

The Biblical Feast of Sukkot

By Dan & Brenda Cathcart

The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/KMLIdLaMjIw>

The scripture reading is Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Feast of Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, is the seventh and final feast of the festival year. The feast is in the seventh month of Tishrei as the months are numbered. The Feast of Sukkot starts on the 15th of the month at the full moon and is celebrated for seven days followed by a special eighth day that is celebrated as a Sabbath. This eighth day is called Shimeni Atzerat, which literally means the eighth day assembly. It is observed as a day to rejoice in the Torah, keeping with the Feast of Sukkot theme of rejoicing. We will cover this day in more detail in part 2 of this teaching next week.

In addition to the Passover, the feast of Sukkot may have the most significance to the followers of Yeshua. It can be demonstrated through examination of the Biblical text that Yeshua was most likely born at or near this feast. Also, prophetically, the Feast of Sukkot is a dress rehearsal of the coronation of the king and wedding supper of the lamb. The Feast of Sukkot is a time to rejoice! It is a celebration that God has again taken up His dwelling place with man. His son, Yeshua, is on the throne and the millennial reign begins.

Historically the feast of Sukkot was established while the Children of Israel were in the wilderness following their exit from Egypt.

Leviticus 23:33-36 NKJV 33 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 34 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. 35 'On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. 36 'For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire 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.

In the time of Yeshua, the Feast of Sukkot was celebrated around the clock for the entire 7 days. It was one of the three pilgrimage feasts so the population of Jerusalem would swell to millions of people. Although all the feasts of the Lord are joyful occasions, the Feast of Sukkot is specifically a time of rejoicing. There was dancing, singing, juggling, and acrobatics all night long every night. In the Talmud, the Rabbis write,

"He that hath not beheld the joy of the drawing of water hath never seen joy in his life."ⁱ

In the days leading up to the Feast of Tabernacles, sukkot or temporary dwellings sprang up all over the countryside leading up to Jerusalem in honor of the commandment to dwell in booths.

Leviticus 23:42-43 NKJV 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.'"

Sukkot were built wherever space could be found. Not only the pilgrims, but also the permanent residents of Jerusalem would build and live in Sukkot for the seven days of the feast. Imagine the whole city of Jerusalem moving out of their homes and building sukkot all over the city! Two and a half million people moving out of their houses and living in booths!

This is the historic backdrop to the gospel narrative of Yeshua's birth! Most of us are intimately familiar with the scripture from the gospel of Luke that tells the story of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem.

Luke 2:4-7 NKJV 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The narrative speaks of the shepherds in the fields with their flocks when an angel appears to them to announce the birth of Yeshua.

Luke 2:8-12 NKJV 8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

There is no mention of a specific date in this account, but from this we can infer that it could not have been during the winter. And it would have been extremely difficult if not impossible for Joseph and Mary to travel between Nazareth and Bethlehem over the mountains of Israel in the cold and snowy winter, a distance of about 90 miles.

What other clues are there for Yeshua's birth at or near Sukkot? The birth of Yeshua is closely timed with the birth of John the Baptist. John was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth. Elizabeth being a cousin of Mary.

Luke 1:5-7 NKJV 5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

As a priest, Zacharias would serve in the temple on a regular basis during his division or "course" of Abijah as well as during the pilgrimage feasts when all the priests served because of the large numbers of people coming to the Temple. These divisions were instituted at the time of king David. You can refer to 1st Chronicles chapter 24 for more details. These same divisions continued in the second Temple era.

Zacharias was servicing in the Temple at his division cycle of Abijah, which is the 8th division just prior to the late spring pilgrimage feast of Shavuot or Pentecost. He was chosen for the special privilege of presenting the incense offering. A highly prized honor for any priest.

Luke 1:8-12 NKJV 8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

This angel, identified as Gabriel, brought to Zacharias the message that his wife Elizabeth would bear a child to them. This child was destined to be great in the kingdom of God.

Luke 1:23-25 NKJV 23 And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. 24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

The same angel who appeared to Zacharias now appeared to Mary, who was betrothed but not yet married to Joseph, telling her that she too would soon conceive a son but while she was still a virgin.

Luke 1:35-37 NKJV 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 "For with God nothing will be impossible."

Elizabeth is six months into her pregnancy when Mary comes to visit her and inform her that she is pregnant with a special son as well. This places Mary's conception six months past Elizabeth's in the month of Kislev. This is in the winter, December on our modern calendar. Nine months later would place the birth of Yeshua squarely in the month of Tishrei and the Fall Feast days. The middle of the month, on the 15th day, is the first day of the Feast of Sukkot. How appropriate it is that the King of Kings is born on the very day that He would ultimately be crowned King of Kings!

For the believers and followers of Yeshua, this makes the Feast of Sukkot doubly important and deeply special. The believers of the first century would have realized what exactly they were rehearsing in the rituals and ceremonies of the festival that had been practiced since the time of Moses some 1500 years prior. What were these ceremonies and rituals, and how do they foreshadow the future coronation of Yeshua?

Unless one lived in or near Jerusalem, it was not easy to travel there in the ancient world. A vast majority of the Jews of that time lived in cities far and wide in the Diaspora. Unless one was wealthy, one could only hope of attending a pilgrimage feast perhaps once in a lifetime. And the journey would take many weeks or even months. For many, their single visit would be their only opportunity in their lifetime to bring their sacrifices and offerings to the altar of God in the Temple.

There are just five days between Yom Kippur and the Feast of Sukkot. During that time, the Jews in Israel would build a Sukkah, that is a booth or tabernacle to dwell in for the duration of the feast. By living in the Sukkah, they rejoice and remember that God provided for them in the wilderness. One of God's provisions was to feed them.

Exodus 16:4-5 NKJV 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. 5 "And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily."

The purpose of providing manna was to teach the Children of Israel about being humble and to get them to look to God for both their physical and spiritual food. God provides a kind of "manna" for us as well.

John 6:57-58 NKJV 57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 "This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

Yeshua further taught His disciples about His abundant and continuing provision.

Matthew 6:25-30 NKJV 25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

The people were to rejoice during the Feast of Sukkot. It was a time of around the clock celebration in the Temple courts and throughout the city. By living in the Sukkah, they are reminded that God dwelt with them.

More important even than manna from heaven, was God's presence with them. He was with them from before they left Egypt. He was with them when they stopped in Succoth to pick up Joseph's bones. God was with them in the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. The cloud above the Tabernacle in the wilderness testified to God's continuing presence with them and provided shade from the heat of the day and light for the entire camp by night.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a time when this same presence of the cloud and fire will be present over all of Jerusalem as a covering, a shelter or Sukkah.

Isaiah 4:5-6 NKJV 5 then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. 6 And there will be a tabernacle (a Sukkah) for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.

In the wilderness, when God's presence filled the Tabernacle even Moses could no longer enter it. God's presence also filled the Temple which Solomon built. In his dedication prayer, Solomon spoke of God's promises to his father David and of the temple as a dwelling place of God. Solomon posed a question, "Would God indeed dwell with man?"

1 Kings 8:26-27 NKJV 26 "And now I pray, O God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David my father. 27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

Both the gospels of Matthew and John answer Solomon's question.

John 1:14 NKJV 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And in Matthew 1:23:

Matthew 1:23 NKJV 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

These verses, along with what we have already demonstrated, suggest that Yeshua was born at the Feast of Tabernacles, because it is the time that God dwells with man. As we examine Yeshua's birth in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, we will see a lot of evidence that He was born during the Feast of Tabernacles. The name Emanuel means "God dwells with us."

Someday on a future Feast of Tabernacles, we will see Yeshua in all His glory and majesty! The prophet Haggai said that God would once again fill a future Temple with His presence.

Haggai 2:6-9 NKJV 6 "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 'and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 8 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 9 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

In a vision, given to him on Yom Kippur, Ezekiel saw another temple which he measured and described in great detail beginning in chapter 40. This temple has not yet been built. In chapter 43 Ezekiel describes the manner in which God will enter this temple.

Ezekiel 43:4-7 NKJV 4 And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. 5 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple. 6 Then I heard Him speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me. 7 And He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places.

As Yeshua ascended into heaven, two men dressed in white, probably angels of the LORD, spoke to the disciples on the Mount of Olives which is to the east of the Temple.

Acts 1:10-11 NKJV 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Some fifty plus years later, near the end of his life, the apostle John was given a vision while in exile on the Isle of Patmos. This vision was given to John as an assurance to the believers who had been scattered throughout the Roman world and faced tremendous persecution under the Roman Emperor Domitian.

Revelation 21:3-4 NKJV 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

As we come once again to this season of great joy, let us build our Sukkah and remember that He dwelt with His people in the wilderness and that He provided for their every need in the desert. Let it be a reminder to us of Yeshua's birth and as the time of His future return to dwell with us once again. He will return to His rightful place on the throne of David in Jerusalem. He will return to be our High Priest here on this earth. Let this Feast of Sukkot be the time that we rejoice that He is the King of Kings and LORD of LORDS.

Study Questions:

1. By living in booths or Sukkot, the Israelites were to remember that their dwelling here on earth is temporary. According to the book of Hebrews, how are we, as the believers in Yeshua, to regard our lives?
2. The Feast of Sukkot is one of the pilgrimage feasts. Each year, the men of Israel, at least those in the land, were to travel to the Temple at each of these feasts three times each year. Every seventh year is a Sabbatical year. What are the special instructions regarding the Feast of Sukkot during a Sabbatical year? (Ref. Deut. 31:10-13 specifically.)
3. What were the special or additional offerings made during the Feast of Sukkot? What did these offerings consist of? Who was to bring these additional offerings?
4. God provided manna in the wilderness to feed the Israelites. What was their response? What was God's response?
5. Will there need to be a Temple in the future for God to "fill with His glory?" Who will build this Temple? When will it be built? (Zech. 6:12-13 specifically)
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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ⁱ Sukkah 5:1