

The Feast of Tabernacles in the Millennial Kingdom

by Randall Price

Once Messiah has returned to earth as King and established His Messianic Kingdom, with its center at the gloriously rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem (Zech. 6:12-15; 8:3; Ezek. 40-48; Matt. 19:28; 25:31-32; Rev. 20:4), the festival calendar will be resumed as predicted by the prophet Ezekiel: "They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts, and sanctify My sabbaths" (Ezek. 44:24; cf. Zeph. 3:18). However, of the seven feasts of the Lord only the Feast of Tabernacles has its typical fulfillment in the Millennium as a demonstration of God's restoration program for Israel in keeping with the terms of the Abrahamic and New Covenants. These covenants promised safe territorial boundaries to Israel where it would serve spiritually as a blessing and witness to the Gentile nations (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:18; Isa. 2:2-4; 60:3; Jer. 32:37-41; 33:16; Ezek. 37:25-28). Confirmation of a Millennial setting for this feast is evident from its many messianic and prophetic features which could only be realized in the time of Israel's future redemption and restoration. For example, the term "tabernacles" (Hebrew, *succot*; Greek, *skene*) has its meaning as part of a restoration promise of God to return to earth and "tabernacle" with Israel in a way never before experienced in history: "Thus says the Lord, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem ...'" (Zech. 8:3a); "I will set My Sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them ... (Ezek. 37:26-27); "the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders" (Isa. 24:23). While this "tabernacling" with Israel will take the form of God's renewed presence in the Temple, the prophet Isaiah indicates that a greater display of this will be witnessed than at any time or at Temple in the past: "Then the Lord will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy" (Isa. 4:5). The "canopy" (Hebrew, *huppah*) of God's glory in this verse is stated in the next verse to be a "tabernacle (Hebrew, *sukkah*) from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain." This wording is intended to connect the past experience of deliverance (from the Pharaoh in Egypt) and temporary man-made shelters (Lev. 23:42-43) with the future deliverance (from the Antichrist in the Tribulation) and permanent God-given sanctuary. Ezekiel depicts the method of this future "tabernacling" with the return of God's Shekinah Glory to the Temple (Ezek. 43:1-7), while Jeremiah's reveals its result as Jerusalem becomes "the Throne of the Lord, and all the nations will be gathered to it..." (Jer. 3:17). Such a divine preview of this future "tabernacling glory" was given to correct Peter's limited concept of building temporary "tabernacles" for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-5; Mk. 9:2-7; Lk. 9:28-35). Indeed later Jewish interpretation saw in the reference to "tabernacles" not only the Israelites temporary shelters in the wilderness but also the divine *sukkah* (the Shekinah) which had "brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 23:43). In this way they connected the Feast of Tabernacles with the promise that God's presence would dwell with Israel in the future as it had in the past (Hag. 2:5-9; cf. Zeph. 3:15c).

In a similar way Jesus had made this connection in His own Person as the "Word become flesh tabernacling among us" (Jn. 1:14). At the Feast of Tabernacles He combined two of the messianic symbols of the feast - the water libation and the light of the candelabras in the Temple precinct - to illustrate the fulfillment in Himself of the promised restoration of Israel under Messiah in the Millennial Age. The significance of this was displayed on the final day (seventh day) of this feast is known as *Hoshana Rabbah* (The Day of the "Great *Hosanna*"), taken from liturgical passages recited throughout the feast which begin with the Hebrew imperative *hoshana* ("save now"). At this time the people waved their lulavs (palm branches) while the Levites chanted the *Hallel* (Pss. 113-118). The name of this day - *Hosanna* - comes from the closing words of Psalm 118 which reads: "Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord... Blessed be he who

comes in the name of the Lord...” This prayer for the speedy advent of messianic redemption accompanied a special ceremony known as the “water-drawing festival” (Hebrew, *simhat bet hassoevah*). At this ceremony water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam in a ceremony known as) and poured on the corner of the Altar in the Temple as a libation offering. Its purpose was in connection with prayers for the annual rains, but also had symbolic messianic connections. It was here at the Siloam (Hebrew, *Shiloach*, “He sent”) that the fuller’s had washed their clothing (Isa. 7:3), a figure drawn upon by the prophets to illustrate the messianic purification of the Millennial Temple’s servants (see Mal. 3:2-3). Here, too, the Prophet Isaiah had challenged Ahaz to trust God not man and revealed a messianic sign (Isa. 7:7-14). Succot also celebrates God’s provision of refuge in the wilderness and recalls His prophetic promise of rescue at the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), and restoration in the future kingdom of Messiah. This water was taken to the Temple and poured over the corner of the Altar, a ritual based on an oral tradition that dated to the time of Moses (*Ta’anit* 3a, *Succot* 44b, 44a). The significance of the pouring of water was both *symbolic* and *prophetic*. Its *symbolic* purpose was a prayer for rain, since the summer was about to end and the rainy season begin. This prayer for rain demonstrated Israel’s dependence upon the Lord, an act of faith that will be required of all nations in connection with this ceremony in the Millennial Temple (Zech. 14:16-19). Its *prophetic* purpose was messianic, looking forward to the outpouring of the *Ruach Ha-Kodesh* (“the Holy Spirit”) upon Israel and the nations under the New Covenant in the Kingdom Age (Ezek. 36:27; Joel 2:28).

This ceremony forms the background for Jesus’ arrival at the feast as described in Matthew 21:9 and John 7:37-39 riding into the Temple precinct through the Eastern Gate entrance, greeted by shouts of *Hosanna*, “Save us please!”, and then proclaiming to the crowds that He was the true giver of the “water” and the “light” of the world (Jn. 7:37-38; 8:12). On this day during Temple times willow branches were beaten against the pavement next to the Great Altar to symbolize the casting away of the nation’s sins. In addition, at this time Israel’s return to blessing will include the spiritual instruction and blessing of the nations, who will join with them in the ongoing celebration of Succot (Zech. 14:16-19). It is also significant that the Scripture portion from the Prophets read in the synagogue on the Sabbath during the Feast of Tabernacles is Ezekiel chapter 38 which deals with the future battle of Gog and Magog in which the Lord miraculously preserves Israel in an end-time war.

The use of “tabernacle” also recalls the famous prophecy of the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom (“the tabernacle of David”) given in Amos 9:11: “After these things I will return and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it, in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name ...” The fulfillment of this prophecy, as explained in Acts 15:14-18, will take place after the full number of Gentiles has been grafted onto the olive tree (in keeping with the blessing of the Gentiles in the Abrahamic Covenant) through faith” (Rom. 11:25) at the completion of the Church Age. those Gentiles (of the sheep nations, who came to faith in the Jewish Messiah during the time of Jacob’s Trouble, see Matt. 25:34-40) will join with redeemed Israelites in the true worship of God. In addition, the apostle John specifically used the imagery of the Feast of Tabernacles in relation to the Tribulation martyrs from among the nations. He depicted these Gentiles as having “palm branches” and “serving in His Temple” while God “spreads His tabernacle over them” and Jesus “guides them to springs of living water” (Rev. 7:9-17). Such Gentile inclusion was anticipated by the alternate name for the feast as “the Feast of Ingathering” (Exodus 23:15-16) and demonstrated during the feast in Second Temple times as Jewish men took part in a Temple ritual where seventy sacrifices were offered in atonement for the sins of the nations that had come from the sons of Noah. The prophets cited this future inclusion of Gentile nations, who formerly oppressed Israel, but will become a part of the worshipping community, as one of the evidences of the changed conditions under Messiah’s New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). For example, Zechariah states that “many nations will join themselves to Lord in that day and will become My people ...” (Zech. 2:11), while Isaiah describes the Millennial Temple as “a house of prayer for all the peoples” (Isa. 56:7; cf. Matt. 21:12; Mk. 11:17; Lk. 19:46) to which all of the nations of the earth will

come to learn the ways of the Lord (Isa. 2:2c-3; 60:3; 62:2), to behold God's glory (Isa. 60:3; 62:2; 66:18), offer sacrifices (Isa. 56:6; 66:20) and to pay material tribute (Isa. 60: 5; 66:18-19; cf. Hag. 2:7-8; Zech. 8:22; Rev. 21:24).

This last reference to Gentile payment of tribute also forms the subject of the only explicit mention of the Feast of Tabernacles in a Millennial context: "Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16). This statement is part of the conclusion to a section of Zechariah (chs. 12-14) which detail the Gentile invasion of Jerusalem during the campaigns of Armageddon. In the immediate context (ch. 14) a summary of events reveal prophetic aspects predicted by the feast: (1) the advent of Messiah (vss. 3-4), the rescue and restoration of the Jewish Remnant (vs. 5; cf. Lk. 21:27-28), the experience of heaven-sent light and living water (vss. 7-8), the recognition of Messiah as universal King (vs. 9), the transformation of Jerusalem (vs. 10), and the gathering of the wealth of the Gentile nations (vs. 14). Those who are addressed as being obligated to observe the Feast of Tabernacles in verse 14 are the remnants of the Gentile nations who were previously allied with the Antichrist in the war against the Holy City (Zech. 12:3, 9; 14:2, 12; cf. Rev. 19:19; Psa. 2:1-3). Although those in the armies who were present in the battle will have been destroyed by a deadly plague (vss. 12-13), others will remain in these countries to appear before Messiah's judgment seat at the conclusion of the conflict (Matt. 25:31-32). Those who converted to Messiah and His rule (Rev. 15:3-4), as evidenced by their costly compassion to the Jewish Remnant (Matt. 25:35-40) will continue into the Millennial Kingdom. Nevertheless, under the rod-of-iron rule of Messiah (Psa. 2:9; Rev. 19:15), representatives of these nations will be required to demonstrate their allegiance to King Messiah by annual appearance at His Throne-City with tribute and material offerings (as token appreciation of divine provision). This act is in accordance with an ancient association of the Feast of Tabernacles with the recognition of the king as God's son, an act alluded to in Psalm 2:10-11: "Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry and you perish in the way ..." The ancient observance of the feast was also followed by a levitically-led ceremony of covenant renewal (Neh. 9:1-38) in which a national allegiance to the Lord was reaffirmed (Neh. 10:29). Therefore, a warning is issued in this passage to these national representatives if they should fail to observe the Feast of Tabernacles (vss. 17-19), which would be tantamount to an act of spiritual and national rebellion. Remembering that part of the ritual of the Feast of Tabernacles was in view of receiving rain (specifically the former rains), one punishment for those nations that fail to appear annually in Jerusalem will be a withholding of rain, the very gift which made possible their gifts. The other punishment will be a plague, which would allow the inclusion of Egypt whose natural productivity depends more on the gift of the Nile than the gift of rains and whose punishment to secure their acknowledgment of Lord's sovereignty during the time of the exodus had been plagues.

The Feast of Tabernacles will serve as the instrument to universally unite these nations in their allegiance to Jesus as King Messiah and Sovereign Lord and Judge (Zech. 14:9, 17; Isa. 2:4) and possibly provide an occasion for the Jewish People to fulfill their destiny as a light to the nations in spiritual instruction to these national representatives (Zech. 8:22-23; Isa. 2:3; cf. Hab. 2:14). Because the nations become vassals of Lord, they have also the right to be called "His people," just as He as their suzerain can be called "their God." This covenantal language of identification ("My people") is absent in Zechariah's presentation of the restored Gentile nations, but it is found elsewhere (cf. Jer. 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38). Isaiah elevates the nations of Egypt and Syria to covenantal status (Isa. 19:24-25), making them co-participants in both the obligations and benefits of the Temple (Isa. 19:21; 27:13; 56:6-8; 60:3, 21; 66:20). The tribute gifts required by the nations (mentioned in Zech. 14:14 but not in the Feast of Tabernacles text) are elsewhere described as the spoils of war which Lord as the suzerain (over vassals) has full right to receive. The wealth of the conquered nations will accrue to Messiah's Millennial Temple in such a way as to

fill it with abundance (a fitting contrast to Israel's past post-exilic poverty), increasing its splendor and value (Zeph. 3:20; Hag. 2:6-7a, 22).

All that God has purposed and planned through His provision as the Lord of His people will be finally fulfilled and celebrated in the Millennial Feast of Tabernacles. The revelation of this Millennial realization should prompt us to gratefully acknowledge God's gift of Messiah for us today and His constant "tabernacling" with us through His indwelling Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:20b; Eph. 2:22). As the future feast will openly demonstrate the unity of Jew and Gentile as they alike bow to Jesus as their Messiah and Lord, it encourages the Body of Messiah today to foster greater unity among all its members before a watching world (Jn. 17:20-21; Eph. 2:14-18). As we do these things in the present age, we honor the Lord of the feast who will one day tabernacle with us forever: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them" (Rev. 21:3; cf. vs. 22).

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