

"Feast of Tabernacles: Enjoying God's Presence"

Leviticus 23:33-44

The fall season has quietly snuck upon us. Lot's of people look forward to in the fall. Fall is a fairly positive time of year. It's not as hot and the nights are cooler. You can work outside and not sweat like crazy. Those who've gone to school are looking forward to the Thanksgiving and the first trip back home. For many it's a time to see family they haven't seen in awhile. And of course Christmas isn't far away it too is a joyful, expectant time. The fall is really a joyful time.

For Jewish people the fall is their most anticipated time of year. Right now many Jews just finished celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, [Sept 20-27] the concluding fall feast. The 7th month in the Jewish calendar which falls around the middle of September, is called 'the High Holy Days'. The first day of the month begins with 100 blasts from the shofar. Feast of Trumpets announces that Israel be spiritually prepared to meet with God about their sins on the Day of Atonement, the 10th day. That was the day when God dealt with Israel's sins once for all by using two goats. One to die for their sins and one to take their sins far away signifying God had accepted payment for your sins and removed them. Once the Day of Atonement was over, the people begin to plan and look forward to the week long Feast of Tabernacles, the happiest celebration in the Jewish calendar.

For those Jews who truly understand the biblical and prophetic understanding of the Feasts, Tabernacles is celebrated with great enthusiasm because of the joy that awaits God's people. What is Tabernacles? Why were they commanded to celebrate it? What prophetic ramifications does it have for Israel and for us?

All these feasts have prophetic implications because Paul told us in Col. 2:16-17 . . .

. . . religious festivals, New Moon celebrations and Sabbath days 'are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality , however is found in Christ.'

The 3 Spring feasts foreshadowed Christ's first coming to die for our sins and rise from the dead. The church was born soon after Christ's resurrection at Pentecost. The 3 fall feasts foreshadow events surrounding Jesus' removing His bride away at the rapture, to judge the world and to rule. Since the Tabernacles was the final and most joyful celebration on the Jewish calendar then it's not surprising that . . .

Tabernacles Foreshadows Israel's Future Blessings in their Land

Again in order to see that clearly we must understand the historical Feasts of Tabernacles. Historically the Feast of Tabernacles . . .

Celebrated God's Provision to the Land (23:33-40; Ex. 23:16; Deut. 16:13-17; Num. 29)

Tabernacles celebrated the end of the agricultural season. It was especially important because if you had a good harvest, you could get through the winter months with enough food. Tabernacles has another name. It is also called the Feast of Ingathering. In Ex. 23:16 we read,

Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in your crops from the field.

Deut. 16:13 *Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. Be joyful at your feast . . . For 7 days celebrate the Feast to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose [Jerusalem]. For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.*

Israel's obedience to God's commands determined how good a harvest they would have. God warned them that if they rebelled against Him He would withhold rain. Tabernacles was to be a celebration of how God provided, just as we celebrate Thanksgiving today.

The week long Tabernacles holiday was one of the 3 feasts that all men age 20 and over were required to come to Jerusalem. Naturally they would take their families with them for the Holy Days. Because almost every body's occupation was tied to agriculture, people had the time, so God commanded them to take a week of holidays! God has to command His people to take a day off in the week and even to take holidays, even though there's always some who feel they can't afford to stop working. Perhaps God knows something we refuse to admit – we need to take time off and celebrate how God has provided for us – physically and spiritually.

Tabernacles celebrated God's physical provisions of the harvest and Tabernacles also had a spiritual element, which . . .

Recalled God's Deliverance from Oppression **(23:41-44; Neh. 8:13-17)**

In Lev. 23:41 God told Moses to tell the people *"On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars and rejoice before the Lord your God for 7 days . . . Live in booths for seven [Sukkoth] days: All native born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendents will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt."*

Neh. 8 describes all 3 fall feasts. It begins with the 1st day of the 7th month, the Feast of Trumpets. In obedience to God's Word the people assembled in Jerusalem. Ezra read from God's Word and the people begin to weep because they realized they had sinned against God. Nehemiah wisely encouraged them to rejoice instead because they just finished rebuilding the walls. The Day of Atonement was approaching and they would deal with their sins then, but for now at the feast of Trumpets Nehemiah said rejoice.

Because it had been so long since the people followed the Lord and listened to his Word, they found out from Ezra and the priests about Tabernacles (v.13). So they gathered the branches and built booths [Sukkoth] on their roofs, their courtyards – wherever they could find space in Jerusalem – because Israel lived in temporary shelters (tents/tabernacles) as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

The idea behind living in a sukkah for a week was to remember the struggles of the wilderness experience and the temporal dwellings that God safely provided in order to deliver them into the promised land where they received permanent homes. Listen to God's warning in Deut. 6:10

When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you – a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, vineyards and olive groves you did not plant – then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

God said build these temporal shelters to remind you of the temporal struggles He delivered them out of into better houses and a land that produces good food. Thank God for what you have now as you recall what He saved you from. Reflect on what your life used to be like before God rescued you. Where would any of us be but for the grace of God?

Tabernacles was a joyous occasion where God's people remembered how God's presence was with them in the wilderness. His provision and protection reminded His people that He is always with them. This end of the year feast also looked forward to the day when God's people would dwell in God's presence securely with no worries, no enemies and in peace. Tabernacles . . .

Anticipated Messiah's Coming to Rule **(Amos 9:11-5; Zech. 14:12-21)**

Israel's disobedience would eventually result in exile to Assyria and Babylon losing their king. In 70 AD the Romans would destroy Jerusalem and the Jews dispersed throughout the world, now losing control of their land. God promised Israel that a day was coming when they would get their land back and enjoy it in peace under the rule of King Messiah. Listen to how this is worded in Amos 9:11-15,

In that day I will restore David's fallen tent [sukkah]. I will repair it's broken places, restore its ruins and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, declares the Lord who will do these things.

Amos will say that in that day the land will be blessed and that God will plant Israel there, never to be uprooted again. God used the word sukka for David's house as He spoke about the day when Israel's promises about their land and Messiah come true. We call this the millennium.

The millennium begins according to Zech. 14 when Jesus sets foot on the earth and saves Jerusalem and Israel from total destruction. It will be a great time of blessing for Israel as Jesus rules on earth. People will live much longer and any rebellion at all will be quelled by Jesus fairly and justly (Is. 11). Here in Zech. 14:16-19 we read that tabernacles will be celebrated by the whole world – not just Israel – during the millennium. If any nation refuses to comply Jesus will withhold rain from their land.

Did the Jews in Jesus' day understand that Tabernacles had a future fulfilment? In Matt. 17:1-13 Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on Mt. Hermon and gave them a glimpse of His glory. When Peter sees Jesus in the fullness of His glory, he says *"It is good for us to be here. If you wish I will put up 3 shelters [tabernacles!] – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."* Peter's first impulse when he sees Jesus glorified was to build a sukka! Peter associated Jesus' coming in glory with Tabernacles.

When Jesus entered the city on a colt, the week before His death, the people thinking He was the Messiah coming to rule over Rome and establish His kingdom rule cut branches from the trees and spread them on the roads and shouting Ps. 118, *"Hosanna to the Son of David . . . Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest."* Hosanna means save us now.

Over time the Jews developed 2 traditions at Tabernacles. During the Feast, the priests would tie willow branches to the altar and march in a procession around it while people waved willow

branches as the priests read Ps. 118:25. On the 7th day of Tabernacles [called Hoshanna Rabba – the great Hosanna] the priests marched around the altar 7 times and recited Ps. 118:25 seven times.

In John 7 Jesus attended a Feast of Tabernacles and used another tradition to teach the people to believe in Him. On the last night of Tabernacles, the priests marched down to the Pool of Siloam and filled a golden pitcher full of ‘living’ water (water from a stream). Under the light of 3 giant menorahs 70 feet high in the temple courtyard, the priests marched around the altar reciting Is. 12:3, *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”* and then they would pour out the water beside the altar as a symbol of God’s future outpouring of the Spirit when God saves Israel as a nation [Joel 2:28; Ezek. 36:25ff].

In John 7:37 we read, *“on the last and greatest day of the Feast [Hoshannah Rabba and the water pouring ceremony] Jesus stood and said in a loud voice ‘If anyone is thirsty let Him come to me and drink. As the Scripture has said, “Streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Holy Spirit, whom those who believed in were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”*

Jesus Himself stated His coming to rule will be accompanied by the pouring of the Holy Spirit according to Joel 2:28. They will all receive the Holy Spirit because all surviving Israelites will be saved at the end of the tribulation and God will restore the remnant to their land.

What conclusions then can we draw about Tabernacles prophetically? The Feast of Tabernacles points to the

Future Celebration of Israel’s Regathering in the Land

Tabernacles was when Israel came together and enjoyed God’s blessing in His Holy City at the temple, where His glory dwelt. God promised Israel that there is a future day when He will regather His people Israel in their land where they will enjoy His blessings forever. He will pour out His Spirit on them and they will place their faith in Jesus as their Messiah. God made these promises first to Abraham, to his sons and grandsons to Moses, to David and through Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. While some deny God’s literal promises to Israel, God says in Ezek. 36:24-30:

... I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and carefully keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave Your forefathers; you will be My people and I will become your God. . I will save you from all your uncleanness and ; I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of trees and the crops of the field so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations.

Isaiah 4:2-6 confirms,

“In that day the branch of the Lord [Messiah] will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Those who are left in Zion who remain in Jerusalem will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The Lord will ... cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. Then the Lord will create over all Mount Zion and over those who assemble there, a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy

Historically, Tabernacles recalled God's deliverance of Israel through the wilderness. Israel has an even greater enemy who will strive to wipe out the nation. Zech. 13:8 says 2/3 of the nation will be wiped out during the tribulation. But God will rescue the remnant. When Israel celebrates Tabernacles in the Millennium they will . . .

Recall God's Deliverance from Satan

Daniel 9:27 warns Israel that in the middle of the final 7 years the antichrist will break his peace treaty with them and seek to wipe Israel out. Jesus, referring to Dan. 9:27 in Matt. 24:22 when warning about this time says *"if those days had not been cut short [i.e. if God had not already predetermined the tribulation would last for 7 years] no one would have survived. But for the sake of the elect [Israel] those days will be shortened."*

During that time only those who take the mark of the beast as a sign of worshipping him as the Messiah in order to survive. The Jews will not take his mark therefore they will experience an even harsher wilderness experience. Surviving by finding temporary shelters and solely depending on the generosity of others for their basic needs. God will provide for them and they will recall in the millennium, the miraculous ways in which God provided and protected a remnant of His people from Satan's direct attack to wipe them out. He won't succeed because the true Messiah and rightful ruler of the world will return and Israel will . . .

Enjoy Jesus' Kingly Presence on Earth **(Zech. 14:9; Rev. 20:1-6)**

We read about Jesus' physical return to destroy the enemies of God in Zech. 14 and Rev. 19.

The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His Name the Only Name.
[Zech. 14:9]

Jesus will toss the antichrist and the false prophet into the burning lake of fire and lock up Satan for 1000 years (Rev. 20:1-2). All deceased believers will join Jesus and those who survived the tribulation to help Him rule a world without Satan. Jesus will walk the earth again in his glorified state ruling with justice and peace. Even though the millennium will be a fantastic time of peace on earth, people still have a sin nature and must decide about Jesus themselves. When Satan is released after the 1000 years he will try one last time to overthrow Jesus. He will gather those who refused to worship Jesus but Rev. 20:9 says fire will come down from heaven and devour them and God will remove all unbelievers from the earth, and bring down from heaven the new Jerusalem where we will all dwell together in sinlessness forever. Then the ultimate fulfilment of Tabernacles takes place.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men and He will live with them. They will be His people and He will be their God. he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Tabernacles was when God's people assembled together to thank Him for His provision for their temporal needs as well as their spiritual rescue from sin to enjoy God's presence. We still assemble together as His people for the very same reasons. He dwells with us through his Holy Spirit. We can enjoy peace and joy even now on earth. But all of which pales in comparison to what awaits us one day.

That will be a great day for those who know Jesus and a terrible day for those who don't. Make sure you believe Jesus is the true King of the world who also died for your sins. Give Him your allegiance now so that you'll know you'll enjoy His kingdom forever. Enjoy His ongoing presence everyday by talking to him and listening to Him through his Word. And do this together with fellow believers in Christ.

May we repeat David's words for ourselves each day, thanking God for what he's done for us. *"You have made known to me the path of life [salvation through faith]; you fill me joy in Your presence; with eternal pleasures at Your right hand."* [Ps. 16:11]

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net