The Feast of Booths

Teaching Tips

February 28, 2016

Bible Study Guide 13

Words You Should Know

A. **Boughs** *(Leviticus 23:40)* 'anaph (Heb.)—Branches.

B. **Booths** *(v. 43)* sukkah (Heb.)—Crude or temporary shelters such as tents.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Heritage and Hope. Families need rituals of celebration to remember their heritage and to pass it on to their children. How can they preserve their heritage to succeeding generations? The Israelites’ celebration of the festival of booths assisted them in renewing their commitment to their guiding and protecting God and in passing on their faith to their children.

A. Pray for your students and lesson clarity.

B. Study and meditate on the entire text.

C. Complete Lesson 13 in the *Precepts for Living®* Personal Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Solicit prayer requests and pray for your students.

B. Ask students to share events celebrated by their families. Ask them to point out any special or unique traditions.

C. Allow time for the students to question one another about the special or unique traditions of their families.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask for volunteers to read the Focal Verses.

B. Use the People, Places, and Times; Background; and In Depth sections to clarify the verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Answer questions from the Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning sections.

B. Read the Lesson in Our Society.

N—Next Steps for Application
A. Read the Make It Happen section and discuss how the students can apply it to their lives.

B. Close in prayer thanking God for guiding and protecting us as His children.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: The Feast of Booths

Theme Song: “What a Mighty God We Serve”

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 8:1–11

Bible Background • Leviticus 23:33-43; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–29

Printed Text • Leviticus 23:33–43 | Devotional Reading • Deuteronomy 8:1–11

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: UNDERSTAND all aspects of the Festival of Booths; APPRECIATE a faith heritage in which God guides and protects the faithful; and DECIDE to pass on to the next generation a legacy of faith.

In Focus

Celeste watched as all of the women in her family gathered around her bedside. They passed her son, only six hours old, from one set of loving hands to the next. Celeste’s mother, her grandmother, an aunt who had flown in from Florida, and two of her grandmother’s sisters were all crowded into the hospital room. After a while, her son was passed back to the oldest of the women, her great-aunt Katherine. Aunt Katherine adjusted the blanket, and then held the baby close to her and began to pray. She thanked God for his parents and asked God to give them the strength and wisdom to raise the child in a Christian home. She prayed for the baby’s brothers and sisters and asked that they love and care for their young brother. Her prayer included other family members as well. Celeste listened carefully to her great-aunt’s prayer. She began to thank God for this family tradition of the elder women of the family praying for every newborn. She looked forward to the day when she would stand among them and pray for her own grandchildren.

Israel was commanded to celebrate feasts that would allow them to remember and honor the goodness of the Lord. What traditions in your life remind you of God’s goodness?

Keep in Mind

“Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 23:42–43).

Focal Verses

KJV
And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

34 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD.

35 On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

36 Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein.

37 These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day:

38 Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD.

39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.

41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:

43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

NLT

And the LORD said to Moses,

34 “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. Begin celebrating the Festival of Shelters on the fifteenth day of the appointed month—five days after the Day of Atonement. This festival to the LORD will last for seven days.

35 On the first day of the festival you must proclaim an official day for holy assembly, when you do no ordinary work.

36 For seven days you must present special gifts to the LORD. The eighth day is another holy day on which you present your special gifts to the LORD. This will be a solemn occasion, and no ordinary work may be done that day.

37 (“These are the LORD’s appointed festivals. Celebrate them each year as official days for holy assembly by presenting special gifts to the LORD—burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices, and liquid offerings—each on its proper day.

38 These festivals must be observed in addition to the LORD’s regular Sabbath days, and the offerings are in addition to your personal gifts, the offerings you give to fulfill your vows, and the voluntary offerings you present to the LORD.)

39 “Remember that this seven-day festival to the LORD—the Festival of Shelters—begins on the fifteenth day of the appointed month, after you have harvested all the produce of the land. The first day and the eighth day of the festival will be days of complete rest.

40 On the first day gather branches from magnificent trees palm fronds, branches from leafy trees, and willows that
grow by the streams. Then celebrate with joy before the LORD your God for seven days.

41 You must observe this festival to the LORD for seven days every year. This is a permanent law for you, and it must be observed in the appointed month from generation to generation.

42 For seven days you must live outside in little shelters. All native-born Israelites must live in shelters.

43 This will remind each new generation of Israelites that I made their ancestors live in shelters when I rescued them from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

The People, Places, and Times

The Jewish Feasts and Holidays. The Mosaic Law prescribes nine annual holy days plus weekly Sabbaths. The annual holy days in order are: Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Booths (Tabernacles). Not all of the holy days in Leviticus 23 continue to be observed by all Jews, with the First Fruits being combined with Passover (observed on the second day) and Trumpets not generally observed. Three of these feasts were designated as pilgrimages (Deuteronomy 16:16). During these times, the Israelites were supposed to travel to Jerusalem to appear before the Lord in His holy sanctuary for ritual worship, sacrifices and celebration. Deuteronomy 16:16 indicates only the males are to attend, but Deuteronomy 16:14 calls for all family members to observe the Festival of Booths. Probably in the earliest days of observance only the males participated, but as time passed, whole families became involved.

Vows. A vow was a pledge or promise to God, made to receive something from Him or as a way of showing thanksgiving to Him for a benefit already received. There was no law demanding that vows be made, although they were regulated to make sure the person offering it understood the seriousness of the pledge.

Freewill offerings. Freewill offerings were made in addition to the required sacrifices. These offerings were spontaneously made as a response to God’s goodness. They were usually made with items valuable to the worshiper and were above and beyond the requirements of the Law. Freewill offerings were a demonstration of the worshiper’s willing heart to honor God. As such, they are a symbol of the believer’s passion and recognition of God and His greatness.

Background

The Festival of Booths is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles or, in Hebrew, Sukkot. This seven-day feast is last of the mandatory feasts mentioned in Leviticus 23, and the last of the three required pilgrimages. A time of rejoicing for Israel, the Feast of Booths celebrated at the end of the harvest season, and was a reminder to Israel that their God had provided them with everything they needed.

At-A-Glance

1. Institution of the Feast (Leviticus 23:33–34)
2. Requirements of the Feast (vv. 35–39)
3. Celebration of the Feast (vv. 40–43)

In Depth

1. Institution of the Feast (Leviticus 23:33–34)

The Feast of Booths is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Ingathering. The feast was to be held five days after the Day of Atonement. Unlike the solemnity of the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Booths was
quite joyous. This feast also served to remind the Israelites of the “booths,” or tent-like shelters, that they lived in during their wilderness experience. During this period in their history, Israel was not yet a nation, but rather a loose confederation of tribes, moving through the desert under the direction and protection of God. In its homeless condition, Israel was totally dependent on God to protect them from enemies.

The Feast of Booths also coincided with the harvesting of the fall harvest. This would probably have included olives and grapes. The people were to give thanks for the productivity of these harvests, recognizing that this too was a blessing from God. During this time, the people were probably feeling especially grateful to God. The grains had been harvested and stored and now the people were gathering the fruit and hoping for rain to nourish the new crops.

2. Requirements of the Feast (vv. 35–39)

As in the other feasts, the celebration of Feast of Booths included sacrifices and offerings to God. Some seventy bulls were sacrificed during the Feast (Numbers 29:13–34). Here we see Israel’s reminder of its mission to the rest of the world. Many rabbinical scholars believed the seventy bulls symbolized the seventy nations of the world before the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 10–11). At the covenant instituted on Mount Sinai, Israel had been sanctified, or set apart, as God’s special people. They were to be a living witness to the existence of the One True and Holy God before all of the nations on the earth.

We must remember that when the Temple was built in Jerusalem, the non-Jewish were not excluded. Instead, a special court was erected to allow the Gentiles a place in the temple where they could come and be instructed about the God of Israel. There in the Court of the Gentiles, the non-Jews could pray to the God of Israel. This is a beautiful reminder to us that our worship of God was never intended to be private and celebrated for the benefit only of other Christians. Rather, we are to praise and thank God for His goodness for the benefit of the world—the saved and the unsaved!

3. Celebration of the Feast (vv. 40–43)

Just before the beginning of the Feast, the people would collect certain types of tree branches. The “boughs of thick trees” are thought to refer to the myrtle tree branches. The branches of willow, and palm and citron trees were also held in the hands and blessed each day of the festival. These leaves were symbolic of the time Israel had spent wandering in the wilderness. These branches would be used to construct booths that mimicked the Israelites’ temporary shelters in the wilderness.

Here we see a powerful analogy to the life of Christians. During that time between accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and the time we enter into the eternal rest of the Lord, the earth we live in is not our home. Like the Children of Israel, we are just pilgrims, and our bodies are the temporary “booths” that we will have to leave when we finally transition from our reconciliation to God until He calls us to our final reward—everlasting life.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Israel to do on the first day of the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:35)?

2. What were the special gifts to the Lord (v. 37)?

Discuss the Meaning

Following the ritualistic offerings at the Feast of Booths, the holy day ends with a lively celebration. Why do you think that is?

Lesson in Our Society
In today’s lesson, we see that the Feast of Booths, and in fact all of the Feasts, were instituted by God. He calls them “his own feasts.” These days, and the Sabbath, reveal the purpose of mankind’s past, present, and future. The feasts also tell us of Jesus’ first and second coming. The feasts are relevant to present-day saints because they are a foreshadowing of God’s ultimate plan for us. They also let us communicate the need to set apart special times and days for celebration. As African Americans, we can celebrate how God has carried us through slavery and segregation and gave us our freedom. These times and days are important as we give honor to God for His provision and guidance and also a way for us to connect with friends, family, and fellow believers.

**Make It Happen**

Not only does the Feast of Booths remind us of the wonderful provisions that God provided to Israel, the feast also sets the stage for the rest and abundance coming to Israel and all the people of God. To those who have loved and obeyed Him and have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior, God intends to provide a rest from all pain and suffering. Commit to thanking God for His continual care, protection, and provision, and renew your trust in Him for the wonderful blessings He has in store for believers.

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do.

**Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned.

**More Light on the Text**

**Leviticus 23:33–43**

Chapter 23 provides commands concerning the important festivals of the calendar year, beginning with the spring festivals of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv. 4–8) and the First Fruits, and the Festival of Weeks (vv. 9–22), also known as Pentecost, which celebrates the beginning of the harvest season with the grain harvest. These are followed by the three fall festivals, which fall in the seventh month—Trumpets (vv. 23–25), the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur (vv. 26–32), and the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles (vv. 33–36, 39–43). Although the ancient Hebrew calendar began with Rosh Hashannah, which is celebrated in late September or early October in the Gregorian calendar, the festival season begins with Passover and Unleavened Bread and concludes with Tabernacles. Both are times of joy, remembering God’s deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and continued guidance and protection during their time in the wilderness. In Deuteronomy 31:10–11, the Israelites are also commanded to read the book of Deuteronomy during the Festival of Booths every seventh year as part of a ceremony renewing their covenant with the Lord.

33 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 34 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD.

The Feast of Tabernacles occurs in the seventh month and is to last for seven days. The seventh month marked the end of the harvest season in Israel, but the number seven also represents completion or perfection in the Old Testament. God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, marking a celebration of the completion of God’s creation. This final celebration of the harvest year is one of feasting, but the Hebrew word for feast (chag, KHAG) is associated both with celebratory eating as well as pilgrimage. Traditionally, the Israelites were to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Since it lasts for seven days, the Israelites are to erect tents to stay in as a reminder of the time in the wilderness when the Lord guided them and protected them.

35 On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. 36 Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and
ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein.

Both the first day of the Feast and the eighth and final day are days when the Israelites do not work. They are both days of holy assembly, and the entire eight days are marked by offerings of fire. These burnt offerings are outlined in detail in Numbers 29:13–38, and the animal sacrifices number many more than the offerings of any other holy festival, indicating the importance of this celebration marking the end of the harvest season. The eighth day is also distinct in that it is no longer a feast (chag) but a solemn assembly (Heb. ‘atsarah, ah-tsah-RAH), a word related to the verb to hold back or refrain. This links it with the final day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which also closes with a solemn assembly (Deuteronomy 16:8). The Hebrew word is associated with communal gathering but also with self-restraint and with closing off. There is a sense of personal and communal sanctity in practicing self-restraint after seven days of feasting, but the word also carries the idea of closing up the festival season in an even more conclusive way than the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Heb. matsot, maht-SOHT) concludes the eight-day observance of Passover and matsot.

37 These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: 38 Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD.

These verses provide a summary reminder of all of the festivals commanded in this chapter. They are all to be sacred occasions which the Israelites celebrate with feasting and offerings (v. 37). These times are distinct from the daily and weekly sabbaths, offerings and vows that the Israelites are to regularly make in celebration to God.

39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. 40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.

The Feast of Tabernacles is summarized again in verse 39 after outlining all of the special holy days in vv. 37–38. Since this is the final festival of the year, it is important to end with a detailed description of its observance. The four types of branches serve as a reminder of the abundance of the agricultural year, and are used to build the tents (Nehemiah 8:14–15). The Israelites are told to rejoice for seven days (v. 40), a command that the returning exiles fulfill in Nehemiah 8:17. A full week of celebration indicates complete joy concerning God’s presence and protection among the Israelites in the wilderness and for each succeeding generation of His people. The connection to creation at the end of the harvest season is crucial, reminding the Israelites that first and foremost the Lord provides through creation itself. Just as God celebrated His creation on the seventh day, so the Israelites should celebrate for seven days at the end of the season.

41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: 43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

No matter how the situation changes from one year to the next or one generation to the next, the Feast of Tabernacles is to be celebrated for seven days every year as a reminder of the Israelites’ time in the wilderness. All of God’s people, no matter who they are or where they are, must make the pilgrimage to live in booths at the end of the harvest season. These temporary dwellings serve as a recollection of the simplicity of the wilderness period, and also a joyful reminder of God’s protection in bringing the Israelites out of slavery and oppression and providing for them in the desert.
The Feast of Tabernacles is still celebrated by Jews around the world, though few make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem due to the impracticalities of travel. Instead, they often erect tents outside their synagogues or in other places in their communities. Christianity has not continued this festival observance, but the feast can still serve as a reminder and celebration of God’s continuing protection and nourishment through rain, sunshine, and healthy crops, as well as through healthy food, homes, jobs, and education for everyone, regardless of whether we live in rural, suburban, or urban settings. Moreover, the eight-day festival is a time to pause for celebration, especially the first and eighth days, which serve as days of rest from regular work. How often do we allow the day-to-day grind to wear us down physically, emotionally, and spiritually? Though it may not always be possible to take an extended break from work, the Feast of Tabernacles reminds us of the importance of setting aside significant time to celebrate God’s protection and abundance in our lives. Since creation, the Lord has continued to provide for His people. The Feast of Tabernacles calls us to rejoice in God’s generosity and wisdom that continue to nourish us day after day, year after year, and generation after generation.

Say It Correctly

Convocation. kahn-voh-KAY-shun.
Solemn. SAH-luhm.
Bough. BOW.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God of the Journey
(Psalm 68:5–10)

TUESDAY

The Journey Begins
(Exodus 3:1–6)

WEDNESDAY

The Journey Falters
(Deuteronomy 1:29–33)

THURSDAY

Remember the Journey
(Deuteronomy 8:1–11)

FRIDAY

Jesus and the Journey
(John 3:14–21)

SATURDAY

Stephen and the Journey
(Acts 7:30–42a)

SUNDAY

The Feast of Booths
(Leviticus 23:33–43)