



How the Feast of Tabernacles Pictures God's Family

The Feast of Tabernacles and the family relationship are inextricably interwoven. Do you know how?

By Neil Earle

"And the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall

be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. 9:6-7).

Peace. Justice. Order. Government. Blending these transcendental concepts into a workable framework still eludes mankind, in spite of many

attempts. As Douglas MacArthur intoned at the end of World War II: "Men since the beginning of time have sought peace. . . from the start, workable methods were found insofar as individual citizens were concerned, but the mechanics of an instrumentality of larger international scope have never been successful."

U Thant, while secretary-general

Photo by Warren Watson

of the United Nations, asked: "What element is lacking, so that, with all our skill and our knowledge, we still find ourselves in the dark valley of discord and enmity? What is it that inhibits us from going forward together to enjoy the . . . harvest of human experience? Why is it, that for all of our professed ideals, our hopes and our skills, peace on earth is still a distant objective?"

Excellent questions! They bring into sharp focus thoughts that have stirred the minds of the most astute statesmen and philosophers for millennia. They pinpoint, too, how overwhelmingly awesome and priceless is the knowledge that the great God imparts to His Church. For you and I know the answers.

We know, literally and specifically, how a glorious utopia will soon grip this troubled planet! Just before the Feast of Tabernacles is a good time to remind ourselves of the true solutions to the problems that boggle mankind.

We are privy to inside information that bemused even Old Testament prophets and patriarchs (Matt. 13:16-17). Why? Because this is the end time, when true knowledge is increasing exactly as the Bible foretold (Dan. 12:4).

The great God of the universe, the ever living One who looks down the span of history and testifies that He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), that great spirit Personality, now unveils the supreme mystery of His awesome plan of salvation to those He calls who will listen, yield, study and obey (John 1:12). Few do.

Mankind rejects the sublime answers to his deepest questions because to implement the solutions requires a total response: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Ps. 111:10).

Yet, for those few who respond, God paints the depth and breadth of His plan in vivid, colorful strokes (Eph. 3:17-18). To sketch in the broad outline of His supreme purpose, He utilizes practical, workable models.

Two of these models are the family relationship and the Feast of Taber-

nacles. As we shall see, these two blend harmoniously together.

In His steps

Why did God institute the family relationship? What does it have to do with this ancient custom called the Feast of Tabernacles?

The Feast of Tabernacles, which originated in the Old Testament, was diligently observed by Christ and His disciples. Shocking?

Remember, the Founder of Christianity was a Jew (Heb. 7:14). He grew up in a Jewish home devoted to carefully obeying the laws of God (Luke 2:52). Like Timothy, Christ knew the "holy scriptures" from infancy (II Tim. 3:15). What religious festivals, then, did Jesus Christ grow up celebrating? The most complete listing is given in Leviticus 23.

This chapter reveals the Originator of ancient Israel's Holy Days. The Holy Days came not from Moses but from the Being who had previously drafted Moses as His instrument to lead Israel out of Egypt:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. . . which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover" (Lev. 23:1-2, 4-5).

Were these festivals abolished when the old covenant was repealed? Not at all.

The Passover, for example, began while Israel was still a slave nation in Egypt. This was before the old covenant agreement, before the entry into Palestine and one full year before the establishment of the Levitical priesthood and its ritualistic ceremonies (Ex. 12:1-17).

That first Passover, a lamb was killed and its blood displayed on the doorposts of Israel's houses, a sign for the death angel to "pass over" those dwellings. What great event did this foreshadow (Col. 2:16-17)?

Nothing less than the living Lamb of God, Jesus Christ Himself, bleeding and dying on that same Passover day hundreds of years later (John 1:36). He suffered the death penalty for all humanity so God could cancel or "pass over" our sins and iniquities (Heb. 10:17).

Understand now why Paul later taught gentile converts in the Greek cities to observe this Festival: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:7). Jesus Christ totally identified Himself with this Festival, at the cost of His own life.

Paul also instructed his Greek converts, "Let us keep the feast" (verse 8). Leviticus 23:6 shows that the Passover is immediately followed by seven Days of Unleavened Bread as an ongoing practice of the early Church (Acts 12:3, 20:6).

Just as the Passover lamb prefigured Christ's sacrifice eventually reconciling all humanity to God (Rom. 5:10), there is deep meaning to eating unleavened bread for seven days.

Unleavened bread pictures a life free of pride and vanity, insidious spiritual leavening that tends to "puff us up" in our own eyes, rendering us more susceptible to Satan's clever temptations (Gen. 3:6, I John 2:16).

Then what? Leviticus 23:9-21 appoints the 50th day beginning with the Sunday following Passover as a Holy Day. This 50th day is called "Pentecost" (meaning "count 50") in the New Testament (I Cor. 16:8). In the Old Testament it was known as the Feast of Weeks, Feast of Harvest or Day of Firstfruits (Deut. 16:16, Ex. 23:16, Num. 28:26).

The word *firstfruits* keynotes God's teaching to His people on this day: God is only calling a few people now; the harvest on this "Feast of Harvest" is a small, early summer harvest depicting the few "firstfruits" who yield fully to God now, in this world still under Satan's sway (Jas. 1:18, Luke 13:23-24).

Only a few are thus enjoying the precious gift of God's Holy Spirit, which, significantly enough, first entered human beings on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Those faithful few who endure to the end are to rule with Christ upon His return (Rev. 2:26). How interesting, then, that the very next Festival commanded in Leviticus 23, the Feast of Trumpets, is associated with the pealing of trumpets, symbolizing Christ's return as the conquering King of kings, to end rebellion and install His saints as part of the new world government (Lev. 23:24, Matt. 24:31).

Leviticus 23:27 mentions a Day of Atonement. Anciently, the high priest on this day conducted an elaborate ritual to the unmasking of humanity's archenemy, the real source of sin and deception, Satan the devil (Lev. 16:1-10, 20-21). God's true Church fasts on this day, in part, to experience a sobering reminder of the pain Satan's ways inflict upon this world (Acts 27:9).

What happens next? So far the Holy Days Christ and His apostles observed take us in symbolism to the reign of Jesus Christ on this planet with no devil to oppose Him. The result? Peace on earth at last! Isaiah paints this beautiful scene:

"And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him [Christ], the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord... The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11:2, 6).

A feast of laughter

It should come as no surprise, then, that the very next Festival eminently portrays this utopian time of harmony, productivity and rejoicing. Listen:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles... when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days... and ye shall rejoice" (Lev. 23:34, 39-40).

This "feast of ingathering" (Ex. 34:22) was ancient Israel's fall harvest festival. It depicted the time when Jesus Christ will set His mighty hand to the exhilarating task of converting the whole world. Envoys accredited by the living Christ will teach all nations (Isa. 49:8-9).

The result? "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). The literal enforcement of God's living laws will change everything (Isa. 30:20-21).

Respect for God and neighbor will be compulsory (Isa. 2:3). The teaching of proper husband-wife relation-

ships and the application of sound child-rearing principles will reinforce the sanctity of marriage (Hos. 2:14-23).

Children will learn to work hard, to "subdue the earth," as God originally intended (Gen. 1:28). Employee-employer clashes will subside. Social divisions will be healed.

Yes, utopia at last! No wonder that the Feast of Tabernacles, the Festival portraying this happy world of tomorrow, emphasizes rejoicing amid abundance. What a highlight for the entire family — commanded rejoicing! Notice the instruction of Ezra and Nehemiah:

"This day is holy unto the Lord your God... Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet... neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth" (Neh. 8:9-12).

Almost 500 years later, Jesus Christ Himself, as the physical Head of His human family, urged the keeping of this great Festival to His brothers and sisters:

"Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand... Then Jesus said... Go ye up unto this feast... But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast... Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught" (John 7:2, 6, 8, 10, 14).

Jesus Christ is our example (I Pet. 2:21). His true Church does indeed keep the Feast of Tabernacles with physical feasting and fellowship, and by partaking of the excellent spiritual food Christ provides through His chosen ministers (Matt. 4:4).

This Festival is an excellent time to review man's overall destiny, the stunning purpose being worked out here below (Eph. 3:10-11). To deeply imprint these lessons, God commands the whole family to appear before Him at this time:

"Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates" (Deut. 16:14).

Of course! The Feast of Tabernacles portrays a future time of restored family relationships, the

healing of the generation gap, the careful nurturing of those vital wellsprings of a healthy society. "A feast is made for laughter," Solomon said (Eccl. 10:19). Zechariah focuses it beautifully:

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. 8:4-5).

Harmony. Stability. Peace. No wonder the Festival foreshadowing this perfectly balanced society stresses family participation. Yet there is an even greater reason, a reason directly related to why human beings were put on this planet in the first place.

God is a Family

Why is the family emphasized at the Feast of Tabernacles?

Remember, this Feast pictures Jesus Christ's direct, personal rule over all nations as the beneficent King of kings (Zech. 14:9). Yet even Christ will still be under authority. As a human being Jesus continually taught His disciples that He derived His power and credentials from the One who had sent Him to this earth as a Messenger (John 5:19-27).

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). As King of kings, Jesus will still be subject to God the Father.

Consider this: One of the stunning truths Jesus unveiled to a blinded humanity was the news that the God of heaven is a Father (John 8:38).

This unprecedented teaching, the implications of which are so profound, led to charges of blasphemy against Jesus Christ (John 10:30-37). Satan-inspired men reacted violently toward it; it struck at the very root reason for man's existence.

Pagans, atheists, deceived religionists could not remotely conceive that the spirit Super-Being possessing the keys of life and death for all eternity, the One holding the sovereign power to disintegrate the galaxies in an instant, that resplendent Personality, is the Holy Father (John 17:11).

Amazing but true! The almighty God of supreme accomplishment and

character — the One who inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15), existing at the very apex of wisdom and power — this magnificent Creator reveals Himself as “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9).

A literal Father, as well. His plan is to let others enjoy His limitless resources and true holiness (II Pet. 1:3-4). Jesus described His Father as infinitely merciful and tender (Matt. 10:29-30).

The awesome truth of Christ’s Gospel message was that God was expanding His Family (John 1:12-13). Physical humans, now only bearing fleshly resemblance to God (Gen. 1:26), can be impregnated with Spirit essence, the very power and substance that flows from God (I Pet. 1:23).

Once our minds are impregnated with this priceless gift, we become God’s begotten children (Rom. 8:16). Once begotten, we look forward to being born as Sons of God through the resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ.

Yet, even now, though we are only begotten, not yet born, we are already called heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (verse 17). No wonder God’s nature is epitomized in the word *Father*.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God . . . Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:1-2).

Think of it: The government of God, the rulership of the vastness of space, the administration of the entire universe, is structured through a family relationship — that of the divine Family (Eph. 3:15). God the Father is in charge, supported totally by His Son Jesus Christ and those of us who will qualify for Sonship (Heb. 1:4-8).

Now we should begin to understand more deeply why God bestowed the matchless privilege of the family relationship upon human beings, His future Sons (Rev. 21:7).

How fitting that the Festival picturing the government of God ruling this earth puts such a spotlight on the family relationship. For God is a

Family, as only our Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong — alone among educators and broadcasters — has steadfastly proclaimed.

Understand, too, why the apostle Paul described the inner dynamics of human family relationships as a “great mystery” (Eph. 5:32). It is a great mystery indeed — only God’s Church understands it!

Our miniature kingdoms

Let’s consider the implications. God owns all, rules all (Rev. 4:11). Yet His rule is no heavy-handed, Hit-

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lerian despotism. Even God’s punishments are lovingly corrective, designed to prod us back to the way of blessings (Heb. 12:7). Few things pained Jesus Christ more than the sad realization that His own chosen disciples often politicked for office and sometimes took a carnal, power-oriented approach to the coming Kingdom of God (Matt. 20:20-23).

For Jesus portrayed His Father as the supreme Servant in the universe, offering His physical clay models equality with Him. What more can even the great God give than that (John 17:20-21)? He vigilantly oversees His children, strengthening us when we need succor, forgiving us when we go astray, rewarding us extravagantly when we please Him (Deut. 32:11).

What a Model for every true Christian husband and father! Every concerned wife should deeply respect

the leadership position God placed in the home in the husband’s office, and every converted husband should continually remind himself that God sees him as the servant of his miniature kingdom, his family (I Pet. 3:7). According to God’s principles of government, the husband is responsible for his family’s happiness and growth — no mean task.

Shouldn’t every husband and wife team plan now to make this Feast special for their own children? This magazine has many helpful suggestions. Remember, in serving your family you are caring for potential heirs in God’s own Family (Mal. 2:15).

Children should deeply appreciate God’s Festival in contrast to the meaningless spectacles of Christmas, Halloween and Easter. God’s Festival lasts an entire eight days of rejoicing — there is really no contest!

How many teenagers rank among the well-traveled students in their schools, thanks to Festival transfers to exotic areas like Mexico City, Niagara Falls or Hawaii? Appreciate those blessings — show it by cooperating even more at this Festival.

Single adults can more deeply enjoy the Feast by emulating their Father in heaven, the Giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17). Share your extra time and extra financial blessings with some less fortunate people this year.

Remember the specific millennial prophecies about the blessings God’s government will bring to families who appreciate the right kind of wholesome recreation. Let’s take a glimpse into that wonderful future:

“Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil . . . Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together . . . And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord” (Jer. 31:12-14).

A beneficent, all-powerful government structured through a family relationship. That is the answer to the quests of philosophers, statesmen and scholars down through the ages. God’s Family — God’s government.

What a day it will be! □