



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 016 The Festival of Tabernacles

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Read Leviticus 23:34-43

When Moses met with the Lord on Mount Sinai, on the way to the Promised Land, he was instructed to observe a number of feasts, or festivals, three of which were to be compulsory – Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. The Hebrew name for Tabernacles is *sukkot*, meaning “booths”.

1. The nature of the Tabernacles Festival. Once the Hebrews whom the Lord had delivered from Egypt had entered the Promised Land, they were to celebrate the festival of Tabernacles annually, in the month of *Tishri* (September or October in our calendar). They were to leave their homes for seven days and live in makeshift shelters (or “booths”). What was the mood at these feasts (see Lev 23:40)? Its purpose was to remind them of something. What was it (v43)?

2. The New Testament significance. Feasts and certain rituals laid down in the Law given on Sinai invariably foreshadowed (had a prophetic association) with something significant in the life of Jesus or his Church. The Passover clearly prefigured Christ’s death to take away sin, and Pentecost marked the coming of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of Tabernacles is not so clear, but we might gain some understanding of its significance from what the Gospel of John tells us in John 1:14 (read this verse). If you used a literal translation, or the Amplified Bible, you will have seen the word “tabernacled”. It is telling us that Jesus “tabernacled” among us. In other words, during his first incarnation (living in this world as a man), Christ dwelt with the people of this world – at this stage temporarily, just as the Hebrews dwelt temporarily in tents.

Now read John 7:37-39. It was at a Feast of Tabernacles (see verses 2 and 10 of that chapter), on the last day of the feast, when it was customary for a priest to collect some water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it on the altar in the Temple, that Jesus made a profound statement. What was it?*

To think about: If the death of Jesus coincided with Passover, could it be that Tabernacles coincided with his birth? We dare not be dogmatic about this interpretation, but it may be worth thinking about. (Note: It is unlikely that Jesus was born on 25th December. It was the date of a pagan festival but was used in the 4th Century AD as a date to remember Jesus’ birth. There is some evidence to suggest that Jesus was more likely to have been born in September. For the reasoning behind this theory, see <http://christiananswers.net/christmas/mythsaboutchristmas.html>.)

To dig deeper:

1. Using a concordance, see what other events took place on occasions of the celebration of Tabernacles.
2. Using Bible dictionaries, commentaries and any other reference materials available to you, see what you can find out about the celebration of Tabernacles, in biblical times and today, and if they have any suggestions about its New Testament significance.

* See Study 015 for a closer look at this passage.