SUKKOT { סֻכּוֹת } (Feast of Tabernacles/Booths)

A Messianic Jewish Commentary

by Hannah Nesher www.voiceforisrael.net

Leviticus 22:26-23:44, Numbers 29:12-16, Zechariah 14:1-24,

Revelation 21:3

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of tabernacles (Chag Hasukkot) חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת for seven days unto the LORD." (Leviticus 23:34)

As we celebrate the Festival of Sukkot סֻכּוֹת (Feast of Tabernacles or Booths), we complete the annual Biblical cycle of the feasts (called mo'adim in Hebrew) that occur in the fall. Celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of Tishrei, Sukkot is one of the three pilgrimage festivals (Shloshah Regalim) where the people of Israel were commanded to appear before God at the Holy Temple.

The Original Thanksgiving

As an agricultural festival, Sukkot marks the end of the harvest time and is therefore called the "*Feast of Ingathering at the year's end*" (Exodus 34:22) Sukkot is the original 'Thanksgiving' festival (minus the turkey, stuffing and pumpkin pie). It is celebrated for an entire week!

"Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest." (Leviticus 23:39)

Season of Joy

Sukkot is also a joyful remembrance of the goodness of God in providing for our Israelite ancestors as they wandered around the Sinai wilderness for forty years before entering the Promised Land.

"Shouts of joy and victory are in the tents of the righteous; Adonai's right hand is mighty!" (Psalm 118:15)

After the somber, introspective time of Yom Tru'ah and Yom Kippur, Sukkot is a joyous celebration. The time of judgment has passed and we enter into the season of joy. In fact, Sukkot is the only feast in which God commanded His People to rejoice.

"**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**." (Leviticus 23:40)

During this festive season, we recall how God's faithfulness provided for our people in the wilderness with daily manna. We also remember God's kindness and mercy in leading and guiding the children of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and protecting them with a pillar of fire by night. Therefore another name for Sukkot is "*The Season of our Joy*".

"You are my God, and I praise You – I exalt You! Praise Adonai, for He is good, for His lovingkindness endures forever." (Psalm 118:28-29)

Simchat Beit Hasho'evah

On the last night of the feast, a water drawing ceremony takes place in remembrance of that which used to take place in the Holy Temple. This ceremony, called '*Simchat Beit Hasho'evah'*, not only celebrates the hope of winter rains in Israel, but also symbolizes the future Messianic Redemption when the Spirit of God (symbolized by the water) will be poured out upon the nation of Israel. This will bring great joy!

"**Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning**." (Psalm 30:5)

The Sages noted that: "*Whoever has never witnessed the Simchat Beit Hashoeva has never in his life seen true joy."*

Simchat Beit Hasho'eva celebrations in Mea She'arim, Jerusalem

Even today, many Jewish people gather near the Western Wall to dance, sing and rejoice before the Lord. People fill the synagogues and streets with singing and dancing with tremendous joy until the wee hours of the morning.

The Prophets tell us that a day will come when the exiles of Israel return to Zion, her streets will be filled with the sounds of joyful melodies; sorrow will disappear.

Jewish people gather at the Kotel for Feasts of the Lord

"**The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away**." (Isaiah 51:11)

Fountain of Living Waters

The seventh day of sukkot is called **Hoshana Rabah** (Great Salvation). It marks the end of the period of judgment that began on Rosh Hashanah. Yeshua (Jesus) stood up on this final day of the Feast of Sukkot (Festival of Tabernacles)[1], probably during the ceremony of the drawing of the water and proclaimed Himself to be the source of Living Water. He invited all who were thirsty to come and drink - the water representing the Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh**).**

"On the last and greatest day of the festival, Yeshua stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." (John 7:37-39)

A fountain in a Jerusalem park

'Living water', as a symbol of the Spirit of the living God is used throughout both Old and New Testament Scriptures. One of the most common Scriptures we sing (and dance) on Sukkot is from the prophet Isaiah: "**With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation (Yeshuah)**." (Isaiah 12:3)

We may go through many trials and tribulations before the coming of Yeshua; but one day He (the Lamb) will lead us to living fountains of waters and we will be comforted:

"…**for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**" (Revelation 7:17)

[1] John 7:3

Livin' in a Booth

The Children of Israel were required to leave the comfort of their homes and to live in little shelters, tabernacles or booths (called 'sukkot'), during the Feast Sukkot and to remember God's salvation, goodness, and provision. Just as the Israelites dwelt in temporary dwellings (called Sukkot סֻכּוֹת in Hebrew), so are we commanded to sit in a sukkah (booth) for this entire week.

Right after Yom Kippur ends, most Jewish people in Israel and all over the world begin building a temporary huts or shelters with a covering of palm branches. A sukkah comes in many different styles and sizes and forms. The common denominator is that it must be temporary and fragile.

The Bible does not give exact instructions on how to construct a sukkah; but the oral tradition gives some specifications. For example, the roof must be open enough that one can see the stars above at night.

For seven days and nights, we eat in the sukkah and consider it our dwelling; some even live in the sukkah entirely for the duration of the festival.

The sukkah itself symbolizes God's covering of protection over us even in times of trouble. This is written in the Scriptures: "**For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His sukkah** בְּסֻכֹּה**; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.**" (Psalms 27:5)

Wave Offerings

" **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**." (Leviticus 23:40)

In Leviticus 23:40 the Hebrew terms for the four plants are:
* *'êtz hāḏār* (עֵץ הָדָר), magnificent/beautiful trees
* *təmārîm* (תְּמָרִים), palm trees
* *'êtz 'āḇōṯ* (עֵץ־עָבֹת), thick/leafy trees
* *'arḇê-nāḥal* (עַרְבֵי נַחַל), willows of the brook/valley

Customers inspect the Four Species in Jerusalem,

In Talmudic tradition, however, the four plants are identified as:

- *etrog* (אתרוג) – the fruit of a citron tree
- *lulav* (לולב) – a ripe, green, closed frond from a date palm tree
- *hadass* (הדס) – boughs with leaves from the myrtle tree
- *aravah* (ערבה) – branches with leaves from the willow tree

Lulav & etrog

Rabbinic tradition explains that these four kinds (arbah minim) of fruit and branches represent the kinds of personalities that make up the community of Israel.

- The *lulav* has taste but no smell, symbolizing those who study Torah but do not possess good deeds.
- The *hadass* has a good smell but no taste, symbolizing those who possess good deeds but do not study Torah.
- The *aravah* has neither taste nor smell, symbolizing those who lack both Torah and good deeds.
- The *etrog* has both a good taste and a good smell, symbolizing those who have both Torah and good deeds.[2]

These fruit and branches used to be waved before the Lord in the Holy Temple on Sukkot. Today, they are waved in the sukkot and synagogues. Traditionally they are held together and waved in all six directions: right, left, forward, up, down and backward while reciting a traditional blessing for unity among all people from every nation.

The Tosher Rebbe of Montreal, Canada, waving the Four Species during Hallel

Festival of the Nations

Another name for Sukkot is the '*Festival of the Nations'*. God's people gather in Jerusalem from many nations of the earth to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and to worship the God of Israel together in unity. This is a partial fulfillment of the end time prophecy:

"**Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) - Sukkot**." (Zechariah 14:16)

[2] Wikipedia, The Four Species

The Nations Gather Against Jerusalem

The Haftorah (Prophetic Portion of Scripture) for Sukkot describes with graphic violence God's punishment of the nations who come against His holy city of Jerusalem. The book of Zechariah contains an apocalyptic vision of the destruction of all the nations which attacked her. "**For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle**…" (Zechariah 14:2)

The judgment on the nations is characterized by earthquakes, plagues, heavy darkness, and signs of nuclear destruction, all manifesting God's personal intervention on behalf of Israel. Finally the nations will see that Israel is the apple of God's eye and woe to the one who dares to touch her. The Lord declares through the Prophet Zechariah,

"**On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves."** (Zechariah 12:3)

Finally all the nations will be converted to the God of Israel and will worship Him in Spirit and Truth. "**In that day, YHVH יהוה will be King over all the earth; in that day, YHVH יהוה shall be One אחד (echad) and His name One אחד** ." (Zechariah 14:9)

As their first act of worship, all nations will be required to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. All those who survived the judgment but refuse to come and celebrate Sukkot will be cursed with drought. (Zechariah 14:16-19)

Many Christians who believe that these 'moadim' (God appointed times of Feasts and Festivals) have been abolished will perhaps need to reconsider their theology when they are required to come to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot or else experience drought.

Many of God's people from the nations are coming year by year to the Land of Israel, to the city of Jerusalem, to celebrate Sukkot together with the people of Israel.

Man of War (Ish Milchamah)

God is portrayed in these prophetic passages as **a Divine Warrior**. One of God's names is Ish Milchama (Man of War). "**The Lord יהוה is a man of war,"** (*Exodus 15:3.)* He fights for Israel and delivers her from all the nations who surround her: "**Then shall the Lord יהוה go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fights in the day of battle."** (Zechariah 14:3)

YHVH יהוה will stand on the Mt. of Olives and in an awesome display of His mighty power, will split the mountain in two! In the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, God split the Red Sea in order to bring forth, out of the waters, a nation unto Himself.

Aerial photograph of the Mount of Olives

Tomb of Zechariah

Crossing through the waters of the Red Sea represents the birth of the nation of Israel. At the end of time, a 'New Jerusalem' will be re-born by this splitting of the Mount of Olives (הַר הַזֵּיתִים, *Har HaZeitim)* which is a famous, ancient burial site.

By splitting this place of death, Yeshua declares His victory over death, and gives birth to the New Jerusalem in the Messianic Kingdom. When the Lord places His feet on the Mt. of Olives and it splits into two, springs of water flow forth, like the breaking of the amniotic sac, thus releasing the **waters of birth**. This hidden stream beneath Jerusalem will flow out to irrigate the Land and make it like a Garden of Eden once again, thus bringing healing to the nations.

"**Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each**

side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1-2)

Therefore, God is seen, in Zechariah's prophetic end time vision, not only as a powerful warrior, taking vengeance for Zion's sake, but also as a gentle midwife who helps to bring forth the rebirth of the heavens and earth.

God will bring forth a New Jerusalem which will live in safety: "**And there shall be no more extermination; but Jerusalem shall dwell safely**." (Zechariah 14:11) The Hebrew word used for extermination is cherem, which is usually translated 'curse'.

There will **no longer be a curse** that will bring destruction and exile.

"**No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him**." (Revelation 22:3)

Jerusalem will never again be threatened by enemies, war or drought. Weeping and sorrow will be no more, for God will answer when they cry out to Him for help.

"**People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you.**" (Isaiah 30:19)

No longer will there be famine or sickness, or death; no more mourning, or crying or pain. All the old will pass away and all things will become new.

'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

This festival of Sukkot has tremendous significance, not only for Israel, but also for the nations of the entire earth for several reasons:

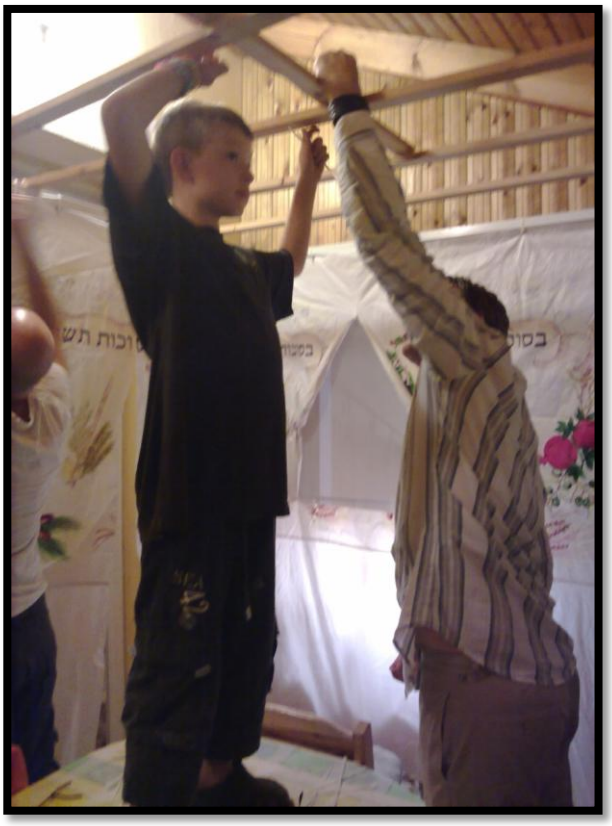
1) Sukkot reminds us that our God is faithful to lead and guide and provide for His people, even in a wilderness season.
2) While dwelling in a temporary shelter, we are reminded that we are only pilgrims and strangers passing through this time on earth; and that Heaven is our true home.
3) The Prophet Zechariah warns God's people in the nations to stand with Israel and not to join with those who come against Jerusalem in the end times.
4) The remnant that survives out of the nations must be prepared to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles together with Israel when the Lord Yeshua returns.

5) Some Biblical scholars believe that Tabernacles is the actual time of Yeshua's birth, since the shepherds were more likely out in the fields in the fall, rather than the winter.
6) When Yeshua returns upon the blast of the shofar on the Feast of Trumpets, and all His people will recognize Him as their Messiah and mourn for him on the Day of Atonement, then He will finally establish His Messianic Kingdom of righteousness on Sukkot.
7) On the Feast of Tabernacles, God will finally 'tabernacle' with His people and dwell amongst us, thereby completely fulfilling Sukkot and the entire cycle of the Feasts of Israel.

"**Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell (tabernacle) with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God**." (Revelation 21:3)

This is the final fulfillment of Sukkot:

"**The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever."** (Revelation 11:15) Halleluyah!



We remember that God has promised to shelter us in His personal sukkah (סכה) in times of trouble. "**For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle (Sukkah (סכה) in Hebrew); In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock."** (Psalm 27:5)

Putting up the family sukkah in Israel

About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

If you appreciate these teachings, your donations are greatly appreciated. It is through your generous financial and prayer support that we can continue to send the Word forth from Zion and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).

To contribute on-line through paypal: http://www.voiceforisrael.net

Or by mail: # 313-11007 Jasper Ave. Edmonton, Ab. T5K 0K6 Canada

e-mail: **nesher.hannah@gmail.com**

website: **www.voiceforisrael.net**

COPYRIGHT POLICY: **Articles by Hannah Nesher may be copied for free distribution or personal use, provided they are reproduced in their entirety and with no changes. If printed in a publication or included on a website, please include our name, address and website and please send us a copy of the publication containing the article.**

There is no cost to use the materials but if you appreciate the information, please do consider sending a donation to support the ministry. www.voiceforisrael.net