

This Week Is a Holiday of Biblical Proportions

It's a busy time in Israel and for the Jewish people. We just completed the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—the High Holidays. And this week, we start the eight-day festival of Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles.

This holiday is unique because not only is it one of three Jewish pilgrimage holidays, drawing Jews from around the world to Israel, but it is also a holiday of the nations that draws people of faith—especially Christians—to the Holy Land. Last year, an estimated more than 60,000 Christians were in Israel for Sukkot, and this year there are expected to be at least as many.

One of the highlights of this week is the annual Jerusalem March in which thousands of lovers of Israel take to the streets to express their solidarity with Israel. They wear costumes and hats of every color and wave their country's national flags. It's like Epcot in Israel, with all the faces and languages.

The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem's Feast of Tabernacles likewise draws around 6,000 people each year, educating and inspiring visitors about the Bible and the land of Israel.

The economic impact of such events cannot be underestimated. According to ICEJ, the Feast's economic impact on Israel is expected to be around \$18 million to \$20 million.

But these events are not just about the financial viability of an already thriving startup nation. Rather, the week of Sukkot is in many ways the fulfillment of biblical prophecies discussed thousands of years ago first by King Solomon and

then by the prophet Zechariah, the latter of whom describes what Sukkot will look like in the end of days.

A young King Solomon began to fulfill his father David's desire to build a home for God in the fourth year of his reign, as described in the Book of Kings. Construction of Solomon's temple lasted for seven years and concluded in the autumn month of Cheshvan in the 11th year of Solomon's kingdom. Nevertheless, the king let nearly an entire year pass before dedicating the Temple on Sukkot of the 12th year. Apparently, King Solomon postponed it 11 months to wait for the perfect moment and the right holiday.

One explanation behind Solomon's timing can be culled from the prayer he recited at the dedication ceremony: "Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel and comes from a far country for Your name's sake. ... when he comes and prays toward this house, may You hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and do all that the foreigner asks of You," (1 Kings 8:41-43a). From its very inauguration, King Solomon established that the temple would forever be a "house of prayer for all nations."

Indeed, there was no more frenetic a holiday in the temple than Sukkot, when numerous animals were sacrificed, including 70 offerings on behalf of the 70 nations of the world. The central prayers of Sukkot focused on rainfall, a universal need. Water libations were brought into the temple with great festivity on Sukkot to beseech the heavens to provide all nations with sustenance and life. Solomon apparently waited to dedicate the temple on Sukkot, the universal holiday.

In addition, the Hebrew prophet Zechariah describes how non-Jews will flock to Jerusalem in the messianic age: "Then it will be that all the nations who have come against Jerusalem and survived will go up each year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacle" (Zech. 14:16).

In other words, the Bible tells us that Sukkot is the holiday when the nations will celebrate together with the Jews in Jerusalem.

Many Jews have been skeptical of Christian support for Israel, even with all of its benefits—and for good reason. Christians and Jews share a painful history of Christian persecution and murder of Jews, usually based on the Christian theological premise that God rejected the Jewish people and chose them instead.

That Christians flock to Jerusalem over Sukkot in the numbers described above is an indication of the 180-degree turn that many Christians have had to take since the founding of the modern State of Israel 70 years ago. Many Christians have started to reject “replacement theology” and open their hearts and minds to how the people of Israel fit into God’s plans. And Sukkot in Israel is a perfect testament to this understanding.

Likewise, Jews must be more open as well to embrace these Christians when they arrive in the Holy Land. Isaiah 2 describes that in the end of days, the nations will stream up to Jerusalem “for Torah shall come forth from Zion, The word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3, The Israel Bible).

In this generation—in this year—we can begin to fulfill Isaiah’s vision and the Jews’ historic mandate to be a “light unto the nations.”

The number 70 is exactly the number of descendants of Noah described in Genesis 10. Seventy is the number of languages into which Moses translated the Torah on behalf of the 70 nations of the world, as alluded to in Deuteronomy.

The Feast of Tabernacles, celebrated in Jerusalem in Israel’s 70th year, represents a historic turning point in Jewish-Christian relations of biblical proportions.

King Solomon and the prophet Zechariah would surely rejoice if they could see us in Jerusalem during this Feast of Tabernacles, as we celebrate 70 years of prophecies being fulfilled in Israel with the 70 nations of the world.

Rabbi Tuly Weisz is the editor of *The Israel Bible*, the first study Bible edited by Jews for Christians and dedicated to highlighting the land and the people of Israel, a #1 New Release in both Jewish and Christian Bible categories on Amazon.