

THE FESTIVAL OF SUKKOT, or THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

God's calendar of sacred seasons is a Divine plan; a schedule whereby man is given the capability of tuning into heavenly frequency. Each festival arrives just in time; each in its respective season - "the voice of my beloved knocks" (Song of Songs 5:4)! In Col 2:16-17 Paul writes that the festivals are "shadows of things to come." The appointed days of God clearly provide an overview of history - each speaking to a specific event in the life and work of Messiah. The Spring Festivals (Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits and Pentecost) were fulfilled within the events of the first coming of Jesus. The Fall Festivals clearly speak to Jesus' return.

The Jewish historian Josephus referred to *Sukkot*, as "A feast very much observed among us." From the time it was first instituted at Mount Sinai, this feast has held a unique and special place among the festivals of Israel. Its legal structure was given by God, its future significance expounded by the prophets, and its spiritual substance exemplified by Jesus during His life on earth.

Since the fall of Adam, humanity experienced exile from God's intimate presence. When God called Abraham, the father of our faith, "he was called to go out ... and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb 11:8). After him, all the patriarchs followed suit: they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth". (Heb 11:13). Their walk of faith ended most of them up in booths, temporary dwellings, which were the most comfortable place in God. He wanted them to learn that He IS the tabernacle and that He longed for intimacy with them. Sukkot formally commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. God provided constant reminders of his watchcare: the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night signified his Presence with his people. Those original "huts" of that generation were actually God's clouds of Presence, which He spread over Israel in His protection and Divine grace. God instituted Sukkot so that we would remember his presence with us during that time, and so that we would rejoice in his provision.

For this reason the Feast of Tabernacles was the final and most important feast of the year. The importance of this festival is indicated by the statement, "This is to be a lasting ordinance." (Lev 23:41). The Festival of Sukkot begins on Tishri 15, the fifth day after Yom Kippur: "On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of Sukkot, seven days for the LORD." (Lev 23:34). This feast follows just 4 days after *Yom Kippur*, the time of awesome reckoning and the dispensing of justice. And lest one feel dejected, despondent or fearful that perhaps his judgment was not favorable, and he has lost that Divine connection, he goes out into the booth itself, symbol of Divine mercy; in stead of running away from the Holy One he flees directly into His presence. There, he is overwhelmed by the realization of the depth of God's love and concern. Commenting on the juxtaposition of these feast days, Solomon wrote: "Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already accepted your works." (Ecc. 9:7). It is commonly referred to as 'the season of our rejoicing'.

Tabernacles is not only a celebration of the harvest, it also celebrates God's dwelling with humanity. It is this element which most clearly shows the Messianic significance. When Solomon built the first temple,

it was on Sukkot that the Spirit of God descended upon it - God came to dwell with man visibly in the Temple on the day that God Himself set aside to mark His dwelling with Man (1 Kings 8). This is one of the reasons many believe that we can determine from the Scriptures and other records that it during Sukkot that Yeshua was born.

During this festival the Israelites were to dwell in booths for seven days (Lev 23:42). It serves as a reminder: "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." (Lev 23:43). Matthew Henry explains it well: "The mercy of God to them, that, when they dwelt in tabernacles, God not only set up a tabernacle for Himself among them, but, with the utmost care and tenderness imaginable, hung a canopy over them, even the cloud that sheltered them from the heat of the sun. God's former mercies to us and our fathers ought to be kept in everlasting remembrance." This feast was fulfilled partially when Jesus Christ the Messiah came to the earth to "tabernacle" with man: "And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14).

Many beautiful traditions are attached to the annual Festival of Booths. For example, it is traditional to invite guests into one's booth for a festive meal each night of Sukkot. Among the list of invitees are some auspicious names: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. Each are specially invited to come into the booth and pull up a chair at the table. Obviously, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David are unlikely to actually attend the meal, since they are all dead. That, however, is the point of the ritual. The Feast of Booths anticipates the Messianic Age, when the dead will be raised to life again and we will all sit at the table with the aforementioned in the kingdom of heaven. When Messiah comes, He will bring in the final harvest of God's kingdom and institute an age of peace and prosperity upon the earth. The prophets relate that day to the festival of Sukkot, a day when every man will sit beneath his own vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4; Zech 3:10). Isa 4:6 tells us that God will spread a tabernacle of glory over Jerusalem.

According to the prophets, the Feast of Booths celebrates a time when all nations will ascend to Jerusalem bearing tribute to King Messiah and celebrating the festival. In that day, all nations will ascend to His throne in Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. Obviously, this is a very important festival for disciples of Messiah today.

Sukkot is the great festival, the culmination of all the appointed times.