

The Good Word

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BIBLICALLY APPOINTED FEAST OF TABERNACLES¹

by Dr. Seraphim Steger

In this series of articles on the Biblically Appointed Feasts of Israel (listed in *Leviticus 23*), we now come to the seventh and final of the LORD'S Appointed Feasts, *Sukkot*,² the Feast of Tabernacles, the most joy-filled of all the ancient festivals. It was the 3rd of the three pilgrim feasts in which all Israelite males were required to present themselves before the LORD,³ and the 3rd of the three harvest festivals. Finally, as the last of the three fall festivals, it finishes the foreshadowing of the future events at Christ's second coming and His role in the salvation of the world. The first harvest festival was that of barley, corresponding to the Festival of Firstfruits wherein Christ Jesus, through His resurrection, and the Old Testament Saints, through their rescue from Hades by Christ Himself, were the firstfruits of salvation in the Church. The second harvest festival was of the wheat harvest, corresponding to Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, wherein the Holy Spirit poured forth upon the nascent New Testament Church expanding the Church both on earth and in heaven. The Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Ingathering, was the final harvest of all the crops at the end of the agricultural year and corresponds to the ingathering of all the remaining Saints at the end of the age. But there is much more to this feast, as we shall see.

The 8 day festival of Sukkot begins on the 15th of Tishrei -- following only 5 days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Sukkot, as indeed all the previous appointed feasts listed in the Law of Moses, testifies of Christ Jesus and His Church, but in a veiled manner, i.e., through types and metaphors.

To best appreciate all the historical and spiritual aspects of the feast, we will need to look at the Holy Scriptures, historical records, and especially the rabbinical descriptions of the feast during the years leading up to the time of Christ's incarnation and His ministry in Judæa. The eschatological aspects of the feast are seen in the Old Testament Prophets

1. Scripture passages are from the King James Version unless otherwise stated.
2. חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת, *Hag ha-Sukkot*, (Alternate English spellings: Succot/Sukkoth/Succhoth), the *Feast of the Booths*.
3. *Deuteronomy 16:16* *Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles ...*

(especially *Isaiah* and *Zechariah*) and the *Apocalypse of St. John*.

THE BIBLICAL RECORD AND THE PRACTICE OF SUKKOT

Sukkot was first revealed to Moses as the *feast of ingathering*,⁴ a harvest feast in *Exodus*:

Exodus 23:14 "Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. 15 Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) 15 And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. 17 Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD."

Exodus 34:22. "And thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end."

Later, the LORD gave Moses more detailed instructions and called it the Feast of Tabernacles:

Leviticus 23: 34 "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD. 35 On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. 36 Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. 37 These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: 38 Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD. 39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. 40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook;⁵ and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.⁶ 41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD

4. חַג הַאֲסִיף *Hag ha-Asif* = Feast of Ingathering

5. Jewish Oral Tradition identifies these 4 species as 1. the fruit of the beautiful tree: the *esrog* (a citron); 2. branches of the date palm: the *lulav*; 3. twig of a plaited tree: the *hadass* (myrtle); 4. willows of the brook: the *aravah*.

6. The Pharisees understood these 4 species to be what the

seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: 43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”



ILLUSTRATION OF THE CAMP OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS WITH THE TENTS OF THE 12 TRIBES SURROUNDING THE TABERNACLE WITH THE PILLAR OF FIRE ABOVE THE HOLY OF HOLIES

In the Fourth Book of Moses, *Numbers 29:12-39* contains a very long and detailed listing of all the animal sacrifices and their drink and meal offerings -- many more than any other festival. In addition to the regular daily offerings, there were 70 bullocks, 98 lambs, 14 rams -- all as whole burnt offerings, as well as 7 goats for sin offerings, for a grand total of 189 animal sacrifices. On the 8th day of the festival, a holy convocation for the Jews, an additional bullock, 7 lambs, 1 ram, and goat were offered. In the rabbinical tradition the 70 bullocks were offered for the salvation of the world: “R. Eleazar stated, ‘To what do those seventy bullocks [that were offered during the seven days of the Festival] correspond? To the seventy nations.’”⁷ This gives rise to another name for Sukkot: the *Feast of the Nations*.

Deuteronomy 16:13 “Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: 14 And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. 15 Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD

worshippers were to carry in their hands, not what they built their booths out of. This is the correct interpretation according to the renowned 19th century protestant Hebraist and converted Jew Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as they were in the Time of Christ*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985, p.273.

7. *The Socino [Babylonian] Talmud, Seder Moed, Tractate Sukkot* 55b, Gemara, Judaica Press, Brooklyn, NY 1965-1990, Davka Corporation DVD, 2017, footnote adds: *Seventy is the traditional number of Gentile nations, and the seventy bullocks are offered to make atonement for them.*

thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice.”

In this passage we see that Sukkot was the feast of rejoicing, a time which the rabbis described in the *Kiddush*⁸ and *Shemoneh Esrei*⁹ prayers as מְנוּחַת שְׂמֵחָתֵינוּ *zman simchateinu* “the season of our joy”¹⁰, arising, as it were, from the joy of a bountiful harvest, the joy of recalling God’s miraculous provision and care for the children of Israel after their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, the joy of knowing their sins (and the sins of the nation) had been forgiven on Yom Kippur 5 days earlier, and their joy of looking forward to a Messianic age. It was a time of great renewal, and was a time for remembrance of everything the LORD God of Israel had done for them: of their total dependance on Him in the wilderness for 40 years through living in temporary booths (for 7 days) as their ancestors had done, and giving them a time to reflect on their responsibilities as the “chosen people” of God.

During Sukkot in the שְׁמִטָּה *Shemittah* [literally (the year of) *release*], the Sabbatical year, the Torah was to be read in its entirety before all the children of Israel, young and old, male and female so that they would hear, learn, and observe the law, and fear the LORD God of Israel:

Deuteronomy 31:9 “And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. 10 And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, 11 When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. 12 Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: 13 And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.”

There are a few very significant events in the history of Israel associated with Sukkot:

King Solomon dedicated the first Jewish Temple in the 7th month c. 948 B.C.

2 *Chronicles (2 Paraleipomenon*¹¹ *Lxx*) 7:8 “Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. 9 And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. 10 And on the

8. קִדּוּשׁ, *kiddish*, literally, *sanctification*, is a blessing recited over wine or grape juice to sanctify the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

9. שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂר, *Shemoneh Esrei*, literally, *The Eighteen* (in reference to the original number of constituent blessings: there are now nineteen) is the central prayer of the Jewish Liturgy.

10. *Mishnah, Seder Moed, Vol III, Succah*, 2nd Ed., 5.1, Artscroll Mishnah Series, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, NY, 1990, p.121.

11. ΠΑΡΑΛΕΙΤΟΜΕΝΟΝ Greek: *that which is passed over*. These two Biblical books contain additional information left out of the histories contained in the Hebrew and Greek Old Testament books of 3 & 4 *Kings* (i.e., 1 & 2 *Kings*).



three and twentieth day of the seventh month [the 8th day of the feast] he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people.”¹²

Secondly, in the first year of return from the Babylonian captivity, after the Jews had rebuilt the altar and began offering sacrifices to the Lord, they celebrated Sukkot.

Ezra 3: “And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then stood up Jeshua [Jesus] the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and **buildd the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.** 3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 **They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required ...**”

Thirdly, in the second year after their return, the Jews laid the foundation of the Temple in time to kept the Feast of Tabernacles in a fuller manner, as shown in *Nehemiah*:

Nehemiah 8:1 “And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. 2 **And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.** 3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law ... 14 **And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:** 15 **And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.** 16 So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. 17 **And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.** 18 **Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.”**¹³

So, after the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt by the repatriated Jews, Ezra read the Torah to the children of Israel in Jerusalem beginning on the 1st day of the 7th month.

12. Also see Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, VIII.4.4-5.

13. Also see Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XI.4.1 & 4.5.

Having learned about the Feast of Booths from the Torah, they all celebrated Sukkot by building booths and living in them as the Law of Moses enjoined them. Although they had celebrated Sukkot the previous year with animal sacrifices on the newly rebuilt altar, they had not constructed their booths -- something not done since the time of Joshua. Why? The *Torah* had not been read to them in previous Sabbath years as required, so they were presumably ignorant of these obligations.

HISTORICAL PRACTICE OF SUKKOT

JEWISH HISTORIAN FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS (A.D.30-100)

“Upon the **fifteenth day of the same month**, when the season of the year is changing for winter, the **law enjoins us to pitch tabernacles in every one of our houses**, so that we preserve ourselves from the cold of that time of the year; as also that when we should arrive at our own country, and come to that city which we should have then for our metropolis, because of the temple therein to be built, and **keep a festival for eight days, and offer burnt-offerings, and sacrifice thank-offerings, that we should then carry in our hands a branch of myrtle, and willow, and a bough of the palm-tree, with the addition of the pome citron:**¹⁴ That the burnt-offering on the first of those days was to be a sacrifice of thirteen bulls, and fourteen lambs, and fifteen rams, with the addition of a kid of the goats, as an expiation for sins; and on the following days the same number of lambs, and of rams, with the kids of the goats; but abating one of the bulls every day till they amounted to seven only. **On the eighth day all work was laid aside, and then, as we said before, they sacrificed to God a bullock, a ram, and seven lambs, with a kid of the goats, for an expiation of sins. And this is the accustomed solemnity of the Hebrews, when they pitch their tabernacles.”**¹⁵

“As to Alexander [Jannaeus]¹⁶, his own people were seditious against him; for at a festival which was then celebrated, **when he stood upon the altar, and was going to sacrifice, the nation rose upon him, and pelted him with citrons** [which they then had in their hands, because] **the law of the Jews required that at the feast of tabernacles every one should have branches of the palm tree and citron tree;** which thing we have elsewhere related. They also reviled him, as derived from a captive, and so unworthy of his dignity and of sacrificing.”¹⁷

Here, c. 99 BC, during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot Alexander Jannaeus, the second Hasmonean King of Judaea, while officiating as the High Priest at the Temple in Jerusalem, demonstrated his support of the Sadducees by refusing to perform the water libation ceremony “properly” (i.e., according to the Pharisees). Instead of pouring it on the altar, he poured it on his feet. The crowd was so shocked at his mockery that they showed their displeasure by pelting

14. Josephus adds the additional information here that the 4 species of trees mentioned in *Leviticus 23:40* were not just for building the booth, but were to be carried in their hands.

15. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, III.10.4.

16. Alexander Jannaeus (127 BC-76 BC), the Second Hasmonean King of Judaea (103-76 BC). The Pharisees did not consider him eligible to be a legitimate High Priest because of improper descent.

17. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII.13.5.

Alexander with the esrogim (citrons) that they were holding in their hands. Outraged, he ordered soldiers to kill those who insulted him, more than 6,000 people in the Temple courtyard were massacred.¹⁸

PRACTICE OF SUKKOT IN JESUS' JERUSALEM

So far we have learned much about the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the feast of ingathering; of building of booths made from a variety of trees in remembrance of Israel's exodus from Egypt and dwelling in booths for 40 years in the wilderness. It lasted 8 days during which many whole burnt offerings and sin offerings were presented before the Lord. It was a time of rejoicing, of unequalled joyous celebration among the Jews. In Josephus above we found out for the first time that pilgrims carried myrtle, willow, palm branches and citrons in their hands as part of their worship *mitzvahs* [required observances]. After the Jews were repatriated from their Babylonian captivity, both the altar and the wall for the Temple were dedicated at Sukkot. Lastly, we saw that the Law of Moses, in its entirety, was to be read aloud to the pilgrims as an important part of the feast in Sabbath years.

In Jesus' time, Jewish pilgrims often came from great distances, dispersed among a multitude of nations. Some would need to leave weeks in advance, so as to reach Jerusalem with sufficient lead time to complete the necessary preparations before the Feast began. I.e., they needed to build their own *sukkah* (or booth) in which to live and to collect the willow, myrtle, and palm branches, and citrons to carry during the festival. They would move into their booths on the first day of the Feast and stay there for a full week -- effectively tabernacling with God as their forefathers did in the wilderness.

Surprisingly, the most dramatic and important parts of the feast for Orthodox Christians actually derive from the extra-biblical Jewish Traditions found in the *Mishnah* and the *Talmudim*. What are these aspects of the festival? They include a daily offering of water, (indeed the only time in the year when water was poured out at the altar); secondly, the lighting of giant lamps, i.e., menorahs in the Women's Court of the Temple (see diagram) giving rise to another name for Sukkot: the *Festival of Lights*; and, lastly, processions around the altar with their willow, myrtle, palm branches, and citrons while they sang, "Please Lord bring salvation now." On the last day of the feast they processed 7 times around the altar.

THE MITZVAH OF THE WILLOWS

MISHNAH, SEDER MOED, TRACTATE SUKKAH 4.5-4.6:

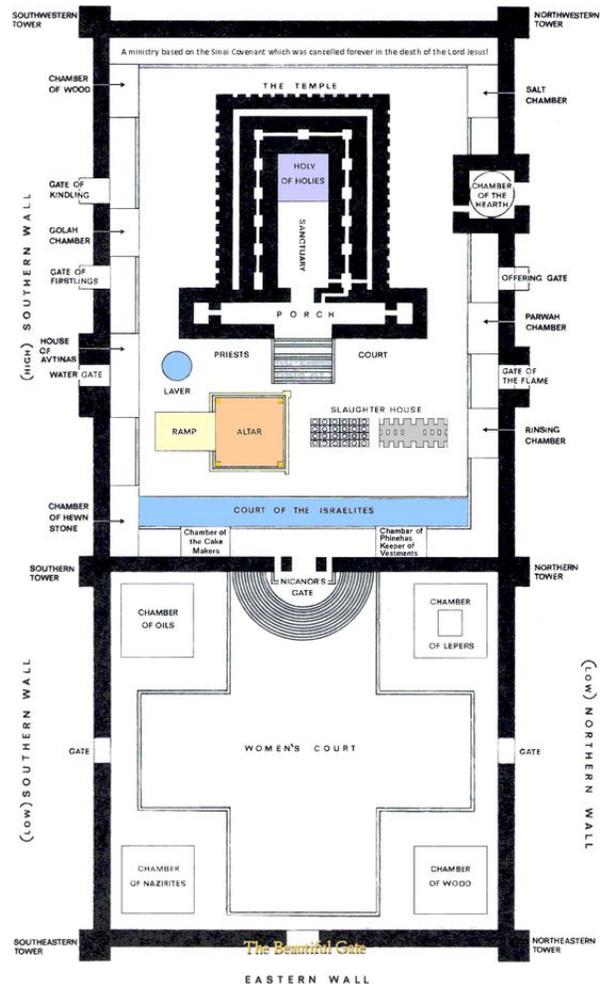
"4.5 How was the *mitzvah* of the willow [performed]? There was a place below Jerusalem called Motza [about a 30 minute walk away]. They descended there, gathered from there large willow branches, and came and stood them up against the sides of the altar, with their sides drooping over the top of the altar.

"They blew [on a trumpet] a *tekiah*, a *teruah*, and a

18. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Jannaeus, corroborated in *Mishnah, Seder Moed, Vol III, Succah*, 4.9. 2nd Ed., Artscroll Mishnah Series, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, NY, 1990, p. 117, the *Jerusalem Talmud, Seder Moed, Tractate Succah*, 48b, and by Flavius Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews, XIII.13.5* above.

tekiah.¹⁹ Each day they would circle the altar one time and say, "Please *HASHEM*²⁰ bring salvation now, please *HASHEM* bring success now" ... But on *that day* they circled the altar seven times ..."

DIAGRAM 1: HEROD'S TEMPLE



This procession transpired during the *Hallel* service, when the 15 *Psalms of Ascent* (119-133) were sung by the Levites as they ascended/descended the 15 steps from the Court of the Israelites to the Court of the Women accompanied by various musical instruments. As the *libations of water and wine* were poured out at the base of the altar the Levites sang the *Hallel* psalms in remembrance of God's mercies to Israel and praised Him for His greatness. The myrtle, willow, and date palm branches were securely bundled together as the "*lulavim*" with a citron attached and were waved by the pilgrims side-to-side and back-to-front on cue: the priests would say, *Give thanks to HASHEM, Please HASHEM bring salvation now*,²¹ and *Please HASHEM bring success now*. But on *that day*, the 7th and last

19. The trumpet sounds were used to arouse the happiness and joy associated with this festival and the water libation.

20. *Hashem* means *The Name*, i.e., *LORD*. This term was used because the Rabbis thought that the name of God was too holy to say out loud.

21. On the *Great Hoshanna*, this would be repeated over and over again! הושיענו הושיענו *hoshiah* = *bring salvation* is a verb form of יושע *Yeshua*, Jesus' name in Hebrew.



day of the feast, the *Great Hoshanna*²², like Joshua and the Israelites circling the walls of Jericho, the priests circled the altar 7 times repeating the above prayers 7 times in great earnest hoping that the wall that separates them from the LORD would be broken down. The pilgrims would then beat their palm branches [the *lulavim* without the *citrons*] on the bottom of the altar as the *Mishnah* informs us:

“4.6 ... R’ Yochanan ben Berokah says: They brought date palm branches [*lulavim*] and beat them on the ground at the sides of the altar. That day²³ was called the *day of the beating of the [date palm] branches.*”

THE WATER LIBATION

How [was] the unique water libation performed? This special libation was performed only during the seven days of Sukkos. All other libations in the Temple were of wine. During the seven days of Sukkot water was poured simultaneously with the wine libation into separate bowls at the base of the altar following the routine offering of the daily morning meal offering. “This water libation was commanded to Moses orally on Sinai (*Gamara* 44a) and has the force of Scriptural law.”²⁴

MISHNAH, SEDER MOED, TRACTATE SUKKAH 4.9-5.1:

“4.9 How is the water libation done? He [the priest] filled a golden flagon holding three *lugim*, from the Shiloach²⁵. When they reached the Water Gate²⁶ they sounded a *tekiah*, a *teruah*, and a *tekiah*. He went up the ramp [of the altar] and turned to his left. There were two silver bowls there. R’ Yehudah says: They were of plaster, but their surfaces were darkened from wine. Each had a hole like a thin nostril, one wider and the other narrower, so that both would drain out at the same time. The western one was for water; the eastern one was for wine ... R’ Yehudah says: He would pour with one *log* all eight [days]. To the purer they would say, “Raise your hand!” For once someone [Alexander Jannaeus] poured it over his feet, and all the people pelted him with their *esrogim* [citrons].¹⁸

“5.1. The flute [is played] five or six [days], this is the flute of the *Beis HaSho’evah*,²⁷ which overrides neither Sabbath nor Festival. They said, “Whoever did not see the rejoicing of *Beis HaSho’evah*, never saw rejoicing in his lifetime ...

“[*Beis HaSho’evah*] was the name given to the place in the Woman’s Court where special arrangements were made for the joyous festivities of drawing the water ... Since the water drawing ceremonies took place every morning of Sukkos, one could expect that the accompanying rejoicing would also be held every night of Sukkos.”²⁸

THE RABBINIC FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

22. *Hoshanna Rabba* (Aramaic) = *Great Supplication* *הושענא רבא*

23. *That day* = the 7th festival day.

24. *Mishnah, Seder Moed, Vol III, Succah*, 4.9 + Commentary, 2nd Ed., Artscroll Mishnah Series, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, NY, 1990, pp. 113-114.

25. *Pool of Siloam*, Hebrew: *בריכת השילוח*, *Breikhat Ha-shiloah*

26. The Water Gate was one of the southern gates of the Temple Courtyard and very close to the altar area, named because water libation was brought into the Temple through it. See diagram on p. 4.

27. *Beis HaSho’evah* is translated as the *House of Water Drawing*

28. *Mishnah, Seder Moed, Vol III, Succah*, 4.9-5.1, pp.117-121.

The most dramatic ceremony of Sukkot was the illumination of the temple by immense menorahs (50 cubits high -- roughly 75 feet tall), thus giving rise to yet another name for the feast: the Festival of Lights (not to be confused with Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, the next festival in the Jewish calendar-- see *St. John 10:22*). It is described in the *Mishnah, Seder Moed, Tractate Sukkah* 5.2-5.5:

“At the conclusion of the first festival day of Sukkos they [Priests and Levites] descended to the Women’s Court, where they made a great improvement. There were golden candelabra [menorahs] there with four golden bowls atop them, four ladders for each [candelabrum], and four youths from [among] the young priests holding pitchers of oil containing one hundred and twenty *log* [1 *log* = 0.3 liters, so 120 *logs* = 40 liters], which they poured into each bowl.

“5.3 From the worn-out trousers of the *Kohanim* [Priests] and their belts they made wicks and they would kindle them. There was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the *Beis HaSho’evah*.

“5.4. Devout men and men of [good] deeds would dance before them with the flaming torches [that were] in their hands and would utter before them words of songs and praises; and the Levites with harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets, and countless musical instruments [stood] on the fifteen steps that descend from the Court of the Israelites to the Women’s Court -- corresponding to the 15 Songs of Ascent in *Psalms*.²⁹ Upon them the Levites would stand with musical instruments and chant songs. Two *Kohanim* stood at the Upper Gate that descends from the Court of the Israelites to the Women’s Court, with two trumpets³⁰ in their hands. When the crier called out they sounded a *tekiah*, a *teruah*, and a *tekiah*. When they reached the tenth step, they sounded a *tekiah*, a *teruah*, and a *tekiah*. When they reached the court, they sounded a *tekiah*, a *teruah*, and a *tekiah*. They would continue sounding *tekiah* until they reached the gate leading out [to the] east. When they reached the gate leading out to the east, they turned to the west and said, “Our forefathers who were in this place [with] their backs toward the Sanctuary and their faces toward the east, and they bowed eastward toward the sun. But as for us -- our eyes are toward YAH.” R’ Yehuda says: They repeated and said, “We are for YAH, and toward YAH are our eyes ...

“5.5 They make no fewer than twenty-one trumpet blasts in the Temple, and no more than forty eight.”

As described the celebration of *Sukkot* in Jerusalem was nothing short of spectacular. The thousands of *sukkahs/booths* made of olive, myrtle, palm and other branches were densely scattered on the streets and rooftops of the city and at night, were unveiled from the night darkness by the superabundant light from these candelabras. The mood of the people was exuberant: they sang and danced to the LORD as the light poured out upon them from the dancing flames above. Indeed, the *menorahs* were so bright that the *Mishnah* says there was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up by them. Through the three open gates leading from the Court of the Women and over the walls the illumination of the candelabra

29. *Psalms* 119-133, the 18th Kathisma, each with the superscription *Ode of Ascent*.

30. These are the silver trumpets, not the shofars



and the sounds of worship and praise overflowed into the surrounding Court of the Gentiles (outside the low walls in the diagram p. 4). How could one not be reminded of the Presence of the LORD above the Tabernacle in the wilderness surrounded by the tents of the children of Israel, where He was seen as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This physical light was a visible foreshadowing of the True Light that would overflow upon the Gentile nations through Christ Jesus.

SUKKOT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now when we read about this feast mentioned by name in the *Gospel of St. John 7:2* (*Now the Jews's feast of Tabernacles was at hand*), we can put the subsequent 3 chapters into a more meaningful context. For example, the drama of the water drawing ceremony takes on a new dimension of meaning when Christ Jesus attended the Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles):

7. 14. "Now **about the midst of the feast** Jesus when up into the Temple and taught ..."

His teachings angered the Pharisees and the chief priests to the point that they *sent officers to take him*. Nevertheless,

7:37 "In the last day, that great day of the feast [the Great Hoshannah], Jesus stood and, cried saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." 39 (But this He spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive, for the Holy [Spirit] was not given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) ... 45. Then came the officers to the chief priest and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? 46. The officers answered, Never man spake like this man ... "

Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit above is a direct reference to the water libation which only took place during this Feast. Moreover, since He was teaching in the Temple, this most likely took place in the Court of the Israelites, where the men usually gathered in plain sight of the altar where the water libations and wine libations were poured out each morning by the priests for the past week (see diagram on p. 4).

Secondly, during the Feast of Sukkot, the following verse from *Isaiah 12:3* was often recited: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." Remembering that the Hebrew word for salvation is *Yeshua*, Jesus' name in Hebrew, this prophesy is much more meaningful:

Isaiah 12:1 "And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. 2 Behold, **God is my salvation**; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; **He also is become my salvation**. 3 Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. 4 And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. 5 Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. 6 Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: **for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.**"

In light of the symbolic and prophetic aspects of the feast,

Jesus's words and actions as recorded in *St. John* take on new and profound significance. He, God in human form, came to Jerusalem to tabernacle with the nation of Israel in this Feast of Tabernacles. In this, his first advent, He did not come with power as a conquering King, but quietly, humbly, as the Son of Man, to teach and exhort his brethren to spiritual perfection. Arriving in the midst of the the feast He began offering spiritual light to a people in darkness. Those with eyes to see were amazed at the brilliance of His teachings. On the final day of the Feast, very possibly at the climactic moment of silence after the last ritual outpouring of the libation of water, He announced that He had "living water" to offer to any thirsting soul who would come to Him and drink. Those with ears to hear would come to understand His promise to pour out the Holy Spirit on those who would place their trust in Him.

Next, it was also during the Festival of Sukkot that early in the morning, the scribes and pharisees brought the woman, taken in the act of adultery, and set her before Jesus in the Court of Women underneath the menorahs burning with a great light -- the only place within the Temple proper that women were allowed to enter. Therefore, this woman was cast at the feet of Jesus, Who, before the incarnation, accompanied the ancient Israelites in the desert as the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night, and now, in His incarnation, He was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (*St John 1:9*). The Type stood amidst the antitypes, but the Jews knew Him not.

St. John 8:2 "And early in the morning³¹ he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, 4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? 6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. 7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. 12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life**".

And to make the point one last time that He was the True Light and out of Him flowed true Living Water, that He was the salvation, the *Yeshua* that they pleaded the LORD to bring them during the seven days of Sukkot, Jesus gave the Judæans and the pilgrims another chance to open their eyes and hearts to him when he healed the man born blind amongst the crowd:

St. John 9:1 "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which

31. Early morning, on Tishrei 22, the 7th and last day of the Feast before sunrise. This day ended at sundown.

was blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? 3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 **As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.** 6 When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7 And said unto him, **Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.)** He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing. 8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? 9 Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. 10 Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? 11 He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. 12 Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not. 13 They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. 14 **And it was the sabbath day³² when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.**"

ESCHATOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

In the *Old Testament* the Lord promised that He would tabernacle among His people:

Leviticus 26:11-12 "And I will set my tabernacle among you, and my soul shall not abhor you; 12 and I will walk among you, and be your God, and ye shall be my people."

Zechariah 2:14 "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Sion: for, lo, I come, and will tabernacle in the midst of thee, saith the Lord."

These promises will be completely fulfilled at the end of the age in the new Jerusalem, the triumphant Church:

Revelation 21:1-6 "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, **Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.** 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. **I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely ...** 22: 17 And the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who heareth say, "come." And the one thirsting, let him come; and the one wishing, **let him take the water of life freely.**"

The ingathering of the saints is completed, the LORD'S

salvation is accomplished, a dwelling place for all who inherited salvation has been provided, the LORD Jesus Christ (*Yeshua*) has now come and will walk among His people, and will be their God. All things have been made new. Death and corruption have been swept away. Truly, this is the ultimate Feast of Rejoicing, the true "*Season of our Joy*." Here we see the meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles in all of its fullness. But why is there no mention of rejoicing here -- that most integral part of Sukkot? St. John didn't mention it, because he didn't need to. Isaiah the Prophet already had!

Isaiah 65:17-19 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. 18 **But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.** 19 **And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be nor more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.**"

The "*Season of our Joy*" will now be *for ever*. The Feast of Tabernacles was a prefiguration, a preview of the eternal tabernacling of God with men. The Church's rejoicing at the end of the age is the true Feast of Tabernacles, the beginning of a new age. Indeed, it is the 8th day of the only Feast with 8 days, an Eternal Holy Convocation!

There is one more interesting *Old Testament* passage that we need to explore because it has been misinterpreted in a chiliastic fashion by evangelical Christians, Jews, and Messianic Jews (Judaizing Christians of Jewish descent), i.e., they interpret the passage literally to describe a 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth following the second coming.

Zechariah 14:16 "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. 17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. 18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. 19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles."

How does the Orthodox Church interpret this passage? Let's examine what the great exegete, theologian, and patristic writer St. Cyril of Alexandria (AD 378-444) had to say:

"After saying that those making war on the churches and directing a lofty and arrogant attitude against holy Jerusalem would be caught up in the penalties befitting them, He forecasts adoration by those left in their wake--namely, adoration in Christ through faith. It is He, after all Who is the expectation of the nations, as the patriarch put it; he is also set to be light of nations, a covenant for the race, to open eyes of the blind, and bring out from their bondage those who are bound, and from prison those seated in darkness. Accordingly, He makes clear that, on leaving the gloom of idolatry and having broken the bonds of the devil's knavery, those from the nations will come to the light of truth and hasten to the yoke of the Savior. He means that the survivors from those who were punished, or those fighting against the

32. This could have been the weekly Sabbath or the festal Sabbath.

THE GOOD WORD

c/o St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church
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churches, who are innumerable, *will come up year by year to worship the King, the Lord almighty, and to celebrate the festival of Tabernacles ...*

FRESCO OF ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, BY STAMATELOS KOTRONAS, 1552, RASCA MONASTERY, SUCEAVA, ROMANIA



“While the Law cited as the basis of the feast Israel’s dwelling in tents when rescued from the oppression of the

Egyptians, the event was in fact a type of the mystery of Christ. We too, in fact, were rescued from oppression by the devil, called to freedom through Christ, as I said, and became subject to him, the King and God of all, spurning the knavery of those formerly in power. We celebrate the real feast of Tabernacles, that is, the day of Christ’s resurrection, when the bodies of all, despite being dissolved in corruption and in thrall to death, become solidified in Him, as it were. After all, He is the resurrection; He is the life, the spoils of the dead, so to say, and *first-fruits of those fallen asleep*, filling us with spiritual harvest and, as it were, causing the produce collected from the fields to be stowed in the storerooms on high. He it is who will reward us with life and enjoyment in paradise -- obviously of a spiritual nature -- now that we have conquered sin, exude spiritual fragrance, and bear the handsome and commendable fruit of the evangelical way of life by living in a pure and holy manner ...

“*Those coming up to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles, therefore, are those who are justified through faith in Christ.* Those not coming up, by contrast, He threatens with ruin and punishment equal to that sustained by the persecutors and abusers; those opting not to love will suffer the same fate as the enemy. **In my view, this is the meaning of what Christ himself said, *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.*”³³**

33. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets, Volume 3*, The Fathers of the Church Vol. 124, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, 2012, pp.273-274.