
**In honor of our mother Mrs. Diana Weiner, with all our love and gratitude and with
best wishes for a shana tov u-metuka!**

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The Inauguration of the Temple on Sukkot

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Sukkot and the Temple

King Shlomo inaugurated the First Temple on the festival of Sukkot:

Then Shlomo assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chiefs of the fathers of *Bnei Yisrael*, to King Shlomo in Jerusalem, so that they might bring up the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Tzion. And all the men of Israel assembled themselves to King Shlomo at the festival in the month of Eitanim, which is the seventh month... And King Shlomo and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled to him were with him before the Ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be told nor numbered for multitude. And the *Kohanim* brought in the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord to its place, into the Sanctuary of the Temple, to the *Kodesh Ha-Kodashim*, beneath the wings of the *keruvim*. (*Melakhim I* 8:1-6)

It appears that the timing of the event was not coincidental, but rather the result of Shlomo's intentional planning.¹ Perhaps the same example was followed in the rededication of the Second Temple in the time of the Chashmonaim. After cleansing the Temple of the defilement of the Greeks, the Chashmonaim celebrated Chanuka as though it was Sukkot, with a rededication of the Temple:

And it was by Divine design that they cleansed the Temple on that same day when the gentiles had defiled it, which was the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev. And they celebrated a festival unto God for eight days, after the manner of the Festival of Sukkot, remembering that not long before they had observed the

¹ The construction of the Temple was finished in the month of Bul, which we call Cheshvan: "And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul (which is the eighth month), the House was finished in all its elements and according to all the fashion of it" (*Melakhim I* 6:38). It is difficult to imagine that Shlomo waited eleven months after the Temple was already finished so that the inauguration would coincide with Sukkot. It seems more likely that immediately after the construction of the Temple was complete, Shlomo built his own house – the house of wood of Lebanon, the throne room where he judged the people, and the house of Pharaoh's daughter. Thereafter, he invited Chiram of Tyre to make the vessels. Only when all this was complete did he inaugurate the Temple, twenty years after the project had been launched, in the twenty-fourth year of his reign.

Festival of Sukkot while in the mountains and in dens, like wild beasts. Therefore, they now carried willow branches and palm branches and sang a song of praise and thanksgiving unto God, Who had granted them strength and success in cleansing His Temple. (*Makkabim* II 10:8-10)²

What does the festival of Sukkot have to do with the inauguration of the Temple?

Hak'hel

The description of the inauguration of the First Temple includes Shlomo's gathering of the entire nation:

Then Shlomo assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chiefs of the fathers of *Bnei Yisrael* ... And all the men of Israel assembled themselves to King Shlomo.... (*Melakhim* I 8:1-2)

It is possible that Shlomo arranged the inauguration to coincide with the occasion of *hak'hel*, which takes place, according to the command in the Torah, on Sukkot at the end of the *shemitta* year:

And Moshe commanded them, saying: At the end of every seven years, at the time of the *shemitta* year, on the festival of Sukkot, when all of Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together – men, women, and children, and your stranger that is within your gates – that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this Torah. (*Devarim* 31:10-12)

Shlomo's *Sanhedrin* may have declared a *hak'hel* on Sukkot of that year, as a special one-time event in honor of the inauguration of the Temple.³ The inauguration of the Temple is an event symbolizing the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven and the acceptance of the Torah anew, as at Mount Sinai, and this is exactly the point of the commandment of *hak'hel*. The *midrash* (*Midrash Tehillim* 68) may be hinting to this when it teaches that Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) was destined for the Torah to be given upon it, for at the inauguration of the First Temple, with the fulfillment of *hak'hel*, the nation of Israel accepted the Torah anew.

It may have been on this occasion, or in anticipation of it, that Shlomo wrote *Sefer Kohelet*, as Ramban teaches at the beginning of his commentary on that Book. He

² Similarly, the prophecy of Chaggai concerning the inauguration of the Second Temple – “The glory of this latter Temple shall be greater than that of the first” – was uttered on the 21st of Tishrei, on Sukkot (*Chaggai* 2:1-9).

³ The *gemara* (*Ta'anit* 29a) states that the destruction of the First Temple took place at the conclusion of a *shemitta* year. The First Temple stood for 410 years (*Bava Batra* 3a), but it is possible that this number includes the 20 years of its construction, such that it actually stood for 390 years. In any event, if the destruction took place at the end of a *shemitta* year, its inauguration could not have happened at the end of a *shemitta* year, so the inauguration could not have coincided with a regular *hak'hel*.

explains that the name “*Kohelet*” alludes to the fact that “his [Shlomo’s] words were uttered at *hak’hel*.” *Sefer Kohelet* includes themes that fit with the inauguration of the Temple. It teaches that the main purpose of the Temple is not the bringing of the sacrifices, but rather the hearing of God’s word emanating from between the two *keruvim*:

Watch your foot when you go to the House of God; to draw near to listen is better than to give the sacrifice of fools... (*Kohelet* 4:17).

Sukkot of Clouds of Glory

Another reason for the inauguration of the Temple being held on Sukkot may be the resting of God’s Presence in the Temple in a manner recalling the Clouds of Glory in the desert. The *sukkot* that we build on the festival are meant, according to one opinion, to commemorate the Clouds of Glory that God provided for *Bnei Yisrael*. A similar cloud filled the Temple at the time of the inauguration:

And it came to pass, when the *Kohanim* came out of the *Kodesh*, that the cloud filled the House of the Lord, so that the *Kohanim* could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the House of the Lord. Then Shlomo spoke: “The Lord said that He would dwell in the thick darkness...” (*Melakhim I* 8:10-12)

On Sukkot of that year, the Temple became the *sukka* of *Am Yisrael*, in the sense that the cloud of God’s Glory rested upon it. The *sukkot* of *Am Yisrael*, pitched around the Temple, recalled the Clouds of Glory in the desert, as well as the resting of the Divine Presence in the Temple.

“And [Hearken] Also to the Non-Jew”

A third possible reason for the inauguration of the Temple taking place on Sukkot pertains to the theme of bringing the nations of the world to the recognition and worship of God, a theme common to Sukkot and to the Temple. In terms of the relationship between Israel and the other nations, the essence and message of Sukkot is the inverse of that of Pesach. The Festival of *Matzot* expresses our liberation from the yoke of the nations and our separation from them in order to reach the foot of Mount Sinai and to hear, “I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (*Shemot* 20:2). God separated us from the nations and brought us close to Him. So it was on the Pesach celebrated in Egypt, and so it is on Pesach as celebrated for all generations. In the poem “*Ve-Amartem Zevach Pesach*,” which we recite at the end of the *Haggada*, we recall various miracles that occurred on Pesach, all with the purpose of distinguishing Israel from the nations and saving us from their hands.

Sukkot, on contrast, expresses our common denominator. The seventy bullocks offered over the course of the festival express the connection between the seventy nations of the world and God in His Temple. The festival of Sukkot is the time when we pray for rain, and this prayer is shared by Israel and the other nations:

An idolater once asked R. Yehoshua ben Karcha: “You [Jews] have set times [festivals], and we, too, have set times. When you are joyful – we are not joyful; when we are joyful – you are not joyful. When are both we and you joyful? When there is rainfall.” Why is this so? [It is written,] “The meadows are clothed with flocks, and the valleys are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing” (*Tehillim* 65:14). And immediately thereafter it is written, “... Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth” (66:1).

This theme of Sukkot is expressed mainly in the prophecies of Yeshayahu concerning the end of days:

And it shall come to pass at the end of days that the mountain of the Lord’s House shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills, and all the nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Yaakov, and He will teach us of His way’s and we will walk in His paths,” for Torah shall emerge out of Tzion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (*Yeshayahu* 2:2-3)

This lengthy prophecy, starting off with the role of God’s House, concludes with the canopy of the Clouds of Glory:

And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Tzion and upon her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall there be a canopy. And there shall be a *sukka* for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain. (*Yeshayahu* 4:5-6)

Indeed, in the prophecy of Zekharia we find that at the end of days, all the nations will come to celebrate the festival of Sukkot:

And it shall come to pass that everyone that is left of all the nations who came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to observe the festival of Sukkot. (*Zekharia* 14:16)

Shlomo tried to the best of his ability to involve non-Jews in the building of the Temple. He relied on Chiram, king of Tyre, to supply the timber, and Chiram, son of the widow from Tyre, to create the vessels. In his prayer at the inauguration of the Temple, he made mention of the stranger who might come from a faraway land:

Moreover, concerning a stranger who is not of Your people Israel, but comes from a faraway country for Your Name’s sake – for they shall hear of Your great Name, and of Your strong hand, and of Your outstretched arm – when he comes and prays towards this House, hear, You in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calls to You for. That all people of the earth may

know Your Name, to fear You, as do Your people, Israel, and that they may know that this House, which I have built, is called by Your Name. (*Melakhim I* 8:41-43)

In *Shir Ha-Shirim*, Shlomo compares the nations to the daughters of Jerusalem, who seek to draw close to the King – God Himself. According to R. Yossi ben Chalafta, Shlomo married many wives from different nations in order to bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence, to teach them monotheistic faith (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 2:6). Thus, Shlomo views the purpose of the Temple as connecting all people of the world to God via *Am Yisrael*. This idea is embodied in the seventy bullocks, representing the seventy nations of the world, that are sacrificed over the course of Sukkot, followed by the offering of a single bullock on Shemini Atzeret, which symbolizes *Am Yisrael*:

This may be compared to a human king who told his servants, “Make me a great feast.” The next day, he told his close friend, “Make me a small, intimate meal, that I may enjoy your company.” (*Sukka* 55b)

In order to express the Temple’s role in bringing the entire world to belief in God via *Am Yisrael*, Shlomo arranged that its inauguration would coincide with the festival of Sukkot.

Mishkan vs. Mikdash

We can now compare the inauguration of the First Temple with the inauguration of the *Mishkan*.⁴

The date of the inauguration of the *Mishkan* is stated clearly in the text: “On the first day of the first month shall you set up the *Mishkan* of the Tent of Meeting” (*Shemot* 40:2). The Torah gives no explicit indication of when the construction began, but according to the Vilna Gaon (Commentary on *Shir Ha-shirim*, 1:4), it began on the 15th of Tishrei – i.e., the beginning of the festival of Sukkot. The construction of the First Temple, in contrast, began in Iyar (*Melakhim* 6:37), right after the month of Nissan, and it was inaugurated on Sukkot (*Melakhim I* 8:2).

This distinction may reflect the difference between the *Mishkan* and the Temple. The *Mishkan* expresses the dwelling of the Divine Presence upon Israel: “Let them make Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst” (*Shemot* 25:8). For this reason, its inauguration took place in Nissan – the month when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt and became distinguished from the other nations. The *Mikdash*, on the other hand, is a fixed place for the resting of the Divine Presence for the whole world, and for this reason Shlomo inaugurates it on Sukkot, which begins in the month of Tishrei – the month expressing the partnership of all nations in the service of God.

The construction of the Second Temple began in the month of Tishrei (*Ezra* 3:1). After a delay that lasted many years, it was finally completed in the month of Adar, and

⁴ For elaboration, see R. Yitzchak Levi, “[The Dedication of the Mishkan \(part IV\)](#)” in his VBM series on the Mikdash.

the festival of Pesach was observed immediately thereafter (*Ezra* 6:16-19). Originally, the builders of the Second Temple had sought to follow Shlomo's example, seeking to express through the edifice they created the recognition of God by the whole world. This plan did not come to fruition, owing to the sins of Israel and the persecution by their neighbors. Ultimately, the Second Temple reflected a more modest ideal, reaching completion in Nissan, like the *Mishkan*, which was meant for Israel alone.

When will the Third Temple be built? Yechezkel's prophecy mentions various sacrifices that will be offered by the *Nasi* on the 1st of Nissan, on the festival of Pesach, and on the festival of Sukkot. These sacrifices are not like those commanded in the Torah, and the *gemara* discusses this point (*Menachot* 45a). According to R. Ashi, who is cited there, the sacrifices enumerated in Yechezkel's prophecy are sacrifices of *milu'im* (inauguration), which the *Nasi* will bring on the occasion of the inauguration of the Temple. In other words, the inauguration of the Third Temple will commence at the beginning of Nissan and end on Sukkot.

At the end of days, the two ideas expressed by the *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash* will be united. The Third Temple will express the special Presence of God upon Israel, as in the *Mishkan*, but at the same time it will also be a place from which the revelation of God's Presence emanates outwards to the entire world.