

The Feasts of Israel - Lesson Eleven -The Feast of Tabernacles

TEXT: Leviticus 23:34 - Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord.

The seventh and final feast given to Israel by the Lord is known as Sukkot or "The Feast of Tabernacles." It is the most joyful and festive of all Israel's feasts. It is also the most important and prominent feast, mentioned more often in Scripture than any of the other feasts. This feast also served as the historical backup for the important teachings of the Messiah in John chapters 7-9.

The Biblical Observance

The Meaning of Sukkot

The Feast of Tabernacles is known by at least two names in Scripture. Most often it is referred to as Sukkot or "Tabernacles." The English word "tabernacle" is from the Latin tabernaculum meaning "booth" or "hut." It acquired this name from the biblical requirement for all Israelites to dwell in tabernacles or temporary shelters during the holiday. It was to be an annual reminder of God's provision during the 40-year wilderness sojourn when Israel lived in similar shelters. This final feast of the year is known in Scripture also as the "Feast of Ingathering", for it was observed after all crops had been harvested and gathered.

Exodus 23:16 - And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labors, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labors out of the field.

Exodus 34:22 - And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end.

The feast was celebrated with great joy. The joy was twofold, for it commemorated God's PAST goodness and provision during their wilderness sojourn, and it commemorated God's PRESENT goodness and provision with the completion of harvest.

The Time of Sukkot

Tabernacles falls in the autumn of the year. On the Hebrew calendar it occurs on the 15th day of Tishri, the seventh month (usually late September to mid-October), only five days after the solemn Day of Atonement. The Feast of Tabernacles lasts for seven days. The first day and the day after Tabernacles (the eighth day, known as Shemini Atzeret) are considered sacred assemblies, or

sabbaths. (Lev. 23:36, 39). As such, no work or any kind is permitted on these days.

Leviticus 23:36, 39 - Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. 39 - Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

The Record of Sukkot

Three portions of Scripture outline the biblical observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. The people were to live in booths and rejoice before the Lord with branches. (Lev. 23:33-43). There were to be many daily, sacrificial offerings (Numbers 29:12-39). In a sabbatical year, the Law was to be publicly read during Tabernacles.

Leviticus 23:33-43 - And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, [34] Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. [35] On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. [36] Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. [37] These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: [38] Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord. [39] Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. [40] And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. [41] And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. [42] Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: [43] That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Numbers 29:12-39 - And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work, and ye shall keep a

feast unto the Lord seven days: [13] And ye shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord; thirteen young bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year; they shall be without blemish: [14] And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto every bullock of the thirteen bullocks, two tenth deals to each ram of the two rams, [15] And a several tenth deal to each lamb of the fourteen lambs: [16] And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering. [17] And on the second day ye shall offer twelve young bullocks, two rams, fourteen lambs of the first year without spot: [18] And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner: [19] And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and the meat offering thereof, and their drink offerings. [20] And on the third day eleven bullocks, two rams, fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish; [21] And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner: [22] And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering. [23] And on the fourth day ten bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish: [24] Their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner: [25] And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering. [26] And on the fifth day nine bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without spot: [27] And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner: [28] And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering. [29] And on the sixth day eight bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish: [30] And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner: [31] And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering. [32] And on the seventh day seven bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish: [33] And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner: [34] And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering. [35] On the eighth day ye shall have a solemn assembly: ye shall do no servile work therein: [36] But ye shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord: one bullock, one ram, seven lambs of the first year without blemish: [37] Their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullock, for the ram, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner: [38] And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt

offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering. [39] These things ye shall do unto the Lord in your set feasts, beside your vows, and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your meat offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings.

Deut. 31:10-13 - And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, [11] When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. [12] Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: [13] And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

The Importance of Sukkot

Because of the joy associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, it became the most prominent of Israel's holidays. It was referred to simply as "the holiday" by the ancient rabbis. The importance of the Feast of Tabernacles is also seen in its inclusion as one of the three pilgrim feasts, Passover and Pentecost being the other two. Three times during the year, all Jewish males were required by the Lord to appear before Him in the Temple (Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks, and Tabernacles). These were known as Pilgrim Feasts because of the required pilgrimage to Jerusalem. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the people brought their tithes and offerings to the Temple, for they were not to "appear before the Lord empty-handed"

Deut. 16:16 - Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty:

Further importance is seen in the great number of required sacrifices during the feast week. Each day one goat, 14 lambs, two rams, and number of bullocks (13 on the first day, decreasing by one each day) was offered in the Temple. Each of the sacrifices were offered with its appropriate meal offerings (flour and oil) and drink offerings (wine). All 24 divisions of priests shared in the sacrificial duties during the week. In the days of the Temple, the Feast of Tabernacles was viewed with great awe, for it was during the Feast of Tabernacles that Solomon dedicated the newly built Temple to the Lord. At that ancient observance of Tabernacles, the Shekinah glory of the Lord descended from Heaven to light the fire on the altar and fill the Holy of Holies.

2 Chron. 5:3 - Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month.

1 Kings 8:2 - And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.

2 Chron. 7:1-10 - Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. [2] And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house. [3] And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endures for ever. [4] Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord. [5] And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. [6] And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of music of the Lord, which David the king had made to praise the Lord, because his mercy endures for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood. [7] Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord: for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brazen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat. [8] Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. [9] And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. [10] And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people.

The Prayer of Sukkot

The Feast of Tabernacles occurs at Israel's change of seasons and marks the beginning of the winter rainy season. One may be surprised to learn that Jerusalem receives as much precipitation as London, England (20 inches). The major difference is that Jerusalem's rainfall occurs between November and March. These refreshing rains bring necessary moisture for working the soil and the sprouting of new crops. If for some reason the weather patterns are such that several weeks of rainfall are missed, a dire water shortage can quickly develop for the coming year's crops. Because the Feast of Tabernacles is observed at this important junction when the anticipation of rain is at its highest, the two have become inseparably connected. Even today, the prayers of rain remain an important part of Tabernacles' observance.

The Service of Sukkot

In the days of the Temple, the Jewish pilgrims flocked to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. They came from every village within the nation and from many foreign countries, most often in large caravans for protection. It was a joyous trip with much singing and laughing along the way.

Upon arrival in Jerusalem, the pilgrims focused their energies upon building booths for the feast. By the afternoon of Tishri 14, thousands upon thousands of leafy booths lined the streets and dotted the surrounding fields and hills. All were carefully located within a Sabbath's day's journey (a little more than a half mile) of the Temple. At sundown, the blast of the shofar (ram's horn) from the Temple announced the arrival of the holiday. A sense of increased excitement fell over the city as darkness came. Myriads of twinkling campfires studded the surrounding countryside like an intricate lacework of tiny amber jewels. Well into the night, muffled laughter and cheery conversations could be heard drifting over the night breezes.

The Water-Libation Ceremony

During the Feast of Tabernacles, the intense anticipation of rain came to be reflected in the temple services. Each morning of Tabernacles, a water libation (sacrificial pouring out of a liquid) was offered to the Lord as a visual prayer for rain. Shortly after dawn each morning, while the many sacrifices were being prepared, the high priest was accompanied by a joyous procession of music and worshipers down to the Pool of Siloam. The high priest carried a golden pitcher capable of holding a little more than a quart of water. He carefully dipped the pitcher into the pool and brought it back to the Temple Mount.

At the same time, another procession went down to a nearby location south of Jerusalem known as Motza where willows of the brook grew in great abundance. They they gathered the long, thin willows and brought them back to the temple. At the Temple, the willows were placed on the sides of the altar so that their tops formed a canopy of drooping branches over the altar. Meanwhile the high priest with the water from the Pool of Siloam had reached the southern gate of the Temple. It was known as the WATER GATE because of this ceremony. As he entered, three blasts of the silver trumpets sounded outside the Temple, and the priests with one voice repeated the words of Isaiah:

Isaiah 12:3 - Therefore with JOY you will draw water from the WELLS OF SALVATION

The high priest slowly proceeded then to the stone altar in the Inner Court of the Temple and ascended the right side of the ramp. At the peak, he turned to the left where there were two silver basins which drained to the base of the altar.

One was reserved for the regular drink offerings (libations of wine) and one for the water libations during this feast. As the high priest raised the golden pitcher to pour out the water offering, the people shouted, "Raise your hand!" In response, the high priest lifted his hand higher and poured, allowing the people to verify his action. This tradition arose around 95 B.C. in response to an uprising in the days of Alexander Jannaeus, the king-priest grandson of Simon the Maccabees. The Maccabees were a family of priests led by their father, Matthias, who in 165 B.C. were instrumental in overthrowing Greco-Syrian rule of Israel. (More on this when we study Hanukkah). However, these descendants became a kingly line, wrongfully merging the offices of kings and priest. According to scripture, Israel's kings were to be from the tribe of Judah and lineage of David, and her priests from the tribe of Levi and lineage of Aaron. As a result, Jannaeus was hated by many of the Jewish brethren. As a Sadducee, he viewed the water pouring with contempt because it was not commanded by the Law of Moses but was a tradition. So instead of pouring the water into the basin, he poured it out upon the ground. The worshippers rioted, pelting him with citron fruits from the branches and sought to kill him. In a great rage, Alexander Jannaeus called the foreign missionary troops of his standing army to quell the riot. When the violent insurrection was finally subdued, six thousand people lay dead, and a horn was broken from the holy altar. Thereafter, the pouring ceremony was always closely scrutinized.

As the high priest poured out the water libation before the Lord, a drink offering of wine was simultaneously poured into the other basin. Three blasts of the silver trumpets immediately followed the pouring and signaled the start of the Temple music. The people listened as a choir of Levites sang the Hallel (i.e. the praise Psalms 113-118). At the proper time, the congregation waved their palm branches toward the altar and joined in singing: "Save now, I pray, Oh Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity" (Psalms 118:25). At the same time the priests, with palm branches in hand, marched once toward the altar.

Psalm 118 was viewed as a messianic psalm and as such gave the feast a messianic emphasis. This is why Jesus was greeted by the crowds shouting Hosanna (Hebrew for "SAVE NOW" in 118:25) and waving palm branches on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:8-9; Luke 19:38; John 12:13). They viewed Him as the Messiah King, come to deliver ("save now" Israel in fulfillment of Psalm 118).

Psalm 118:25 - Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.

Matthew 21:8-9 - And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. [9] And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Luke 19:38 - Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

John 12:13 - Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

They hailed Him with the messianic imagery of palm branches from the Feast of Tabernacles. This same imagery is in view in Revelation 7:9-10 where redeemed saints worship, with palm branches in hand, around the throne of God and of the Lamb:

Rev. 7:9-10 - After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; [10] And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

This custom of carrying branches and singing psalms during the Feast of Tabernacles is of ancient origin. It dates back at least to the time of the Maccabees, some 165 years before Christ (cf. Mac. 10:6-7). The water-drawing ceremony is also from antiquity. Although debate exists as to whether Isaiah alluded to the water-drawing ceremony (Isaiah 12:3) or the ceremony was derived from the words of Isaiah, it is known that the ceremony was in use at least 100 years before the time of Jesus.

The Temple-Lighting Ceremony

The celebration of the water pouring (as opposed to the ceremony) was observed during the evenings of the feast by an impressive light ceremony in the Temple. It was known as the Simchet Bet Hasho'ayva ("The Rejoicing of the House of Water Drawing"). As the second evening of Tabernacles approached, the people crowded into the vast outer court of the Temple known as the Court of the Women. On this occasion a barrier was raised to divide the men from the women. In the center of the court stood four towering menorahs (lamp stands), each with four branches of oil lamps. Their wicks were manufactured from the worn-out linen garments of the priests. Each menorah had four long ladders leading up to the lamps which were periodically refilled by young priests carrying large pitchers of olive oil. The Feast of Tabernacles began in the middle of the lunar month when the harvest moon was full and the autumn sky was clear. The outline of the surrounding Judean hills was clearly visible in the soft moonlight. Against this backdrop, the light of the Temple celebration was breathtaking. All night long, the elders of the Sanhedrin performed impressive torch dances, while

the steady yellow flames of the menorah oil lamps flooded the Temple and the streets of Jerusalem with brilliant light.

Soon after the celebration was underway, a group of Levites gathered in the Inner Court in what was known as the Court of the Israelites. Once formed, the group of Levites moved through the Nicanor Gate to stand at the top of the 15 steps leading down to the Court of the Women. The sound of Temple flutes, trumpets, harps, and other stringed instruments swelled as the Levites sang the 15 Psalms of Degrees (Psalms 120-134). With each new psalm they descended to the next step.

This celebration was repeated every night from the second night until the final night as a prelude to the water drawing the next morning. Nothing in ancient Israel compared to this light celebration. It was so spectacular that the ancient rabbis said, "He that hath not beheld the joy of the drawing of the water (the Simchet Bet Hasho'ayva celebration) hath never seen joy in his life (Sukkah 5:1). The light celebration was reminiscent of the descent of the Shekinah glory in Solomon's day and looked forward to the return of the Shekinah glory in the days of the Messiah:

Ezekiel 43:1-6 - Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looked toward the east: [2] And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. [3] And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. [4] And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. [5] So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. [6] And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me.

Jesus and the Feast of Lights

John recorded that it was the day after the Feast of Tabernacles (the eighth day), which was considered a sabbath, when Jesus returned from the Mount of Olives to teach in the Temple (John 8:2; cf. 7:2, 37). As the Pharisees came to entrap Him, Jesus proclaimed, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12) The Pharisees did not question the meaning of His statement. They knew it was a messianic claim, for they immediately called Him a liar. They were familiar with the many titles in Scripture which ascribed LIGHT to the Messiah. He is called the "Star out of Jacob," the "light of Israel," the "light of the nations (Gentiles)," a "refiners fire," a "burning lamp," and the "Sun of righteousness."

Later that day, the Messiah reinforced this same truth when He healed the blind man. As He did so, He repeated, "As long as I am in this world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:5). The Pharisees were again angered at Jesus. The issue continued to be His messiahship (John (9:22). This time however, they chose to find fault in that He had healed the blind man on the eighth day, which was considered a sabbath by Scripture (John 9:14). Although there were no Mosaic laws against the act of healing on the Sabbath, the traditions of the Pharisees classified it as work and therefore forbade it. More than just a messianic claim, Jesus' claim to be the "light of the world" carried a reference to the Temple light celebration. The celebration was still vivid in their minds. They had just celebrated it six nights in a row. The light that JESUS offered (i.e. salvation Isa. 49:6) would light not just the Temple, it would light the whole world. He Himself was the source. GLORY!!

John 9:5 - As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

John 9:14 - And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.

John 9:22 - These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.

Isaiah 49:6 - And he said, It is a light thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

The Hoshanah-Rabbah Ceremony

On the seventh and final day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Temple services reached a climax. The anticipation of rain was at its annual high. Jewish tradition held that it was on this day that God declared whether there would be rain for the coming year's crops. Consequently, on this final day of the feast, the Temple water-pouring ritual took on great importance. Water was the foremost thought on every one's mind.

On the other six days of this feast, the silver trumpets gave THREE blasts. On this day the trumpets gave THREE SETS OF SEVEN blasts. On the other six days, the priests made but ONE circuit around the altar. On this day, the priests made SEVEN. As they marched around the altar, they sang the Hosanna verse (Psalm 118:25) and the people waved palm branches. For these reasons, the day was known as Hoshanah Rabbah, or "Great Hosanna". Thoughts of rain for the coming year and messianic fervor (Psalms 118) were at their highest pitch.

The year was around A.D. 30. It was Hoshanah Rabbah, the last day, the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles. As the people intently watched the priests

conduct the service, a loud voice rang out from the crowd. The priests glared in consternation, and the people whipped around in great surprise to see who dared interrupt the service. They saw a young Galilean in His early 30s, the one whom many held to be a great rabbi, a prophet, or even the Messiah. He boomed:

John 7:37-39 - If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. [38] He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. [39] (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

John 4:14 - But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

The sound of His words produced silence, then ecstasy. The religious leadership was infuriated, indignant, and threatened. Some wanted to kill Him.

John 7:44 - And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.

The authoritative claim was understood by all, believed by some, spurned by others. Some thought He was claiming to be "THE PROPHET," that Moses had predicted would appear within Israel. He was. However, in their theology, they believed the prophet was not the same individual as the Messiah. Some believed He was claiming to be the Messiah - and, of a truth, He was. However, still others debated this notion with, "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ (the Messiah) comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem. So John recorded, "There was a division among the people because of Him."

John 7:40-44 - Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. [41] Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? [42] Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? [43] So there was a division among the people because of him. [44] And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.

The fall out among the religious was great. The Priests and Sadducees called an emergency meeting. It was a meeting of the chief priests, those 24 priests who were head over the 24 divisions of the priesthood (1 Chron. 24:1-19). They were aristocratic Sadducees who controlled the TEMPLE worship. The Pharisees controlled the SYNAGOGUE worship. These two groups, usually at

great odds over theology and engaged in religious power struggles, were united in their hatred of Jesus.

They summoned the officers to give an account as to why they had not arrested Jesus. The officers were Levites who patrolled the Temple compound and enforced Temple law. They were the security force, the Temple guard, whose responsibility it would have been to arrest Jesus for interrupting the service. A few days earlier, the officers had been commanded to arrest Jesus (John 7:14, 30-32), but not they had missed the perfect occasion. In their arguments they had been stunned by his statements and spoke in summation the greatness of the Feast of Tabernacles:

John 7:46 - The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

The Modern Observance of Tabernacles

The Tabernacles

The primary symbol of the Feast of Tabernacles is the Sukkah or tabernacle. It recalls Israel's hastily built housing in the wilderness. As soon as Yom Kippur is past, booths are constructed in yards and patios of Jewish homes. The booths are made with no fewer than three walls covered with intertwined branches. The roofs are thatched so that there is more shade than sunlight during the day, but sparsely enough to allow the stars to be seen at night. Inside they are decorated with colorful harvest fruits and vegetables. During the Feast of Tabernacles, Jewish families eat their meals in the booths, and the very observant even sleep in them.

The Branches

Leviticus 23:40 - And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.

Because of a conflict in interpretation branches were used in both the building of the booths and carried in the hands of joyful worshippers. Scripture mentions four types of trees used to fulfill this command: boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook. They are referred to as the "four species." The etog, a tree which produces small lemon-like fruit, is interpreted by the Jewish authorities to be the "beautiful trees." The lulav, or long branch of a date palm, is held to be the "palm trees." The hadas, or myrtle tree, with its tiny leaves, is believed to be the "leafy" trees. Usually three myrtle branches are held in the hand. The arava, or willow tree, is used in

fulfillment of the "willows of the brook." Usually two willow branches are held since the scripture mentions them in the plural. The etog or citrus branch, is held in the left hand, and other three types of branches are bound together and held in the right hand. As in the Ancient Temple services, the branches are held while the Hosanna verse is chanted. (Psalms 118:25)

The Synagogue

As a preservation of the ancient Temple ceremony, all congregants circle the synagogue while singing Psalm 118. The Torah scroll on the center platform of the synagogue, instead of the ancient altar, is the object of the procession today. After the cessation of the Temple services, the Feast of Tabernacles become more closely tied to Yom Kippur which occurs only five days earlier on the Hebrew calendar. Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of the feast, came to be viewed as the last day on which the judgments meted out by God on Yom Kippur could be reversed. On this day, willow branches are ceremonially beaten on the synagogue pews to remove the leaves, symbolizing repentance and removal of sins.

The Rejoicing

Even though the Temple water-drawing ceremony and light celebration do not exist today, the concept of rejoicing is still connected with the Feast of Tabernacles. In the Middle Ages, a new holiday arose known as Simchat Torah ("The Rejoicing of the Law"). It occurs on the ninth day (or the eighth day in Israel) from the start of the Feast of Tabernacles. This post-biblical holiday preserves the traditions of rejoicing and the reading of the Law of Moses during Tabernacles. (Deut. 31:10-13). During the year, the entire Law (the Five Books of Moses) is read, a portion at a time, each Sabbath. On Simchat Torah, the annual cycle of reading the Law begins again. The last chapter of Deuteronomy and the first chapter of Genesis are read as the cycle begins anew. Everyone in the synagogue receives an "aliyah" (an opportunity to read the scriptures from the pulpit). Afterward the congregation marches around the synagogue with great rejoicing as the uplifted Torah scroll leads the procession.

The Future Fulfillment

The Ingathering

The Bible often speaks of the final judgment as a harvest:

Hosea 6:11 - Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people.

Joel 3:13 - Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great.

Matthew 13:39 - The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

Rev. 14:15 - And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

This harvest is a future Day of Ingathering when God gathers His people unto Himself and burns the wicked like the chaff and stubble.

Malachi 4:1-2 - For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. [2] But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

The Feast of Tabernacles is tied to Israel's FUTURE as well as her past. When the Messiah sets up His millennial Kingdom, He will gather the remnant of Israel back to her land. Isaiah described this event as the harvesting of olives. Tree branches are beaten with rods and the olive berries gathered once they fall to the ground:

Isaiah 27:12-13 - And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. [13] And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

Isaiah 11:11-12 - And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. [12] And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Jeremiah 23:7-8 - Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord lives, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; [8] But, The Lord lives, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

The righteous among the Gentiles too, will be gathered to the Lord. In that day, the Gentiles will pray in Jerusalem:

Zech. 14:16-17 - And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. [17] And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

The Gentile nations that refuse to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the millennial Kingdom will receive no rain upon their lands. This passage provided the biblical basis for the tradition of praying for rain during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Tabernacle

The Lord will not only gather His people, but He will TABERNACLE in their midst during the coming Messianic Kingdom (See our study on THE TABERNACLE):

Ezekiel 37:27-28 - My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [28] And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

Rev. 21:3 - And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

The sign of God's presence, the Shekinah glory, will be seen in Zion again. It will appear as a shining fire over the whole of Mount Zion. It will be like a tabernacle, providing protection and refuge for the nation after centuries of persecution and the time of Jacob's sore trouble. That is not far off in the distant future- MESSIAH IS COMING!

Isaiah 60:1,19 - Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. 19 - The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.

Zech. 2:5 - For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

Isaiah 4:5-6 - And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defense. [6] And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.

The Water and the Light - A Type of Christ

When the Messiah spoke of Himself as the light of the world, He referred to salvation and forgiveness of sin He offered to all those who put their trust in Him. As it was spoken by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, **"I will give YOU as a light to the Gentiles, That YOU should be My salvation unto the ends of the earth"** (Isa. 49:6). He offers that light to men today: **"He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"** (John 8:12). Have you experienced the life-changing light of the Messiah, or are you still walking in darkness?

The water is also a type of the Holy Spirit. There are three types of water sources in the land of Israel. Huge, rock-hewn collection tanks, known as cisterns, are used to collect rainwater during the rainy months. Massive cisterns, capable of holding millions of gallons of water, still exist today at the Masada stronghold. However, cisterns are the least desirable and valuable water source in Israel - they can easily become contaminated or stagnant and are not replenish able until the next rainy season.

Wells are a more valuable water source. They provide fresh, replenished water, but even they can dry up during a drought. The most valued water source in Israel are the brooks and rivers which are fed by springs (such as those at Ein Gedi). These were known in the Bible as "living waters" or, in other words, waters with movement. The Lord used this truth to illustrate Israel's rebellion and idolatry:

Jeremiah 2:13 - For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

When Jesus addressed the people in the Temple on the last day of the feast, He alluded to the same fact. He said, "He who believes on Me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water (John 7:38). This was the purest water, the most valued water, and water that would never dry up.

Ancient Jewish theology connected the water-drawing ceremony with the Holy Spirit. "Why do they call it, 'the house of drawing'? Because they draw the Holy Spirit" (Gen. Rab. 70:1) And again, "Why is the name of it called, the drawing out of water" Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit according to what is said: 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation'" (Ruth Rab. 4:7). They believed the Holy Spirit came upon them and manifested Himself through great JOY!

Jesus' reference to water was used with the exact same connotation and connection. "But this spoke concerning the SPIRIT, whom those believing in Him would receive." (John 7:39)

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in relation to salvation was a much-repeated theme of the Old Testament prophets:

Ezekiel 11:19 - And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:

Ezekiel 36:27 - And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Ezekiel 37:14 - And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.

Ezekiel 39:29 - Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God.

Joel 2:28-29 - And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: [29] And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

Isaiah 32:15 - Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

Isaiah 59:21 - As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.

The Lord said through Isaiah:

Isaiah 44:3 - For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:

The Hebrew prophet Zechariah prophesied of a future, glorious day when Israel as a nation will look upon the pierced Messiah and repent of her rejection of Him. God's Spirit will be poured out upon them and they will enter into the New Covenant as a nation:

Zech. 12:10 - And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

This is the Feast of Tabernacles. It speaks of light, water, and praise. Three elements which point to the Messiah's return and restoration of Israel as a nation. It speaks of rest. Jesus said come unto me ALL of you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you REST. Isaiah said the Spirit of God was a REST and a REFRESHING. When Jesus tabernacles with you, you will be at REST and you will be REFRESHED!

Prophetically, the Feast of Tabernacles is right around the corner. Rapture, Tribulation, Rest. Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles. The three fall feasts of Israel are God's prophetic time clock that is ticking as we write this. Violence has erupted in the Middle East unlike at any time in nearly 10 years. The rumblings of thunder are being heard. A distant cry is being heard that is telling the church to get herself ready for the rapture and be prepared to meet the bridegroom for He is coming very SOON. Another cry is being sent to a dying world that time is short and her destruction is sure. Great days of tribulation are ahead not only for Israel but the entire planet Earth. It's getting late neighbor. It's getting late. Do you know that you know that you know that you know that Jesus lives within you today. Does He tabernacle with you at this moment? Are you washed in the precious blood of the Lamb??

God bless.....