

The Feast of Tabernacles: Foreshadow & Fulfillment

The Feast as Given by God

The Commands for the keeping of the Jewish Feasts were Given to Moses. Three of them were called the *Great Feasts*: **Passover**, **Pentecost** (or the Feast of Weeks); and **Tabernacles** (or the Feast of Booths). Jewish-Christian historian, Alfred Edersheim, points out how these three feasts had great significance for the nation of Israel in a number of ways, and I know this is a lot to take in in an oral presentation, so I put them on a handout:

(1) They were significant *in relation to the land* God had given them, and the increase God would give them from it. The **Passover** was in the spring of the year representing the early period of the growing season. Fifty days after Passover came **Pentecost**, the feast of Weeks, when newly ripened wheat, one of the early crops, was offered to the Lord as *firstfruits*. Last was the feast of **Tabernacles**, a feast of ingathering when all the fruits of the field had been gathered in.

(2) The feasts were also significant *historically*, by marking three great periods in Israel's history. **Passover** commemorated the deliverance out of Egypt when Jehovah passed over Israel, protecting them from the destroying angel and sparing them as a nation. **Pentecost** marked the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, when God solemnly covenanted with them, saying, "*If you will obey My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to Me above all people, and you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Exodus 19). **Tabernacles** commemorated the end of Israel's journey through the wilderness, where they had lived in tents. To observe it, they took boughs of palm and willow trees, made temporary huts of branches and sat under the booths. It was a joyful celebration remembering the Lord who had saved them from their enemies and brought them to the land of promise.

(3) Finally, the feasts were significant *prophetically* as pictures of great spiritual realities in the life of God's people. **Passover** points to Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrificed for us, whose sacrifice brings to us a perpetual feast. "*For indeed Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*" (1 Corinthians 5:7). **Pentecost** is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, which would confirm Christ's covenant of grace in the heart of the believer: "*...if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones [meaning the Ten Commandments], was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?*" (2 Corinthians 3:7-8). But one step more is needed. If we have received redemption, we also have the Holy Spirit, but we still wait for our inheritance and abiding home. The feast of **Tabernacles** points to the everlasting inheritance, the end of wandering, when the multitude, with palms in their hands, redeemed out of all nations, will look back upon their tribulations in this wilderness world, and celebrate the ultimate salvation they had anticipated for so long.

The Feast After the Return from Captivity

After the Captivity in Babylon, when the Jews had returned to Israel, one of the things that marked their restoration of the worship of Jehovah was that they kept the feast of Tabernacles. Ezra and Nehemiah were two of the leaders of that return from Babylon, and both of them (Ezra in chapter 3, and Nehemiah in chapter 8) mention the observance of this important Feast. Particularly in Nehemiah 8:17, it is attended with great joy, similar to what we see in Revelation 7: "*And there was very great gladness.*"

Jesus and the Feast of Tabernacles

In the Time of Christ, the Feast of Tabernacles had expanded and become even more elaborate in its celebration. Jesus' attendance at one

of these feasts in John 7 and 8 seems to indicate that such was the practice. Commentator William Milligan writes,

The Feast of Tabernacles was at once the last, the highest, and the most joyful of the festivals of the Jewish year... In the later period of their history the Jews connected the Feast of Tabernacles with the brightest anticipations of the future as well as with the most joyful memories of the past. They beheld in it the promise of the Spirit, the great gift of the approaching Messianic age; and, [in order] that they might give full expression to this, they sent on the eighth, or great, day of the feast, a priest to the pool of Siloam with a golden urn, that he might fill it from the pool, and, bringing it up to the Temple, might pour it on the altar, and during it, the joy of the people reached its highest point. They surrounded the priest in crowds as he brought up the water from the pool, waved their "palms" —and made the courts of the Temple re-echo with their [salvation] song as found in Isa. 12:3: *"With joy you will draw water out of wells of salvation."* At night the great illumination of the Temple followed. (Milligan, *Expositors Bible*)

Note how in John chapters 7&8, He applies the fulfillment to Himself. He alludes to the pouring of the water [see Isaiah 12:3] upon the altar: *"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38).* In the next chapter, Jesus alludes to the illumination of the temple and applies it to Himself when He says, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).*

The Feast in Revelation

In Revelation 7, the allusions to that Old Testament Feast are so significant as to suggest that what is being described here is the ultimate fulfillment of it. Compare the details with the explanation we just read:

- In v. 9, we see the heavenly worshipers: *"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all*

nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands." Remember the palm branches which they used to make the booths in the Old Testament celebration.

- In v. 10, they sing a *salvation* song. Remember that the theme of the feast of Tabernacles was salvation: *"and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" ...*
- In v. 16, there is no heat of the sun to scorch them: *"They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat" — why? Because the Son of God is apparently the light of it. Remember Jesus' words at the Feast: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).*
- In v. 17, they are led to the Fountain of living waters, and because of Him, they will never thirst, *"for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* Remember Jesus' words at the feast: *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).*
- All of this is true because their God who sits on the throne will dwell among them: *"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell [that is, "tabernacle"] among them" (v. 15).* John's Gospel told us, speaking of Christ's first coming, that *"the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14).* He made His dwelling place among us. The Old Testament tabernacle, in which God dwelled among His earthly nation, was just a faint foreshadowing of the true tabernacle seen in Revelation 7, which is Christ dwelling among His heavenly people.