

Deuteronomy 16:13-15

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The Israelites were commanded to joyfully celebrate the Feast of Booths with all those who belong to them. This feast commemorated the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land by living in structures made of wood and foliage. They are to have that celebration at the central sanctuary.

Verses 13 – 15 deal with the third pilgrim festival that Israel was to *celebrate—the Feast of Booths*. The term *booths* (Heb. “sūkkôt”) refers to temporary shelters made of branches and foliage that were used for shelter either by soldiers in the field, or by watchmen guarding their fruit trees, or by grape harvesters living in the vineyards during the grape harvest season. The *Feast of Booths* is also called the Feast of the Ingathering, as here in Exodus, which commands the three pilgrimage festivals that Israel is to hold each year:

“Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field.”
(Exodus 23:14-16)

This *Feast of Booths* or Feast of the Ingathering was connected with the Fall harvest, and celebrated the gathering of new wine and grain into storage for the winter.

The *threshing floor* refers to a hard, level surface on which the grain was removed from the harvested plants (with a flail). The *wine vat* refers to a large container that holds liquids. It was often made of wood and tied with a lower container by a pipe. So, once the grapes were mashed in the larger container, the juice ran into the smaller one. Both are activities performed at the end of the harvest.

The *Feast of Booths* was to be a seven-day festival which was to begin *seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat*.

This means that it began after the grain and grapes had been processed, placed in containers and stored away. After the harvest is over, and the work is done, it is time to celebrate. According to the book of Leviticus, this celebration began *on the fifteenth day* of the seventh month called “Tishri,” roughly corresponding to sometime in September/October in our calendar ([Leviticus 23:34](#)). This feast celebrated the culmination of the agricultural year ([Leviticus 23:39-43](#)).

[Leviticus 23:36](#) mentions an additional eighth day attached to this seven day Feast of Tabernacles. The first day and the eighth day of this feast are to be days of rest with all the laws of the weekly sabbath applying to these two non-sabbath rest days. In Hebrew, the eighth day is called “Shemini Atzeret” and is looked at in Jewish tradition as its own distinct appointed time. It is specifically mentioned in [Nehemiah 8](#):

“He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day here was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.”
([Nehemiah 8:18](#))

Shemini Atzeret is called “The last day, the great day of the feast” in [John 7:37](#).

Moses told the people that they should *rejoice in your feast* (v. 14). It was to be a time to enjoy the bounty of their harvest. It was a time to enjoy their family, neighbors, and fellow countrymen, whom they were to love as themselves. It was a time to enjoy the fruits of their labors. Their hard work had turned to a benefit, and it was time to *rejoice*. They were also to celebrate the great benefits of being in such a wonderful covenant relationship with their Suzerain LORD. By following His ways, they have the opportunity to live in a land that is greatly blessed, where love rather than exploitation is the primary attitude each person has toward the other.

Not only was the head of the household told to rejoice, his whole household was to participate in the celebration. Moses lists all who should attend: *you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns*. The head of the family was to rejoice with everyone who belonged to his household.

The term translated *stranger* (Heb. “gēr”) can be better explained by the term “sojourner” since it refers to someone who resides in a foreign country who

simply travels for pleasure or business ([Deuteronomy 5:14; 10:18-19](#)). The *stranger* would not have land and would be dependent to varying degrees upon the Israelites. But they were to be invited to participate as well. The joy and thanksgiving of the festival was to be shared by all.

This also applied to the *orphan* and the *widow*. These were also vulnerable parts of the population.

These three people groups (*stranger, orphan and widow*) were among the ones who had the least power in the Israelite society. Since the core of God's covenant with His people was for them to treat one another as they would want to be treated, these laws made special provisions for the vulnerable, to protect them from exploitation. The poor are to be included in the celebration. They too are to rejoice and enjoy community along with everyone else at the festival.

As with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Moses told the people that for *seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God* (v. 15). Living in the booths for seven days was to remind the people of the journey through the desert, where they lived in tents, after their deliverance by their LORD from slavery in Egypt. During the journey, the twelve tribes became a nation which prepared them for their life in the Promised Land. The people were to *celebrate*. This was a happy occasion, and a joyful feast of remembrance and fellowship. The Israelites have not even entered the land, and God is already making commands for them to remember. The human memory fades quickly, and these festivals are designed as continual reminders.

Another requirement was that the feast was to be celebrated *in the place which the LORD chooses*. This is a reference to the central sanctuary and it was the religious site where God's presence dwelt. The central sanctuary was initially the tabernacle that had already been constructed while in the wilderness, and eventually became the temple, which was first constructed under King Solomon. Celebrating the Feast of Booths at the central sanctuary would allow the Israelites to experience God's presence among them as they thanked Him for His provisions. The place of the sanctuary had not been chosen at this time. But the fact that God mentioned it definitively spoke of the certainty that the Israelites would take possession of the land once they crossed the Jordan River.

The reason for the *celebration* given here was *because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful*. God's blessings here refer to the bountiful agricultural

products He would give to His people as well as the strength and courage He gave them to work. The feast occurred at the time of the fall harvest, and the people were to remember the ultimate source of their bounty, and be grateful. This again presaged the reality that God was about to allow them to possess the land they had already been granted.

This would have been an important mindset for the people as they prepared to enter the land. Such blessings demanded that His vassals be grateful and joyful. They were to elevate their Suzerain God above anyone and anything because He is the ultimate source of their blessings, and they were to enjoy the company of their fellow Israelites, their brothers and neighbors whom they were to love as themselves. This reflects the covenant they had entered with their Suzerain Ruler, as displayed in the Ten Commandments. They were to honor His laws and serve and love one another.

We are told that in the Millennial Kingdom even the gentile nations will be required to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the Feast of Tabernacles:

“Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths”
([Zechariah 14:16](#))

Gratitude and remembrance will continue during the millennial reign.

Biblical Text:

¹³ “**You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; ¹⁴and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. ¹⁵Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.**