

Christian Faith and Practice Through...The Feast of Tabernacles

“You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.” Deuteronomy 16:13-15

The Feast of Tabernacles (a.k.a. Booths or Nations) is the last of the seven yearly appointments that YHVH wants His children to keep with Him. In this short article we will go over the basic guidelines laid down for us by God to celebrate the feast together. One very large group of people who claim to wear His name are refusing to follow His Ways, but a remnant is realizing that perhaps the doctrines of men are wrong and more of His Word applies to His followers than previously thought. So this series of articles on Christian Faith and Practice is intended to help introduce the various specifics commanded in the Scriptures and provide a little background and encouragement for discovering the joys and blessings of obedience.

Yom Teruah is on the first of the month (Tishrei), Yom Kippur is on the tenth, and Sukkot (sue-coat, Hebrew for temporary home such as a booth or tent) begins on the 15th (this year starting on September 21). It lasts for a total of eight days, the first and last of which are regular Sabbaths, in addition to any weekly Sabbath. In a farming community (which might be closer to what God wants than our present techno-garbage society) this was after the fall harvest, and the feast was partly in thanksgiving for the bounty provided by the Father. The Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) was a sukkot, and our own bodies could be considered a sukkot. The first mention of booths is in Genesis 33:17.

Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth.

Succoth is another spelling for Sukkot. The alleged “manger” which some Christians like to use in their pagan Christmas stories was not a feed bin or a stall for animals, but more likely a sukkot, and if you want my backup on this just send an email. A booth can be any kind of a temporary shelter. Some of our Jewish brothers and sisters build one inside the house out of flimsy materials such as cardboard and branches. Others build them outside with more sturdy materials that shed rain and hold up under high winds, or just pitch a tent. Some only eat meals in them; others live in them for the whole week. I suppose any of these options are fine as long as the idea is to rejoice, remember, and rehearse for the future.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 NASB

Rehearsing is interesting here because a bunch of Scripture ties this feast to the future time when the Messiah will return and set up His Kingdom on earth (as it is in Heaven). Then, there will be no harm done by the environment, or other people, to us, so a temporary structure will be sufficient for our housing needs. Everyone will follow the Messiah's commands (like it or not), and there will be peace breaking out all over the place. The feast also ties us to the time when Isra'el spent a lot of time living in tents, and they took YHVH's tent around with them too. If you will, it is also symbolic of our temporary abode here on earth because our permanent home is wherever Jesus is. And, there are ties to the Garden, when people walked with God and we didn't need houses because the environment (and other people) was not harmful to our own Tabernacles.

Leviticus 23 has more of the specifics for celebrating this festival.

Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD. On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly.

You shall do no laborious work. These are the appointed times of the LORD which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, to present offerings by fire to the LORD—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each day's matter on its own day—besides those of the Sabbaths of the LORD, and besides your gifts and besides all your votive and freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD. On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day.

Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the LORD.
Leviticus 23:33-44 NASB

Notice that in the reference at the head of this article (Deuteronomy 16:13-17) that everyone is to be involved. In the reference immediately above (Leviticus 23:33-44) it says that all native-born Isra’elites are to live in the booths. However, in verse 33 it says “children of Isra’el.” If all believers are not “children of Isra’el” then I don’t know who is. The branches mentioned can, I believe, be any tree branch that is both beautiful to look at and leafy (pretty much including any tree branch). Palm and willow are just mentioned as examples of what YHVH has in mind. These branches are used for decoration, and for waving as part of rejoicing. Think about the sounds and smells when hundreds or thousands of people wave bunches of beautiful scented branches and rejoice!

At three feast times each year all Isra’el was to travel to Jerusalem – Unleavened Bread (Hag HaMatzot), Weeks (Pentecost or Shavuot), and Booths or tabernacles (Sukkot).

They were not to appear empty handed, meaning they needed to bring freewill offerings.

Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.” Deuteronomy 16:16,17 NASB

And as I’ve mentioned before, we can either dismiss this because there is no Temple, or we can ask, “Where has He put His name now? Directly on us, the stones of His Temple?” So far this is my understanding, unless you can show me something different. We are all strangers and aliens here, and we are traveling by faith to the place God has told us to go, dragging these old tents around with us and waiting for our new dwelling.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:8-10 NASB

This feast was also known as the “Feast of Nations.” According to Numbers 29:12-40, sacrifices were offered for the nations (70) throughout the week. The number 70 comes from Deuteronomy 32:8 where Moses says that the number of the nations was set according to the sons of Isra’el, and Deuteronomy 10:22 where the Word says the number of people was 70. When the Temple was destroyed it was not just a sad day for Isra’el but also for the nations, because these sacrifices were for them also. Of course we

know that the Messiah offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 7:27), but this was true and applicable both before and after His death. Why institute sacrifices in the first place? Why not just point to the Messiah's death and say it was sufficient, though not realized in time and space (Revelation 13:8)? There is more going on here than meets the eye.

Besides, this feast is specifically mentioned as continuing on into the Millennial Kingdom in Zechariah 14:16-18.

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. (NASB)

Another task we are to perform at this feast (in the Sabbath year – every seventh year) is the reading of the entire Law to E-V-E-R-Y-O-N-E so that he or she may hear and fear. Kids who haven't known are taught, aliens (E.T. phone home?) are included, even the men get in on the act. Um, did I mention it was for all people?

Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess." Deuteronomy 31:10-13 NASB

So there you have it. Build a temporary shelter (you can also pitch a tent), get some nicely scented and beautiful branches to wave around while singing and making merry, eat special food if you'd like, rest on the first and the eighth day (plus regular Sabbaths), every once in a while read the Law (first five books) to everyone, and rejoice a whole bunch.

Did I mention rejoicing?

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice

Bruce Bertram

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