

The 7 Biblical Feasts and What They Mean For Followers Of Yeshua: Part 2

Last week we followed a series of God's Appointed Times called the 7 Biblical Feasts as it is developed in Leviticus and later refined in Deuteronomy. What we saw was that there were several purposes and manifestations of those 7 Feasts. While we will talk about Sukkot this week in more detail, it is key to understand that all of the 7 Feasts work together; they are a 7-act play, so to speak. Understanding Sukkot is important; but without seeing where it fits as but one among the other 6 feasts...even though it represents the Grand Finale... we'll miss the point.

The 7 Biblical feasts were, at their most basic and literal level, agricultural and memorial festivals. Most of the feasts were timed to coincide with a season of the year, because each season...spring, summer, fall, and winter...had connected with it a certain agricultural activity such as planting or harvesting. Some of the Feasts, like Passover and Yom Kippur, had nothing to do with agriculture but instead invoked something else... a memory of an event. In the end, we find that there are 3 Feasts in the spring, one in the early summer, and 3 more in the fall...for a total of 7.

The 3 spring Feasts are **Pesach**, Passover. Followed immediately by **Matza**, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And, that is immediately followed by **Bikkurim**, the Feast of Firstfruits. **Bikkurim** is when the first of the Barley harvest is brought in.

The 1 summer Feast is **Shavuot**; we know this one better as Pentecost (Pentecost is a Greek word which means "the 50"). Also called by Jews The Feast of Weeks, this feast is to begin precisely 7 weeks plus one day (7 weeks equals 49 days, add one more day and we get 50 days), after **Bikkurim**, Firstfruits. **Shavuot** is when the first of the WHEAT harvest is brought in (as opposed to Firstfruits, when it is BARLEY that is harvested).

The 3 Fall feasts are **Yom Teruah**, also celebrated as **Rosh Hashanah**...Jewish New Year. 10 days later is **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement. And, then 5 days after that is the one we're going to spend the rest of our time, today, looking at, **Sukkot**... also called the Feast of Tabernacles or The Feast of Booths.

Please notice that the 3 spring feasts are intertwined and begin and end in a very compact period of time... 8 days. Passover occurs in the Hebrew month of Nissan, and it always begins on the 14th day of Nissan. The next day, Nissan 15, is the first day of the 7-day-long celebration of **Matza**, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And, Nissan 16 is the day of **Bikkurim**...the Feast of Firstfruits. Or at least is it according to some traditions. Other traditions celebrate **Bikkurim** on the first day after the 7th day Sabbath after Passover and Unleavened Bread, so exactly when it occurs can vary from year to year. So, you see how these 3 feasts are not only connected, but they overlap with one another. In fact, it is kind of a traditional shortcut among the Jews to simply call the sum total of these 3 spring feasts Passover or Unleavened Bread.

Now, while Passover (**Pesach**) is indeed a Spring Feast, the one day of Passover on Nissan 14, is not really an agricultural festival so much as a day of remembrance. It is, for the Hebrews, to celebrate and remember the day that God forced Pharaoh to release Israel from their captivity in Egypt. More specifically, Passover recalls that great and terrible night that the Lord killed all the firstborn of Egypt, including the firstborn of their domestic livestock. Those who followed the Lord's command to paint the blood of a yearling ram on their doorposts (the Hebrews) were spared.

In the same way, so is **Matza** not so much an agricultural festival as a remembrance. For this recalls that the people of Israel, in readying for their Exodus, were instructed to prepare bread without the use of yeast, leavening, for their journey. This was because it was going to happen very rapidly...a matter of hours in reality...that they would be released to leave Egypt, and there would not be time to allow the bread to sit and rise as it normally would.

Firstfruits was indeed all about agricultural, as its immediate point was to give to God the first of the Barley harvest; and this is part and parcel with the biblical principle that all firstlings... that is, the first of everything...automatically belongs to God. **Shavuot**, coming 50 days later, celebrated the first of the WHEAT Harvest, and so it was a purely agricultural festival.

Several months later, in the month of Tishri, begins the series of 3 Fall festivals. These are also tightly compacted in time...though not quite so tight or integrated as the Spring

Feasts. From the first feast, Yom Teruah, to the BEGINNING of the 3rd feast, **Sukkot**, is 15 days.

Whereas the first two spring feasts were memorial days...days of remembrance of things that happened in Israel's redemptive history...the first two fall feasts were religious rituals that exemplified God's holiness and His justice. **Yom Teruah**, the first day of the religious event calendar year, celebrated repentance and new beginnings. **Yom Kippur** which followed 10 days later celebrated God's presence among Israel, and the cleansing of the Sanctuary of its impurity due to proximity to sin, and it included atonement for the people of Israel from their sins in the Scapegoat ceremony which was but a part of the Day of Atonement's rituals.

Then, 5 days later on Tishri 15, begins The Feast of Tabernacles. Interestingly, right from the beginning, it carried with it BOTH a meaning as a day of remembrance AND as a day of agricultural significance. It was remembering Israel's 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness, part of their exodus from Egypt, while living temporary shelters...tents, also referred to as booths or tabernacles... hence the name The Feast of Tabernacles. Agriculturally, it was to celebrate the last of that year's harvests. This was the Fall season, so as winter approached the last little bit of all the various grain and grape harvests was taken in, before the growing season came to a close. Agriculturally, this was a time of transition; a transition from ONE growing year to the next. It marked the end of the agricultural year. And, following the end of the agricultural year would come an extended time when there would be neither planting nor harvesting. The plants would decay back into the soil, the ground would rest for a few months, and then would hopefully come the early rains and the cycle of planting and harvesting would start all over again.

Let me whet your appetite a little for learning about Sukkot with this reading taken from the prophetic book of Zechariah.

READ ZECHARIAH 14 all

This is speaking about those days of wrath just ahead and the coming of the Lord...the Day of the Lord. We spoke last week about my firm belief that this will occur during the Fall feasts, otherwise the pattern of the Messiah Yeshua performing His signal works precisely on the feast days would be broken. And, none of God's patterns have EVER been broken. Remember: Yeshua was

executed on Passover, He entered the tomb on Unleavened Bread, and He arose on Firstfruits.

Let me point out one other thing: notice the 3-1-3 pattern of the Biblical Feasts: 3 spring feasts clustered together...then a pause...then 1 summer feast...then a pause...then the 3 fall feasts clustered together.

The work of Messiah.....1st His sacrifice, then His sinless body not decaying in the tomb, and lastly then His resurrection...all happened in rapid succession, in only about 72 hours! This direct work of Messiah all happened on those 3 Spring Feast days.

But, then, there was a pause. The resurrected Messiah, Yeshua, now departs. A little time passes and in His place, the Holy Spirit, the Ruach HaKodesh, is sent. It is a singular, stand alone, event. And, of course, as per the pattern, the Holy Spirit comes on the Feast day of **Shavuot**...Pentecost.

Now...since that amazing **Shavuot** not even 2 months after Yeshua was executed on a Roman cross... another pause...a long one...is underway. We are today living during the time of that long pause. There has been a pause in the direct work of Messiah on earth since the day of Pentecost. But, if I am right...and I believe the Bible completely bears this out...when the prophesied return of Yeshua occurs, several things will again begin to happen in **rapid** succession. First, Messiah arrives on the Mt. of Olives. Next, He begins to judge mankind and separate those who love Him from those who have opposed Him. Part of that process is the Battle of Armageddon, where He fights for Israel. The outcome results in the final ingathering of His Believers and then entry into His 1000-year reign over His Father's Kingdom.

Many who, up until His feet touch down on the top of the Mt. of Olives...which then dramatically splits in half... Had NOT believed and trusted Him; but now, they suddenly will. Out of terror and awe, they will. But most of earth's inhabitants, who are firmly committed to their faith in the Anti-Christ, will stubbornly deny Yeshua and be lost for all eternity. Those brand-new Believers along with those who had long trusted Him, **are** that FINAL ingathering. Why final? Because when the Day of the Lord, wrathful judgment, occurs, those who at that moment do not trust Him, have sealed their fates forever. There will be no more 2nd chances to repent. No more do-over opportunities. No more walking down

the aisle to confess Christ. There is coming a moment in the history of the world...and it is oh, so near... when we who love God will STOP beseeching the world to repent...because, it will be too late... forgiveness and mercy will no longer be available. The saved population becomes a fixed number.

Yom Teruah, Tishri 1, also known as Jewish New Year...will be, in my opinion, that Day of the Lord when He returns. Next, **Yom Kippur** will be the day that Yeshua fights for Israel and saves them from the gentile nations and from the Evil One. It is the day that all those who rebel against God are destroyed. The Feast of Tabernacles is the day that the work of judgment is completed, and the only humans who remain on the face of the earth are in the camp of the Lord; this is the first day of the Millennial Kingdom. All this is described here in Zechariah 14; but then we get to those important words of verses 16-18. They say that the Feast of Tabernacles, Sukkot, will remain a fixture into the Millennial Kingdom and beyond. There is so much else we could talk about regarding this chapter of Zechariah, and the 1000-year reign, and so on, but we need to stop and talk some more about Sukkot. But remember...you and I will be celebrating this Feast, forever. So, let's understand it, observe it as best as is possible in our era, by learning HOW to celebrate it.

There are several symbols associated with Sukkot; but two are probably the most outstanding: the Lulav, and the Succah. A succah is a temporary shelter made of palm fronds and other natural plant materials. The Lulav consists of palm branches that are bound together, plus two other types of bush or tree branches. Let's talk about the Lulav and Etrog.

Now, it might surprise you to know that in the midst of the celebration of Sukkot, in which most elements of it are Tradition and not Biblically called out, the Lulav...which is also spelled L-u-l-a-b...IS commanded in Scripture.

CJB Leviticus 23:39-41 ³⁹ ***“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. ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ 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.

The Lulav is to consist of 4 parts: the Scripture says those 4 parts are something called **1)** choice fruit, **2)** palm frond, **3)** something else called thick branches, and **4)** river-willows.

The river-willow and palm frond are self-evident; but there was and remains some argument over what is meant by the "thick branches". Way before Yeshua it was determined that myrtle would be used for the thick branches.

Exactly how this Lulav was to be put together is largely Tradition. The Tradition is that the palm frond is NOT to be allowed to spread out. Rather, it is to be folded, and held together with a twig and a piece of palm frond wrapped around it to keep it from unfolding. The Myrtle and the river willows are to be tied at the bottom of the unfolded palm frond...and voila! You have a Lulav.

The Etrog has been more of a subject of controversy...and in various Rabbis' and Sages' attempts to convince others to their viewpoints on just WHAT that "choice fruit" should be, quite a bit of questionable legend has been employed to win over followers of their beliefs. A yellow, oversized lemon-like fruit has become the Traditional solution to the "choice fruit" that is called for. The name for this fruit is etrog, and it is of the citrus family, so we'll see some Bibles call the fruit a "citron", which is certainly not far off the mark. It is edible, and often IS eaten. Some Jews call the Etrog the "Adam's apple", or the "Paradise fruit"...because some Rabbis have suggested that the Etrog is the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eden. Your guess as to that speculation is as good as mine.

The way the Lulav was used as part of the Sukkot ritual has varied a bit over time. The primary difference occurred as to WHERE the Lulav was employed. That is, whether at the Temple, in Jerusalem, or someplace else like a synagogue. Because Sukkot was one of the 3 Biblical Feasts that God instructed that a pilgrimage was to be made to Jerusalem and the Temple (the other 4 feasts did NOT have a requirement to be present in Jerusalem), then that's where the Lulav was to be used. Obviously, when there has been no Temple, or when the Jews were in exile, that changed because following every requirement of the Law wasn't physically possible.

During the eras when there was a Temple...and let me point out that the issue of going to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage was to be at the TEMPLE, not simply being in the city of Jerusalem...the Lulav and Etrog were to be held and waved. The Lulav would be held in the right hand, and the Etrog in the left. In the grounds of the Temple area the worshipper would begin by facing east; he would then start reciting some prescribed prayers, and shake, or wave, the Lulav. He would shake it up and down, side to side, and then turn to the right, face south and do it all again; he'd make another turn to the right, face west, repeat, turn to the right once more, face north and complete the cycle. The symbolism was to announce and acknowledge God's sovereignty over all of nature on Earth by acknowledging the 4 points of the compass; after all, this was an agricultural festival.

Generally, the prayers they spoke were from the Hallel; the Hallel is composed of Psalms 113 through 118. At least in the 2nd Temple era, the most common Psalm used in the ceremony of the Lulavs was from Psalms 118, verses 1-4. As you think about what we talked about earlier, that Sukkot will eventually be practiced by all Believers and all nations on into the Millennium and beyond....and if you'll contemplate that it certainly appears that the Feast of Tabernacles will be the entry into the Millennium...listen to the words of these verses as spoken by the ancient Hebrews, as they shook those Lulavs at the Temple:

NAS Psalm 118:1-4 Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. ² Oh let Israel say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." ³ Oh let the house of Aaron say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting." ⁴ Oh let those who fear the LORD say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting."

EVERLASTING lovingkindness is the theme. How much more appropriate it will be that day that we're all in Jerusalem, facing our Lord and shaking our Lulavs, during His 1000-year reign, saying adoringly to Him... "your lovingkindness is everlasting".

In addition, after some prescribed sacrifices were made, there would be a parade around the altar of the Temple where the Lulavs would be carried. They would circle it once each day for the 1st six days, and circle it 7 times on the 7th day of the Sukkot celebration.

As for the Etrog, it was customary, at the end of Sukkot, to give the Etrogs to the children for them to eat.

All that I've just told you takes place in Jerusalem, at the Temple. But, since it was MEN who were required to make Pilgrimage...not children and not women, though at times

a man's family would go as well...there were requirements and customs to be observed back on the home-front. And, the main one was the building and living in a Succah.

I'm not going to get into all the various requirements for a Kosher Succah. For one reason, various Rabbis have differing requirements for the materials, the size, how the materials are applied, when the Succah must be used, etc. The Bible gives us very little requirements other than a person must build one and LIVE IN IT for the entire time of the Feast of Tabernacles. That doesn't mean a person had to STAY in the Succah and never leave it. If a person had to tend his flocks or cook a meal, or whatever, he could certainly go outside. The idea was, move out of your house and into a Succah for the duration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Generally speaking, the use of the Succah in modern times has been reduced to sleeping in it and dining in it because of impractical realities such as most Jews living in dense cities where there's no place to even erect one. The most observant Jews go so far as to work in portable succahs. In fact, there is a whole industry of makers of small, portable Succahs that enable folks to carry around and erect these very small Sukkahs at their workplace, so they can perform their jobs inside of one, particularly when it's a desk job.

Further, if there is one point of agreement about building a Succah, it is that the roof of the Succah must be of palm branches, and they must not be so thickly woven together such that one cannot see the stars. In Israel, today, city dwellers in particular find building a Succah to be challenging... particularly if they live in an apartment; because another general requirement is that the Succah be erected outdoors. So, as one travels through cities in Israel during Sukkot, you'll see these odd structures on tiny balconies of high-rise apartment buildings. Hotels, as well as some cafes, will even erect large Sukkahs on their outside patios for their patrons to sit under.

It is the RARE individual in Israel, however, that actually lives in a Succah during Sukkot. Rather, they either don't have one at all, or they will take some of their meals in one. But, just as Lulavs and Etrogs are biblically mandated, so are Sukkahs. So, we can kind of laugh and scoff at the idea of it all, but perhaps we should rethink it. After all, the vast majority of Believers today take all our supposed devotion to Yeshua and the Holy Scriptures and set it aside in the way we celebrate Easter and Christmas. I mean, we color chicken eggs and hide them for children to find? We put up a fir tree and put lights and brightly colored ornaments all over it? Just exactly what Scripture are we fulfilling when we do that? At Easter, we buy our kids giant chocolate bars in the shape of Rabbits, and then turn around and tell them that the Easter Bunny is coming. Could someone fill me in on the spiritual significance, or the God-principle we are remembering with that? How WEIRD are those practices, let alone the strangeness of creating those holidays in the first place. How about we top it all off with celebrating the resurrection of our Jewish Messiah with a meal often consisting of a nice big thick slab of pig...ham? How much we like to say in our meal blessing, 'Jesus, come and sit at our table with us'. Right,... and our offer to Him is food He would never have touched. Every one of these things...which, frankly, are the main events, the Constantinian Church's high holy days and the focus of modern Easter celebrations...are, without question, following the practice of pagan fertility rituals and anti-Semitism. It may not have necessarily been intended that way; but that is the result when the prime directive of Constantinian Christianity... the Christianity that all Churches practice today... is to discard the Biblical Feasts and all that Jews do. We've just pretty much merrily gone along without really examining the things we do and celebrate...supposedly FOR God. If we're going to do something that is pretty strange looking in honor of our Lord.....maybe we ought to put away the egg dye and cellophane fake grass in favor of an honest attempt at celebrating Festivals that God says HE WANTS US TO CELEBRATE, and even tells us **when** and to a small degree **how**.

So, let's pause and review where we stand. During Sukkot, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, every family is to construct and live in a Succah. Every male, 13 years of age and older, is to go to the Temple in Jerusalem, make a series of sacrifices, and personally participate in the waving of the Lulav. Much prayer is offered up during this serious but joyous time of remembrance of the 40 years

God spent forming Israel into a nation set-apart for Himself, during their exodus from exile in Egypt.

The Bible commands in Leviticus that the first day and the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles are to be Sabbaths. Not THE 7th day Sabbath, but other sabbaths. By calling these other non-7th day Sabbaths, sabbaths, I am using the common way of speaking as among Jews and Christians. Actually, however, this is both sloppy scholarship and a poor use of the word sabbath because the Torah does NOT designate these as sabbath (Hebrew, Shabbat) days of full ceasing that have some equivalence to the 7th day Sabbath. Rather, in most them, some amount work and preparation of meals, is allowed. The day is usually for preparing an upcoming festival, or if celebrated after the festival is completed, it is a time to thank God for the festival, or to rest, or to do whatever one must do to transition back to normal life.

Other things went on as part of the Sukkot ritual as well. The Levites had a choir that would play instruments and sing Psalms. These Levite musicians were not priests. Remember that while the Temple priests came from the tribe of Levi, it was from ONLY one particular family of Levites that a person could be a priest...the family descended from Aaron. All other Levites could NOT be priests, but they did have Temple duties ranging from cleaning up the place, to being guardians of the Temple, to being musicians. It's always well to remember that the Temple guard we read of in the New Testament did not consist of Romans (no gentile was allowed in the Temple grounds)...it wasn't even ordinary Jews.....it was made up entirely of Levites.

When there **was** a Temple, one of the highlights....perhaps the most mesmerizing and awesome part of the daily Sukkot ritual...was the water libation ceremony. The libation ceremony is called in Hebrew **necek**. This libation offering usually consists of water or wine or both. The one for Sukkot is a water libation. And, without going into all the detail of the actual ritual, let me just say that water is put into a golden pitcher, and then it is poured out by a priest at the Temple, each day of Sukkot.

What is the meaning of this water libation? Simple, really. Recalling that several of these feasts are agricultural-based, and that the Feast of Tabernacles, Succoth, occurs at the FINAL harvest of the season, before new crops are planted,

the water libation is connected with the plea to Yehoveh for rain. As very little is said in the Torah of just HOW the water libation ritual was to be accomplished, traditions were developed on its proceedings; and, of course, these traditions changed over time.

In general, it operated like this: the High Priest would take that golden pitcher, go outside the city walls and down to the Pool of Siloam and fill it with about a liter of water. In the meantime, some other priests went to another pool of water where willows grew; they gathered the willows and laid these long willow branches against the sides of the Great Altar of Burnt Offering, such that they extended above the platform and formed kind of a canopy.

The High Priest would then walk in holy procession to a special gate in the thick walls that protected and surrounded the Holy City: the gate was called the Watergate. He would wait there until some Levite musicians sounded 3 loud trumpet blasts, and then he would go to the Great Altar, and in front of large crowds pour the water out while saying in a loud voice: ***"Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation"*** taken from Isaiah 12:3. As the High Priest was pouring the water out of his pitcher, another priest poured wine out of a similar pitcher; when that was done, music was played by the Levites and then the crowd would recite one of the Hallel portions, Psalm 118:25: ***"Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity"***. This song was called the Hosanna (Hoshanah). During this song, scores of priests would march around waving palm branches.

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles was the grand finale. Tradition even gave that last day a special name: Hoshana Rabbah. On that last day, all the rituals were even grander, and the people even more expectant. On all other days of the feast the High Priest came through the Watergate with his golden vessel full of water, taken from the Pool of Siloam, and his signal to walk through the gate was the sound of 3 trumpet blasts. But on the **last** day of Sukkot, the Levites blew 7 trumpet blasts, and then repeated it 3 times. The crowds waited in great anticipation of this moment, in which the feast was drawn to a close. The High Priest then solemnly proceeded up the several steps to the Altar and waited until the crowd quieted and gave him all their attention. Then, with great drama, he lifted the water libation vessel and poured out its contents for the last time...not to be done again until next year.

The water libation ceremony was THE highlight of Sukkot. The final day's libation ceremony was like when the fireworks at the end of the day at Disney...the best was saved for last. It was during the moment of the final day's water libation ceremony that we read of Yeshua shouting out to the thousands who were standing, smashed together in silence, staring in awe as the High Priest held that shiny gold vessel shoulder high and away from his body, and then tipped it ever so slightly so as to allow the water to pour slowly and with great drama. In John 7 we are told that at that very moment Jesus turned and shouted this to the multitude: ***"If any man is thirsty, let him come to ME and drink."***

It's amazing the Jews didn't kill him right there on the spot. Just think about the words the High Priest had just spoken: "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation", to which Yeshua responds, "if any man is thirsty, let him come to ME and drink." He pronounced Himself to be that well of salvation...whom the people knew could only be God... and the people and the priests **knew** that was exactly what He meant.

So, Believers, we need to accept that these feasts are as much for us as they were for the Israelites. These are not given by God as options, but rather as ordained and commanded for all of His followers. Let us give up our highly questionable manmade holy days in favor of God's appointed times, rather than the other way around, as it has been since Constantine and the 4th century A.D. creation of the gentile Church as we know it today.