

SUKKOT: A UINIVERSAL HOLIDAY

The Talmud tells of a rabbi explaining how God will judge the world. There will be an announcement: "Everyone who helped those who engage in the study of Torah, come and receive your reward." Immediately, all the nations send their heavenly representatives to claim a share. The first is Rome.

"What are your merits?" God asks. "Why, Heavenly master, You are surely aware of our glorious contribution to the culture and civilization of Your world. We constructed public markets, baths, and places of enjoyment and business. We amassed gold and silver as no other nation before or after us. And for whose sake did we do all this? Only for the purpose of permitting Your people Israel to study Torah free of care and worry."

God replies: "How dare you present such a claim? Did you not build these amenities for your own enjoyment? Whom did your so-called civilization serve but yourselves?" And so it goes with Persia and all the other nations, as each withdraws empty-handed.

Then an idea is proposed that the nations join forces and return to the Almighty with one last plea. A spokesperson approaches God and argues: "If we do not deserve a share for active merits, You should consider that You never obligated us to observe the Torah, as You did with Israel. We, too, would have followed Your laws if it was demanded of us." God retorts: "Long before Israel was given the Torah, all nations had become subject to the Seven Laws of Noah. They were only seven, compared to the 613 Israel volunteered to observe. And what did you make of those seven?"

A back and forth ensues, after which the Almighty decides "You have appealed to My mercy. Here is one mitzvah (commandment), Sukkot. Go and fulfill it." Still, according to the Talmud, the nations blow even that opportunity. But we are supposed to learn from the city of Nineveh (in the story of Jonah) that repentance is possible even for the nations.

We are all called to repentance. It is not for us to judge the call but to trust Him and do what He commands. Most of historical Christianity has interpreted apparent gentile inclusion in God's covenant to mean Jewish exclusion, giving rise to the deplorable teaching of Replacement Theology that has inflicted so much damage on the Jews. In many instances, it was the Church itself which inflicted the most heinous atrocities. However, we are living in a period where a change of heart is occurring before our eyes.

How wonderful to know we are living in miraculous times! The Jewish people have returned to Zion and have again become a sovereign nation. The nations are still trying to figure out how it came to be. Most would like to rationalize the

return as a national political event. There are a few who acknowledge that the God of Israel is still around and His promises still endure.

Since 1965, pockets within the Christian world have rejected Replacement Theology, asked for forgiveness for past anti-Semitism, and affirmed that God's covenant with Israel is eternal. What is truly astounding is that gentiles are coming as pilgrims to the Land and praising the God of Israel during Sukkot in fulfillment of Zechariah 14:16. Even during the height of the intifada, Christians made their way here and declared "We are with you!"

Yet for many in the Jewish community, 2000 years of painful memories prevents any move to accept Christian gestures of goodwill. It is more comfortable to say that Christian support has a hidden agenda, that all they really want is to convert Jews or bring about Armageddon.

Should we not accept their extended hand of friendship? Certainly! A dialogue between us can only pave the way for better relationships and better understanding. Does this mean we join hands completely as one faith community? Certainly not! But should we not begin down the road to reconciliation with God and each other?

Sing out praise, O you nations, for His people! For He will avenge the blood of His servants, inflict revenge upon His adversaries, and appease His land [and] His people (Deuteronomy 32:43). Moses prayer is an invite of the global community to rejoice and extol with the Jewish nation. The prophecy is being fulfilled in our times and specifically during Sukkot.

While the above mentioned Talmudic story does not end well for nations of the world, the rabbinic sage probably never fathomed a time where the masses would stand with the Jewish people. For so long, we were a nation that stood alone and now we have friends who are affirming Isaiah (2:3) *Many peoples will go and say, 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord'...For from Zion will the Torah come forth and the word of God from Jerusalem.*

It was an honor to celebrate Sukkot with my Christian friends in Israel.

Response to article *SUKKOT: A UNIVERSAL HOLIDAY*
By Jack W. Langford

SUKKOT: THE GRAND FINALE

Sukkot is better known in the English Bibles among Christians as The Feast of Tabernacles. It is the grand finale of the three major Feasts of each year according to the Mosaic calendar. For each of these Feasts the Children of Israel were to appear before God at the Sanctuary. Sukkot being situated towards the end of the sacred year calendar first of all celebrated the final fall harvest of the land of Israel. In this regard it was first called “the Feast of Ingathering” (Exo. 23:16). Also, according to God’s instructions, it was to commemorate the 40 year wilderness journey of Israel in the desert wherein they dwelt in booths. In the celebration they were to reenact this event by dwelling in booths for the seven days of the Feast (Lev. 23:42 & 43). The Feast has an eighth day added to it which was to be a Holy Convocation or Sabbath (Lev. 23:39 & Num. 29:35). In addition, the Feast would be characterized by a crescendo of rejoicing (Deut. 16:14). And finally, this is the one Feast of Israel that God has prophetically stated all the Gentile nations must also have representation present in the future Kingdom age (Zech. 14:16-21).

More recently, Gentile Christians have already been gathering to celebrate the Feast of Sukkot in great enthusiasm in the new nation of Israel. This is done primarily in anticipation of the prophetic command of Zechariah 14 mentioned above. It is also done because the more Evangelical, Bible believing Christians clearly recognize that God’s Word has promised a restoration for the nation of Israel in these last days. Obviously, any person who takes the Hebrew Scriptures literally, as inspired of God, must recognize that God’s final plans for Israel have just begun. In addition, the Greek Scriptures (New Testament) likewise foretell of the restoration of Israel in God’s plan (see Romans 11). It is only the various Catholic Churches (Roman, Greek, Russian, etc.) and those liberal Churches in Protestantism that will not take part in this celebration, nor in any real support for Israel in her present struggles, because they actually still believe in the old travesty of “Replacement Theology.”

Make no mistake about it, Rome’s apology to the Jews for its part in the Holocaust and for the centuries of blood-thirsty persecution, only came about by political necessity, once the magnitude of the recent crime came to light. In addition, the Roman leadership has always been masters at playing both sides in a conflict. On the one hand the Pope will visit Yad Vashem with humility and tears in his eyes, and then turn right around and cross the boarder to bemoan, on behalf of the Palestinians, that cruel wall of separation erected by the Jews. The Palestinians are not fools either. They play the same game. On the one hand, they film the Pope, beneath the backdrop of that wall, bemoaning their situation, in order to get more world sympathy, and then they turn right around and make life miserable for Catholics in order to drive out more of them from their areas. And then the Roman Catholic authorities have the audacity to blame their losses on the action of the Jews instead of the madness of the Muslims. Historically, the Jewish people have suffered equally from both of these religious systems.

Yes, indeed, the genuine support of Israel by Bible-believing Christians is all the more refreshing in light of these dust-clouds of satanic religious confusion.

On the other hand, as indicated in the CJCUC article, just what then has been God's plan and provision for the Gentiles peoples of the world throughout history?

Jews and Gentiles alike trace their ancestry back to the same grandparents—Adam and Eve. In preparing a covering (atonement) for Adam and Eve God was providing personal soul salvation for all mankind alike who would by faith receive it. God wrote the same moral principles in the inner consciousness of all mankind as He gave on stone to Moses. In addition, the whole physical creation speaks of God's holiness, majesty and mercy to all mankind on earth—*“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech, there is no language where their voice is not heard...The law of the LORD is perfect converting the soul...”* (Psalm 19). *“The earth is full of the loving kindness of the LORD”* (Psalm 33:5). *“The LORD is nigh unto all them that are of a broken heart and saves such as be of a contrite spirit”* (Psalm 34:18). *“The LORD has made known His salvation, His righteousness has He openly showed in the sight of the heathen...All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of God”* (Psalm 98:1-4). Etc., etc.

In addition, one of the important provisions through the instrumentality of the Abrahamic Covenant was that *“All families of the earth would be blessed”* and *“In your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed”* (Gen. 12:3 & 22:18). Because of this, it was no secret that the prophets foresaw God's salvation blessings upon the Gentiles—*“I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles...My salvation to the ends of the earth”* (Isa. 49:6); *“I was found of them that sought Me not”* (Isa. 65:1); *“Rejoice ye Gentiles with His people”* (Deut. 32:43); *“I will provoke you to jealousy by them which are no people”* (Deut. 32:21); *“He will rise to reign over the Gentiles”* (Isa. 11:10); *“Praise the LORD all ye Gentiles”* (Psalm 117:1); etc., etc.

When the early Jewish Christian leadership saw the great number of Gentiles who came to believe in Jesus as their Savior, they were led to propose again their continuance in the Noaic Laws (Acts 15:18-21). The Gentiles were further encouraged by the distinctive revelations given to the apostle Paul concerning *“The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:2) which governed and directed their whole life. However, this very same apostle spoke extensively about the final restoration of Israel to the place of prominence before God (see Romans 11:1-36).

So it is, that after this present time when God is *“visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name”* (Acts 15:14) is fulfilled, and the present *“fullness of the Gentiles has come in”* (Rom. 11:25), *“So all Israel shall be saved”* (Romans 11:26).

And thus, with the glorious advent of the Messiah, in victory over Israel's enemies, the newly regenerated Gentile nations will celebrate Sukkot in Jerusalem with all of redeemed, newly regenerated Israel (see Zechariah 13:1 & 14:16-21).