

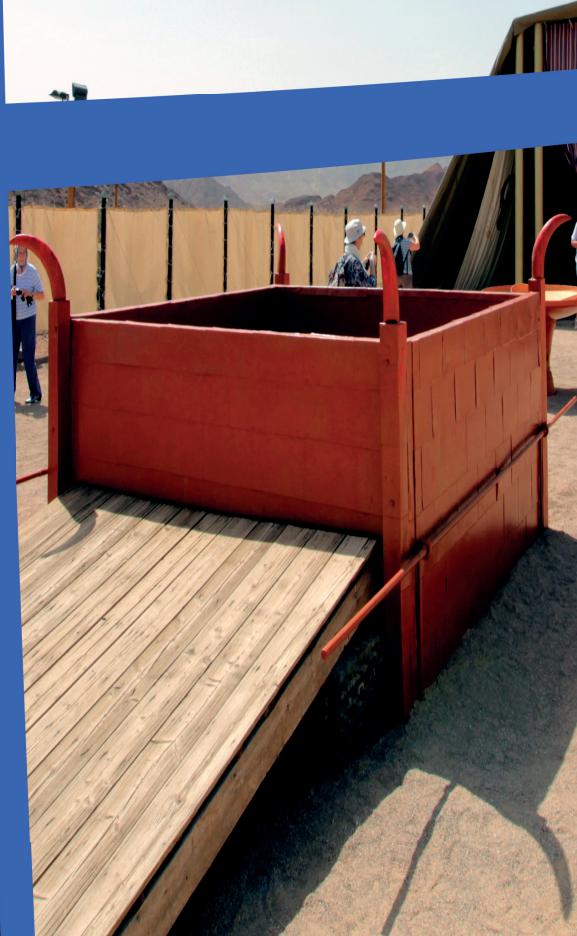


The Feast of Tabernacles

Exploring the biblical meaning of the feast.

Written by Rod Boggia

Produced by
Prayer for Israel.



THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

By Rod Boggia

The Feast of Tabernacles is the last of three Autumn Feasts and this year it falls on the 15th day of the seventh Jewish month of Tishrei, which is usually the first two weeks of October. Some say that it is the time that Jesus was born and also the time when He will return in glory, as we shall see. Tabernacles is the last of seven annual Feasts, which are as follows.

Spring Feasts: Passover, Unleavened Bread and Feast of First-fruits (also the barley harvest)

Summer Feast: Weeks, or Shavuot, or Pentecost (also the wheat harvest)

Autumn Feasts: Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Tabernacles, or Booths (Sukkot) or ingathering (also the fruit harvest)

The seven annual Feasts are related to the agricultural seasons and are both physical and spiritual harvest times. When you study the Feasts you will find such richness, edification and depth of understanding. But the most important reason for us to study the Feasts is that they each point to Messiah Jesus. The majority of Christian Feasts that we celebrate: Easter, Pentecost and Harvest Festival – are derived from the Lord's Feasts of Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. Christianity has lost its connection with the Feasts of the Lord because, at the first Council of Nicaea, the Emperor Constantine uncoupled the Christian Feasts from

their Biblical counterparts. But God has not finished with these Feasts of the Lord – they are still relevant. Even during the Millennial (1,000 year) reign of Jesus, at His second coming, all the nations will be required to come up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and worship the Lord each year. Moreover, those who refuse to come will be judged and on those nations there will be no rain! You can read this amazing prophecy in Zechariah chapter 14 verses 16-17. One very important point is that God does everything of eternal importance through these Feasts of the Lord: Passover is salvation day for the Israelites; Weeks is a first-fruits wave offering of all those who will be saved, Jew and Gentile alike; and Tabernacles represents the final ingathering of souls for God's kingdom.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

It is worth remembering that before the Autumn Feasts commence the Jews spend the month before in repentance, seeking forgiveness for anyone they have hurt or offended. Between the Feast of Trumpets (the first day of the seventh month) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur – the tenth day) the Jews have “ten days of Awe” when they repent before the Lord for their sins, followed by a five-day period leading up to the Feasts of Tabernacles (the fifteenth day). This Feast is laid out in Leviticus 23 vv 34-43:

Verses 34-36: *“Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘The fifteenth day of the seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no*

customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.”

Verses 39-40: 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. 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.”

Verses 42-43: You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 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.”

Verse 36 tells us an intriguing fact: Tabernacles is a seven-day offering, yet there is a mysterious eighth day to the Feast! – very Jewish! – but more of that later. In v 40 the Israelites built booths made of various branches with the top opened to the sky – a reminder of their desert wanderings. So strong is this tradition that today, in Israel, booths abound at Tabernacles – built against homes and hotels – even on top of garages! – a beautiful sight as the booths are illuminated. Gentiles attending the Feast of Tabernacles in

Jerusalem have been a relatively recent phenomenon and many Jews are excited as they know from the passage in Zechariah 14 that the nations will come up to Jerusalem and that Messiah’s coming is close.

THE COMINGS OF JESUS

Scripture teaches that Jesus was born, not at Christmas, but in the Autumn – at the Feast of Tabernacles – the time when He will return! There are two Biblical explanations: one short and the other long! The short answer is given in John 1 v 14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” Jesus is, of course, the Word; the word dwelt (in Greek, ‘skenoo’) means: to dwell with, to tent with, or tabernacle with. When would Jesus tabernacle with His people? – at the Feast of Tabernacles – also the season when He will return!

The word, stable, appears nowhere in Scripture; it has to be a possibility that Jesus’ manger was in a booth (sukkot) for then, as now, inns offer booths to travellers. The ‘long’ answer to Jesus’ birth is given in Luke chapter 1, as almost all the clues are given there. Zacharias, a Temple priest, was praying to God because his wife, Elizabeth was barren (Luke Ch. 1). What we discover is that the angel, Gabriel, appears to Zacharias, saying that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son (v 13). Because Zacharias doubts the angel (v 18) he is struck dumb (v 20). Switch now to Gabriel’s appearance before Mary, telling her that she would conceive a son, who would be called Jesus (verse 31) and that this would be by a supernatural conception of the Holy

Spirit (verse 35). Gabriel then gives Mary a wonderful nugget of information: her cousin Elizabeth is now 6 months pregnant (v 36). Let's work out the timing of Jesus' birth. At the time that Zacharias was struck dumb, Elizabeth conceived John. Later, when Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth her cousin was six months pregnant.

So, adding 6 and 9 together we can calculate that Jesus would be born 15 months after Zacharias was struck dumb. If we knew when Zacharias was serving as a priest in the Temple, we could calculate the time of Jesus' birth. Because the Old Testament records the times at which the priestly families served, we can check Zacharias out. Note in verse 3, that Zacharias was of the priestly division of Abijah.

Now turn to 1 Chronicles chapter 24; this chapter lists the 24 divisions of priests that served in the Temple, each for a 2-week period; now look at verse 10: So, Zacharias served in the Temple for two weeks; the eighth division would therefore be the last two weeks of the fourth month. Next we need to convert the Jewish lunar months to the Gentile solar months.

The Jewish first month, Nisan, runs approximately from mid-March to mid-April; therefore the fourth month runs from around mid-June to mid-July and the latter two weeks of that month brings us round to the first two weeks of July. Add on 15 months and this brings us round to the latter end of the Jewish seventh month of the following year, mid-September to mid-October. The last 2 weeks of the

seventh month, ie, the first 2 weeks of October – is the Feast of Tabernacles! Jesus will come a second time at the Feast of Tabernacles: we won't know the day, the time or the hour; we will not even know the year – but we will know the season!

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The Feast of Tabernacles must have been an amazing event for Jews, who were required to attend the Feast, and Jerusalem would have been at bursting point with around two million Jews in attendance. In addition, in the Temple courts, four huge lamp-stands sixty feet high were erected, each holding four enormous lamps which literally lit up the Old City of Jerusalem. John records that Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles (Ch 7). On the final day of the Feast, the High Priest took a pitcher of water to the pool of Siloam and filled it with the running water – 'living water,' and poured it over the Temple altar; at this point Jesus makes His magnificent statement:

"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. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-38) There was another tradition at Tabernacles that before the water was poured on the altar, a pitcher of red wine was first poured out. This was a picture of

the blood of Jesus being poured out before the Holy Spirit the Living Water, could be given. This was mirrored in Jesus' seven piercings (head, back, hands, feet and side). Only after the shedding of His blood did water, representing the Living Water of the Holy Spirit, flow from His side: first the blood, then the water. Shortly afterwards, perhaps reflecting on the magnificent lamp-stands, Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12)

THE EIGHTH DAY: SIMCHAT TORAH

This mysterious eighth day was spoken of by John when He said: On that last day, that great day of the Feast..." and has great significance. Orthodox Jews call this day 'Simchat Tora' (rejoicing in the Law). They take the Torah scrolls out of the Ark in their synagogues and parade them around outside, rejoicing in the Law and singing and dancing before the Lord. Their rejoicing puts us, who have the Spirit, to shame. As Christians, we look forward to the final fulfilment of these three Autumn Feasts:

- The Feast of Trumpets: Paul reminds us of the heralding trumpet sound in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: "*Behold I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*"
- The Day of Atonement: On this Holiest of days, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to seek the atone-

ment of the sins of the nation. Could this be the day when our Great High Priest, Jesus appears?

- The Feast of Tabernacles: Could the mysterious eighth day of the Feast, Simchat Torah, be the time of Jesus' appearing?

In my mind's eye I wonder whether His brothers and sisters in the flesh, instead of parading the Torah scrolls, will lift Jesus high, rejoicing:

"This is Yeshua Ha-Maschiah, our Lord and Saviour, the Torah made flesh; He is going to dwell with us forever!"

Jesus' second coming is sure and certain; He will gather in all the saints – believers whether dead or alive, will celebrate the marriage Feast of the Lamb in heaven, then usher in His rule and reign for 1,000 years on earth – the Messianic age – a time of unprecedented peace and righteousness – we may not know the day or hour of His coming or even the year, but we will know the season – hallelujah!