

— A TWO-SESSION BIBLE STUDY GUIDE —

BORN IN A BOOTH

The
Biblical Case for Jesus' Birth
at the Feast of Tabernacles



The Church of God

Church Doctrine Formally Affirmed: May 11–13, 2021

Council of Apostles and Elders

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*"And the Word became flesh and **dwelt** [tabernacled] among us,
and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,
full of grace and truth."*

— John 1:14 (NKJV)

Session One: "God Moves In — Understanding the Feast of Tabernacles"
Session Two: "Born at the Right Time — The Biblical Timeline for Jesus' Birth on Tishri 15"

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Purpose

This two-session guide leads your group through the Scriptural, historical, and prophetic evidence establishing that Jesus Christ was born on **Tishri 15** — the opening day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). The study is designed so that participants read most Bible passages directly from their own Bibles, making *Scripture itself* the primary voice of the study.

The Two Sessions

- **Session One (60 min.) — "What Is the Feast of Tabernacles?"**
Establishes a thorough understanding of the feast: its command, its meaning, its history, and its prophetic shadow pointing to the Messiah.
- **Session Two (60 min.) — "Born at the Right Time"**
Builds the complete biblical timeline case for the birth of Jesus on Tishri 15, drawing on priestly chronology, Luke's narrative, the Hebrew calendar, and the testimony of the prophets.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- This study guide
- Pens or pencils
- Whiteboard or marker board for timelines (optional)

Note on Bible Passages

Passages marked **READ** are for the group to find and read aloud. Passages printed in full are key anchor texts for deeper study and discussion. Leaders are encouraged to allow group members to read passages rather than reading for the group.

Points to Consider: *This study is intentionally passage-driven. Its purpose is to let the evidence unfold directly from Scripture rather than merely presenting conclusions. Allow time to locate, read, and reflect on each passage.*

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.

SESSION ONE

"GOD MOVES IN"

Understanding the Feast of Tabernacles

Before we can appreciate why Jesus was born at Tabernacles, we must understand what Tabernacles is.

Estimated Time: 60 Minutes

◆ Opening Prayer (2 Minutes)

Leader: Open in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate God's Word and help the group see Jesus in the beauty of His appointed feasts. Ask for open and receptive hearts as you begin this study together.

Introduction: God Is a Detail-Oriented God (5 Minutes)

God does nothing randomly. Every date on His sacred calendar was chosen before the foundation of the world. Galatians 4:4 tells us:

◆ Key Anchor Verse

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law."

— Galatians 4:4 (NKJV)

That phrase — *"the fullness of time"* — tells us Jesus did not arrive on a whim. He was born at a precisely appointed, divinely chosen moment. Our goal in this study is to find that moment in Scripture.

READ ALOUD TOGETHER: Galatians 4:1–5

◆ Discussion Starter

What does the phrase "*the fullness of time*" suggest to you about how God works? Does God follow a schedule?

***Points to Consider:** God's redemptive plan is intentional and ordered. The phrase "the fullness of time" invites reflection on the precision of divine timing rather than randomness.*

Part One: The Sacred Calendar — God's Appointed Times (12 Minutes)

A. The Feasts Are God's, Not Man's

READ: Leviticus 23:1–2

***Points to Consider:** Scripture calls these the "feasts of the LORD," not merely feasts of Israel. They are more than cultural traditions; they are sacred appointments claimed by God as His own.*

◆ Key Word Box

MOED (מוֹעֵד) — Hebrew for "appointed time," "set time," or "meeting." Plural: **MOEDIM**. These feasts are literally God's calendar of divine appointments. They are not suggestions — they are pre-set, sacred meetings between God and His people ordained from eternity.

B. The Seven Feasts — A Brief Overview

God appointed seven feasts in Leviticus 23. They fall in two groups — Spring and Fall — and together they tell the complete story of redemption.

#	Feast Name	Hebrew Name	Hebrew Date	Season	Meaning
▲ Spring Feasts					
1	Passover	Pesach	Nisan 14	Spring	Redemption through the blood of the lamb
2	Unleavened Bread	Chag HaMatzot	Nisan 15–21	Spring	Removal of sin; consecration
3	Firstfruits	Bikkurim	Day after Sabbath in Passover week	Spring	Resurrection; first of the harvest
4	Pentecost / Weeks	Shavuot	50 days after Firstfruits	Late Spring	Giving of the Law; outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2)
▼ Fall Feasts					
5	Trumpets	Rosh Hashanah	Tishri 1	Fall	Proclamation; the King is coming
6	Day of Atonement	Yom Kippur	Tishri 10	Fall	Judgment; cleansing; the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies
7	Tabernacles	Sukkot	Tishri 15–21 (+22)	Fall	God dwelling with His people; harvest joy; completion

Points to Consider: *The Spring Feasts correspond in sequence to Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit. The Fall Feasts point toward final fulfillment, while Tabernacles proclaims God dwelling with His people—a theme revealed profoundly in the Incarnation.*

READ ALOUD TOGETHER: Leviticus 23:33–44 (The full Tabernacles command — read slowly as a group.)

Part Two: What Is the Feast of Tabernacles?

(12 Minutes)

A. Its Names and Their Meanings

◆ Key Word Box

SUKKOT (סֻכּוֹת) — Hebrew plural of **SUKKAH** (סֻכָּה), meaning "booth" or "temporary shelter." The holiday is also known by these names:

- **Chag HaSukkot** — "Festival of Booths"
- **Chag HaAsif** (חַג הָאֲסִיף) — "Festival of Ingathering" (Exodus 23:16) — emphasizing the completed harvest
- **Z'man Simchateinu** — "The Season of Our Joy" — Tabernacles is the *only* feast where God explicitly commands His people to rejoice (Deuteronomy 16:14–15)

B. When Does It Occur?

Tabernacles begins on the **15th day of Tishri** — the seventh month of the Hebrew religious calendar — corresponding to late September or October on the modern Gregorian calendar. It lasts for seven days, followed by an eighth day called **Shemini Atzeret** — "The Eighth Day Assembly."

READ: Leviticus 23:39–43

Points to Consider: *Tishri 15 is a fixed date, not an estimate. Every year, Tabernacles opened on this appointed day, embedding the observance firmly in the biblical calendar.*

◆ Hebrew Calendar Timeline — The Month of Tishri (September/October)				
Tishri 1	Tishri 10	Tishri 15	Tishri 15–21	Tishri 22
Feast of Trumpets (<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>)	Day of Atonement (<i>Yom Kippur</i>)	FEAST OF TABERNACLES BEGINS Tishri 15	Seven Days of Dwelling in Booths	Eighth Day Assembly (<i>Shemini Atzeret</i>)

C. What the People DID at Tabernacles

READ: Leviticus 23:40–43 | Deuteronomy 16:13–15 | Nehemiah 8:13–18

Four practices defined the feast:

1. **DWELLING IN BOOTHES** — Families built temporary shelters (sukkot) from palm branches and leafy boughs and lived in them for seven days, sleeping under the stars. This commemorated the wilderness journey when God housed and protected Israel.
2. **TAKING THE FOUR SPECIES** — The *lulav* (palm), *hadassim* (myrtle), *aravot* (willow), and *etrog* (citron) were waved together, declaring God's sovereignty over creation (Leviticus 23:40). For believers, they picture diverse gifts united in Christ (John 17:21) and fruitful only by abiding in Him (John 15:4–5), calling us to wholehearted worship and witness.
3. **CELEBRATING THE HARVEST** — This was the final harvest of the year (grain, olives, grapes). It was a time of overflowing gratitude and community celebration.
4. **PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM** — Every Jewish male was required to appear before the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem three times per year: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16).

***Points to Consider:** The pilgrimage requirement helps explain why Jerusalem and nearby Bethlehem would have been crowded and why there was “no room” (Luke 2:7). The nation’s movement for Tabernacles provides important context for the birth narrative.*

D. The Temple Ceremonies at Tabernacles — First-Century Context

By the time of Jesus, two dramatic ceremonies marked the feast each day at the Temple in Jerusalem:

1. THE WATER-POURING CEREMONY (Nisukh HaMayim): Each morning, a priest carried a golden pitcher to the Pool of Siloam, drew water, and poured it over the altar while the crowd sang Isaiah 12:3 — “Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” This ceremony prayed for the coming rains and anticipated the Messiah, the Living Water.

READ: John 7:37–38

***Points to Consider:** On the last great day of Tabernacles, Jesus called the thirsty to come to Him and drink. His words identify Him as the fulfillment of the living-water hope expressed in the feast’s water-pouring ceremony.*

2. THE ILLUMINATION OF THE TEMPLE (Simchat Beit HaShoevah): Each night, four enormous golden menorahs were lit in the Court of Women, flooding all Jerusalem with light. Torches, music, dancing, and singing filled the night. This ceremony anticipated the Messianic age when God’s glory would illuminate the world.

READ: John 8:12

Points to Consider: Jesus' declaration, "I am the light of the world," follows the feast's great lighting ceremony. Together with John 7, this shows Him presenting Himself as the reality to which Tabernacles' water and light ceremonies pointed.

◆ **Discussion Question (4 Minutes)**

In both John 7 and John 8, Jesus chose the high points of the Feast of Tabernacles to make two of His greatest "I AM" declarations. What does that tell us about how Jesus viewed these feasts? Was He simply attending — or fulfilling?

Part Three: Tabernacles in History — God Always Shows Up at This Feast
(10 Minutes)

A. The Wilderness — God First "Tabernacled" With Israel

READ: Exodus 40:34–38

God's Shekinah glory filled the Tabernacle — He "moved in" and dwelt with His people for the very first time. The wilderness period, commemorated every year by the Feast of Tabernacles, was the original pattern: God dwelling among His people in a temporary structure.

B. Solomon Dedicates the Temple at Tabernacles

READ: 1 Kings 8:1–2, 10–11 | 2 Chronicles 7:1–3, 8–10

Points to Consider: Solomon dedicated the First Temple during Tabernacles, and God's glory filled the house. This reinforces a recurring biblical pattern: Tabernacles is associated with God taking up His dwelling among His people.

◆ **Key Word Box**

SHEKINAH (שְׁכִינָה) — A Hebrew word derived from the verb שָׁכַן (shakan), meaning "to dwell" or "to reside." It describes the visible, glorious presence of God. The same root gives us the Greek word John chose in John 1:14. God's "Shekinah" presence — His tent-dwelling glory — is the thread that runs from the wilderness through Solomon's Temple to the manger at Bethlehem.

C. The Return from Exile — Tabernacles Revived

READ: Nehemiah 8:13–18

After 70 years in Babylon, when Israel returned and rebuilt, the first thing they did was celebrate Tabernacles. Ezra read the Law, the people wept, and then they rejoiced with "very great gladness." Every return to God in Scripture is marked by a return to the feast.

D. Tabernacles in the Coming Kingdom

READ: Zechariah 14:16–19

In the Messianic Kingdom, *all nations* — not just Israel — will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This is the only feast scripture specifically carried forward into the age to come. It was the first feast (wilderness), it was renewed at the return from exile, it will be celebrated eternally. If God places such permanent weight on this feast — might He not choose it for the single most important event in history?

Part Four: The Feast That Points Directly to Jesus

(10 Minutes)

A. John 1:14 — The Single Most Important Verse

◆ Anchor Verse — Read Aloud Together

*"And the Word became flesh and **dwelt** among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* — John 1:14 (NKJV)

◆ Key Word Box — The Most Important Word in John 1:14

DWELT — Greek: **ESKĒNŌSEN** (ἐσκήνωσεν) — from the verb **SKĒNOŌ** (σκηνώω), Strong's G4637. Literally: "to pitch a tent," "to tabernacle," "to dwell in a booth." The noun form **SKĒNĒ** (σκηνή) is the exact Greek word used in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) for the Tabernacle — the wilderness dwelling of God's glory.

John did **NOT** use the ordinary Greek words for "dwell" or "live" — such as *oikeō* or *menō*. He specifically chose the **TENT WORD** — *eskēnōsen* — **"HE TABERNACLED among us."**

Points to Consider: John's word choice presents the Incarnation as God pitching His tent in human flesh. The glory that filled the wilderness Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple now dwelt bodily in Jesus, making Tabernacles a fitting setting for His arrival.

ALSO READ: Revelation 21:3

The final fulfillment: *"Behold, the tabernacle (skēnē) of God is with men, and He will dwell (skēnoō) with them."* The same Greek word. The story of God tabernacling with man begins at the Feast of Tabernacles — and it ends in Revelation 21 with the same word. The feast frames all of history.

B. The Transfiguration Echo

READ: Matthew 17:1–5

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain and His glory shone, what was Peter's immediate instinct? *"Let us make three tabernacles — one for You, one for Moses, one for Elijah."* Peter was looking at the Shekinah glory and his mind went directly to the feast of God dwelling with His people. The language of Sukkot was woven into the disciples' understanding of divine glory.

C. Isaiah Prophesied It

READ: Isaiah 9:2–7

◆ Key Passage — Isaiah 9:2–3, 6 (NKJV)

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; They rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest... For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given..."

— Isaiah 9:2–3, 6a (NKJV)

Points to Consider: Isaiah 9 links the birth of the promised Child with light, joy, and harvest imagery. Because Tabernacles is the harvest feast, the passage provides a meaningful prophetic setting that also echoes the glory surrounding the shepherds in Luke 2:9.

◆ Discussion Questions (3 Minutes)

1. Why do you think God used a temporary "tent" to house His glory throughout the Old Testament — in the wilderness and in Solomon's Temple — before the permanent Temple age?
2. What does it mean to you personally that when God chose to come to earth in human flesh, John describes it as God *"pitching His tent"* among us?

Session One Closing

(3 Minutes)

◆ Session One Summary

Today we established the foundation. The Feast of Tabernacles is:

- God's ordained "**Season of Joy**" — the harvest celebration, beginning on Tishri 15
- The feast where God repeatedly "**showed up**" — in the wilderness, at Solomon's Temple, at the return from exile
- The feast that **ALL nations** will celebrate in the coming Kingdom (Zechariah 14)
- The feast whose very word — *sukkah, booth, tabernacle* — becomes **John's chosen word** to describe the Incarnation: "*The Word tabernacled among us*"

Next Session Preview: In Session Two, we follow the biblical timeline — verse by verse, month by month — through Luke 1 and 2, the Hebrew priestly calendar, and the words of Isaiah and John to build the complete scriptural case that Jesus was born specifically on **Tishri 15** — the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

◆ Closing Prayer (2 Minutes)

Leader: Close in prayer thanking God for the beauty and precision of His Word. Ask for open hearts and minds for Session Two. Consider reading Leviticus 23:34-36 as a spoken benediction over the group before dismissing.

SESSION TWO

"BORN AT THE RIGHT TIME"

The Biblical Timeline for Jesus' Birth on Tishri 15

Scripture provides a precise chronological chain — from a priest in the Temple to a Baby in Bethlehem — that lands exactly on Tishri 15.

Estimated Time: 60 Minutes

◆ Opening Prayer (2 Minutes)

Leader: Open in prayer. Ask God to help the group trace His divine fingerprints through the precise details of Scripture. Ask for clarity of mind and reverence for the Word as the group follows the chronological chain together.

Introduction: God Is in the Details

(5 Minutes)

"God was very specific as He instructed the Israelites concerning His feast dates in the Old Testament. He was not vague when He defined His feast dates and what He wanted done on those dates."

— The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres, Council of Apostles and Elders, May 2021

Today we will show that God embedded a precise chronological trail in Scripture — beginning with a detail about a priest's weekly service rotation — that leads us directly to the birth of Jesus on **Tishri 15**.

◆ Anchor Verse — Read Aloud

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman..."

— Galatians 4:4 (NKJV)

Points to Consider: *The "fullness of time" was not random. The priestly system, Hebrew calendar, Luke's narrative, and the prophets together form a chronological framework worth examining carefully.*

Part One: Understanding the Hebrew Calendar and the Priestly Courses (10 Minutes)

A. Two Calendars Running Side by Side

Month #	Hebrew Name	Gregorian Approximate / Key Event
Month 1	Nisan / Abib	March–April Passover
Month 2	Iyyar / Ziv	April–May
Month 3	Sivan	May–June Pentecost / Shavuot
Month 4	Tammuz	June–July
Month 5	Av	July–August
Month 6	Elul	August–September
Month 7	Tishri / Ethanim	September–October FEAST OF TABERNACLES (Tishri 15)
Month 8	Marcheshvan / Bul	October–November
Month 9	Kislev	November–December
Month 10	Tevet	December–January
Month 11	Shevat	January–February
Month 12	Adar	February–March

Points to Consider: Tishri begins the civil year but is Month 7 of the religious calendar. This distinction affects how the priestly rotations are counted and should be kept in view throughout the timeline.

B. The 24 Priestly Courses — God's Built-In Calendar

In the days of King David, he organized Israel's priests into 24 rotating divisions, each serving at the Temple for one week at a time, rotating twice per year. All priests served together during the three major feasts.

READ: 1 Chronicles 24:7–19 (Note: Abijah — also spelled "Abia" — is listed as the EIGHTH division, verse 10.)

Points to Consider: The 24 priestly courses rotated through the year. Identifying a priest's division can therefore provide a calendar marker for events connected with his period of service.

◆ Key Detail

*The delineation of the priestly courses began with Solomon's dedication of the Temple — which took place during the Feast of Tabernacles (2 Chronicles 7:1–2, 8–10). This means the **first priestly course began its rotation during Tabernacles** — in the month of Tishri. This is the beginning point of our timeline.*

READ: 2 Chronicles 7:1–2, 8–10

Note: Solomon dedicated the Temple, fire came from heaven, God's glory filled the house — and this happened during the Feast of Tabernacles. **The priestly rotation system was born at Tabernacles.**

Part Two: The Timeline Begins with Zacharias
(12 Minutes)

A. Luke Gives Us the First Clue

READ: Luke 1:5–10

***Points to Consider:** Luke 1:5 identifies Elisabeth and places Zacharias in the priestly division of Abijah, the eighth course. This brief biographical detail becomes a key starting point for the proposed chronology of Jesus' birth.*

◆ Key Detail — The Course of Abijah

Abijah's course was the **EIGHTH** of the 24 priestly divisions. Counting from the beginning of the civil year (Tishri), the rotation moves forward through the calendar:

- Courses 1–2 serve during Tishri (with *all* priests serving the Feast of Tabernacles together)
- After the feast, individual course rotation resumes
- Counting forward through the months, the **8th course — Abijah** — serves its first annual rotation in the month of **Sivan** (approximately **late May to early June**)

The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres notes that "Zacharias was ministering before the Lord during the middle of May when the angel of the Lord appeared to him." This places his first service period in **late May / early June**.

B. The Angel Appears — And the Timeline Begins

***Qualification:** Luke does not explicitly identify this as Abijah's first annual rotation. That timing is a reasonable working assumption based on the study's reconstruction of the priestly schedule and its fit with the surrounding evidence, but it should not be treated as stated certainty.*

READ: Luke 1:11–23

When Zacharias's week of Temple service ended, he went home. And after that — Elisabeth conceived.

◆ **Key Text — Luke 1:23–24 (NKJV)**

"So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived..."

— Luke 1:23–24a (NKJV)

◆ **First Anchor Point on the Timeline**

*ELIZABETH CONCEIVES — approximately early **JUNE**.
This is the starting gun of the entire chronological case.*

C. Elisabeth Hides for Five Months

READ: Luke 1:24

"After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months..." For five months — June through October/November — Elisabeth kept her pregnancy private. This detail in Luke is essential: it prepares us for the critical pivot point in Luke 1:26.

Part Three: The Angel Visits Mary — The Key Marker

(8 Minutes)

A. Luke's Precise Language

READ: Luke 1:26–38

Points to Consider: In Luke 1:26, “the sixth month” refers to Elisabeth’s pregnancy. If her conception occurred around June, Gabriel’s visit to Mary would fall approximately six months later, around December.

◆ The Pivot Point of the Entire Timeline

*Elisabeth conceived: **JUNE***

*Gabriel visits Mary: SIX MONTHS LATER = **DECEMBER***

*Mary conceives Jesus: **DECEMBER** (approximately)*

*Normal human gestation: **40 weeks / 280 days***

*Nine months after December = **SEPTEMBER** — the month of **TISHRI***

B. The Master Timeline — Scripture by Scripture

Event	Person(s)	Approximate Date	Scripture
Zacharias serves his priestly course (8th Division — Abijah)	Zacharias	Late May / Early June	Luke 1:5–10; 1 Chr. 24:10
Angel Gabriel announces John's birth to Zacharias	Zacharias	Late May / Early June	Luke 1:11–20
Zacharias completes service; returns home	Zacharias	Early June	Luke 1:23
Elisabeth conceives John the Baptist	Elisabeth	Early June	Luke 1:24
Elisabeth hides herself for five months	Elisabeth	June – Oct./Nov.	Luke 1:24
Angel Gabriel appears to Mary — “in the sixth month”	Mary	December	Luke 1:26–27
Mary conceives Jesus by the Holy Spirit	Mary	December	Luke 1:35

Event	Person(s)	Approximate Date	Scripture
Mary visits Elisabeth (approximately 3 months)	Mary & Elisabeth	December – March	Luke 1:39–56
John the Baptist is born	John	Late March / Early April (Passover season)	Luke 1:57
JESUS IS BORN (280 days after December conception)	Jesus	Late September / October — TISHRI 15	Luke 2:6–7
THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES BEGINS	All Israel	Tishri 15	Leviticus 23:39

- This pattern is consistent throughout the appointed Feasts. Jesus fulfilled Passover on its appointed day as the true Passover Lamb (John 19:14, 31–36; 1 Corinthians 5:7), and the Holy Spirit was poured out on the appointed Day of Pentecost while that Feast was being observed (Acts 2:1–4). Following this pattern, it is not difficult to assert that, just as Jesus fulfilled the other Feast Days on the very days appointed for them, He did the same when He “tabernacled” among us: He was born on **Tishri 15**, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. His birth was therefore not merely associated with the Feast; it fulfilled its central promise—God dwelling with His people—on the Feast’s appointed day.

READ: Luke 2:6–7

***Points to Consider:** Nine months after a December conception leads to late September, the season of Tishri. The proposed timeline therefore aligns Jesus’ birth with Tishri 15, when the Feast of Tabernacles begins.*

Part Four: Four Confirming Witnesses (10 Minutes)

Now that the timeline is established from Luke, we confirm it from four additional angles. These are independent witnesses that all point to the same conclusion.

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WITNESS 1: The Shepherds in the Fields

READ: Luke 2:8

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night."

This simple verse is powerful historical evidence. In Judea, shepherds did not typically remain in open fields overnight during the cold and rainy winter season (November through February). Shepherds abiding in fields at night points to the mild autumn season — September/October — which is precisely when Tabernacles occurred.

ALSO READ: Micah 4:8 — The “tower of the flock” near Bethlehem. Micah addresses Migdal Eder, a watchtower used by shepherds to guard their flocks, and announces that royal dominion will return to Zion. Genesis 35:19–21 places this landmark in the Bethlehem region, giving the image added significance beside Micah 5:2, which identifies Bethlehem as the ruler’s birthplace. Some later traditions associate the area with flocks intended for Temple sacrifice, which would make the first announcement to shepherds especially meaningful; however, Scripture itself does not state that these were Temple shepherds. The passage therefore provides a suggestive geographical and messianic connection, not a precise date for Jesus’ birth.

***Points to Consider:** Some scholars suggest that shepherds near Bethlehem tended Temple flocks year-round, so the seasonal argument should be weighed carefully. Even so, mild autumn weather and the “tower of the flock” tradition in Micah 4:8 are consistent with a fall setting.*

✓

WITNESS 2: The Roman Census

READ: Luke 2:1–5

Caesar Augustus decreed a census requiring everyone to return to their ancestral city. Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem — nearly 100 miles on foot. Consider:

- Roman censuses were typically **NOT conducted in winter**. Winter travel was dangerous and impractical.
- Fall — after the harvest was gathered — was the most practical time for travel and for taxation, since people had money from the sale of their crops.
- The Feast of Tabernacles was a **pilgrimage feast**. All Jewish males were already required by God's law to travel to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16). A Roman governor wanting to efficiently count the Jewish population would wisely schedule a census to coincide with a time when the population was already traveling.
- The Roman government inadvertently fulfilled Micah 5:2 by leveraging the Tabernacles pilgrimage season to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.
 - Bethlehem lies about five miles south of Jerusalem. Joseph went there because the census required registration in David’s ancestral city (Luke 2:4), while nearby Jerusalem was the destination for the Tabernacles pilgrimage. This proximity made both circumstances compatible: the census brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, fulfilling Micah 5:2, and a feast-season gathering could have contributed to regional crowding.

READ: Micah 5:2 — Bethlehem prophecy

✓

WITNESS 3: "No Room in the Inn" — The Feast Explains It All

READ: Luke 2:7

"...because there was no room for them in the inn."

Why was every room full? **Because of Tabernacles.** Bethlehem is only 5 miles from Jerusalem. The Feast of Tabernacles was the largest pilgrimage feast of the Jewish year — drawing hundreds of thousands of worshippers to Jerusalem and the surrounding region. Every room, every guest space, every home was packed.

◆ **Key Thought**

While the nation celebrated the feast of God dwelling with His people in temporary booths, God was fulfilling the feast by dwelling with His people in the most humble temporary dwelling imaginable. The Son of God was born in the ultimate Sukkah — a manger. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

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WITNESS 4: Counting Forward from Passover

READ: Luke 3:23

"Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age..."

Luke says Jesus began His ministry at about age 30. If His ministry lasted 3½ years, He would have been about 33½ when He died at Passover in Nisan. Since a half-year remains after 33 full years, count six

months forward from Passover: Nisan to Tishri. This places His birth in the Tishri season, when the Feast of Tabernacles begins.

Count Six Months Forward		
Starting Point	Count Forward	Result
Jesus dies at Passover at about age 33½	Count six months forward from Nisan	This leads to Tishri , the proposed season of His birth
Nisan 14 <i>March / April</i>	Nisan → Iyyar → Sivan Tammuz → Av → Elul → Tishri	Tishri 15 Feast of Tabernacles

ALSO READ: John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55; 13:1 — John records the Passovers that help establish the length of Jesus' ministry.

Points to Consider: This simple count depends on two assumptions: that Jesus' ministry lasted 3½ years and that He was about 33½ at His death. If those assumptions are accepted, Passover plus six months points to the Tishri season and supports a Tabernacles birth.

Part Five: What Scripture Proclaims at His Birth

(5 Minutes)

A. Isaiah 9: The Harvest Light

READ TOGETHER: Isaiah 9:2–7

Points to Consider: Isaiah 9 brings together three images that illuminate the birth narrative:

- v. 2 — "A great light has shined" — correlates with Luke 2:9: the glory of the Lord shining around the shepherds at the moment of birth
- v. 3 — "They rejoice...according to the joy of harvest" — Tabernacles IS the harvest feast; joy at harvest = joy at Tabernacles
- v. 6 — "For unto us a Child is born" — The Child arrives at harvest time, wrapped in harvest imagery

The promised Child is announced through the language of light, harvest, and joy—themes closely associated with Tabernacles.

ALSO READ: Luke 2:9–14 — The angels appear in glory (Shekinah light), echoing Isaiah 9:2 exactly.

B. John 1:14 — The Word Pitched His Tent

◆ Re-Read Together — John 1:14 (NKJV)

*"And the Word became flesh and **dwelt** [ESKĒNŌSEN — tabernacled] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*

— John 1:14 (NKJV)

Points to Consider: John deliberately uses the language of pitching a tent rather than an ordinary word for living or remaining. This presents Jesus' human body as the dwelling of God among us and connects the Incarnation with the central theme of Tabernacles.

FINAL READ: Revelation 21:3 — The feast that started with a manger ends with the New Jerusalem. God has been tabernacling with His people from the first Tishri 15 to eternity.

Part Six: The Church of God Position and Celebration
(3 Minutes)

A. Church Doctrine Affirmed

The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres, during its **May 11–13, 2021 Council of Apostles and Elders**, formally accepted as church doctrine that **Jesus Christ was born on Tishri 15** — the beginning of the annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration. This doctrine is built on the scriptural foundation we have traced together through these two sessions.

The Church of God does not commemorate the birth of Jesus on December 25. While those who honor Jesus on that date with sincere devotion are respected, the scriptural and historical evidence points clearly to autumn — specifically **Tishri 15** — as the time of the Lord's birth.

B. How We Celebrate

Each year at the Feast of Tabernacles, The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres remembers the birth of Jesus with:

- Special worship services and programs honoring the birth of the Lord
- Banquets where members and friends gather to celebrate Emmanuel — God With Us
- The joyful recognition that our Lord arrived not in winter's darkness, but in the golden light of the harvest season

Points to Consider: *Celebrating Tabernacles recalls more than Israel's booths in the wilderness. It celebrates the claim that God "moved in"—the Word took on flesh, dwelt among humanity, and revealed Emmanuel, God with us.*

◆ Final Discussion Questions (3 Minutes)

1. Of all the evidence presented across both sessions — the priestly chronology, the shepherds' fields, the census, the back-count from the Cross, the meaning of John 1:14 — which piece of evidence strikes you as the most compelling? Why?
2. How does knowing that Jesus was born at Tabernacles change the way you read John 1:14?
3. How does it enrich the meaning of Tabernacles for you personally, knowing that this is when God literally *tabernacled* among us in human flesh?
4. What is one truth from this study that you want to carry with you and share with someone else?

◆ Closing Prayer (2 Minutes)

Leader: Pray a prayer of worship and thanksgiving, celebrating the fact that "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4) led to Tishri 15 — the Feast of Tabernacles — when God moved in. Pray through the theme of God dwelling with His people, from the wilderness tabernacle to the manger to our hearts today. Consider closing with Revelation 21:3 as a spoken benediction:

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." — Revelation 21:3 (NKJV)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MASTER SCRIPTURE REFERENCE LIST

Session One

- Galatians 4:1-5 — "Fullness of time"
- Leviticus 23:1-2 — "Feasts of the LORD" / God's appointed times
- Leviticus 23:33-44 — The Tabernacles command in full
- Leviticus 23:39-43 — Dwelling in booths; Tishri 15
- Deuteronomy 16:13-15 — Command to rejoice; pilgrimage
- Deuteronomy 16:16 — Three required pilgrimages
- Nehemiah 8:13-18 — Tabernacles revived after the exile
- Exodus 40:34-38 — God's glory fills the wilderness Tabernacle
- 1 Kings 8:1-2, 10-11 — God's glory at Solomon's Temple during Tabernacles
- 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, 8-10 — Temple dedicated at the Feast of Tabernacles
- Zechariah 14:16-19 — All nations will celebrate Tabernacles in the Kingdom
- John 7:37-38 — Living Water (Water-Pouring Ceremony)
- John 8:12 — Light of the World (Illumination Ceremony)
- John 1:14 — The Word tabernacled among us
- Matthew 17:1-5 — Transfiguration; Peter builds tabernacles
- Isaiah 9:2-7 — The harvest light; a Child is born
- Revelation 21:3 — God tabernacles with man forever
- Micah 4:8 — Tower of the flock

Session Two

- Galatians 4:4 — Fullness of time
- 1 Chronicles 24:7-19 — The 24 priestly divisions; Abijah is the 8th
- 2 Chronicles 7:1-2, 8-10 — Priestly rotation begins at Tabernacles
- Luke 1:5-10 — Zacharias; the course of Abijah
- Luke 1:11-23 — Gabriel appears; Zacharias struck mute
- Luke 1:23-24 — Zacharias returns home; Elisabeth conceives (June)
- Luke 1:26-38 — "In the sixth month" — Gabriel visits Mary (December)
- Luke 1:39-56 — Mary visits Elisabeth
- Luke 1:57 — John the Baptist is born (March/April)
- Luke 2:1-5 — The Roman census
- Luke 2:6-7 — Jesus is born; no room at the inn

- Luke 2:8 — Shepherds in the fields at night
- Luke 2:9-14 — Glory of the Lord; the angels' announcement
- Luke 3:23 — Jesus began His ministry at about 30 years of age
- Micah 5:2 — Born in Bethlehem
- Isaiah 9:2-7 — Harvest light; Child is born
- John 1:14 — The Word tabernacled among us
- John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55; 13:1 — Four Passovers in Jesus' ministry (confirming 3½-year ministry)
- Revelation 21:3 — Final fulfillment of the Tabernacles theme

APPENDIX B: KEY WORD GLOSSARY

MOED (מוֹעֵד) — "Appointed time" or "divine meeting." Plural: *Moedim*. God's sacred calendar appointments with His people.

SUKKAH (סֻכָּה) — A temporary shelter or booth. Plural: *Sukkot*. The dwelling structure of the Feast of Tabernacles.

SUKKOT (סֻכּוֹת) — "Booths" or "Tabernacles." The name of the feast itself.

SHEKINAH (שְׁכִינָה) — The visible, glorious dwelling presence of God. From the Hebrew root *shakan* (שָׁכַן), "to dwell."

SHAKAN (שָׁכַן) — Hebrew verb: "to dwell," "to settle," "to tabernacle." Root of *Shekinah*.

SKĒNOŌ (σκαηνόω) — Greek verb: "to tabernacle," "to pitch a tent," "to dwell in a booth." Strong's G4637. Used in John 1:14 and Revelation 21:3.

SKĒNĒ (σκαηνή) — Greek noun: "tent," "booth," "tabernacle." The standard Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) word for the wilderness Tabernacle. Root of *skēnoō*.

ESKĒNŌSEN (ἐσκαήνωσεν) — The exact form of the verb appearing in John 1:14. Past tense, third-person singular: "He tabernacled," "He pitched His tent among us."

TISHRI (תִּשְׁרִי) — The seventh month of the Hebrew religious calendar (first month of the civil calendar). September/October. The month of the Feast of Tabernacles, beginning on Tishri 15.

ABIB / NISAN (אֲבִיב / נִסָּן) — The first month of the Hebrew religious calendar. March/April. Month of Passover.

LULAV (לוּלָב) — A palm branch, one of the "four species" waved during Tabernacles.

ETROG (אֶתְרוֹג) — A citrus fruit (citron), one of the "four species" used at Tabernacles.

SHEMINI ATZERET (שְׁמִינִי עֲצֵרֶת) — "Eighth Day Assembly." The sacred assembly on Tishri 22, the day following the seven days of Tabernacles.

COURSE OF ABIJAH / ABIA — The eighth of the 24 priestly divisions established by King David (1 Chronicles 24:10). Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, served in this course. Its first annual rotation fell in late May/early June — the critical chronological anchor for the timeline of Jesus' birth.

APPENDIX C: THE COMPLETE BIRTH TIMELINE AT A GLANCE

Approximate Month	Event	Scripture Reference
Late May / Early June	Zacharias serves his Temple rotation (Course of Abijah — the 8th course)	Luke 1:5–10; 1 Chr. 24:10
Late May / Early June	Gabriel announces John's birth to Zacharias; Zacharias struck mute	Luke 1:11–23
Early June	Zacharias completes service and returns home	Luke 1:23
Early June	Elisabeth conceives John the Baptist	Luke 1:24
June – Oct./Nov.	Elisabeth hides herself for five months	Luke 1:24
~December	Gabriel appears to Mary — "in the sixth month [of Elisabeth's pregnancy]"	Luke 1:26
~December	Mary conceives Jesus by the Holy Spirit	Luke 1:35–38
December – March	Mary visits Elisabeth for approximately three months	Luke 1:39–56
~Late March / Early April	John the Baptist is born (Passover season)	Luke 1:57
~Late September / October — TISHRI 15	JESUS IS BORN — 280 days (40 weeks) after December conception	Luke 2:6–7
TISHRI 15	THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES BEGINS	Leviticus 23:39

◆ **The Theme of This Study — From Beginning to End**

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

— Revelation 21:3 (NKJV)

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Scripture quotations from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.