

The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles
The Feast
Sukkot

Introduction

1. The Feast of Booths is the third of the “Pilgrim Feasts” in the calendar year, meaning all males were required to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem on three occasions.

“Three times a year all your males shall appear
before the Lord” (Exod. 23:17).

2. As with other feasts, this one overlapped with the Feast of Ingathering. The Feast of Ingathering marked the end of the agricultural year as well as the civil year. It was a time to express thankfulness to God for material blessings.

“You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, that is,
the first fruits of the wheat harvest [Pentecost], and the Feast
of Ingathering at the turn of the year” (Exod. 34:22).

3. Three events mark the end-of-the year celebration: The Blowing of the Trumpets (the first of the month announcing ten days of reflective preparation of heart). On the tenth day of the same month was the Day of Atonement and five days after that was the beginning of the Feast of Booths, as well as the Feast of Ingathering.

“When you have gathered in the crops, you shall celebrate the
feast of the Lord for seven days.... You shall live in booths for seven days,
all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths” (Lev. 23: 41-42).

- I. What were the instructions for observing the Feast of Booths in ancient Israel?
 - A. It was to be a time of great rejoicing, unlike the “Ten Days” or the Day of Atonement (“you shall rejoice before the Lord” [Lev. 23:40]).
 - B. Each family is to build a booth made of the “foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches, boughs of leafy trees, and willows from the brook” (Lev. 23:40). The family is to live in the booth during the seven-day feast.
 - C. On the first day of the celebration, a “holy convocation” convenes with a series of sacrifices (Num. 29:12-16) with a series of sacrifices daily throughout the week. On the first day:
 1. For a burnt offering, or dedication offering: 13 bulls, 2 rams, 14 male lambs (1 year old and unblemished).
 2. For a grain offering: fine flour mixed with oil (3/10s of a bushel for each bull or about three bushels, 2/10 for each lamb or about a half bushel, and a tenth for each of the

14 lambs or about 1 ½ bushels. These as the above would be totally consumed by fire.

3. For a sin offering: one male goat.
 - D. On days two through seven, there are offerings.
 1. The number of bulls decline by one each day, the rams and lambs remain the same each successive day.
 2. The grain offering remains the same in proportion to the number and category of animal. As the number of bulls decrease so the replication of the 3/10s ration.
 3. The sin offering remains the same.
 - E. The eighth day, like the first, is a holy day of convocation. The burnt offerings are to be 1 bull, 1 ram, and seven lambs. The grain offerings are the same proportion to the number of animals (see Num. 29:17-40) and one male goat for a sin offering.
 - F. Though a week-long celebration that commenced on a sabbath, a day was added at the end with the result that it began and ended on a sabbath, a holy convocation.
 - G. The feast is the most festive in the cycle of seven.
- II. What was the purpose of the Feast of Booths for the first observers?
- A. It commemorated the provisions of God for His people, not only delivering them from bondage but carrying them safely through the wilderness to the “promised land.”
 - B. It is to remind them that they are sojourners toward a world yet to come.
- III. What is the record of the celebration of the Feast of Booths in the Holy Scriptures?
- A. It is rather sad and ironic that from the time of Joshua to that of Ezra the feast was not observed. “The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day” (Neh. 8:17), that means about a thousand years. It is just as strange that the Passover was not enthusiastically celebrated from the time of Samuel until the time of Josiah (II Chron. 35:18).
 - B. We do know that with the dedication of the Temple under Solomon the feast was observed (I Kings 8:2, 65-66) for 14 days.
 - C. When the exiles returned from captivity, the people under Ezra observed the feast in 445 (the feast requires the ability to make animal sacrifices).

“The entire assembly of those that had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them.... And there was much rejoicing” (Neh. 8:17).

“And they read from the book of the law daily from the first day to the last. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance” (Neh. 8:18)

- IV. How do observant Jews commemorate the Feast of Booths today?
- A. Outside devout Jewish homes small booths are constructed in which the family resides, eats, and worships during the days of the feast. Jewish people not only look back to God’s provision in the wilderness, but longingly forward to a divine shelter in the world under the auspices of the Messiah.



- B. They are to remember that they are sojourning toward a world yet to come.
- C. They make a Lulav, a banquet of three plants that is to be held in the right hand and waved (one palm branch, two willow branches, three myrtle branches), and in the left hand one citrus fruit to be raised to the Lord. These are waved before the Lord.

Palm branch has no smell, but sweet fruit (dates). It represents the Law for those who do not know it but seek to live it out.

Myrtle branches has a good scent, but not sweet. It represents those who know the law but do not live it.

Willow branches is neither a pleasant smell nor sweet. It represents those who do not know the law and do not live it

Citrus has fragrance and sweet taste. It represents those who know the law and live it out.

Waving the full bouquet, the Jewish people plead before God, “Lord, take us all as we are,” and recite Ps. 118:25 (“O Lord do save, we beseech Thee. O Lord, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity”). As one has written, “Through God’s Word, we know that He indeed receives us as we are, but He has no intention to let us remain the same. He is faithful to teach us, transform us and help us grow.”

- D. It is common for Israelis to share gifts and baskets of food with their friends and family.



- E. Zechariah 14, a prophetic passage, is given special emphasis because the celebration also looked forward to the hope that Messiah will come and reign over all the earth.

V. How was did Jesus connect with the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths?

The gospel of John affords insight into the Feast of Booths and the ministry of Jesus. The evidence suggests that Jesus claimed that he was the fulfillment of the feast. Clearly, the people were required to come to Jerusalem and erect booths for their time in the city. Additional ceremonies were added to the Mosaic ritual by the time of our Lord

- A. John used language that would have caused the Jewish believers to interconnect the feast as fulfilled in Jesus.

“And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* [tabernacled] among us
And we beheld His glory....” (1:14).

The point being that the presence of God with the ancient people was a picture of the presence of God with us, caring and watching over us in our wilderness sojourn to the “promised land.”

- B. John rehearsed the ministry of Jesus during the feast which he attended at the temple on at least one occasion.

“Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths was at hand....
But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up
into the temple and began to teach” (7:2, 14).

- C. On the last day of the feast, the eighth day was a day of holy convocation (it is a seven-day feast, but it continued another day because God told them to hold a closing ceremony on the eighth day).
 - 1. On this eighth day, a postlude to the feast, the celebration pointed toward a future time when Messiah would come bringing salvation. These two ceremonies, likely introduced by post-exilic Jews, since they are not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, took place of this day. Jesus applied both as fulfilled in Himself, making the definitive claims that He was the nation's hope, the Messiah.
 - a. The Water Libation Ceremony



In this ritual, priests every day would secure a pitcher of water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it out on the altar in the temple. As the priests submerged the pitcher in the pool, he recited Isaiah 12:3 (“Therefore they shall joyously draw water from the springs of salvation”). With singing the praise Psalms, the Hallel (113-118), the priests in process would carry the water to the temple (perhaps through the Water Gate). In so doing there was a looking back upon deliverance, praise for a present seasonal deliverance, and a hope for a future deliverance. That day Jesus identified the deepest meaning of the Water Libation” with Himself.



Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “^bIf anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38).

Some people who heard these words, clearly understood the implications.

“*Some of the people* therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, “This certainly is the Prophet.” Others were saying, ‘This is the Christ’” (John 7:41).

b. The Illumination of the Temple Ceremony



During the feast four 75' menorahs or candelabras in the Court of the Women were erected that would remind the people of the "pillar of fire" that guided and comforted the people from the harshness of the desert in their wilderness trek. It is said that the light from them would illuminate the entire city. It would seem in context of the John passage that Jesus spoke these words identifying Himself as the One who scatters the darkness and brings light to guide our path.



"Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying,
'I am the light of the world; he who follows Me, shall not walk in darkness,
But shall have the light of life'" (John 8:12)."

The light symbolized the presence of God, the Shekinah Glory, the "Light" that not only led the people in the wilderness but filled the Temple (I Kings 8: 10-11).

VI. As Christ-followers, how is the ancient celebration meaningful to us?

A. As we look back believing that the "Promised One" has already come and inaugurated our redemption:

1. Just as God lead His ancient people through the wilderness giving them light in darkness and nourishment so it is that we have the assurance that God will guide, guard, and keep us until we each reach the "Land of Promise."

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble...
for the Lords your God is the one who goes before you.
Man said to Him, "
(Deut. 31:6, quoted in Heb. 13:5).

2. We are to be a joyful, thankful people, filled with praise to God, even though we walk in a wilderness because Jesus has become for us "The Light of the World," the balm for our thirsty souls.

"Jesus answered and said to her,
'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you,
Give me a drink, you would have asked Him
and He would give you living water'" (John 4:10).

“The women said to Him, ‘I know Messiah is coming....’
Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He’” (John 4:25-26).

- B. As we look forward believing that the “Promised One” will come again to bring to us a final redemption in His presence forever:

There is a coming day promised to us when we will see the Shekinah glory, the very presence of God,

“And I hear a loud voice from the throne, saying,
‘Behold, *the tabernacle* of God is among men,
and *He Himself shall dwell among them* and
they shall be His people, and God,
Himself shall be among them’” (Rev. 21:3).

“He said to me, ‘It is done. I am alpha and Omega,
the beginning and the end. I will give to *the one*
who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost’” (Rev. 21:6)

Let us live today in the light of our future!