

SUKKOTH AND THE MYSTERY OF THE SUKKAH

Almighty God our Father we come before you in the name of your son Yeshua, to praise your name and worship you on this second day of the Feast of Tabernacles. We ask that your Spirit will fill and Inspire, guide and direct us in keeping this Feast holy. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to celebrate your Feast with great joy, gladness and thanksgiving. Blessed is your name. Righteous and just are your works. Amen!

The handiwork of God surrounds us with the glory of the Universe and marvelous mysteries to search out. The front cover of *National Geographic* of March 2014 magazine pointed out to me this week got my attention with an intriguing article entitled, “Star Eater” which I really look forward to reading. It explores information about black holes discovered in the sky where there are no stars and that are much like a space portal that scientists are mystified about —where things go when they disappear into a black hole. Although their name suggests emptiness, black holes are the most densely filled objects in the universe giving them enormous gravitational pull. However, a black hole has no more vacuuming power than a regular star, it just possesses extraordinary grip for its size. Black holes with their incredible gravitational pull are basically time machines. In a mathematical sense, something not just small, but also unimaginable heavy is there. The evidence for what could reside in a black hole is compelling.

Sukoth has many interesting aspects that are not immediately or easily understood that most people know little or nothing about. The sukkah that is an integral part of observing the Festival of Tabernacles is a mystery of what, why, where and when that is one of the mysteries of Sukoth (Tabernacles). It amazes me that I kept the Feast of Tabernacles for over 40 years in the WWCG from 1957-1997 before I really understand the meaning of the Feast of Sukoth. After 30 years I was no longer a member and I began to learn more piece by piece and bit by bit. Even then, a temporary booth was dwelling in a motel or rental house at a location designated by WWCG as a feast site where we would talk about the feast.

After first realizing brethren should have a sukkah at the Feast of Tabernacles, we set one up inside the conference room at the motel in Rapid City, S.D. During our time there we visited a sukkah at the home of a local Jewish family who invited our group of 50 plus, as well as, other guests from the community to their home during the festival. There we learned about the lulav, and the blessing of the sukkah. We made our own lulavs to wave and used a fragrant lemon as the citron fruit with the palm, myrtle and willow branches. Daily we marched around the outside perimeter of the conference room and praised the Lord and swept up the beaten myrtle leaves. We were growing in grace and knowledge and learning how to do what God says to do.

In Wichita, Kansas we were blessed to construct a sukkah at two of the brethren’s homes, enjoyed planned pot-luck luncheons , sitting in the sukkah, learned to blow shofars, and were instructed in Israeli dances. What a joy! The following year a sukkah was set up with PVC pipe

in our backyard in Pasadena, Calif., because a hurricane hit Wilmington, N.C. where accommodations had been made. Since moving to Omak in 2005 we have put up a sukkah in our yard with the capable artistic help of Mike from Southern Cal and others. I have traveled far and wide keeping the feast these 40 years keeping the feast like camp-meetings staying in motels hearing sermons with large groups over 5,000. Our time was spent eating out, seeing local attractions, hearing inspiring sermons and music, and being with others, but it just wasn't the real essence of Sukkot.

I never once heard a single sermon on the "sukkah" (temporary dwelling) at the Feast of Sukkoth (Tabernacles), yet it was called the Feast of Tabernacles. The word tabernacles is nothing but a translation of the Hebrew word Sukkoth. The Hebrew word Sukkoth means temporary hut or dwelling. It is to be a reminder of the moveable huts the Israelites dwelt in after coming out of Egypt as they moved place to place in the Sinai desert for 40 years on their way to the Promised Land. They had no permanent dwelling, but they were like campers who pitched their tents as they continued on their journey.

The oracles of God (Torah/ the five books of Moses) were committed (given) by God to the Jews for safe keeping and preservation which they have done. They have a whole history for thousands of years in the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles which can be accessed by anyone who wants to learn about the keeping of Sukkoth. After the initial acceptance of deciding to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, it is important to read the rest of the instructions of how to keep it regarding taking the leaves of the myrtle, palm, and willow and beautiful fruit and wave it before the Lord in praise. Whatever the annual holy day, people were asked the question, Why are we here? The answer is because God says, "You shall observe this day as a statute forever throughout your generations." The full understanding of why and how was not understood at the time.

It was known that the feast of Tabernacles does point to the millennial kingdom and the reign of Christ. However, there is more than that. It symbolizes our forefathers who dwelt in temporary dwellings and we are enacting that scene as if we are coming out of Egypt (sin) and we are dependent on God daily as they were. We spend time in the sukkah seven days during Tabernacles, as Israel did in temporary dwellings. *Reference: Mirrors in Time* by Joel Ziff, page 233. "Sukkot begins on the fifteenth day of Tishri, five days after Yom Kippur. It is celebrated for eight days. The first day and eighth days are celebrated as full holy days with restrictions on work. On Sukkot, we harvest the fruits of our labor of self examination during the days of Awe, experiencing the pleasure and satisfaction resulting from these changes and in this spirit, Sukkot is also known in Hebrew as *Z'man Simchateinu*, the time (or season) of our Joy."

"Sukkot is also commemorated by using the four species of growing things: a palm branch—*lulav*, a citron (lemon-like fruit) —*etrog*, willow branches—*aravot*, and myrtle branches—*hadassim*, as commanded in the Torah—**Leviticus 23:40**. 'And you shall take on the first day, the fruit of the hadar tree, branches of palm trees, a bough of the avot tree and willows of the brook, and shall rejoice before the Lord, our God.' On page 35, he discusses the mysteries of Sukkot. Sukkot carries multiple meanings: a symbol of the transformation as we move out of our homes and into a new structure, a symbol of fragility in its impermanence, a symbol of minimal protection from the elements."

The walls of the sukkah offer little protection, but it is to teach us that our real protection comes from God above in heaven from the pressures of daily life. We are to focus upon God as our center of protection, not a place or a building.” For the Israelites wandering in the desert, the sukkah provided a new home after they left slavery in Egypt. The sukkah links us to that archetypal experience of change. In this spirit, we begin to build the sukkah immediately after the end of Yom Kippur. We move out of the permanent shelter which we habitually regard as home. We move into a new home in the world and establish it as a center for the activities of daily life —eating, meditating, socializing and study. We invite guests into our sukkah and feed one another.” As we grow in grace and knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, we also experience a change in the results. “It is important not only that we change our coping responses, but experience those changes as positive, pleasurable and satisfying. With our new way of being, we are better able to resolve the problem that previously overwhelmed or frustrated us.”

The sukkah is a symbol of change and helps us become aware of how we have been transformed by God’s Spirit of power dwelling in us. We are more open, honest and responsive—strengthening the bonds with others, feeling our ability to give to others and to receive from them as a result of the changes we have made during the Days of Awe and Yom Kippur. The experience of joy and celebration on Sukkot reminds us of our own transformation as we discover and express our own positive feelings. **2 Corinthians 5:1-5**—Paul says, “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, ³if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. ⁴For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

The Sukkah is a temporary meeting place between us and God. It is a type of the temple of God that moved with the Israelites through the wilderness where God dwelt among the nation of Israel. When we put up our sukkah and dwell in it, we are concentrating on having fellowship and joy with God’s Holy Spirit. There He joins with us as we fear him and stand in awe of our Father. If we are not following the command to dwell in the sukkah seven days at Tabernacles we are missing the real purpose of the feast, to meet with Christ and God the father in the sukkah. If we build the sukkah as a sign of our faith and obedience, and dwell in it as God commanded, the Holy Spirit will meet with us in it, just as he dwelt in the tabernacle in ancient Israel.

In 1980, I took a tour group to Israel to the temple Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. At the edge of the Temple Mount, Hassidic Jews and many other people were praying and inserting prayers into the wall. It was at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles and where I first learned about the sukkah. My group was invited to fellowship inside a sukkah (20 x 12 x 8) that was set up a short distance from the wall. Tables inside were laden with wine and fruits including dates, raisins, and nuts from the fall harvest. Before that I did not have any knowledge about a sukkah. I was really enjoyed learning about the sukkah and fellowshiping in the sukkah with others for the first time.

In 587 B.C. during the days of Ezekiel, the prophet, when God withdrew his presence, king Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and burned down the temple. God

withdrew his presence and said that the Jews would suffer captivity for 70 years—one year for each Shemitah year that Israel failed to keep. Israel failed to obey God’s command and observe the Sabbatical land rests which were to be kept every 7th year within a 50 year cycle after they entered the Promise Land. There are seven Shemitah years in a 50 year cycle. Israel had failed to keep the Shemitah year for 70 cycles (490 years). Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem, and then Nebuchadnezzar came in a second time in 587 when he destroyed the temple. Since God had left the temple, Nebuchadnezzar was able to destroy it.

There is no temple in Jerusalem today, but God comes and dwells in the sukkah. He commanded his people to build for themselves huts and to dwell in them at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Sukkah is a symbol of faith in God. It may seem fragile, but it teaches that our faith is not in the branches or structure of the sukkah, but God whose Holy Spirit will meet and dwell with his people in the sukkah as he promised. In the days of King David the tabernacle of God was moved to Jerusalem where the temple was built in the days of King Solomon and God’s presence dwelt in Israel’s midst. Every year we reenact the journey of Israel out of Egypt by building and dwelling in the sukkah rejoicing before God’s presence. He wants us to be full of joy and happiness and awe—fully aware of where we are and who we are with, in an attitude that is confident in faith that he is our God and he will protect us. The Sukkah is a symbol that is to remind us —

1. God is our protector.
2. our fellowship is with God (our abiding in God and Christ and in his word)
3. actually experience the coming together in the sukkah in love and extending that love outward toward our neighbor (others); sharing in companionship and community

John 15:7—“If you **abide in me**, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” **John 13:34-35**—“love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” We invite guests and neighbors into our sukkah and share our food with one another, and visit our neighbors and give to the poor. The Hebrew word *hag* means festival and it also means dance—leap and twirl as we rejoice before the Lord. This is rejoicing like God wants us to do before him. As Ezra and Nehemiah said, “the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Coping successfully with our stresses and our own anxieties is often exacerbated by isolation and alienation. It is such a sad thing to me that people today grow up mistreated in bad family relationships — abused, fearful, anxiety ridden, angry and they never learn how to love and to be loved. They just do not know how to give and how to receive, and how to relate successfully with someone else in a positive way. They may walk around ignoring and avoiding others, because they just haven’t learned to love or forgive.

The Bible gives the example of King David coming up to Jerusalem with the Tabernacle of God (2 Sam. 6:14). David knew how to dance with whirling and exuberance in serving the Lord! **1 Chronicles 14:25**—“So David, the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the house of Obed-Edom with joy.²⁷ David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who bore the ark, the singers, and Chenaniah the music master with the

singers. David also wore a linen ephod. ²⁸ Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn, with trumpets and with cymbals, making music with stringed instruments and harps. ²⁹ And it happened, as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the City of David, that Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David whirling and playing music; and she despised him in her heart."

2 Samuel 6:20-23—"Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, 'How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!' ²¹ So David said to Michal, 'It was before the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the LORD. ²² And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor.' ²³ Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death." David banished her from his presence and never touched her again from that day.

During this feast we are to also walk humbly before God and one another as we rejoice before God. God has commanded us to make the sukkah, a type of the portable tabernacles where Israel met with God. In a sense, God chose to put his name temporarily in the sukkah for us to meet with him, by his command and authority and in his name, because he there. He commanded that we dwell temporarily *in the sukkah* for seven days. **Deuteronomy 14:26**. We are to take our special festival tithes, ²⁶ "you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household."

Deuteronomy 16:13-15—"You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. ¹⁴ And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice"— completely rejoice and have nothing but joy.

There is no temple in Jerusalem today. I have never realized before that the only place that I know of today that God has chosen where God has put his name is in the sukkah which he commanded us to make each year at Tabernacles and where he plainly chose to put his name in this season and time. Three times we have read that we are to rejoice. Three is the number of decision (finality). Three times Paul asked God to remove the thorn from his flesh that was bothering him. But God said no; my grace is sufficient for your weakness. God decided that Paul needed that test to stay humble so God would continue to work through Paul. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**—"And **lest I should be exalted** above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for **my strength is made perfect in weakness.**' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ

may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Condemnation of the devil was pride. Feast of Tabernacles is a special of strengthening and of spiritual power being unleashed in our life through the vehicle of the sukkah and the presence of God there. It is an exciting opportunity with a special blessing. He will help us overcome our human feelings of isolation and alienation and being cut off from Him and one another—a sad feeling. I hate to see people cut themselves off, but they often do because of human weakness and becoming offended. This feast is a chance to extend out-going love.

In contrast to the inward turning of the Days of Awe (searching our life inwardly and getting rid of weaknesses), on Sukkot we focus on extending outward toward others in a giving and sharing frame of mind. We celebrate with singing, dancing, music and waving the lulav which help us turn our energies outward and to naturally think of other people.

Reference: Joel Ziff, *Mirrors in Time*, pages 239-242. "Sukkot serves as a bridge by helping us translate our experience of essence on Yom Kippur so that we can apply and integrate what we have learned into everyday life activity. On Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret, there was also a libation of water (ceremony) in which water was poured on the stone of the altar at the temple. There were two altars in the Sanctuary: one in the outer court and one in the inner court. The outer court symbolizes the outer aspect of the work of the heart; the inner altar symbolizes the inner work of the heart. On Yom Kippur (corresponds to the fire and the silver temple altar) the outer work, associated with the element of silver involves awakening the natural love within each person. This task is accomplished through the fire of prayer which burns our material concerns in the same way that the fire consumes the animal offering. Enmeshed in the material world, we are caught up in the worries over our sustenance, worries which are consumed in the fire of prayer. In the *Song of Songs* this process describes the relationship with God as *Smolo tachat le' roshi* which means, 'your left hand cradles my head.' This suggests that we use our heads, our capacity to understand and gain perspective as we consider our particular worries and concerns in relationship with the Infinite."

"The inner work of the heart is associated with the altar of the inner court on Sukkot (water and the golden altar). In this process, our relationship with God is portrayed by the end of the verse as *Yemino techabkaini*, which means, 'your right hand hugs me.' The image of the hug suggests greater intimacy and closeness than the previous image. Shneur Zalman associates this quality of relationship with the libation of water on Sukkot. The emotional changes in the relationship with God symbolized by the fire sacrifice and water libation using the analogy of a parent and child. When the child is separated from the parent, the longing to be close is obvious; the child's heart beats loudly and calls for connection. The child's love is expressed with the heat of a burning fire. However, when the child is close to the parent, the child, feeling the love and connection, becomes calm and relaxed. Love is equally present but hidden within the heart. Water flows down, cooling the heat of the fire, softening, nourishing and energizing."

"On the eight day, we collect the water we have accessed. It becomes a well from which we can nourish ourselves as we resume ordinary life. *Azeret* can be translated as assembly or collection. On this day we assemble within ourselves the storehouse of energy which will fuel our efforts through the remainder of the year, as we bring light into the darkness. Just as we can store water

in a cistern, joy energizes our continued efforts through the year. On *Shemini Atzeret*, the beginning of the planting season, a special prayer for rain is added to the daily service. In this same spirit, we are able to work hard to nurture our new beginnings, but we still need nourishment to flow down to us from the heavens to help us grow and develop. On *Shemini Atzeret*, we access the ; ‘living waters’ of salvation which flow the quality of God’s loving-kindness, *Chesed* (love).”

The dynamics in my new book on the *Mysteries of God’s Holy Days* will be unlike any book that you have read. Because its explanations will be rewarding and satisfying, it will be information that you will want to share with others. Brethren, we have just begun the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles). Praise the Lord!