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Hag Sukkot (Booths)

Leviticus 23:33-36 and 39-44

Hag Sukkot DIG: Why would YHVH want the Israelites to especially remember their time in the wilderness? What would Sukkot remind them of? Given the significance of the feast, why do you think Yeshua chose to reveal Himself on the greatest day of the feast?

REFLECT: What redemptive actions has God taken in your life? Any “tent” meetings? “Wilderness” experiences? “Feast” times? Which of these memorable events is most important to you? Why? What feelings did that event arouse in you for ADONAI?



The three fall **festivals** have a special eschatological significance. To understand this significance, we will look at **Sukkot** and examine the prophet **Zechariah**. In **Zechariah Chapter 14**, we read that it will be on a certain **Sukkot** in the future that **Messiah** will come again and take residence on David’s throne in **Jerusalem**. Though **the prophet** does not say specifically that the exact time of **Messiah’s** arrival will be on **Sukkot**, nevertheless, **he** does indicate that the first **festival** that will be celebrated in the new era will be **Sukkot**. Accordingly, we read in **Zechariah 14:16**, “Finally, everyone remaining from all the nations that came to attack Yerushalayim will go up every year to

worship the king, ADONAI-Tzav'ot, and to keep the festival of Sukkot." This implies that **Sukkot** is closely associated with **the Lord's** return - a time when **Messiah** will come to Tabernacle among us.

Hag Sukkot will be fulfilled by the Messianic Kingdom.

Hag means *pilgrimage*, and whenever this term is used to characterize a **festival**, it refers to an actual pilgrimage, either to a nearby or to a faraway site. The duty to undertake a pilgrimage is known in a number of other religions, most notably in Islam, where the Arabic term *hajjatun*, is similar to the Hebrew *hag*, and designates a **holy** pilgrimage. This means that any **festival** called **hag** could not be fully celebrated at one's home, but required one's presence at the Temple in **Jerusalem**. In earlier times, before the Temple was built, the pilgrimage might have brought a family to a nearby altar, but subsequently **Deuteronomy 12** ordained that all sacrificial offerings were to be brought to one, central Tabernacle/Temple, which necessitated a much longer pilgrimage for most **Israelites** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ct - The Place to Worship ADONAI**).⁴⁶⁴ Three times a year, every able-bodied **Jewish** man was to make the pilgrimage to **Jerusalem** to celebrate the **three** pilgrimage **feasts** of **Hag ha'Matzot**, **Hag Shavu'ot**, and **Hag Sukkot** (see the commentary on **Exodus Eh - Three Times a Year Celebrate a Festival to Me**).

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 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! The wind comes in, the rain comes in, and at

night you can see the stars through the roof that is made out of palm branches. Some people live in rich houses, some people live in poor houses, but on **Sukkot**, all of us are equal, because we eat and sleep in **the “sukkah” (booth)** itself (see a video presentation of **Sukkot** by clicking [here](#)).

The Biblical Practice: The feast itself is seven days long. **ADONAI said to Moshe**, “Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of Sukkot for seven days to ADONAI. On the first day there is to be a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work. For seven days you are to bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI; on the eighth day (**Second Maccabees 10:6**) you are to have a holy convocation and bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI; it is a day of public assembly; do not do any kind of ordinary work’ (23:33-36).” It was celebrated by building **booths** to commemorate the forty years of wilderness wanderings. **These are the designated times of ADONAI that you are to proclaim as holy convocations and bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI - a burnt offering, a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, each on its own day - besides the Shabbats of ADONAI, your gifts, all your vows and all your voluntary offerings that you give to ADONAI (23:37-38).**

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** (see **Dt - The Eighth Day**) was also to be a day of **Sabbath rest**. **But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered the produce of the land, you are to observe the festival of ADONAI seven days; the first day is to be a complete rest and the eighth day is to be a complete rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit, palm fronds, thick branches and river-willows, and celebrate in the presence of ADONAI your God for seven days (23:39-40). According to long standing tradition, the four species are the palm branch, willow and myrtle branches and a citron fruit. The rabbis developed 326 rules and regulations concerning the four species.** In Temple times they were brought to the Temple and incorporated into the worship service for **Sukkot**, but since they are not Temple sacrifices, they are not Temple dependent. It marked the first fruits 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 four species are still taken and waved before **YHVH** today. This is the customary way it is done. The **palm, willow** and myrtle are bundled together and held vertically in the left

hand and the citron is held in the right. They are placed together. Facing east, the blessing is made, "Blessed are **You LORD** our **God, King** of the Universe, who has sanctified us with **His** mitzvot and commanded us to take the **palm branch**." Then the four species are waved before **ADONAI** in six directions: east, south, west, north, up and down. This ritual is usually performed each of the **seven days of the festival**.⁴⁶⁵

You are to observe it as a feast to ADONAI seven days in the year; it is a permanent regulation, generation after generation; keep it in the seventh month. You are to live in sukkot for seven days; every citizen of Isra'el is to live in a sukkah, so that generation after generation of you will know that I made the people of Isra'el live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am ADONAI your God. Thus, Moshe announced to the people of Isra'el the designated times of ADONAI (23:41-44).

The Traditional 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 begin 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 aesthetic. 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.⁴⁶⁶

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**, which celebrated the dwelling of **God**!

There were two key ceremonies associated with **Sukkot** during the Second Temple period. The first is drawing out of **the water**. **The source of this tradition is not in the Bible, but in 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 was where the grooves draining 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** and **[Gp](#) - On the Last and Greatest Day of the Feast**).

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 (to see the Court of the Women **click [here](#)**). 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'kinah 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. 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 **the Feast of Weeks**

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 of Weeks** 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 Tabernacles**. According to **John 12:12-13**, they broke off palm branches, which is in keeping with **Sukkot**, but not with **the Passover**, which 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 **the Feast of Weeks**. In the Dispensation of Torah (see my commentary on **Exodus Da - The Dispensation of Torah**), it was obligatory for **Jews** only, but during the Millennial 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 **the Feast of Booths** 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**!

When approaching **the High Holy Days**, I believe there is some important evidence that is often overlooked in regard to **Messiah's** two-fold ministry. **Sukkot**, besides being a celebration of the fall harvest, is also understood to be a prophetic picture of the Kingdom of **Messiah**. We build our **Sukkot**/temporary huts to remind us of the great truth that the day is coming when **Messiah** will "dwell or tabernacle" in our midst and fulfill the promises as the son of David. This must be the reason that Prophets foretell of the kingdom celebration of this **feast** among all the redeemed, both Jew and non-Jew: **Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16)**. It makes sense that **Sukkot** will be the preeminent **feast** in the Kingdom since **Messiah** would then be dwelling with **His** people!

Yet within this Fall **feast** is also hidden the secondary aspect of **Messiah's** work; namely **His** suffering for the atonement of our sins. This means that there must be some kind of connection between **Sukkot** and the First Coming of **the Messiah** as the Messianic **Jews** would see it. I find it interesting that there has always been some debate about when **Yeshua** was actually born in the world. Most Western Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th as the designated day to remember **the Messiah's** First Coming. Perhaps many people, both **Jews** and **Gentiles**, have overlooked the important **holy day** of **Sukkot** as **God's** time to celebrate the First Coming of **Messiah** as well? As the **Jewish** believer wrote in the first century: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt** (literally, *tabernacled*) **among us (John 1:1 and 14).**

How perfect! As the writer thinks of the First Coming of **Yeshua**, he makes the connection to our ancient **Feast of Sukkot**. Indeed, **Messiah** dwelt with **His** people at **His** First Coming to **Isra'el** as **Ben Yosef**. Through **His** death and resurrection, **Yeshua** of Nazareth is able to fulfill the other aspect of the **Messianic** call as **Ben David** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ My - The Jewish Concept of Two Messiah's](#)). **He** is returning soon to complete the whole plan of **the Father**.⁴⁶⁷

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 First Fruits was therefore fulfilled by the resurrection of Christ life, Shavu'ot was fulfilled by the birth of the Church, the Feast of Trumpets 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 will be fulfilled by the Messianic Kingdom.

A Practical Guide for Believers in Messiah: The central element for the celebration of **the Feast of Tabernacles** 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.

Depending upon one’s tradition and climate, the interpretation of what it means to live in a **sukkah** will vary considerably. Originally, given the climate of the land of **Isra’el**, it was certainly understood that living in **the sukkah** meant moving into it during the duration of **the festival**. In colder climates, the requirement is satisfied by simply eating in **the sukkah**. Some Torah communities have begun to actually go camping for the duration of **the festival**. Other communities use the opportunity of **the festival** to visit one another and spend time sitting in each other’s **sukkot**. It is a time of gladness and fellowship.⁴⁶⁸

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 will all the **Jewish** holidays, they start with the blessings over the wine and challah bread.

A special emphasis will be the *ha-Kavod* (processionals), in which the people march around the sanctuary waving *the lulav* (closed fond 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 stare, 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.

On October sixth, 1973, a coalition of Arab nations attacked Isra’el-occupied territories. And fifty years later, Isra’el faced the same situation at the hands of Hamas terrorists. As if attempting to emulate Hitler’s “final solution,” these wannabe Nazi’s launched surprise attacks on October seventh, 2023, the most joyous day of the **Jewish** calendar, **the eighth day** of the festival of **Sukkot**. Anyone who has any objections to **Isra’el’s** subsequent

response to this massacre, should do their crying at the kibbutzim of Kfar-Azar and Be'eri, where many **Jewish** babies and toddlers were tied together in piles and burned alive. Peace died with them there.

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** (see my commentary on **Deuteronomy Af - Parashah**). 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 days 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**.⁴⁶⁹