

But WHY ‘Temporary Dwellings’?



Photo by Scott Smith

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennium. But this Feast is also the Feast of “temporary dwellings.” Why? What do temporary dwellings have to do with the Millennium?

By Clayton Steep

In the Millennium, depicted by the Feast of Tabernacles, the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of God.

Jesus Christ will be administering God’s government and ruling all nations with a rod of iron. Every person on earth will understand the reason for this human life. No longer will the knowledge about the *incredible human potential* be suppressed by diabolical forces.

People everywhere will at last know the reason why they were born. All over the world the true religion of God will be the *only* religion. In every facet of society true values will be recaptured.

And the rejoicing will be great!

But what does all this exciting news about the way the world will then be have to do with us living in

temporary dwellings today during the Feast of Tabernacles?

Plenty, as we shall see.

What is a “tabernacle”?

A tabernacle, a booth or a tent is a temporary shelter. The name “Feast of Tabernacles” or “Feast of Booths” means the Feast of Temporary Dwellings. It was among the feasts God gave to ancient Israel to keep them mindful of His purpose. But the Israelites rebelled against God. As a result they went into captivity and lost the knowledge of God’s ways.

Later a Jewish remnant returned to their homeland under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. The period witnessed a revival of true religion, during which the following remarkable discovery was made in the Scriptures:

“And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month [the Feast of Tabernacles]: And that they should . . . fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written” (Neh. 8:14-15).

They found in the law of God that all Israel was to dwell in temporary dwellings during the Feast of Tabernacles.

“So the people went forth, and . . . made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so” (verses 16-17).

The Feast had never been national-

ly observed in the correct manner since the days of Joshua. This handful of people who came back out of captivity made themselves booths and lean-tos from branches. In these shelters they lived during the Feast.

The law that they had "rediscovered" is in Leviticus 23:39-43. "It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths" (verses 41-42).

It doesn't matter what the booths or dwellings are made out of. Back then they were made of branches. Today they may be canvas tents, aluminum trailers, brick motels, hotels or condominiums. The important point is that they be places of temporary residence.

But why was Israel to spend the Feast in temporary abodes?

The answer is given in verse 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."

After the tribes of Israel came out of Egypt they had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before going in and possessing the promised land. While in the wilderness they had no permanent dwellings. They wandered from place to place, setting up their tents, staying awhile, then pulling their tents down and moving on.

The Israelites were *heirs* to the land God had promised to them. But they were not yet *inheritors*. They were merely heirs waiting to become inheritors of the land of Canaan.

That is why they lived in temporary dwellings. They were sojourners, pilgrims. They lived *in* the world of the wilderness, but they were not *of* it. Their inheritance was elsewhere.

Abraham had been a pilgrim too, as were Isaac and Jacob.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed . . . By faith he sojourned [a temporary stay] in the land of promise, as in a strange country [because he hadn't yet received it for his inheritance], *dwelling in tabernacles* [tents, temporary dwellings] with Isaac and Jacob, the *heirs* [not yet *inheritors*] with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city

which hath foundations [permanence], whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8-10).

Yes, Abraham in faith looked for the new Jerusalem and the glorious Kingdom of God. He and other saints "died in faith, not having received the promises [the inheritance], but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (verse 13).

What a beautiful picture for us!

Christians are "strangers and pilgrims" (I Pet. 2:11) in this life. We are *in* the wilderness of this world, but we are not *of* it (John 17:11, 14). We are separate from the world (Rev. 18:4) — heirs, but not yet inheritors, of our permanent dwelling place, the promised Kingdom of God.

We are temporary

We are mortal beings, made of the dust of the ground. The human existence is truly fleeting — here today, gone tomorrow. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14).

Only a few people on earth today are blessed with the knowledge of what this life is all about. Most people who have ever lived have come and gone without realizing why they were born — what their true potential has been.

In the Millennium, however, the whole world will understand the purpose for life and what the human potential is. They will comprehend that during this life we are mortal heirs who may become immortal inheritors of the Kingdom of God. By living in temporary dwellings during the Feast we portray a world during the Millennium in which everyone understands the truth of what life is all about.

All mortals are destined to die. Only by receiving the germ of eternal life from God's Spirit can a person hope to live forever. As Christians we have that eternal life abiding in us (I John 5:11). These physical bodies of ours — with all of their imperfections, their selfish desires, their weaknesses, yes, their aches and pains — are only meant to last long enough for us to qualify for eternal life.

The apostle Peter expressed this

thought. Getting along in years and realizing that the hour of his martyrdom was approaching as Jesus had foretold (John 21:18-19), he wrote, "I know my tent must be folded up very soon — as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me" (II Pet. 1:13-14, Moffatt version).

A tent that sooner or later will be folded up and put away. Is that how you think of your physical body? Too many people do not. They fret and worry about the shape of their nose, the color of their hair, the wrinkles and creases that come with age. They spend their lives in anxious pursuit of more luxurious ways to pamper, clothe, shelter and transport these temporary dwellings. They miss the point entirely. They don't know what this life is all about because they don't understand that we are merely pilgrims preparing for an eternal inheritance.

Step out into eternity for a minute and look back at this life. Does it really matter that you can't afford to feed and clothe your body as you would like, that you have flat feet, a bad back or that your "tent" is defective in some other way — maybe even with a serious or terminal disease? Your tent was not designed to last forever. It was only meant to last long enough to get you to your eternal inheritance. Then God will give you an eternal house.

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle [tent] were dissolved [as it is bound to be], we have a building of God, an house [yes, a *house* — no longer a tent!] not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (II Cor. 5:1-2). It is part of the reward Jesus will bring with Him to give us at the resurrection.

"For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened . . . that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (verse 4).

That is what we need! "For . . . this mortal must put on immortality" (I Cor. 15:53). If we overcome and endure to the end, we will be made immortal.

Paul, who himself was a tentmaker by occupation, understood and preached the reason for which we were born into these physical, tempo-

rary bodies. He comprehended our incredible human potential. He wrote, "... we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21).

To become members of the God Family as Christ is a member. That is the purpose for human life. That is the only goal that counts.

Why the Feast of Temporary Dwellings

That brings us to the reason for which we are to abide in temporary dwellings during the Feast picturing the Millennium.

The ancient physical nation of Israel was to dwell in booths during the Feast of Booths to commemorate the fact that they were once pilgrims living in tents while waiting to inherit the physical promised land.

As Christians having the Holy Spirit, we see the spiritual analogy: We humans are temporary beings waiting to inherit the Kingdom of God. We are merely pilgrims in this present life. Human existence is just a time of preparation for eternity. Living in a temporary booth or dwelling during the Feast depicts the whole world understanding this awesome purpose for human life.

The Feast is a time to rejoice that this life is not all there is and that in the Millennium everyone will realize this truth.

The Bible makes a definite connection between rejoicing and dwelling in booths at the Feast. In Leviticus 23:40 God told the Israelites to build booths and, He commanded, "ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days." In Nehemiah 8:17 all the congregation made booths and sat under them and "there was very great gladness."

Remember the wilderness trek

One of the sections of the Bible that can be profitably studied in connection with dwelling in booths is Numbers, chapters 9-21. Most of what we know about Israel's 40 years of living in tents in the wilderness is contained in these few chapters. But there are also some tremendously vital lessons we need to think about and apply to our Christian "sojourning" on earth. Here are a few

examples related to this section.

The purpose of the Christian life is summed up in Deuteronomy 8:2-3. The number 40 is often used in the Bible to indicate a period of testing. The Christian life is a period of testing to see whether we qualify for our inheritance.

"And thou shalt remember [a command!] all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no." That is what God wants to find out. That is why we are mortal now. God is going to find out where we stand before we inherit eternal life. He doesn't want a Lucifer-type rebellion in His Kingdom.

"And he humbled thee . . . that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

What a lesson to learn while we are in our earthly tabernacles!

God was an ever-present guide to the children of Israel. In a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day He led them. They had to be always ready at a moment's notice — night or day — to pack up their temporary shelters and follow the cloud when it moved. "And . . . whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed" (Num. 9:21).

Maybe they had just gotten their tents set up. Maybe some were particularly fond of a choice location near a big rock or a cave where the children could play. No matter. They had to keep their eyes on that cloud and fire. "Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried . . . the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it [the cloud] was taken up, they journeyed" (verse 22).

We might ask ourselves how responsive we are to God's direction. Are we always prepared to forsake any and every earthly tie that would hinder us from obeying God? Are we ready to move on?

Most of Israel's actions in the wilderness, such as rebelling against the leaders God had appointed, lusting and complaining, were examples of

what *not* to do. But they were recorded that way expressly for our learning (I Cor. 10:6). They should be thoroughly studied so you can "be reverent in your conduct while you sojourn here below" (I Pet. 1:17, Moffatt version).

Think about the meaning

Staying in temporary dwellings portrays Israel's pilgrimage in the wilderness, our own pilgrimage as Christians in the present evil world and the time during the Millennium when all will understand that they are pilgrims in this life.

However, we should consider one other event having to do with "temporary dwellings."

At Jesus' return to earth, the nations of Israel will have been in captivity. He will deliver them and lead them to their inheritance. This is described in Isaiah 65:9, "I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah *inheritors* of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there" (Revised Standard Version).

As the newly delivered Israelites make their way to the land they shall inherit (Isa. 27:13, 11:12-16), temporary dwellings will once again provide shelter. "And I that am the Lord thy God . . . will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast" (Hos. 12:9).

We foreshadow that happy event also.

How rich in meaning is the Feast of Booths! No wonder some brethren who don't have to travel because their city is an official Feast site go as far as to exchange houses among themselves for the duration of the Feast just so they can absorb and drink in as much meaning as possible from the occasion.

Think about the meaning as you open the door of your motel room. As you lie down in a bed not your own, as you eat under circumstances different from what you are used to, as you dig in your suitcase hoping to find another pair of socks, think about what you are portraying.

Think, Temporary. Think, Pilgrims. Think, Heirs. Think, World-wide understanding of the purpose for life.

Then rejoice and have a great Feast of Temporary Dwellings! □