

AN EXPOSITION:  
HEBREW LAW II – THE FINAL FEAST - SUKKOT

by

Michael J Ledee II

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## INTRODUCTION

The twenty-third chapter of Leviticus summarizes the seven Feasts of the LORD. The word *feast* means celebration and appointed time<sup>1</sup> which God has determined based on His eternal plan. Though all these feasts originated during the time of Moses, they have not diminished in importance for the Jewish people. The same cannot be said for the majority of Christendom. Generally speaking, the Feasts of the LORD are not celebrated by Christians today, most reasoning that they are archaic practices that the New Covenant has done away with since Christ fulfilled the Law. Though it is the opinion of this writer that the LORD's divine appointments are significant for all of God's people (Jew and Christian alike), due to the constraints of this work, the focus will be on what is probably the most relevant of the seven feasts; Sukkot/The Feast of Tabernacles. *This paper will explain the origins and meaning of Sukkot and why this Feast is relevant to Christians today.*

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

According to God's calendar, the religious year begins in the spring (the first month of Nisan) with the celebrations of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits. Pentecost is held between the spring and fall, fifty days after First Fruits. The Fall Feasts are the culminating season of celebration on the LORD's religious calendar, starting in the seventh month (Tishri). The season begins with the Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruah) on Tishri 1. Trumpets are blown in anticipation of the judgment of God, which comes nine days later on the Day of Atonement/Yom Kippur. As the priest would make atonement for the nation and sins were dealt with, Sukkot was the final occasion to celebrate the LORD's forgiveness and presence among the people.

Sukkot/Tabernacles/The Feast of Booths/Feast of Ingathering was a week-long celebration where God's provision and habitation among the people were remembered. More sacrifices were made during this feast than all the other festivals combined.<sup>2</sup> After the seven days of celebrations were completed, an additional day, *the eighth day*, was honored as the Feasts of

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Brannan, ed., [\*Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible\*](#), Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> David L. Stubbs, [\*Table and Temple: The Christian Eucharist and Its Jewish Roots\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 312.

the LORD came to a close for that religious year. If one considers the meaning of each season, spring/Passover looks back at redemption, summer/Pentecost looks to the present recommitment of the covenant relationship, and fall/Sukkot looks forward in anticipation to the close of the year/end of the age. One can see how these seasonal celebrations align with the earth's seasonal changes (spring season - beginning, summer - growth, fall - harvest).

## OVERVIEW OF SUKKOT

Though often treated separately, the celebrations of the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles/Sukkot form a single festival cycle in the month of Tishri. The three feasts are sometimes grouped under the collective name "Booths" and can refer to the entire season or the final feast.<sup>3</sup>In Scripture, besides being called the Feast of Booths it is also referred to as *the Festival of Ingathering*, simply *the Festival*, or *Hoshana Rabba*, which means Great Salvation.<sup>4</sup>

The instructions for the celebration of Sukkot are written in Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "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. On the first day, there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. 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. Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 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.'"

Essentially, Sukkot celebrates God's forgiveness and His provision (during the days in the wilderness when the LORD miraculously fed them manna and their clothing and sandals were not worn out) and His provision today. Some view Sukkot as a "Jewish "Thanksgiving." It is

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 312.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

widely believed that the Puritans, who were great students of the Hebrew Scriptures, based the first American Thanksgiving on Sukkot.<sup>5</sup>

## CELEBRATION

Traditional observance of Sukkot centers on two primary actions: building a sukkah (temporary shelter) and the blessing of the lulav with the etrog. A sukkah's construction mimics the temporary nature of the tents the Israelites lived in during their time in the wilderness. It is typically constructed of tree branches and other temporary materials, allowing the stars to be seen through the roof's covering. The sukkah should be large enough to include a table for meals, and are frequently slept in overnight.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to building and living in the sukkah, the lulav and etrog are waved daily. The lulav and etrog were a bundle of plants made out of four species of trees and fruits, "a palm branch (lulav), the branch of a myrtle tree (hadas), the branch of a willow tree (aravah), and the fruit of a citron tree (etrog). These, in part, represented the fruits of the promised land.<sup>7</sup> Worshippers recite or sing the Hallel Psalms, Psalms 113–118, and during certain phrases, 'Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good'<sup>8</sup> and 'Save us, we beseech you, O Lord'<sup>9</sup>, they would wave them."

Of all of the appointed times, Sukkot was unique in that it was commanded by the LORD to be celebrated joyously. The Old Testament mentions joy regarding Sukkot more than any other feast. Interestingly, no reference to joy is made in the verses detailing Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Trumpets, or the Day of Atonement. When speaking about Pentecost, joy only occurs once.<sup>10</sup> When speaking about Sukkot, the word rejoice occurs three times, once in Leviticus 23:40 and twice in Deuteronomy 16:14.

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<sup>5</sup> Barney Kasdan, [\*God's Appointed Times: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Celebrating the Biblical Holidays\*](#), 2nd ed. (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), 92.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>7</sup> David L. Stubbs, 314.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 118:1.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 118:25.

<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 16:11.

The intensity of the celebration is best illustrated by the practices of the Israelites before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, as recorded by the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 51a and 51b:

He who has not seen the rejoicing at the place of the water-drawing has never seen rejoicing in his life. At the conclusion of the first festival day of Tabernacles they descended to the court of the women where they had made a great enactment. There were there golden candlesticks with four golden bowls on the top of each of them and four ladders to each, and four youths drawn from the priestly stock in whose hands were held jars of oil... there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illumined by the light of the place of the water-drawing. Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before them with lighted torches in their hands, and sing songs and praises. And Levites without number with harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and other musical instruments were there upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the court of the women, corresponding to the fifteen songs of ascents in the psalms.<sup>11</sup>

The Talmud tells of another custom during this feast called the water libation ceremony. On the seventh day and final day of Sukkot, a priest would bring a golden pitcher of water from the Pool of Siloam and carry it back to the Temple:

Crowds of people would form a huge processional behind the priest, dancing, singing and chanting the Hallel Psalms (113–118) as they entered the Temple mount. For each of the first six days of Sukkot, the processional would circle the Temple altar one time, and on the seventh day (Hoshana Rabbah) there would be seven processions to magnify the joy. The ceremony's highlight came when the priest dramatically poured the water at the altar of the Temple....It was then poured into bowls at the corners of the altar from which it would flow outward...The response of the multitudes was so immense that the Talmud says whoever has not been in Jerusalem for this ceremony has not even experienced real joy (Sukkah 5)! Hence, it became known as Simcha Bet Ha-sho-evah (the Rejoicing of the House of Drawing Water).<sup>12</sup>

This rite was an enacted prayer for God's blessing of water (winter rains) in the coming year.<sup>13</sup> The water from the Pool of Siloam poured out on the altar was the source of water the prophets would use to anoint the kings from the line of David. Based on the understanding of Scriptures like Isaiah 12:3, 44:3 and Joel 2:28, the Israelites living during the time of Jesus/Yeshua considered the water libation ceremony to be symbolic of the Spirit being poured out in the days of Messiah. According to writings like the Talmud, this same practice occurred during Yeshua's days. With an understanding of the meaning of Sukkot and how it was

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<sup>11</sup> Jacob Neusner, [\*The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary\*](#), vol. 5b (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 211.

<sup>12</sup> Barney Kasdan, 98.

<sup>13</sup> David L. Stubbs, 315.

celebrated during the second temple period, we can now read of Yeshua's Sukkot experience as recorded in the New Testament.

## ALLUSIONS TO TABERNACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

John 7:2 sets the stage, "Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand." According to Deuteronomy 16:16, Yeshua was required to visit the Temple during Sukkot and apparently spent most of the feast there.<sup>14</sup> John 7:37-41 captures the climax of this event:

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. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Therefore, many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ."<sup>15</sup>

John 7:37 includes the detail of Yeshua's visit to the temple occurring on the last/great day of the feast. With the significance of the *last and great day* of the feast kept in mind, the true importance of Yeshua's words can be understood, as the following quotation captures:

Sukkot was in full swing. The joy of the first six days was exuberant. On the great final day (Hoshana Rabbah), the crowds were filled with expectations for the Messiah and the Holy Spirit he would bring. At the very time of the water drawing ceremony, Yeshua made a bold proclamation: Do you truly want the living waters of the Holy Spirit? Does anyone understand the true significance of this ceremony? If anyone desires what the Bet Ha-sho-evah [House of Drawing Water] symbolizes, let him believe in me. I am the Messiah who will pour out the Holy Spirit on Israel!<sup>16</sup>

One can realize why Yeshua's statements would have caused a stir. Verse 43 says His words caused division among the people, "many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly this is the Prophet.' Others said, 'This is the Christ.'"<sup>17</sup> Christians without a foundational understanding of the meaning of Sukkot and its celebrations will miss the bold statement Yeshua made on this feast's climactic day. Yeshua had explained before that He was the source of living water,<sup>18</sup> but this time was different. The fact that He said what He said on the specific day He did reveals his undisputed proclamation of Messiah ship. When considered in the proper context,

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<sup>14</sup>John 7:14 records that He taught in the Temple during the middle of the feast.

<sup>15</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup>Barney Kasdan, 99.

<sup>17</sup>John 7:40-41.

<sup>18</sup>John 4:14.

readers today should come to the same conclusion as many who heard Yeshua's words at that Sukkot celebration 2,000 years ago: His claims were valid: He is Immanuel, God with us!

The theme of impermanence is inherent to Sukkot; keeping this in mind, other connections can be discovered in the New Testament. For example, Paul describes our physical bodies as a tent (the earthly and temporary dwelling place of our spirit), and for this reason, we earnestly desire to be clothed with the celestial and permanent habitation which only comes from God in heaven.<sup>19</sup> In like manner, in describing his approaching martyrdom, Peter described his physical body as a tent, "knowing that shortly I *must* put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me."<sup>20</sup> In both instances, the same Greek word *skenoo* is used to describe our bodies as a tent.<sup>21</sup>

However, the most profound New Testament example of the usage of *skenoo* is found in the Apostle John's description of Yeshua's incarnation in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and *dwelt* (pitched a tent) among us." Once more, the root *skenoo* is used here to describe the temporary dwelling place of the Son's Spirit during His earthly life. In this final instance, John's point is thus: in like manner to the Tabernacle or Temple, the physical body of Yeshua is the LORD's temporary presence or dwelling place on the earth. It is also probable to conclude that Yeshua was not born on December 25<sup>th</sup> but during the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>22</sup> If this was the case, the Tabernacle of God tabernacled among men during the Feast of Tabernacles.

This concept of God's Presence temporarily inhabiting earthly bodies can also be applied to our understanding of the *Body of Christ/Church*. Though the same Greek word is not used for *tent* in verses like 1 Corinthians 12:12,<sup>23</sup> the similarities are apparent. As Messiah's earthly body was the temporary dwelling place of the Spirit of God, the Body of Christ now serves as God's presence in Yeshua's absence from the earth. The same Spirit that inhabited the temporary body of Yeshua, now for this dispensation, lives within the Church until He returns once more. The

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<sup>19</sup>2 Corinthians 5:2.

<sup>20</sup>2 Peter 1:14.

<sup>21</sup> Rick Brannan, ed., [\*Lexham Research Lexicon of the Septuagint\*](#), Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

<sup>22</sup>For a brief explanation on this reasoning, see the Appendix at the end of this work.

<sup>23</sup> The Greek word used in this verse is *soma*, meaning body. Rick Brannan, ed., [\*Lexham Research Lexicon of the Septuagint\*](#),

LORD's presence will "pitch a tent" in this world for a time until The Day of the Lord arrives and the Restrainer is taken out of the way.<sup>24</sup>

## THE FULFILLMENT OF SUKKOT AND END-TIME TYPOLOGY

The Hebrew word translated as *feast* in English is *moed*, which not only means appointed time but also a dress rehearsal.<sup>25</sup> The Feasts of the LORD serve two purposes: (a) they are remembrances of the Israelites' experience during the days of Moses, and (b) herald and precede the anticipatory events concerning their future fulfillment of Messiah. The idea was for the Messiah's completed work to be recognized and received by Israel since they were intimately familiar with these Feasts, which they had been celebrating for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, when Yeshua fulfilled Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost, most Jews (even today) do not recognize that He is the summation of the Law and Prophets. Yeshua's fulfillment of the Scriptures through the Feasts of the LORD reveals the greater truths of the mysteries of God.

The Fall Feast aligned with the final agricultural harvests of the year, primarily the grape harvest. In both Testaments, God has used vineyard typology to reveal the truths of the final end-time harvest.<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 5:1-7 is one of the most well-known examples in the Old Testament, Revelation 14:14-20 serving as one familiar passage in the New Testament.

Just as the Israelites in the wilderness looked forward to receiving the promises of God when they finally occupied the promised land, Sukkot became associated with the eschatological and messianic completion of God's eternal plans. The Israelites would look forward to fully

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<sup>24</sup>2 Thessalonians 2:6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Rick Brannan, ed., [\*Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible\*](#).

<sup>26</sup>In the opinion of this writer, grouping Yeshua's wheat harvest and grape harvest eschatological imagery into the same event is an error. In Matthew 20:1-16 for example, Yeshua uses the picture of a vineyard to teach on *stewardship relating to the heavenly rewards* workers receive in the Kingdom, paying those who labored for the least time in the presence of those who worked longer, *first* (possibly alluding to a pre or mid-tribulation rapture of the Church, as pictured in Revelation 7:9-17). The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43) concerns the *final judgment* of the wicked *first* (Revelation 20:11-15), followed by the faithful of God being gathered into His barn (Revelation 21:3). Keeping the celebratory theme of Sukkot in mind, Yeshua described the culmination of God's plans for his people as a great feast, comparing the Kingdom to a wedding banquet (Matthew 25:1-13, Luke 12:35-38). This event is announced by the sound of a trumpet (Feast of Trumpets?) and followed by the final judgment (Day of Atonement?). In keeping the different Fall Feasts in mind, major eschatological events like judgment and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb appear to occur at separate times.

realizing God's promises as the greater and final exodus at the end of the age.<sup>27</sup> As Sukkot was celebrated during the second temple period, the people would sing the Hallel Psalms (Psalms 113-118) and march around the altar for seven days. The greatest and final day of Sukkot was referred to as *The Great Hosanna*, calling on God to bring His final victory and eternal plan to completion.<sup>28</sup>

The significance of Sukkot and its relation to the end of the age was understood and embraced by the 1<sup>st</sup>-century church. David Stubbs explains this apostolic connection the early believers of Yeshua intimately understood:

For early Christians, the Eucharist had an eschatological aspect to it that was similar to the Feast of Sukkot. Christ's real presence was celebrated in the feast, but Christ's presence was also understood as a foretaste of or a "projection" of Christ's second coming. Christ's coming in the Eucharist was both "now and not yet." The early church understood and expressed those 'comings' of Christ and the Spirit using the same themes and symbols that Sukkot did, and by using types shared with the Sukkot celebrations—as if Sukkot was transposed into a new key given Christ and the Spirit's work.<sup>29</sup>

*Hosanna* (Hebrew) and *Maranatha* (Aramaic) essentially have the same meaning: *God save us*. Invoking this prayer, *Maranatha* was originally part of the liturgy of the early church during the ceremony of the communion meal. It was a prayer for Messiah's presence in the present and a look forward to the final triumphal entry as the Spirit and the bride say 'come,' anticipating Yeshua's second coming.<sup>30</sup>

The seven-day celebration of Sukkot also commemorates and parallels the seven days of the first week of the creation. The week of creation comprised six days of work and a seventh day of rest. This is a shadow of the 6,000 years of "work," God and the creation working towards the final redemption, and the 1,000 years of "rest," when the saints rejoice as Messiah reigns on earth for 1,000 years.

After seven days of celebrations culminating on the seventh and greatest day of Sukkot (representing the millennial reign of Christ), *Shmeni Atzeret* (eighth day) was a holy day with a more somber tone. The eighth day is the final day of the seven-day celebration which overlaps into the first day of a new week. It is both the first and the last, just as the year of jubilee occurs on the last year of a forty-nine-year cycle and the first year of a new forty-nine-year cycle. In

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<sup>27</sup> David L. Stubbs, 312–313.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 319–320.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 316–317.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 317.

Scripture, the concept of the eighth day represents newness, completion, and eternity. Sunday is another type of "eighth day," as the Resurrection of Messiah is a picture of newness and completion, occurring on the first day of the week. Basil the Great wrote that the Lord's Supper was held on the first day of the week because, "this day foreshadows the state which is to follow the present age: a day without sunset, nightfall, or successor, an age which does not grow old or come to an end."<sup>31</sup>

The eighth day is depicted in the final two chapters of Revelation, once the millennial reign is complete and the wicked are finally judged. The language of Revelation 21:3 cannot be ignored; John, in this one verse, writes twice that God will dwell/tabernacle with men. In the end, the Church is both a place (Temple of God) and a people (New Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband).<sup>32</sup> With unveiled face, we will be able to finally approach the One who dwells in unapproachable light.<sup>33</sup> We will know Him as He intimately knows us.<sup>34</sup> The prayer of oneness that Yeshua made at the last supper,<sup>35</sup> the prayer of oneness between the Church, Yeshua, and the Father, will finally be accomplished.

## CONCLUSION

Of all of the LORD's feasts, Sukkot was the culmination and most highly anticipated celebration of the religious year. Sukkot celebrates the past: God's provision in the wilderness, the pouring out of the Spirit upon the people, and possibly the birth of Messiah. But God's people also look forward in anticipation as they await Yeshua's return to establish His Kingdom on earth. The Savior, who, for a short time, tabernacled with humanity 2,000 years ago, will set up His dwelling place in Jerusalem for all to come and give Him honor and praise. Evil will be judged and purged from the world by His perfect justice and power. In the Millennium Kingdom, the nations will receive blessings as they come up to the Holy City every year to celebrate Sukkot, and those who do not will experience plagues and punishments.<sup>36</sup> Hallelujah to Yeshua

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<sup>31</sup> Barney Kasdan, 103.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 21:2.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Timothy 6:16.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12.

<sup>35</sup> John 17:21-23.

<sup>36</sup> Zechariah 14:16-19.

the Tabernacle of God,<sup>37</sup> who is the Tabernacle that will never be torn down.<sup>38</sup> At the close of that age, we will dwell in the presence of the LORD for eternity. Though Christians understand Yeshua's significance concerning feasts such as Passover and Pentecost, His placement and fulfillment within the Feast of Sukkot is a mystery to most. It is a truth that the first-century church embraced and has unfortunately been unacknowledged for millennia. How remarkable is it that God is opening the eyes of His people in these last days to truths such as this? He is teaching and preparing the heart of His bride to behold with greater clarity and awe the day when we will meet Him in the air and be seated at His table in the Tabernacle of God. If we would only receive it!

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<sup>37</sup>Revelation 21:3.

<sup>38</sup>Isaiah 33:20.

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## APPENDIX

A brief statement on the timing of December 25th. Most historians agree that the selection of this date to mark the birth of Christ was a settlement made between the pagans and the Christians of the newly formed Roman Catholic Church of the fourth century. As the original Apostles died, the Church largely departed from its Hebrew foundations/context and became increasingly influenced by Western thought. While there are numerous historical evidences against the December 25<sup>th</sup> date (the middle of winter not being an appropriate time for shepherds to tend sheep or for the Romans to institute a census), the Gospel of Luke provides Biblical evidence to support Sukkot as a better option.

Luke 1:5 says Zechariah (John the Baptist's father) served the priesthood under the division of Abijah, and did so according to the custom of the priesthood (Luke 1:8-9). First Chronicles 24 lists the divisions of the priesthood and places the division of Abijah as the eighth division (verse 10), according to their ordinance by the hand of Aaron their father, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded him (verse 19). With the religious year starting on Nisan 1 (March/April), this places Zechariah's priestly service (and encounter with Gabriel) at the time of Pentecost. After Zechariah's time of service, he returned home, Elizabeth conceived, and hid herself for five months until the end of November (Luke 1:23-24). One month later, Luke 1:26 introduces Gabriel's visitation to Mary in the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy), which places the event in December. After Mary's conception, she visits Elizabeth and stays with her for three more months (Luke 1:56), which would have been the last three months of her pregnancy. This places John the Baptist's birth during Passover and Yeshua's birth six months after, during Sukkot.

The LORD has a pattern of perfectly choreographing and aligning significant historical events. It can be seen why Yeshua's birth best fits the prophetic timeline if He was born during Sukkot. He would have been conceived during the darkest time of the year (winter solstice/Hanukkah) as the Light entered the darkness. Likewise, His birth would have occurred during the most joyous time of God's feasts, the Light of the World coming forth as the lights of Sukkot towered above the temple, burning for all the world to see as multitudes sang, "Save now (Hosannah), I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God *is* the Lord, and He has

given us light. Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You *are* my God, and I will praise You; *You are* my God, I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever (Psalm 118:25-29).”