



From Tabernacles to Passover

by Tim Kelley

The Feast of Tabernacles is probably the most joyous time of year for the people of God. We enjoy making the plans and thinking about the time we'll have visiting friends we sometimes don't see but once a year. But when it's over and we've made the trip back home, there's oftentimes a period of "let down" as we face the onslaught of fall and winter.

One clear example of this is when, back in 1981, my wife and year-old son went to Hawaii for the feast. That year the feast began in mid October, and because we remained in Hawaii for a week or so after the feast, it was almost November before we arrived home. After spending two and a half weeks in the near-perfect garden paradise Hawaiian weather, we disembarked the giant Braniff 747 in Dallas only to be met with drizzling rain and low 40 degree temperatures in Dallas. The two-hour trip back to our home in east Texas revealed that the trees had lost their leaves and everything seemed muddy and dingy. It was quite a change from where we had been just 8 hours earlier.

Weather is not the only thing that brings on the post-feast doldrums. Many find themselves having to catch up on school work that has accumulated while being gone; others face the fact that they must now find a new job simply because they kept the feast. Another reason we might feel "blue" at the conclusion of Sukkot is that there are now six months till the festival season begins again.

God's festivals are intended to be times of joy – times when God's people come together and study His word and learn of the way to salvation promised to those who follow His ways. Each festival is a step along the way that builds on the previous festival, and as such – build to the climax we experience at the Feast of Tabernacles. Thus, it's only natural that when Sukkot is over, and there's this six-month interlude where it seems that God's plan is not advancing, we might long for a refreshing that is not necessarily satisfied by the weekly Sabbaths.

In this message, I want to talk about what we can do individually and collectively to keep the festival excitement going. I want to show the Biblical significance of this time of year, show that some of Yeshua's greatest moments took place during this six-month period between the festivals, and show that we can do great things during this period as well.

Biblical Significance of Autumn and Winter

Rain in due season is vital to the well-being of the inhabitants of Israel. The two primary periods of rain come in late October in order to germinate the seeds of ancient Israel's two staple crops – barley and wheat, then again in March and April, providing moisture to mature those crops. Sandwiched between these two gentle rains are the heavy downpours of mid-winter – rains that would wash away the seeds if they came as the "early" rain, or slow the harvest if they came as the "latter" rain. Thus, in scripture, these are referred to as the "former and later" rains.

^{NKJ} **Joel 2:23** Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you -- The **former rain**, And the **latter** rain in the first *month*.

Depending on where you may have observed the festival, you may have been taught about the "Beit ha Shuava" or "House of the Water Drawing". This ancient Jewish tradition took place throughout the festival of Sukkot and was used as a petition to YHVH for the fall rains that were needed for survival. The Beit ha Shuava" had another purpose as well, that of representing the Holy Spirit that was promised in the latter part of Joel 2. According to Yeshua, the Holy Spirit would come and teach God's people the secret things of God –

^{NKJ} **John 14:26** "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will **teach** you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

In the Joel passage, the word for “former rain” (the rains that come in the fall) is “moreh” (מורה – 4175). Moreh is also the Hebrew word for “teacher”. Moreh is also related to “torah” since they both come from the root word “yarah” (יָרָה – 3384) which means to “point out”¹, “shoot”², or “cast forth”³.

Thus the prophecy in Joel could indicate that YHVH would send not only the rain, but also His spirit and instruction during this “Sukkot to Passover” part of the year. Used together, God can reveal a deeper understanding of His way of life. This could be an indication of what He’s expecting of us as we work through the winter months and look forward to the spring festival to begin.

Yeshua and the Winter

As mentioned earlier, the winter months are quite wet in the Promised Land and temperatures generally range from the low 40’s to the mid 50’s . . . not a good time for travel, especially on foot. Thankfully, YHVH festivals are agricultural based and thus the inhabitants of Israel were able to avoid travel during the winter season. Never-the-less, bad weather did not slow Yeshua down in His pursuit to provide a way of salvation to His people. It was during these months that we see Yeshua performing some of the most convincing acts to prove to His disciples that He is indeed the Messiah of Israel.

Water to Wine

The book of John seems to have been written with a festival theme, marking Yeshua’s activities based on how they coincide with the yearly festivals. John also records what is generally understood to be Yeshua’s first miracle. Taking into account that the length of Yeshua’s ministry was about 3 ½ years, and that the first festival mentioned was Passover⁴, it would not be a stretch to conclude that His first miracle – turning water to wine at a wedding in Cana – took place sometime after Sukkot but before Passover – probably in late winter.

Seeing the water turned to wine was very significant because it was the first public miracle witnessed by His newly-chosen disciples. It helped establish in their minds that He was not simply a run-of-the-mill rabbi, but was one who could do the things He said He would do. In doing the miracle, Yeshua did not simply change the water to wine; He changed it to old wine, the best wine. The underlying message to His disciples was that He was going to restore the old ways, the old paths that had been delivered by the fathers⁵. Thus it appears that His first miracle was for the benefit of his disciples . . . to help secure their faith and trust in Him.

Walking on Water

The heavy rains of winter are oftentimes accompanied by thunderstorms and high winds, and based on John’s chronology, Yeshua’s miracle of walking on water probably took place in late winter⁶ - sometime after Sukkot but before Passover. This was a miracle that was witnessed only by Yeshua’s disciples. He had just miraculously fed 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, and afterwards sent His disciples by boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee . . . though He did not go with them. During the

¹ Gen 46:28

² 1 Sam 20:20

³ Ex 15:4

⁴ John 2:23

⁵ Jer 6:16

⁶ John 5:1 - probably FOT; John 6:4 – Passover was near, but Yeshua was still in Galilee; John 6:59 – Yeshua still in Capernaum

night the wind picked up and the waves grew intense. Then out of the darkness they saw Yeshua walking toward them on the water, and once He climbed into the boat, the winds ceased.

In this miracle – which again, only the disciples witnessed - Yeshua again provide proof that He ruled nature and that He was the source of their salvation –

^{NKJ} **Psalm 65:5-7** ⁵ By awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us, O God of our salvation, *You who are* the confidence of all the ends of the earth, And of the far-off seas; ⁶ Who established the mountains by His strength, *Being* clothed with power; ⁷ You who still the noise of the seas, The noise of their waves, And the tumult of the peoples.

- and provided undeniable proof to the disciples that He was the coming Messiah, the Son of God⁷.

At Solomon's Stable

The most clear account of Yeshua teaching that He was God's anointed is when He was challenged by the Jewish leadership in the Temple during the Jewish festival of Chanukah, which of course, is observed in the winter.

^{NKJ} **John 10:22-23** Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch.

It appears that this particular year, instead of returning to the Galilee after the festival of Sukkot as was His custom, Yeshua may have remained in Judea for the purpose of making it crystal clear to His disciples and his detractors that He was indeed the promised Messiah.

On this occasion, the Jewish leaders found that He was going for a stroll at a somewhat secluded part of the Temple mount, some distance from the Temple itself – which, of course, was the place where there would be a lot of activity. As He was walking along, probably with just a few of His disciples, the Jewish leaders gathered themselves together and surrounded Him in an attempt to put Him on the spot. They asked Him a very simple question “Are you or are you not the Maschiach – the anointed of God.” Yeshua had answered that question numerous times in the past and had confirmed it by various signs and miracles. In fact, Nicodemus showed that the Pharisees clearly knew that He had been sent by God⁸, never-the-less, that did not stop them from trying to trip Yeshua up.

Instead of answering their question, Yeshua asked them if the signs He had given were not enough to prove His identity and purpose. Not being able to deny the miracles, the Jews charged Him with committing blasphemy – a charge they could not substantiate based on their own law and culture⁹. This further enraged them, but Yeshua was able to slip through the crowd and escape.

This confrontation likely served to show the disciples that the miracles they had and were witnessing, when taken in the context of the scriptures, prove that Yeshua was the Son of God, the Holy One of Israel.

Resurrection of Lazarus

The last clearly recorded act of Yeshua that we know happened between Sukkot and Passover¹⁰ was when He resurrected Lazarus from the dead. After the Chanukah event, Yeshua apparently departed Jerusalem and dwelt near the Jordan River. It was there that He received news of Lazarus' illness.

Yeshua knew why Lazarus had become ill and thus said to His disciples -

⁷ Matt. 14:33

⁸ John 3:2

⁹ See <http://www.amiyisrael.org/articles.html#shaliah>

¹⁰ Does not include the events that took place just days before His crucifixion

^{NKJ} **John 11:4** . . . "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

God had purposely caused Lazarus to become ill for the purpose of glorifying Yeshua and to bolster the faith of Yeshua's disciples¹¹, for according to Jewish tradition (right or wrong), He had yet to raise anyone from the dead who was (in their minds) truly dead¹².

As the story goes, upon hearing of Lazarus' illness, Yeshua did not immediately make the 8 – 10 hour trip back to Bethany, the town just east of Jerusalem where Lazarus and his sisters lived. Instead, he tarried for two days. Yeshua probably knew that by the time He had been notified of Lazarus' illness, he was already dead; and though Yeshua probably would have liked to heal his friend, it was not God's purpose for Lazarus to be healed, but instead, it was His intent for Yeshua to provide un-deniable proof to His disciples and those round about that Yeshua had the power to resurrect the dead. And so Yeshua tarried long enough that His detractors, and even his disciples and close friends, believed that there was no hope (in this age) for Lazarus to be brought back from the dead.

Thus, on the third day, Yeshua, along with His disciples, returned to Bethany to find that Lazarus had been dead for nearly four days. Though Martha and Mary, along with many of Yeshua's friends – even many from the Jewish leadership - believed that Yeshua would have been able to heal him – if He had come earlier - they obviously never considered the thought that He might be able to resurrect him from the dead. So Yeshua told them to roll the stone from the opening of the tomb and then He prayed this prayer -

^{NKJ} **John 11:41- 42** . . . "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ²And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me."

After this, Lazarus rose and walked out of the tomb. His resurrection was witnessed by Yeshua's disciples, Lazarus' family, many of their friends, and some from the Jewish leadership. It was a turning point for many of His followers they now knew that He had the power over life and death. It was also a turning point for Yeshua's opponents. They knew that if He was not stopped soon, the entire nation would turn to him. So from that point forward, they plotted to kill him.

¹¹ John 11:4, 15

¹² According to Yeshua, Jairus' daughter was not dead, but was sleeping. (Matt 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52). The son of the Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11) appears to have just died. See sidebar.

Jewish Belief in the Resurrection

While in my early 20's, a friend gave me a copy of a book entitled "How to Have Confidence and Power in Dealing with People", written by an expert in personal relations name Les Giblin. The crux of the book is that if you want to work effectively with people, you must do so based on how they are – not how you wish they would be. Such was the case of Messiah Yeshua. He oftentimes dealt with those He came in contact with based on what they believed, regardless if it were true or not.

The 1st century Jewish people believed that the "soul" of a dead person hovers over the body for three days, and that if the person were to come back to life during that time, it could reclaim its "soul" and live again. But at the end of three days, the "soul" dissipates and the body cannot reclaim it, thus there is no chance of an immediate resurrection, but the person must now await the resurrection in the "last days".

Thus in order for his detractors to believe that Yeshua had indeed raised someone from the "dead", Yeshua had to wait til the 4th day – the day that the Jews believed a person could no longer be resurrected.

Genesis Rabbah 100:7; Leviticus Rabbah 18:1

"Jewish Views of the Afterlife", Simcha Paul Raphael; pg 140

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shemira>

Proving Messiah

These four events – turning water to wine, walking on water, His confrontation at Hanukkah, and the resurrection of Lazarus – were all major events in Yeshua’s life and all took place between Sukkot and Passover . . . and what’s more, they all shared the common purpose of confirming to those who followed Him that He was indeed the Messiah of Israel. For 3 ½ years the disciples followed him - watching His every move, analyzing everything He said, and personally witnessing nearly all His miracles. Yet even they had doubts about who He was until after He was resurrected and walked with them another 40 days.

Why is it we think we can truly know Him, much more prove Him, without having to do the same?

From my perspective, though we say we believe that Yeshua is Messiah, we – like our Christian brothers – would have a hard time proving He is if we were asked to do so. And why is that so? Because we’ve never been taught to do so. We, like so many other religions, basically believe what we’ve been taught from childhood, and as long as we stay “in the church” we are somewhat protected from those who would challenge our beliefs. But should we break out of the church “cocoon”, we will become vulnerable to those who would attack our beliefs. Do we have the knowledge to stand up for what we believe?

It’s evident that Yeshua spent time during the winter, non-festival months to teach and convince His disciples. Maybe we should do that too. Maybe we should spend part of these next six months brushing up on our “Messiah” theology so that we are armed with the information and tools to show those who challenge us that Messiah Yeshua is real and that He satisfies not only the Biblical requirements for a Messiah, but the Jewish requirements as well. Maybe we should spend this time of year “growing in grace and knowledge of Messiah Yeshua” so that we can prove to ourselves what we’ve probably taken for granted all these years.

Shalom Aleichem!