

Hag Ha-Sukkot

On Sukkot (Succos/ Tabernacles) we are commanded to build a Sukkah (Booths) using as building materials the "4 species" listed in Lev 23:40, which the Rabbanites claim are to be carried as a bundle.

The Torah commands us to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Hag HaSukkot) for 7 days, from the 15th to the 21st of the Seventh month (sometimes referred to as Tishrei). This holiday is also known as "Succos" and the "Feast of Tabernacles". Work is forbidden on the 1st day of the seven days. Sukkoth is one of the three "Pilgrimage Festivals" which means every male will someday again be required to come to Jerusalem during this 7 day period. Most laws in the Torah apply to both males and females, however, the Pilgrimage law refers specifically to males. Both males and females are required to dwell in a Sukkah (Booth) for all 7 days of the Festival whether at home or in Jerusalem.

Building a Sukkah

The Torah requires that we build a Sukka on Hag HaSukkot but does not say how many walls it must have or describe it beyond saying what materials it must be made out of (see below). This means that a Sukka does not have to comply to any of the fictitious Rabbinite specifications laid out in Massekhet Succot and other Rabbinic literature.

The Torah commands in Leviticus 23:40 that we "take" on the first day of Hag HaSuccot "fruit of a splendorous tree [or, a splendorous fruit tree], date branches, the branch of a thick tree and willows of the creek". Upon first reading this it is not immediately clear what to do with these branches and reeds. The Rabbis claim that one is supposed to make these plants into a bundle which is waved during the prayer service. However, this is not said anywhere in the Bible. On the contrary, in the Biblical book of Nehemiah (ch.8) we are told of a national gathering in which the Torah is read to the people and they rediscover what is commanded in it. We are told in verses 14-16:

"And they found written in the Torah that YEHOVAH commanded through Moses that the Children of Israel dwell in Booths (Succoth) in the Seventh month. And concerning that which they heard [in the public reading] they passed a voice through all their cities and Jerusalem saying 'Go out to the mountain and bring olive branches and oil tree branches and myrtle branches and date branches and branches of thick trees to make booths, as it is written.' And the people went out and they brought and they made for themselves booths, each man on his roof and in their courtyards and in the courtyard of the House of God and in the broad areas of the Water Gate and the broad areas of Ephraim Gate."

Clearly according to the book of Nehemiah the "four species" are to be used as materials for building a Succah. Note that according to Neh 8:15 using the "four species" to build a Succah is what is required because "*it is written*". In other words, when they read Lev 23:40 they understood it to be commanding the taking of the "four species" for the purpose of building Succot. The Karaites have always accepted the interpretation of Neh 8:14-16 over the dubious interpretation of the Rabbis. Notice also that the Etrog (*citron*) is not mentioned anywhere. Instead the "*splendorous fruit tree*" of Lev 23 is represented in Nehemiah 8 by "*olive branches and oil tree branches*". "Splendorous fruit tree" is a very appropriate description of the olive tree considering the place of olive oil and the olive tree in ancient Israelite society.

So after comparing Leviticus 23 and Nehemiah 8 it becomes clear there are 4 categories of vegetation which can be used to build a Sukkah:

1. **Any leafy trees** that can give shade (compare Ez 20,28).
2. **Any palm trees**. A date palm and presumably all palm tree species.
3. **Any fruit trees** (compare Leviticus 23 and Nehemiah 8)
4. **Any trees growing along the banks of creeks**. Arvei Nahal - usually translated as "willows of the creek". Nehemiah 8 replaces "Willows of the Creek" with "myrtle branches". This refers to trees growing along creek banks of Israel (see Isa 44,4), or ANYWHERE (see Ps 137,2).

The word Sukkah comes from the root “Shin Kaf Kaf” meaning "**to cover**". The main part of the Sukkah is the roof or covering which is made from one or all of the above materials. The walls can be made of any material available.

Shemini Atzeret

The "8th day" of this 7 day Festival is a day of rest called in the Torah "**Shemini Atzeret**". This holiday is widely known today by the Rabbinic misnomer "Simhat Torah" ("Celebration of the Torah"). The Rabbanites made up this name which refers to their annual reading of the Torah in weekly portions which ends on Shemini Atzeret. Neither the annual reading of the Torah nor the name Simhat Torah appear in the Bible and these are later Rabbinic corruptions of God's law. Shemini Atzeret is not part of Sukkot and the laws of Sukkot do not extend to this day (i.e. Pilgrimage, dwelling in a booth). As a day of rest all work is forbidden on Shemini Atzeret.

Comparison of Leviticus 23 & Nehemiah 8

Leviticus 23:40

And you will take on the first day
splendorous fruit tree (branches),
and date branches
and branch of a thick tree
and willows of the creek
for joy before Yehovah for 7 days.

Nehemiah 8:15

Go out to the mountain and bring
olive branches and oil tree branches
and date branches
and branches of thick trees
and Hadas branches
to make booths as it is written.

Building a sukkah is fun, it's OK to do anywhere and it's even a Biblical instruction. This can even be done on the annual Sabbath (First day) of the Feast! So why not start having some fun and build yourself a Sukkah THIS Feast of Tabernacles? :-D