

God's Appointed Times

Sukkot – Feast of Tabernacles

Feast of Tabernacles – *Leviticus 23:33-44, Matthew 1:22-23, John 1:14, Revelation 21:1-4*

Purpose

Sukkot means tabernacles, booths, or tents and carries the meaning of **dwelling**. This eight-day feast (*Tishri 15-22*) celebrates both the latter harvest of the fall as well as commemorates the 40-year period of time the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, living in tents. During this time, God “*tabernacled*” (dwelt) among them and His presence was with them. This wonderful celebration of God’s faithfulness is the culmination of the holy days of the seventh month.

Practice (Old and New Testament)

The primary and central element of this festival is the booth or tent. As commanded in *Leviticus*, observers are to construct temporary shelters and live in them for seven days during the festival. The festival begins with the waving of palm branches and other leafy branches as a gesture of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord. The week long celebration includes offerings, meals, processions and worship services all pointing to the central theme – **God dwelling with his people**.

By the time of Christ, the rabbis and other religious leaders had added additional rituals including one known as *Simcha Bet HaShoevah* – the Rejoicing of the House of Drawing Water. Each day of the festival, a priest would fill a pitcher of water from the pool of Siloam and carry it back to the Temple and pour it on the altar, followed by a crowd of people in processional form. This was done in the hope of the coming Messiah and His kingdom as indicated in *Isaiah 12:3, Ezekiel 47* and *Isaiah 55:1*.

Prophetic Fulfillment by Christ (Holy Spirit)

John tells us in his epistle that “the Word was made flesh and *dwelt* among us, and we beheld His [*Sh'khinah*] glory” (*John 1:14*). The word *dwelt* (Greek *skene*) was derived from *tabernacle*. John clearly uses the metaphor of the tabernacle to declare that God, in flesh, came and dwelt among us. *Matthew 1:22-23* tells us that Christ would be called *Immanuel* which means “*God with us*”.

Jesus himself in *John 7:37-39*, on the last day of *Sukkot*, and probably at the height of the celebration that included the water pouring ceremony - proclaimed that His Spirit would be the literal fulfillment of living water being poured out among men.

And finally, in *Revelation*, we are told that we will live and reign with Christ during the Millennium (20:4-5), the Feast of Tabernacles will be reinstituted (*Zechariah 14:16-17*) and that ultimately He will dwell [tabernacle] with us forever (21:1-4).

Practical Applications, Observations and Challenges

As we have seen throughout this entire series, the major elements of God’s plan of salvation and fulfillment through Christ were revealed in the holy days. Would something as important as the birth of the Messiah be any different? There are a number of indications that the birth of Christ was more than likely during the Feast of Tabernacles/*Sukkot* (fall/Sept-October).

- Shepherds would not be tending sheep out in the open fields during the winter months
- Christ’s 3 ½ year ministry traces backward (from a March/April crucifixion) to an Sept/October birthday, not a December one
- The Romans would have likely held a census during a festival when pilgrimages were common
- Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of God dwelling with us, the purpose of *Sukkot*

Once again, like Easter, the 4th century Roman Christian church selected a date that coincided with pagan festivals to ease Christianity’s acceptance – specifically the Babylonian *Feast of Isis* (Dec. 25)

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and the Roman winter solstice holiday, *Saturnalia* (Dec. 21), honoring the god Saturn. The modern name *Christ-Mass* was first adopted in the country of Germany around the 16th century.

Summary of the fall festivals

“With the close of Sukkot, we reach the end of the fall [high] holy day season. What wonderful truth is evident. What a complete picture of the latter-day plan of God for this world. Sometime soon the *shofar* will sound to announce the gathering of the believers. This will be followed by the *Day of Atonement* when **Yeshua** will return for a second time to the earth. This, in turn, will lead all believers into that joyful celebration of the Kingdom of God at *Sukkot*! May we be ready to dwell in that holy habitation of our Heavenly Father”. *Barney Kasdan, God's Appointed Times, pg. 104.*

Conclusion

God's appointed times, festivals and holy days clearly outline His plan for the world and serves as a reminder of His past faithfulness and a hope for the future. They were established as a *lasting ordinance for generations to come* and find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Jesus Christ, *Yeshua HaMashiach*, is:

- Our Sabbath rest
- Our Passover Lamb
- The Unleavened bread
- The Cup of redemption
- The Spirit of God
- Our High Priest
- The Living water
- “God [dwelling] with us”