

Chanukah, Celebrated instead of Sukkot

What can you tell me about the Feast of Dedication being celebrated in place of *Sukkot* by the Maccabees when they rededicated the Temple?

When the Seleucid Greek invaders occupied the Land of Israel, it was forbidden for any of the Biblical holidays to be celebrated, possibly under the threat of death. Obviously, this would have included *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles. Many Jews continued to celebrate the appointed times in secret, or in some limited way without being caught.

Some in the Hebrew Roots sector, who largely frown on observing *Chanukah*, say that when the Maccabees rededicated the Second Temple that the eight-day festival they celebrated was Tabernacles, which they were unable to celebrate prior to this time. They base it on statements made in 2 Maccabees 10:5-6:

“It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. And they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of booths, remembering how not long before, during the feast of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals” (RSV).

The REB actually says “they recalled how, only a short time before, they had kept that feast while living like wild animals in the mountains and caves.” Did the Maccabees actually try to “keep *Sukkot*” while evading the Seleucid armies in the wilderness? We might never have an answer to this question. But what we do know is that while there were various elements and themes of *Sukkot* brought into the first Festival of Dedication, it was celebrated and mandated as its own unique holiday. The text continues, clarifying what the Jews assembled in Jerusalem were actually doing:

“Therefore bearing ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year” (2 Maccabees 10:7-8, RSV).

We are told that this new holiday, commemorating the rededication of the Temple, was “decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year” (NRSV). This makes *Chanukah* something new and unique that was not intended to be a substitute for *Sukkot*, even though *Sukkot* may have served as a template for much of it to be based upon.