, and to the plains of Idumea, and to Azotus and Jarmia; and three thousand of them fell.

Then Judas and his force turned back from pursuing them, and he said to the people, "Do not be greedy for plunder, for there is a battle before us. Congias and his force are near us in the hills. But stand now against our enemies and fight them, and afterward seize the plunder boldly."

Just as Judas was finishing this speech, a detach-

with hymns."

Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action. And when Lysias saw the rout of his troops and observed the boldness which inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he departed to Antioch and enlisted mercenaries, to invade Judah again with an even larger army.

Then said Judas and his brothers, "Behold, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it." So all the army assembled and they went up to Mount Zion. And they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins.

Then they rent their clothes, and mourned with great lamentation, and sprinkled themselves with ashes. They fell face down on the ground, and sounded the signal on the trumpets, and cried out to Heaven.

Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place.

They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs,

and built a new altar like the former one.

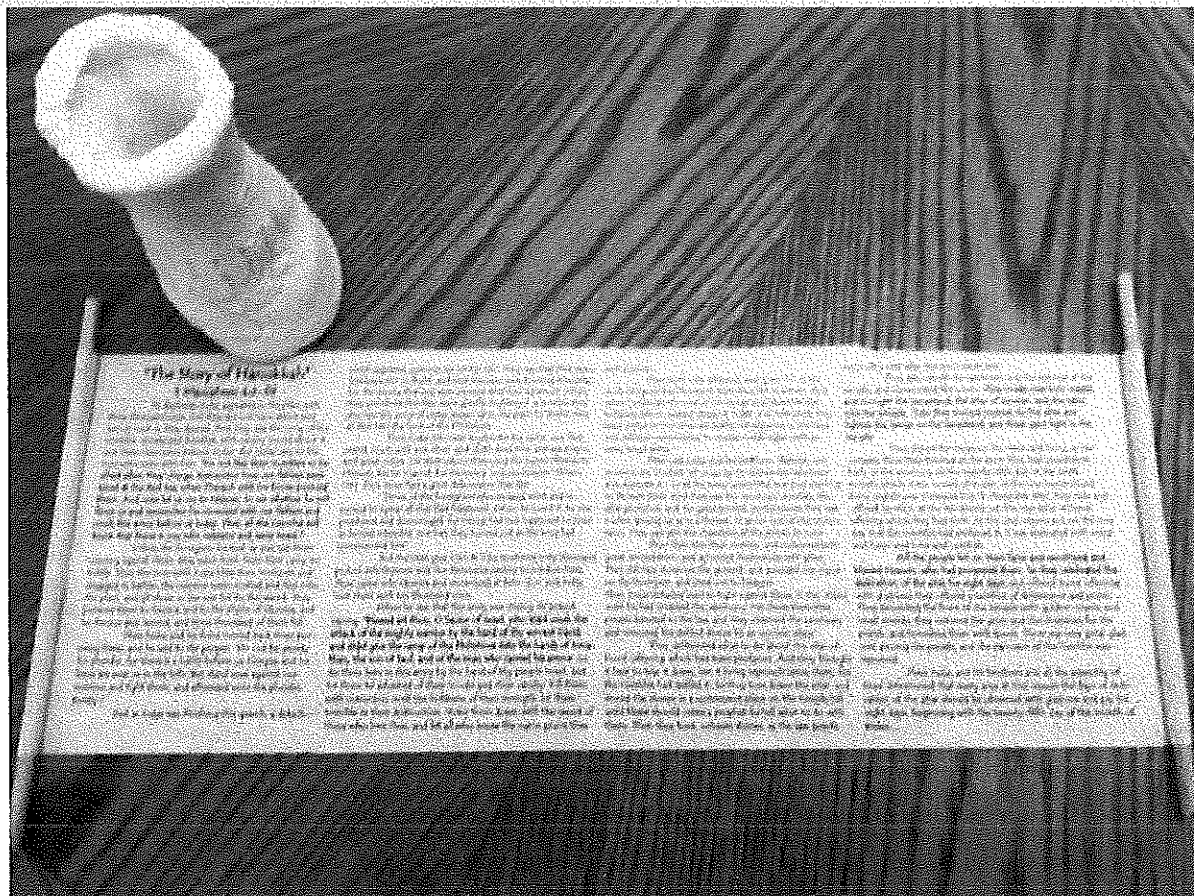
They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple.

They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken. Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Kislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year [Seleucid Era; 15 December 165], they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering which 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 worshipped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise.

They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and furnished them with doors. There was very great gladness among the people, and the reproach of the Gentiles was removed.

Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev.



Teacher preparation:

1. Read the Scripture passages prayerfully, asking God to show you what He has to say to you and to those He's given you to teach.
2. Read the Biblical Explanation and Background, and think about what concepts you need to teach.
3. Prior to class write the following phrases randomly on the dry erase board: "Faith in God, Temple worship, Study of Scripture, Hebrew language, Holidays i.e. Passover, Purim
4. Prepare the necessary materials.

Lesson Plan

Opening:

Greet the children and introduce yourself.

Opening with a prayer.

Dig:

Today we're going to learn the story of the origins of the biblical holiday of Hanukkah. This story is found in the book of 1 Maccabees that was written down between the times that the Old and New Testaments were written. Although 1 Maccabees was ultimately not included in our Bibles, it contains a story of faith and courage that made it possible for the events in the New Testament to happen.

As the Old Testament era was drawing to a close, there were a number of things that were important to the Jewish people living in the land of Judea: [Point to the phrases written on the dry erase board] Their faith in God, the ability to worship God in the Temple, the study of Scriptures, the Hebrew language, biblical holidays like Passover which celebrated the Exodus story and Purim which celebrated the faith of Queen Esther when she saved her people from being killed. These things along with other Jewish customs were important to help maintain their Jewish identity and faith in God after the times of the prophets.

This was important because, in between the times that the Old and New Testaments were written, the land of Judea had been conquered by the legendary Macedonian king Alexander the Great and his Greek army. Although Alexander the Great allowed the Jewish people to worship the God of Israel and maintain their religious and ethnic customs, Greek culture swept through the land under Greek occupation. After Alexander's death, King Antiochus was installed as the Greek king that ruled over Jerusalem and Judea. He did not like the Jews or Jewish faith and culture.

King Antiochus decided that wanted to erase everything Jewish from the land. [As you mention each point, erase a phrase from the dry erase board.] He made laws that forbid faith in the God of Israel. He outlawed Temple worship, the study of Scripture, and observance of biblical holidays like Passover and Purim. He even tried to erase the use of the Hebrew language and other Jewish customs like circumcision. To top things off, he erected an idol of the Greek god Zeus in the Temple in Jerusalem and told the people that Zeus was their new god.

Ask: How would you feel if some foreign country invaded the United States and told us that we couldn't go to church anymore, that we couldn't speak English anymore or display the American flag? [Let kids have time to respond]

The old Jewish priest Mattathias and his sons were upset by the Greeks' attempt to erase their faith and Jewish identity. They formed a group of Jewish rebels called the Maccabees. Led by Mattathias' son Judas, the Maccabees made a commitment that the Greeks would not erase their faith in God or Jewish worship and culture from the land of Judea. So the Maccabees led a revolt against the Greek armies.

1 Maccabees recounts that one time before they faced the Greeks, Judas encouraged the men by saying, *"Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. And now, let us cry to Heaven, to see whether He will favor us and remember His covenant with our ancestors and crush this army before us today. Then all the Gentiles will know that there is [a God] who redeems and saves Israel."*(1 Maccabees 4:8-11)

God did help the Maccabees beat the Greeks. They freed Jerusalem and Judea from Greek occupation, tore down the idol of Zeus in the Temple, cleansed the Temple and made it ready for the worship of God once again. When the priests relit the flames on the Temple menorah all the people of Judea were able to proclaim once again that *"The LORD is my light and salvation – whom shall I fear?"* (Psalm 27:1)

Ask: Do any of you know the miracle that God performed in the Temple when the Jews relit the Temple menorah? [Let kids answer. If kids don't know the story say] Legend has it that when the priests went to relight the candles on the menorah in the Temple, there was only one pot of holy oil to fill the oil lamps on the menorah. The oil was enough to only keep the menorah lit for one day, but God made a miracle happen. The menorah stayed lit for 8 days, just long enough for new holy oil to be produced. That is why the menorah is the symbol of Hanukkah.

Say: After the Temple was rededicated to the LORD, the Jews decided that the people should celebrate the rededication of the Temple every year to remember not only the faith and courage of the Maccabees who refused to let the Greeks erase faith in God from Israel, but also the miracle that God performed in the Temple. They developed an annual holiday called "Feast of Dedication" or Hanukkah which has been celebrated every year ever since. The Bible says that Jesus even celebrated Hanukkah at the Temple in Jerusalem during his ministry (John 10:22-23).

The Maccabees made it possible for faith in God to exist during the time of foreign occupation. If it hadn't been for the Maccabees, faith in God might have been erased forever, and the events in the New Testament might have never happened.

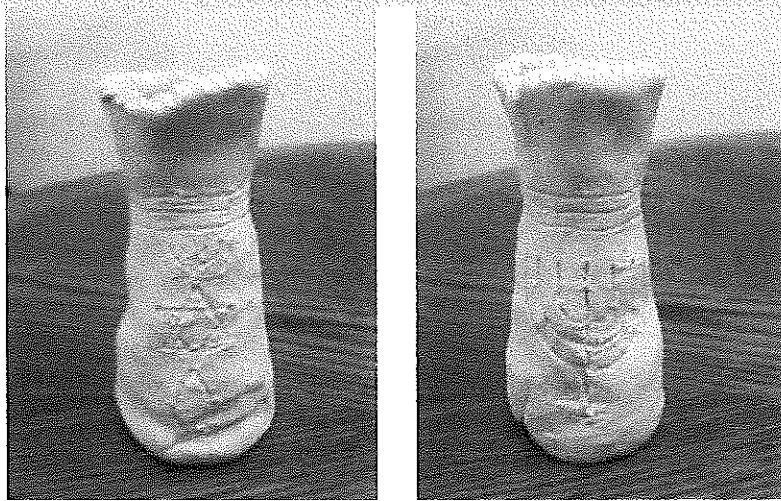
Ask: How would the New Testament be different if the Maccabees hadn't saved the Jewish faith from being erased? [People wouldn't have believed in the God of Israel, People wouldn't have been looking for a Jewish Messiah, No one would have worshipped God in the Temple. No one would have studied the Scriptures, and the Scriptures might have been lost forever, Jesus wouldn't have grown up Jewish, The Church wouldn't never been started by Jewish Christians, etc.]

1 Maccabees records this important story of faith and courage that made the birth of Jesus and the establishment of the Christian Church possible.

Today, we're going to make a clay scroll holder, so you can have your very own copy of the story of Hanukkah found in 1 Maccabees. This way you'll never forget this story of faith and courage that didn't make it into the Bible. The clay pot will feature an etching of the Temple menorah on one side, reminding us of how Judas Maccabees liberated the Temple and rededicated it to the glory of God. On the other side, you'll draw the Messianic Seal, one of the oldest symbols of Christianity that was used by the Early Church in Jerusalem, it features the Temple menorah, star of David, and ichthus fish which was a early Christian symbol for Jesus. This symbol helps remind us that the faith of the Early Church was deeply rooted in the Jewish faith of the Old Testament. The Maccabees helped keep that faith alive, and we Christians are indebted to them forever.

Instructions for Craft

1. Have kids glue wood dowel rods to ends of 1 Maccabees scroll. Let glue dry.
2. Have kids take their portion of clay, flatten it and mold it into a clay jar. Make sure the mouth of clay jar is wide enough to insert the scroll into it. Measure opening by inserting sample Maccabees scroll in it.
3. Decorate clay jar with nail to make designs of "menorah" and "Messianic Seal."
4. Let clay jars and scrolls dry. They will be available for pick-up next week.



Reflection:


As kids finish the craft project, practice this month's memory verse with them a couple of times. *"The LORD is my light and salvation - whom shall I fear?"* (Psalm 27:1)

End the lesson with a group prayer.

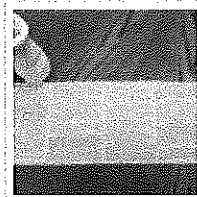
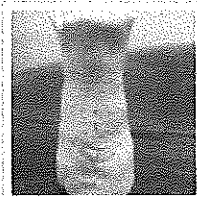
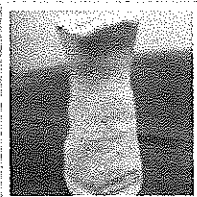
Written by Rev. Ron Shifley from: Scotland United Church of Christ
Scotland, SD, USA

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Images (3)



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1 Maccabees Scroll.pdf

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Games and Cooking Lesson Plan - 1 Maccabees 4:6-59 "The Story of Hanukkah"

Discovery Destination:

Materials:

- "Rugrats Chanukah" episode on DVD; "Rugrats Holiday Celebration", Paramount, 2004 or "Rugrats: Season 4", Nickelodeon, 2011
- TV, DVD player
- Wooden Dreidel (one for each student) Can be purchased in bulk at BargainJudaica.com
- Handout: "Dreidel Game Instruction"s (one for each student) Attached for download and printing
- Foil covered chocolate coins (about 30 per group; 2 groups)
- 2 low kids tables to play games on
- Cooking oil
- Electric fryer
- Tube biscuits to make donuts
- Cinnamon/sugar mixture to coat donuts
- Tongs
- Plates, napkins

Teacher preparation:

1. Read the Scripture passages prayerfully, asking God to show you what He has to say to you and to those He's given you to teach.
2. Read the Biblical Explanation and Background, and think about what concepts you need to teach.
3. Learn more about persecuted Christians living today at The Voice of the Martyrs website: www.persecution.com/
4. Prepare the necessary materials.

Lesson Plan

Opening:

Greet the children and introduce yourself.

Open with a prayer.

Dig:

Teach about 1 Maccabees, briefly relating that it is a story that took place between the times that the Old and New Testaments were written and that it inspired the biblical holiday of Hanukkah that Jesus himself celebrated in the Temple in Jerusalem. If it is past the first Sunday of this rotation, first ask the children to relate what they've already learned about the story of Hanukkah in other workshops.

Rugrats Chanukah Video

Play the first 2:00 minutes of "Rugrats Chanukah." [This portrays the plight of the Jews under King Antichous, when the Jews were forbidden to study the Scriptures and played the Dreidel game as a way to hide their religious observance. It also introduces the hero Judah Maccabee.]

After the video clip is over, ask:

Imagine what it would have been like during this time, and you were told that you could no longer worship God and study the Bible. How would this have made you feel?

Do you think you'd would have given up your faith in God to get along with the Greeks, or would you have still studied the Bible, and worshipped in secret like the Jews did in the Rugrats cartoon?

What do you think it was like to have to meet in secret to study the Bible? Would you have been afraid?

Legend has it that the Jews used the game of Dreidel as a cover up when Greek soldiers discovered them studying the Scriptures. What do you think you might have done to keep the Greeks from discovering that you were studying the Bible?

Say: In a number of countries around the globe, Christians today live under similar circumstances and are oppressed, even at times put in prison for their faith. In some countries people are put in prison for even owning a Bible. Let's say a prayer for those who live under religious persecution today. [Lead the class in a short time of prayer. You might want to pray for persecuted Christians living in Iran, Egypt, Sudan, China].

Recite the memory verse together a couple of times: *"The Lord is my light and salvation – whom shall I fear?"* (Psalms 27:1)

Then say: Fortunately, during the times between the Old and New Testaments, the Maccabees stood up for their faith, freed Jerusalem and the Temple from Greek occupation. The biblical holiday of Hanukkah celebrates the faith and courage of Judas Maccabees and the miracle that God performed among the Jews at the Temple. Today, we're going to have fun and get a chance to play a traditional Hanukkah game and enjoy a tasty snack that reminds us of God's miracle at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Dreidel Game

One of the fun traditions of Hanukkah is the spin the Dreidel game. A Dreidel is a four-sided spinning top that families play with on Hanukkah. Each side is imprinted with a Hebrew letter. These letters form an acronym for the Hebrew words (Nes Gadol Haya Sham) "A great miracle happened there," referring to the miracle of the oil that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Dreidel game is played to commemorate the time when worship of the God of Israel was outlawed by King Antiochus from 168-165 B.C. and the reading and teaching of Scripture was forbidden. Yet, as legend has it that faithful Jews continued to teach God's Word in small groups in defiance of the law. When Greek soldiers would pass by, the Jews hid their Torah scrolls and began spinning the Dreidel so that it would appear that they were gambling and not studying Scripture, just like we saw in the Rugrats video clip earlier.

[Divide the kids into two groups and sit them around the two tables, unless the group is small. On each table should be one Dreidel and a lot of foil wrapped chocolate coins.]

The game is played using a Dreidel and chocolate coins (gelt). Each player starts out with 10 or more coins and places one coin in the "pot". The first player spins the Dreidel, and depending on which side the Dreidel falls on, either wins a coin from the pot or gives up part of his stash. The code is as follows:

- Nun – "none"- the player gets none and the next player spins
- Gimel – "all" – the player gets all of the coins in the pot. Each player then puts one coin in to replenish the pot.
- Hey – "half" – the player takes half of the pot, rounding up if there is an odd number of coins.
- Shin – "put one in" – each player puts one coin in the pot.

Play continues until one player wins the entire pot of coins. After the game is over, all the coins are divided up so each player has their own chocolate coins to take home and enjoy.

[Allow kids the chance to play the Dreidel game. If time runs too long to complete the next part of the lesson, call the game and divide up the gold chocolate coins evenly among the kids.]

Frying Donuts

One of the traditional foods eaten during the celebration of Hanukkah are fried donuts. The oil used to fry donuts reminds us of the miracle of the holy oil in the Jerusalem Temple.

1 Maccabees recounts how after the Maccabees defeated the Greeks and freed Jerusalem from foreign occupation, they went to the Temple in Jerusalem to cleanse it so that it could be dedicated to the worship of God once again. *"They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. They offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple... So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days..."* (1 Maccabees 4:49-50, 56)

Legend has it that when the priests went to light the lamps on the menorah, they discovered that there was only enough purified olive oil to light the menorah for one night. Yet, in faith, they lit the lamps anyway. A miracle happened. God let the flames on the menorah burn for 8 days until more holy oil could be made. This is why lighting the menorah is one of the central acts during the annual celebration of Hanukkah.

Eating foods fried in oil is also another tradition that reminds us of the miracle of the oil. Today, we're going to fry some donuts and enjoy them. As we do, take a moment to remember God's miracle in the Temple so many years ago.

1. Have a helper fry the donuts while the kids are playing the Dreidel game above.
2. Give kids bowls of sugar and cinnamon mix to coat their warm donuts with
3. Let each child enjoy at least one fried donut.

Reflection:

End the lesson with prayer, thanking God for the ordinary miracles that He performs everyday in our lives.

Pass out a Dreidel and instructions on how to play the game to each student before they leave so that all the kids can play Dreidel at home.

Written by Rev. Ron Shifley from: Scotland United Church of Christ
Scotland, SD, USA

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Dreidel Game instructions.pdf

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The Hanukkah Game of Dreidel

How to Play the Dreidel Game

One of the fun traditions of Hanukkah is the Spin the Dreidel game. A dreidel is a four-sided spinning top that families play with on Hanukkah. Each side is imprinted with a Hebrew letter. These letters are an acronym for the Hebrew words נס גדול היה שם (Nes Gadol Haya Sham), "A great miracle happened there", referring to the miracle of the oil that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The dreidel game is played to commemorate the time when Judaism was outlawed by King Antiochus from 168- 165 B.C. and the reading and teaching of Scripture was forbidden. Yet, legend has it that faithful Jews continued to teach God's Word in small groups. When Greek soldiers would pass by, the Jews would hide their Torah scrolls and begin spinning the dreidel so that it would appear that they were gambling and not studying Scripture.

The game is played using a dreidel and chocolate coins (gelt). Each player starts out with 10 or 15 coins and places one coin in the "pot." The first player spins the dreidel, and depending on which side the dreidel falls on, either wins a coin from the pot or gives up part of his stash. The code is as follows:

- Nun—"none"—the player gets none and the next player spins
- Gimel—"all"—the player gets all the coins in the pot. Each player then puts one coin in to replenish the pot.
- Hey—"half"—the player takes half of the pot, rounding up if there is an odd number
- Shin—"put one in"—each player puts one coin in the pot

Play continues until one player wins the entire pot of coins. After the game is over, all the coins are divided up evenly so each player has their own chocolate coins to enjoy.

Dreidels can be purchased online at www.bargainjudaica.com.

