

Bite Size Bible Study

Sukkot #137

By Pastor Lee

Sukkot (pronounced Sue-COAT) is Hebrew but it is also known by several other names – Feast of Booths, Festival of Ingathering, or Feast of Tabernacles. Many of you may have heard of this festival by one or the other of these common names. It is a Biblical holiday celebrated on the 15th day of the month of Tishri (late September to late October). It is one of the three biblically mandated festivals on which Jews were commanded to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Festival of Sukkot begins on Tishri 15, the fifth day after Yom Kippur. It is quite a drastic transition, from one of the most solemn holidays in the year to one of the most joyous. Sukkot is so unreservedly joyful that it is commonly referred to in Jewish prayer and literature as the Season of Rejoicing.

Sukkot's significance is both historical and agricultural. Historically, it commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, it is a harvest festival because it coincides with the fall harvest.

The word "Sukkot" means "booths," and refers to the temporary dwellings that are commanded as temporary living quarters during this holiday in memory of the period of wanderings in the desert. The name of the holiday is frequently translated "Feast of Tabernacles," which, like many translations of Jewish terms, is particularly misleading, because the word "tabernacle" in the Bible refers to the portable Sanctuary in the desert.

Sukkot lasts for seven days. The two days following the festival, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, are separate holidays but are related to Sukkot and are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot.

³³ Adonai said to Moshe, ³⁴ "Tell the people of Isra'el, 'On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of Sukkot for seven days to Adonai. ³⁵ On the first day there is to be a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work. ³⁶ For seven days you are to bring an offering made by fire to Adonai; on the eighth day you are to have a holy convocation and bring an offering made by fire to Adonai; it is a day of public assembly; do not do any kind of ordinary work.

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. ⁴² You are to live in sukkot for seven days; every citizen of Isra'el is to live in a sukkah, ⁴³ so that generation after generation of you will know that I made the people of Isra'el live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am Adonai your God.'" Lev 23:33-36, 39-43 CJB

In honor of the holiday's historical significance, the command is to dwell in temporary shelters, as Israel's ancestors did in the wilderness. The commandment to "dwell" in a sukkah can be fulfilled by simply eating all of one's meals there; however, if the weather, climate, and one's health permit, one should spend as much time in the sukkah as possible, including sleeping in it.

A sukkah must have at least two and a half walls covered with a material that will not blow away in the wind. A sukkah may be any size, so long as it is large enough to fulfill the commandment of dwelling in it. The roof of the sukkah must be made of material referred to as sekhakh (literally, covering), it must be something that grew from the ground and was cut off, such as tree branches, corn stalks, bamboo reeds or sticks. It must be left loose, not tied together or tied down and must be placed sparsely enough that rain can get in, and preferably sparsely enough that the stars can be seen, but not so sparsely that more than ten inches is open at any point or that there is more light than shade. The sekhakh must be put on last.

Sukkot represents a time of renewed fellowship with Adonai. Since Yom Kipper has just finished when one has admitted their sins, made restitution as best as possible and been forgiven, it represents the renewal of our relationship with God. As such it is right and fitting that this festival is joyous and full of expectancy of an exceptional future in the Kingdom of God.

It is a time to concentrate on God's nature of Love for all of His children. Jesus' life, death and resurrection has made possible our deliverance from sin. His Good News is for all people of all time periods. Historically only the Hebrew people celebrated the Sukkot period but in the future it will be for all nations, tribes, and peoples.

Prophetically this festival portrays Jesus coming a second time to complete the Kingdom of God. A time when all that has become disorganized and confused due to Adam and the rest of mankind not being able to fulfill their original purpose of ruling and being responsible for the world and its inhabitants. It will be a time when everything will be completely functional again.

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