

FANTASTIC FEASTS... & WHERE WE FIND THEM

Do you know what LARPing is? It is **Live Action Role Play**.

You know what a historical reenactment is, right? A historical reenactment is an educational or entertainment activity in which people follow a plan to recreate aspects of a historical event or period. Civil War reenactments are perhaps the best known.

Somewhere between a historical reenactment and LARPing is the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles.

I say that because, during its seven days, Jews were to reenact the wilderness living of their ancestors by building and living in temporary structures. They were to live-out their history.

We find the feast in Leviticus twenty-three:

Lev 23:33 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Lev 23:34 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the LORD.

Lev 23:35 On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work *on it*.

Lev 23:36 For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. *It is* a sacred assembly, *and* you shall do no customary work *on it*.

Lev 23:37 'These *are* the feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day -

Lev 23:38 besides the Sabbaths of the LORD, besides your gifts, besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings which you give to the LORD.

Lev 23:39 '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.

Lev 23:40 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.

Lev 23:41 You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be a statute forever in your generations.* You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Lev 23:42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths,

Lev 23:43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: *I am the LORD your God.*' "

The Hebrew name for Tabernacles is *Sukkot* designating a *booth* or *hut* made of leaves. The English word is derived from the Latin *tabernaculum*.

God told the nation of Israel to live in huts made of branches and leaves for seven days to remember the forty years that their ancestors were in the wilderness and had to live in temporary structures.

Tabernacles is the final calendar feast, falling on the 15th of Tishri, five days after Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement). The first and the eighth days were sabbaths - no work was to be done, and Israel was to rest.

It was one of the three holidays that all Jewish males were required to go to Jerusalem and appear before the Temple of God.

The Temple sacrifice for Tabernacles during the seven-day period was huge:

- On the first day 13 bulls were to be offered, fourteen lambs, two rams, and one goat, along with meal and drink offerings.
- On the second day the number of bulls would be twelve and decrease by one each day of the feast, with the other sacrifices being the same each day.
- All twenty-four divisions of the priests shared in the sacrifices during this period.

It was during this feast the *Shekinah* glory filled the Solomon's newly built Temple at its dedication (First Kings 8; Second Chronicles 7:1-10).

Three ceremonies were performed during Tabernacles: the Water Libation, the Temple Lighting, and the *Hoshana-Rabbah*.

The high priest would take a golden pitcher and exit the water-gate, making his way to the Pool of Siloam to fill up the pitcher. He would be accompanied by a procession of music and worshipers.

He would return, via the Water-gate, to the Court of Priest where the Altar was located. As he entered three blasts of the silver trumpets sounded from the Temple.

The priest would quote Isaiah 12:3, "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

The priest would then ascend the altar and pour out the water-libation; while he did this another priest would pour out the wine-libation as specified in the Law. The choir of Levites sang the *Hallel* - Psalms 113-118.

At the right point the people would respond waving their palm branches toward the altar singing: *Save now, I pray O Lord: O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity*" (Psalm 118:25)

On the evening of the second day of Tabernacles was the Temple Lighting Ceremony. The people would crowd into the Court of Women. In the center of the Court of Women stood four huge menorahs to light the courtyard. The wicks for these menorahs were old priest garments. Members of the Sanhedrin performed torch dances while people watched and walked with their oil lamps.

Because the Temple was elevated, the light could be seen for many miles in all directions.

Later in the evening the Levitical choir would assemble in the Court of Israelites and proceed through the Nicanor Gate. At the top of the stairs they would begin to sing the Psalms 120 to 134, one Psalm for each of the fifteen stairs. The sound of music would then proceed from the trumpets, string instruments, harps and flutes as the Levites sang.

This celebration was repeated each night for the next six nights. This was done as a prelude to the Water Libation ceremony in the morning. The Talmud comments on the joy of this event by saying; "He that hath not beheld the joy of the drawing of the water hath never seen joy in his life."

The last day of the feast was the greatest day of the feast. On this day, the priest would blast their trumpets twenty-one times when the water was poured; three sets of seven blasts. On this day the priests would also make seven circles around the great altar. As they circled the altar they said Psalm 118:25 and the people raised palm branches. This is why it was known as *Hoshana Rabbah* or “Great Hoshanna.”

The Gospels record that Jesus not only celebrated Tabernacles, but He took traditional elements of the celebration and applied them to His own life and mission. We find this particularly in John 7 and 8 where Jesus uses two traditional symbols from the Feast of Tabernacles celebration, water and light, to help the people understand who He is and what He offers.

The light from the Menorah’s was to remind the people of how God's Shekinah glory had once filled His Temple. But in the person of Jesus, God's glory was once again present in that Temple. And He used that celebration to announce that very fact.

He was teaching in the court of women just after the Feast, perhaps standing right next to those magnificent candelabras when He declared to all who were gathered there, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Jesus also stood in the Temple and cried out, “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” (John 7:37-38).

The seven feasts, taken together, are a prophetic calendar:

- The first four, the spring feasts, have already been precisely fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus.
- The last three, the fall feasts, predict the Second Coming of Jesus to dwell with men upon the earth.

One researcher said: “So God was setting up ‘fixed times’ during the year when the nation of Israel would be ‘called out’ to gather together, every year, to ‘rehearse’ future coming events.”

The Feast of Tabernacles looks forward to Jesus establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth at His Second Coming. During this period Jesus will rule over the nation, He will “Tabernacle” with His creation, ruling from the Temple in Jerusalem. Israel will become the chief nation on the earth as promised in Deuteronomy 28:1-2.

This period is known as the Millennium because Revelation twenty describes it as lasting 1000-years. This period of rest and fellowship is the foreshadowing pictured in The Feast of Tabernacles.

Sometime after the resurrection and rapture of the church, the Great Tribulation will begin. At its end, on what would be the Feast of Trumpets, Jesus will return, and the Jews will receive Him as their Messiah. He will dwell among them.

There is a foreshadowing of God tabernacling with men on the earth in the Gospel of Matthew. Peter, James and John accompany the Lord up a mountain. While there, they see Him transfigured, and He is visited by Moses and Elijah.

Peter wanted to do what? “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

Peter thought it was the time that the saints of all ages would live together and tabernacle with God on the earth - heavenly people right alongside of earthly people.

The Lord is coming for His church. His calendar for Israel will continue; He will fulfill the final feasts just as He fulfilled the first ones.

Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!