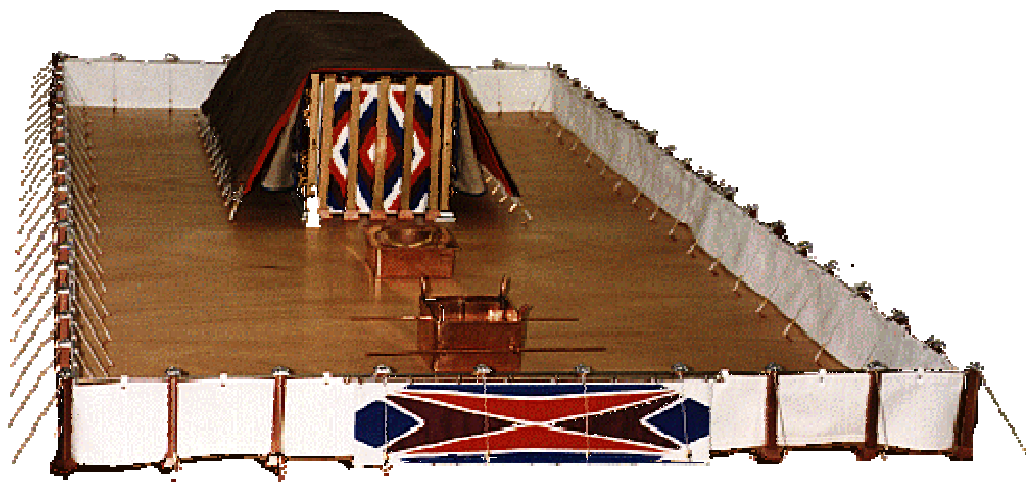


THE PARABLE OF SUKKOT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES



In the Old Testament God commanded the observance of special feasts and holy days. The observance of these Holy days was a requirement of the Law. Obviously God considers Holy days very important. Why does God our Father stress their importance? Paul tells us in Colossians that,

"Therefore let no one sit in judgement on you in matters of food and drink, or with regard to feast (holy) days, or a new moon or a Sabbath. Such things are only a shadow of things to come, and they have only a symbolic value." Colossians 2:16-17.

As you can see, feast days are clearly symbolic, and are a shadow of things to come. Sukkot (The Feast of Tabernacles or The Festival of Booths), is the Jewish festival which God ordained to be celebrated by Israel in Leviticus.

"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, the first day you shall take the fruit of pleasing trees (and make booths of them), branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick (leafy) trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year, as statute (law) forever throughout your generations; you shall keep it in the seventh month. You shall dwell (live) in booths (tents) for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the Israelites dwell in the booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I Am the Lord your God. Thus Moses declared to the Israelites the set or appointed feasts of the Lord." Leviticus 23:39-44.

Holy days are a "shadow of things to come". This festival is to be celebrated in tents which are temporary dwellings. God ordained this holiday to remind the Jews of the time that, because of their unbelief or sin, He made them wander in temporary dwellings in the wilderness. Because of their sin, they could not enter into the promised land. During this time they were without home or nation. They were waiting for the Lord to lead them into the promised land. The land of "milk and honey", Israel.

Today, as Christians, this festival represents to us the time which we spend on this temporal earth, in temporal bodies.

"I think it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle (tent, booth), to stir you up by way of remembrance, since I know that the laying aside of this body of mine will come speedily, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me." II Peter 1:13-14

This verse, clearly tells us that these bodies of flesh, are merely "temporary dwellings", or "tabernacles". The Book of Hebrews shows that we have no permanent home on this earth and are indeed waiting for the Lord to lead or take us to the promised land, the Kingdom of Heaven.

"These people (*the people of faith described in Hebrews 11*) all died controlled and sustained by their faith, but not having received the tangible fulfillment of (God's) promises, only having seen it and greeted it from a great distance by faith, and all the while acknowledging and confessing that they were strangers and temporary residents and exiles upon the earth. Now those people who talk as they did, show plainly that they are in search of a fatherland (their own country). If they had been thinking with remembrance of that country from which they were emigrants, they would have found constant opportunity to return to it. But the truth is that they were yearning for and aspiring to a better and more desirable country, that is a heavenly one. For that reason God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Hebrews 11:13-16

Also, King David said,

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not Your peace at my tears! For I am Your passing guest, a temporary resident, as all my fathers were." Psalms 39:12

"I am a stranger and a temporary resident on the earth; hide not Your commandments from me" Psalms 119:19.

Jesus said,

"Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have lodging places, but the son of man has no place to lay His head." Matthew 8:20

The Festival of Sukkot was obviously important to the Lord. He made it a law which commands its celebration for all eternity. In biblical times, Sukkot was one of the most important festivals of all the feasts. Many pilgrims would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate its colorful and elaborate temple rituals. Jews also consider Sukkot a festival of the future. Zechariah clearly shows this. Speaking of Jesus Christ's Millennial reign,

"And everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, The Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." Zechariah 14:16.

The booth or sukkah is a small, temporary structure with four walls and a roof made of tree branches. To the Christian, this booth represents the temporality of our present life and our possessions on this earth. Jews are required to live in these booths during the entire seven day festival.

Some rituals and traditions of this festival are:

The booth (sukkah) is to be a temporary dwelling. God intended this to remind the Jews of the time He had them wandering in the wilderness until he led them to the promised land.

This reminds Christians that though we are in this world, we are not part (citizens) of this world (John 17:4). It also reminds us that we are foreigners in a foreign land (Hebrews 11:14) and are waiting to be taken by Messiah, Jesus Christ, into our promised land. This is a main theme of the holiday as Jews celebrate it to this day.

Jews must live in the booth and consider it their home during the festival. This is intended to remind them that the houses in which they live throughout the year are only temporary dwellings. Jews may bring couches into the booth, as well as decorations and other items for their comfort. They are to eat, drink, and take their leisure time in the booth. They are also encouraged to study God's Word while in the booth.

As Christians we are reminded that although we are in temporary dwellings (our mortal bodies), it is acceptable to be comfortable while waiting for the return of our Lord. We also need to study God's Word to better understand His plans for our lives.

The roof of the booth is also to be made of materials which show the booth as temporary. It must be made of tree branches and should provide shade. The roof is to have enough openings to see the stars at night. Because this is to be a joyous holiday and because of the nature of the ritual, rabbis allow Jews an exception to the requirement of living in the booth if it rains. The rain would make the celebrant uncomfortable and dampen the spirit of a holiday which is meant for rejoicing.

As Christians, this again reminds us that this world is temporal and reminds us to keep our eyes heavenward. When life rains its problems and tribulations upon us, Jesus encourages to come under the shelter of His wings.

Another tradition is to decorate the booth. The Jews associate the holiday of Sukkot with beauty. Jews are encouraged to be creative when decorating the booth. They use many items to decorate such as olive branches, grape vines, decorative carpets and tapestries, oil decanters and many other fine decorations. They intend these to express the beauty of the holiday.

Sukkot is a seven-day festival. The eighth day is another holiday but is considered part of the festival. On the first day of the seven-day festival they build the booth (sukkah) and the celebrant then moves in. The second through sixth days are considered intermediate days and have no special traditions of their own other than to continue living in the booth. The seventh day, however, is a festival day with many rituals and customs. The eighth day of the festival is called "Simhat Torah" or Rejoicing with the Torah (God's Word in Hebrew). As we shall see later, this eighth day is an important part of the parable of the Feast of Sukkot.

The seventh day of Sukkot is called "Hoshanah Rabbah". This is literally translated as "The Great Hosanna" or "The Numerous Hosannas". The word Hosanna means "oh save" and is an exclamation of adoration. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, the people, believing the Messiah had come to reign as King in Jerusalem, cried,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!" Matthew 21:9

The seventh day of the festival represents the coming of our Great Hosanna, Jesus Christ who will, on the seventh millennial day, literally enter the city of Jerusalem to reign on this world as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Before I continue, we must look at a verse in II Peter. This statement of Peter's was included with one of Peter's revelations of our Lord's second coming. That verse is:

"Nevertheless, do not let this fact escape you, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." II Peter 3:8

I believe, that this verse is an important "key" to understanding other scripture to which the passage of time is ascribed as days. Not all of them mind you. But I believe we can apply this key in several parts of the bible including parables spoken by Jesus and in this case, to the length and timing of the festivals ordained by God.

I will refer to this key verse, II Peter 3:8, as "*Peter's Key*" (pun intended). Peter said,
"do not let this fact escape you,"

Peter is asking us not to miss the important fact stated in this verse. I believe that this truth is one of the "keys" which Jesus gave Peter in Matthew,

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven:..." Matthew 16:19

To see the parable of this seven-day festival let us now apply "Peter's Key" to the seven (and eight) days of festival.. At the beginning of the first thousand years we begin to live in the sukkah or temporary dwelling on this earth. The first six thousand years are spent dwelling on this temporal earth without any physical change. The change comes on the seventh millennium or thousand years. This seventh millennium will be called the "Great Hosanna". During the seventh day of the festival Jews still lived in the tents but went up to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. In Revelations we know that Jesus will reign as King of Kings, in absolute righteousness, for one thousand years (one millennium) from His seat of government in Jerusalem (Rev. 20:4). During this millennium Christ's redeemed will rule with Him in Jerusalem. This is clearly shown in next chapter of Revelations, to be the last thousand years of "this" earth before He creates the new heaven and new earth.

The seventh day of the festival, Hosanna Rabah, is also called by Jews "The Final Day of Judgement"! This is based on the Zohar, the sacred book of the Jewish Kabbalists. Tsav 31 b says,

"The seventh day of the festival is the close of the judgment of the world and writs of judgment issue from the sovereign."

There is a Jewish tradition that judgments can be changed before the seventh festival day and that the final seal is not put on their "Books of Life and Death" until then. Jews wish each other "pikta tava", (Hebrew for a good note), meaning a good writ of judgment. At the end of Christ's millennial reign He will convene the "Great White Throne of Judgement" (Rev. 20:11-15) and judge the dead. Those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be judged and cast into hell, and hell will be sealed forever. (Rev. 20:11-15).

Immediately afterwards, He will create a "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1). In Revelations chapter 20, we can see that Jesus Christ will reign on this earth for a thousand years (a millennium). He will, at the end of that reign, judge the dead. Then in Revelations, Chapter 21, He will create the new heavens and earth, beginning the eighth millennium or eighth day. To the Jews, the number eight represents "new beginnings and eternity".

The eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles is considered part of this seven-day festival because Moses said, "you shall keep the feast of the Lord seven days; the first day and (the) eighth (day) a Sabbath." Leviticus 23:39.

The eighth day of the festival is "Simhat Torah". This holiday is always the day after the seventh day of Sukkot and is actually the eighth day of the festival. Notice, this is an eight day festival. And yet it is called a seven day festival. The Lord intentionally set this day apart from the others because it is very different. It is a new beginning. This holiday is called "Simhat Torah" or "Rejoicing with the Torah (or Word)". Remember, this represents the eighth millennium when we begin to spend glorious eternity with Christ on the new earth. In these new heavens and earth, God's people will spend eternity rejoicing with the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

"Then I heard a mighty voice from the throne and I perceived its distinct words, saying, See! The abode of God is with men, and He will tabernacle (live) among them; and they shall be His people, and God shall personally be with them and be their God." Revelations 21:3

Rejoicing for eternity with the Living Word is the essence of Simhat Torah as it is celebrated by the Jews. This holiday represents to the Jews, that time when redeemed Israel will spend eternity with the living Torah, the Messiah. Jews go to extraordinary lengths to celebrate and rejoice, literally with the Torah, the Word of God, on this the eighth day of the festival.

The tradition of Simhat Torah is that they remove all Torah scrolls from their arc (container). All members of the congregation, from youngest to oldest, are allowed and even encouraged to touch and kiss the scrolls. This is representative, to the Jewish celebrants, of the day in which they will have physical access to the Lord, the Living Torah, the Messiah.

After everyone has been allowed to kiss the Torah, the leader breaks out into joyous song and the entire congregation joins in. Everyone begins to dance while holding the Torah scrolls, which are passed around to ensure that everyone, young and old, has an opportunity to dance with The Torah. This, even to the Jews, represents that glorious day when God's redeemed shall spend eternity rejoicing with the Messiah, or the Living Word of God.

The rejoicing on "Simhat Torah" is intended to be an expression of the love for, and the joy of the Torah. They distinguish this expression of joyful love of Torah from another Jewish holiday that relates to the Torah. That Holiday is "Shavous" or "Revealing the Torah". This holiday is celebrated earlier in the year. It commemorates the establishment of the covenant and the Jews acceptance of the "ol Metz vod" or the Yoke of the Law. The expression of this holiday is very different from the joyful celebration of Shavous. They celebrate it through study and are considerably more somber.

But on Simhat Torah there is not the sense of the weight of the yoke of the law, it focuses instead on the Torah as a beloved companion in life. A Jewish scholar stated "As with a bride and a groom dancing with each other at a wedding, on Simhat Torah, Jews desire to hold the Torah in their arms and dance the night away".

THE CYCLE OF THE JEWISH YEAR AND HOLIDAYS

There are three types of holidays which mark the cycle of the Jewish year. These are the High Holy Days, the Pilgrimage Festivals, and the Minor Holidays.

In the cycle of High Holidays we can see another parable. The year begins with Rosh Hashana (new year) which is known as the Day of Judgement (Yom Hading). This cycle ends with the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). This represents the biblical history of this fallen world. It begins with Adam disobeying God and bringing judgement on man and indeed upon all of creation. It will, according to the Word of God, end on the Day of Atonement when the Lord Jesus Christ returns for His bride. His church.

There are two types of time. These are historical (linear) time and cyclic time.

Historical time is linear and is marked by the occurrence of events throughout time. An example of historical time would be the flood during the time of Noah. This was an event that occurred at a fixed point in time. Historical time is a constant linear (in a line) movement into the future and is centered on progress and development. The beginning of the Jewish historical year is the beginning of the high holy day festival cycle. Historical time begins for the Jews with Rosh Hashanah or the New Year. During this holiday an evaluation is made of a persons progress through the previous year both by the celebrant and by God.

Cyclic time represents events which reoccur every year or in a cycle. An example is the four seasons. It is circular and consists of reoccurring patterns. The autumnal equinox is an example of cyclic time. This event happens every year at a fixed point in time. The Jewish cyclic year begins with the month of Nisan. Nisan is recognized by Jews as the first of all the months of the year (and yet it is not the New Year). Nisan is the beginning of the pilgrimage festival cycle. These holidays are Pesach (Passover), Shavout (Revealing the Torah), and Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles).

The seventh and last day of Sukkot (The Feast of Tabernacles) is Hashanah Rabah. Hashanah Rabah is the end of both the Cyclic Pilgrimage Holidays and the Historical High Holiday cycle. Hashanah Rabah (Great Hosanna) is the end of the year and is representative of both the cyclic and historical types of time. The very next day, the eighth day of the festival, is Simhat Torah, or Rejoicing with the Word. This parable of time, illustrates the ending of time on the seventh day, the "Great Hosanna" and the beginning of time everlasting, rejoicing with the Living word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.