

FESTIVAL OF BOOTHS: FIRST CENTURY

In the first century, the Jewish Festival of Booths (Sukkot) was a joyous, week-long pilgrimage to Jerusalem that centered on the Temple and celebrated God's provision. The agricultural, historical, and spiritual themes of the festival were emphasized through temporary dwellings, water and light rituals, and large-scale sacrifices.

As one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals, Sukkot drew huge crowds of Jewish men from across the Roman Empire to Jerusalem, the focal point of celebration.

Pilgrims built temporary shelters called sukkot on rooftops, in courtyards, and in the surrounding hills. These booths were constructed with leafy branches, with roofs left sparse enough to see the stars.

The festive and communal atmosphere was filled with music, dancing, and meals shared with friends, family, and strangers.

PRIMARY THEMES AND SYMBOLS

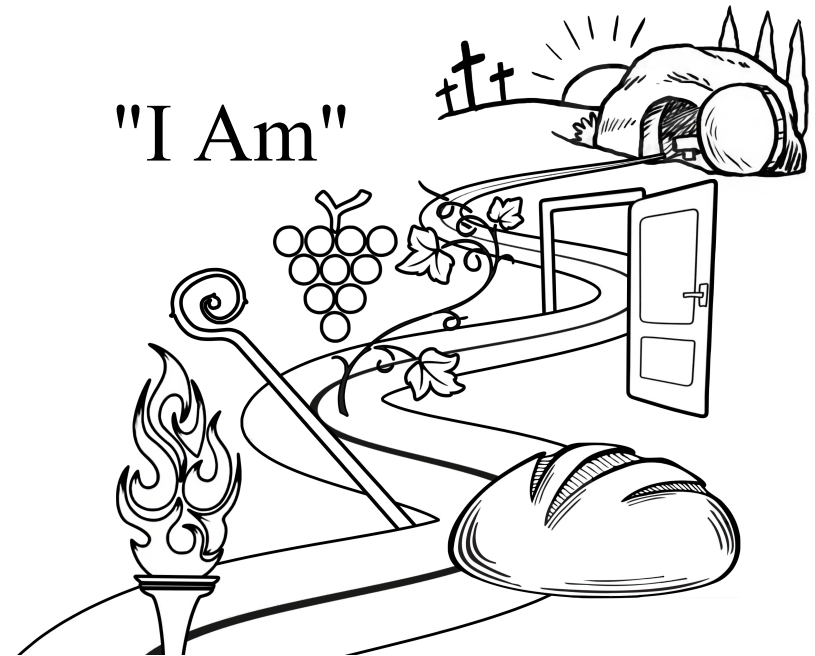
Tents or Booths: The core ritual was dwelling in the sukkot for seven days to commemorate the Israelites' 40-year journey through the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. The temporary structures served as a physical reminder of God's provision and protection during that time.

Harvest: As the "Feast of Ingathering," Sukkot marked the conclusion of the agricultural year, particularly the gathering of grapes and olives. This harvest festival was a time to rejoice and thank God for his abundance.

Four Species: Following the command in Leviticus, worshippers carried and waved a palm branch, three myrtle branches, two willow branches, and a citron. The waving of these items in all directions represented praising God and acknowledging his omnipresence.

Water libation ceremony: A joyous ceremony involved priests drawing "living water" from the Pool of Siloam into a golden pitcher. The priest would lead a musical procession back to the Temple, where the water was poured onto the altar amidst the joyful cries of the crowd. The ceremony expressed hopes for abundant rain in the coming year and was seen as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, "I am Living Water" John 7:37

Illumination: During the festival, four massive lamps were lit in the Temple's Court of the Women, illuminating the entire city of Jerusalem. Pious men danced and sang praises throughout the night. The brilliant light recalled the Shekinah glory, or visible presence of God. Jesus, "I am the Light of the World." John 8:12



a study of
The Gospel According to John
Summer 2025
Lesson #8
John 7
"Men Maddeningly Missing the Moving Mark"

REVIEW: In which chapters do we find these themes?

- a. Jesus is Eternal Diety-God
- b. Jesus is the Living Word of God
- c. Jesus is Eternally Human
- d. Belief in Jesus = Eternal life
- e. Disbelief = Sin & Condemnation
- f. Trinity - includes the Holy Spirit
- g. Light vs. Darkness
- h. The Godhead is husband/bridegroom to God's people
- i. Seeing God's kingdom requires a spiritual rebirth
- j. God's Kingdom = abundance
- h. Disciples beget disciples/witness/testify

John 1	introduction of Jesus, John the Baptist, disciples	
John 2	Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding and cleanses the Temple	
John 3	Jesus speaks with Nicodemus at night, John the Baptist testifies	
John 4	Jesus and the Samaritan woman	
John 5	Jesus heals on the Sabbath and has the authority of God	
John 6	Jesus feeds a crowd of 5000+, gets chased by crowds, walks on water, expounds on eating his flesh and drinking his blood, many disciples leave him	

VOCABULARY:

Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι) John differentiates between the religious leadership and the common people by calling leaders "the Jews" and calling the people "the crowds." Most every character in John's Gospel is Jewish, Jesus, the disciples, the other followers, the crowds... so it is a clue when John uses "the Jews" he is speaking of the temple authorities, and religious leaders.

Festival of Booths (תּוֹכַסָּה גִּזְרִי) See insert.

BRIEF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT:

See insert back for information about the Feast of Booths.

The Israelites celebrated three major festivals each year. The first is Passover, celebrating the Hebrews deliverance from slavery. The second is Pentecost, festival of first fruits and is linked to giving the Law on Mount Sinai, and Sukkot, the third, the feast of booths celebrating the time of gathering in the harvest of summer. Jesus fulfilled Passover by delivering the world from sin through his death and resurrection. He also fulfilled the feast of Pentecost when he sent the Holy Spirit into all believers, writing God's law on our hearts. We continue to await the fulfillment of the Feast of Booths, as the final harvest of God's Kingdom.

Choose parts and read through John 7's script in the insert.

Read John 7:1-11

1. What does this dialogue and narration reveal about family loyalty?
2. Consider sibling dynamics when your older brother is the Son of God.

Read John 7:12-24

1. Unpack verses 16-19
2. Unpack verses 21-24

Read John 7:25-44 "Where are you from?"

1. What comments reveal the people's knowledge of the Messiah?
2. What clues in the text reveal the thoughts of the crowd? Are they a monolith of belief, or a smattering of opinions?
3. Where is John drawing the line between spirit and body?

Read John 7:45-53

1. Why is Jesus "unarrestable?"
2. How does Nicodemus respond?
3. What is the Pharisees' problem?
4. Where are they missing the mark?

Read again John 7's script in the insert.