

October 2003

Sukkot 2003 begins at
sunset, October 10,
and ends at sunset October 17.

Hag Sameach (May you rejoice in The Feast)!

The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)

The final Feast of the Lord in the Biblical calendar is the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (*Hag ha Sukkot*, pronounced sue-COAT). This greatest of all feasts (*Ha Hag* in Hebrew, literally "The Feast") was given by God through Moses to His children:

"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... It shall be a statute forever... 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" (Leviticus 23).

Some food for thought: The Hebrew word for feast, *hag*, comes from a root meaning "to dance or be joyous." That is why dance is an integral part of all Jewish feasts, especially Sukkot. It is Biblical to dance before the Lord!

Seven: Biblical Number of Completion-Perfection

Sukkot is celebrated during the seventh and holiest month of the Jewish year. Seven is considered to be God's perfect number, the number of completeness. Sukkot is a seven day festival, the final feast of the year and the last Feast of the Lord that will be prophetically fulfilled. The day will come, according to the Holy Scriptures, when all nations will go up to Zion to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot. This will occur in the fullness of time when the Lord shall be King over all the earth, a day in which the Lord is one, and His name one (Zechariah 14:9). The prophet Zechariah speaks of the universal celebration of Sukkot:

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which come against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain" (Zechariah 14:16-17).

The withholding of rain is symbolic of the withholding of the outpouring of God's Ruach HaKodesh. The lesson: Worship the Lord as He desires (and requires) and His Spirit will rain down upon you. Refuse to worship the Lord as He directs, and there will be no outpouring of His Spirit in your life.

When the prophet Zechariah uses the word nations, does this mean that the God of the Bible wants Christians to celebrate a Jewish feast? Yes! "Nations" in Hebrew is *goyim* which also is translated "gentiles." **All** the Feasts of the Lord may be celebrated by God's children (whether born Jewish or not), however Sukkot seems to be the feast that is universal in nature. There are believers all over the world who have **already** begun to celebrate this Feast. It is *Zeman Simchateinu* to them, literally, the Season of our Rejoicing. Perhaps this is the year for **you** to begin to celebrate Sukkot. A good place to begin is with an understanding of all that this feast represents.

Sukkot: Past, Present, Future

Sukkot reminds us of Israel's 40-year wilderness wandering period. God had supernaturally freed His people from Egyptian bondage, led them through the Red Sea, and provided for their every need while they went through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. Manna rained down from Heaven, water came out of a rock to quench their thirst, their shoes and clothing did not wear out, and they were guided by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They dwelt in temporary dwellings (*sukkot*) in the wilderness. For forty years God faithfully protected and provided for His children.

Today, Sukkot falls during the time of the final harvest in Israel. It occurs right before the rainy season. It is a time of thanking God and rejoicing in His abundant provision as crops are brought in (the origin of our American Thanksgiving). As Jewish people live in makeshift tabernacles (flimsy booths with branches as roofs) there is an awareness of the fleeting nature of life. Dwelling in a sukkah for seven days reduces life to a level of simplicity that can free us from our slavery to materialism. **God** is the real source of our joy, not our possessions. He is the God who is still Faithful to guide and provide.

Sukkot also looks to the future when the "tabernacle of God" will dwell among men and God will rule on earth with all people living under His bounty and in His peace. *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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, and God Himself will be with them, and be their God'"* (Revelation 21:1-3). We await with great anticipation this glorious fulfillment of Sukkot!

Sukkot in Bible Times

Sukkot was the most joyous feast during Bible times. All males of Israel were commanded by God to come up to Zion to celebrate the Feast (Deuteronomy 16:16). They had passed through a season of repentance and redemption (Trumpets and Atonement) and were ready to rejoice.

Jerusalem must have been quite a sight as little booths (*sukkot*) filled the city. As we read in Exodus 23:16, the Feast coincided with Israel's final harvest: *"...the feast of Ingathering, which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field."* Baskets of crops must have made a beautiful, fragrant backdrop to the ceremonies that took place at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The harvest was over, the work was done and it was time to spend seven festival days thanking and praising God for His goodness in providing for His people.

Sacrifices to the Lord at the Holy Temple were more numerous on Sukkot than at any other time. Seventy bullocks were sacrificed on behalf of the 70 nations of the world. These sacrifices

looked forward to the conversion of the gentiles to the God of Israel, and their gathering under the Shekinah glory.

Since rainfall was crucial to Israel's agrarian society, the Israelites developed a ceremony in which they called upon God to provide abundant water from Heaven for their crops during the next rainy season which was about to begin. This dramatic ceremony began with a Levitical priest who descended to the Pool of Siloam carrying a golden pitcher. Worshippers with flutes accompanied him as he filled the golden pitcher with water. Upon returning to the Temple through the Water Gate, shofars were sounded. The priest entered the Temple area, went to the southern side of the great altar, and placed two silver basins there. He proceeded to pour the water from the golden pitcher into one of the basins. Amidst the playing of flutes, worshippers chanted the words of Psalm 118, "*O Lord, do save, we beseech Thee; O Lord, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity*" (Psalm 118:25). As these words were chanted, the choir of Israelites waved palm branches towards the altar until all the water was poured.

Since rain in the Hebraic mind also represented the Holy Spirit, the water drawing ceremony looked forward to the day when Joel 2:28 would be fulfilled: "*...I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh...*" The joy of the water pouring emanated from the joy of God's presence through His *Ruach* (Spirit).

Yeshua at Sukkot

Picture the following scene: Yeshua came up to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot. On the seventh and last "great day of the Feast," called *Hoshana Rabbah*, the "Great Hosanna," he witnessed the water drawing ceremony and the priests circling the Temple altar seven times, repeating the cry "Hoshannah" (Save now) seven times. Yeshua, whose very name means "salvation," stood in the midst of the celebration and cried out, "*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...*" (John 7:37-39).

Yeshua was identifying Himself as the source of living water, just as He had identified Himself a few days earlier to a woman of Samaria at a well when He said: "*Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*" (John 4:14).

Yeshua is the source of living water. He is the One who saves, the Giver of eternal life.

There was another ceremony of the feast of Tabernacles called the Illumination of the Temple. Four huge golden candlesticks were set up in the court of the women in the Temple. Four youths of priestly descent filled the candlesticks with pure oil. The light that shone from these four candlesticks was so bright that, according to rabbinic sources, "There was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up with the light ..." (Sukkah 5:3).

Now picture Yeshua, the young rabbi, walking in the midst of the great celebration surrounded by Levitical musicians, the Levitical choir and religious leaders dancing, singing songs of praise and holding burning torches. Jerusalem shone brightly with a light that was seen from miles around. In this setting, Yeshua proclaimed, "*I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life*" (John 8:12).

Yeshua is the Light of the World. He is the Shekinah glory of God dwelling among men.

At the Feast of Tabernacles, Yeshua claimed to be the source of living water (John 7) and the light of the world (John 8). Yeshua proved these claims when he healed a man born blind by sending Him to wash in the pool of Siloam. Yeshua's statement in John 9:5, "*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world,*" was indeed true.

7 Sukkot Lessons for us to remember

1. Yeshua took on a temporary dwelling (*sukkah*) when He came to dwell among men. (Phil. 2:7)
2. Yeshua is God tabernacling among men. (John 1:14)
3. We live in temporary dwellings (bodies); we're just passing through. (I Corinthians 15:52-54)
4. This life is fleeting. God is forever. (II Corinthians 5:1)
5. We are **commanded** to rejoice during Sukkot. (Deuteronomy 16:13-14)
6. God is Faithful as we go through this wilderness on our way to the Promised Land. (I Corinthians 1:9)
7. We are more secure in a sukkah with God than in a castle without Him! (Hebrews 13:5-6)

Join Neil & Jamie in Tampa for Sukkot

We hope you can join us as we minister at a special Sukkot celebration, a spiritual feast, a party with God, in Tampa, Florida on October 10-11. Paul Wilbur will also be ministering. If you are there, please introduce yourselves to us. If you need prayer, ask us to pray for you. We will be delighted to do so!

P.S. We are expecting God's Spirit to **rain down** in a powerful way!

P.P.S. Music for lovers of Israel: "Heart for Israel Worship" CD (You'll love it!)

Blessings!,

Neil and Jamie