



THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

WEEK 9
11.01.15

FOCUS VERSE

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.

LESSON TEXT

Nehemiah 8:14–18

14 And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:

15 And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

16 So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.

17 And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.

18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

John 7:37–39

37 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, 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.)



FOCUS THOUGHT

We should gladly give thanksgiving and joyful celebrating and worship for the blessings of God.



Health Benefits of Worship

To be clean inside, a body needs motion. A sluggish, sedentary lifestyle creates dangers for a person's health similar to those caused by nicotine or alcohol. My wife discovered some great information on how to stay healthy and take care of our God-given bodies. As I have listened to her discuss these findings, I have become aware this could be a reason many worshipers leave church feeling so good. I'm not referring to the spiritual feeling but the physical.

In a precision system of stretches and motion, the T-Tapp program has helped thousands improve their quality of life by using a unique combination of muscle-toning and lymph-stimulating movements. Simply tapping the foot and clapping the hands pump lymph through the body's extremities. This lymphatic fluid carries out toxins and other

buildup the body cannot process any other way (t-tapp.com/media/ttappdifference.html, accessed September 19, 2014). People are reversing trends of diabetes, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, and the harmful effects of traditional cancer treatment. How? By moving.

What an advantage we have in the Pentecostal movement. We have movement! Clapping, foot tapping, shouting, jumping, running, and dancing are not foreign to a Spirit-filled service. Not only does the presence of the Lord carry away sins and other pollutants of the soul, but His call to move in worship cleanses our physical bodies as well. At the Feast of Tabernacles, participants marched, yelled, and waved branches in the air. We carry on such a spirit of exuberance today and reap both spiritual and physical blessings.

OUTLINE

I. JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

- A. A Joyful Journey
- B. A Peace Offering

II. A WEEK OF CELEBRATING

- A. Camping Out
- B. The Great Day
- C. The Solemn Assembly
- D. A Feast for All Time

III. A TIME OF THANKSGIVING

- A. A Harvest Festival
- B. Tithes and Offerings

IV. OUR CELEBRATION OF SALVATION

- A. Jesus Fulfilled the Feast of Tabernacles
- B. Our Deliverance from the Wilderness of Sin
- C. Our Rejoicing in a Life of Much Blessing
- D. The Temporary Aspect of Our Journey

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Something draws thousands of people out into the wilds every year. They set up tents to provide shelter under which to sleep or as a place to take cover from the rain. Campers resort to primitive methods of food preparation: cooking out in the open air, roasting hot dogs and marshmallows over an open fire, or filtering their coffee through a sock. What drives these people with climate-controlled homes and vehicles to "rough it" in the wilderness? No one can say for sure, but there is nothing like getting in touch with nature. Every so often, one has to step out and gaze at the stars, watch clouds, or splash through mud puddles. The old covenant Law of the Jews even included a special time to get out of the daily routine, to rough it for a week, and to barbecue some meat. But more than all these things, this holiday was a time to celebrate.

The Feast of Tabernacles provided the people of Israel a chance to rejoice in the goodness of the Lord who had provided them

the latter rain that brought the fall harvest. This was more than just a cookout or a campout. This was a sacred time of getting back to basics to reflect on the way things used to be. It was a time to remember how good things really were. It was a break from routine so the people of faith could celebrate the Lord who had brought them from bondage and given them a place to dwell.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The Word of God gives a few glimpses of how the faithful were to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Later, the returning remnant had to reinstitute this week of celebration. Years later Jesus came on the scene during that great feast. Finally, Scripture hints to the future age of eternal celebration where the themes and features of the feast will culminate.

Many also refer to the Feast of Tabernacles as the Feast of Booths. Sometimes it is referenced as simply “The Feast.” This feast features more sacrifices than any other time of the year. Every day, priests would offer two rams at the Temple. Daily they offered fourteen lambs. Each day’s schedule of sacrifices included bulls as well, but the number of them changed day by day. On the first day of the feast week, they offered thirteen bulls, the next day twelve, eleven the next, and so on until they offered only seven on the seventh day (Numbers 29:12–40). (See *Christ in the Feast of Tabernacles* by David Brickner for historical details and explanations.)

I. JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Children would have found this event exciting as they traveled, slept outdoors, and met new people. The adventure of building a little fort with tree branches for a roof surely provided many good memories for the young ones. This festival was about memories. In the wilderness, the descendants of Israel made many memories while traveling through the wilderness, living in makeshift tents. Maybe for that first generation, revisiting those days was not so joyous; but they gladly would have celebrated that those days were over. Each successive generation could get in touch with their roots to share the experience of wonder and uncertainty, and to

thank their Lord for another year of His protection and provision.

This feast centered on Jerusalem during the days of Nehemiah and Ezra. These men of God reinstated the celebration after it had been ignored for many years. What a joy each following year for the faithful to hike back to the heart of Israel and camp out in temporary shelters. Here rich and poor alike could celebrate. Of all the feasts, this one became a time of remembering the poor. It was an honor to have a needy person join one’s family for a meal under the makeshift roof.

A. A Joyful Journey

This was not a journey just for the outdoorsy folk or carpenters. Musicians gravitated to this holiday as well. It became a week of singing. Many people sang psalms such as Psalms 113–118 that celebrated the kindness of the Lord. As families traveled to Jerusalem, no doubt many of them sang Psalm 122:1: “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.” The Temple became the center of attention for this festival with the many sacrifices, the lighting of the lamps in the courtyard, and the water-pouring ceremony.

The first day of the feast was a welcome day for weary travelers: it was a Sabbath of rest from labor—a holy day to reflect upon the Lord. Each day the celebrants would eat at least two meals in their booths, but they could leave the booths during the day to go visit or even tend to business. The eighth day, the day after the Feast of Tabernacles week had ended, was another Sabbath rest. The first day was a time to rest, refocus, and rejoice. The eighth day was a time to rest, refocus, and prepare to re-assimilate to everyday life. Certainly the participants left with renewed energy and a refreshed focus for the rest of the year.

B. A Peace Offering

Feasting began up and down the streets of the city. On top of buildings and all along the roads, people rejoiced together in thrown-together shacks, eating, talking, remembering, crying, and laughing. Homeless people felt as if they were in the majority for a week as all walks of life adopted provisional lifestyles. Families enjoyed hosting Levites and poor

people in their crude huts. The smell of fresh citrus could be caught in the breeze as celebrants brought out their *etrogs*, a lemon-like fruit, which served to remind them of how God had brought them through the wilderness to a fruitful land.

During this festivity, each family brought a peace offering to give to the Lord and to eat before Him. These meals would be similar to a North American family having a cookout while camping. Picture mom, dad, grandparents, cousins, and whoever else would join in the fun, socializing while the steaks sizzle on the grill. Of course the scene is not that trivial; much more was involved.

II. A WEEK OF CELEBRATING

The people were commanded to bring fruit, palm branches, willow branches, and a brushy branch, possibly from the myrtle tree. They would shake and wave these symbols of their journey from bondage to blessing. The palm branches may have reminded them of their time in Egypt and their travels from one desert oasis to another. The brushy branch would remind them of their time in the wilderness. The willow branch would remind them of the times God provided water for them from streams. The fruit would remind them of the bounty in the Land of Promise.

Children who were old enough to carry anything would also be expected to carry branches and wave them. This included them in the celebration of God's goodness. The Feast of Unleavened Bread at Passover lasted seven days. The Feast of Pentecost culminated after forty-nine days of the counting of the sheaf. The Feast of Tabernacles, however, came in the seventh month and lasted seven days. Each day the priests sacrificed fourteen lambs. During that week they sacrificed fourteen rams. Throughout this festival, seven goats died as sin offerings. By the end of the seven days, they had slaughtered seventy bulls. The abundance of sevens associated with this holy week shows it was not only a culmination of the harvest but also a symbolic representation of God's greatest and best.

A. Camping Out

Many families pile into the old jalopy every summer and make their trek into the

backwoods or down by a lake to camp for a week. What begins as an exciting time of trying something new can often end with a longing to return to the comforts of home. Mom is ready to get back to her gas stove. Dad misses his Denver mattress. And the kids might be missing their backyard, friends, or life without a daily layering of insect repellent.

Perhaps by the end of the feast week, many participants had grown weary of their transitory and inadequate shelters. They had begun to long for a return to whatever comforts they normally enjoyed. This also appears to be a part of the purpose behind the event.

While we look back to where God has brought us from, we should never grow complacent about where we are. We should continually look forward to what is coming. The time of the harvest reminds us that one season must come to a close and another take its place. Now we are living in the time of the harvest. This is the time to win the lost and build the Kingdom. The day is coming when this makeshift era will end. Now we are "camping out" with God, but a better day is coming. Soon God's people will go to be with Him in a better place.

B. The Great Day

The parade was coming again! The high priest led the way from the Temple each morning. Priests, Levites, musicians, worshipers, and even children waving branches and fruit followed along. Half a mile across the city, the high priest dipped a golden pitcher into the Pool of Siloam to fill it with water. The parade turned in the street, went through the water gate, and headed back toward the Temple.

Each of the seven days, this procession marched with shouts of hosanna to the Lord to save them as they waved palm branches. The priest returned to the Temple where he poured out the water from the golden pitcher in a reenactment of the rain God would send. The people shouted to the priest, "Raise your hand!" He lifted his hand to show he had poured the water as expected, and they rejoiced. They thanked God for providing water—a thing one never took for granted in an agrarian society. The singers sang from Isaiah 12:3, "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Beginning the second night of the feast, young priests would climb ladders up the seventy-foot-tall candelabra and light them. Each of the four lampstands had four lights and stood in the Women's Court of the Temple. The glow from these sixteen lights would reach practically everywhere in the city. The whole town would be alive with the sights and sounds of the feast. Priests and Pharisees would take up torches and dance in the Temple court beneath the lights that memorialized the pillar of fire in the wilderness. Some of them would celebrate around the clock, awaiting the rising of the sun. They took the command literally to have nothing but joy during this event.

The last day was Hosanna Rabba, the great day of the feast. *Hosanna* means "Lord save us" and *rabba* means "great." So *Hosanna Rabba* was the day when people shouted the most about God's coming salvation. On this great day, many would run down to the valley, grab willow branches, and return to the Temple just as the golden pitcher was returning to the precincts.

On this day, the high priest led the parade around the altar seven times before pouring out the water. Each of the seven times around the altar, the priests would give three blasts on the trumpets, and the people would cry out, "Please bring salvation now. Please, God, please, save and bring salvation now!" The people would shake the willow branches feverishly until the leaves fell off. They continually raised their shouts for salvation louder and louder each time until with a mighty crescendo of "Lord save us!" the water was poured out.

C. The Solemn Assembly

The day after the feast ended was the eighth day, another day of rest. All week the participants had heard from the sacred writings. They had sung praises from the psalms, talked of the faith of their ancestors, and read aloud the law of Moses. This was a time to rejoice in God.

Unfortunately, after the time of Joshua, the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles fell into neglect. People got distracted with life, sin, enemy threats, and false religions. One of the few observances of the feast was when

King Solomon dedicated the Temple. While the sacrifices and worship were enough to make up for the many years the people had failed to sacrifice, the people still did not get involved as they should have. Nehemiah and Ezra noticed this lack in the practice of the faithful and addressed it.

What a great event it must have been for the returning remnant to rediscover the elements of joy their ancestors had missed. Those in Nehemiah's day who had "come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths" and among them "there was very great gladness" (Nehemiah 8:17). On the eighth day, the leaders held "a solemn assembly" as was customary for the event (Numbers 29:35; Nehemiah 8:18). The people were to rest and reflect on all the joy and energy that had gone into the previous week.

D. A Feast for All Time

While designing this celebration, God must have had an eye toward eternity. Not only are many messianic hopes tied up in this event, but the prophets saw something more. Zechariah saw that the nations who had once been enemies of Jerusalem would one day turn "to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16). He declared the Lord would "smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:18). Further, he declared a time of total consecration to the Lord without distraction from devotion to the Holy One (Zechariah 14:19–21). This could be what many look for in the fulfillment of a time of peace and unification on the earth after the Lord's return. Whatever this prophecy specifically means, it appeals to a wider issue Jews often overlooked: God's plan to give light to the nations.

Most Jews did not see a place for Gentiles in the circle of faith. However, God did and He even built that message into many symbols and prophetic elements such as this feast. The number of bulls sacrificed raises a few questions in the minds of Bible students who wonder why God ordered a descending number to be sacrificed on each day of the feast. The sum of those numbers is seventy. Could it be more than coincidence that is the sum of the nations of earth listed in Genesis 10?

Later, when the family members of Jacob numbered seventy, Jews saw this as an indication the Hebrews were an answer to the nations of the world. Under Moses, seventy elders led in the nation. Jesus sent seventy disciples out to evangelize. The number seventy appears to be connected with God's work to use Israel to reach the nations. The blood of those bulls symbolized the blood of Christ, the ultimate sacrifice, which is for the whole world, for every nationality. The Feast of Tabernacles included everyone from all walks of life—even the strangers, the poor, and the homeless. God wants everyone involved in praises, redemption, and the joy of knowing the One who can save us.

We do not observe just a day or a week of celebration. We sing His praises and give thanks to Him at all times.

III. A TIME OF THANKSGIVING

Those who will receive the message of this event will find themselves with plenty to thank the Lord for. Those who originally celebrated this seasonal get-together had fruit, grain, meat, oil, and much more for which to thank the Lord. Those who have become part of His kingdom have much more for which to thank Him. We do not observe just a day or a week of celebration. We sing His praises and give thanks to Him at all times.

A. A Harvest Festival

This was not a carnival where people showed up to eat funnel cakes and cotton candy. This harvest festival meant that all who worked their fields and groves had plenty of food to go around. This was a feast where God required the participants to “appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he

shall choose; . . . and they shall not appear before the LORD empty” (Deuteronomy 16:16). No one was to appear empty-handed. They brought grains, oil, grapes, citrus, nuts, and seeds. Great food, lots of variety, and exciting events pulled the community together as they camped out on the flat-roof homes, in the streets, and along the roadsides.

B. Tithes and Offerings

Part of the giving by the Israelites was to bring tithes each year to support the Levites. Each third year, they brought a special tithe to give to the poor, disabled, and widows (Deuteronomy 14:22–29; 26:12–15). In addition, the Israelites were asked to give freewill offerings during feast times. God expected His people to give: “And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee” (Deuteronomy 16:10). “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee” (Deuteronomy 16:17). Giving then, as today, was to be proportional to one's income. It was not enough to thank God for His generous bounty; the people gave in faith that He would provide again.

Not only were the followers of the Lord to set aside something for the Levites and the poor, they were also to set aside something for themselves to enjoy at the feast. Each meat offering to the Lord included a baked food involving flour and oil. God commanded them to come “eat before the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy 14:23). These feasts, the three major ones in particular (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles), were to be part of their annual calendar and budget.

Families who lived too far from Jerusalem to travel with animals and produce were to sell those things and use the money to buy whatever they wanted to feast on when they got to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:24–26).

This festival was a time to share with others as well. Those who were lavish in their worship, celebration, and giving could pray this with confidence: “Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land

that floweth with milk and honey” (Deuteronomy 26:15).

IV. OUR CELEBRATION OF SALVATION

If Jews under the Law had to celebrate because God required it, how much more do believers in Jesus have a cause to celebrate. Our celebration does not come because of outward forces but because of inward forces. When an individual thinks of Jesus and all He has done, often that person can do no less than shout, clap, jump, run, or dance. The abundance of riches in His Spirit leaves us with no recourse but to be exuberant in His presence. We have more than food and branches to shout with. We have joy, hope, love, peace, and His character dwelling in us.

A. Jesus Fulfilled the Feast of Tabernacles

When Jesus entered Jerusalem the week before His crucifixion, the people broke into a celebration similar to what they would do at the Feast of Tabernacles, except this was about four months earlier than the normal celebration. They began snatching palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna!” They understood this Man was the fulfillment of the longing and expectations of the feast. “Lord save us!” they cried. And save us He did.

Jesus may have prepped them to understand His identity as the fulfillment of the feast. For one thing, He told them, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). It also appears He announced His identity at the Feast of Tabernacles, which came in the season just before His crucifixion. Jerusalem had become hostile toward the Lord, and He knew He could not make too big of a scene without an uprising from the religious leaders.

When His brothers asked why He was not going to the feast, Jesus demurred and did not commit Himself to them. One of Jesus’ brothers taunted, “No one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world” (John 7:4, NKJV). Then His brothers left for the city, but Jesus lagged behind.

What a surprise it must have been to the sarcastic brothers when Jesus came to Jerusalem and showed Himself to the world on

Hosanna Rabba. “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37–38). The water drawn from the Pool of Siloam was nothing compared to Jesus, the Living Water. The water had been paraded up the street in a golden vessel, but the Living Water stood before them in an unlikely container. This Living Water would be soon poured out into any available container when He poured out His Spirit.

B. Our Deliverance from the Wilderness of Sin

The Feast of Booths served to remind the people of how their ancestors had gotten through the Wilderness of Sin, a literal name for the wasteland through which they had traveled (Exodus 16:1; Numbers 33:11). Believers today have come through a wilderness of sin too. Our deliverance from sin is a far greater cause for celebration than their deliverance from a desert. Jesus, our Water of Life, has given us new life and a cause to celebrate now that the drought of godless living is over.

C. Our Rejoicing in a Life of Much Blessing

Jews danced and shouted with fruit and tree branches in their hands. We have much more available than just food and shelter. More than just having a willow tree by the water, we can be like trees planted by the water. We who walk in the Spirit can bring forth heavenly fruit. Not only can we rejoice in what the Lord does in our lives, we can be such a blessing to others that they find cause for rejoicing in us. The promises and blessings are not just for those in the church. Unlike Israel, we do not keep our joy to ourselves. Our hope and celebration is for all people, and we must invite them to join us.

D. The Temporary Aspect of Our Journey

Those festive branches would wilt and shrivel. The wind and rain would tear apart the temporary shelters if human hands did not deconstruct them first. Nothing about the Feast

of Booths was enduring. It was all as temporary as paper tablecloths and napkins. No one expects a Thanksgiving feast to last forever.

In the same sense that the Feast of Tabernacles centered on makeshift constructions, our bodies are temporary too. Nothing about our lives is permanent. Misfortune and good fortune may come in one's lifetime, even within one year. Relationships, health, jobs, and positions are all more transitory than we want to admit. Life itself is nothing more than a Feast of Tabernacles. It is a time to reflect, to worship, to celebrate, and to look forward to what is coming. We are on a journey that will end very soon. With a thankful glance to the past and a celebratory moment in the present, we live toward the future, laying up treasure in Heaven, longing for that permanent body, and living forever with Jesus.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

It is time to join the celebration around the altar. It is time to shout and sing before the Lord who saves us. The people of His kingdom have a right to dance, play music, and shout unto the Lord with all their strength. We drink from a pure source, the living water Jesus has given us. This hope is not just for those who are in the Kingdom but for all who thirst.

If one begins to go dry spiritually, it is time to get out of the routine and refocus on the reason to celebrate. On the side of the road, on the rooftop, or wherever one can get alone to think on the Lord, a believer must rekindle the flame and worship. We look also for that "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1). The New Jerusalem features living branches on "the tree of

life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2).

On the eighth day, the day after the feast had ended, Jesus taught in the Temple and said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). True believers do not need candelabra in the court of the Temple. If the shadows have grown and darkness has closed in, one must climb the ladder to His presence and light the wick of His glory with prayer so His radiance will shine brightly again.

We look for the city John saw where there was "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Revelation 21:23). In that land, "there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

The new covenant congregation is not commanded to keep the Feast of Booths. Instead, the Carpenter from Galilee has gone to prepare a place for us. "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock" (Psalm 27:5). His construction project is out of this world. Trimmed with gold and etched with pearls, our eternal home is more than rough-sawn lumber and wilting branches. Our everlasting home is built to stand beyond time and eternity. We can lift the palms of our hands, praising Him for being the light of the world and the living water, as we worship with reckless abandon. ■

REFLECTIONS

- What does the Feast of Tabernacles symbolize spiritually?
- How does Jesus fulfill the Feast of Tabernacles?
- How will the Feast of Tabernacles be fulfilled in eternity?
- What has the Lord delivered you from that you can celebrate?