

The Feasts of the Lord, Part 7 – Tabernacles

(Easter, April 5th, 2015)

Summary

- The Feast of Tabernacles, or *Sukkot* in Hebrew, is the last of the seven great Feasts of the Lord. [*The commands regarding its observance are given in Lev. 23:33-43, Num 29:12-39, and Dt 31:10-13.*]
 - It was a one week long feast in the early fall, beginning on the 15th of Tishiri, which is five days after the Day of Atonement.
 - A time of joy, it marked the end of the summer harvest and was referred to in Exodus as the Feast of Ingathering, for it was observed after all the crops had been gathered into the storehouses (Ex. 23:16 and 34:22)
 - This week long celebration was also the third and final Feast requiring a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
- Biblical prescriptions for observing *Sukkot*
 1. The people were to build shelters or huts and live in them during the week of the feast, thus the feast was also called the Feast of Booths. The Latin word is *tabernaculum*, from which we derive our English word for the feast, Tabernacles.
 2. The week began and ended with a day of rest, no work done.
 3. Also on the first day the Israelites were to cut tree branches (palm, willow, etc.) use them to celebrate and rejoice in the Lord throughout the week.
 4. Food offerings and many sacrifices were made in the Temple each day of the feast (Num 29:12-38).
 5. Every seven years, in addition to the above, the Law was to be publically read to the people (Dt. 31:10-13).

Meaning/Significance

- This feast was perhaps the largest of all the seven, it required the most sacrifices, all 24 divisions of Levitical priests, pilgrimage, the building of booths, gathering tree branches, and elaborate worship services at the Temple.
- The booths were to remind Israel of their time in the wilderness, when they sojourned from Egypt to Canaan, and dwelled in tents. This association with the tents and the wilderness was specifically commanded by God.
 - The key emphasis for Israel, both then in the wilderness, and at the present time of the Feast, was on the transitory nature of their dwellings. That is, their homes and hardship were temporary until they reached the Promised Land.

- At the end of the week the people came out of their booths and celebrated not having to live that way anymore.
- The booths served as a prophetic reminder of God's promises fulfilled.
- It marked the end of the harvest season, thus carrying a dimension of thanksgiving of all that had been provided, and hope that new rains will come in the expectancy of a new harvest.
 - Thus the Feast marked both the prosperity enjoyed in the Land of Promise, but also the reminder of the hardships that brought them there.
 - To quote Allan Ross, the Feast may be summarized this way: "The people of God must preserve in memory how the Lord provided for them throughout the year and how he proved for their ancestors as he led them to the fulfillment of his promises.
- The Feast not only marked the end of the harvest season, but also the beginning of the rainy season, which in Judea runs from November to March. The regular rhythms and cycles of rain during this part of the year were vital to the ongoing cycles of planting and growing crops.
 - Thus a significant part of the services of Sukkot involved prayer asking for and giving thanks for rain and water.
 - During the days of the Temple in the first century BC, an elaborate procession was established wherein the High Priest would go to the Pool of Siloam and fill a golden pitcher of water. He would return to the temple and pour out the water as a libation offering to God.
 - In addition, an elaborate light ceremony was also developed, where priests would light hundreds of torches which could be seen for miles around Jerusalem
 - Although these practices were not prescribed in Scripture, they were had been around for hundreds of year by the time of Jesus. It is no small coincidence then that in John 7 and 8, Jesus is at the Feast of Booths and says, I am living water, and I am the light of the world!

Application & Fulfillment

- Three things to focus on: Thanksgiving, judgment, and resurrection
 - Thanksgiving and gratitude are expressed in giving praise to God and finding ways to use what God has given for his glory.
 - Like Israel's transient nature in the wilderness, as Christians our citizenship and true home is in heaven, the New Creation with Christ—Revelation 21:1-7
 - Our lives, however short and miserable or long and fruitful, are still temporary. We must be able to look to the coming kingdom, which is already here in part, but one day will arrive in full, where God's blessing, prosperity, and perfection will be established at the end of the age.

- Do we anticipate leaving this temporary state and entering into the permanent place of God's rest with him?
- Fulfillment in Christ: Judgment and Resurrection
 - Look at this passage from St. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5. Although he does not specifically mention the Feast, the images and themes of the Feast of Tabernacles are strongly present.

5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. **2** Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, **3** because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. **4** For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. **5** Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. **7** For we live by faith, not by sight. **8** We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. **9** So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

- Judgment
 - Repeatedly the Bible refers to the final judgment as a harvest, where God will gather to himself his children, and burn the chaff of the wicked. Tabernacles anticipates the final judgment.
 - Here, Paul holds up the 'end game' of this temporary life: the Day of the Lord and the judgment of all by God.
 - We will stand before God either clothed in the righteousness of Christ, or in our own clothing, which is nothing more than the 'emperor's new clothing.'
- Resurrection
 - Paul uses the image of the tents to refer to our mortal bodies, and their temporary-ness, like the temporary-ness of the Israelite tents in the wilderness.
 - The Gospel promise is that through faith in Christ we who are mortal shall share in the immortal 'dwelling', that is a resurrected immortal body like Jesus, who was raised and shall die no more.