

## **The Day of Laying the Foundation of God's Sanctuary According to the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia**

### **Introduction**

Two prophets who are known to us – Haggai and Zekharia – accompanied Zerubavel and Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak in the great return to Zion following the declaration by Cyrus (Koresh), king of Persia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judea, restored the altar, and eventually rebuilt the (Second) Temple, at the beginning of the reign of Darius (Daryavesh). A third prophet – Malakhi – is associated with the period of the later ascent by Ezra (the midrash asserts that “The same Malakhi is Ezra” – Megilla 15a).

The prophecies of Zekharia in general, and the wondrous visions that he describes in them in particular, present a difficult challenge to students and commentators alike. Everyone has battled over them. At the same time, the essence of his prophecy – like that of his predecessor, Haggai – is exceedingly clear and simple: it is a message of consolation and salvation to the nation just now returning from exile; a prophecy about the rebuilding of the Temple and the return of the Divine Presence to the redeemed Jerusalem, together with her children who are once again filling her streets.

One cannot read these prophecies today without a tremor of emotion, in view of the return to Zion in our times. Even the menorah and the olive branch, as the symbols of the State of Israel, have their source in Zekharia's visions.

A review of these prophecies shows that they reveal many new concepts in the realms of exegesis, philosophy, reasons for the commandments, and the festivals and the fasts, as well as some weighty questions that challenge us in our own era. I was drawn to explore these prophecies in greater depth when I once happened to notice that it was on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Kislev) in the second year of the reign of Darius, that Haggai began uttering his prophecy concerning the laying of the foundation of God's Sanctuary. In other words, the 24<sup>th</sup> (or rather, the 25<sup>th</sup> – as we shall see) of Kislev as the day of laying the foundation of the God's Sanctuary preceded the rededication by the Hasmoneans by several generations! Is there some connection here? Could there possibly be none? Is it possible that no-one, throughout all the centuries since then, was aware of Haggai's prophecy? And if it was noted, why was it never mentioned in relation to Hannukah?

I proceeded in my exploration of these prophecies, seeking answers, and heard some hints from Rabbi Yishayahu Hadari, *shlita*. I found that Rabbi Yaakov Emdin, in his work *Mor u-Ketzi'a* (siman 670) “discovers” this prophecy of Haggai, interprets Hannukah in light of it, and asserts the authenticity of the lesson even though “the early masters never thought of it”. Another clue is offered by the Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib of Gur) who, in his characteristic brilliant style, binds Hannukah to Sukkot. At the same time, my journeys through the hills of Yehuda and Shomron offered clear evidence that the months of Heshvan and Kislev are the season for olives and oil in Eretz Yisrael; hence the law that *bikkurim* can be brought to the Temple up until Hannukah.

This represents the connection between the natural aspect of Eretz Yisrael (the oil season) and the miracle of Hannukah (the cruse of pure oil).

All of the above led me to an understanding of the festival that will be set forth below, concerning the prophecies of Haggai and the visions and prophecy of Zekharia, as well as a general account of the history of Hannukah, from the beginning of time.

Our journey begins with the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia, which – for the sake of clarity – will be discussed in order of the prophecies and their chronology.

### **a. Prophecies of the second year of Darius**

#### **1. 1<sup>st</sup> of Elul**

In general, Haggai – and Zekharia after him – deals with two main problems at three different periods of time. The first problem is the lack of willingness to build the Temple, even though Darius is already king of Persia and is entering his second year of reign. Darius is supportive of the returnees from exile and their endeavors, as their adversaries also came to discover (Ezra 5:7). Nevertheless, the returnees had not yet commenced building the Temple. This lack of interest and desire is cloaked in the righteous claim that the time is not yet ripe. “This people has said: The time has not come, the time for the House of God to be rebuilt” (Haggai 1:2).

The prophet counters their “time” argument by pointing out that in matters related to their personal affairs, they seem to be certain that the time is right for each of them to build his own beautiful home. If each is working on his own “wide house... with rafters of cedars” (cf. Yirmiyahu 22:14), then it cannot be that the time has not yet come to build God’s House, too. As King David expresses it: “See now: I dwell in a house of cedar, while the Ark of God dwells within a curtain?!” (Shemuel II 7:2). Therefore, Haggai rebukes them: “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your well timbered houses, while this House lies in ruins?... Because of My House that lies waste, while you run off, each to his own house” (Haggai 1:4,7). Because every person is inclined to build a fine and comfortable house for himself and to invest his efforts in his own private domain, he ignores matters of communal importance, and certainly has no thought for Divine service.

God responds to this situation by striking a blow to the economic prosperity of the returnees, in the form of severe drought. In this way He seeks to shake them out of their complacent occupation with their homes and their fields, and to arouse them to soul-searching and a reevaluation of their ways: “And now, so says the Lord of Hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, but brought in little; you eat, but are not satisfied; you drink, but are not satisfied; you are clothed, but no-one is warm; and he that earns, puts his wages into a bag with holes... Because of My House that lies waste, while you run off, each to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold dew, and the earth withholds its produce. For I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that

which the ground brings forth, and upon man, and upon cattle, and upon all labor” (Haggai 1:5-6; 9-11).

## 2. 24<sup>th</sup> of Elul

Haggai’s prophecy has an impact on the people: “Zerubavel son of Shaltiel, and Yehoshua son of Yehotzadak – the Kohen Gadol, and all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai, the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people were fearful before God... And God stirred up the spirit of Zerubavel son of Shaltiel, governor of Yehuda, and the spirit of Yehoshua son of Yehotzadak, the Kohen Gadol, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and labored in the House of the Lord of Hosts, their God...” (Haggai 1:12-14).

This “labor” appears to have amounted to no more than general preparations and a gathering of the materials and tools for the building of the Temple (Rashi and Radak explain it thus, and this is the way in which the concept of “*melakha*” [work] is to be understood in some places in the context of the building of the Mishkan, too [Shemot 36:6-7]), since the actual construction commenced only in the ninth month (Kislev), as we shall explain below.

## 3. 21<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei

The second problem that Haggai addresses is the pervading sense of weakness and inadequacy. No matter how hard the people work, and no matter how much is invested in the building, the Temple that will arise cannot hope to approximate the splendor of the First Temple, since only a portion of the Jews have returned to the land, and they do not represent an independent, sovereign kingdom.

This profound feeling finds expression in the description of the first attempt to establish God’s House during the reign of Cyrus, in the second year of the return of the exiles from Babylon: “And many of the kohanim and the leviim and the older heads of the households, who had seen the First Temple – when the foundation of this [Second] Temple was laid, before their eyes, they wept with a loud voice, but many [others] shouted aloud with joy. And the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound could be heard from afar” (Ezra 3:12-13). The same phenomenon is the subject of Zekharia’s challenge: “Who despises the day of small things? For those seven shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in Zerubavel’s hand. The eyes of God – they rove about throughout the land” (Zekharia 4:10, see Rashi and Radak ad loc.).

The sense of inadequacy and the sin of weeping are the focus of Haggai’s second prophecy, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of the seventh month (Tishrei) – i.e., on the last day of the festival of Sukkot (known today as Hoshana Rabba): “Who of you that remain saw this House in its earlier glory? And how do you see it now – is it not in your eyes as nothing?! But now - be strong, O Zerubavel, says God, and be strong, O Yehoshua son of Yehotzadak, the Kohen Gadol, and be strong, all the people of the land, says God, and work. For I am with you, says the Lord of Hosts.” And lest they ask, “What should we do?” the prophet immediately specifies: “According to the word of My covenant with you when you came

out of Egypt, and My spirit is present in your midst, do not fear” (Haggai 2:3-5, see Radak and Ibn Ezra on verse 5).

Here the prophecy goes on to describe a great revolution in the world. There will be great honor for Israel, and a reversal of Israel’s dependence upon the nations to a situation in which all the nations will come to give glory to Israel and to the House of God, and – ultimately – a true peace granted by God.

These promises, all uttered under the heading of “in just a little while” (verse 6), were never realized in Zerubavel’s time. Indeed, they have not been realized in full to this day. Ibn Ezra, in his commentary on Haggai (2:9), understands the promises as being conditional, based on the parallel prophecy of Zekharia (end of chapter 6) – a prophecy that concludes the series of Zekharia’s prophecies uttered during the second year of Darius’s reign, parallel to Haggai and slightly later: “And [all of this] shall be, if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God”.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> of Heshvan – Zekharia’s prophecy

Zekharia’s first prophecy is recorded as occurring on Rosh Hodesh of the eighth month; i.e., immediately after Haggai’s second prophecy. It conveys, in essence, God’s anger that the people are not obeying the prophets (with apparent reference to the prophecy of Haggai) and are repeating the behavior of their ancestors, who similarly failed to heed the words of the “early prophets” (the prophets of the First Temple). Zekharia beseeches them: “Do not be like your forefathers...” (Zekharia 1:4), and he reminds them that their forefathers had acknowledged their mistakes when they were finally exiled. He recalls: “And they repented and said: As the Lord of Hosts planned to do to us, in accordance with our ways and our actions, so He has done to us” (1:6).

This explains the unusual brevity that characterizes Zekharia’s opening prophecy, which would appear to lack any clear message: what is it that Zekharia is demanding of his listeners? The solution is simple: this prophecy rests upon Haggai’s preceding one, and urges its listeners to obey that prophecy immediately – as indeed happened on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month. This view is further supported by the verses in Ezra, which mention Haggai before Zekharia: “Then the prophets - Haggai the prophet, and Zekharia son of Iddo, prophesized...” (Ezra 5:1); “And the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesizing of Haggai the prophet and Zekharia son of Iddo...” (6:14)

#### 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev – “Now ask instruction of the kohanim, saying”

On the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month (Kislev), Haggai comes back to the first problem – the lack of desire to arise and build God’s House, owing to the fact that everyone is busy with his own affairs. This is the reason why God has brought the drought: in order to awaken them and draw them out of their self-absorbed focus on their private prosperity.

This prophecy opens with a sort of “quiz” addressed to the kohanim concerning matters of *kodshim* and *taharot*: “Now ask a teaching of the kohanim, saying: if a person carries consecrated meat in the flap of his garment, and with that flap he touches bread, or

pottage, or wine, or oil, or any food – does it become consecrated? And the kohanim answered and said, No. Then Haggai said: If a person who is impure, on account of [contact with] a dead body, touches any of these – will it become impure? And the kohanim answered and said, It will become impure” (Haggai 2:11-13).

The Gemara addresses these questions from the purely halakhic perspective, and the Sages are divided as to whether the kohanim answered correctly or incorrectly (Pesahim 16b-17a), depending on whether Haggai was asking about the fifth degree of impurity (i.e., if the consecrated meat inside the garment touched the bread, which then came into contact with the pottage, which in turn transmitted impurity to the wine, and on to the oil) or only the fourth (as a literal reading of the verses would seem to suggest – i.e., that each of these foods came into independent contact with the garment, in which case they would all become impure, in the second instance, but would not become consecrated, in the first).

However, Ibn Ezra takes a more literal view of the intention behind the questions: “It becomes clear that that which is consecrated has no power to sanctify that which is not, by means of mediating contact, in the way that impurity resulting from contact with a dead body has the power to render something else impure. This is meant as a metaphor, like the technique of Natan, who spoke to David and caught him at his word... because they were building houses for themselves to dwell in, while God’s House remained waste...” (Ibn Ezra on Haggai 2:14).

According to Ibn Ezra, then, the prophecy is coming back to its opening argument: the laziness of the returnees and their absorption in personal matters are what invite the prophet’s rebuke, which rests upon a halakhic metaphor: impurity spreads more easily than sanctity, or purity, can do. If something that is ritually pure comes into contact with something that is ritually impure, the first is affected by the latter, but not vice versa.

Hence we deduce that the manifestation of holiness in the world requires human effort and action. In the absence of this human investment, it will not appear miraculously from heaven. Only impurity and defilement can spread “on their own”, as it were, without any human effort. Therefore, declares the prophet, all sacrifices that are now being offered upon the altar, in the absence of the Temple, are impure – because the people have no wish to build it; they are waiting for it to appear on its own. To descend from heaven, perhaps.

However, from heaven there descends only a drought, in response to their apathy and self-centeredness.

#### End of Haggai’s prophecy

On that same day – the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month – Haggai conveys a further prophecy – his last – complementing his message from the last day of Sukkot, declaring that the day of liberation from foreign rule is drawing close. Rashi interprets this as referring to the fall of the Persian kingdom at the hands of the Greeks, and as hinting to the salvation associated with the Hasmoneans, and he elaborates on this explicitly in commenting on

the prophecy of Zekharia (as we shall see below). Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, maintains that there do seem to have been some great and significant events that took place even during the Persian reign, but “we have not located the ancient texts”.<sup>1</sup>

#### “The olive tree did not bear fruit”

For what reason does Haggai’s prophecy conclude on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev? Why does the day of laying the foundation of God’s Sanctuary fall specifically on that date, or the day after it? Is there any connection between all of this and the rededication of the Temple by the Hasmoneans on that date (or the day after), several generations later?

The verses that hold the key to answering all of these questions are connected to the severe drought that struck the land: “Consider now: from this day onwards, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of God’s Temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? And do the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, still not bring forth? From this day I will bless you” (Haggai 2:18-19). The reason for the promise commencing on this date in Kislev is not that the sowing of winter crops was postponed owing to the drought (as R.M. Zer-Kavod proposes, *Da’at Mikra*, ad loc), although this is certainly a reasonable hypothesis. The simplest and most obvious reason is that, as noted above, the olive season is the last in the yearly cycle of the “seven species” of Eretz Yisrael. Its duration, including the pressing of the olives, is from Tishrei until the end of Kislev.

At the end of the ninth month the season for olives and oil comes to an end. For this reason, the *bikkurim* – “first fruits” consisting of the seven species - cease not at Sukkot, but at Hannukah. “The festival of Sukkot shall you make for yourselves for seven days, when you gather in your grain and your wine” (Devarim 16:13) – but the oil *starts* only at Sukkot, and ends at Hannukah.

That year was a year of terrible drought. With regard to the grain and the wine, this situation was apparent already in the sixth and seventh months (Elul-Tishrei). The olive season, however, was only beginning then, and the harvest could not yet be measured. In chapter 2, verse 16, Haggai conveys a detailed accounting of the average produce for the year from the threshing floors (fifty percent), and from the wine-presses (forty percent). Since the summary of the harvest is of great importance to the prophet – and no less so to his listeners – it is clear why, for the sole purpose of including the olive harvest, too, the prophet waits until the end of the ninth month.

“From this day onwards I will bless you”, promises Haggai in God’s Name. This does not mean that now the olive trees will suddenly produce all that they should have in the preceding months, but rather that from now onwards, with the laying of the foundation of the House of God, a blessed year has begun: a year in which the sowing might be later than usual, but it will produce a blessed harvest and a full ingathering. Only in Nissan would the people begin to see that the year had indeed been a good one, but perhaps they

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<sup>1</sup> This dispute may be related to the controversy concerning the dates involved and the identity of Artaxerxes; the scope of the present article does not allow for detailed discussion of the respective views.

took heart from the signs that would have been apparent already in Shevat, with the healthy rains that would be falling.

The day of the actual laying of the foundation of God's Temple was apparently not the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Kislev) but rather the next day, the 25<sup>th</sup>, for concerning the 24<sup>th</sup> Haggai says, "*Before* one stone was laid upon another in God's Temple" (2:15).

All of this leads us to the prophecy of Zekharia, which was uttered on the twenty-fourth of Shevat (exactly two months after Haggai's final prophecy) and conveyed a message of consolation and salvation.

#### 24<sup>th</sup> of Shevat – Zekharia's visions

"On the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Shevat", Zekharia prophesized and told of his visions, which were prophecies of consolation and salvation (Zekharia 1:7 – 6:8). The menorah and the olive tree are at the center of all of them. We shall now examine the visions, their structure, and their significance more closely.

#### **b. Zekharia's visions as an overall menorah structure**

A careful review of Zekharia's visions reveals that there are in fact five separate visions, each comprising two images:

- a. The vision of the horses (1:7-17) and the vision of the chariots (6:1-8) are one and the same.
- b. The vision of the measuring line (2:5-9) and that of the flying scroll (5:1-4) are one and the same.
- c. The vision of the horns (2:1-2) and that of the plowing (2:3-4) are the same.
- d. The vision of the 'efa' and the woman going out (5:5-8) and the vision of the women going out (5:9-11) are the same.
- e. In the midst of all of the above, right in the middle (chapters 3-4) we find the vision of the menorah with its seven lights, with the bowl on top of it and the olive branches at its sides, and the vision of the stone with the seven eyes, or facets, symbolizing God's eyes which roam about the land. These two images likewise comprise a single vision: the menorah symbolizes Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol, while the stone represents Zerubavel son of Shaltiel, the governor of Yehuda. These two figures – Yehoshua and Zerubavel – are also the "two olive branches"; the "two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth". The building of the Second Temple, and the salvation of Israel, rest upon both of them together – as we see also in chapter 6, in the vision of the crowns, which concludes the visions.

In view of the above structure, we propose that all of Zekharia's visions appeared to him in a prophetic revelation organized in the form of a menorah<sup>2</sup> and its branches, "its seven

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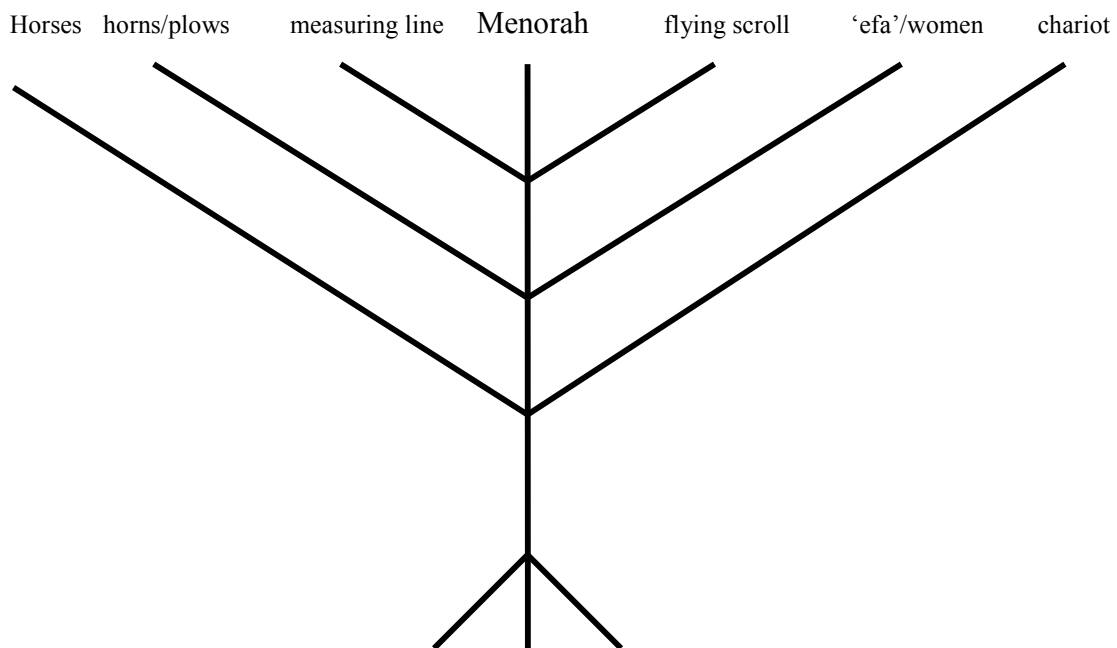
<sup>2</sup> The term "menorah" refers specifically to the central pillar; see Shemot 25:31-35 – "You shall make a menorah of pure gold: of a solid piece shall you make the menorah; its shaft and its branches, its bowls, its bulbs, and its flowers shall be of itself. And six branches shall emerge from its sides; three branches of the

lamps upon it”, “and two olive branches by it – one on the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side of it”.

What we have here, essentially, are seven units of visions (adopting Targum Yonatan’s interpretation of the “seven eyes” [3:9] as seven visions, and in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Y. Ibn Kaspi, who maintains that Zekharia describes seven visions): there is one central unit of visions, with three units of further visions, in symmetrical and complementary form, on each side of it. In addition, we suggest the possibility of two further visions on the two sides of the menorah and its branches; these are the “two olive branches” on the right and left sides of the menorah.

Some very difficult questions that have mystified commentators attempting to make sense of Zekharia’s visions are resolved if we accept that it is a single revelation, in the form of a golden menorah with seven branches, each a prophetic vision, whose main message is the return of the chariot of the Divine Presence to Jerusalem. It is a prophecy that is similar to, but the inverse of, the vision of the departure of the chariot of the Divine Presence in Yehezkel, chapters 8,11.

### Structure of the visions in the image of a menorah



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menorah out of one side, and three branches of the menorah out of the other side... and in the menorah shall be four almond-like bowls...”. The menorah and its branches as an overall prophetic vision reappears over and over in our tradition, especially in Kabbalah. As an example of this phenomenon we may point to the familiar illustrations that decorate many synagogues with chapters from Tehillim written in the form of a menorah, with verses set out along its branches.

The ten discrete visions come together here to form a menorah consisting of seven units, as follows: the vision of the horses corresponds to the vision of the chariots on the other side (= two branches); the vision of the horns together with the vision of the plowers (which are connected by means of internal links) on one side parallels the vision of the 'efa' and the vision of the woman (once again, these are connected by means of internal links) on the other side (= two more branches); the vision of the measuring line corresponds to the vision of the flying scroll (= another two branches); and the central pillar – “the menorah” – comprises two visions jointed together: the vision of the stone that is addressed to Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol, together with the vision of the menorah that is addressed to Zerubavel, the governor of Yehuda. This duality within the central pillar may be explained by the fact that the national leadership is indeed a dual entity: along with the monarchy there is also the *kehuna* (priesthood), as specified in the vision of the two crowns: “He (Zerubavel; see 4:9) will build God’s Temple, and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne, and there shall be [Yehoshua] the kohen at his throne, and a counsel of peace shall prevail between them” (6:13).

### **Prophecy of the crowns at the end of the visions (Zekharia 6:9-15)**

This prophecy, which is also from the same day (24<sup>th</sup> of Shevat), is of a different character than the prophecy of the visions. It is earthly, brief, and to-the-point, like Zekharia’s opening prophecy. It mentions names and actions, and foretells how Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak, the Kohen Gadol, and Zurubavel, will bring about the sprouting of redemption and peace (as implied by the words, “My servant, tzemah” – Zekharia 3:8).

The prophecy of the crowns should be viewed as the conclusion of the entire revelation of the visions. The closing verse of this prophecy, therefore, is the condition upon which all of the wonders and salvations of the visions depend: “And (all of this) shall be, if you will diligently obey the Lord your God” (6:15). This formula, which usually serves as an introduction<sup>3</sup> (like any statement of condition), is employed here as a final warning. In other words, all of the prophecies and Divine promises that have been uttered by Haggai and Zekharia are dependent upon the behavior of Am Yisrael, and the critical test of whether they will obey God. The potential for redemption, salvation and great wonders is offered by God; its realization is in the hands of Am Yisrael.

Thus Zekharia concludes the prophecies of the second year with the same idea that introduced them, and he sets out a condition for the prophetic prophecies of Haggai, as Ibn Ezra explains in his commentary on Haggai 2:9. The same idea is expressed by Reish Lakish in the Gemara (Yoma 9b), maintaining that if all of Am Yisrael had gone up “like a wall” to Eretz Yisrael in the days of Ezra, the Divine Presence would have returned to their midst and there would never have been another exile.

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<sup>3</sup> It has its origins in the introduction to the section of rebuke in Sefer Devarim (28:1): “And it shall be, if you will diligently obey the Lord your God...”; see also Devarim 7:12; 8:19; 11:13; 28:15.

Rashi, in contrast (and sometimes Radak) associates the promises of the “shaking up” of the nations with the honor and peace that will come to Am Yisrael with the era of the Hashmonaim. Commenting on Haggai 2:6, he explains: “Yet again, in just a little while – when the kingdom of Persia, which now reigns over you, comes to an end, then “yet again” – there will arise one from the monarchy of Antiochus to reign over you and cause you suffering, but his reign will be “just a little while”, and then “I will shake” – through miracles that will be performed for the Hashmonaim, “the heavens and the earth” – they will understand that My Presence dwells in this House, and they will bring gifts of bold and silver – as recorded in the book of Yosef ben Gurion”.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to suggest that the period from Zerubavel until Shimon the Hashmonai can be described as “just a little while”. However, from a philosophical and historical perspective we may combine the interpretations of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, and suggest that during the time of Zerubavel the people did not merit it – either because they themselves were not worthy, or because not everyone had come back from Babylon, and therefore this prophecy was fulfilled only in the days of the Hashmonaim. Even then it was not realized in full, for the kingdom of the House of David did not return, as in the prophecy of the “tzemach” for Zerubavel, and in fact it was removed– perhaps owing to the sins of the earlier generation.

The connection between Haggai’s prophecy and Hannukah according to Rashi is, therefore a direct one: it was the Hashmonaim who completed the foundation and the construction of the Second Temple, and were responsible for the Divine Presence dwelling inside it, by saving Judea from foreign rule during the time of Shimon ha-Hashmonai. Did the Jews of the Hasmonean generation understand and interpret their role in this light? We cannot be certain, but it would seem that the answer is in the affirmative. In any event, can it be coincidental that the rededication of God’s House, in the days of the Hashmonaim, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, appears so well suited to the final prophecy of Haggai, which was uttered in the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month (Kislev), on the eve of the laying of the foundation for the Sanctuary?

Zekharia’s revelation of visions, which is all about consolation and redemption, with visions of salvation accompanying it, testifies clearly that indeed, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, construction commenced on the House of God, following immediately on from Haggai’s (first) prophecy of the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. It seems, then, that by virtue of the beginning of the construction of the Temple, the people merited the prophecies of consolation and salvation – Zekharia’s visions.

The content of the prophecy serves to emphasize the importance and centrality of olives and wine, the integration of the olive branches and the menorah in the prophecy of

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<sup>4</sup> The reference here is to the Book of Josippon, whose description is based on Hashmonaim II 1:22. It is interesting to note that Rashi does not hesitate to interpret the prophecies of Haggai in accordance with the Book of Josephus, and contrary to the simple meaning of the Gemara and the teachings of the Sages. He maintains that the Divine Presence did return, and that it remained in the Second Temple – at least during the time of the Hashmonaim.

redemption, and the return of the Divine Presence to the Second Temple.<sup>5</sup> This message was being conveyed many years prior to the Hasmonean rededication.

### c. Laying of the foundation of Hannukah

The eight days of Hannukah present a long list of difficult questions, which are just a part of a much broader and multi-faceted riddle. Most of the questions have been addressed by many Torah scholars over the generations, and various explanations have been offered with a view to solving them. It would seem, though, that the answers that have been proposed are only partial ones; they address each question locally, without providing a single, all-encompassing explanation for the riddle of Hannukah in its entirety.

Below, we propose such an explanation, based on the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia, which were uttered many years prior to the Hasmonean victories.

#### What is Hannukah?

Let us review the main questions that arise in connection with the festival of Hannukah. These approach to these questions depends, to a great extent, on a understanding of the essence and roots of the festival, and the reason for its establishment.

\* The first, simplest and most accepted understanding of Hannukah arises from the festival's very name. "Hannukah" is derived from the root "h-n-k", meaning 'dedication'. In other words, the festival celebrates the revival of the Divine service in the Temple, and its eight-day long rededication by the Hashmonaim, after it had been defiled for three years by the Syrian-Greeks.

This already raises several difficulties:

1. Why was a specifically eight-day period set aside for the Hasmonean dedication? The precedents that we find in the Torah would seem to provide different models: in the context of the Mishkan - "seven days of consecration" (*milu'im*) (Vayikra 8:33), and twelve days of dedication (*hannuka*) (Bamidbar 7), and in the context of the First Temple – seven days each (Melakhim I 8:65).
2. Why was the kindling of lights instituted as a special mitzvah for Hannukah, and why specifically at night? (In the Temple, the kindling of the lights of the

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<sup>5</sup> The menorah in the Sanctuary, and the "keruvim" (cherubs) in the Holy of Holies, were the only vessels of the Mishkan and the Temple that were made of a solid piece of gold. The *keruvim* expressed God's Kingship and His Presence in His House, in the midst of Israel, as a supernal fire that appears from the heavens. It was correspondingly to the heavens that the chariot of the Divine Presence returned upon the destruction of the First Temple, as described by Yehezkel (chapters 8,11). The menorah, in contrast, has lights that are kindled from below by the kohen who performs the Divine service "before God"; this is epitomized in the Second Temple and its special illumination. The return of the Divine Presence to the Second Temple is therefore expressed in the menorah rather than in the *keruvim* – all subject to Israel's behavior. This explains why the menorah became the most important Jewish symbol for all generations, up until its eventual adoption as the symbol of the modern State of Israel – which, of course, was designed on the basis of the lights in Zekharia. May we be worthy of it.

- menorah was completed before sunset, like all the other Divine service that was performed there – Rambam, Laws of Daily and Additional Sacrifices, 3). What is the connection between the kindling of lights specifically on Hannukah, and the dedication of the Temple and the dedication of the altar? (Is it possible to suggest that the *hannukiya* that we light parallels the menorah in the Temple? See Menahot 28b, emphasizing the need to avoid replicas of Temple vessels.)
3. Why was the dedication of the Temple held specifically on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev? Is this date coincidental? According to the Book of Hashmonaim I, the day was chosen intentionally, since on this date three years previously the Temple and the altar had been defiled. However, this fact serves only to shift the question one stage further back: What is the significance of the Syrian-Greeks defiling the Temple on this particular day? Is there any connection between this date and the prophecies of Haggai (and Zekharia) in the second year of the reign of Darius? And what is their connection to oil and to the menorah?

\* A second well-known explanation as to the essence of Hannukah views the festival as a commemoration of the Hasmonean victory and of the return of Jewish sovereignty (see Rambam, Laws of Megilla and Hannukah, chapter 3, law 1). Once again, this explanation raises some questions:

4. Is there any direct, fundamental connection between the dedication of the Temple (with the kindling of the lights) and the military victories (with the “*al ha-nissim*” prayer), and if so – what? Moreover, one day would seemingly suffice for praise and thanksgiving over the victory (like the “day of Nikanor”).
5. Why did the festival of Hannukah not fall away with the destruction of the Second Temple, like the other festivals mentioned in Megillat Ta’anit (see Babylonian Talmud, Rosh ha-Shana 19b and Shulhan Arukh siman 573:1)? All of the reasons cited for celebrating Hannukah turned into reasons for mourning, with the Hasmonean victories, the altar, and the Temple as a whole burning in the Roman fires. Would a commemoration of mourning not be more appropriate in our times? Even if not – what is there left to celebrate?

\* The third explanation that is offered for the essence of the festival concerns the miracle of the cruse of oil. Here, too, some clarification is required:

6. Why does the Gemara cite the story of the cruse of oil as the reason for the festival of Hannukah, rather than the military victory? Since when is a festival instituted to commemorate miraculous signs and wonders? We find no festival commemorating, for example, the wonders performed by Eliyahu and Elisha<sup>6</sup>, or the ten miracles that were part of the Temple routine<sup>7</sup>.

7. How are we to explain the fact that the story of the cruse of oil, which is so central to the discussion in the Gemara, is completely absent from the Books of the Hashmonaim, which were written close to the time of the events, in Eretz Yisrael (Hashmonaim I) and in exile (Hashmonaim II)?

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<sup>6</sup> Melakhim I 17:8-16; Melakhim II 4:1-7

<sup>7</sup> Mishna Avot, chapter 5, mishna 5

8. How are we to explain the apparent contradictions in the tannaitic sources in this regard? In Massekhet Shabbat, discussing the candles, we find as an explanation the story of the oil which sufficed for eight days. In Massekhet Menahot, on the other hand, we find the story of the eight metal skewers, from which the first Hasmonean menorah was hastily fashioned, and which was kindled when they first entered the Temple.<sup>8</sup> But in Avot de-Rabbi Natan, and in the “Talmud” of Megillat Ta’anit, we find “eight days” defined as the period during which they were busy preparing the altar! (It should be noted that all of these seemingly contradictory explanations appear in the “Talmud” of Megillat Ta’anit.)

In addition to the above, there are four more questions pertaining to further sources:

9. Is there any connection between the lights of Hannukah and the dark period surrounding the shortest day of the solar year, and the end of the month (with no moon), all of which are concepts that also find expression in pagan festivals celebrated at this time of year? Is it possible that this parallel is coincidental? (See Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zara 8a.)

10. The Mishna, in Massekhet Bikkurim (chapter 1, mishna 6) specifies Hannukah as the end of the period for bringing *bikkurim* (first fruits) to the Temple: “From Shavu’ot until Sukkot, one brings (*bikkurim*) and also recites (the special recitation for the occasion). From Sukkot until Hannukah, one brings but does not recite. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira says: he brings and also recites.” How is it possible that the time period defining a biblical commandment is dependent upon a date and an event from the Second Temple period? Why does the season for *bikkurim* not end on Sukkot, “when you gather in your labor from the field”? On the other hand, what is so special about these days of Hannukah, that they delineate a boundary in time for the first fruits, which come from the world of agriculture? (Also, we may ask: may *bikkurim* be brought until the beginning of Hannukah, or until the last day of the festival?)

11. Is there any basis for a comparison between Hannukah and Sukkot, to the extent that Hannukah is referred to in Sefer Hashmonaim II 1:9 as “the festival of Sukkot”? (Such a parallel would seemingly help to solve our first question – why specifically eight days – but at first glance any parallel between these two festivals appears to be altogether arbitrary and meaningless!)

12. Why does Josephus call Hannukah “the festival of lights”, and why is he unable to explain this name except on the basis of a purely theoretical midrash: “Because the merit (of serving our God) appeared to us, without our having even hoped for it”<sup>9</sup>?

Our review of the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia has already led us to a double conclusion: a. The date of Hannukah is not coincidental, and its roots go back to the beginning of the Second Temple period, many years prior to the Hasmonean

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<sup>8</sup> Menahot 28b, and in greater detail in Pesikta Rabbati, parsha 2, ot 1.

<sup>9</sup> Antiquities XII 7,7

rebellion. b. the central place of oil and the menorah in this festival transcends by far the context of the Hasmonean victory.

The question we posed above – concerning the bringing of *bikkurim* until Hannukah – is the key to solving the entire puzzle. Attention should be paid to the agricultural seasons in Israel: the festival of the ingathering is the end of the gathering from the threshing floor and from the winepress – but not the end of the oil season. The olive harvest and the production of oil in Eretz Yisrael take place - as nature enthusiasts and hikers in Israel are well aware - during the months of Tishrei, Heshvan and Kislev, i.e., between Sukkot and Hannukah. Hannukah is therefore the end of the olive season, the last of the “seven species” to complete its cycle, and therefore also the final conclusion of the yearly season of *bikkurim*.

However, this does not explain everything. This period of the year also has a strong connection with the astronomical realm and the relationship between light and darkness at this time, as we shall see below.

### **Period of darkness and the beginning of light**

From the beginning of time, the end of the month of Kislev has been a time of diminishing light. At this point on the solar calendar, the days grow shorter while the nights grow longer, and the winter solstice (in December, according to the Gregorian calendar) always falls very close to Hannukah, just as the spring and autumn equinoxes fall around the festivals of Pesach and Sukkot. (The Torah therefore commands, “Observe the month of spring and you shall make a Pesach [sacrifice] to the Lord your God”; this also represents the essence of the system for calculating leap years in the Hebrew calendar.) To this diminishing sunlight we may add the effect of the regular lunar cycle, whereby the light of the moon diminishes to the point of disappearing at the end of every Hebrew month.

Therefore, the final week of the month of Kislev is a period strongly characterized by a diminishing of light: there are the short days in the northern hemisphere (including, obviously, Eretz Yisrael), along with the gradual disappearance of the light of the moon, as at the end of every month. Together, these conditions make for the week with the lowest natural level of light in the whole year.

This low point in the natural light of the world obviously calls for an increase of light on the part of man – if only in the simplest sense of the need to illuminate places of habitation during the long, dark nights. This need exists throughout the winter months, but during the last week in Kislev the necessity is emphasized, on both the practical and the symbolic level, through the correlation of deficiency in both sources of light. Even the ancient pagans were aware of this simple natural fact, and they celebrated a cosmic natural festival of light and fire at this season. As the Talmud Bavli describes it (Avoda Zara 8a):

“These are the festivals of the idolaters: The New Year and the Saturnalia... Rav Hanan bar Rabba said: The New Year takes place eight days after the solstice; the Saturnalia – eight days prior to the solstice....

The Sages taught: When Adam saw that the days were getting shorter, he said: Woe to me; perhaps it is because I sinned that the world is getting dark and is returning to its primal chaos; perhaps this is a Divine death sentence. And so he spent eight days in fasting and prayer.

When he saw the beginning of [the month of] Tevet, with the days growing longer, he said: This is [simply] the way of the world! So he went and made an eight-day celebration.

The next year he celebrated both the earlier [eight-day] period and the later period.

He [Adam] instituted [these celebrations] for the sake of Heaven, while they [the pagans] commemorate these days for idolatry.”

The Talmud Bavli is well aware of the similarity between certain Jewish festivals and some pagan ones. However, the conclusion that it draws is the opposite of that arrived at by scholars of comparative religion. Hannukah is not a monotheistic festival that grew out of a pagan one. Rather, the festival started out as a cosmic, universal one, devoid of any paganism. It was a festival established by Adam, who “instituted them [the eight-day periods] for the sake of Heaven”. Only afterwards, with polytheistic stagnation, did it become a pagan festival (see Rambam, Laws Concerning Idolatry, chapter 1).

The Talmud depicts Adam as lacking astronomical knowledge, but possessing impressive religio-intellectual profundity. At first he notes the gradual shortening of the day, relative to the time of his creation (in Tishrei, when day and night are of equal length), and interprets this as a direct punishment for his sin – a sort of slow, tortuous death that has been decreed for him. However, when he realizes that the days are once again growing longer, he does not become arrogant. He does not boast that God has accepted his prayer and commuted his verdict. Such a religious view (so familiar to us in our times) has no place, according to the Talmud, and we cannot imagine such a thought entering the mind of Adam, who was a religious believer but not a primitive person. There could only be one explanation for the lengthening of the days: there are laws that govern nature, and Adam discovered, through his observation of nature, the law of periodicity according to which the world operates: “It is the way of the world”. The stars proceed in their heavenly paths – all according to the laws of nature. If the world operates according to its way, then it will not be influenced by prayers and fasting; nor even by man’s sins. Seemingly, the jump from this perception to all-out heresy would not seem to be a long one. But Adam, who is not primitive, is also not a heretic. And therefore he celebrates eight festive days, “for the sake of Heaven”.

At this point it is worth comparing the story in Massekhet Avoda Zara with the well-known explanation in Massekhet Shabbat for the miracle of Hannukah and the institution of the festival. The “eight festive days” (*shemona yamim tovim*) celebrated

by Adam, specifically at the time of month and the time of year with the least amount of light, are obviously a hint to Hannukah, but without any mention of the name of the festival – since, obviously, “Hannukah” did not yet exist. However, it is also important to point out the differences. Adam commemorated *two* eight-day periods: one of fasting and prayer, the other of celebration. These became two 8-day festivals; one at the end of the period of diminishing daylight and increasing darkness, and the other immediately afterwards, as the days once again started to grow longer. Hannukah, on the other hand, is a single 8-day festival, at the end – the climax – of the “dark” period, during the last week of Kislev.<sup>10</sup> This gives us a new understanding of the dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel as to whether the Hannukah lights are kindled in a way that “grows less” (like the daylight which is gradually diminishing), or in a way that “grows more” (like the daylight which is gradually increasing).

The clearest expression of the connection between the story of Adam’s festival and Hannukah is in the Gemara’s statement that “the next year he made both (eight-day periods) into days of celebration”, together with the expression, “He established them for the sake of Heaven”. These parallel the statements in Massekhet Shabbat, concerning Hannukah: “The next year they established them as days of celebration, with praise and thanksgiving”. This parallel leaves no room for doubt as to the connection between the two festivals, and the clear intention of the discussion in Massekhet Avoda Zara is to explain Hannukah, in a special way, as a cosmic, primal “festival of Adam”; a festival of light, at the time when the light is most restricted. It was the idolaters who defiled this festival, turning it into a pagan one that is celebrated at the same time of year.

The Christian world was influenced by the pagan festivals of the Romans and preserved the date of the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month (the beginning of the last week in the full lunar month), and then transferred it into the solar calendar – even though the original significance of the date was thereby lost. Nevertheless, a natural, cosmic festival is liable and likely to spread in the form of a pagan, idolatrous celebration – and that is what indeed happened.

Here we must add the agricultural aspect, the aspect of Eretz Yisrael, which came to purify the cosmic festival which had become a pagan celebration. The natural agricultural cycle of Eretz Yisrael is such that the end of the olive season (and therefore the end of the period for bringing *bikkurim*) falls in the last week of the month of Kislev. This creates a situation in which the celebration of the *bikkurim* with

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<sup>10</sup> The Maharal of Prague, in his work “Ner Mitzva”, comments that at the time of the Creation, day and night were equal, while Hannukah falls at the time of the least amount of light: “The light has four boundaries: One boundary is where the light is at its peak, while darkness is at its most restricted; from that point onwards, the light begins to diminish... and this happens in Tammuz... And then there is a boundary where the darkness prevails completely over the light, and this happens in the month of Tevet... The light begins to emerge from the darkness on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, since the creation of the light of the world took place at the time when day and night are equal, and this was on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul... Therefore it was on the 25<sup>th</sup> (of Kislev) that the miracle of the oil took place and there was light... since that time has the special attribute of the beginning of (the emergence of) light.”

olive oil coincided with the natural, universally-recognized need to create light at this time of darkness. Thus there appeared the light of pure olive oil, from the produce of the land brought as *bikkurim* to the Temple, replacing the impure, pagan “light and fire”, so as to illuminate the world with purity, with its source in the holiness of the land and of the Temple.

Here we arrive at a surprising and thought-provoking parallel. The Temple, built for the glory of God, was defiled by idolaters, and then restored to its status of purity by the Hashmonaim. Similarly, the festival which had existed from the beginning of time as a universal, cosmic celebration was defiled and became a pagan holiday, until it was once again restored to purity by the Hashmonaim. This, then, is the link through which the Gemara explains Hannukah on the basis of Adam, presenting a model that is similar but different from the more familiar one from Massekhet Shabbat.

According to what we have said above, the olive season – the ingathering of the oil – is the focus of prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia, which establish the date of the 24<sup>th</sup> of the ninth month as the day when the foundations were laid for the House of God, since this represents the conclusion of the previous cycle (the year of produce and *bikkurim* which has just ended) and the beginning of the new cycle (the new year of produce and *bikkurim*).

The first foundation of the festival of Hannukah is the end of the olive harvest, which in fact parallels Sukkot, which is the end of the ingathering of the grain and the wine. This idea is summed up in the words of the Mishna, in Massekhet Bikkurim (chapter 1, mishna 6): “From Shavu’ot until Sukkot, one brings (*bikkurim*) and recites. From Sukkot until Hannukah, one brings but does not recite. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira maintains: One brings and recites.”<sup>11</sup> This mishna is not some sort of appendix that happens to make mention of Hannukah, the festival of the Maccabees. Quite the opposite: it is the first and most ancient biblical expression of this festival, in the sense of the end of the season of *bikkurim*, with the conclusion of the time for bringing an offering of oil from that year.

The statements in the Book of the Hashmonaim and the hints in the rabbinical literature that link Hannukah with Sukkot<sup>12</sup>, presenting Hannukah as a sort of “*Sukkot Sheni*” in the ninth month, are all based on this parallel, which is an essential feature of the agricultural year in Eretz Yisrael, and is given such clear expression in the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia.

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<sup>11</sup> By Sukkot it would usually be possible to bring an offering of the first of the oil, but so long as the olive season continues, one could certainly bring more. This would appear to be the source of the controversy concerning the recital. The question here is whether it is desirable (*le-khat’hila*) that a person bring an offering from the olives harvested later in the season, in which case he should certainly recite the special speech over the *bikkurim*, or whether oil from later on in the season (after Sukkot) is acceptable but not preferable (*bedi’avad*), in which case he should not recite.

<sup>12</sup> See Sefat Emet on Hannukah – 541, 544, 536.

Likewise, the name given by Josephus (Antiquities XII 7,7) - “the festival of lights”, even though he himself was unable to explain it, testifies to the essence of the festival being connected with the kindling of lights using oil, with the conclusion of the period when it could be brought to the Temple as *bikkurim*. Eventually there came the historical event, with the fulfillment of the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia – the victory of the Hashmonaim, and the festival was officially instituted for all generations.

### **The history of Hannukah – Summary**

The historical order of events, as I understand it, is as follows:

- a. The pagan world commemorated and celebrated a festival of “light and fire” as a universal astronomical festival – “the festival of Adam”, as Hazal refer to it, which had been distorted and defiled and became a pagan holiday.
- b. The end of the period of ingathering for olives is at the end of the ninth month, as stated explicitly in Massekhet Bikkurim. Since this time is connected to the natural order of the land and with the calendar, we must conclude that the celebration of this time is an ancient practice, perhaps dating back even to the First Temple period. The celebration of the oil and the kindling was instituted as an Israelite holiday of *bikkurim* which came to purify the pagan holiday of light and fire and to replace it (eight days!).
- c. In the days of Haggai and Zekharia, in the second year of Darius, following the severe drought that had affected all types of produce, and in the wake of the prophecy from the end of the ninth month, relating to olives and to oil, the day of laying the foundation of God’s House – the actual renewal of construction - was instituted on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev, coinciding with the days of celebration over the bringing of pure oil at the end of the season of *bikkurim*, as light to Israel and to the world.
- d. King Menelaus and the non-Jews living and ruling in Jerusalem instituted a “rededication” of the Temple of their own, transforming it into a place that would combine Israelite faith with a universal, Hellenistic vision. For this reason they placed their idol in the Temple, choosing specifically the twenty-fifth of Kislev as the day for this desecration, so as to correspond with the original day of the laying of the foundation of the Second Temple. This was a deliberate attempt to offend the religious public, which they defined as a group of zealots. It is possible that this also represented another attempt to imbue these days with pagan significance, as during the festival of light and fire at this time of year.
- e. Three years later, Yehuda Maccabee and his brothers planned the rededication of the altar and of the Temple as a whole for the anniversary of its defilement – the day of the oil – and they celebrated the festival of Sukkot in the ninth month, “with myrtle branches and citron branches and palm branches, for eight days, with joy and festivity (Hashmonaim II 10:5-7). They thereby instituted for all generations the parallel between the

dedication of the Temple in the days of Shelomo, on Sukkot (Melakhim I 8:2; *ibid.* 65), and its rededication in Kislev in the days of the Hashmonaim, with a further parallel between the ingathering of the grain and the wine and the ingathering of the olives, as celebrations of equal weight.

- f. “The next year” they instituted these days as holidays, with praise and thanksgiving, preserving the custom of kindling lights with oil, and the eight-day duration, so maintain the parallel between Hannukah and Sukkot. This parallel was noted explicitly in letters that were sent out to all of Israel, and even to the Jews who were living in Egypt (Hashmonaim II 1:18; 2:16).
- g. Almost all of the prevailing interpretations in the rabbinical literature for the eight days of Hannukah, are bound up with oil and kindling.<sup>13</sup> All of these have their sources in ancient traditions and teachings, which connect the theme of the festival with its source – oil and kindling. Only during this part of the year could the miracle of the olive oil, with its strong connection to nature, have taken place, and all of the stories that are told around it are well suited to this season. Even after Hannukah had been established as a festival with a strongly historical character, it continued to be associated with the olive oil and the lights that were kindled, in addition to the recent historical event – the Hasmonean victory. Thus was established a “rabbinically ordained festival” (Rambam, Laws of Megilla and Hannukah, chapter 3, law 3), which ends up being highly reminiscent of the three biblically-ordained pilgrim festivals. Its root is a religio-agricultural “season” - the conclusion of the ingathering of the olives, which is not a festival, but to it is added the element of the Second Temple, during the time of Zerubavel, followed by the rededication by the Hashmonaim, as national historical events.  
In this sense, Hannukah resembles the festivals in the Torah which link the Exodus from Egypt with the spring (barley), the wheat harvest with the giving of the Torah on Shavu’ot (hinted at via the third month – Shemot 19), and the ingathering of the threshing floor and of the vineyard with the *sukkot* in the desert (and perhaps also the great *sukka* of peace and redemption at the End of Days – see Zekharia 14). The event of Hannukah, however, took place during the Second Temple period, and therefore it is not mentioned in the Torah, nor does it have the same status as the biblical festivals (no prohibition of labor). The biblical pilgrim festivals rest upon only two foundations: a religio-agricultural festival connected to Eretz Yisrael, and a national, historical time that is necessarily connected to the Exodus from Egypt.
- h. Following the destruction of the Temple, there was no tangible remnant of the direct achievements of the Hashmonaim, but the festival of Hannukah

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<sup>13</sup> The eight skewers from which they fashioned a menorah (Megillat Ta’anit, cited in Pesikta Rabbati chapter 2, and in the Gemara – Rosh ha-Shana 24a; Menahot 28b; Avoda Zara 43a); the eight days that the pure oil lasted for kindling (Megillat Ta’anit, cited in the Gemara – Shabbat 21b); as well as most of the explanations for the well-known question of why the festival lasts eight days, while the miracle of the oil was only really during seven days (since there was sufficient oil for the first day without any miracle) (Beit Yosef, Laws of Hannukah, on Tur Orah Hayim, siman 670).

could not be abolished because of its unique character, which was far broader than the historical event from the time of the Hashmonaim. Therefore the Gemara emphasizes the commandment of kindling and the miracle of the cruse of oil as the essence of the festival. The real meaning of the question that the Gemara poses – “What is Hannukah...” is that following the destruction, the festival of Hannukah no longer has sufficient justification based only on the Hasmonean victory, and that the continued observance of the festival is mainly related to the oil and the kindling. The miracle of the oil, the legend that has inspired generations of Jewish children, is the most faithful expression of the original, fundamental, agricultural reason for the festival. Sefer Hashmonaim I, which was written during the time of the Hasmonean dynasty, focuses – naturally – on the military victory, ignoring the matter of the oil, while it is specifically the rabbinical sources that reflect the festival’s primal, ancient, complex significance.

The Hasmonean victory imbued Hannukah with its dual nature – religio-agricultural and historio-national, and thus it was instituted as a festival for all future generations. However, the original foundation – the ingathering of the olives – had established its character as a festival of lights and the kindling of oil. This prevented the festival from falling away after the historical event had been overturned, in precisely the same way that we continued to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt even throughout all the exiles.

### **24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev?**

Finally: what is the exact date of the ingathering of the olives – the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev or the 25<sup>th</sup>? Why is Haggai’s prophecy recorded as having been uttered on the 24<sup>th</sup>, while the Books of the Hashmonaim and Hazal establish the festival as occurring on the 25<sup>th</sup>? We explained above that Haggai’s final rebuke comes “before one stone was placed upon another in God’s Sanctuary”. Therefore, the day of laying the foundations must have been the following day – the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. But this makes the whole connection rather arbitrary, and had we not known the significance of the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev from all the traditions surrounding Hannukah, we would not think to interpret Haggai’s prophecy in this context.

The “twenty fourth day of the month” is mentioned several times during that same period. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of Shevat Zekharia uttered a prophecy of consolation (1:7); on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the seventh month (Tishrei) the people gathered in Jerusalem to forge the covenant (Nehemia 9:1), and on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, the day of the laying of the foundation of God’s House, Haggai’s last two prophecies were uttered.

All of this appears to me to be connected with the seven days preceding Rosh Hodesh, an appropriate time for soul-searching, fasting, repentance and atonement. The climax and conclusion of this week is obviously on Rosh Hodesh itself.

It seems logical – although difficult to prove – that the last seven days of the ninth month, up until and including Rosh Hodesh Tevet, were the final days of the ingathering of the

olives. Therefore, the laying of the foundation for the Sanctuary took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. However, in years when it was known in advance – based on calendrical calculations – that the month would be 30 days long, the seven days would begin on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month. This, apparently, was the case in the year 145 of the “era of documents” (*minyán shetarot*), the Hellenist-civil year that started during the year 312 B.C.E. Therefore Hannukah was established – in light of the specific event that took place during the time of the Hashmonaim – specifically on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. And since the month of Kislev is 30 days long in most years, the seven days end on Rosh Hodesh Tevet. The joining of the seven days to the winter solstice of the solar calendar gives us eight days, but this brings us back to the pagan, invalid context. Therefore, we must return to the parallel between Sukkot and Hannukah.

To the seven days of the natural, agricultural festival, Yehuda Maccabee and his brothers added an eighth day, to parallel Shemini Atzeret following immediately on from Sukkot, and they regarded this as hinting to the eight skewers or to the eight days that the pure oil lasted. In truth, concerning the eighth day that was added, known as “Zot Hannukah” and continuing Hannukah into the month of Tevet, there are various different explanations that treat it as an additional, special day that possesses sanctity beyond that of the seven days of the natural order. The same idea is expressed in the eighth day for a circumcision, following a seven-day period of life; the eighth day that followed the seven days of consecration (Vayikra 9) with the revelation of the Divine Presence in the Mishkan; and the day of Shemini Atzeret – the “eighth day of convocation” - which is appended to the seven days of the festival of Sukkot.

We began our discussion with a multi-faceted puzzle surrounding the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia, and we have concluded with a comprehensive reconstruction of the history of Hannukah, which illuminates the festival with the olive oil – the “*yitzhar*” – of Eretz Yisrael, and restores all of the oil “legends” to their rightful place in history.

It is amazing that the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia, which were manifestly clear and relevant in the eyes of the Hashmonaim, with no need for complicated explanations, disappeared from the consciousness of later generations (despite the fact that Zekharia’s prophecies were set down as the *haftarah* for Hannukah), to the point where all the concepts of Hannukah became entangled in a knot of riddles. Only Rabbi Yaakov Emdin and the Sefat Emet were able, with their sharp intellects, to discern the direction in which to seek the solution. Had these prophecies not been preserved throughout the generations, we would not even be able to imagine such a complicated development behind the festival of Hannukah.

May its lights continue to illuminate our way with the dual light of Am Yisrael who are saved by the miraculous light shining from within nature, in Eretz Yisrael with its grain, wine and oil.

Translated by Kaeren Fish