

# THE FESTIVAL OF TABERNACLES: CELEBRATING THE WILDERNESS WANDERINGS LIVING IN TENTS; THANKING GOD FOR THE HARVEST LEVITICUS 23:33–44

## *Introduction*

In human history, God has one primary focus, that of salvation — the saving of people and their worship of Him. Holy Scripture tells us that God created man to live with Him, that God's great purpose is to reveal the riches of His grace to man throughout all eternity (Eph 2:7). To get this point across to the people of ancient history, God set aside several religious holidays. Note two striking points about the annual feasts or festivals:

First, these holidays focused upon the salvation and redemption of man and the worship of God.

Second, the holidays painted the prophetic picture of salvation, the salvation that God was to bring to man through His Son, the LORD Jesus Christ.

God used the annual festivals to show a believer how he was to walk day by day throughout life. This will be clearly seen as the feasts or festivals are studied. This is the subject of this chapter: *Laws that Govern the Annual Feasts or Festivals of Worship: The Prophetic Picture of Salvation, Leviticus 23:1-44.*

- I. The festivals were appointed or set by God: they were sacred assemblies or festivals not secular, a time when the people came together for worship and joyful celebration (vv. 1-2).
  - II. The Sabbath Day of rest: the first and most basic appointed day (v. 3).
  - III. The three spring festivals were closely connected (vv. 4-14).
  - IV. The Festival of Harvest or Pentecost: to give thanks for the harvest and to dedicate one's life anew to God (a symbol of Pentecost, of the great harvest of souls, and of people giving their lives to God) (vv. 15-22).
  - V. The Festival of Trumpets: to arouse the people to trust God more and more and to heed the message of joy and atonement (reconciliation) (vv. 23-25).
  - VI. The Day of Atonement: to cleanse the people from their sins (a symbol of sins being cleansed through the shed blood) (vv. 26-32).
  - VII. The Festival of Tabernacles: to celebrate the wilderness wanderings when the people lived in tents on their way to the promised land, and to thank God for the harvest (a symbol of the believer's march through this world to heaven) (vv. 33-44).
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### ***Leviticus 23:33–44 The Festival of Tabernacles***

There was the Festival of Tabernacles. This festival celebrated the wilderness wanderings when the people of God had to live in tents on their way to the promised land. It also celebrated a gathering of the harvest at the end of the year; therefore it was to be a period of thanksgiving to God for the harvest (Exo 23:16). The Festival of Tabernacles is a symbol of the believer's march through this world to heaven. On their march to the promised land, the people of God had to live in tents. It was going to take God forty years to teach the people to follow Him and to obey His commandments through trial after trial. Therefore, the people had to be able to pitch camp and to break camp on the spur of the moment when the need to escape some trial arose. Moreover, the desert or wilderness was not to be their permanent home; consequently, they were not allowed to build any kind of permanent housing. They were to live in tents until they reached the promised land, at which time they would be allowed to build houses and to settle down. Because they were forced to wander about so long in the wilderness, their journey is referred to as the *Wilderness Wanderings* or *Wilderness Journeys*. During this period of time while they were marching to the promised land, they lived in temporary tents. As stated, the Festival of Tabernacles was to celebrate the wilderness wanderings when they lived in tents on their way to the promised land. They were to be forever thankful to God and to keep their minds focused upon the promised land. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. The people were to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (v. 34). It was to last for seven days, a full week of festivities and worship.
2. The people were to begin with a sacred assembly on the first day, doing no work whatsoever (v. 35). They were to approach God for atonement (reconciliation) during each of the seven days, approach God through the Burnt Offering (v. 36). On the eighth day, they were to hold another sacred assembly to close the festival. The body of the whole nation was called together to approach God for atonement or reconciliation — through another Burnt Offering (v. 36).
3. Note that the importance of the Feast of Tabernacles and the other feasts was stressed (vv. 37-38):
  - => They were all annual sacred assemblies for worship, a time when the whole nation was to assemble together to approach God (v. 37).
  - => They were for the purpose of approaching God for atonement or reconciliation — through the sacrifices and offerings (v. 37).
  - => They were to be additional celebrations, not to replace a person's regular approach to God. They were to be in addition to all other approaches to God.
  - => They were not to replace the Freewill Offerings, nor the regular Sabbath day worship, nor any other gift or offerings that the people brought to God. They were, as stated, to be an additional period of worship or celebration of the LORD (v. 38).

4. Note that the importance of the Feast of Tabernacles is re-emphasized (vv. 39-40). It was to be celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and last for seven days. It was to be celebrated after the crops had been harvested. Both the first day and the eighth day were to be days of rest.

Note that the people were to build booths or shelters from tree leaves on the first day (v. 40) They were to live in these booths or shelters for seven days (vv. 40, 42). The festival was to be a celebration of great joy and rejoicing before the LORD (vv. 40-41).

5. The festival was to be a lasting, permanent law (v. 41).
6. Note the purpose for the festival: it was to teach all descendants that their ancestors had to live in booths when God delivered them out of Egypt. Note that this was a symbol of how temporary this world is. Also note the warning of God: “I am the LORD your God” (v. 43). God expected His people to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. If they failed, His judgment would fall upon them. He is the LORD their God, able to execute judgment.

**Thought 1.** As the believer marches to heaven, his dwelling upon this earth is only temporary. No matter what kind of house he lives in, it is temporary. It is made out of decaying, corruptible materials. It will waste away, and some day, perhaps decades or even centuries out in the future, it will cease to be. Earthly homes are only temporary structures. Moreover, the believer is living in a temporary body, a body that the Bible describes as a temporary tent or tabernacle (2 Cor 5:1-4). The body is corruptible and will decay and cease to exist. The believer’s journey or pilgrimage through this world is only a temporary journey. He is marching to his permanent and eternal home in heaven, where he will live forever in the presence of God.

**Mat 6:19-21** *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

**2 Cor 5:1-4** *Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. Because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

**Phil 3:20-21** *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

**Col 1:5** *The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.*

**Titus 2:12-13** *It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

**1 Pet 1:3-4** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 4 And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade kept in heaven for you.*

**1 Pet 1:24** *For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”*

**Rev 22:14** *Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.*

**Job 10:9** *Remember that you moulded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?*

**Psa 89:48** *What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?*

**Psa 103:15** *The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field.*

**Isa 40:6** *A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.” ■*