



Sukkot I

October 17, 2024

Shalom aleichem Mispacha! Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, is a festival after the fall harvest. It is a Thanksgiving festival celebrating the ingathering of the harvest and commemorating Israel's wanderings in the desert for forty years. Its official name is *Chag HaSukkot*, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. You may also hear *Chag Ha'asif*, the Feast of Ingathering, or sometimes just *HaChag*, the Feast. The rabbis gave it another appropriate name: *Zeman Simchatenu*, the Season of our Joy.

This festival and all of ADONAI's festivals are described in Leviticus 23. 34 "Speak to Bnei-Yisrael, and say, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Feast of Sukkot, for seven days to Adonai. 35 On the first day, there is to be a holy convocation—you are to do no laborious work. 36 For seven days, you are to bring an offering by fire to Adonai. The eighth day will be a holy convocation to you, and you are to bring an offering by fire to Adonai. It is a solemn assembly—you shall do no laborious work." (Leviticus 24:34-36 TLV). Today is our holy convocation called by ADONAI, and we will be convened and assembled again next Thursday, the Eighth Day.

ADONAI also tells us how we are to celebrate. 40 "On the first day you are to take choice fruit of trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and rejoice before Adonai your God for seven days. 41 You are to celebrate it as a festival to Adonai for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations—you are to celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You are to live in sukkot for seven days. All the native-born in Israel are to live in sukkot, 43 so that your generations may know that I had Bnei-Yisrael to dwell in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Adonai your God." (Leviticus 23:40-43 TLV). There's something about worshipping with the *Lulav* that's unexplainable. Shaking branches of trees and a lemon doesn't make any sense in the natural world. But it delivers a spiritual blessing, even a sense of *shalom* when one worships ADONAI in this way. We can also dwell in a *sukkah*. We receive that same spiritual blessing when we gather in our *sukkah* for a meal. Some even like to sleep in them. Unfortunately, we have been unable to build our congregational *sukkah* for the last three years. We have had one for our other years, except during COVID. Not having it is due to a lack of manpower, but ADONAI willing, maybe next year we can have it again. Don't be concerned that we are not doing what the *Torah* has commanded. ADONAI commanded this festival and all other festivals in Leviticus 23 to be observed only in Israel. *Shabbat*, the first *moed* listed there, is to be observed everywhere. When we celebrate with *Lulav* and *sukkah*, it is our voluntary expression of love for ADONAI and Yeshua, a rehearsal for the coming fulfillment of this spiritual picture. Since we no longer have a Temple, bringing the offerings by fire to Adonai is impossible. The modern celebration of *Sukkot* has become a joyous outdoor festival filled with symbols and a party-like atmosphere. The week's focus is the *sukkah* decorated with fruits, vegetables, cornstalks, palms, willows, and other greenery. Family and friends are invited to join us in the *sukkah* to eat and sometimes even to sleep there. Many of us would still like to be able to do that, but these old tents we live in don't

have the strength to construct them or the stamina to hold out for extended celebrating. The *sukkah* can be made of almost anything: wood, PVC pipe, tent poles, etc. The walls can be made from canvas, bamboo, colorful bedsheets, or plywood. Rafters can be bamboo rods, thin wooden sticks, discarded lumber, or fallen branches. The roof is covered with greenery and branches, especially palm fronds, if you can get them. The roof covering is called *sh'cach*. There are two requirements for it. It must be thick enough to provide shade from sunlight but not too dense to prevent the stars from being visible at night. These are the rabbi's requirements but can't always be met. While in Israel during *Sukkot* in 2002, most Jerusalem apartments had the *sukkah* on their balcony covered with a green tarp. A few had one palm frond, possibly purchased from enterprising young Israelis, some of whom we saw illegally harvesting them from public palm trees in roundabouts. We heard they were selling them for \$20.00 per branch. *Oy veh!*

The verse that tells us to take choice fruit of trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and river willows was developed by the rabbis hundreds of years ago into a specific way to celebrate. The name given to these plants is *arba minim*, the four species. The first species, the choice fruit, is an *etrog*, a citron, a citrus fruit similar to a lemon. It looks like a bumpy lemon with a protrusion on one end called a *pitom*, which is the stem that connects the flower to the fruit. The other three plants are bound together into a bundle, referred to as a *lulav*, the Hebrew word for palm branch, which is the dominant part of the bundle. The palm is in the center with two willow (*arava*) branches, *aravim*, on the left, and three myrtle (*hadas*) branches, *hadassim*, on the right. According to the rabbis, the four species symbolize different body parts, which, joined together, serve ADONAI. The willow is the mouth, uttering prayer, and the *etrog* is the heart, the seat of wisdom and understanding. The palm is the spine, symbolic of upright character, and the myrtle, the eyes, are tools of learning and enlightenment. The four species also take on qualities of different types of human beings. The smell was equated with righteous deeds, and the taste was likened to learning. The *etrog* with both taste and smell represents the knowledgeable person who performs good deeds. The myrtle with smell but no taste is the person who is righteous but ignorant. The palm has taste but no smell and indicates one who is learned but does not engage in righteous acts. The willow with neither taste nor smell is the sort of person we'd all prefer not to be. For years, we have enjoyed the Israeli movie *Ushpizin* during *Sukkot*. It is about an orthodox couple who receives guests during *Sukkot* but unhappily finds that they are not perfect guests. Featured in the movie is *Moshe's* prized *Etrog* which succumbs to tragedy. We will show it after *Oneg* today. The ritual of the *lulav* and *etrog* is performed each morning of the festival during morning prayers in the synagogue and can also be performed in the home or in the *sukkah* as well.

What is the significance of *Sukkot* to us as Messianic Jews and Gentiles? The book of *Yochanan* tells us *14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.* (John 1:14a TLV). The word "tabernacled" is derived from the Greek word *skénoó* (skay-no'-o), which means to encamp, dwell or inhabit. *Skenos* is the noun form. In the Septuagint, *skenos* translates the Hebrew word for "tabernacle," *Mishkan*. *Mishkan* is from the Hebrew verb *shakan*, meaning dwell or inhabit. Thus, Yeshua tabernacled among us, possibly referencing the Festival of *Sukkot*. Many now believe that Yeshua was born during this festival. We are not going into the evidence today other than to say that there are three major areas that lead to this conclusion. They are 1) the age and birth of *Yochanan HaMatavil*, John the Immerser, as relates to the birth of Yeshua, 2) the time of the year that shepherds would be out with their flocks, and 3) the service cycle of the priests in the Temple as it

related to Zechariah, John's father, a *kohen*. So, it is possible that the manger described as Yeshua's cradle was actually in a *sukkah*. When Jacob moved back to Canaan from Haran (Genesis 33:17), he settled in *Sukkot*, and built *sukkot*, cattle shelters, for his cattle.

Yeshua observed the *Torah* in every regard, including the observance of the festivals. In John chapter 7, He is shown attending the Festival of *Sukkot* on the seventh day of the festival, *Hoshanah Rabah*. During the festival, there was a water-pouring ceremony each morning. Water was brought by the officiating *kohen* from the pool of Siloam and ceremoniously poured into the basin at the base of the Altar of Burnt Offerings. This was the most joyful of all the Temple ceremonies. The *Mishnah* says "that he that has not seen the rejoicing at the place of water-drawing has never seen rejoicing in his life." (*Sukkah* 5:1). Because it was still dark, the ceremony was accompanied by a torchlight procession, dances, singing, and chanting accompanied by many musical instruments. This was a symbolic act performed in compliance with the prophecy by Isaiah 3 *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* (Isaiah 12:3 TLV). Visualize the scene on the seventh day. There was a tremendous crowd in the Temple. The *kohen* made his way through the darkness up the hill from the pool of Siloam into the Temple enclosure, his way lighted by hundreds of torches. He entered the Temple and approached the altar. The water in his golden pitcher was poured into a basin at the altar's base. As he poured, he brought to mind the prophecy: "Then you will joyfully draw water from the wells of salvation." As soon as this was done, a man standing nearby called out loudly: 37, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture says, 'out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37b-38 TLV). The man was, of course, Yeshua, who spoke of the *Ruach HaKodesh* to be given after His death. In this, He also pointed to Himself as the rock in the wilderness during the 40 years of wandering when the rock gushed forth water: 4 .. and all drank the same spiritual drink—for they were drinking from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the Rock was Messiah. (1 Corinthians 10:4 TLV). We will perform our symbolic water-pouring ceremony next Thursday on *Shemini Atzeret*.

We said that *Sukkot* is also called the Season of Our Joy. Concerning the 40 years in the wilderness, it was a season of joy because Adonai divinely brought the Israelites through the dangers of the wilderness into the Promised Land. Today's festival is a season of joy because we have gone through the seasons of repentance and the redemption of *Yom Kippur*. The joy now is in knowing that our sins were forgiven and the joy of walking with ADONAI, knowing Him, and being obedient to Him. As followers of Yeshua as Messiah, we have that joy daily, but it is good to corporately recognize this spiritual deliverance as our Jewish brothers and sister are doing the same worldwide.

As Yeshua tabernacled among us, so are we in temporary dwellings, the *sukkah* that is our body. This temporary dwelling is a place for our souls and spirits, a temple in which the Holy Spirit can dwell. 19 Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:19-20 TLV). But in the future, we will leave these *sukkot* for more glorious ones as we join Messiah Yeshua in the air. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruptibility, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this corruptible will have put on incorruptibility and this mortal will have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:53-54 TLV).

Sukkot is a *moed*, a Hebrew term meaning “festival” or “feast.” The word derives from a root signifying a circle, capturing the cyclical nature of the annual festivals. At *Pesach*, Messiah Yeshua became our Passover lamb. At *Bikkurim*, Firstfruits, he became the Firstfruits from the dead. At *Shavuot*, He gave us his *Ruach HaKodesh* and wrote his *Torah* on our hearts. We were called to repentance at *Rosh Hashanah*, and at *Yom Kippur*, we were forgiven. Now during *Sukkot*, we are rejoicing as we await the future *shofar* announcing Yeshua's return, joyfully accepting and celebrating our forgiveness. We complete this circle of festivals, year after year while looking forward to the day we will celebrate *Sukkot* in Jerusalem with Messiah Yeshua. On *Hoshana Rabbah*, the Great Day, the sixth day of the festival, Yeshua told us he would give us living water. *Hoshana Rabah* means the great *hoshana*, a contraction of *hoshia na*, words found in the *Hallel* which we prayed together today. 25 *Hoshia-na! Please, Adonai, save now! We beseech You, Adonai, prosper us!* (Psalm 118:25 TLV). This greeting was called out to Yeshua as he entered Jerusalem before his last Passover. The people waved palm branches and called out *Hoshai na!*, Save Now!, a symbolic act taken from *Sukkot*, as they expected Him to deliver them from the Romans. We look forward to the future, Great Day of *Sukkot* when we will wave palm branches before our Messiah and King. Revelation possibly describes the future *Hoshana Rabbah* this way 9 *After these things I looked, and behold, a vast multitude that no one could count—from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues—was standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in 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!”* (Revelation 7:9-10 TLV).

Greet each other with *Chag Sameach*, and let your joy be expressed in the knowledge that we will celebrate *Sukkot* many times with Yeshua in Jerusalem. Then that day will indeed be known as *Zeman Simchatenu*, the Season of our Joy. *Chag Sameach!*