

**Sukkot I**

September 26, 2026

Shalom aleichem Mispacha! *Sukkot*, the Festival of Tabernacles, is a post-harvest festival, a Thanksgiving celebration that commemorates the ingathering of the harvest. It also commemorates Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness when they lived in flimsy temporary shelters. Its official name is *Chag HaSukkot*, the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths. 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.

We can also view the forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness as a spiritual picture of their wandering over the past 3,400 years. The symbolic wilderness of the last 3400 years captures all the strife and turmoil of those years leading up to the present day, first in the Middle East and now throughout the earth for all its inhabitants. Yeshua said: *6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must happen, but it is not yet the end.* (Matthew 24:6 TLV). To give us forewarning of these things, He had *Yochanan* write *Revelation*, a metaphor-rich account of events from Yeshua's time to the end. Most of the events described are not literal end-times events, but metaphors for events that have happened throughout history.

Because Yeshua's Messianic Gentile disciples come from so many different backgrounds, they have been exposed to a variety of theologies over the years. The most prominent one, Dispensationalism, lingers throughout the Body of Messiah and presents a skewed picture of the end times, depicting the events John describes as primarily futuristic and occurring at the end. However, many Messianic followers of Yeshua reject this, believing that these events are progressive and unfold throughout history. In reality, Dispensationalism is a false doctrine, with its beginnings originally promoted by two Jesuit priests, one in the 1500s and the other in the 1700s. Because Catholicism was beginning to be viewed by Protestants as "the whore of Babylon" of *Revelation*, the first priest invented an end-time scenario that the second embellished, suggesting that the later events of *Daniel 9*, specifically verse 27, do not occur alongside the rest of the events of *Daniel* but in the far future at the time of the end. In the 1830s, Reverend John Nelson Darby used their writings to develop his theology of Dispensationalism, giving that meaning to *Daniel 9:27*. *27 Then he will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of abominations will come one who destroys, until the decreed annihilation is poured out on the one who destroys."* (*Daniel 9:27 TLV*). His theology says this means a global leader will arise to rule the world, initially appearing benevolent by allowing Temple sacrifices to resume, only to turn tyrannical and ban them after three and a half years. But Scripture does not

support this. Only four verses mention the word antichrist, and they are all in 1 John and 2 John, referring to the spirit of antichrist that was already in the world. In reality, Daniel 9:27 refers to Yeshua, who, by His death on the cross in the middle of a literal week, rendered the Temple offerings ineffective, even though they continued for another 40 years after His death. Captivated by Darby's theory, Reverend C.I. Scofield published an annotated study Bible in 1909 that popularized "Dispensational Theology. This perspective has shaped the Body of Messiah for more than a hundred years.

Sukkot is the joyful conclusion to these 3400 years of wilderness wanderings, portraying ADONAI's presence dwelling among us, divine provision, and the final, complete spiritual harvest. 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). Since there is no longer a Temple, Israel cannot make offerings by fire. 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). While we are not commanded to celebrate this way, there's something inexplicable about worshipping with the *Lulav*. Shaking tree branches and a citrus fruit doesn't make sense in the natural world, but it brings a spiritual blessing, even a sense of *shalom*, when one worships ADONAI in this way. We can also dwell in a *sukkah*. While we are not commanded to, we are permitted to do so, and we experience the same sense of *shalom* when we gather in a *sukkah* for a meal. Some even sleep in them. We haven't been able to build a congregational *sukkah* for the past few years, and while we aren't required to, we hope to do so when we can. When we celebrate with the *Lulav* and the *sukkah*, we voluntarily express our love for ADONAI and Yeshua, rehearsing the coming fulfillment of this spiritual picture. The modern celebration of *Sukkot* has become a joyous outdoor festival filled with symbols and a party-like atmosphere. This week, the 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* for a meal. The *sukkah* can be made of almost anything: wood, PVC pipe, tent poles, etc. You can make the walls from canvas, bamboo, colorful bedsheets, or plywood. Rafters can be bamboo rods, thin wooden sticks, discarded lumber, or fallen branches. Cover the roof with greenery and branches, especially palm fronds, if you can get them. During our 2003 visit to Israel for *Sukkot*, most apartments in Jerusalem had their *sukkot* on the balconies, with green tarp walls. A few had one palm frond, possibly purchased from enterprising young Israelis, whom we saw harvesting fronds from public palm trees in roundabouts. We heard they were selling them for \$20.00 per branch.

The verse that tells us to take the 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 of celebrating. These plants are called *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*, the stem that connects the flower to the fruit. The other three plants are bound together into a bundle called a *lulav*, the Hebrew word for palm branch, which is the bundle's dominant component. The palm is in the center, with two willow branches (*aravim*) on the left and three myrtle branches (*hadassim*) on the right. According to the rabbis, the four species symbolize different body parts that, when joined together, serve ADONAI. The willow is the mouth, speaking 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 for learning and enlightenment. The four species also take on qualities of different types of human beings. Smell was equated with righteous deeds, and taste with learning. The *etrog*, with both taste and smell, represents the knowledgeable person who performs good deeds. The myrtle, with smell but no taste, represents 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. During *Sukkot*, we have enjoyed the Israeli movie *Ushpizin*. It follows an Orthodox couple in Jerusalem who host guests during *Sukkot* but are unhappy to discover the guests are not perfect, but rather escaped convicts. The movie features Moshe's prized *Eetrog*, which meets a tragic end, becoming a lemon for salad, but the story ends with a positive spiritual outcome and news of a long-desired child.

What does *Sukkot* mean to us, Messianic Jews and Gentiles? Is there anything else to add to its importance? Yes, there is: Yeshua's personal relationship with *Sukkot*. Yochanan wrote, 1 "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14a TLV). The word "tabernacled" derives from the Greek word *skénoó* (skay-no'-o), meaning to "encamp," "dwell," or "inhabit." The noun form *skenos* (skay-noss) means "tent" or "abode," and can be used metaphorically to refer to the human body as a temporary tent. Around 250 years before Yeshua was born, a group of Jews began translating the *Tanakh* into Greek, a project that took more than 100 years to complete. It was called the *Septuagint*, from the Latin word for seventy, because, according to tradition, 72 Jewish scholars translated it at the request of the Egyptian pharaoh for inclusion in the Great Library in Alexandria. In the *Septuagint*, *skenos* (skay-noss) translates the Hebrew word *Mishkan*, meaning "tabernacle." *Mishkan* comes from the Hebrew verb *shakan*, meaning "to dwell" or "to inhabit." In this sense, Yeshua tabernacled among us, possibly alluding to *Sukkot* as the time of His birth. Some believe He was born during that festival. We are not delving into the full evidence today, except to say that three major areas lead to this conclusion. The age and birth of Yeshua's cousin Yochanan HaMatbil, John the Immerser, relative to Yeshua's birth, is one factor in determining the time of year. A second determinant of time is the time of year when shepherds would be out with their flocks. The third is the priests' service cycle in the Temple, specifically as it relates to the *kohen* Zechariah, John's father, and to the time when his wife, *Elisheva*, became pregnant. These three point to a Fall season of Yeshua's birth. Also, the manger, described as Yeshua's

cradle, could have been in a *sukkah*, a shelter built in a barn for *Sukkot*. A *sukkah* is a “cattle shelter,” as we learn from Jacob’s return to Canaan from Haran (Genesis 33:17). He settled in the town of *Sukkot* and built *sukkot* (singular, *sukkah*), cattle shelters, for his cattle. While the evidence is significant, ADONAI has not commanded us to observe or celebrate it, and we don’t.

We know Yeshua observed the *Torah* in every respect, which would have included observing all of the festivals. In John chapter 7, He is shown attending the Festival of *Sukkot* on the seventh day, *Hoshanah Rabah*. During the seven days of the festival, the water-pouring ceremony (*Nisuch HaMayim*) took place each morning. Priests poured both water, as a physical prayer for rain, and wine, in thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest, into two dedicated silver bowls with drainage spouts at the top of the Altar of Burnt Offering. The liquids mixed and drained down to the altar's base and into the drainage system. After all-night festivities, at daybreak a large, jubilant crowd joined the priests in a joyous, music-filled procession from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam to fetch water, then returned to pour it on the altar. When we were there in 2003, some of you will remember that only a few steps were exposed before reaching the water. Archaeologists have now uncovered three distinct sets of five steps—15 total—separated by stone landings. They also found a massive, ancient dam beneath the Pool of Siloam, the oldest and largest ever found in Jerusalem, roughly 40 feet high, 69 feet long, and 26 feet wide. Reaching the Altar of Burnt Offering, the officiating *kohen* ceremoniously poured the water into the silver basin. 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 Isaiah 3: 3 “*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*” (Isaiah 12:3 TLV). This took place each morning of the festival, but now imagine the scene on the seventh day. On days one through six, immediately before pouring the water and wine, the priests processed around the altar once, but on the 7th day, they marched around the altar seven times in an intense, ecstatic display of praise and prayer. Then the *kohen* poured the water from his golden pitcher into the silver basin, a physical, symbolic prayer for rain. As he poured, the crowd would have remembered the prophecy: “Then you will joyfully draw water from the wells of salvation.” As the water was poured out, 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 Yeshua. This was a climactic time. As they poured out the water on this final day, the Temple crowds shook lulavs (palm branches) and chanted the *Hallel* psalms. Specifically, they shouted Psalm 118:25: “*Hosanna! (Save us, please!) O Lord, please send prosperity!*” (This, known as *Hakafot* [Circuits], is something we do on *Shemini Atzeret*, because there is no time to do it during this celebration). The atmosphere was filled with a desperate, collective plea for physical rain and spiritual salvation. At this peak moment, Yeshua stood and shouted, “*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.*” He signaled to the crowds that He was the true source of water and that the ritual water from the Pool of Siloam could satisfy only temporary, physical thirst. He was the ultimate fulfillment of their prayer for “Hosanna”

(Salvation). The spiritual water they prayed for stood before them, offering eternal blessing through the *Ruach HaKodesh*. He declared Himself the ultimate fulfillment of all these things: the Temple, the ritual they had been performing, Israel's prayers for rain and especially salvation through the *Ruach HaKodesh* to be given after His death. He was also the embodiment of 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). Traditional Judaism has many beautiful traditions for the Festival of *Sukkot*, but we have one they don't. Each year, we reenact the 7th day *Nisuch HaMayim* by pouring water into a basin at the foot of the *bima*, remembering Yeshua's words: "*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.'*" And we will do this in just a few minutes. Page | 5

As Yeshua tabernacled among His people Israel, so we are in temporary dwellings: the *sukkah* that is our body. This temporary dwelling is a place for our souls and spirits, a temple where 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.* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 TLV). But in the future, we will leave these earthly *sukkot* for more glorious heavenly 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). We will receive incorruptible heavenly bodies, much like Yeshua's. What a glorious day!

Sukkot is a *moed*, a Hebrew term meaning "festival" or "feast." The word derives from a root meaning "circle," capturing the cyclical and recurring nature of the annual festivals. At *Pesach*, Messiah Yeshua became our Passover lamb. At *Bikkurim*, 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. At *Sukkot*, we will live in Yeshua's presence forever, a complete picture of ADONAI's mercy. Now, during today's Festival of *Sukkot*, we rejoice as we await the future *shofar* that will announce Yeshua's return, joyfully accepting and celebrating our forgiveness. We complete this cycle of festivals, year after year, looking forward to the day we will celebrate *Sukkot* in Jerusalem with Messiah Yeshua. On *Hoshana Rabbah*, the Great Day, the seventh day of the festival, Yeshua told us he would give us living water. *Hoshana Rabbah* means the "great hoshana," or great salvation, with *hoshana* a contraction of *hoshia na*. This was the greeting called out to Yeshua as he entered Jerusalem before his last Passover. The people waved palm branches and shouted *Hoshia na!* (Save Now!). Save us! Save us, a symbolic act taken from *Sukkot*, as they expected Him to deliver them from Roman occupation. We look forward to the future and to the Great Day of *Sukkot*, when we will wave palm branches before our Messiah and King in Jerusalem. Revelation 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 Sukkot 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 Sukkot Sameach!*