



The Birth of Jesus during Sukkot

The Scriptures seem to indicate to us that Jesus was born during the festival season of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles). In fact, I believe that He was born on the Feast of Sukkot (which is Tishrei 15 on the biblical calendar, and is analogous to our September/October). With this in mind, let's look for some evidence of this in the Bible.

In Luke 1:5, Zachariah is a priest (*Cohen*) of the division of Abijah. What does this mean? Israel was divided into 24 districts at the time of Jesus. Each of these districts sent two representatives to officiate at the temple during the weeks of the year. In First Chronicles 24, the first division of the priests would serve in the first week of the year, which would be both in the month of Nisan and the month of Tishrei since both months begin the new year. As we saw earlier in this book, Nisan is the first month in the religious calendar set up by God in Exodus 12:2 and Tishrei is the first month of the year according to the civil calendar.

During the third week in the month of Nisan, the priests from all 24 districts would come to the temple to help during the week of Passover (*Pesach*). This would also be the case for the festival of Pentecost (*Shavuot*) and for the festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles) when all males were required to go to Jerusalem as specified by God in Deuteronomy 16:16. In First Chronicles 24:10, we see that *abijah* was the eighth division or course of priests. The course of abijah would minister during the tenth week of the year. Remember, the weeks of Passover and Shavuot would not be counted because all the priests were required to go to Jerusalem then.

In Luke 1:9-10, we see that Zacharias is burning incense. This is done in the room of the temple known as the Holy Place. As the incense (which represents the prayers of God's people (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4) is being burned by the priests in the temple, 18 special prayers are prayed. These 18 prayers would be prayed every day in the temple. One of these prayers is that Elijah would come. This is important because it was understood by the people, as God established, that Elijah would precede the coming of the Messiah as stated in Malachi 4:5.

These 18 special prayers would be prayed twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. In Luke 1:11-13, the angel appeared on the right side of the altar and told Zacharias that his prayer was heard and John the Baptist would be born. John the Baptist was not literally Elijah, but was of the spirit of power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

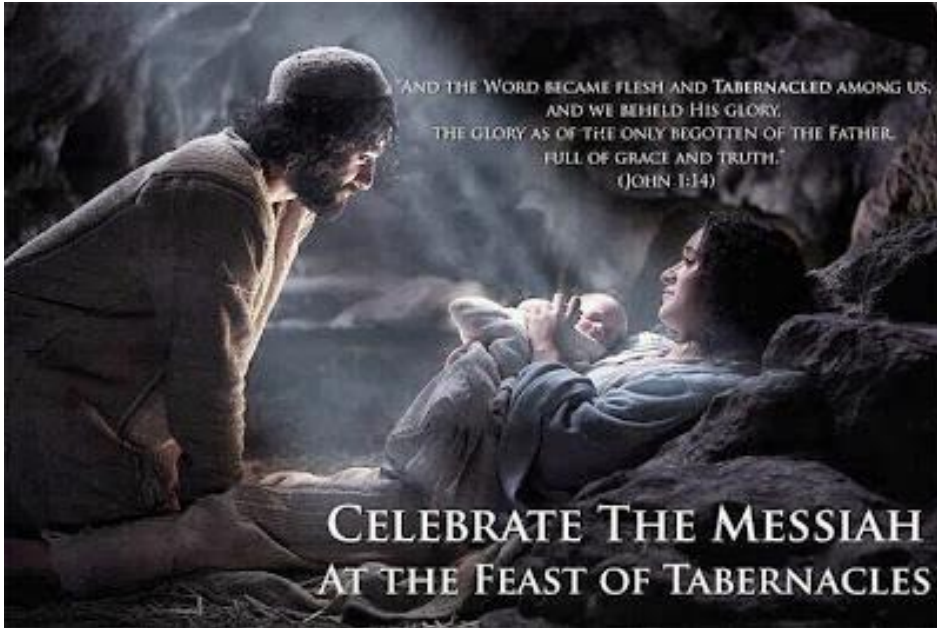
Allowing two weeks for the laws of separation that God commanded in Leviticus 12:5; 15:19,24-25 after going back to the house (Luke 1:23) and then going forward nine months (Sivan [tenth week] + 2 weeks + 9 months) puts the birth of John during the festival of Passover. This is an extremely important point because during the service for Passover, which is called the Passover Seder, the people are instructed by God to go to the door during one part of the service and look for Elijah while the Passover meal is eaten. The cup is called the cup of Elijah. The understanding of Elijah preceding the coming of the Messiah was the basis for the question in Matthew 17:10-13.

In Luke 1:26 during the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. This should have been around the twenty-fifth of Kislev, otherwise known as *Chanukah*. During the time of the first century, Chanukah was known as the second Sukkot. During the time of Chanukah, all of the Sukkot prayers are prayed once again. Mary's dialogue with the angel

Gabriel is found in the Sukkot liturgy today. If you calculate from the twenty-fifth of Kislev and add eight days for the festival of Chanukah plus nine months for Mary's pregnancy, this will bring you around the time of the festival of Sukkot, or Tishrei 15. On Tishrei 22, known as *Shemini Atzeret* or the eighth day, Jesus was circumcised (Luke 2:22-23; Leviticus 12:1-3).

Other Evidences of Jesus' Birth during Sukkot

As we have stated earlier, the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles) is called “*the season of our joy*” and



“*the feast of the nations.*” With this in mind, in Luke 2:10 it is written, “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings (*basar* in Hebrew; otherwise known as the gospel) of great joy (Sukkot is called the 'season of our joy'), which shall be to all people (Sukkot is called 'the feast of the nations').” So, we can see from this that the terminology the angel used to announce the birth of *Jesus* were themes and messages associated with the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles).

In Luke 2:12, the babe (*Jesus*) was wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. The swaddling cloths were also used as wicks to light the 16 vats of oil within the court of the women during the festival of Sukkot. So, swaddling cloths are associated with the festival of Sukkot.

Notice also in Luke 2:12 that the baby *Jesus* was laid in a manger. The word *manger* is the Greek word *phatn'e*. It is the same word translated as “*stall*” in Luke 13:15. By seeing how the word is used in Luke 13:15, we can see that the Greek word *phatn'e* means a place for hitching cattle. The Hebrew word for stall is *marbek*, which can be found in Amos 6:4 and Malachi 4:2. In Genesis 33:17 it is written that Jacob journeyed to Sukkot and made booths for his cattle (the word booth in this passage is the Hebrew word *sukkah*; the plural being *sukkot*). So we can see from these passages how the Hebrew word for booth was used by Jacob for his cattle in Genesis 33:17, and how the Greek word for manger or “*stall*” (*phatn'e*) was also used to refer to hitching cattle in Luke 13:15. *Phatn'e* is the same word translated as “*manger*” in Luke 2:12, where *Jesus* was laid at the time of His birth.

During the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles), God required that all male Jews come to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16). For this reason, the city would be overcrowded with people and would explain why Mary and Joseph could not find lodging in and around Jerusalem (Luke 2:7).

Bethlehem, the place where *Jesus* was born, is only about four miles from Jerusalem.

The last evidence I will give for the birth of *Jesus* during Sukkot according to the Scriptures is in Matthew 2:1. There we see that wise men come from the East to visit *Jesus*. The land of the East is

Babylon, where the largest Jewish population was at the time of the birth of Jesus. These Jews were descendants from the captivity when King Nebuchadnezzar defeated Israel and took the Jews to Babylon to serve him. Babylon is referred to as the land of the East in Genesis 29:1 and Judges 6:3. The wise men in Matthew 2:1 were rabbis. The rabbis, also called *sages*, are known in Hebrew as *chakamim*, which means wise men. The word in Matthew 2:1 in Greek is *magos*, which is translated into English as “Magi.” *Magos* in Greek is the Hebrew word *ravmag*. *Ravmag* comes from the Hebrew word *rav*, which means “rabbi.” It should also be noted that the Greek word *magos* can also mean scientist, counselor, scholar, or teacher. The rabbis were scholars or teachers of the Jewish law. *Jesus* was referred to as “Rabbi,” or “Teacher” in John 1:38, 47, 49; 3:2. So, we can see that the wise men were Jewish rabbis coming from Babylon to witness the birth of Jesus.

A question we can ask ourselves is, “What made the rabbis make the journey from Babylon to Bethlehem to witness the birth of Jesus?” The answer is given in Matthew 2:2, as it is written, “we have seen His star in the east....”

One of the requirements during the time of Sukkot was to build an outside temporary shelter and live in it during this festival season. This shelter is called a booth, or *sukkah*. The *sukkah* had to be built with an opening in the roof so the people could see the stars in heaven. This is another reason for why the rabbis would be looking for, and thus seeing, the star in the sky when it appeared. In addition, there was a prophecy in Numbers, as it is written, “*a star shall come forth from Jacob...*” (Numbers 24:17 NAS). King Herod inquired about where the Messiah would be born in Matthew 2:4. He was told in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6), based upon the prophecy in Micah 5:2. In Matthew 2:10 it is written, “*When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*” Once again, remember that Sukkot is called “*the season of our joy.*” In Matthew 2:2, the rabbis saw the star from the East. Salvation was seen by the Jewish people as coming from the East. Jesus descended from the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). The tribe of Judah was positioned on the east side of the tabernacle of Moses (*Moshe*) in the wilderness. Finally, in Luke 2:32, Jesus is called a light to the Gentiles. Once again, Sukkot is called “*the festival of lights*” and “*the festival of all nations.*”

Therefore, by studying and understanding the festival of Sukkot and the themes and messages that God desired to be conveyed during this festival, enables us to read the Bible in a new light; it enables us to understand that *Jesus* was born during the season of Sukkot and that He is the Star we are all called to see with our (spiritual) eyes!

Source: An excerpt from Chapter 9 – Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles – in *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah* by Edward Chumney, referenced at <https://hebroots.com/sevenfestivals.htm>