

1 - Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths

Exodus 23.16, 34.22; Leviticus 23.34-36, 39-44; Numbers 29.12-40; Deuteronomy 16.13-15, 31.10-13. 1 Kings 8.12,12.32, 2 Chronicles 5.3, 7.8, Ezra 3.4, 8.14-17, Zechariah 14.16-19. John 7.1-10.21

[a] Exodus lists the three annual feasts, when all the males are to appear before the Lord, as the [a] Feast of Unleavened Bread, [b] Feast of Harvest of the first fruits of your labours and [c] Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labours from the field.

[b] Leviticus tells us it is celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month [Tishri, Sept/Oct] and is called the Feast of Booths. חג הסוכות [tag Succoth] which is from the verb "to weave together" referring to the plaited branches with which the booths were covered. A booth was a temporary shelter usually made for cattle [Gen 33.17] or for men [Jonah 4.5] and especially in a battle field as they camped out [2 Samuel 11.11; 1 Kings 20.12]. So we must not think, in modern style of a booth as we think of a cubicle such as is used as a phone booth, or voting booth. It is a temporary natural shelter made from branches found in the fields and forest.

[c] The feast recalls the time they were redeemed, and lived in temporary shelters. There are offerings offered for seven days and on the 8th day there is a holy convocation; the 1st day is a rest day, as is the 8th. They are to take foliage from the beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and the willow. They are to live in booths for seven days; all the native born in Israel "so that your generations may know that I had sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

[d] The feast is celebrated using many offerings each day. Numbers relates the considerable number of offerings which are offered over the 8 days.

[e] Deuteronomy tells us that it is a joyful, family feast including all the children, the servants, the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and widows of the towns - it was not just a feast for the farmers and the agricultural districts. It is a joyful feast and celebratory of what God has given them.

[f] It was a time to remit debts and read the Law. It was also at this time every seven years to remit debts at the Feast of Booths; and to gather together to read the law for the men, women and the children and the stranger; so that they may learn and fear the Lord and be careful to do what He said.

[g] Important occasions co-incided with it. 2 Chronicles reminds us that the Ark was brought into the Temple that Solomon had built at the time of the Feast of Booths; which was remembered as the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple.

Ezra 3 recalls that at the building of the altar of the God of Israel under Joshua the son of Jozadak and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel they celebrated the Feast of Booths [so it must have been Sept/Oct]. Ezra 8 makes clear that as Ezra reads the Law to the people who had returned from the captivity. As they gathered they went out and made booths of the leafy branches and they made booths of them on their roofs, courtyards, in the House of God and in public squares.

[h] God the Provider is celebrated and acknowledged. Zechariah 14 prophesies of the nations who are left after the Armageddon experience will come up to Jerusalem and worship the Lord and celebrate the Feast of Booths. If they do not celebrate then they will have no rain, This is the plague with which the Lord will smite them if they do not celebrate the Feast of Booths, not longer will there be a merchant in the houses of the Lord that day.

What this implies is that, just as the feast of booths celebrated the ingathering of the harvest, and acknowledged that all of the produce was really from God, Who owned the land, and provided the early and latter rain for the harvest so it must be acknowledged by the nations that He is the Lord and Provider of the whole earth. It is He who provides for the rich production of the earth for us to eat. In this way the punishment for those nations who do not go up to acknowledge and celebrate this truth is that they shall have no rain.

2 - The Feast of Tabernacles at the time of Jesus

At the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated in Jerusalem, John's Gospel makes this the setting for two of Jesus' major themes of teaching concerning Himself.

At that time, the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in a particular way in Jerusalem.

[1] Each person had to provide for himself a Succoth [booth] in which he slept and ate his meals for the seven days.

[2] Each person had to collect twigs of myrtle, willow and palm in the environs of Jerusalem. These were the original makings of the booths, but later, some of them were bound together in a

sort of festal plume, called the lulab, to which a citron was added. The lulab was a symbol of rejoicing and was carried daily and waved aloft as the Hallel [Psalms 113-118] were sung.

There were three common rites celebrated each day.

[3] The water libation was the first common act of each of the days of Booths.

[a] On the morning of the first day of the Feast, a procession of priests led down to the Pool of Siloam a water container, which was to suffice for the seven days.

[b] It was brought back with the shofar being blown at the city gate [Isaiah 12.3].

[c] The pilgrims, singing the Hallel and waving their lulabs, watched as the priests walked around the altar and the people cried "Save us we beseech thee O Lord."

[d] The priest then ascended the ramp of the altar to perform the libation, with two silver bowls, one for water and one for wine.

[e] On the seventh day, they walked around it seven times, and the priests, instead of waving their lulabs aloft, beat the earth with them to show that the ceremony was ending.

[4] The second great common rite, the lighting up of the temple, was enacted at night. It expressed the rejoicing of the feast. Four, very large Menorahs, were lit and illumined the entire temple area. Under these, the people danced a torch dance to the accompaniment of flutes; while the Levites, descending the 15 steps that led down to the Court of the Women, chanted the Song of Ascents [Psalms 120-134]; one for each step. This lasted most of the night for each of the seven days.

[5] The priests only, at dawn each day of the feast, went to the East gate of the temple. At sunrise they turned West and said, "Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their faces toward the east and they worshipped the sun toward the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord. [cf Ezekiel 8.16]

[6] On the 8th day the Hallel was sung in a solemn assembly.

3 - The water and the light of John Chapter 7-8

Just as the tabernacles reminded them of their whole wilderness wanderings, then the water of libation was something that brought back to mind the way that the Lord had provided for them the water in the wilderness. This was one of the elements of the wilderness journey which would be one their minds. The other element was the lighting of the women's court by the Menorahs. The Menorahs themselves recalled the light of the presence of God which lit up their way right throughout the wilderness and which not only meant the presence of God but his protective presence and guidance for them throughout that time they dwelt in Booths. It is these two elements which are uppermost in the section of John's Gospel where the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication of the Temple are used as the backdrop for an exposition of these two central themes of the Gospel as it expounds the Lord's person in chapters 7-9.

4 - John's Gospel uses the OT in its presentation of Jesus

John uses the OT material as being fulfilled and brought to its conclusion in Jesus. We can see this in the way that, lying behind the material brought up for discussion, there is usually an OT incident or motif which is preliminary in the mind of the readers.

[a] In the Prologue we were introduced to some theme words which are taken right through the first half of the gospel, and in a variety of settings are built upon. These words are simple words and yet, as the themes builds, they are often used in an increasingly deep way. They are the words of the prologue such as Word, life, light, darkness, witness, believe, world, receive, children of God, born of God, flesh, glory, truth.

[b] Also, in the use of OT incidents which are then clearly referred to Jesus or some aspect of His life and suffering.

[1] The titles of chapter 1: Lamb of God, he who baptises in the Spirit, Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, he of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Joseph, King of Israel, Son of Man.

[2] He is the providing bridegroom of the wedding feast [chapter 2] bringing the kingdom of joy and feasting and of consummation by the conversion of the legal style of cleansing to the wine of the kingdom. He is also the bridegroom of the people of God [3.28-30]

[3] His body is the temple of the Spirit [chap. 2]; just as He is a walking tabernacle, a Bethel upon which there is an open heaven communicating with men and women. [Chapter 1.51]

[4] Entering and seeing the kingdom of God [chapter 3] is a matter, as Ezekiel foreshadowed, of being born of water and spirit [Ezekiel 36.5-7]. Jesus is lifted up as the Serpent in the wilderness was [3.13] for salvation from the wrath of God.

[5] He is the provider of the gift of living water, greater than Jacob the digger of wells. He is so even for Samaritans [Chapter 4] who have had five foreign rulers over them in their history, none of whom were their husband.

[6] He is the Lord of the harvest, and insists that men gather food for eternal life [4.27-38] which is the satisfaction of obedience to God's will.

[7] He is the Lord of the Sabbath [5.16 ff.] because He is the Son of his Father. He raises the dead and judges the world. He has the witness of the Father.

[8] He is the Feeder of men and women in the wilderness, as of old. He is the bread of life, the daily manna and yet by his death He is true food and true drink for His people. He is the bread from heaven.

5 - Jesus as the giver of the water of life

We have seen the water of purification [chapter 2] used as a basis for supplying the wine of the kingdom – something fulfilled in the miracle of Jesus providing for his people in the marriage and life.

We have also seen the water infiltrating into Jacob's well, which was the occasion of Jesus speaking of a gift of God, in contrast to the resting water of the well this was living [running] water which He will give [4.10-14]. It is a satisfying water which, once taken, becomes a source or supply of water, a well which springs up to eternal life – the very life of God = the life of the kingdom of God.

We have seen the water of healing in the pool of Bethesda, stirred up by angelic activity. But alas; you have to be first to it - it constitutes a race among men and women who are sick, to lay hold of it. A man seeking help to appropriate the stirred water, is healed by a word of Jesus' command.

We have seen the food [manna from heaven] and drink [water from the rock] of the wilderness now likened unto Jesus flesh and blood. The giving of life to his people is connected with his death and suffering. There is something there which makes Him the source of life to them. [Chapter 6].

Now we see on the last Day of the feast of Tabernacles Jesus cries out [7.37-44]:

[1] They should come to Him and drink if they are thirsty.

[2] The drinking activity is = believing in Jesus; so to come to faith in Jesus is to drink in such a way that the thirst of men and women is not so much quenched as there will be a river of living water flowing from the belly of the man [from his innermost being]. So the image of drinking/believing leads to a reception of life in the inner being of a person which will flow out from there.

"thirsty" then come to mean craving the life of God.

[3] The editorial explanation of the writer John, is that Jesus was specifically speaking of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Which believers in Him were to receive. This reception is understood to be future at the time of the record of Jesus speaking it. The timing has to do with Jesus being glorified. ["Glory" in this Gospel is a study in itself.

[4] This is the first reference to the glorification of Jesus which the Gospel exemplifies. It is a characteristic of John's Gospel [1.14, 2.11] and includes the whole Passion and the Triumph which followed. So John regards Jesus Death as a Victory [12.32, 11.4,40] as Jesus understood the hour of his death to be the hour of his glorification [12.23]. Similarly, Jesus spoke of the moment Judas went out as the time He was already glorified [13.31]; and that He had already received His glory by the faith of his disciples before He suffered [17.10]. In another aspect of this same idea, his glorification followed after his withdrawal from the earth 17.5, 16.14]. Here John uses this phrase about Jesus' glorification as a way to express the divine unity of the work of Jesus in His whole manifestation [1 John 3.5,8, 1.2]. This is different from Paul, who regards the two distinct stages of Jesus ministry as humiliation and exaltation.

6 - Jesus as the Light of the world

It is best to understand our passage in chapter 8 in the light of the development of the word light throughout the gospel and in connection with the life which God brings to his own.

1.4 In Him was life and the life was the light of men. in a Person was life, and this life is for men the light. This raises the question of life in relation to light. This light is something which shines in the darkness

Balga Autumn 2006 - Israel's Feasts - Session 9 - The Feast of Tabernacles
Jesus: Giver of the Water of Life and the Light of the world.

i.e. it breaks in on that which is already there the darkness does not 'overcome' it [comprehend] either in the sense of encapsulate, understand

1.9 John Baptist is not the light: the true light

a. comes into the world in the sense of the incarnation]

b. enlightens every man. What will this mean - we shall have to see what the light does to people to understand the development. Suspend judgement here for the moment. Yet, whatever it means it is cosmic in scope

3.19-21 The scene of 3.14ff, is that which has established the message on the basis of Numbers 21.1-9, where, as the wrath of God comes into the camp of the Hebrews, Moses pleads for the people, and the Lord allows them to set up a brass serpent to which they can look if bitten. Then, as they trust the word of God for their salvation from His wrath, then they have it. This picture is the basis for first understanding that the immediate purpose of the Father in sending Jesus was to save the world.

But, having stated that, verse 19 introduces the idea that light has come into the world

a. those who practise evil. Men choose darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil [i.e. their choices are a reflection of their deeds - they have a pre-commitment already in play] Men do not come to it because it involves an exposure of their deeds as to source. The light brings division, this division is seen on respect of the movement of people. Which in turn reflects their actions. And we are concerned with the source of their action.

b. those who practice the truth

They come to the light to show that their deeds have been worked in God. i.e. the source of their deeds becomes clear, their deeds are the work of the Father, as Jesus' are. God's light brings a recognition of His action everywhere. So - the light actually brings division, and recognition of the work of His in the world in men is seen. As to source.

Notice the pattern here in the style of John. There is a pattern of A,B and C which is repeated in the

ies as below.

{A} Everyone who does evil hates the light and {B} does not come to the light {C} lest his deeds should be exposed

But {A} he who practices the truth {B} comes to the light
that {C} his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God

Here we see a way to think about the text so as to see the equivalents and contrasts which John uses to convey his message. So for example

A: he who does evil is contrasted with practicing the truth. Not, as we might have expected "does good". It is the practised truth which is the opposite of evil. In this way, usage of the word truth is explained.

B: coming to the light is explained as affected by the motive. One does not want his deeds exposed, the other does so that God may get glory. See the statement of the Lord in regard to the blind man in 9.3. "that the works of God might be manifest in him."

C: Exposure of evil is contrasted with manifestation of God's works. The light does both, it exposes evil for what it is, it also shows you what God is doing so that He may receive glory.

5.35-36 Jesus witness to the truth is greater than John's

8.12-20 Here, in the light of the Feast of Tabernacles, perhaps as the lighting of the lamps in that festival brings forth the occasion, Jesus announces that He as the light of the world. He explains that this may be said of Him because the ones who follow Him do not walk in the darkness; they have the light of life. So, this understanding of light as connected with light makes clear that it is the life they receive which works as light in darkness does – it presses it back and they can walk in the light of that life. It speaks of a perception made available to the walker because of the possession of the life within them.

9.4-5 and the following verses

The day and the time for the working of the works the Father gave Him to do. Here we are seeing the matter of the source of His works is the one in question. Compare this with Jesus' constant understanding and teaching that the works He did were not his works but the works of the One Who sent Him.

a time is coming when He cannot do those works. The "and it was night" of 13.40 show how the rest of chapter 9 illustrates the works of Jesus and the strength of the **9.39-41** reply to them.

Here at the end of the chapter 9 there is a statement of judgement is issued over the Pharisees in the light of their presumed self knowledge and understanding.

12.35,44-46 verse 35- "the light" is here obviously the person of Jesus. They are to walk [rely in such a way] while they 'have' Him.

A. If they live this way the darkness will not overtake them.

B. The one walking in the darkness is typified by the fact that he doesn't know where [in the sense of goal or immediate movement?] he is going. The darkness has a confusing effect which effects the life of a man.

C. The thing to do "while they have the light" is to believe in the light [= trust Me]. The reason for doing this trusting, is that they may become "sons of light". Now we have a movement which speaks of their status in relation to the Light.

Here we see the inter-relation between light, darkness, believe, sons of God.[born of God]
verse 46 - Now the statement is made clear. "I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in me may not remain in darkness."

Here is the direct correlation between "believe" and "light" both associated with the Person of Jesus. Further, not to remain in darkness, implies that the persons of the world are in the darkness. And we have learned from verse 35 that the darkness is typified by not knowing where one is going, and also is a position of being overtaken by another power.