

The Feast of Tabernacles

The Significance of the Feast

This feast had three names. It was called the *Feast of Tabernacles* or **Booths** (Leviticus 23.34) as Israel were required to construct and dwell in them seven days as a remembrance of how they had lived in the wilderness (Leviticus 23.42-43). It was also called the *Feast of Ingathering* (Exodus 23.16) as it was the end of the agricultural year and the completion of the entire harvest. **Deuteronomy 16.13:** *Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine.* Finally, it was called **The Feast** (1 Kings 8.2) or **The Feast of Jehovah** (Leviticus 23.39, JND) as it pictures the fulfilment and completion of God's purposes for Israel, and indeed all of mankind.



The seven days of Tabernacles is a picture of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. An additional Sabbath (making an eighth day) is attached to the end of the feast, thus foreshadowing a *new beginning*; the *eternal state*. Israel has been *regathered* (Trumpets), *repentant* (Day of Atonement) and now she is *rejoicing* (Tabernacles).

The Schedule of the Feast

- Tabernacles begins on the *fifteenth* day of the *seventh* month (Leviticus 23.34), the day of the **full moon** in Israel's lunar calendar. *The Sun of Righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings (Malachi 4.2) and the restored nation of Israel is reflecting His glory to the full.*
- The **seventh** month is significant. It marks the completion of God's purposes for Israel and mankind. The millennial period is variously described in Scripture, e.g. the *fulness of the times* (Ephesians 1.10), the *restitution of all things* (Acts 3.21), the *reconciliation of all things* (Colossians 1.20), the *regeneration* (Matthew 19.28) and the *world to come* (Hebrews 2.5). God has dealt with mankind for 6,000 years in innocence, conscience, government, promise, law and grace. The millennium is the seventh age, the *age of glory*.
- The feast lasted for seven days with an additional Sabbath on the eighth day (Leviticus 23.36). This was therefore the **longest** feast. *This is not surprising as the eighth day is a picture of the eternal state, God's eternal rest (hence the Sabbath) having been restored.*

The Celebration of the Feast

The feast was like no other as it was marked by great **rejoicing** (Leviticus 23.40) and **remembrance** (Leviticus 23.43).

- **Remembrance:** The people remembered how they had lived in the wilderness. As pilgrims they built booths. **Exodus 12.37:** *And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses (Egypt) to Succoth (booths).* These booths were small shelters or huts made of branches. During the feast, replica makeshift shelters were built and placed in the streets, on the (flat) roofs of houses and in the temple courts (Nehemiah 8.16).
- **Rejoicing:** The people greatly rejoiced as they considered the miraculous way God had protected them in the *past* through the wilderness journey, and, following the harvest, rejoiced that He had continued to provide for them in the *present*.

The booths were made with boughs of various trees (Leviticus 23.40) which reminded them of the wilderness experience. These were:

- **Goodly** trees. 'Goodly' has the thought of *honourable* or *beautiful*. Israel had the honour of bearing God's name in the wilderness. Note. Numbers 23.21, 24.5.
- **Palm** trees. The palm is an upright tree which acts as a symbol of *triumph* used on occasions of great rejoicing (John 12.13; Revelation 7.9). Israel enjoyed many victories over their enemies in the wilderness, e.g. Amalek (Exodus 17).
- **Thick** trees. This speaks of *strength* and *stability* ministered bountifully by the Lord (Exodus 13.3; 15.2; Psalm 68.5).
- **Willows** of the brook. A tree which speaks of sorrow (Psalm 137). There were many tears shed on the way (Numbers 11.4, 14.1; Deuteronomy 1.45, 34.8).

Let us ever remember that **we** are strangers and pilgrims travelling through the wilderness (1 Peter 2.11). What an honour (goodly trees) it is for us to bear the name of the Lord Jesus as we travel home to heaven. There will be tears along the way (willow), but He gives us strength (thick trees) and victory (palm).

It is a delight to note that the trees mentioned in Nehemiah 8.15 are somewhat different. The nation has recently returned from Babylonian captivity and thus there is a foreshadowing of Israel enjoying millennial rest. There are now **olive** branches (suggesting the nation in the full enjoyment of spiritual life); **wild olive** branches (Jew and Gentile enjoying blessing together, Romans 11); **myrtle** branches (a symbol of prosperity and glory) and no mention of the **willow**. Sorrow will be replaced by joy. God has wiped away every tear! **Revelation 7.15-17**: *Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sits upon the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall not hunger any more, neither shall they thirst any more, nor shall the sun at all fall on them, nor any burning heat; because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.* See also Isaiah 4.5-6.

The Sacrifices of the Feast

Numbers 29.12-40 describes the sacrifices offered during the feast. They are marked by the number **seven**. For example: **Two** rams every day for seven days (2 x 7 = 14); **14** lambs every day for seven days (14 x 7 = 98); **13** bullocks on the first day, decreasing by one until **seven** on the seventh day (70); **one** goat for a *sin offering* every day (1 x 7); **189** sacrifices in total (27 x 7). All of which speaks of the complete perfection of the person and work of Christ displayed to all throughout the millennial period.

However, the number of bullocks offered during the seven days **declines**. *Thirteen* (one short of absolute perfection) are offered on the first day, reducing by one every subsequent day, possibly suggesting a declining appreciation of the *person and rule* of Christ during the millennium. **Psalm 18.44**: *At the hearing of the ear they hearken to me, Sons of a stranger feign obedience to me.* Many born during this period will not accept Christ as Saviour and thus join in rebellion with Satan at the end of the period (Revelation 20.7-9). However, there were further sacrifices on the eighth day (Numbers 29.35-38). Why? *Throughout the long rest of eternity, the value, worth and fragrance of His sacrifice remains.*

The Scriptures and the Feast

There are **two** references to the Feast of Tabernacles in the NT and both are highly significant. Luke 9.33 records the statement of Peter in relation to the transfiguration (see also Matthew 17.4; Mark 9.5): *Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three **tabernacles**; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.* The glory revealed on the mount was a foretaste of the millennium (see 2 Peter 1.16). But, this was not the fulfilment of Tabernacles as Peter thought. The Passover Lamb was yet to be slain! The whole scene demonstrates the two-fold character of the coming kingdom. There is the *earthly* aspect (Peter, James and John) within full sight and sound of the *heavenly* aspect (Christ, Moses and Elijah).

In John 7.2, the Jews' feast of Tabernacles was at hand. Sadly, the feast had become merely outward ceremony; it was no longer Jehovah's feast of Tabernacles. On each of the seven days of the feast, a ritual known as the 'joy of pouring water' was performed. A priest would march at the head of a procession down to the pool of Siloam and fill a golden pitcher with water. Entering through the water gate, the priest would pour out the water at the foot of the brazen altar. Immediately after this, the choir of the Levites would sing the Hallel (Psalms 113-118), the people responding at the appropriate moments with **Psalm 118.25**: *Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.* The pouring of water was symbolic of God's provision of water in the wilderness (**past**) and the rains which had brought the **present** harvest. The ceremony was also a prayer for the **future** outpouring of rain and the Holy Spirit. It was at this point in the service that **John 7.37** unfolded: *In the last day, that great day of the feast (seventh day), 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.* The message was clear. The Lord Jesus Himself was the fulfilment of the feast. He is the one who brings eternal joy. He is the one in whom God finds eternal rest. He is the one who provides eternal salvation. He is the one who supplies **living water** (Holy Spirit) that satisfies eternally. Do we find such satisfaction in Him?