

THIRTY-FOURTH MESSAGE:
HOLY ASSEMBLIES FOR THE FIRST DAY OF THE FEAST OF BOOTHS
AND THE DAY FOLLOWING THAT FEAST
PLUS AN EXPLANATION OF THE BOOTHS
Leviticus 23:33-44

Introduction

The last MESSAGE concerning Israel’s appointments with Jehovah called for holy assemblies to be held on the first day of the Feast of Booths (see comments on v. 34 below concerning the name for this festival) and on the day following that Feast. During the Feast of Booths, the Israelites were to live in huts made of broad and thick leaved branches fastened to a fragile frame. This practice was to remind them of their wilderness days, so that no matter how settled and prosperous they might become in their land they would remember that Jehovah had lifted them up from being poverty-stricken travelers in the wilderness to be a force for Him all over the world.

This Feast had been mentioned twice previously by the name “Feast of Ingathering” (Ex. 23:16-17; 34:22-23), but in those passages it had been described only very briefly. The main emphasis of both of the previous references had been to specify that this Feast was to be one of the three occasions in the year when all males in Israel were required to gather “before Jehovah.” In those references, the Feast had been called the Feast of Ingathering, but they clearly referred to the same occasion that is called “Feast of Booths” in this MESSAGE, because they both agree with verse 39 about when this Feast was to be observed. Exodus 23:16 specifies that it was to be held “in the end of the year, when you have gathered in your labors out of the field.” Exodus 34:22 says it was to be held “at the year’s end,” and Leviticus 23:39 says it was to be observed “after you have gathered the produce of the land.” Clearly, all three statements mean the end of the farm year, in other words, at the completion of the final harvest of the year (see Introduction to Leviticus under the heading *Supposed contradictions in the text*). When a farmer has safely gathered in his last harvest for the year, he experiences a time of great relief and rejoicing. The Feast of Booths or Ingathering was to be just such a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving for the Israelites at the completion of their fall harvests. The spirit of that Feast must have been in many respects like the American Thanksgiving Day. While they were reveling in the richness of their harvest, they were to remember how poor they had been when Jehovah called them to Himself. The Feast was to remind them that Jehovah had made the difference between what they had been and what they had become and that they should be grateful to Him for the change.

The day following the Feast of Booths was a separate celebration that rounded out and brought to a close the sacred festivals of the Israelite religious year.

This MESSAGE may be outlined as follows:

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Critical Note

The use of two titles for this Feast has been used by many critics as evidence to support the Development Theory of the origin of these materials. According to their arguments, the two names must have come from different documents that were written in different periods of Israel's history, thus showing that this MESSAGE was a composite formed by a clumsy editor. Such an assumption is not necessary at all to account for the two names. The Feast of Weeks also had two titles, each of which had a valid application to the original significance of the day (see comments on Lev. 23:15-16 in MESSAGE 31). In that case, as in this, the use of two titles signified different aspects of the occasion. One title referred to the time of year when the Feast was to be held, while the other title referred to the purpose for its observance. No reason can be given why Jehovah could not have revealed both titles in His commands at Sinai. There is no need to suppose long periods of time were required to develop the two titles. The critics have invented an unneeded solution to a non-existent problem.

Critics have also made much out of the Addendum (vs. 39-43) that is given after the closing statement in this MESSAGE that summarized all of the MESSAGES concerning the holy assemblies (vs. 37-38). They claim that the Addendum must have been copied from a separate source and must have been placed in its present location by a clumsy editor. A discerning reading of each of the MESSAGES on the holy assemblies shows, however, that the Addendum was not clumsily added as an afterthought. Rather it was carefully located in its proper place with regard to the theme of the MESSAGES. The theme of the five MESSAGES in Leviticus 23 is not "Feast days" but "holy assemblies." Information about the Feasts is given in each of the five MESSAGES because it was a convenient time to present that information, but the theme of the five MESSAGES is the holy assemblies that were to be held on special occasions in Israel. Thus, this MESSAGE discussed the theme for which Jehovah gave it, which was to command that a holy assemblies be held during that Feast of Booths. However, since the Feast of Booths had not been fully described previously, an explanation needed to be given for calling the occasion by the name "Feast of Booths." It was more appropriate to make that explanation at this time than it would have been to wait until a later MESSAGE, because he people would have been left wondering why Jehovah had used the name "Feast of Booths." So, Jehovah added an Addendum to inform the Israelites of His plan for them to build and live in booths during the entire week of this Feast. He carefully separated His instructions about the booths from His instructions about the holy assemblies, so the body of this MESSAGE would be consistent with the Introductory Note in verses 2 and 4 and with the Summary Note in verses 37-38. Then after completing His instructions about the holy assemblies, He added an explanation about living in booths during this Feast. This arrangement is not clumsy editing but careful and logical adherence to a theme.

A third critical question related to this chapter grows out of noting that this MESSAGE says this Feast was to be held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, whereas Exodus 23:16 and Exodus 34:22 say it was to be held "at the end of the year." Advocates of the Development Theory contend that both statements cannot be true because the end of Israel's religious year came at the end of the second month and the end of their secular year came the end of the sixth month and, therefore, these traditions had to have developed over long periods of time. This question was discussed in the introduction to this writing (see Introduction to Leviticus under the heading *Supposed contradictions in the text*). The critics' arguments are based on a wrong assumption about the meaning of "the end of the year." "That expression means the end of the agricultural year when the harvests were finished and has nothing to do with either of their calendar years, as the critics suppose. The last crops to be harvested in Israel were the olive (or oil) crop and the grape (or wine) crop. Those crops were harvested from early August to the end of September. The seventh month of the Israelites' religious calendar extended from the middle of September to the middle of October in relation to our calendar. Thus, the fifteenth day of the seventh month came just about the first of October, or about half a month after the olive and grape harvests had ended (concerning the time of the seventh month, see comments on Lev. 16:29a in MESSAGE 20 and on Lev. 23:5 in MESSAGE 30 under the heading In the first month on the fourteenth day of the month). "The fifteenth day of the seventh month" in this MESSAGE corresponded exactly with "the end of the year" in the Exodus references. The statement in this MESSAGE simply made the time for holding the Feast of Ingathering or Booths more specific. This observation is confirmed in verse 39 of this MESSAGE, which says the Feast of Booths was to be held "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you have gathered in the produce of the land."

CHAPTER XXIII

Introductory Note (23:33)

Verse 33. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

This verse is another of the notes added by Moses to inform the reader that a new MESSAGE from Jehovah is being begun. It continues the theme of the holy assemblies and likely was delivered to Moses on the same day as the other four MESSAGES on that theme (MESSAGES 30-33).

- A. Holy assemblies for the first day of the Feast of Booths (23:34-36a)

Verse 34. **Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month [is] the Feast of Booths, seven days for Jehovah.**

Speak to the people of Israel, saying, This MESSAGE also was for all of the Israelites. It was another occasion that all Israelites needed to remember and observe. According to Exodus 23:16 and Exodus 34:22, all Israelite males were to gather “before Jehovah” during the Feast of Ingathering, which was all the more reason why this MESSAGE about that Feast needed to be relayed by Moses to all the people.

On the fifteenth day of this seventh month. The time when this celebration was to begin was on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, which was five days after the Day of Coverings (see comments on Lev. 16:29a in MESSAGE 20 and on Lev. 23:27 in MESSAGE 33).

[is] the Feast of Booths. The name of the Feast should be translated “Feast of Booths.” Though in English translations this festival has traditionally been called “Feast of Tabernacles,” the word translated “booths” has no relationship to the word translated “tabernacle” in the name “Tabernacle of Meeting” (see comments on Lev. 1:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading out of The Tent of Meeting). The word in this verse did not refer to a tent, as the word “tabernacle” did. It referred to a rough, temporary brush shelter. The

reason why this name was given to the Feast is explained in the addendum to this MESSAGE (see comments on verses 39-43 below).

In Exodus 23:16 and 34:22, this Feast was called the Feast of Ingathering. Both names were appropriate. “Feast of Ingathering” emphasized the occasion this Feast was to celebrate, which was the ingathering of the last harvest of the year. “Feast of Booths” emphasized the method by which it was to be commemorated, that is, by Israel’s living in booths for a week to remind them of their years of living in temporary dwellings in the wilderness.

seven days for Jehovah. The duration of the Feast was to be seven days. Like the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it was to be a full week of remembering the wilderness wanderings. After the Israelites would arrive in the Land, they were to spend a week twice in the year remembering their lowly past and expressing gratitude for their bountiful present. The first for remembering their wilderness journeys was during the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring (see comments on Lev. 23:5-8 in MESSAGE 30). The other time was during the Feast of Booths in the fall. During the fall Feast, they were to remember their years in the wilderness by living in booths for a week.

Verses 35. **On the first day [must be] a holy assembly. You must not do occupational labor.**

On the first day of the Feast of Booths, the people were to gather to praise and worship Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 23:2 in MESSAGE 30 under the heading in which you must call holy assemblies are these. [They are] appointments with me). That day was to be a sabbath day, in which they would cease from doing work for their occupations and take time to worship Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 16:31 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading a sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves), Lev. 29:3 in MESSAGE 23 under the heading keep My sabbaths, and on Lev. 23:29 in MESSAGE 33).

Verse 36 a. **[For] seven days, you must present fire-offering to Jehovah.**

A holy assembly was to be held on only the first day of the Feast (v. 35), but fire-offerings were to be offered on each of the seven days of the Feast (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a fire-offering). The specific fire-offerings for this Feast were described in a later MESSAGE, which is recorded in Numbers 29:12-34.

B. Holy assembly for the day following the Feast of Booths (23:36b)

Verse 36b. **On the eighth day, you must hold a holy assembly and present a fire-offering to Jehovah. It [is] a restricted time. You must not do any occupational labor.**

On the eighth day, you must hold a holy assembly and present a fire-offering to Jehovah. On the eighth day, they were to hold another holy assembly; and that day also was to be a sabbath. Since the Feast of Booths was to last for seven days (v. 34) and this verse refers to an eighth day, the eighth day does not seem to have been a part of the Feast of Booths, though it was closely connected with it. The same close relationship existed between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They also were separate Feasts, but closely connected with each other (see comments on Lev. 23:5-8 in MESSAGE 30). The purpose for the observance on the eighth day seems to have been to close out and complete the special Feasts of the Israelites' religious year. This verse specifies that fire-offerings were to be offered on the eighth day also. The separate statement concerning fire-offerings for that day is a further indication that a distinction was to be preserved between the seven days of the Feast of Booths and the day after that Feast. That conclusion is confirmed in Numbers 29:35-38 where a different set of offerings was prescribed for the eighth day from the set of offerings prescribed for the first seven days (Num. 29:12-34).

It [is] a restricted time. You must not do any occupational labor. The word translated "restricted time" has traditionally been understood to refer to a holy assembly; however it is an entirely different Hebrew word from the usual expression for "holy assembly." This word is based on a root that means "restrain" or "restrict." It refers to a restricted time. Therefore, it has been understood to mean a time set aside for holding a holy assembly. Translators have struggled to find an acceptable translation into English that conveys the same meaning as "holy assembly" without using the same words, none of which accurately convey the real significance of the term.¹

In Deuteronomy 16:8 this expression is used with reference to the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In 2 Chronicles 7:9; and in Nehemiah 8:18 (as in this verse), it is used to refer to the celebration of the day after the Feast of Booths. Since it is used on those occasions to refer to the last day of those two Feasts, some conclude that the word refers to a closing or concluding celebration. However, the term also is used in 2 Kings 10:20; Jer. 9:2; Amos 5:21, where it has no connection with the end of a Feast.

The expression can also be connected with the sentence that follows, which says that occupational work was not to be done on that day. Therefore, it can mean a time when the Israelites were restricted from working. The literal translation "a restricted time" leaves open either possibility. Either way, the day following the Feast of Booths was to be a sabbath, and work at one's occupation was forbidden on that day.

¹ KJV, ASV, LITGV, NRSV, RSV, and RV all translate the word as "solemn assembly," making no difference from the usual expression. HCSB uses "solemn gathering," NASB "an assembly," BBE "special holy day," CEV "coming together for worship," CJB "public assembly," GNB "day for worship," and MSG "solemn convocation."

Summary Note: Concerning all the holy assemblies (23:37-38)

Verse 37. **These [are] appointments of Jehovah which you must call holy assemblies to present fire-offerings to Jehovah: rededication-offerings, homage-offerings, slaughter-offerings, and liquid-offerings, a day's offering on its day.**

These [are] appointments of Jehovah which you must call holy assemblies. this verse summarizes all five MESSAGES about holy assemblies (MESSAGES 30-34), just as verses 2 and 3 of MESSAGE 30 had introduced all five MESSAGES. It provides additional evidence that the five MESSAGES form a unit and that likely all five were delivered to Moses on the same day. It also emphasizes that the theme of the five MESSAGES is the appointments or holy assemblies of Israel, just as verses 2 and 4 of MESSAGE 30 had made the same emphasis (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 30).

to present fire-offerings to Jehovah: rededication-offerings, homage-offerings, slaughter-offerings, and liquid-offerings. Each of the holy assemblies was to be observed by offering fire-offerings specified for the occasion. The offerings included rededication-offerings (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading If his offering [is] a rededication-offering), homage-offerings (see comments on Lev. 2:1 IN MESSAGE 1 under the heading offers an offering of homage to Jehovah), slaughter-offerings (see comments on Lev. 3:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a slaughter-offering of peace offerings), and liquid-offerings (see comments on Lev. 23:13 in MESSAGE 31 under the heading and its liquid-offering).

a day's offering on its day These words are an idiomatic expression meaning that each offering was to be offered on the day specified for it. The offerings to be offered on each occasion were described more specifically in a later MESSAGE recorded in Numbers 28-29.

Verse 38. **In addition to the sabbaths of Jehovah and in addition to your gifts and in addition to all your vows that you must give to Jehovah.**

This verse lists other features that were to accompany the holy assemblies. The first feature mentioned was "the sabbaths of Jehovah." These sabbaths were not the weekly sabbath but sabbaths that were required in connection with holy assemblies, as specified in the five MESSAGES. The second feature was "gifts." That word seems to refer to specific donations that Jehovah required the Israelites to give for the support of His work and of His ministers. Those gifts included firstlings (see comments on Lev. 27:26-27 in MESSAGE 38), first-fruits (see comments on Lev. 2:12 in MESSAGE 1 and Lev. 23:17 in MESSAGE 31; see also Num. 18:12-13; Deut. 26:1-11) and tithes (see comments on Lev. 27:30-33 in MESSAGE 38; see also Num. 18:21-32; Deut. 26:12-15). During holy assemblies was an appropriate time for those donations to be brought to the Tabernacle and presented to the priests. The third feature was vows and voluntary gifts, which were gifts brought voluntarily above and beyond the donations that were required by Jehovah. They were to be brought to express the worshiper's heart at times of their own choosing. Vows were gifts promised to be given at a specific time, while voluntary gifts were gifts presented on the spot without any prearrangements, (see comments on Lev. 7:16 in MESSAGE 7; see also Lev. 27:2-25). The holy assemblies were great times of giving to Jehovah in all of the ways described and provided for in Jehovah's MESSAGES to them.

Addendum: Concerning the booths
(23:39-43)

Verse 39. **On the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you must keep the Feast of Jehovah [for] seven days. On the first day [must be] a sabbath, and on the eighth day a sabbath.**

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you must keep the Feast of Jehovah [for] seven days. After the Summary Note that applied to all five MESSAGES on the holy assemblies, Jehovah returned in verses 39-43 to add information concerning the Feast that He had addressed in this MESSAGE. The specified day and the words “when you have gathered in the produce of the Land” clearly identify this occasion as the Feast already mentioned in verses 33-36.

At first glance it seems strange that the MESSAGE should return to discuss one of the occasions for a holy assemblies after the closing Summary Note that applied to all of the holy assemblies. The reason for doing so becomes clear when the theme of the five MESSAGES is taken seriously. That reason already has been explained in the Critical Note on this MESSAGE (see Critical Note above). The purpose of the five MESSAGES in Leviticus 23 was to list occasions when holy assemblies were to be held. The holy assemblies were to be held in connection with special worship occasions throughout the year. The holy assemblies to be held in connection with the Feast of Booths and the day following that Feast had been explained in verses 33-36 of this MESSAGE; however, some important information concerning that Feast had not been explained in any previous MESSAGE. That information was important if the Israelites were to understand the way the Feast was to be observed. Rather than distracting the theme of holy assemblies in verses 33-36, the additional information that was needed about the Feast was held for an Addendum at the end of the MESSAGE. The arrangement is purposeful and logical. Therefore, verses 39-43 explain the significant information that the Feast of Ingathering was to be observed by living in booths during the seven days of the Feast. That

explanation reveals why the Feast was called by the name “Feast of Booths.”

On the first day [must be] a sabbath, and on the eighth day a sabbath. This sentence repeats the requirements concerning sabbaths for the Feast of Booths and the day following. The instruction that Sabbaths were to be held on the first and eighth days further confirms that these verses refer to the occasion that already had been discussed in verses 33-36 (see comments on vs. 35-36 above).

Verses 40-41. **40 And on the first day you must take the product of luxuriant trees—leaves of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice at Jehovah’s face [for] seven days.**

41 And you shall keep it [as] a Feast to Jehovah [for] seven days in the year. [It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations. You must keep it in the seventh month.

And on the first day you must take the product of luxuriant trees—leaves of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook. On the first day of this Feast, the Israelites were to cut broad leaves and thick branches off of luxuriant trees. Evidently they were to wave those branches in public celebrations of joy and excitement. Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8-11, and Luke 19:37 show that when people welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem a few days before His crucifixion, they used tree branches for that purpose.

and you shall rejoice at Jehovah’s face [for] seven days Rejoicing was to continue for all seven days of the Feast. The verse does not say that they were to wave tree branches for seven days, because the next verses tell of another use they were to make of those branches. He Feast of Booths was to be a time of joy and happiness. Living in temporary booths was not to cause them to suffer or be miserable. It was to inspire them to rejoice and celebrate that God had delivered them from their days of privation in the wilderness and brought them to a time of comfort and plenty. They could full appreciate their blessings only by remembering how God had delivered and protected them in the past.

And you shall keep it [as] a Feast to Jehovah [for] seven days in the year. [It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations. You must keep it in the seventh month. Keeping this Feast as a seven day celebration was commanded by a statute from Jehovah God. It was to continue for an age from generation to generation. The expression means that means this Feast, like all the other occasions that required holy assemblies, was to be an ongoing yearly observance. However, the words “for an age” does not mean strictly “forever.” Jehovah expressed His command in a way that left open the possibility that He could cancel it at some time in the future, which He did in Jesus (see comments on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1).

Verses 42-43. **42 You must live in booths [for] seven days. All that are native born in Israel must live in booths.**

43 That your descendants may know that I caused the people of Israel to live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God.

After waving the branches to express joy, the Israelites were then to use them to build booths in which they were to live during the seven days of the Feast. They were to build the frame of the booths out of the tree limbs and cover the frames with the leafy branches they had gathered and waved to express their joy. Obviously, the booths were to be built close to The Tabernacle so the people could participate in the holy assemblies to be held on the first day and the eighth day of the combined celebrations. The people were to live in the booths for the seven days of the Feast. Nothing is said about their living in the booths on the eighth day, which further confirms that the eighth day was considered to be a separate celebration. Likely the eighth day was to be used to tear down the booths and participate in the holy assembly that closed out that year’s annual celebrations.

Living in the booths was to remind them of the days when Israel lived in the wilderness. No direct statement is made in the Record that the Israelites at any time built booths out of tree limbs during their wilderness journeys. Almost surely not enough trees existed in the wilderness to make it possible for them to build booths during those years.

However, the Book of Exodus often says they lived in tents during those years (Ex. 16:16; 18:7; 33:8-10; Lev. 14:8; Num. 16:26-27; 24:5). Most likely the booths were intended to resemble the tents in which the Israelites lived during their wilderness travels. The purpose of the booths was to assure that, when the Israelites would live in stone houses in the Land, they would remember the years when their forebears lived in fragile temporary structures in the wilderness. Later, when the Israelites would be settled in houses in the Land, it would be difficult and expensive for each Israelite to obtain a tent to be used for just one week during the Feast, but each family could easily construct for itself a booth of branches. As they lived in booths for the week, they would have occasion to think of how far Jehovah had brought them from the days when their forebears lived in temporary structures and traveled from place to place as God led them. It would help them realize how wonderfully God had blessed them in their land.

Concluding Note: Concerning Moses’ obedience (23:44)

Verse 44. **And Moses explained the appointments of Jehovah to the people of Israel.**

Moses obeyed Jehovah and relayed to the Israelites each of the MESSAGES concerning the appointments Jehovah had made with them. Moses had heard God’s demands for obedience. He was careful to obey those commands.

If the MESSAGES of Leviticus developed over many years and were gathered together by some clumsy editors at some late date, statements such as this one are nothing less than lies. We must make a decision. If they are lies, they cannot be God’s Word. If they are God’s Word, they cannot be lies. Their deep spiritual insights and their marvelous consistency give assurance that they are God’s Word, and every word in them is true, including the words about when and how God spoke them to Moses and how he then conveyed those words to the people.

Application

A nation that has had great successes needs to remember where those successes came from and how they were achieved. When a nation has been blessed by God as much as America has been blessed, it especially needs to remember God, thank Him for the past, and depend on Him for the future. America has instituted many ways for remembering its glorious past, but are we now adequately recognizing God's involvement in that past? We have written records of our history and require all our students and naturalized citizens to study them, but more and more those histories emphasize the struggles of our politics instead of the providences of God. We build great monuments, but most of the monuments glory in the exploits of our military and the wisdom of our human leaders rather than the involvement of God in the turning points of our history. We observe great holidays like Christmas, and Thanksgiving, but more and more Christmas is becoming a time for honoring each other with presents rather than a time to honor God for coming into our world to provide for us salvation. And more and more Thanksgiving is becoming a day to enjoy family and food rather than a day to praise God for raising us up from a frontier nation to the mightiest force in today's world.

We need a revival, a renewal, and a reformation to restore us to recognizing that the true source of our blessings from beginning until today is God. America, remember God's involvement in our past, or He may forget to involve Himself in our future!