

## **Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles**

### **Review**

In our study of the Feasts of Israel, the seven feast days given to Israel as part of the Law, we have seen how the spring feasts, Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost are all associated with the First Advent in some way. The fall feasts speak of the Second Advent, including picturing the Israelite believers last chance for repentance before the Days of Awe following Rosh Hashanah and the blowing of the Last Trumpet," which we see as the rapture of the Church. It also captures the final judgments on Israel and an unrepentant world, redeeming the surviving remnant of the Tribulation at the coming of Messiah (Second Advent) for life in the Kingdom (Yom Kippur).

We now come to the seventh and final feast of Tabernacles, which is about Israel's promised kingdom or what Christians call the Millennium.

**Lev 23:39** Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. 40 And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41 You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.' " 44 So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.

### **Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)**

*Sukkot*, translated as "Tabernacles," or the festival of "Booths," occurs for seven days, from Tishrei 15 to 21. Seven is the number associated with God and completeness. The Torah identifies the *sukkah* (booth) with the

temporary dwellings in which the Israelites lived in the wilderness after they left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land (Lev 23:42).

### **From Yom Kippur to Sukkot**

Not coincidentally, the same time period marks the beginning of the construction of God's *sukkah*, the *mishkan*, the sanctuary in the wilderness

**Ex 25:8** And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. <sup>9</sup> Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

Why was the *mishkan* built? The Torah says, "... that I may dwell among them" (Ex 25:8). It was built to establish the relationship between God and Israel, God would dwell amidst His people. Spiritually speaking, this physical tabernacle was given by God to teach and instruct us that He desires to live and dwell with His people by means of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

The Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) completes the sacred festivals of the seventh month. In contrast to the somber tone of *Rosh HaShanah* and the Day of Atonement, the third feast of Tishrei was a time of joy. *Sukkot* is called the "Season of Our Joy" because after the season of repentance and the redemption of *Yom Kippur* came the joy of knowing your sins were forgiven and the joy of walking with God, knowing God, and being obedient to God.

Historically, *Sukkot* commemorates the days in the wilderness of Sinai after coming out of Egypt, when God protected, led, and sustained the children of Israel. This was a picture of the Millennium because there was a supernatural environment for the people in the wilderness. Their covering was the cloud (Exodus 16:10; 19:1,9,16; 24:12-16; 40:35-38). This is known spiritually as the immersion (baptism) into the cloud (1 Cor 10:1-2). The cloud was a covering shelter and protection by day, and was a pillar of fire by night. It was warmth, light, and protection.

The *sukkah* or booth, symbolizes man's need to depend upon God for his provision of food, water, and shelter. This is true in the spiritual realm as well. Our booth is the physical body, which is a temporary dwelling place for

our souls and spirits (1 Cor 6:19-20). Our food is the Word of God (Mat 6:11; 4:4; John 6:33-35), the cleansing, rinsing, and washing that the Word of God brings to our lives (Eph 5:26), and the shelter of God's protection over our lives from the evil one (Mat 6:13; Ps 91). Our physical needs will be provided for by God if we seek Him spiritually (Mat 6:31-33).

### **The Festival of Ingathering**

*Sukkot* (Tabernacles) is the fall harvest festival and is the time of the final ingathering of produce before the oncoming winter. Hence, it is also called *Hag HaAsif*, the festival of Ingathering. The granaries, threshing floors, and wine and olive presses are full to capacity. Weeks and months of toil and sweat put into the soil have finally been amply rewarded. The farmer feels happy and elated, so *Sukkot* is also called "***The Season of Rejoicing.***"

*Sukkot* (Tabernacles), the Feast of Ingathering, represents the great harvest of believers from out of the Tribulation (Mat 13:39-43). The greatest evangelism in the history of the world will be by 144,000 anointed members from the tribes of Israel proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom through *Yeshua* HaMashiach (Rev 14:1-7). Thus, there will be mortal believers who accepted *Yeshua* as their personal savior and survived the seven-year tribulation period. They will be the guests at the wedding feast invited by the Father of the Bridegroom. There will also be resurrected OT (and NT) believers present in the Kingdom, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. As part of *daily meal during Tabernacles* is the custom of inviting *ushpizin*, symbolic guests, each day to join (the family) in the *Sukkah* — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David.

### **The Feast of Dedication**

It is also called the Feast of Dedication because King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem during *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) (1 Kings 8:2).

### **The Feast of the Nations**

Yet another name for Tabernacles is the Feast of the Nations because it will be celebrated by all the nations on earth during the Messianic age (Kingdom/Millennium) (Zech 14:16-18). This refers back to what God promised in Genesis 12:3, as it is written, "...all families of the earth [shall] be blessed [through his seed]." That promise was fulfilled through *Yeshua*, the Messiah, as stated in Galatians 3:8,14,16,29.

## **The Festival of Lights (The Light of the Temple)**

Another ceremony of the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) was the illumination of the temple (*Beit HaMikdash*). According to the *Mishnah*, at the end of the first day of the Feast of *Sukkot*, the priests and the Levites went down to the court of the women. Four enormous golden candlesticks (50 cubits high) were set up on the court with four golden bowls placed upon them and four ladders resting against each candlestick. Four youths of priestly descent stood at the top of the ladders holding jars containing pure oil, which they poured for each bowl (*Mishnah, Sukkah 5:2*). The wicks were made of strips from the worn out liturgical dress of the priests – also known as “swaddling clothes”. The light emanating from the four candelabras was so bright that the *Mishnah* says in *Sukkah 5:3* that there was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up. The mood was festive with pious members of the *San Hedrin*, and the different religious schools would dance well into the night, and singing psalms of praise to God. Jerusalem glistened like a diamond that night and her light could be seen from afar.

## **Spiritual Application (Halacha).**

Spiritually speaking, the light represented the *shekinah* glory that once filled the temple where God's presence dwelt in the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezekiel 43:5). During this time, the temple was thought of as "the light of the world." In the brilliance of this gloriously lit temple, *Yeshua* cried in John 8:12 that He was "*the light of the world.*" Israel was chosen to be God's light to the world (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) in service to God. God wanted a people out of the world whom He could use and work through to reveal His redemptive plan to the whole world so the world could see that God and His Messiah *Yeshua* are light (John 1:1-4; 1 John 1:5).

Israel was to be a witness (light) to the world (Isaiah 43:1,10,12,14; Luke 24:44-49; and Acts 1:1-8). Israel's mission was to proclaim to the world that the God of Israel is the only true God and there is no other Savior (Acts 4:10,12). Israel, as a corporate nation, failed in her mission to be a witness to the world, but individual members who believed and followed after God were faithful to their task: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, and some kings such as David and Solomon. The very Bible, which you are able to read today, was written by faithful Jews. The greatest light and

witnesses the world has ever known was Jewish. Because Israel birthed the Messiah, they, in essence, have been a blessing to all nations through Him (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8,14,16,29). Israel's failure was only a temporary setback to her destiny of being a blessing to all nations, which will be accomplished during the thousand-year reign of the Messiah.

Israel still remains God's chosen people (Romans 11:25-29), and still has a role to play in the future of the world (Romans 11:12-15).

Israel will be used by God and will have a central part in the thousand-year reign of the Messiah (Isaiah 62:1-5). Israel will be a blessing to all nations at this time (Mal 3:12; Ezek 34:23-30; Zech 8:11-15; Isa 19:23-25).

Jerusalem will be the spiritual focal point of the world, and this time will be Israel's "Golden Age," during the Messianic era, because the King of Jerusalem, the Prince of Peace, will reign in Jerusalem (Isa 2:2-4; 52:9-10; 62:7-8, Micah 4:1-3; Ps 102:18-21; 125:1-2; 137:5-6). The day is coming when a restored and renewed Israel will once again be a light to the nations, for the destiny of Israel is linked to the destiny of the world!

**A fascinating and mysterious pattern** of sevens emerges from the seemingly endless list of sacrifices found in Numbers 29:12-35.

- During the week of Tabernacles 70 bullocks were offered on the altar.
- When Jacob and his family went to Egypt, there were 70 people who went, and it was there that they became a nation. (Gen 46:27; Ex 1:1-5)
- When the offerings are grouped or counted, their number always remains divisible by seven.
- There are 182 sacrifices (70 bullocks, 14 rams, and 98 lambs; 7 divides into 182 exactly 26 times).
- Add to this the meal offerings, 336 tenths of ephahs of flour (48 x 7) (Num 29:12-40).

It is no coincidence that this seven-day holiday, which takes place at the height of the seventh month, had the perfect number, seven, imprinted on its sacrifices. The number seven was connected to the sabbath, the Lord's Rest, which was also seen as a picture of the Messianic Kingdom.

## **The Four Species (*Arba Minim*)**

In Leviticus 23:40, it is written, "On the first day you shall take the product of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days."

The four species are also called the *Etrog* and *Lulav*. So, "the product of goodly trees" is **interpreted by the rabbis** to refer specifically to an *etrog* (citron), a yellow citrus fruit that is about the same size as a lemon, but sweeter and spicier. And the branches, "boughs of leafy trees," and "willows of the brook" have been interpreted as a *lulav* (palm branch), *hadasim* (myrtle), and *aravot* (willows).

Each celebrant brought an *etrog* or *citron* as well the branches of a palm, of a myrtle, and of a willow. The three branches were held in the right hand and the *etrog* on the left, and they were brought together to be waved east, south, west, north, up, and down. Since the palm branch, or *lulav*, was the stiffest and the most prominent element of the four species, the whole ceremony was called the waving of the *lulav*. The four plants are also used in the synagog during the *Sukkot* holiday when the cantor leads the procession, and each man who has a *lulav* and *etrog* follows behind him. During the procession, the cantor recites prayers, asking for blessings on the land and fruit of Israel.

Palm branches, myrtle branches, and willow branches are collected and held in the right hand and represent Israelites. The *etrog*, representing the Gentiles or non-Jewish believers, is also gathered. At the start of the ceremony, the *etrog* is upside down, meaning, before we came to God, we were in a state of being upside down. Through the ceremony, it is turned right side up and joined to the other three. We are turned right side up when we turn to God, are joined to Him in marriage.

## **The Daily *Sukkot* Ceremony**

The priests were divided into three divisions. The first division were the priests on duty for that festival. They would slay the sacrifices. A second group of priests went out the eastern gate of the temple and cut willow branches 25 feet in length and then form a line with all the priests holding a willow. About 25 or 30 feet behind this row of priests would be another row of priests with willows – row after row of the willows. The whole road back

to the temple was lined with pilgrims in Jerusalem to celebrate the festival as they were commanded by God to do. Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were three feasts all Jewish males were required to be in Jerusalem for (Deuteronomy 16:16).

On a signal the priests would step out with their left foot, and then step to the right, swinging the willows back and forth. Meanwhile, a third group of priests, headed by the high priest (*Cohen HaGadol*), went out the gate known as the Water Gate from the pool known as "*Siloam*" (John 9:7,11), which means "gently flowing waters." The high priest had a golden vase and drew the water known as the living water (*mayim hayim*) and held it in the vase. His assistant held a silver vase containing wine. Just as the priests with the willows began to march toward Jerusalem, so did the priests in Siloam.

As they marched toward the city of Jerusalem, the willows made a swishing sound in the wind. The word *wind* in Hebrew is *Ruach*. The word *spirit* in Hebrew is also *Ruach*. This ceremony was symbolic or representative of the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) of God coming upon the city of Jerusalem.

As each of the party reached their respective gates, a trumpet (*shofar*) was blown. Then one man would stand up and play the flute. The flute player is called "*the pierced one*." The flute is pierced, and *Yeshua* was pierced during the crucifixion (Psalm 22:16; Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34-37; Revelation 1:7). The flute player led the procession and blows the call for the wind and the water to enter the temple.

The priests with the swishing willows come into the temple and circle the altar seven times. The priests that were slaying the sacrifices are now ascending the altar, and they begin to lay the sacrifices on the fires. The high priest and his assistant ascend the altar and all the people of Israel are gathered into the courts around there.

The people start singing, "With joy we will draw water out of the well of salvation" (Is 12:3). The high priest and his assistant pour the water and the wine on the corners of the altar where the horns are. The priests who had the willow start laying the willows against the altar, making a *sukkah* (a

picture of God's covering). In this, we have a picture of *Yeshua* as He was on the tree. He was on the altar (tree) when His heart was pierced (John 19:34), then the water and the blood separated and they were poured out. God through *Yeshua* was providing a covering (*sukkah*) for all those who would believe in Him.

### **Spiritual Application (Halacha).**

The drawn water also represents rain, essential for bountiful harvests. The rain represented the Holy Spirit and the water drawing pointed to that day when, according to the prophet Joel [*Yoe*], God would rain His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29). In the Talmud we read, "Why is the name of it called the drawing out of water? Because of the pouring out of the Spirit of God, according to what is said, 'With joy shall ye draw out of the wells of salvation'" (Isaiah 12:3). *Sukkot* was given by God to teach us of the Messianic era, the Millennium, when the earth will experience the greatest outpouring of God's Spirit.

**John 7:37-38** On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup> He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (V7:2 identifies the occasion as the Feast of Booths.)

### **The Seasonal Rains**

One of the most outstanding truths of the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) involves the seasonal rains in Israel. Of course the rains are necessary for the full maturing of the crops for a bountiful harvest. They were sometimes withheld by God as discipline for Israel. God promised Israel that upon their obedience to the covenant He made with them at Mount Sinai (Ex 34:10; Deut 5:2; 29:12-15), that He would give them the rains in their due season (Deut 11:10-17). No rain was a sign of judgment and the curse of God on the land as well as on the people (I Kings 8:33-43; 17:1-7; 18:41-46; Prov 16:15; Amos 4:6-13; Joel 1:10-12). But they have even more meaning as a type or picture of past and future events.

The prophet Joel tells us that the former and latter rain would come in the first month (Joel 2:23). Passover is the first month in the religious or sacred



calendar, and Tabernacles is the first month in the civil calendar. So Israel has two first months in the same year because of the special calendar that God set up in Exodus 12:2. Hosea 6:3 tells us of the coming of the Messiah, "He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth."

We have seen how the first advent did occur in relation to the latter rains, the spring rains, on the exact dates of the associated feasts. The fall rains (former or early rains) are associated with the fall feasts of Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Tabernacles, thus the Second Advent should occur connected in some way with these feasts, most likely on their exact dates.

*Yeshua* is the rain that came down from Heaven as well as the living water and the fountain of living water spoken of in John 4:4-6,10-14,20-24; and Revelation 21:6 and 22:1-5,17. *Yeshua* desires that we drink of the water He gives, which results in everlasting life (John 4:14) that we might be filled (Matthew 5:6). The rain is a type of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon all flesh (Acts 2:1-8,14-21; Joel 2:23,28-29). The Holy Spirit is also likened to the rain (Joel 2:21-32; Acts 2:1-8,14-21; James 5:7; John 7:37-39). The Word of God is likened to the rain (Deut 32:1-3; Is 55:8-12; Eph 5:26). Rain is associated with righteousness in Hosea 10:12. God has made His righteousness available for all who believe on the Messiah (Ro 3:21-22; 5:17).

The greatest outpouring of God's Spirit is yet to come. The feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) and the rain speaks of a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God, a universal outpouring of His Spirit. This outpouring will be accompanied by signs and wonders and manifestations of the gift of the Holy Spirit as well as a revelation and illumination of the Word of God beyond all that has ever been seen in history. This outpouring will touch every nation, both Jew and non-Jew. The believer in the Messiah who is living at the time of the latter rain is called to seek the Lord and ask Him to send rain on the people of the earth (Zech 10:1; Psalm 46:4; 65:9-10; Jer 5:23-24; 31:10-14).

Rain also speaks of revival, restoration, and returning to God and trusting in Him, just as the rain came after Elijah prayed seven times for it (1 Kings 18:41-46).

The fullness of this feast in the seventh month will be experienced at the coming of the Messiah when He will rule and reign on the earth during the Messianic age, the Millennium. This time will be a time of joy for all believers in the Messiah *Yeshua* and will be the age of Israel's glory.

**Jer 31:10** “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,  
And declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say,  
‘He who scattered Israel will gather him,  
And keep him as a shepherd *does* his flock.’

<sup>11</sup> For the Lord has redeemed Jacob,  
And ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion,  
Streaming to the goodness of the Lord  
For wheat and new wine and oil,  
For the young of the flock and the herd;  
Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden,  
And they shall sorrow no more at all.

<sup>13</sup> “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance,  
And the young men and the old, together;  
For I will turn their mourning to joy,  
Will comfort them,  
And make them rejoice rather than sorrow.

<sup>14</sup> I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance,  
And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the Lord.”

### **Summary:**

The Feasts of the Lord were given by God to Israel, but Gentile believers can rejoice in them also. They are a picture, a map if you will, of God’s plan of redemption. The spring feasts, Passover, First Fruits, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost are all associated with the first advent and what Christ did on the Cross for us. The Fall feasts picture the Second Advent and the final phase of God’s redemptive plan, ultimately taking His own into eternity.

## The Sukkah

The sukkahs represents the Israelites sleeping under the stars. In modern times, they are usually cobbled together from scraps of plywood and have only loose branches for a roof. They are set up in backyards, balconies, gardens, hotels, and even restaurants.

The word *sukkot* means huts (some translations of the bible use the word booths), and building a hut is the most obvious way in which Jews celebrate the festival. Every Jewish family will build an open air structure in which to live during the holiday. The essential thing about the hut is that it should have a roof of branches and leaves, through which those inside can see the sky, and that it should be a temporary and flimsy thing. The Sukkot ritual is to take four types of plant material: an *etrog* (a citron fruit), a palm branch, a myrtle branch, and a willow branch, and rejoice with them. (Leviticus 23: 39-40.) We saw these branches in ceremonial use previously in our study.

Most people nowadays live in houses or apartments with strong walls and a roof. Spending time in a fragile hut in the garden or under a roof of leaves rigged up on a balcony gives them the experience of living exposed to the world, without a nice comfy shell around them. It reminds them that there is only one real source of security and protection, and that is God. Similarly, the holes in the roof reveal the sky, and metaphorically, God's heaven, the only source of security. Another meaning goes along with this: a Jew can be in God's presence anywhere. The idea here is that the person, having abandoned all the non-natural protections from the elements has only God to protect them — and since God does protect them, this shows that God is there.

A sukkah must also have at least two walls and part of a third wall. The roof must be made of plant materials (but they must have been cut from the plant, so you can't use a tree as the roof).

“Jews don't live in these huts completely; it depends on the climate where they live. People in cold countries can satisfy the obligation by simply taking their meals in the huts, but in warmer countries, Jewish people will often sleep out in their huts. What Jewish law requires is that the hut should be a person's principal residence. The festival is set down in the Hebrew

Bible book of Leviticus: ‘You shall dwell in booths seven days, that your generation shall know I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.’”

### **The Birth of *Yeshua* During *Sukkot***

The Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) is called "*the season of our joy*" and "*the feast of the nations*." In Luke 2:10 it is written, "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings [*basar* in Hebrew; otherwise known as the gospel] of great joy, which shall be to all people." That the terminology the angel used to announce the birth of *Yeshua* were themes and messages associated with the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles).

In Luke 2:12, the babe was wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. The swaddling cloths were the worn out garments of the Temple priests and were also used as wicks to light the 16 vats of oil within the court of the women during the festival of *Sukkot*. So, swaddling cloths are associated with the festival of *Sukkot*.

During the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles), God required that all male Jews come to Jerusalem (Deut16:16). For this reason, the city would be overcrowded with people and would explain why Mary and Joseph (*Yosef*) could not find lodging in and around Jerusalem (Luke 2:7). Bethlehem, the place where *Yeshua* was born, is only about four miles from Jerusalem.

Now consider the wise men in Matthew 2:1 come from the East to visit *Yeshua*. The land of the East is Babylon, where the largest Jewish population was at the time of the birth of *Yeshua*. (Gen 29:1 and Judges 6:3). The wise men in Matthew 2:1 were Jews from the Babylonian captivity and rabbis. Rabbis, also called *sages*, are known in Hebrew as *chakamim*, which means wise men. The word "Magi" in Matthew 2:1 is the Greek *magos*, which is the Hebrew word *ravmag* from the Hebrew word *rav*, which means "rabbi." The rabbis were scholars or teachers of the Jewish law.

What made the rabbis make the journey from Babylon to Bethlehem to witness the birth of *Yeshua*? The answer is in Matthew 2:2, as it is written, "...we have seen His star in the east...."

One of the requirements during the time of *Sukkot* was to build an outside temporary shelter and live in it during this festival season. The *sukkah* had to be built with an opening in the roof so the people could see the stars in heaven. This is another reason for why the rabbis would be looking for, and thus seeing, the star in the sky when it appeared. There was a prophecy in Numbers, "...*a star shall come forth from Jacob...*" (Num 24:17). King Herod inquired about where the Messiah would be born in Matthew 2:4. He was told in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6), based upon the prophecy in Micah 5:2. In Matthew 2:10 it says of the Magi, "*When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*" *Sukkot* is also called "*the season of our joy.*"

In Matthew 2:2, the rabbis saw the star from the East. Salvation was seen by the Jewish people as coming from the East. Jesus descended from the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5) and the tribe of Judah was positioned on the east side of the tabernacle in the wilderness.

It seems likely Jesus was born during the season of *Sukkot*, and that He is the Star we are all called to see with our (spiritual) eyes!