

# How to Observe the Feast of Booths

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July 2017

How do Christians observe the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles, depending on your Bible translation), when the New Testament offers us little information on how to keep this festival? By examining the Old Testament instructions about this festival, primarily found in Leviticus 23, through the lens of the New Covenant. We will gain a deeper understanding on how to observe the Feast of Booths as a New Covenant festival.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the Lord. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. For seven days you shall present food offerings to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the Lord. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.

"These are the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the Lord food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, besides the Lord's Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the Lord.

"On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 23:33-43, All scriptures quoted are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise stated).

## Old Testament References

Leviticus 23:33-43; Numbers 29:12-34; Deuteronomy 16:13-15; Exodus 23:16; 34:22; 1 Kings 8:1-2, 65-66; 2 Chronicles 7:8-10; Nehemiah 8:14-18; Zechariah 14:16-19

## New Testament Reference

John 7:1-36 or John 7:1-53

Among Christians observing the biblical festivals of Leviticus 23, there is a disagreement over which verses in the Gospel of John refer to the Feast of Booths, and which refer to the Eighth Day Assembly, a festival immediately following Booths (Leviticus 23:33-36, 39; Nehemiah 8:14, 18). Some people think the verses in John 7:1-36 refer to the Feast of Booths, with John 7:37-39 referring the Eighth Day Assembly. While others think the verses in John 7:37-39 are referring to the seventh day, or last day of the Feast of Booths; with the verses in John 8:1-10:21, referring to the Eighth Day Assembly.

## Fifteenth-day of the Seventh Month (Leviticus 23:34, 39-41)

We begin observing the seven-day Feast of Booths on the fifteenth-day of the seventh month of the sacred calendar (Leviticus 23:34, 39-41; Numbers 29:12).<sup>1</sup> Biblical days start and end in the

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<sup>1</sup> Most Christians who observe the biblical festivals use the Calculated Hebrew Calendar. Modern Judaism uses this same calendar.

evening, or at sundown, not midnight.<sup>2</sup> For example, in 2017 the fifteenth-day of the sacred calendar falls on October 5th. Therefore, we began to keep the festival at sunset on October 4th, with the festival ending at sunset on October 11th.

### **Holy Convocation and Sabbath Rest (Leviticus 23:35, 39)**

#### *Convocation*

God commands that we observe this festival by gathering with others in a "holy convocation" or "sacred assembly" on the first day of the Feast, the fifteenth-day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:35; Numbers 29:12). From Hebrews 10:23-25, we see that "assembling together" (*New King James Version*) helps us to motivate and encourage one another. According to 1 Corinthians 14:26-31, what transpires when we "assemble" (*New American Standard Version*) must lead to our edification, learning, and encouragement.

#### *Rest*

We observe the first-day of the Feast of Booths as a Sabbath rest in which we do not work (Leviticus 23:35, 39; Numbers 29:12).

### **Present an Offering to the LORD (Leviticus 23:36)**

#### *Old Covenant Feast of Booths Offerings*

Daily Offerings (Numbers 28:1-8)

Feast of Booths Offerings (Numbers 29:12-34)

#### *New Covenant Spiritual Sacrifices*

As Christians and members of the New Covenant Holy/Royal Priesthood we no longer make physical sacrifices or offerings as dictated by the Old Covenant (Hebrews 9:1-14; 10:1-14); we now offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Romans 12:1-2), involving personal acts of sacrifice to God and fellowman. Sacrifices such as prayer (Psalm 141:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:8), verbally expressing praise and thanks to God (Hebrews 13:15), doing good for others (Hebrews 13:16), sharing what we have with others (Hebrews 13:16; Philippians 4:18), being humble (Psalm 51:16-17), martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:6; Philippians 2:17), and making converts (Romans 15:15-16). The Feast of Booths reminds us we have a responsibility to offer ourselves in service to God and fellowman

### **Celebration, Rejoicing and Worship (Leviticus 23:39-41)**

The Feast of Booths is a time to celebrate and rejoice before God for seven days (Leviticus 23:39-41; Deuteronomy 16:13-15; Nehemiah 8:17-18). Not only is the Feast a time for celebration, but based upon Zechariah 14:16-18, it is also a time of worship.

In order to "rejoice before the LORD" for seven days (Leviticus 23:40), and for that matter any of God's festivals, Israel saved what we might call a "Festival Tithe" (Deuteronomy 14:22-27). They used this tithe to rejoice before God with their families, and fellow Israelites in need of financial help to observe God's festivals (Deuteronomy 12:17-19). In using this tithe, Israel learned "to fear the LORD [their] God always" (Deuteronomy 14:23). As spiritual Israelites, we should follow this example and save a "Festival Tithe" so we can keep the Feast of Booths, as well as all the other festivals.

### **Dwell in Booths for Seven Days (Leviticus 23:40-43)**

A very important part of observing the Feast of Booths is to spend seven days living in a "booth" (Leviticus 23:40-43; Nehemiah 8:13-17). A "booth" is any type of temporary shelter. The Hebrew word translated booth in Leviticus and Nehemiah is *sukkah* or *Cukkah* 5521: "1) thicket, covert, booth a) thicket b) booth (rude or temporary shelter)" *The NAS Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*.

For the children of Israel staying in booths during the Feast of Booths was a reminder that God made them "dwell in booths when [He] brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 23:43).

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<sup>2</sup> In the Bible days start and end in the evening or at sundown. The Book of Genesis describes the days of creation with the term, "there was evening and there was morning," then the descriptive words "the first day," or "the second day," all the way to seventh day. For whatever reason we fail to see the term "there was evening and there was morning," used in reference to the seventh day, which scripture identifies as following the sixth day (Genesis 1:4-5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:1-2).

The Feast was a continual reminder to Israel of its forty years of wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 32:13; Leviticus 23:42-43). During those years, the Israelites had no permanent home. They were strangers, sojourners, and guests in the lands they traveled through (1 Chronicles 29:15; Psalm 39:12). They were merely heirs to the land God promised to give them (Numbers 34:2, 13, 29; Joshua 11:23), not yet inheritors. Each year the Feast was a reminder of this time of sojourning.

The forefathers of the children of Israel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also lived in temporary dwellings as heirs, but not inheritors of this same promised land (Hebrews 11:8-9). The patriarchs knew that they were only “strangers and exiles in the land” (verse 13 *Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament*).

Like the children of Israel and the patriarchs, Christians are “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11) in the wilderness of this world. This is not our world or society (John 17:14, 16). We are just passing through to a better world to come. As Christians, we are only heirs of God, not yet inheritors of our permanent dwelling place the promised Kingdom of God (Matthew 25:31, 34; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; James 2:5). Staying in a temporary dwelling during the Feast of Booths teaches us that this physical life is only temporary; that we are now sojourners in this world waiting to inherit the Kingdom of God.

#### **Give an Offering to the LORD (Deuteronomy 16:13-17)**

We also observe the Feast is by giving God an offering. We are not to “appear before the LORD empty-handed” during the Feast of Booths (Deuteronomy 16:16). During the Feast Israelites would bring their offerings in the form of livestock or produce to the Tabernacle or Temple where they were sacrificed. How do we apply this instruction today? The general custom during this modern age is to give this offering in the form of a financial gift to the organization that is hosting the Feast site one is attending.

Another way to apply this instruction is by offer up the spiritual sacrifices mentioned earlier. The giving of an offering is very personal, and how someone does this may vary from person to person.

#### **Being Taught the Word of God (Deuteronomy 31:10-12; Nehemiah 8:18; John 7:14)**

Besides worshipping and celebrating, the Feast of Booths is a time to spend seven days studying and being taught from the scriptures. Moses instructed that every seven years during the Feast of Booths the entire Law was to be read to Israel “so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD [their] God, and be careful to observe all the words of [the] law” (Deuteronomy 31:10-12). During the time of Ezra and Nehemiah “the book of the law of God [was read] daily, from the first day to the last day [of the Feast of Booths]. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance” (Nehemiah 8:18). Jesus used the Feast of Booths as an opportunity to teach the people who gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths (John 7:2, 14). The seventh chapter of the Gospel of John provides us with the details of Jesus’ festival teachings, and the reaction to these teachings by the people and religious leaders. Based on these examples we should use the Feast of Booths as a time to learn more about God by studying the scriptures.

Although the New Testament offers little information on how to observe the Feast of Booths. We have seen that by examining the Old Testament instructions about this festival, through the lens of the New Covenant. We can learn how to observe a New Covenant Feast of Booths.