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When and Where the Israelites Dwelt in Sukkot

“I settled the Israelite people in booths,” כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – Leviticus 23:43

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City of Sukkot in Jerusalem. Effi B. / Wikimedia

Equipped for Endless Marching?

The books of Exodus and Numbers are filled with, “Endless marching and counter-marching across the desert […] north and south, east and west.”[1] This depiction suggests that the Israelites would have to be able to pack up quickly and efficiently and carry all their belongings including their abode. Indeed, Numbers describes this reality, tying it in to the action of the miraculous cloud which leads Israel on its journey:

במדבר ט:כא וְיֵ֞שׁ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶ֤ה הֶֽעָנָן֙ מֵעֶ֣רֶב עַד בֹּ֔קֶר וְנַעֲלָ֧ה הֶֽעָנָ֛ן בַּבֹּ֖קֶר וְנָסָ֑עוּ א֚וֹ יוֹמָ֣ם וָלַ֔יְלָה וְנַעֲלָ֥ה הֶעָנָ֖ן וְנָסָֽעוּ:

Num 9:21 And at such times as the cloud stayed from evening until morning, they broke camp as soon as the cloud lifted in the morning. Day or night, whenever the cloud lifted, they would break camp.

When staying in places for short periods, with the need to suddenly pack up and move in the morning without warning, people use tents and do not live in booths (i.e., *sukkot*), which are heavy and unwieldly.[2] By the same token, Menashe Harel, the late geographer and winner of the Israel prize, noted that desert nomads who camp long-term at an oasis switch from tents to booths.[3] In short, tents are appropriate to a life of traveling, booths to (relatively) long term habitation.

The Mitzvah of Sukkah

A well-known verse in Leviticus 23, explaining the mitzvah of dwelling in booths on the holiday of Sukkot, states:

ויקרא כג:מב בַּסֻּכֹּ֥ת תֵּשְׁב֖וּ שִׁבְעַ֣ת יָמִ֑ים כָּל הָֽאֶזְרָח֙ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל יֵשְׁב֖וּ בַּסֻּכֹּֽת: כג:מגלְמַעַן֘ יֵדְע֣וּ דֹרֹֽתֵיכֶם֒ **כִּ֣י בַסֻּכּ֗וֹת הוֹשַׁ֙בְתִּי֙ אֶת־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל** בְּהוֹצִיאִ֥י אוֹתָ֖ם מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרָ֑יִם אֲנִ֖י יְ-הֹוָ֥ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶֽם:

Lev 23:42 You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, 23:43 in order that future generations may know that **I settled the Israelite people in booths** when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I YHWH your God.

The inexplicable claim of this verse, that Israel dwelt in booths during the wilderness wandering—wandering people don’t use booths—is likely the motivating factor behind the midrashic interpretation that the “booths” are a reference to the clouds of glory, which accompanied the Israelites during their wandering.[4] But what is the non-midrashic sense of this text?

A Narrative of Tents

Scholars further point out that the biblical narratives generally mention tents and not booths,[5] as the following examples illustrate:

* When Moses sets up the Tent of Meeting outside the camp

שמות לג:ח וְהָיָ֗ה כְּצֵ֤את מֹשֶׁה֙ אֶל הָאֹ֔הֶל יָק֙וּמוּ֙ כָּל הָעָ֔ם וְנִ֨צְּב֔וּ **אִ֖ישׁ פֶּ֣תַח אָהֳל֑וֹ** לג:י… וְקָ֤ם כָּל הָעָם֙ וְהִֽשְׁתַּחֲו֔וּ **אִ֖ישׁ פֶּ֥תַח אָהֳלֽוֹ**:

Exod 33:8 Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise and stand,**each at the entrance of his tent**…33:10 all the people would rise and bow low, **each at the entrance of his tent**.

* Treatment of someone with *tzaraat*(skin disease):

ויקרא יד:חוְיָשַׁ֛ב **מִח֥וּץ לְאָהֳל֖וֹ** שִׁבְעַ֥ת יָמִֽים:

Lev 14:8 He must remain **outside his tent** seven days.

* Complaint about lack of meat:

במדבר יא:יוַיִּשְׁמַ֨ע מֹשֶׁ֜ה אֶת־הָעָ֗ם בֹּכֶה֙ לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֔י ו**אִ֖ישׁ לְפֶ֣תַח אָהֳל֑וֹ**

Num 11:10 Moses heard the people weeping, every clan apart, **each person at the entrance of his tent**.

* The punishment of Datan and Abiram:

במדבר טז:כוס֣וּרוּ נָ֡א **מֵעַל֩ אָהֳלֵ֨י**הָאֲנָשִׁ֤ים הָֽרְשָׁעִים֙ הָאֵ֔לֶּה… טז:כז… וְדָתָ֨ן וַאֲבִירָ֜ם יָצְא֣וּ נִצָּבִ֗ים **פֶּ֚תַח אָֽהֳלֵיהֶ֔ם**…

Num 16:26 “Move away **from the tents** of these wicked men…” 16:27 …Now Datan and Abiram had come out and they stood**at the entrance of their tents**…

How, then, are we to understand the reference in Lev 23:43 to the Israelites dwelling in booths?

The Lengthy Stay at Kadesh

Although the Israelites wander through the wilderness, Deuteronomy presents the Israelites as staying for a long time at Kadesh, after the scout incident:

דברים א:מו וַתֵּשְׁב֥וּ בְקָדֵ֖שׁ יָמִ֣ים רַבִּ֑ים…

Deut 1:46a Thus, you dwelt in Kadesh many days/years.[6]

This context suggests that the Israelites stayed at Kadesh for many years,[7] so that an entire generation could die as a result of the scout fiasco.

Indeed, Kadesh is the only station in the entire Exodus trail where the verb י-ש-ב – “abide” or “settle” and not ח-נ-ה – “encamp” is used.[8] The verb abide contains an element of permanency, long stay and probably dominance.[9] This was already noted in the Babylonian Talmud (b. *Megillah* 21a):

רבי יוחנן אמר: אין ישיבה אלא לשון עכבה, שנאמר ותשבו בקדש ימים רבים.

R. Yohanan said: “Dwelling (ישיבה) specifically refers to lengthy stays, as it says, “and they dwelt in Kadesh many days/years.”

This verb is associated with Kadesh in three separate sources:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| E (Judg 11:17)[10] | וַיֵּ֥שֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל בְּקָדֵֽשׁ: | And Israel dwelt in Kadesh. |
| D (Deut 1:46) | וַתֵּשְׁב֥וּ בְקָדֵ֖שׁ יָמִ֣ים רַבִּ֑ים | And they dwelt in Kadesh many days/years. |
| P (Num 20:1a) | וַיֵּ֥שֶׁב הָעָ֖ם בְּקָדֵ֑שׁ | The people dwelt in Kadesh.[11] |

The association of the verb ישב (dwell or settle) with Kadesh in three of the sources demonstrates the pervasiveness of the tradition of Israel’s lengthy stay at Kadesh. But according to P, how long was the stay at Kadesh?

The Timing of Israel’s Journey in the Wilderness: The Priestly Tradition

The Priestly text records Israel’s arrival at Kadesh in Numbers 20:

במדבר כ:א וַיָּבֹ֣אוּ בְנֵֽי־יִ֠שְׂרָאֵל כָּל הָ֨עֵדָ֤ה מִדְבַּר צִן֙ בַּחֹ֣דֶשׁ הָֽרִאשׁ֔וֹן וַיֵּ֥שֶׁב הָעָ֖ם בְּקָדֵ֑שׁ וַתָּ֤מָת שָׁם֙ מִרְיָ֔ם וַתִּקָּבֵ֖ר שָֽׁם: כ:ב וְלֹא הָ֥יָה מַ֖יִם לָעֵדָ֑ה וַיִּקָּ֣הֲל֔וּ עַל מֹשֶׁ֖ה וְעַֽל אַהֲרֹֽן:

Num 20:1 The Israelites arrived, the entire congregation*,* at the wilderness of Zin on the first month. The people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. 20:2 The community was without water, and they gathered against Moses and Aaron.

The verse states that they arrived in the Wilderness of Zin on the first month, but of what year?

From Josephus to Ramban: An Arrival in the 40th Year

Commentators such as Rashbam, ibn Ezra, and Ramban took the death of Miriam as the clue to the year of the Israelite’s arrival at Kadesh.[12] Although no biblical text actually says that Miriam died in the fortieth year, this is assumed because her death is associated with the drying up of the water, which leads to the sin and deaths of Aaron and Moses, all of which occurs in the 40th year (see Num 33:38 and Deut 1:3). The tradition that Miriam died in the fortieth year goes back at least as far as Josephus (*Ant*. 4:78):

Then it was that Miriam, the sister of Moses, came to her end, having completed her fortieth year since she left Egypt, on the first day of the lunar month of Xanthikos [=Nissan]. They then made a public funeral for her, at a great expense. She was buried upon a certain mountain, which they call Sin…

That same year, according to P, Aaron dies on the fifth month and is buried on Mount Hor (Num 33:38), which is about a day’s march south-west of Kadesh.[13]

If this dating is correct, it means that unlike Deuteronomy, P believes the Israelites stayed at Kadesh between 4 and 5 months.

The Arrival in Kadesh and the Death of Miriam: A Composite Verse

A closer look at v. 20:1, however, indicates that it is composite text. The first half of the verse “the arrival in Kadesh” is from P, and the second half “Miriam’s death from E.[14] Thus, even assuming that the tradition in Josephus is correct, P’s itinerary here is not marking the fortieth year, since the two parts of the verse should be read independently of each other.

A number of Priestly elements characterize the first part of the verse:

* Precise dating to frame the narrative.
* The term עדה (congregation).
* The combination בני ישראל כל העדה “The Israelites, the entire congregation” appears only one more time in the Torah, (20:22) in the description of Aaron’s death (Num 20:22–29) which belongs to P.
* Mentioning Kadesh together with the Wilderness of Zin appears only in Priestly texts (Num 27:14, 33:36; Deut 32:51).

The death of Miriam, however, is part of the E text. Miriam only plays a role in the stories of the exodus and wilderness wandering in E:

* The song on the sea in which she is described as a prophetess (Ex 15:20–21),[15]
* Miriam’s slandering of Moses and her subsequent scaly affliction (Num 12:1–16)[16]
* We *might*add to those references Moses’ nameless sister that looked after him floating on the water in his basket, if the verse refers to Miriam (Ex 2:4–8).[17]

In short, only E sees Miriam as a historical figure whose acts deserve mentioning and therefore whose death should be noted.[18] Miriam’s death shares the same formula that describes Aaron’s death in E (Deut 10:6).[19]

Separating Miriam’s Death Account from the Kadesh Notice

Since Miriam’s death does not belong to the same source as the arrival at Kadesh,[20] we have to look into P to find its own time frame for Israel’s arrival at Kadesh. All P dates, except for Numbers 20:1, include a reference for the year of the Exodus.[21] I believe that the original P verse had the year of arrival at Kadesh, and that it was not the fortieth year following the exodus but significantly earlier.

To avoid a conflict of an early date of arrival in the beginning of the verse with the (implied) late date of Miriam’s death in the end of the same verse, the compiler cut the year that was in P, and left the arrival at Kadesh undated. But what was this original date in P?

The Timing of the Wilderness Travel in the Priestly Narrative

Numbers 9:19-22 gives us a sense for the rhythm of the Israelites’ travel in P:

במדבר ט:כא וְיֵ֞שׁ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶ֤ה הֶֽעָנָן֙ מֵעֶ֣רֶב עַד בֹּ֔קֶר וְנַעֲלָ֧ה הֶֽעָנָ֛ן בַּבֹּ֖קֶר וְנָסָ֑עוּ א֚וֹ יוֹמָ֣ם וָלַ֔יְלָה וְנַעֲלָ֥ה הֶעָנָ֖ן וְנָסָֽעוּ: ט:כב אֽוֹ יֹמַ֜יִם אוֹ חֹ֣דֶשׁ אוֹ יָמִ֗ים בְּהַאֲרִ֨יךְ הֶעָנָ֤ן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן֙ לִשְׁכֹּ֣ן עָלָ֔יו יַחֲנ֥וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל וְלֹ֣א יִסָּ֑עוּ וּבְהֵעָלֹת֖וֹ יִסָּֽעוּ:

Num 9:21 And at such times as the cloud stayed from evening until morning, they broke camp as soon as the cloud lifted in the morning. Day or night, whenever the cloud lifted, they would break camp. 9:22 Whether it was two days or a month or a year—however long the cloud lingered over the Tabernacle—the Israelites remained encamped and did not set out; only when it lifted did they break camp.

Clearly, the Priestly text is not picturing a direct, quick march, but one with starts and stops. Part of the trip was done quickly, with merely overnight stops. This is implied by the description of Israel’s first month on the road:

* The Israelites left Ramesses on the fifteenth day of the first month (Num 33:3)
* They arrived seven stops later at the wilderness of Sin on the fifteenth day of the second month (Exod 16:1).

Thus in one month, they passed seven encampments: Succoth, Etham, Pi-hahiroth, Marah, Elim, Sea of Reeds and the wilderness of Sin (Num 33:5–11).

Twenty-One Stops in How Many Months?

Four stops after the Wilderness of Sin, the Israelites set out from the Wilderness of Sinai, “In the second year, on the twentieth day of the second month” (Num 10:11a). This is the last date P gives for Israel’s itinerary until their arrival in Kadesh, 21 stops later (Numbers 33:16–36).[22]

Certainly, the Israelites could have completed this trip in the eight remaining months of the second year of the Exodus.[23] As an analogy, the army of Seti I (1290–1279 B.C.E.) took only eleven days to cross the distance from Sila on the eastern Egyptian border to Rapha on the western Canaanite border.[24]

But granted, the distances may have been greater (scholars debate the location of Sinai) and there may have been stops—even long stops—on the way, as described in Num 9. Nevertheless, since no reference is made to any long stops in the text, the first month mentioned as the date of their arrival at Kadesh (Num 20:1a) can be reasonably understood as the first month of the third year, at the latest, the fourth or fifth year following the exodus.

That leaves the Israelites 35 to 37 years for residing at Kadesh according to P; the only stop described anywhere in P as a place where Israel dwelt (י-ש-ב). This agrees with the description in Deuteronomy that Israel dwelt in Kadesh for many days (Deut 1:46a).[25]

A Different Picture of the Wilderness Wandering

Many biblical passages mention 40 years of wandering.

דברים ח:ב וְזָכַרְתָּ֣ אֶת כָּל הַדֶּ֗רֶךְ אֲשֶׁ֨ר הוֹלִֽיכֲךָ֜ יְ-הֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ זֶ֛ה אַרְבָּעִ֥ים שָׁנָ֖ה בַּמִּדְבָּ֑ר… ח:ד שִׂמְלָ֨תְךָ֜ לֹ֤א בָֽלְתָה֙ מֵֽעָלֶ֔יךָ וְרַגְלְךָ֖ לֹ֣א בָצֵ֑קָה זֶ֖ה אַרְבָּעִ֥ים שָׁנָֽה:

Deut 8:2 Remember the long way that the You’re your God has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years… 8:4 The clothes upon you did not wear out, nor did your feet swell these forty years.

דברים כט:ד וָאוֹלֵ֥ךְ אֶתְכֶ֛ם אַרְבָּעִ֥ים שָׁנָ֖ה בַּמִּדְבָּ֑ר…

Deut 29:4 I led you through the wilderness forty years…

יהושע ה:ו כִּ֣י׀ אַרְבָּעִ֣ים שָׁנָ֗ה הָלְכ֣וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֘ בַּמִּדְבָּר֒ עַד תֹּ֨ם כָּל הַגּ֜וֹי אַנְשֵׁ֤י הַמִּלְחָמָה֙ הַיֹּצְאִ֣ים מִמִּצְרַ֔יִם…

Josh 5:6 For the Israelites had traveled in the wilderness forty years, until the entire nation—the men of military age who had left Egypt—had perished…

These verses conjure up a picture of “endless marching and counter-marching.” And yet, a look at four different biblical sources (E, D, P, H) suggest a different picture, in which the Israelites spend most of their time in a quasi-permanent settlement in Kadesh, sitting in their booths—*sukkot*, awaiting orders to march forward.

[View Footnotes](https://www.thetorah.com/article/when-and-where-the-israelites-dwelt-in-sukkot)

1. Benjamin W. Bacon, *The Triple Tradition of The Exodus* (London and Hartford: The Students Publishing Company, 1894), p. 237.
2. Others have noted as well that booths are not suitable to the biblical description; see, for example, Menachem Ben Asher’s comment, in his article,  [“,כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל”](http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/sukot/pmen.pdf) in which he observes:

ועדיין יש לתמוה: האומנם בסוכות ישבו ישראל במדבר? והרי מסופר על מגוריהם באוהלים כדרכם של נוודי מדבר שצורת מגוריהם מאפשרת להם קיפול של האוהל לפני כל מסע והקמתו בכל מקום חנייה.

1. See: Menashe Harel, *South Sinai* (Jerusalem 1971), 88–90 [Hebrew].
2. For detailed discussion of this midrash, see Jeffrey Rubenstein’s TABS essay, [“The Sukkah and Its Symbolism,”](http://thetorah.com/sukkah-and-its-symbolism/)and the TABS essay, [“The Sukkot Enigma: Knowing Why We Sit in the Sukkah.”](http://thetorah.com/why-we-sit-in-the-sukkah/)
3. David Frankel deals with this problem in his TABS essay, [“How and Why Sukkot Was Linked to the Exodus,”](http://thetorah.com/how-and-why-sukkot-was-linked-to-the-exodus/) but takes a different approach.
4. The term ימים can mean both “days” and “years.” See, for example, the phrase שנתים ימים (“two years”) in Gen 41:1 and other places, or the phrase מימים ימימה (“from year to year”) in Exod 13:10 and other places.
5. In my view, this Kadesh is a reference to Petra and not Ein el-Qudeirat, but the matter is not critical for the argument in this piece. For more on this, see my TABS essays, [“Solving the Problem of Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran,”](http://thetorah.com/solving-the-problem-of-kadesh-in-the-wilderness-of-paran/) and [“Locating Beer Lahai Roi.”](http://thetorah.com/locating-beer-lahai-roi/)
6. Admittedly, Num 33:36 uses the verb ח-נ-ה, but this is a stylized text which always uses the same formula. Num 22:9 also uses the term ח-נ-ה for the stops along the way. This is because the entire passage is picturing the travelling and describing its rhythm, even long stops (ימים) are just stops. The Kadesh tradition, however, envisions Israel settling the place for decades; this is something else entirely.
7. See Norman K. Gottwald,*The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 512–530.
8. The major part of Jephthah’s speech (Judg 11:16–22) depends on the Sihon narrative of E, and even utilizes some lost E passages preserved nowhere else. See my forthcoming piece on the haftarah of *Parashat Chukkat* for details.
9. Lev 23 is part of H, a later work added onto P, and would have been familiar with Num 20 and the Priestly itinerary. Moreover, as the latest layer of the Pentateuch, it is likely that H was even familiar with D, and thus, would have known all three presentations of the Kadesh tradition. Thus it is reasonable to imagine H making reference to this tradition to explain the law of sukkah even if it was placing this law earlier than the narrative. (Editor’s Note: For another example of such a phenomenon, see the reference in Exodus 12:15 to the mitzvah of matzah which comes before the Israelites leave Egypt in a hurry and are unable to bake bread in 12:39, the ostensible reason for the mitzvah. ZIF)
10. See similarly several modern scholars, e.g.: Baruch Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 4a; Doubleday, 1993), 488; George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on NUMBERS* (ICC; Edinburgh 1903), 257–260; Samuel R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*(Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1896), 32–33.
11. For more on Aaron’s death in Deuteronomy, see my TABS essay: “[Why Deuteronomy has an Account of Aaron’s Death in the Wrong Place.”](http://thetorah.com/why-deuteronomy-has-an-account-of-aarons-death-in-the-wrong-place/)
12. For a detailed discussion of this text from a source critical perspective, see David Frankel’s TABS essay, [“The Grain and Pomegranates of Mei Merivah.”](http://thetorah.com/the-grain-and-pomegranates-of-mei-merivah/) As the reader will see, Frankel and I are in agreement on some matters and not others.
13. Haran claims that all descriptions of ecstatic prophesies belong to E, see: M. Haran, *The Biblical Collection*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Bialik 2004), 157 [Hebrew]; Martin Noth assigns all appearances of “active” Miriam to J, see: Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, (OTL; trans. J.D. Martin; Philadelphia: Westminister 1968), pp. 93–94, 144–145.
14. The incident took place at the Tent of Meeting that appears in E only; Aaron and Miriam refers to themselves as prophets whom God talks to (Num 12:2). That reference fits the E conception described in the previous note. Reference to that affliction in Deuteronomy (24:9) also supports the identification of this story with E, since the author of D used E as his main source.
15. For the argument that Miriam was originally not understood as Moses’ sister and that the sister in Exod 2 is someone else, see Isaac Sassoon’s TABS essay, [“Moses, Aaron, and Miriam: Were They Siblings?”](http://thetorah.com/moses-aaron-and-miriam-were-they-siblings/) and Tamar Kamionkowski’s TABS essay, [“Will the Real Miriam Please Stand Up?”](http://thetorah.com/will-the-real-miriam-please-stand-up/)
16. Moses’ family is mentioned in two genealogical lists. Both belong to P. On one list, Miriam is not mentioned at all (Exod 6:20). Although she is mentioned in the other list (Num 26:59) she has just a name with no real life attached to it.
17. For the identification of this passage as an E text, see my TABS essay: “[Why Deuteronomy has an Account of Aaron’s Death in the Wrong Place.”](http://thetorah.com/why-deuteronomy-has-an-account-of-aarons-death-in-the-wrong-place/)
18. Here is where I part ways with Frankel (“Grain and Pomegranates”), as he sees the phrase, “the people stayed at Kadesh” as the beginning of the E (or non-Priestly) text, and I see this as still part of the Priestly text. Frankel sees Kadesh as a short version of Kadesh-barnea. As the arrival at Kadesh(-barnea) was already noted in P (Num 13:26aβ) he couldn’t assign the arrival at Kadesh (Num 20:1aβ) to P. I see the exact wording of E’s arrival at Kadesh in Judg 11:16b, therefore I can’t assign Num 20:1aβ to E.
19. Compare Exod 16:1, 19:1; Num 10:11, 33:3, 38b.
20. Kibroth-hattaavah, Hazeroth, Rithma, Rimmoin-perez, Libnah, Rissah, Kehelath, Mount Shepher, Haradah, Makheloth, Tahat, Terah, Mithkah, Hashmonah, Moseroth, Bene-jaakan, Hor-haggidgad, Jotbath, Abronah, Ezion-geber, Kadesh.
21. Rowley calculates that it would have taken the Israelites only two years to get from Egypt to Jordan, see: H.H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua, Biblical Traditions in The Light of Archaeology*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1950, pp. 106, 133.
22. See: Alan H. Gardiner, “The Ancient Military Road Between Egypt and Palestine,” *JEA* 6 (1920): 99–116.
23. Menachem Ben Asher, in his above referenced article, comes to a similar conclusion:

אם אנו מתרשמים שבאותן שלושים ושמונה שנים של עונש נדדו אבותינו במדבר כמעט ללא מנוחה, באה התורה ואומרת: “בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל”. הם לא נדדו עם אוהליהם כנוודי מדבר, אלא חנו ימים רבים במקום אחד, ושם בנו לעצמם סוכות, שהן דיור קבוע למחצה, לשהות בהן זמן רב, כנאמר: “ותשבו בקדש ימים רבים, כימים אשר ישבתם” (דב’ א:מו), ללמדנו שגם אם נדונו אבותינו לשנים רבות של חיי מדבר כעונש על חטאם החמור, נהג ה’ עמהם ברחמים.