

## Sukkot - The Feast of Tabernacles

### Introduction

Immediately after the somber mood of repentance and judgment that accompanies the High Holy Days<sup>1</sup> there is a transition to a holiday of rejoicing and celebration. Jews begin to build their individual sukkot (booths - tents - tabernacles - huts) in which they will live for a week in the **presence** of the Lord. This feast is the greatest one of the year and the only one to be celebrated by all the nations during the millennial reign of Christ on earth (Zechariah 14:16). The three major themes of the festival period are:

1. Living in a temporary dwelling (sukkah).
2. Ingathering of the **final** harvest . . . symbolized by the gathering of the four species.
3. Rejoicing in the presence of God.

This seven-day feast (appointed time) occurs in autumn during the seventh month of the sacred year. The Bible refers to this month as "Ethanim" meaning "permanent" but today's Jewish people call it Tishrei. The month falls during our September to early October time frame. Sukkot (The Feast of Tabernacles) begins five days after Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement) on the 15th of Ethanim.

### Scriptural Injunction

*"Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast (appointed time) of Booths for seven days to the LORD.' On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work. These are the **appointed times** of the LORD which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, to present offerings by fire to the LORD--burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each day's matter on its own day--besides those of the sabbaths of the LORD, and besides your gifts and besides all your votive and freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD. On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast (appointed time) of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees,<sup>2</sup> palm branches and boughs of leafy (myrtle) trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall thus celebrate it as a feast (appointed time) to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'" So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the **appointed times** of the LORD. (Leviticus 23:34-44)*

### More Facts about The Feast Of Tabernacles

The origin of Sukkot is agricultural as it relates to the final harvest of the year and is referred to as the Festival of Ingathering in Exodus 23:16 and 34:22. The gathering of the **four species serves as a representation of the final harvest and carries with it spiritual significance**. King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem on Sukkot (1st Kings 8 and 2nd Chronicles 5:1-7:10). And Sukkot was the first sacred occasion observed after the resumption of sacrifices in Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 3:2-4).

### Some Requirements

The emphasis of the feast must be complete joy. *"You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful. (Deuteronomy 16:13-15)* The sages teach that there is no requirement to rejoice during the festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover - death, burial and resurrection of Jesus) and that the requirement to rejoice at the festival of the Harvest (Weeks/Pentecost - the giving of the Holy Spirit) is given only once. Yet the requirement to rejoice at the festival of Ingathering (Tabernacles - when we dwell with God) is given many times.

<sup>1</sup> The High Holy Days are the ten-day period of repentance and judgment that commences with Yom Teruah (Day of Warning/Trumpets), followed by the Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe) and ending with Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). The High Holy Days begin on the new moon of the seventh month and end on the tenth day of the month. The seventh month is called "Ethanim" which means "permanent."

<sup>2</sup> The passage should be read as follows, "the product (fruit) of hadar trees" in other words an "etrog" or "yellow citron".

Moses instructed the children of Israel to gather for a reading of the Law (Torah) during Sukkot every **seven** years, in the year following the Shmita (Sabbatical) year (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). **Seventy** additional bulls and **twice** the number of lambs are sacrificed as burnt offerings during the feast. These offerings represent the seventy nations and the two groups of God's people. The first and eighth days of the feast are Sabbath (rest) days.

### **The Sukkah (Tabernacle)**

The sukkah (tabernacle) is a reminder of the fragile dwellings the Israelites lived in during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness after being delivered by God from Egypt. Throughout the feast, meals are eaten inside the sukkah and men sleep there as well. Every day during the feast, members of the household recite a blessing over the lulav (the four species).

### **Lessons for Christians Concerning the Tabernacle (*Sukkah*)**

#### **Lesson 1 - We Are All Sojourners:**

From the days of our father Abraham, we have been strangers and pilgrims in the earth. God seems to desire it that way.

It has also spelled disaster when God's people grew too comfortable. This was undoubtedly one of the reasons God issued the command for the Israelites to dwell in booths for one week each year, and why the custom is to be continued as a "statute forever."

As sojourners we must all learn to hold things loosely. This is especially difficult in our materialistic age. We are constantly held by the tyranny of "things." Things control and manipulate us; they become gods, or idols, over us. As the people of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, God impressed upon them the message of Tabernacles, lest they be drawn away by the very affluence of the Promised Land. The message is still a good one today.

Christians also must learn that this life is only temporary. We, too, are on a pilgrimage to the Promised Land in eternity. We need to seek God's kingdom, not earthly comfort. As we seek first the Kingdom of God, the Lord provides for our material needs.

Finally, sojourning is a great equalizer. When the Israelites were wanderers in the desert they all lived in tents - rich and poor alike. The book of Deuteronomy speaks of all the people going to their *tents*. After the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, the book of Judges mentions *tents and houses*. By the time of the book of Kings, the author speaks of *tents, houses and palaces*. During Tabernacles, all men are equal before God and one another. Each one sits in his flimsy sukkah and considers God, not his own special status.

#### **Lesson 2 – Our Faith Requires Flexibility:**

We must be able to move when God moves. Christian history is filled with those who had vested interests that prevented them from moving when God moved. The tabernacle is a flimsy structure. It is almost a tent and can be put up or taken down in a few minutes. It is sensitive to the wind of the Holy Spirit. It is open to the heavens; it is indefensible and cannot be closed off.

Throughout the Bible, it seems that the struggle has gone on between the concept of tabernacle and the concept of house. The whole episode of Stephen's stoning seemed to revolve around this issue. Stephen told his hearers that David "*desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob, but Solomon built Him a house*".

Certainly, the house is more attractive, more comfortable, a more durable and appealing human habitation. Yet in the house, we lose flexibility to follow the cloud, we lose sensitivity to the wind and we lose the intimate contact with the creation and the Creator.

The Bible looks forward to a time of purer and simpler faith. The prophet Amos speaks of the end of days as a time when the Tabernacle of David will be restored. That flimsy tent with its glorious worship and fellowship with God has probably touched both Judaism and Christianity more than any of us realize. David's worship, his Psalms and his ecstasy before God have surely influenced many outbreaks of revival, in both Jewish and Christian history. It is noteworthy that some of the great revivals actually were held in tents and brush arbors, closely resembling the ancient tabernacle.

With this in mind we can better understand the movement of the last days spoken of by John in Revelation: "*Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.*"

The tabernacle may have been a fragile and unsightly structure, but it enabled the Israelites to look out of the tent door and see the glory of God hovering over them in the pillar of cloud and fire. Throughout subsequent history, both Israel and the Church have traded away spiritual reality for human security.

### Lesson 3 – We Must Remember the Frailty of Our Own Lives:

As you sit in the sukkah and watch the wind rustle the leaves overhead, some will fall on you. Early in the week of Sukkot, the leaves are fresh and green, but soon they are dry and dead. The verse of Isaiah 64:6 becomes especially clear, *“We all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away.”*

With the “house” concept it is easy for us to feel permanent and self-sufficient and to lose sight of our very brief sojourn on the earth. As the flight attendant announces on a short stopover, “Our ground time here will be brief.” The tabernacle also speaks of our frailty that we are but flesh. Yet in our frailty, we are reminded that God provides, for which we should be thankful. However, the very consistency of God’s provision and blessing sometimes dulls our gratitude. The greatest thing about God’s blessings is that they are fresh each day ... they are new every morning - great is His faithfulness. We didn’t do it ourselves.

The New Testament writers often refer to our bodies as a tabernacle. Paul reminds us that *“... if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.”*

Like the Tabernacle, we too are flimsy and frail, and soon begin to fade. Life is short. Our hope is not in what the world has to offer, but that God has already provided for us to serve Him here and now, and for eternity. Jesus said, *“In my Father’s house are many mansions - I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* The place for our permanent abode (house) is in eternity.

### The Four Species and Their Interpretation

The four species represent the four types of people that are gathered before the Lord. This is especially significant during the millennial reign of Christ where everyone will know Him. As it is written:

*“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ **for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,**” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

**Palm** - Spiritually, we are not to be like the palm, as it can only bear fruit (deeds), but is not fragrant (spiritual blessing). These are people who live their lives by the letter of the law but have no love or compassion in administering it, for themselves or others.

**Myrtle** - We are not to be like the myrtle, as it only has fragrance, but can’t bear fruit. These are people who are “so heavenly minded they are no earthly good.” They may say spiritual things and may be very sweet people, but their lives don’t produce any real lasting fruit.

**Willows** - We are not to be like the willow, as it can neither produce fruit nor fragrance. These are people who are blown around by every wind of doctrine and never know where they are spiritually. Therefore, they produce no lasting fruit.

**Etrog** (citron) - We are to be like the etrog as it produces both fruit and fragrance. These are God’s steadfast believers who live a balanced life in wisdom before God and man.

Each day during the week the people take the lulav (four species) in their hands and make a circuit around the synagogue while reciting Psalm 118:25: *O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!* In reality we see this pictured in the book of Revelation. *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and **palm branches were in their hands;** and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9-10)*

### The Daily Water Drawing Service

During the intermediate days of Sukkot, gatherings for music and dance take place. They commemorate the drawing of water for the water-libation on the Altar of Burnt offerings, which is unique to this feast. Originally, water taken from the Pool of Siloam was taken up the Jerusalem pilgrim road to the Temple where it was poured out with equal amounts of wine upon the altar. There are a couple of allusions that can be drawn from Scripture regarding this event. The first one pertains to a prophecy in Isaiah.

*Then you will say on that day, "I will give thanks to You, O LORD; for although You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation." Therefore **you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.** And in that day you will say, "Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples; make them remember that His name is exalted." Praise the LORD in song, for He has done excellent things; let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 12:1-6)*

Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well connecting water with salvation.

*Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; **but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.**" (John 4:14-14)*

The second allusion pertains to the concept of true worship ... both in Spirit and Truth. It can be thought of this way: The Spirit represents the Holy Spirit ... the Truth represents the Word of God ... both indwelling in a man thereby creating a pure form of worship. Jesus also commented to the Samaritan woman about this as well.

*Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;** for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. **God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**" (John 4:21-24)*

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### Yeshua is the fulfillment of the Water Pouring Ceremony at Sukkot!

The Pool of Siloam symbolized the "wells of salvation," and the Hebrew word for **Salvation** is very close to the name of our Messiah **Yeshua**.

Back at the Temple, thousands were waiting for the procession to return from the **Pool of Siloam**.

Announced by a three-fold trumpet blast, the priest with the golden pitcher approached the altar and **poured out his water offering**. The musicians played on their holy instruments, and everyone began singing the *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118).

Psalm 118:22 is actually a **Messianic Prophecy** that says:

**"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone."**

John 7:37 says that Yeshua was right there with everyone else during the Water Pouring Ceremony, and He declared in a loud voice:

**"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37-38)**

Each day during Sukkot, the *Hallel* is still sung in synagogues here in Israel and around the world. Unfortunately, as the Jewish people sing Psalm 118:22 this year, they have no clue that this Scripture is a **Messianic Prophecy** referring to Yeshua!

THE DAY AFTER, Yeshua proclaimed that He was the fulfillment of Psalm 118:22, He healed a man blind from birth. And guess where the man was healed?

Yeshua spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Then Yeshua said to him, **"Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam."**

This is the pool of water where the priest drew the holy water, and where the priests recited: **"With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation."**

So the man went and washed, and came home seeing! Yeshua healed him physically, and then his eyes were spiritually opened when he believed Yeshua was the Messiah of Israel.

### Hosanna Rabbah - The Great Day of Salvation

The seventh and last day of the Feast of Tabernacles is marked by a special synagogue service in which **seven** circuits are made by worshippers holding their four species reciting Psalm 118:25.<sup>3</sup> *O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!* It appears that the people of God are crying out to Him for salvation for the benefit of all and it corresponds to the time of the Great White Throne Judgment of God.

#### Hoshana Rabbah is the day on which the judgment that was sealed on Yom Kippur is "delivered."

This is what Jesus said on Hosanna Rabbah while He was ministering with His disciples. *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39)*

Despite the appeal of Christ and the people of God, there will be those who do not accept His salvation. An example of those who might not, are the participants in the war of Gog and Magog. Immediately following the seven circuits of the synagogue the people beat their willow branches (no fruit - no fragrance) against the ground. This is emblematic of the destruction of people who do not accept the Lord's salvation.

### The Message Of The Feast - Dwelling With God

*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4)*

### Shemini Atzeret - The Eighth Day

The "eighth day" stands as an oddity in the "appointed times" of the Lord. It is **connected** to Tabernacles but technically not part of it because the "appointed time" of Tabernacles lasts for only seven days. However, the "eighth day" is a **Sabbath** day.

The mystery of the "eighth day" is this. The number eight represents a **new** beginning. In six days God created the heavens and the earth and on the seventh day God rested from all His work of creation. The number seven represents the completion of a cycle; therefore the number eight represents the beginning of a new cycle. Also when the number 8 is laid on its side ( $\infty$ ) it becomes the symbol for **infinity** (eternal or without end).

While the feast of Tabernacles represents the future reign of Jesus Christ on earth for a 1000-year period,<sup>4</sup> the eighth day begins with the Great White Throne Judgment when heaven and earth pass away and ends with God creating a new heaven and earth.<sup>5</sup> Jesus spoke of this day. *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."* (Matthew 24:35-36)

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<sup>3</sup> The context for Psalm 118:25 are the surrounding verses which gives this individual verse more strength and a fuller meaning. *The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly. I will not die, but live, and tell of the works of the LORD. The LORD has disciplined me severely, but He has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous will enter through it. I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; we have blessed you from the house of the LORD. The LORD is God, and He has given us light; bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I give thanks to You; You are my God, I extol You. Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting. (Psalm 118:14-29)*

<sup>4</sup> The millennial reign of Christ on earth is the 7<sup>th</sup> 1000-year day from Adam.

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 20:11-21:1