

## The Feast of Tabernacles

*By the Messianic Jewish Bible Institute*

*“Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.” Zechariah 14:16*

So highly regarded was Sukkot in the Hebrew Bible that the prophet Zechariah prophesied all nations would make their own annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship the LORD at the Feast of Tabernacles. But to understand the significance of such a prophecy we need the larger context.

God had made it clear to each of the Hebrew Patriarchs that He would create national Israel to be His instrument to “bless all the peoples of the earth” (Genesis 12). Moses rehearsed the same theme, just prior to receiving God’s Torah, that Israel would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” e.g., God’s pilot mission agency to affect the reconciliation of all nations to their Creator (Exodus 19-20).

As part of Israel’s religious calendar, “The Feast of Tabernacles” was given as the final of seven appointed feasts of the LORD as expounded in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16. Its Hebrew name, *Sukkot* (soo-KOHT), plural of *sukkah*, means “huts,” “booths,” or “tabernacles.”

It is also known as “The Festival,” “The Feast,” or “The Feast of Ingathering” (Chag ha-Osif).

An eighth day, Simchat Torah or “Rejoicing of the Law,” was later added to honor and celebrate the annual cycle of public reading of the Torah.

Sukkot commemorates gratitude for two historical realities: (1) the temporary housing and abundant provision God supplied His people in the wilderness for 40 years, and (2) the harvest season when the agrarian nation would live in their fields to redeem time for the ingathering of crops.

In Israel’s fields and later homes, the poorly constructed *sukkah* would be the dwelling place of every Jewish family, especially invited guests (*Ushpizin*, even patriarchal figures), and other outsiders (friends, neighbors, and even non-Jews) who may come into “the tabernacle” designed to give all glory to God.

Life was to be lived in the midst of the Tabernacle as much as possible during these days. Fully furnished, one would eat, drink, study, entertain, amuse, and sleep in the *sukkah*.

The frequent waving of the *citron* (citrus) and *lulav* (palm branch) in all four directions of the earth with the recitation of Psalms 113-118 signified the universality of God’s dominance and eternal reigning authority over everyone and everything. A benediction (*Hoshiana*) calls for the Redeeming God’s salvation to save the people He seeks.

When *Simchat* Torah arrives now, the Torah is carried around the synagogue platform, or *bema*, seven times.

All parties are honored to carry the Torah, the divine counsel of God for national Israel, while participants sing and dance in celebration of God's revelation. Concluding Deuteronomy and beginning Genesis afresh in the reading frame conveys the never-ending duty of mankind to study God's Word.

On the Feast of Tabernacles, the message resounds that God "tabernacled" with us in the person of Yeshua: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

As the Temple was gloriously illuminated at Sukkot by four massive and brightly lit golden candlesticks, men of piety and good deeds danced with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises. Even as countless Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets and other instruments of music on the fifteen steps leading from the Court of the Israelites up to the Court of the Women, Yeshua stepped forward and cried out, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12)

The water-drawing ceremony at Sukkot, *Nissuch Ha-Mayim*, during which God was called upon to provide rain to water the crops, was an occasion filled with joy, activity and drama.

As the Levitical priest was accompanied by a host of exuberant worshipers and liturgical flutists, both water and wine were poured together into a basin leading through pipes back to the Kidron Brook.

It was on the last day of Sukkot, during the water libation ceremony in this grand setting, that Messiah Yeshua stood in the midst of His Jewish people to reveal He was the fulfillment of their celebration and the answer to their prayers.

On that last and greatest day of the Feast, He stood and said in a loud voice, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* John 7:37-39

The prophet Zechariah wrote of a coming day when all the nations of the earth will be called upon to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

Israel will fulfill her promised destiny under the authority and direction of Yeshua and successfully proclaim the Gospel worldwide. A time of global redemption will come when the nations recognize God's authority in Yeshua and become worshipers in a renewed Jerusalem as seen in Revelation 7:9-10 and 21:3-4.

Ultimately the whole of mankind will become worshipers in God's Tabernacle. None will dare to defy the Eternal One. And that will most definitely be the greatest season of our joy!