

# THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

## Objectives:

- To identify some of the main components of the Feast of Tabernacles.
- To gain an understanding of how this feast was observed during the time of Christ.
- To gain an understanding of how this feast applies to believers today.
- To explore some of the possible prophetic fulfillments of this feast.

## Approach:

Do you recall the near hysteria about the possibility of global disaster due to the so-called “millennium bug?” Stores that supplied food for long-term storage and supplies for living “off the grid”, as well as camping gear saw record sales. More recent natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina and 9/11, presented us with real opportunities to see how fragile life is and how difficult it can become when the comforts we have grown accustomed to are suddenly withdrawn. We are not a nation that is naturally comfortable with “roughing it.” Even die-hard camping enthusiasts have modern supplies that make living in the rough much easier than it was decades ago. The feast we will be studying today recalls a period in Israel’s history when they lived in tents or tabernacles and serves as a reminder that “roughing it” is not so bad when your Tabernacle is God Himself.

## I. GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

### A. The Feast of Tabernacles is known by several other names:

1. The Feast of **Sukkot or Booths**, since God commanded the Hebrews to live in temporary shelters for the seven days of the feast.
2. The Festival of **Ingathering**, since according to Lev. 23:39 it was to occur after the crops had been gathered. There was an agricultural component to this feast.
3. The **Season of Our Joy**--in contrast to the somber days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Tabernacles was a time of great joy and celebration.

4. The **Feast of Nations**--Zechariah 14:16-18 indicates that this is the one feast that will be celebrated by the nations during the millennial reign.
5. The **Festival of Dedication**--according to I Kings 3, King Solomon dedicated the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles.
6. The **Festival of Lights**--one tradition associated with this feast was the illumination of the Temple, thus the feast came to be called the Festival of Lights.
7. The **Feast**--the joy of Sukkot was so great that it simply came to be known as the feast.

**B. This was the seventh feast, it occurred during the seventh month**, which would have been during the seventh full moon of the year and it was to be celebrated for seven days. In Scripture, what does the number "7" signify? (the number of perfection or completeness).

**C. Tabernacles was the third and final pilgrimage feast.** All men age 13 and older were required to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast in the Temple. "During the Feast of Tabernacles, the people brought their tithes and offerings to the Temple, for they were not to 'appear before the Lord empty-handed' (Deut. 16:16)"<sup>1</sup>

**D. Tabernacles commemorates God's provision of shelter** for the Israelites during the wilderness experience. "It is widely believed that the Puritan colonists, who were great students of the Hebrew Scriptures, based the first American Thanksgiving on Sukkot."<sup>2</sup>



*"Modern" Bedouin tent in desert of Israel*

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<sup>1</sup> Howard, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> Kasdan, p. 92.

E. According to Lev. 23:33-44, **God mandated five general requirements for the Feast of Tabernacles:**

1. The feast was to be celebrated for seven days. The first day was a sacred assembly and the eighth day was a closing assembly. No regular work was to be done on these two days.
2. The Hebrews were to construct a booth and live in it for the duration of the holiday.

a. Traditional Jews begin construction of their sukkot at the close of Yom Kippur.



*Ratcliff Booth 2000*

- b. The booth was to be built outside and had to have at least three walls.
  - c. The roof of the booth was to be covered with anything that grows from the ground. The roof was to be arranged so that it provided shade during the day but also allowed the stars to shine through during the night.
3. They were to obtain a lulav and etrog to be used in the Temple worship. (Lev. 23:40) The lulav was made of branches from the palm, myrtle and willow trees. The etrog was a yellow citrus fruit called a citron (about the size of a lemon).



*Lulav and Etrog*

4. Sacrifices were to be offered in the Temple each day of the Feast. Numbers 29:12-35 lists the various animals that were to be offered. In all 70 bullocks were offered which was understood to stand for the 70 nations in existence at the time. A total of 182 sacrifices were offered during the week. 182 divides by 7 exactly 26 times. The meal offerings were also divisible by seven. "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."<sup>3</sup>

5. The 8<sup>th</sup> day was a concluding day and was called the Shemini Atzeret. It was to be set apart as a Sabbath and a holy assembly.

**F. Prior to the time of Christ, several other traditions had been added to the Tabernacles celebration:**

1. The Water-pouring celebration--"each morning of Tabernacles a water libation (sacrificial pouring out of a liquid) was offered to the Lord as a visual prayer for rain." (Howard, p. 138) The priest carried a large golden pitcher from the Temple mount down to the pool of Siloam. "Surrounded by jubilant worshipers, he drew water from the pool, then returned to the Temple, walking through the water gate, which led to the inner court. A great cheering crowd waited for him near the altar. Priests blew the ceremonial silver trumpets, and other priests chanted the words of Isaiah" 'Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.' (Isaiah 12:3)"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chumney

<sup>4</sup> Hagee, p. 153.



*Pool of Siloam: Jerusalem model in Israel*

2. The Temple-Lighting Ceremony--4 enormous golden candlesticks in the court of women were filled with 7.5 gallons of pure oil and lit using the worn-out liturgical clothing of the priests for wicks. "The light emanating from the four candelabras was so bright that the Mishnah says . . . that there was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up with the light. . . The mood was festive. Pious men, members of the Sanhedrin, and heads of different religious schools would dance well into the night, holding bright torches and singing psalms of praise to God" <sup>5</sup>

3. Simchat Torah--during the Middle Ages a 9<sup>th</sup> day was added to Tabernacles. The term "Simchat Torah" means "The Rejoicing of the Law." This day is spent rejoicing and celebrating the Torah. It is customary to read the end of the book of Deut. as well as the beginning of the book of Genesis.




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<sup>5</sup> Chumney



## II. JESUS AND THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

A. **Scholars believe that Jesus was born on or during the Feast of Tabernacles.** They cite several evidences for this belief:

1. The shepherds were in the fields with their flock when Jesus was born. "The Mishna states that, because of winter weather, the flocks around Bethlehem were normally brought into a protective coral called a 'sheepfold' from November through February."<sup>6</sup>



2. When the angels announced Yeshua's birth to the startled shepherds, they used Tabernacle terminology. Luke 2:10 "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

- a. Tabernacles is called "the season of our joy"--"good news of great joy"

- b. Tabernacles is called "the feast of the nations" --"for all the people."

3. We can date Jesus' conception from Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. Zechariah was serving in the Temple when God told him he would father a son.

- a. Temple service was divided up between the priests so that each priest was scheduled to serve for two weeks in addition to all of the divisions of priests serving during the three pilgrimage feasts. Zechariah was a part of the 8<sup>th</sup> division of priests and thus would minister in the temple during the 10<sup>th</sup> week of the year. (The weeks of Passover

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<sup>6</sup> Kasdan, p. 97.

and Pentecost would not be counted because all of the priests were required to be in Jerusalem).

b. By this calculation, John the Baptist would have been born during Passover. It is interesting to note that the angel of God told Zechariah that his son would possess "the spirit and power of Elijah". Remember that a place is set at the Passover Seder for Elijah because of Scripture that indicate that Elijah will be a fore-runner of the Messiah.

c. Elizabeth was six month pregnant when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. This would have been around the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, or on Chanukah. Jesus may have been conceived during the festival of Chanukah and that would put His birth during the Feast of Tabernacles.

4. Because this was a pilgrimage feast, Jerusalem was crowded. The Romans would often declare tax time during a Temple feast due to the difficulties with travel. The term "sukkot" can be translated "stable" so Jesus may have been born in a booth like we see here today. (see Gen. 33:17)

5. The apostle John, in describing the birth of Jesus, used Tabernacles terminology. John 1:14 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

6. Eight days after His birth, Jesus was circumcised into the Abrahamic covenant according to Luke 2:21. If Jesus was born on the first day of the feast, his circumcision would correspond to the festival Shemini Atzeret.

**B. Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles according** to John 7:1-10, even though it was dangerous for Him to do so. According to John 7:37-39 He addressed the worshippers in the Temple on the "last and greatest day of the Feast."

1. The 7<sup>th</sup> day of the Festival is called "Hoshana Rabbah" or the "great hosanna". Several special rituals and customs made this day more like a full festival day than any of the intermediate days.

2. During the Water-drawing Celebration on this day, instead of circling the altar one time with the golden pitcher, the priest circled it 7 times. Willows, cut from the river bank and carried into the Temple by the priests were waved and then laid against the altar, forming a sukkot or canopy of drooping branches over the altar.

3. Isaiah 12:3 is quoted "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." Yeshua in Hebrew means "salvation."

4. Psalm 118:25 which reads, "O Lord, save us" is cried out by the people. "Psalm 118 is viewed as a messianic psalm and as such gave the feast a messianic emphasis. This is why Jesus was greeted by the crowds shouting Hosanna (Hebrew for "Save now" in Ps. 118:25) and waving palm branches on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:8-9. . .) They viewed Him as the Messiah King, come to deliver ('save now') Israel in fulfillment of Psalm 118. They hailed Him with the messianic imagery of palm branches from the Feast of Tabernacles. This same imagery is in view in Rev. 7:9-10 where redeemed saints worship, with palm branches in hand, around the throne of God and the Lamb."<sup>7</sup>

5. It was in this context that Jesus spoke to the crowded worshippers in the Temple and declared that "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 7:37-39) "In other words, He said: *I am the answer to your prayers. I am the Messiah. I can save you now so that you will never thirst for salvation again.*"<sup>8</sup>

**C. Later during the Feast Jesus stood and declared to His people "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)**

1. "The light from the Feast of Tabernacles lambs illuminated the whole city."<sup>9</sup>

2. "The light represented the shekinah glory that once filled the temple where God's presence dwelt in the Holy of Holies. During this time, the Temple was thought of as 'the light of the world.'"<sup>10</sup>

**D. In the healing of the blind man, Jesus combined two very important themes of Tabernacles. John 9:1-12.**

1. He again stated that He was the light of the world (v. 5).

2. He emphasized water once more when He told the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam (v. 7). All of Jerusalem's attention was on this pool during the Feast.

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<sup>7</sup> Howard, p.139.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> Scarlata, p.352.

<sup>10</sup> Chumney





*Sea of Galilee*

### **III. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES FULFILLED**

**A. We are looking forward to the time when God will once again tabernacle with men** according to Rev. 21:3 "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.'"

1. Tabernacles points to our future as believers.
2. "Most Bible scholars agree that Tabernacles represents the beginning of the Millennium.. We should look forward expectantly to the Feast of Tabernacles, just as we look forward to the coming of the Messiah, to bring His government, His Kingdom, and His laws."<sup>11</sup>

**B. The Feast of Tabernacles points to the day when all the nations of the world will gather in Jerusalem.**

1. According to Zechariah 14:16-19, the whole world will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem during the Millennium. There will be severe punishments for nations who refuse to participate.
2. In a sense, the stage is being set for this "coming-up" or "aliyah in Hebrew.
3. Massive numbers of Jews are immigrating to Israel from many nations but especially from Russia. Numerous Messianic and Christian organizations are working diligently in Israel to provide for the needs of these new immigrants.
4. Christians are visiting the Holy Land in record numbers. The majority of pilgrims visiting Israel are Christians (remember three of the world's major

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<sup>11</sup> Scarlata, p. 354.

religions call Israel home). With the dawn of a new millennium on the horizon, more and more tourists are flocking to Israel on pilgrimages. Hotels and accommodations are being stretched to the max.

5. Could this be the preparation and building for future Scriptural/prophetic events?

6. Why is it that Jerusalem and this tiny nation of Israel continues to be such a trouble spot? What is so important about this tiny strip of arid land?

### **C. The Feast of Tabernacles is a promise of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in an unprecedented fashion.**

1. The emphasis on rain and living water is associated with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. John explains that Jesus' statement in the Temple referred to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

2. "Rain also speaks of revival, restoration, and returning to God and trusting in Him."<sup>12</sup>

3. While we enjoy the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives today, "so far we have for the most part seen only showers of blessing. The greatest outpouring of God's Spirit is yet to come. The Feast of 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 the history of the congregation of believers in the Messiah. This outpouring will touch every nation, both Jew and non-Jew."<sup>13</sup>

(conclusion)

What is our responsibility as members of the terminal generation while we wait for the day when we will tabernacle with God? We long for the rain of God's Holy Spirit to pierce every heart, to bring in the final harvest, to point Jew and Gentile alike to the promised One, Jesus the Messiah. "Just as the rain came after Elijah prayed seven times for it in I Kings 18, the great rain or outpouring of God's Holy Spirit will come when the believers in the Messiah will earnestly pray to God that it be done."<sup>14</sup> Let me challenge you to pray as never before, for the outpouring of the Spirit of God. Let's covenant to pray for revival for our families, for our church, for our land, for our world. That is our duty, privilege and great responsibility.

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<sup>12</sup> Chumney

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



*Jordan River*

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