

The Feast of Tabernacles  
Leviticus 23:39-43

Richard Tow 9-27-15

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits” (Ps 103:1-2).<sup>1</sup>*

That is, in essence, what the Feast of Tabernacles is all about.

The Feast of Tabernacles begins this evening at sunset and lasts for seven days.

There is an additional 8<sup>th</sup> day event that is a distinct holiday itself. It is known as Shemini Atzeret which literally means “the assembly of the eighth (day).”<sup>2</sup> Even though it occurs immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles, it is celebrated in a very different way. And since it is not a part of the Sukkot proper,<sup>3</sup> we will not deal with it in the message today. Leviticus 23:33-36 establishes the Feast of Tabernacles and then verse 36 also calls for a sacred assembly on the 8<sup>th</sup> day (Shemini Atzeret). Follow with me as we read those verses.

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 34 ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. 35 On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. 36 For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.’”<sup>4</sup>*

I want to first share some biblical teaching about the Feast of Tabernacles and talk about how the underlying purposes of that feast applies to us today.

During the Millennial reign of Christ, the Feast of Tabernacles will not only be celebrated by Israel; but it will be celebrated by the whole world. Turn with me to Zechariah 14. After the Battle of Armageddon, after the Second Coming of Christ (which is described in the first part of this chapter), Jesus’ throne will be established in Jerusalem; He will reign over all the earth. All nations will be required to pay homage to Him and required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Follow as I read verses 16-19.

*“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. 17 And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. 18 If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. 19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

---

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotes are from New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Tracy R. Rich, “Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah,” Judaism 101 accessed 9-28-15 at <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday6.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1980) p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 29:35-38 provides additional information about Shemini Atzeret.

So during Millennial (thousand-year) reign of Christ after the tribulation period,<sup>5</sup> the Feast of Tabernacle will be enforced with swift and sure punishment to all the nations. I share that verse to point out two things: (1) the Feast of Tabernacles ultimately has significance for gentile nations as well as Israel and (2) the relevance of the Feast of Tabernacles did not end with the Old Testament. During the current Age of the Church we are not required to keep the Law; and we are not required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles the way nations will be required to do it during the Millennial.<sup>6</sup> But we would do well to understand and appreciate why God established this feast to begin with and cooperate with the eternal principles behind the ordinance. This message is designed to help you do that.

The Feast of Tabernacles is about **REMEMBERING**—Remembering God’s faithfulness in our past.

One thing that got Israel in trouble was forgetting God—forgetting that He was the One who took care of them—forgetting His goodness and provision. Forgetting God in that way led to their captivity. God states His complaint to Israel in Hos 2:13 *“I will punish her For the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, And went after her lovers; But Me she **forgot**,” says the LORD.”*

In chapter 13:5-6 God says to them, *“I knew you in the wilderness, In the land of great drought. 6 When they had pasture, they were filled; They were filled and their heart was exalted; Therefore they **forgot** Me.”*

Moses had warned of this in Deut 8:11-20

*“Beware that you do not **forget** the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, 12 lest -- when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14 when your heart is lifted up, and you **forget** the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; 15 who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end -- 17 then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' 18 "And you shall **remember** the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 Then it shall be, if you by any means **forget** the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. 20 As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God.”*

Let me just quickly go down a rabbit trail and then return to our subject. There is strong prophetic warning going forth in America. Yet a lot of pastors are dismissing the warning by saying that all that related to the nation of Israel. “We’re the church (not Israel), we are gentiles and God does not deal with us in the same way He did them.” But look closely at the passage I just read. God warns Israel of His judgements in Deut. 8; he likens it to the way He

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 20:1-6. The word “millennial” comes from Latin mille (“thousand”) + -ennium (from annus (“year”).

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 4:9-11; 5:1-7.

judged gentile nations for the same sins. Verse 19 *“Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. 20 As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God.”*

God judges sin. He judged Israel’s sin. He judged Sodom’s sin. He judged the Canaanites sin. He will judge America’s sin. And He will begin in the House of God.<sup>7</sup> He is longsuffering, He gives ample opportunity for repentance; but when the iniquity comes to the full,<sup>8</sup> *“Katie bar the door”*<sup>9</sup> because God will clean house! *“As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish....”*

Three times in that brief passage God warns them to not forget the LORD and once He emphasizes the necessity to remember. He specifically tells them to not forget His faithfulness to them as they went in the wilderness from Egypt to the Promise Land.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a time set aside for them to remember the Lord’s faithfulness in their history. In the wilderness they had no permanent dwelling. They had to make little booths or sheds to shield themselves from the desert sun. So the first thing they were to do at the Feast of Tabernacles (in fact, they began this process immediately following Yom Kippur)<sup>10</sup> was to build little booths to dwell in during the seven days of the feast. The Hebrew word for booths is *sukkot*.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, this feast is also called Sukkot. In the *Vulgate* translation *sukkot* was translated with the Latin word *“tabernacula”* and that’s why we know it as Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>12</sup> The prominent feature of this feast is the booths that were a replica of what Israel dwelt in in the wilderness. When God wants to help us remember something, He has us do something physical. We remember the physical engagement with the thing better than just an abstract thought. So when God wants us to remember Christ’s death on the cross, He gives us the Communion ordinance and says to us, *“This do in remembrance of Me....”*<sup>13</sup> Take the bread and wine in your hands, hold them, eat the bread, drink the wine, and let it be a reminder of the one and only way of salvation. When God wanted Israel to remember His faithfulness to them in the wilderness, He told them to build these booths and physically dwell in them during the seven days of this feast.

Now let me drive this point home with Lev 23:39-43. Notice in this passage the reference to Israel’s experience in the wilderness.

*“Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. 40 And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. 41 You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in*

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 4:17.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 15:14-16; 2Peter 2:8-8; 3:3-10; Revelation 2:21.

<sup>9</sup> Colloquialism meaning “look out”; “take precautions there’s trouble ahead”  
<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/213750.html> accessed 9-26-15.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchand Zhava Glaser, *The Fall Feasts of Israel* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1987) p. 187.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>12</sup> Gale A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and The Gospel of John* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989.) p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25.

*your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."*

So the feast was designed to help the nation remember that it was the Lord who got them to where they were; that from generation to generation they would remind one another of God's goodness to them; and they would never forget that every good thing they enjoyed was from the hand of the Lord. What do we have going on in America? We have people trying to write God out of our history. We have holidays that serve greed and materialism much more than praise to God. Thanksgiving was originally designed as a day to remember God's provision. Instead people rise early to trample one another at the department store. Independence Day could be a time to sing "God to Bless America" or sing in remembrance:

*"O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain; for purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain! America! America! God shed his grace on thee."*

We need to be reminded "America! America! God shed his grace on thee." That is the only reason for our greatness. And if that grace be withdrawn, gone will be the greatness.

Now let's make individual application. Has the Lord been good to you? Has He rescued you time and again? Did He not deliver you out of bondage, just as He did for Israel? Has He not taken care of you even in times you shouldn't have made it—but you did! Why? because God shed His grace on you.

The next seven days would be a good time to count your blessings.

*Ps 103:1-5 "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!*

*2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:*

*3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases,*

*4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."*

Could we just take 30 seconds and tell Him how good He has been to us?

The Feast of Tabernacles is about **REJOICING**--celebrating God's provision.

It is also called the Feast of Ingathering<sup>14</sup> because it was a celebration of the fall harvest.

We just walked through Ten Days of Penitence. It was a time to humble ourselves, confess our sins, and consecrate ourselves to God. That was a solemn time. The Feast of Ingathering is a joyous time. Israel sang and danced before the Lord. They made offerings to the Lord in gratitude for enabling them to prosper. The crops would not have grown had He not sent the rain.

Deut. 16:13-17

*"You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. 14 And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. 15 Seven days you shall keep a*

---

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 23:16.

*sacred 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 surely rejoice.”*

Notice the emphasis here on rejoicing. There’s a time to fast (a time for solemn retrospection) but there is also a time to cut loose and enjoy God! To get everything right with God and get caught up in His presence is the most exciting, awesome experience anybody can have. What the church needs is first deep repentance and then (in that right relationship with God) a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That’s the real attraction of the Church to the world; and the Devil’s got nothing to compete with it. Most Christians have been inoculated with some good, clean fun as a substitute for that. It’s a mighty insufficient substitute. May God give us a fresh outpouring of Your Holy Spirit! That is what we need; and it is the only thing that will meet our need.”

It was at the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7 that Jesus made this declaration to the crowd. John 7:37, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* What was He talking about when He said that? He was talking about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. People were going through the prescribed religious rituals of the Feast of Tabernacles; but Jesus wanted them to know it’s spiritual reality; what it was ultimately pointing to. This was a harvest feast. They were praying for rain. They were praying for fruitfulness. In the natural, we need all that from God, and He cares about that. But the deeper reality is that we need to be freshly filled with the Holy Spirit and let that produce fruitfulness in our lives.<sup>15</sup>

So this is a good time to look to the Lord for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on His Church and in our lives. Zech 10:1 *“Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.”*

Ask and ye shall receive!<sup>16</sup>

Joel 2:23-26 *“Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you --The former rain, And the latter rain in the first month. 24 The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. 25 "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, The crawling locust, The consuming locust, And the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. 26 You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, And praise the name of the LORD your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; And My people shall never be put to shame.”*

In Rev. 7 we see a great multitude of people in heaven with palm branches in their hands. That is symbolic of the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>17</sup> The Palm branches were used in the construction of the booths and in their wave offerings to God during the feast.<sup>18</sup> We have seen that the Feast of

<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:4; 4:31; Eph. 5:18; John 15.

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 7:7-11; Luke 11:9-13; James 4:2-3.

<sup>17</sup> W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966) P. 156. (Leviticus 23:40). Bloch, pp. 191-195, 199.

<sup>18</sup> There is controversy among Rabbis as to which way the palm branches were used. *The Fall Feasts of Israel* by Mitchand Zhava Glaser (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1987) pp. 190-192. Nehemiah 8:14-15 seems to verify the use of palm branches in the construction of the booths. It seems reasonable to me, palm branches were used in both functions.

Tabernacles invoked remembrance of God's care and provision during Israel's journey through the wilderness. These people in heaven are not literally holding Palm branches; it is symbolism to alert us to what the Feast of Tabernacles meant to God's people. Here they are in heaven remembering God's faithfulness during their journey on earth and celebrating the unabated presence of God with great joy.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a harvest celebration and this is some of the harvest: souls in heaven. The nation of Israel was called of God to bring the gentiles into the kingdom. They were supposed to evangelize the world. Instead Israel fell into sin and went into captivity. But during the tribulation period God raises up the nation of Israel (symbolized by the 144,000 in the first part of Rev. 7)<sup>19</sup> and they bring in a huge harvest of souls.

Follow with me as we read Rev 7:9-17

*"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Just as God took care of His people in the wilderness, He took care of these people. Doesn't mean they didn't go through some hard times; but He got them to their final destination victoriously. They shall never hunger or thirst anymore; *"the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat..."* In heaven they will celebrate God's care and they will rejoice forevermore.

Conclusion:

So we have seen the imprint of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Pentateuch, in the Prophets, in the Gospels, in the book of Revelations. The underlying principles, eternal in nature, are:

- (1) REMEMBERING God's faithfulness in our past.
- (2) REJOICING in His goodness now and forever.

During this feast time we:

- (1) Look back in gratitude for past mercies.
- (2) Look up in the present for rain (fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives).
- (3) Look forward in expectation of God's provision and goodness in the days ahead.

---

<sup>19</sup> Although there is much controversy about the 144,000 in Rev. 7, the most natural interpretation is that these people are literally Israelites by nationality (Romans 11:25-32). E. W. Morey is probably right in taking the 144,000 number as symbolic. He writes, "A thousand was the basic military division in the camp of Israel (Num. 31:4-5), the result of 10X10X10, a perfect cube symbolizing completeness, multiplied by 144, or 12X12." *New Spirit Filled Life Bible*, Jack W. Hayford, Ex. Ed. (Thomas Nelson Bibles, 2002) p. 1827.