

The Booth and the Clouds of Glory

Sukkah

The Hebrew word for tabernacle is "*sukkah*," which originally meant "woven" and applied to the branches woven together to make simple shelters. Israel was commanded to dwell in booths like this for seven days. The booth reflects the fragility, precariousness and impermanence of life in this world.

As the booth deteriorated, Israel could glimpse the stars through its openings. The heavens represented God's eternal constant covering that was Israel's true dwelling place. In truth, it is the mercy seat, overshadowed by the wings of the cherubim and the cloud of glory - the Shekinah of God's presence.

Sukkah, (a hut made of entwined boughs) *Suk* and other variations of the word are found throughout the Old Testament, and are translated different ways.

Psalm 18:11 - "He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion (*sukkah*) round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies."

Psalm 27:5 - "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion (*sukkah*): in the secret of his tabernacle (ohel - tent, dwelling place) shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock."

Psalm 31:20 - "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion (*sukkah*) from the strife of tongues (slander)."

Psalm 76:2 - "In Salem also is his tabernacle (*sukkah*), and his dwelling place in Zion."

Amos 9:11 - "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle (*sukkah*) of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this."

Acts 15:15-17 - "And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle (Greek *skene* - tent or tabernacles made of green boughs, or skins or other materials) of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."

Kanaph

Another term lends itself to the same idea:

"*kanaph*" - wing, skirt, corner of a garment

Psalm 91:4 - He shall cover (*sakkach* - the root of *sukkah*, to cover, to weave together) thee with his feathers, and under his wings (*kanaph* - wing, skirt, corner of garment) shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Used when Boaz covers Ruth as an indication he is betrothed to her, taking her “under his wing.”

Ruth 3:9 - “And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt (*kanaph* - wing, skirt, corner of garment) over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.”

“spread therefore thy skirt” was the idiom for becoming engaged to be married.

Previously, Boaz had used the same term for Ruth’s trust in God:

Ruth 2:12 - “The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings (*kanaph*) thou art come to trust.”

Finally, this idea is displayed in John’s vision in Revelation:

Revelation 7:15 - “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell (*skēnoō*) among them.”

“dwell among them” = “will spread his tabernacle over them”

The Pillar of Cloud

Leviticus 23:42 - “Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:”

The Rabbis wondered about this. Israel dwelt in tents in the wilderness. Booths were made only after they settled in the Promised Land and had a harvest to celebrate. Their solution was in the next verse:

Leviticus 23:43 - “That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.
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i.e. “Because with sukkoth I redeemed” - The booth/covering that redeemed Israel was God’s presence manifested in the pillar of cloud and fire that accompanied them in the wilderness.

Numbers 10:34 - “The cloud of the Lord was above them by day, when they traveled from the camp.”

Rashi's commentary - Seven clouds are recorded in the account of their travels: four from the four sides, one above, one below, and one in front of them, which would flatten the high land, raise the hollows and destroy snakes and scorpions - [from Sifrei].

Rashi's comment on **Leviticus 23:42** - "Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:" - [These were] the clouds of glory [with which God enveloped the Jewish people in the desert, forming a protective shelter for them against wild beasts and enemies.] [See Num. 10:34 and Rashi on that verse, above.]- [Sukkah 11b]

See **Deuteronomy 8:15** - "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;"

See also **Psalm 91:13** - "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon (serpent) shalt thou trample under feet."

Thus Jesus exhorts us:

Luke 10:19 - "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

And Peter agrees:

1 Peter 5:7-8 - "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be sober-minded and alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

The Talmud relates that in the end of days, "all the nations of the world will express a desire to repent, and God will judge them through the commandment of building a sukkah... He will give this single commandment to the entire world to fulfill." (BT Avoda Zara 3)

Probably because of this prophecy in Zechariah:

Zechariah 14:16 - "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." (Compare that with Amos 9:11, above)

God uses both the imagery of the Tabernacles booth combined with the picture of the Pillar of Cloud and the understanding of "kanaph" to describe our unique position as believers.

The Bride of Christ is under the eternal protection and covering of God, dwelling on the mercy seat as the cherubim intertwine their wings over us, and the Shekinah Glory of God's presence envelops us on all sides.

Because all believers have seen through the deteriorating "sukkah" of this world, we can let go of it and enter the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

The Hashkiveinu Prayer, the second blessing following the Shema at the Sabbath evening service:

"Help us, Adonai, to lie down in peace, and awaken us again, our Sovereign, to life. Spread over us Your sukkah of peace; guide us with Your good counsel. Save us because of Your mercy. Shield us from every enemy, plague, sword, famine, and sorrow. Remove the adversary from before and behind us. Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings, for You, G-d, are our Guardian and Deliverer; You, God, Who spreads the sukkah of peace upon us, upon all of his people Israel, and upon Jerusalem, are a gracious and compassionate King. Guard our going out and our coming in, and grant us life and peace, Now and always."