

The Testimony of Tabernacles – Sukkot

by Rabbi Jeff Forman
... to build, to encourage, to inspire



For forty years the Jewish people lived in temporary booths or tabernacles while in the wilderness. During that time God miraculously sustained them. He provided manna from heaven, water from the rock, and clothing that did not wear out—all while preparing the next generation to inherit the land He had promised.

This forty-year period of living in booths is remembered each year in the joyous festival called Sukkot or Tabernacles. It takes place during the seventh month of the Jewish calendar along with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Sukkot is one of the three festivals designated by the Lord as pilgrimage festivals, requiring the people of Israel to journey each year to Jerusalem to celebrate them.

According to Leviticus 23:42-43, Jewish people are to dwell in booths for seven days each year. *“You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God”*

Why Did Israel Dwell in Booths?

It was not God's intention for the people to live in booths for so long in the wilderness. When He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, His desire was for that first generation to enter the Promised Land without delay. However, just before crossing the Jordan, Israel sent twelve spies to survey the land. Ten returned with a fearful and discouraging report. Only Joshua and Caleb trusted God's promise and urged the people to move forward in faith. Nevertheless, the people succumbed to fear and unbelief and disobeyed the Lord. As a result, God judged them and said, *“According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.”* (Numbers 14:34)

Their refusal to trust God and enter the Promised Land resulted in forty years of wandering in the wilderness. During that time, the people experienced life in temporary dwellings or Sukkot.

This wilderness journey serves as a powerful portrait for us. Having been delivered from the bondage of Egypt—a picture of sin—we believers are now pilgrims on our way to an eternal Promised Land. This present world is not our permanent home, and just like Israel dwelling in booths in the wilderness, we too live in temporary Sukkot – our bodies!





How Does the Sukkah Speak to Us Today?

Life in the Sukkah was temporary – it reminds us that this life is brief. Psalm 90:10-12 calls us to consider: *The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years...So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* Let us live in the light of eternity, looking forward to our eternal inheritance.

Life in the Sukkah was transitory - it reminds us that life is transient. Everything around us is constantly in flux, and with each new technological advance, the pace of change seems to accelerate. Yet, there is a constant in our lives, an anchor amid change, challenges and storms, *for He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So, we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear...” (Hebrews 13:5-6)* The cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left the Israelites and the Lord will never leave us either.

Life in the Sukkah was vulnerable - it reminds us of how exposed and fragile we really are. Just like the Israelites living in sukkahs were subject to weather and wide-open to attack, we too are at the mercy of happenstance. Yet, living a life dependent upon God gives us a sure foundation. He is our strength and our shield. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Messiah Yeshua, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope... to an inheritance... that does not fade away... who are kept by the power of God through faith...” (1 Peter 1:3-4)*

Life in the Sukkah was unencumbered - The sukkah speaks to us of the simple life. Let us live our lives unentangled, focusing on the most important things. In Luke 10 we see a portrait of two opposite approaches to life – Miriam and Martha. Miriam sat at Yeshua’s feet taking in His every word. Martha went about distracted, worried and troubled by many things. Yeshua gently instructs her that only *“...one thing is needed.” (v.42)*

Life in the Sukkah was on the move - The sukkah speaks of a mobile life. Israel had to be flexible to follow God. When the cloud departed, they had to pack up and follow. So, we too are to be led by the Spirit of the Living God. We cannot remain so entrenched in our habits and inflexible in our own ways that we are unable to hear and follow His voice. We need to be responsive and ready to go where the Lord leads, willing to “Go into all the world!”

May God teach us through the Sukkah to number our days and present to Him a heart of wisdom! (Psalm 90:12)



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