



Sukkot I

October 7, 2025

Chag HaSukkot, the Festival of Tabernacles or the Festival of Booths, is an “appointed time” of ADONAI that occurs at the end of the fall harvest in *eretz Yisra’el*, the land of Israel. There are several other ways to refer to it, but one of the most fitting names given by the rabbis is *Zeman Simchateinu*, the Season of our Joy. It also has several other names. *Chag HaAsif*, meaning the Festival of Ingathering, highlights its connection to the harvest festival. Another name for *Sukkot* is *Chag*, meaning “the Festival,” because it was considered the most important pilgrimage festival, and its overwhelming joy made it the festival above all others. The rabbis viewed it as a time of celebration, marking the end of the agricultural year with a good harvest, but they also saw it as a symbol of the *Olam Haba*, the world to come—a time when we will all live with the Messiah. Leviticus 23 is our primary reference about *Sukkot* in the *Torah*: 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 23:34-36 TLV). As Yeshua’s Messianic Jewish and Gentile followers, our goal is to obey His commands, and we understand these commands in Leviticus 23 as applying to us because He is the Living Word. As the Living Word, the Word made flesh, as John described Him (John 1:1), He is both the author of the *Torah* and our Creator. We understand that the *Torah* addresses us when it states that we should eat only animals with cloven hooves, those that chew the cud, and eat fish with fins and scales, and that we should worship on the seventh-day Sabbath. There is no doubt about that for us, those and many other commands. But there are some commands for which we aren’t held responsible, and most of these in Leviticus 23 fall into that category. The context of Leviticus 23 regarding the *moedim* clearly indicates that these specific commands are meant to be performed only in Israel, and then only when there is a Temple. We can’t bring offerings by fire to ADONAI without a Levitical priesthood and a Temple, so we cannot do those things. But regarding *Sukkot*, the context also clearly shows that the first and eighth days are *Shabbats*. We are not to do ordinary work on them, and we are to assemble before ADONAI just as we are doing today.

Although we are not required to follow all the commands related to *Sukkot*, we want to focus on the aspects that highlight this festival, and worshiping in the traditional Jewish way is very meaningful to us. It’s because, for those of us outside Israel, we also see these festival days as rehearsals for the future when we will celebrate in the land of Israel with Messiah Yeshua. Although we can’t bring offerings by fire, we can celebrate in some of the ways the ancient rabbis have shown us. Regarding *Sukkot*, we are also told: 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). Most everything we are doing today is rabbinic interpretation, and that's OK and most of our liturgy comes from Rabbinic Judaism. For many years, we built a *sukkah* outside the building and happily enjoyed our festival meal there, a *sukkah* constructed according to the guidelines the rabbis laid out. We have not been able to build it in the last few years, and it is unlikely that we can again here under our new property owner. We joyfully worship ADONAI with *lulav* and *etrog* in the way the rabbis have shown us. The four species are the *etrog* (citron), *lulav* (palm branch), *hadas* (myrtle), and *arava* (willow). Earlier in our service, each of us had the opportunity to worship with the *lulav* by shaking it in six directions while reciting the words: *Hodu L'Adonai ki Tov ki le'olam chasdo*. "Give thanks to ADONAI for He is good and his loving kindness endures forever." There is additional rabbinic meaning attached to these different parts of the *lulav*, but we won't go into that today. The activities we undertake to celebrate and worship during the seven days of *Sukkot* and on *Shemini Atzeret*, the Eighth Day of Assembly, are performed in anticipation of the future days when we will celebrate with our Messiah in the land of Israel. Today is a joyful day; a day of rejoicing as we honor ADONAI and our Messiah, and look forward to His return.

As Messianic disciples of Yeshua, *Sukkot* can also have additional significance for us, as we consider the possibility that He was born during this festival. Yeshua's disciple John wrote: *4 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. We looked upon His glory, the glory of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14 TLV). The Living Word, Yeshua, became a human being and lived among His fellow Jews and Israelites. The English word "dwelt," found in other translations, comes from the Greek word *skene* (skeen-ee), which is itself derived from a word meaning "tabernacle." That's why the Tree of Life Version of the Bible uses the word "tabernacle". Essentially, John writes that Yeshua "tabernacled among us," which may itself be a reference to *Sukkot*. Many believe that He was born during this festival, and I do as well. But we don't state this emphatically since it is based on circumstantial evidence, and we guard against celebrating it as such, for that would be an addition of something that ADONAI has not commanded. We can see the possibilities, but should not claim them as the absolute truth, since Scripture doesn't verify them.

Three clues lead us to this understanding. They are 1) The time of year of *Yochanan Hamatavi'l's*, John the Immerser's, birth, in relation to the birth of Yeshua. 2) The time of the year that shepherds would be in the fields with their flocks, and 3) The Temple service cycles of the priests. Yeshua being born during *Sukkot* also makes it possible that the manger, the feeding trough described as Yeshua's cradle, may have been located in a *sukkah*.

The most substantial evidence that Yeshua could have been born during *Sukkot* comes from calculations about John's father Zechariah's time of service in the Temple. By determining the times he served in the Temple, we can approximate when John was born. Based on John's birth, we can also make an approximate estimation of when Yeshua was born.

With reference to Zechariah's service in the Temple, Luke says: *23 When the days of his priestly service had been completed, he went home. 24 After these days, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant....* (Luke 1:23-24a TLV). The background is that while Zechariah was serving in the Holy Place of the Temple, the Angel Gabriel told him he was going to have a son. Both he and Elizabeth were elderly, and Elizabeth was barren. This would be another miraculous birth, just like Isaac to Abraham and Sarah. John, who is essential to the story, was conceived after Zechariah returned home from that period of service in the Temple. By

knowing when he served in the Temple, we can estimate when John was born. We are told that after Elizabeth conceived, she hid herself for five months (Luke 1:24), and then told that one month later, in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent to tell Miryam that she was going to become pregnant with ADONAI's son. (Luke 1:26). In this, Luke shows us the relative ages of John and his cousin Yeshua, and from this information, we understand that John was approximately six months older than Yeshua.

We now need to look at 1st Chronicles to gather information about when Zechariah was serving in the Temple. There, we can find the lists of the divisions of the *kohanim*, the priests, arranged in the order in which they were to serve in the Temple. This method of organizing priests for Temple service, along with the Levites, was set up by King David around the time he anointed Solomon to succeed him as king. The plan was to divide the descendants of Aaron's two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, into 24 groups of priests. Each group of a thousand priests would serve twice a year, each time for an entire week. Additionally, during the festivals, all 24 divisions would be on duty. 1st Chronicles states that Zechariah was part of the eighth division called *Aviyah*. (1 Chronicles 24:10).

The biblical year started every year on the 1st of *Nisan*, and it was from this date that calculations for Temple service were made. Zechariah's eighth division would have served during the 10th week of the year, starting from *Nisan* 1. Why was it the 10th week and not the 8th? It was because all priests served during the two weeks surrounding *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, the two festivals that took place during these first weeks of the year. Zechariah's service during these two festivals advanced his division's schedule by two weeks.

During his service, we find Zechariah burning incense at the Golden Altar of Incense in the Holy Place of the Temple: *9 According to the custom of the priestly office, it became his lot to enter the Holy Place of Adonai to burn incense.* (John 1:9 TLV). In his book **The Temple,** Alfred Edersheim explains how Zechariah received this great honor, specifically that he was chosen by lot in the pre-service meeting of the priests in the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple. Zecharia was chosen from all the priests of his course who were on duty, about one thousand. Since each division had so many priests, we are told that burning incense at the Golden Altar was a once-in-a-lifetime honor. Zechariah had become an extremely old man and had never received this honor before. While the Levites retired from service at age 50, the *kohenim* usually served throughout their entire lives. Luke continues: **<10>** *10 And the whole crowd of people was praying outside at the hour of incense burning* (John 10:10 TLV). As the incense burned and the smoke with its aroma ascended to ADONAI, eighteen special prayers were also being offered by the worshippers, the 18 benedictions of the *Amidah*, the ancient "Standing Prayer." It is in the *Amidah* that we begin to see a connection between John, the son who was to be born to Zechariah, and Elijah. Although Elijah is not directly mentioned in these prayers, an implication exists. The 15th Benediction is a prayer for the coming of the Messiah, and it was well understood at that time that Elijah would precede the Messiah's arrival. Consequently, that hope for Elijah was also reflected in the prayers of the people. Those gathered in the Temple that day didn't know it, but the son soon to be born to Zechariah was destined to be Elijah in spirit and power. This was prophesied by the angel Gabriel as he spoke to Zechariah, who stood serving in the Holy of Holies. *17 And he will go before Him (the Messiah) in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to the children and the disobedient ones to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready for ADONAI a prepared people.* (Luke 1:17-18 TLV). It was significant that Zechariah offered incense during the time of these prayers, as the incense symbolized prayers rising to ADONAI. Gabriel also said: *13 "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife,*

Elizabeth, will give birth to your son, and you will name him John” (Luke 1:13b TLV). Gabriel said that Zechariah was praying, but what exactly was his prayer? It must have been for a son, because no other answer to prayer is found in the scripture. And John was special, a miracle son to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age, who would become the forerunner of the Messiah.

By counting nine months from Elizabeth’s conception, which happened about ten weeks after *Nisan* 1, you arrive at Passover the next year, and it was probably at that time that John was born. Passover, as the time of John’s birth, also aligns well with scripture, which states that Elijah will come before the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). Jewish tradition sets a chair for Elijah at the Passover table, hoping that he will come soon, signaling the arrival of the Messiah.

Miryam, the wife of Joseph, also had an encounter with Gabriel: *26 Then in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by Adonai into a town in the Galilee named Natzeret 27 and to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Miriam* (Luke 1:26-27 TLV). Elizabeth became pregnant shortly after Zechariah served in the Temple, around the middle of Sivan, roughly 10 weeks after Nisan 1. Six months later, Gabriel spoke to *Miryam*. Counting forward six months from mid-Sivan, the time of John’s conception, brings us to the possible time of Yeshua’s conception, the month of *Kislev*, around the time of *Chanukkah*. If this is true, the month of *Chanukkah* represents more for us than just the *Chanukkah* story and could also be the time of conception of our Messiah.

In the 1st century, *Chanukkah* was known as the second *Sukkot*. This tradition originated from the belief that the eight days of *Chanukkah* were a divine gift from ADONAI, intended to honor the eight days of *Sukkot* that were lost several centuries earlier due to the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes and his pagan soldiers. The time between *Chanukkah*, the possible time of *Miryam*’s conception, and *Sukkot* the next year would have been about 280 days. This would fit within the normal gestation period for a human female. So, it’s possible that Yeshua was born on this day, *Tishrei* 15, the first day of *Sukkot*, a Sabbath. If this is true, Yeshua’s *b’rit milah*, his circumcision, performed on the eighth day after His birth, would have taken place on *Shemini Atzeret*, the eighth day concluding festival.

We don’t definitively claim it happened this way, but various factors suggest Yeshua’s birth occurred at this time. One was that shepherds were in the fields with their flocks when an angel appeared to them. He said: *10 “Do not be afraid! For behold, I proclaim Good News to you, which will be great joy to all the people. 11 A Savior is born to you today in the city of David, who is Messiah the Lord* (Luke 2:10b-11 TLV). We also know that during this time of year, the shepherds were still in the pastures with their flocks. But in late December, because of the cold weather, the flocks would have already been inside their winter quarters. Additionally, the angel’s words, *great joy to all the people*, are very similar to the rabbi’s name for this season, *Zeman Simchateinu*, the Season of Our Joy.

We are worshipping ADONAI today on the first day of *Chag HaSukkot*, the Festival of *Sukkot*, the possible time of our Messiah’s birth. If He were born on this day, it adds extra significance for us during the season of *Chanukkah*, the possible time of His incarnation. There is further evidence supporting this possibility. *Chanukkah* is called the Festival of Lights because, supposedly, there was only enough oil to light the Temple *menorah* for one day, but it lasted for eight days. However, this comes from the *Talmud* and was written more than three hundred years after the event occurred. There is no mention of oil in the Books of 1st and 2nd Maccabees, the historical account of the event. The truth is that the eight-day

duration of *Chanukkah* was linked to *Sukkot*, which Israel was unable to celebrate during their fight against the Syrian army. According to the Books of Maccabees, the observances of the festival included offering thanksgiving to G-d for the success of purifying the Temple and singing songs of praise.

However, there is still a connection between Yeshua and *Chanukkah* due to its association with *Sukkot*, specifically as a belated celebration of *Sukkot*. One year, Yeshua arrived in Jerusalem about halfway through the Festival of *Sukkot* and then taught for several days. On the seventh day of *Sukkot*, He made an important statement: *37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast (Hoshanah Rabah; “the great day”), Yeshua stood up and cried out loudly, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. (John 7:37 TLV). This was His declaration of Himself as Mayim Chayim, Living Water, the Holy Spirit that was to come from Him. The next chapter begins: 1 But Yeshua went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn, He came again into the Temple. All the people were coming to Him, and He sat down and began to teach them. (John 8:1-2 TLV). You’re starting to think I am going down a rabbit hole, but hang on! That day was the eighth day, Shemini Atzeret. Atzeret means “to hold back,” and the rabbis thought that this meant that ADONAI wanted us to tarry with Him one more day. This image of “remaining” is symbolic of eternity. On Shemini Atzeret, Yeshua said: 12 “I am the light of the world. The one who follows Me will no longer walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12b TLV). Was there something that had just taken place during *Sukkot* that prompted Yeshua’s statement? Yes, there was. The people had been beneath four 75-foot-tall candelabras in the Court of the Women, each of the first six nights of the festival. Each candelabra had four light bowls, and they were said to produce enough light to illuminate all of Jerusalem. The light was so bright it lit up every courtyard and could be seen from miles away. By saying “I am the light of the world,” was Yeshua connecting the Festival of *Chanukkah*, the “Second *Sukkot*,” with the actual Festival of *Sukkot*? It may have been His intention, but we don’t know, however, it is interesting to consider. Whatever the case, we who have trusted Him are beneficiaries of His light and have received the “light of life,” salvation, and everything that goes with it. Don’t place too much emphasis on this possibility, but ponder it for yourself.*

During *Sukkot*, we see a spiritual picture of Yeshua. We have seen spiritual images of Him during other festivals, including *Pesach*, *Chag HaMatzot*, *Shavuot*, *Yom Teruah*, and *Yom Kippur*. In the festivals we have celebrated so far this year, we have seen Yeshua as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, as the Bread of Life, as the giver of the Comforter, as the coming King who will raise the dead and His living followers, and as the righteous Judge before whom everyone must ultimately stand. Today, during *Sukkot*, we see Him pictured as the reigning King who rules over all the earth for eternity. We excitedly look forward to Yeshua’s divine fulfilment of the three Fall festivals, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot*, just as He has already fulfilled the two Spring festivals of *Pesach* and *Shavuot*. Until these events occur, we will continue to honor, commemorate, and worship the Father and His Son, Yeshua, on the festival days that ADONAI has commanded us in His *Torah*. *Chag Sukkot Sameach*: Have a joyous festival! We also cry: *Maranata*! Our L-rd, come! Yeshua, may your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven!