

A Short Introduction to Sukkot

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Today is the third day of *Chag HaSukkot*, in English “Festival of Tabernacles” or “Booths.” It is also known as “*Chag HaAsif*” or “Festival of Ingathering,” and it is the last of the three pilgrimage festivals.

Although we will hear more about *Sukkot* later, I want to introduce this special season now at the beginning of the service, so that as things unfold, newcomers among us will have better understanding.

The word *Sukkot* means booths or temporary dwellings, and the holiday of *Sukkot* lasts for seven days beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month on the lunar calendar, which is *Tishri*. We traditionally live and eat in *sukkot* in remembrance of when the Israelites did the same in response to God’s commandment. We keep the first day of *Sukkot* as a Sabbath and therefore do no customary work on it, and we hold a Holy Convocation on it in obedience to Scripture; we did that in our home gatherings this past Wednesday evening. These things are in compliance with Leviticus 23:33-36, and in a later verse we read:

“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.”

The materials out of which the Israelites were commanded to make their *sukkot* – “the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook” (the four species, or *arba minim*) are what have given rise to the tradition of waiving the *lulav* and *etrog*, as we will do later in the service. The facet of *Sukkot* that commands us to live in booths reminds us of God’s provision for the Jewish people and for all of us throughout the ages and even today, so *Sukkot* is a time of thanksgiving and a call to faith to place ourselves in God’s hands.

The seven day feast of *Chag HaSukkot* ends at sundown next Wednesday, but Thursday (beginning Wednesday evening) is the “eighth day,” or *Sh’mini Atzeret*. Many consider it the eighth day of *Sukkot*, but we consider it an additional day extension, because Leviticus plainly commands that the Feast of *Sukkot* shall be only seven days. *Sh’mini Atzeret* is defined in Scripture as one of the annual

Sabbaths, so we do not do regular work next Thursday, and we will have *Sh'mini Atzeret* home gatherings next Wednesday evening.

There are several times that *Sukkot* is mentioned in the New Covenant Scriptures, but I will mention just one – perhaps the most important one of them, John 7:37-43:

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Yeshua stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Yeshua was not yet glorified. Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Mashiach." But some said, "Will the Mashiach come out of Galilee? "Has not the Scripture said that the Mashiach comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him.”

We don't know whether that "last great day of the feast" was day seven of *Sukkot* or *Sh'mini Atzeret*, but, whichever it was, it is where the division among the Jewish people regarding Yeshua's identity first began.

I saved a very important Scripture about *Sukkot* for last; it is Zechariah 14:16-17:

“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. 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.”

This Scripture is of great significance in prophesying that all the nations of the earth will one day come to recognize their connectedness to Israel as the nation of priests that hosts the special presence of God.

And with that, let us proceed with our service.