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Keep the Feast Sukkot

Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-44; Exodus 23:14-17; Numbers 29:12-38;

**Deuteronomy 16:13-17, 31:9-13; First Kings 12:25-33;
Second Chronicles 7:8-10; Ezra 3:4; Nehemiah 8:13-18
Zechariah 14:16-19; John 7:1-41**

Keep the feast of Sukkot DIG: What was the purpose of the Sukkot celebration? What were the Israelites to remember about ADONAI? What was the biblical practice? What is the Jewish observance today? What do you think of all the specific rules and regulations concerning the building of the booth? What is the Messianic significance of Sukkot?

REFLECT: What do you do to remember your wilderness wanderings? How often do you do it? How long has it been since you have constructed your own “booth” of remembrance? Do you think once a year is enough? Or should you build your “booth” of remembrance more often than that? Should you remember the good part of your journey or the difficult part?

The Feast of Sukkot will be fulfilled by the thousand-year Messianic Kingdom.



Perhaps by now you are beginning to understand why the fall season is considered the time of the high holy days for the **Jewish** community. Three major holy days occur in the first

nineteen days of the biblical month of Tishri (September-October). They are Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur and this holy day season ends with **the eight days** of **Sukkot**.

As with the other days, the name of this holy day tells its purpose. Essentially it is two-fold, the first being related to the fall harvest, the end of the harvest season. As **Leviticus 23** teaches, **Sukkot** was to be a time of bringing the latter harvest. It is, in other words, **the Jewish** "Thanksgiving." In fact, it is widely believed that the Puritan colonists who came to America, who were great students of the Hebrew Scriptures, based the first American Thanksgiving on **Sukkot**.

A secondary meaning of this holy day is found in the command to dwell in booths as a memorial of **Isra'el's** wilderness wanderings. To expand the theme of this specific historical event, we might best summarize **Sukkot** with the word "habitation." We know from the Torah that **ADONAI** dwelt with **His** people in their forty-year wilderness camping trip. Yet, as we camp in **booths** today, we should be reminded that this same faithful **God** watches over our lives. With such meaningful themes, no wonder **Sukkot** is known as *Zman Simkhatenu* (The Time of Our Rejoicing). The fact that **YHVH** provided for us and built **His** habitation with us is something to celebrate!

*Dear wonderful and powerful **Father**, We love **You**! How glorious to know that the Feast of **Sukkot** will be fulfilled by your reigning for 1,000 years (**Revelation 20:1-6**). Just previous to that **You** will have returned as **King of kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:11-21)** and wiped out **the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies** - proving **You** are all powerful! That knowledge is both comforting for **You** are our **Father**, and it inspires us to be diligent in serving **You** with our whole heart and in sharing about **You** with others. We will have a limitless number of days in heaven enjoying the peace that **You** have won for us by your death on the cross (**Second Corinthians 5:21**), but now is the time to pray for and share with our family and friends **Your** holiness and love.*

*Please open their hearts to understand the urgency to move beyond just head knowledge of **Your** love. As it is said, "**Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.**" (**Hebrews 3:15; Psalm 95:7c-8**). **God** said, "**So in My wrath I swore, 'They shall never enter My rest'**" (**Hebrews 4:3**). May they choose to give up doing what they want to do and to trust **You** by surrendering control of their lives over to **You**. **For we who have trusted are entering into that rest (Hebrews 4:3a)**. We love **You** and are earnestly seeking to use our time, our money, and our thoughts for **Your** glory. In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

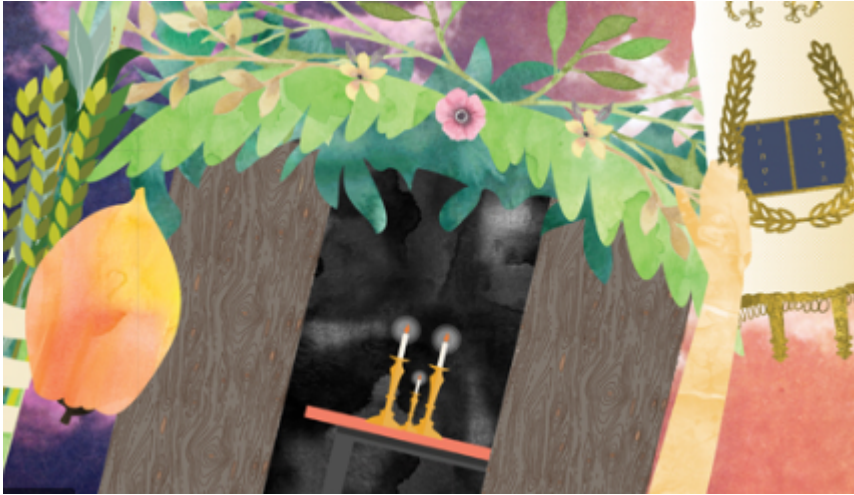
The Biblical Practice: The feast itself is seven days long. It was celebrated by building

booths or tabernacles to commemorate the forty years of wilderness wanderings. **The feast** was to be celebrated with four species. The first species is the citron, a citrus type of fruit. Second, the branch of a palm tree. Third a branch of a myrtle tree, and fourth the branch of a willow tree. It marked the firstfruits of the fall harvest. Because **Sukkot** follows Yom Kippur, it is considered to be a time of rejoicing following the affliction of the Day of Atonement. **The rabbis developed 326 rules and regulations concerning the four species.**

There was the addition of **an eighth day** of solemn assembly immediately following the seventh day of **Sukkot**, which technically was not a part of **the Feast of Booths**. For **seven days the Israelites** were to live in **booths**, sleep in **booths**, eat in **booths**, to remember the wilderness wanderings. But **the eighth day** was also to be a day of Sabbath rest (**Leviticus 23:39-39**).

You are to keep the Feast of Sukkot for seven days (see John 7:2) after gathering in the produce from your threshing floor and winepress. So, you will rejoice in your feast - you, your son and daughter, slave and maid, Levite and outsider, orphan and widow within your gates. The joyful nature of the festival survived from the older agricultural festival, although the reason for **the joy** was now **YHVH's** bountiful provision. **Seven days you will feast to ADONAI your God in the place He chooses, because ADONAI your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hand, and you will be completely filled with joy. Three times a year all your males are to appear before ADONAI your God in the place He chooses - at the Feast of Matzot, the Feast of Shavuot, and the Feast of Sukkot. No one should appear before ADONAI empty-handed - the gift of each man's hand according to the blessing ADONAI your God has given you (Deuteronomy 16:13-17).**

The Jewish Observance: The Torah stipulates **the fifteenth of the Jewish** month of Tishri as the time when **the Jewish people** are to begin dwelling in **the sukkah** (singular for booth) and celebrating **God's** provision. This holy day is so joyful, traditional **Jews** don't even wait for the fifteenth of Tishri to construct their **sukkah**. Many began the construction five days earlier, immediately after the close of Yom Kippur.



The construction of the sukkah can be both challenging and fun for the whole family. The Bible gives us a rather general commandment to build a sukkah, but **the rabbis spelled out ten specific rules and regulations concerning the building of the booth.**

First, there must be the feeling of a temporary abode. So, it must be built in a somewhat flimsy way to emphasize the wilderness wanderings. The temporariness is not in the walls as such, but in the roof part of the sukkah.

Second, the material for the roof must possess three specific characteristics. First, it must come from the earth and this excludes making the roof from animal skins, metal or cloth. But wood can be used. Secondly, the roofing material must be cut down and no longer connected to the ground, which excludes using attached branches. They must be cut off. Thirdly, it must not be subject to ritual impurity so the roof cannot contain fruits and food that will spoil.

Third, the roof must always be put on after the walls are totally completed so that when it is constructed, the booth is complete.

Fourth, the roof must be sufficiently thick so that there is more shade than sun. No opening can be more than eleven inches and the stars should be visible on a clear night. Nevertheless, it should not be so thick as to keep rain out.

Fifth, any booth built inside or under an overhanging porch, balcony, or tree is invalid. The shade inside the booth must come only from the booth and nothing else.

Sixth, there are no restrictions on the materials for the walls, so they could be made of metal, wood, canvas, brick or stone.

Seventh, the sukkah must have at least two complete walls. It may have three and as many as four. The fourth may be left completely open. When it is built against a house outside, one or more walls of the house may be used as walls for the booth as well.

Eighth, there is no maximum size of the booth, but there is a minimum requirement. It must be big enough to hold one person and one table.

Ninth, the booth must be no lower than 37 inches and no higher than 36.5 feet because one must be aware that they are sitting in a booth. The rabbis, as they often did, decided in their infinite wisdom, that any higher than 36.5 feet, the person would no longer feel like they were sitting in a booth.

Tenth, decorations emphasized the esthetic. The walls may be decorated with pictures, tapestries, or flowers. The roof may be decorated (but not composed of) with fruits, nuts, apples, grapes, and pomegranates, but these are not to be eaten for the entire week.

Since **Sukkot** has so many rich spiritual lessons associated with it, we would expect to find some important reference to it in the B'rit Chadashah. Not far into the gospel accounts of the life of **Yeshua**, we find the first powerful reference to **Tabernacles**. As **John** relates the special background of **Messiah**, he openly declares the divine nature of **Messiah**. **The Word** was not only **with God in the beginning**, but this **Word** is the very manifestation of **God Himself (John 1:1)**! This **Word**, as **John** calls **Him**, was manifested to the world in a very special and tangible way: **The Word became a human being and tabernacled among us, and we saw His Sh'khinah glory, the Sh'khinah or the Father's one and only Son, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)**.

Yeshua of Nazareth is more than just a good rabbi or an intriguing philosopher. According to the Bible, **He** is the visible manifestation of the **God** of creation! Yet, did you notice the metaphor **John** employs to describe this incarnation of **Messiah**? **The Word tabernacled** (Greek: *skene*) **among His people**. In other words, as **John** sought to describe **the Messiah's** first coming to **His people**, the most obvious picture was the holy day of **Sukkot**, the holy day that celebrated the dwelling of **God**!

There were two key ceremonies associated with **Sukkot** during the Second Temple period.

The first is the drawing out of **the water**. **The source of this tradition is not in the Bible, but in the Oral Law** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ, to see link click Ei - The Oral Law](#)), **although they tried to base it on Numbers 29:17-19 and Isaiah 12:3, which said: With joy you shall draw water**. The location where the water was drawn was from the Pool of Siloam, and the place where the water was poured was on the southwest corner of the bronze altar because it is where the grooves which drained the blood of the sacrifices were located. The pouring out of the water in Judaism, was a symbol of the outpouring of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** in the last days (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Go - Jesus Teaches at the Feast of Booths](#)).

The second key ceremony is the lighting of the lights. There were huge lampstands, each one with four golden cups, set up in the Court of the Women. These lights would then be lit toward sundown **and the rabbis taught that there was not a courtyard in all Jerusalem that was not lit by the lights emanating from the Temple Compound**. The lighting of the lights was followed by dancing and juggling with fire torches. **The Jews** believed the lights were a symbol of **God's** Sh'khinah glory (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Gr - I AM the Light of the World](#)).

The Messianic Significance: Sukkot will be fulfilled by the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom (see the commentary on [Revelation Fh - The Dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom](#)). But during the life of **Messiah** there were two misapplications of **Sukkot**. The first time was at the Transfiguration (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Gb - Jesus took Peter, James and John Up a High Mountain where He was Transfigured](#)). When **Yeshua** was transfigured, Peter suggested that he be allowed to build three booths: one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for **Yeshua**. This was a proper response. **The Jews** believed that when **the Messiah** came, **His** Kingdom would begin. Knowing the TaNaKh very well, **Peter** also knew that the Messianic Kingdom was the fulfillment of **Sukkot**. The Bible says that the Dispensation of Grace (see my commentary on [Acts Am - The Dispensation of Grace](#)) was a mystery to the righteous of the TaNaKh (**Ephesians 3:1-13; Colossians 1:26**). In the Bible a mystery is something that was once hidden, but now is revealed. So, while **Peter** was correct in his theology, his timing was off. **He** did not know that **the Feast of Passover** must be fulfilled before Shavu'ot can be fulfilled. **Peter** did not understand that **Messiah** had to die before the Kingdom could be established. In other words, Passover had to be fulfilled before **Sukkot** could be fulfilled.

The second misapplication of **the Feast Shavu'ot** was during the Triumphal Entry (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ It - Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem as the Passover Lamb](#)). The actions of the people both by what they said and by what they did

showed that they also expected the Kingdom to be established at that time in fulfillment of **the Feast of Sukkot**. According to **John 12:12-13**, they broke off palm branches, which is in keeping with **Sukkot**, but not with the Passover, which is what they were celebrating. Furthermore, according to **Matthew 21:8-9** and **Mark 11:8-10**, they cried out, **Hosanna in the highest** and **Hosanna to the Son of David**. Like **Peter**, they did not understand that Passover had to be fulfilled before **Sukkot** could be, and the Passover could only be fulfilled by the death of **Messiah**.

During the Messianic Kingdom it will be obligatory upon all the Gentile nations to send a delegation up to Jerusalem to celebrate **Shavu'ot**. In the Dispensation of Torah (see my commentary on **Exodus Da - The Dispensation of Torah**), it was obligatory for **Jews** only, but during the Messianic Kingdom, for a thousand years, it will be obligatory for every Gentile nation. If a nation fails to send a delegation to observe this **feast** then they will be punished by drought (Zechariah 14:16-19).

Just as **Sukkot** was a time of rejoicing following the affliction of Yom Kippur, even so the Messianic Kingdom will be a time of rejoicing following the afflictions of the Great Tribulation. What a celebration there will be as the children of **God**, both **Jews** and Gentiles, celebrate this **feast** at that time. Amen. Come, **Lord Yeshua!**

The Feast of Passover was fulfilled by the death of **Messiah**, **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** was fulfilled by the sinlessness of **His** sacrifice, **the Feast of Firstfruits** was therefore fulfilled by the resurrection of **Messiah**, **Shavu'ot** was fulfilled by the birth of the Church, **Rosh ha-Shanah** will be fulfilled by the Rapture of the Church, **the Day of Atonement** will be fulfilled by the Great Tribulation, and **the Festival of Booths** points to the Messianic Kingdom.

A Practical Guide for Believers in Messiah: The central element for the celebration of this **feast** is **the booth** we call **the sukkah**. While you may want to use the rabbinic description as a guideline (**see above**), you should not forget the freedom to construct this **booth** as you want. As with all the biblical holy days and customs, the sukkah is a "shadow" of the greater lessons of the coming **Messiah (Colossians 2:17)**.

Building the sukkah can be an exciting and educational family project. Whether it is a shack on the side of the house or a free-standing structure, the hut can be constructed by anyone who wants to help. The outer frame can be assembled from various materials that, in turn, can be fortified with the traditional palm branches or leaves. For this reason, **Sukkot** is a great time to trim up the yard as well! Children will love to add their cut-out paper fruit, leaves, or Bible verses.

As previously noted, traditional **Jews** begin constructing their sukkah immediately after breaking the fast of Yom Kippur. Many Messianic **Jews** and Gentiles follow this custom by inviting people over for a “**Sukkah** Decorating Party,” and planning for the upcoming holy days begins in earnest.

As the fifteenth day of Tishri begins, a holiday dinner is prepared. The table is set; although, being outside in the Sukkah, it will probably have a less formal atmosphere. Since this holiday is to be a reminder of the forty-year camping trip in the wilderness, the dinner will probably feel more like an outdoor picnic than a formal meal. But as with all **the Jewish** holidays, we start with the blessings over the fruit of the vine and challah bread.

A special emphasis will be the *ha-Kavod* (processionals), in which the people march around the sanctuary waving *the lulav* (closed frond of a date palm tree) and recounting the Hallel (Praise) Psalms 113-118.

These elements of the inner in the sukkah continue for eight days of the festival, while the synagogue services are usually convened only on the first two. To really get into the spirit of the holy day, the family might want to sleep in the sukkah under the stars, weather permitting.

As mentioned before, the seventh day of the festival has much spiritual significance for believers in **Yeshua**. However, as we reach **the eighth day**, we come to a special holiday, the Eighth Day of Assembly (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Gp - On the Last and Greatest Day of the Feast**). As mentioned in **Leviticus 23:26**, this day is to be set aside as a Shabbat and a holy assembly.

As if all these festivities aren't enough, **the Jewish** community has added an additional ninth day to **Sukkot** called *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing of the Torah). As its name implies, this day celebrates the revelation of **God** as symbolized in the Torah scroll. It's a time of tremendous joy, with dancing and lively music.

A central part of the service is the reading from the last chapters of **Deuteronomy** and the start of the yearly cycle of reading the parashah every Shabbat all over again with the first chapters of **Genesis**. Although rabbinic Judaism celebrated this holiday in the Middle Ages, believers in **Yeshua** can surely affirm the idea behind it. **God's** Word is good and should be revered. It is even to be joyously celebrated! How much more so for believers of **Yeshua Messiah**.

With the close of *Simchat Torah*, we reach the end of the high-holy-day season. What

wonderful truth is evident! What a complete picture of **God's** plan for redeeming faithful **Jews** and Gentiles unto **Himself**. Sometime soon the shofar will sound and announce the regathering of believers from all over the world in the rapture. The seven-year Great Tribulation will follow this. But in the last three day of the Great Tribulation, **the Jewish** leadership will realize that they have rejected **the Messiah** and call out for **His** return. Then **Yeshua Messiah** will return for the second time to the earth. This, in turn, will lead all believers into the joyful celebration of the Kingdom of **God** at **Sukkot**. May we be ready to dwell in that holy habitation with our **Kosher King**.³⁷⁵

Haftarah Re'eh: Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 54:11-55:5 (see Af - Parashah)

During **Isaiah's** lifetime, **ADONAI** disciplines the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** through **Assyria** who eventually conquered her and imported various Assyria people groups to occupy the land, intermarry with **the Jews**, and assimilating **them** into their Assyrian culture. **They** became the hated Samaritans (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gw - The Parable of the Good Samaritan**). This was the outworking of **Isra'el's** disobedience that **Moshe** warned **her** about (see **Cq - A Blessing and a Curse**). **They** chose the path of **cursing**. But **God's** plan is always to restore and redeem in order to keep promises. Thus, **He** reminds **her** of a future covenant renewal that would fulfill **His** promise to David out of the abundance of **His** love (**Isaiah 55:3**).

B'rit Chadashah suggested readings for Parashah Re'eh: John 7:37-52

Yeshua fulfills **God's** promises. **Moses** and **Isaiah** both warned of negative consequences for disobedience. **They** also pointed forward to **the One** who would fulfill the promises of **YHVH** for blessing. **Yeshua** stood up during **Sukkot** and said: **Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them (John 7:37b-38)**. Following **Yeshua** will inevitably cause the world to say that you are ignorant and blinded. Which relationships in your life cause you to struggle with these kinds of judgments. Pray for those people and step out in faith to share **God's** invitation for them to believe in **Messiah** and receive what they really need.

**Also see: suggested readings for Parashat Re'eh:
First Corinthians 5:9-13; First Yochanan 4:1-6**