



# Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles

By Steve Cohen

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## The Significance of Sukkot

*On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of Sukkot, seven days for the Lord. --  
Leviticus 23:34*

Sukkot is the remembrance of wandering in the desert; also a harvest festival. Sukkot is observed by building and “dwelling” in a booth; waving branches and a fruit during services. The festival lasts 7 days.

The Festival of Sukkot begins on Tishri 15, the fifth day after Yom Kippur. It is quite a drastic transition, from one of the most solemn holidays in our year to one of the most joyous.

Sukkot is so unreservedly joyful that it is commonly referred to in Jewish prayer and literature as Z’man Simchateinu Z’mn Simchateinu, the Season of our Rejoicing.

Sukkot is the last of the Shalosh R’galim (three pilgrimage festivals).

Like Passover and Shavu’ot, Sukkot has a dual significance: historical and agricultural. Historically, Sukkot commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, Sukkot is a harvest festival and is sometimes referred to as Chag Ha-Asif, the Festival of Ingathering.

The word “Sukkot” means “booths,” and refers to the temporary dwellings that we are commanded to live in during this holiday in memory of the period of wandering.

The name of the holiday is frequently translated “Feast of Tabernacles,” which, like many translations of Jewish terms, isn’t very useful. This translation is particularly misleading, because the word “tabernacle” in the Bible refers to the portable Sanctuary in the desert, a precursor to the Temple, called in Hebrew “mishkan.”

The Hebrew word “sukkah” (plural: “sukkot”) refers to the temporary booths that people lived in, not to the Tabernacle.

Sukkot lasts for seven days. The two days following the festival, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, are separate holidays but are related to Sukkot and are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot.

No work is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday. Work is permitted on the remaining days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo’ed, as are the intermediate days of Passover.

## Lulav and Etrog

On the first day, you will take for yourselves a fruit of a beautiful tree, palm branches, twigs of a braided tree and brook willows, and you will rejoice before the Lord your G-d for seven days. -Leviticus 23:40  
Another observance during Sukkot involves what are known as the Four Species (arba minim in Hebrew) or the lulav and etrog. We are commanded to take these four plants and use them to “rejoice before the Lord.”



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The four species in question are an etrog (a citrus fruit similar to a lemon native to Israel; in English it is called a citron), a palm branch (in Hebrew, lulav), two willow branches (aravot) and three myrtle branches (hadassim). The six branches are bound together and referred to collectively as the lulav, because the palm branch is by far the largest part. The etrog is held separately.

With these four species in hand, one recites a blessing and waves the species in all six directions (east, south, west, north, up and down), symbolizing the fact that God is everywhere.

Now let's look at the context by which the word tabernacle is used in the New Testament.

1. Jesus tabernacled among us (John 1:14)
2. Peter spoke about his body being a tabernacle (2 Peter 1:13-14)
3. The apostle Paul told us that our earthly bodies were earthly houses or tabernacles (2 Corinthians 5:1-5)
4. The tabernacle of Moses was a tent of habitation (Acts 7:44, Hebrews 9:2-8)
5. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tabernacles (tents) (Hebrews 11:8-9)
6. The tabernacle of David was a tent or dwelling place (Acts 15:16, Amos 9:11). This tabernacle was the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 5:2-5, 8:1-21)
7. Jesus entered the temple on the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2,27-29)
8. The Bible speaks of a heavenly tabernacle (Hebrews 8:1-2, Revelation 13:6, 15:5).
9. Jesus was the true tabernacle of God (Hebrews 9:11)

So, the booth or tabernacle was a temporary dwelling place. Historically, it was to remind the people of their exodus from Egypt as described in Leviticus 23:42-43. Prophetically, the tabernacle points toward the future. A tabernacle is supposed to remind us that we are but strangers and pilgrims on the earth, this being a temporary dwelling place.

So the believer in Christ is but a stranger and pilgrim on this earth (Hebrews 11:8-10,13-16, Genesis 23:3-4,47:9, 1 Peter 1:17, 2:11).

*When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. -- Hebrews 9:11-12*



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## For More Information

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