

The title of this message started out to be "Rivers of Living Water" but as I continued to work on it, I realized that it is really just a history lesson – the history of a first century Jewish tradition that has come to be known as "the Last Great Day". So even though we're going to touch on the idea of "Rivers of Living Water", I'm going to focus on showing where John, the disciple Yeshua loved, came up with the concept of "the Last Great Day"

The Last Great Day is a very interesting festival. Many sermons have been given about it over the years. I can remember many of them. Yet the Last Great Day is never mentioned in the Old Testament, and it is only mentioned one time in the new Testament - in John chapter 7 where it says -

^{NKJ} **John 7:37-38** 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. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

So the question I want us to consider is; "what was John thinking about when he wrote this in his biography of Yeshua's life?" What did John expect his audience to believe when he made this statement, and why did he make this statement on the day that he made it? Have you ever thought about any of that? Probably not, but it is all very pertinent to the understanding of what this particular day is all about.

What we're going to do in this study is to discover some of the history behind this 1st century Jewish tradition. With this history, we can begin to understand where this statement came from and what John was thinking when he said it. Before we start, I've got to lay a little groundwork. We've got to understand the Hebrew concept of time and time cycles; and we've got to understand a couple of things about 1st century Jewish tradition and Yeshua's attitude toward it.

So here's our lesson plan. We're going to:

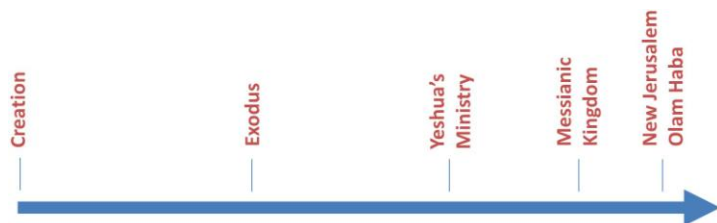
- show the importance of cycles in the scripture, especially the timing of the feast of Tabernacles
- look at Yeshua's thoughts about Jewish tradition
- look at something many in the Hebrew walk have never heard of, the first century Water Pouring Ceremony.

Let's get started by discussing biblical cycles.

Biblical Cycles

When we think about time, especially in our western "Greek" understanding, time is linear - it has a beginning, and in most cases, it has an end. In most biblical timelines, it starts at creation and then continues in a straight line forever.

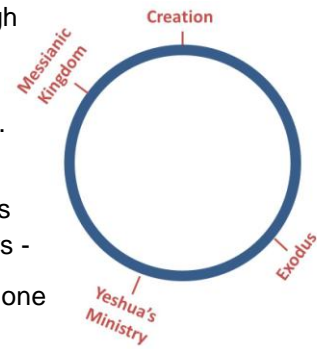
Most biblical time lines include specific points in history - the Exodus, Yeshua's ministry, and the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom which starts at year 6000 and continues for 1000 years. After that is the arrival of the New Jerusalem - a time that the Jewish people call the Olam Haba, or "world to come". It is essentially a "time after time". So, what we have is a timeline that has a very definite beginning and a somewhat vague ending because it just continues to go on.



Now compare that to a Hebrew timeline. A Hebrew timeline is a circle. There are a lot of things that are circles in the Hebrew culture. Our circular timeline has the same points on it as did the linear timeline



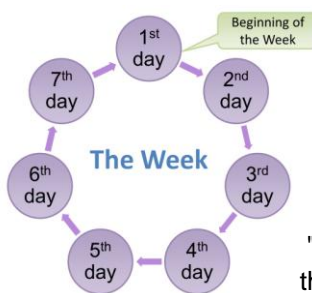
above, but as you see, it starts at creation, and going clockwise, it goes through the Exodus, continues through Yeshua's ministry, then to the Messianic Kingdom, and then it ends up where it start – at the creation. Only after making a full circle, we are at a New Creation - a new Heaven and new Earth¹.



So basically what happens in Hebrew thought is that what happened before is going to happen again. It is cycles that go over and over and over again, things repeat themselves. That should not be a surprise to us because Solomon says -

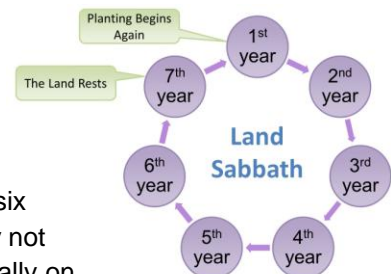
^{ESV} **Ecclesiastes 1:9** What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

How many of us believe that to be true - what has happened before will happen again? That God works in cycles? To help us see, I'll illustrate a number of Biblical cycles - cycles we are all aware of.



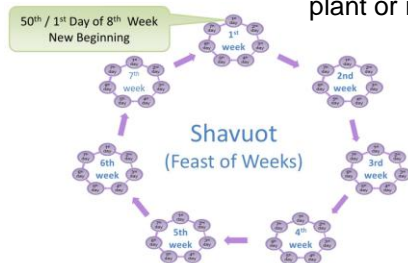
Let's start with the Biblical week. The seven day week starts on the first day and goes around to the seventh day. After the seventh day, we start a new week. But let's say we have an event that starts on Sunday and continues for eight days. The day on which the event ends is the "eighth" day, even though it is technically on the 1st day of the week.

So on our weekly cycle, after you complete the 7th day, the next day - the "eighth" day begins a new week. We could say that it is a "new beginning" - the beginning of a new week. This is significant in understanding Biblical cycles because there are a number of "new beginnings" in scripture, and most of them have something to do with the number "eight". For instance - circumcision. Circumcision takes place on the eighth day². In Hebrew thought, it is the day a male child receives his name and truly begins a new life. An example of that is found in Luke 1:39, where John the Baptist was given his name on the eighth day - the day that he was circumcised. The firstborn of the male children are redeemed on the eighth day³. Otherwise they go into the service of Yahweh. Therefore, redemption on the eighth day Alters their life. The priestly services began on the eighth day⁴. The scripture shows that they remained sequestered in the tabernacle for seven days, but on the eighth day they began their new life as priests of Israel. Lepers were proclaimed "clean" on the eighth day⁵ and were then allowed to come back into the camp. For the leper, this pictured a new life.



Let's look at some other biblical cycles. We will start with the land sabbath, which we understand as being a seven year cycle. For the first six years you may plant and you may reap, but on the seventh year you may not plant or reap. On that year, you must depend totally on

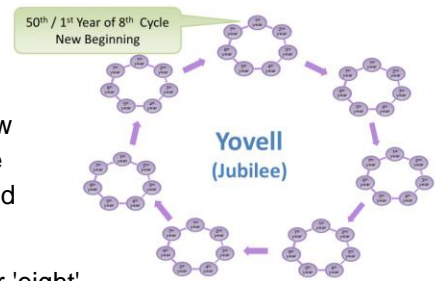
Yahweh to provide your food, but on the eighth year - the 1st year of the new cycle, you may begin planting again - it is a new beginning.



¹ Rev. 21:1-2
² Lev. 12:3
³ Ex. 22:30; Ex. 13:12-15; Numbers 18:15
⁴ Lev. 9:1
⁵ Lev. 13:6



Another example is Shavuot – Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks. With this festival, we begin counting seven cycles of seven days beginning with the day of the Wave Sheaf Offering. The first day of the eight week is Shavuot. This is the 50th day. So on the 50th day there is a new beginning. This is the day Israel was betrothed to YHVH. It pictures the day Israel became a people - the day the former Egyptian slaves ceased being slaves to anyone but YHVH.



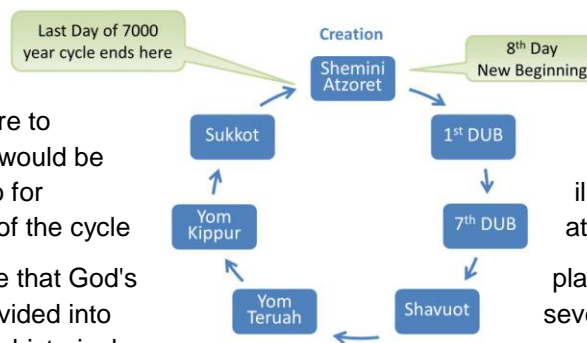
The Yovel or “Jubilee” year is another cycle associated with the number 'eight'.

The Jubilee year is the year after seven cycles of seven years. When you complete the seven cycles of years, the Jubilee begins in the first year of the eight cycle. It too is a significant because on Yom Kippur that year, freedom is proclaimed throughout the land. All land is returned to its original owner and all Hebrew slaves are released - even those owned by non-Hebrews. For all the people, there is a 'restart', a new beginning to life.

Let's now look at the festival cycle.

The Festival Cycle

It is hard to illustrate the cycle of the festivals because the festivals are not time periods, they are events that are illustrated by three harvests – the early harvests of barley, and wheat, and the general harvest which takes place in the early fall. Though the grain harvests started winter. Therefore, if we were to the cycle, the most logical would be sowing actually began⁶. So for designating the beginning of the cycle at the creation when illustration purposes, I'm



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Most Bible students believe that God's plan, and so the cycle is divided into periods. If we then take the historical plan of salvation is a 7000 year events that define the spring festivals along with the understanding that the fall festivals occur at the end of the age, we find that the 1000 year Messianic Kingdom (pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles) ends at the same time of the creation. So what do we do with the eight festival - Shimini Atzoret - the Eighth Day Assembly? It has to coincide with the Creation. In other words, Shemini Atzoret begins a new cycle – it is a New Beginning.

But the Eighth Day is not the topic of this message. This message is about the seventh day - the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Nevertheless, we had to build the foundation that Shemini Atzoret is the beginning of the later cycle in order to understand that the “Last Great Day” is part of the early cycle. So let's now take a closer look at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)

Tishri 15	Tishri 16	Tishri 17	Tishri 18	Tishri 19	Tishri 20	Tishri 21
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The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles - "Sukkot" in Hebrew - is a seven-day festival.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:34** "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for seven days* to the LORD.

⁶ On the third day of creation, God created “sowing seeds”. The word “sowing” is “zara” (זָרָה – 2232) which is a verb. In the context of “let the earth bring forth” it appears that God had planted seeds, and that those seeds should now begin to produce fruit.



It starts on Tishri 15 and goes down through Tishri 21. It spans 1000 years of time. I divided 1000 years seven ways and it comes up to about 143 years per day.

One of the instructions as to how to properly observe this festival has to do with “booths” (Hebrew ‘sukkot’) – temporary shelters that a traveler would hastily build out of fallen branches and leaves.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:42** 'You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths ...'

The reason given for building these booths was –

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:43** '... that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God.' "

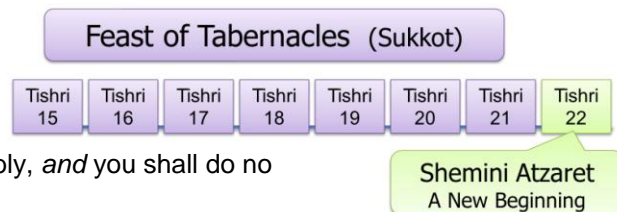
The reason given is significant in understanding this festival. You are to dwell in booth for seven days because during the Festival of Sukkot, you are still considered a ‘sojourner’, a traveler. You have yet to arrive at the “Promised Land” - your permanent home.

Being that we are told to stay in booths for seven days, what then happens on the eighth day? You can get out of your booth, and if you live in the vicinity of Jerusalem, you can go back home. You don't have to be in a booth on the eighth day, because it says to dwell and booths for seven days. Why is this? Why don't you dwell in booths on the eighth day? Because the eighth day is a new beginning, you are now at home – your permanent residence.

So on the eighth day – Shemini Atzaret – you begin a new 1-day festival, and that 1-day festival pictures the New Jerusalem - all eternity – the ‘Olam Haba’ – the ‘world to come’.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:36** 'For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.

On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It *is* a sacred assembly, *and* you shall do no customary work *on it*.



Let's now take a look at Jewish tradition.

Jewish Tradition

Was Yeshua opposed to all Jewish tradition? Apparently not, since He observed or honored many of the Jewish traditions of His day. For instance –

- He observed the traditional Torah and Haftara readings on the Sabbath and apparently, His disciple did as well, even continuing them after His death.⁷
- He, and later His disciples, used the traditional rabbi - discipleship system that was widely used in His day.
- He observed the custom of baptisms which included immersion in a ‘mikvah’ before stepping foot on the Temple mount and baptism to mark a change in status as He did at the beginning of His ministry.
- He followed the tradition of paying the yearly Temple tax instead of paying it only once in a lifetime as the Torah prescribes⁸
- He observed the festival of Hanukkah, which is not a “Leviticus 23 festival” but a traditional Jewish festival.

⁷ Luke 4:16-20; Acts 15:21

⁸ Matt. 17:24-27; Ex. 30:12-16 – we know that He did not agree with the common belief, but He did it anyway to avoid getting caught in a trap (see the Greek meaning of the word ‘offense’)



Tradition is not a bad word. We all have traditions. If you went to church anywhere, you probably observed various traditions. I visited a Lutheran church one time and was up and down, up and down on my knees all the time. That's their tradition. The church I was a part of for over 25 years had a tradition where each Sabbath you sang three songs, listened to a short message, sang another song, then had a sermon which was followed by another song. No matter where you went in the United States, if you attended that denomination, you almost always observed that same tradition.

What about dress codes. Nowhere in the Torah does God tell the normal Israelite how to dress, nevertheless churches, Bible Study groups, and events like weddings have dress codes. They are traditions even though some are loosely linked to a Torah commandment.

Many Torah keepers are not even aware that they keep many Jewish traditions. If you were married under a canopy – that's a Jewish tradition, and in fact much of the 'traditional' Christian wedding is based on Jewish tradition. If you observe the Biblical festivals on the days the majority of Jews do, you are observing a "traditional Jewish calendar" – the calculated 'Hillel II calendar' that even the Jewish people admit is not necessarily correct.⁹

Once we understand that some Jewish tradition is okay as long as it doesn't violate the Torah, we generally don't have a huge problem with Jewish tradition since - after all, it is just tradition.

the Water Pouring Ceremony

With that, let's now take a look at a Jewish tradition that was observed by Yeshua and his disciples during the feast of Tabernacles. That tradition is called the water drawing ceremony. In Hebrew, it is called the "Beit HaShoava" or "the house of the water drawing".

Where did the tradition come from? Is it found in the Tnakh (the Old Testament)? No – it was just Jewish tradition!

There's a lot of speculation about where it came from, but no one really knows for sure. The most common understanding is that it was developed from various scriptures over a period of time.

In the first century, the Jewish people considered one aspect of salvation being the end-time return of the Hebrew people - the lost tribes of the house of Israel as well as the Jewish people who were scattered throughout the middle east from Babylon to Egypt and up into Asia Minor. When the Hebrew people were drawn back to the land, the Jews believed that to be the point when Israel would be saved - just as it was in the Exodus.

They also believed that during this period of salvation, there would be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They believed that salvation, the return of the tribes, and the outpouring of the Holy spirit was pictured by water being poured out, and they got this from a number of prophecies including –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 55:1** "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters ...

If you were to read the context of this verse you will find that it is set within a prophecy about the return Of Israel. Another is -

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 43:19-20** Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert. ²⁰ The beast of the field will honor Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I give waters in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert, To give drink to My people, My chosen.

⁹ My wife and I continue to observe the Hillel II calendar because in a time when all calendar theories are questionable, the Hillel II calendar has kept the Jewish observing the festivals together for nearly 2000 years.



These two verses pertain to the end-time return of the Hebrew people to the land of Israel. Another passage is -

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 12:2-3** Behold, God *is* my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, *is* my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.' ³ Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.

All of these passages pertain to the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of the Messianic Kingdom, which the Jews looked at as being the great salvation.

They also understood that the prophet, Joel had shown there would be a great outpouring of the Holy spirit sometime during the Messianic Kingdom which of course, is pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles. Looking at Joel chapter two, you'll see that the chapter lays out the fall festivals starting with Yom Teruah (the Feast of Trumpets) and continues through Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and on into Sukkot. It is in the context of Sukkot that it says -

^{NKJ} **Joel 2:28** " And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;

So the Jews took these passages and developed a traditional ceremony that depicted what they saw in those scriptures - the Holy Spirit returning to the Hebrew people, which would lead to their return to the land of Israel.

Every morning of the feast, the high priest and his assistant, along with a large entourage of priests, Levites, and onlookers, would go down to the Pool of Siloam – the primary water source for the city of Jerusalem - and draw out of it a pitcher of "living water" - water that is flowing . They would then head back up toward the Temple where they would eventually pour that water on the Altar of Burnt Offerings.

While they were collecting the living water, other priests were in a valley somewhere northwest of the Temple gathering willow branches. Once enough of the branches had been cut, the priests would return to the eastern gate of the Temple, waving the willow branches back and forth as they approached the city of Jerusalem. The purpose behind waving the willows was to simulate a specific sound - the sound of wind, which in Hebrew is the same word for 'spirit'. Some say those branches were up to 25 feet long, and you'll see why in a moment. Again - this was to simulate the sound of the Holy Spirit coming into Jerusalem at the end of days.

As the priests with water and wine, as well as the priests with willow branches were approaching the Temple precincts, still other priests were laying the morning sacrifices on the Altar. Once both groups were in place, a shofar would be blown signaling the High Priest and his assistant to go through the Water Gate – the gate located on the south side of the Temple - and ascend the Altar. That same shofar blast would signal the priests with willows to proceed toward the Altar, waving their willows back and forth as they circle the Altar one time. At the completion of the circuit, the Silver Trumpets were sounded, the water and wine were poured out on the Altar, and the willow branches were stood up around the Altar to simulate a Sukkah over it; thus the need for long willow branches.

This ceremony was the highlight of each festival morning. Feast goers would arrive at the Temple early each morning so they could get a good view of the ceremony. This went on for six days - priests marching around the Altar one time waving willow branches as they go. This was patterned somewhat after the example of Joshua and Israelites going around Jericho. The Israelites went around Jericho one time every day for six days. They would carry their shofars with them, but they would not blow them. They would just march around the city.

The seventh day was different, but only in that on that day the people would march around the city seven times, and at the end of the seventh circuit, they blew their shofars and shouted. As a result of the shout, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.



The Jewish people of the 1st century probably connected what they were doing with the Jericho story. For six days, they would circle the Altar one time, but on the seventh day, they would circle the Altar seven times. At the end of the seventh circuit, the priests would blow the silver trumpets, the High Priest would pour the water on the Altar, and the people would begin to shout - and it was a loud shout. You can imagine why. They were expecting something great to happen just as had happened at Jericho some 2,500 years earlier. "Maybe this would be the day the King arises out of Israel and begins the restoration of the Kingdom" some probably thought, but of course year after year nothing happened.

In addition to marching around the Altar seven times on the seventh day, what was different about this day is that it had its own name. It was called Hoshanna Rabba - the Great Salvation. That name is based on one of the Hallel¹⁰ psalms where it says,

^{ESV} **Psalm 118:25-29** Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! ²⁶
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.
²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with
 cords, up to the horns of the altar! ²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my
 God; I will extol you. ²⁹ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love
 endures forever!

The words "save us, save us we pray" in Hebrew is "Hosheana-ana" which literally means "save us now, we pray, we pray". Hosheana Ana has been anglicized to the English "hosanna".

During the festival, the Levitical choir would sing part of the Hallel prayers every day along with certain traditional prayers, but on the seventh day, they sang them all starting with Psalm 113 going all the way through 118. So this day was called the "great day" because of the great amount of prayers and praises that were sung on this day.

In Psalm 118 we find a significant statement that likely had a huge impact on the believing Jews on that "great day" of the feast. That statement is the beginning part of verse 26 –

"Blessed. It is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

You might remember this phrase. It was chanted as Yeshua entered Jerusalem for the Passover the year He was crucified. The people lined the road spreading palm branches and clothing in front of Him as He rode into town on a donkey. The people chanted -

"Hosanna! 'Blessed Is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!" .

The same thing happened roughly six months earlier at Sukkot – the same Sukkot of John 7. It is recorded in Mark, chapter 11.

^{NKJ} **Mark 11:1-10** Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples ... ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread *them* on the road. ⁹ Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna! 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!' ¹⁰ Blessed *is* the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

The distance from Bethany to Jerusalem is about a mile, and because of the terrain, the walk takes about 30 minutes. But Yeshua did not walk it. Instead, He willingly got on this donkey and He willingly let the people spread willow branches and their clothing on the ground before Him. To those who observed this, Yeshua was making a statement - without actually making a statement. He was letting it be known that

¹⁰ Hallel is Hebrew or Praise. They are Psalm 113 – 118,



He was Israel's king without having to say it. Up to this point, He had never proclaimed to be King because He knew that to do so would have been considered insurrection. Because it was still "not His time" He continued to refrain from proclaiming kingship, but He did want to give His disciples and followers hope, so He went through the motions without saying a word, knowing that the people would know what He meant by what He was doing.

Based on what the people were saying, they were expecting the restoration of the Kingdom of David, and they expected Yeshua to be the King. Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey - just as Solomon had done some 900 years earlier – gave them that hope.

They hoped He would come in to Jerusalem and take the kingdom by force, but He did not do that. Instead, He just joined in with all the other Jewish people and kept the feast. And so I would suspect that every day, like all of his Jewish brothers, He would go up to the Temple and watch the Beit HaShuava - the water drawing ceremony; and He would do this day after day for all six days.

To better illustrate what I believe happened that day, I will tell it like a story. Keep in mind, this is purely speculation, but it is speculation based on both John and Mark's account and on Jewish history.

The setting is the Temple in Jerusalem on Hoshanna Rabba, the last day of the feast of Tabernacles in 30-31 AD. It is approaching nine o'clock in the morning, the time for the morning sacrifices, and the crowds are scurrying about - some with dried out lulavs in their hands as they search for a place where they might see the proceeding around the Altar - the Beit HaShoava – the Water Pouring Ceremony. Finding a place to stand, they can hear the swoosh-swoosh-swoosh of the willow branches being waved back and forth as the priests once again, make their way up toward the Eastern gate of the Temple. In the direction of the Water Gate, they can hear the shouts and sounds of the shofar as the water-bearing priests make their way back from the Pool of Siloam to the South.

The two groups are finally in place and as the sacrifices continue, the shofar is blown and the High Priest makes his way to the Altar and begins his ascent to the top while the willow-waving priests come closer and began to circle the Altar. Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh - the sound of the willows rise above the excitement as the people wait to see if anything great is going to happen this year. Those who believe that Yeshua is indeed the king look to see if they can find Him in the crowd. Finally, they locate Him standing on the temporary bleachers that were set up for the crowds to be able to see. Keeping one eye on Him and the other eye on the proceedings, they wonder, "Is He going to openly declare that He is King? Is He going to put the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Romans in their place?"

As the seventh circuit ends, the silver trumpets sound, and as the priests pour their water and wine on to the Altar, the people begin to shout - but nothing happens. The willow-bearing priests begin to stand their willows against the side of the Altar as the sacrifices continue. The shouting begins to subside and the believers begin to stare at Yeshua who is still standing at the same place. "Come On Yeshua!" the believers say to themselves. "We are here to help You. Declare Yourself King! The King of Israel!" But Yeshua just continues to stand. When the shouting stops and as the people begin to gather their things to leave, a familiar and very amplified voice cries out saying,

"... If anyone thirst, 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." (^{NKJ} John 7:37-38)

That was the voice of Messiah Yeshua - one of the thousands of Jews who were cramped together in the Temple courts trying to watch and see what was going on this seventh day of the feast of Tabernacles.



It is not my purpose to explain what He meant by what He said. That will have to wait for another teaching. What is important is that what He said made an impact on His disciple, so John recorded it for us so that we – some 2000 years later, can formulate in our mind how salvation will come to all Israel, and ultimately to all mankind.

When you think about it, something great did happen that day. The greatest plot of all began to be formulated as the Jewish leaders sought to find a way to have mankind's Saviour put to death, and six months later - during the festival of Passover – they brought their plot to fruition.

So on that last day, that great day of the feast, Yeshua confirmed that the Jews were correct. The Holy Spirit would be poured out during the latter part of the messianic kingdom. He confirmed that salvation would indeed come to Israel – just as the prophets had said. He confirmed that He was indeed that fountain of living water spoken of in Jeremiah 2:13. And without publicly proclaiming it, He acknowledged that he was the King - the King of Israel. He confirmed that what the Jews had done earlier that week in laying their garments on the ground before Him as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey was indeed, the right thing to do. They were right. They had it figured out – He confirmed it all.

And that is why we have this special day at the end of Sukkot called “the Last Great Day”.

History lesson is over.

Shalom Alecheim!