

Make This a Feast of JOY



*Here's how you can properly rejoice
before God at the Feast of Tabernacles.*

By Neil Earle



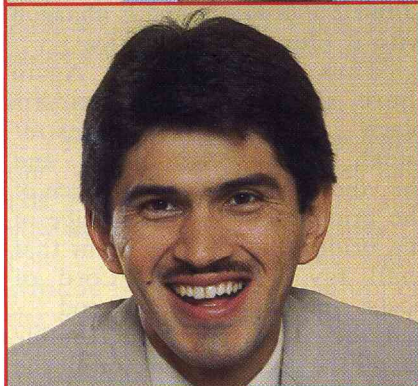
“A feast is made for laughter,” wise King Solomon observed (Eccl. 10:19).

Obviously, then, the great God, possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19), enjoys laughter and joy a great deal. He commands seven annual feasts (Lev. 23).

The Feast of Tabernacles, the sixth of these annual festivals, is upon us. The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the coming 1,000-year reign, on earth, of Jesus Christ and God's immortal, Spirit-born children in the Kingdom of God.

Rejoicing and celebration are inevitable results of God's government, as many scriptures reveal: “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11).

“And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isa. 25:6).



“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding . . . Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage” (Matt. 22:2-4).

How eagerly God wants us to understand that His Kingdom — the supreme quest of our lives — is no solemn, boring round of meaningless rituals conducted behind stained-glass windows. Neither is it an eternity of mindless, emotional frenzy. God's model for the Kingdom is the wedding supper, the commemorative banquet honoring accomplishment and overcoming (Rev. 19:9).

“Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12:37).

Grasp the picture

What a picture! This is the time of year to grasp this incredible picture more clearly. God



does His part. He makes a sweeping gesture to epitomize the grandeur of life in His Family: He uproots multiple thousands of people from their normal lives and immerses them with thousands of other individuals and families all required to spend 10 percent of their incomes in eight days (Deut. 14:25)!

How bold — how dramatic! A time of compulsory rejoicing (Deut. 16:14). Seven days of vision (Lev. 23:34). A week of spiritual uplift and exaltation (Neh. 8:17-18). The Feast of Tabernacles pictures nothing less than the glorious, utopian reign of Jesus Christ and His handpicked staff, a royal Family, to rule with Him (Dan. 7:27).

Is this our feeling as we approach the Feast of Tabernacles? Or are we perhaps defi-

cient in the very second fruit of God's Holy Spirit — joy (Gal. 5:22)?

Do we really see ourselves as the light of the world (Matt. 5:14), or do our worldly cares dominate our lives to the point that we are, like everyone else in this society, shortsightedly absorbed with our own problems?

Are we convinced that God's Spirit is at work within us, or has it been a long time since we felt truly exuberant about our matchless opportunity to live forever (I John 3:1)?

If you feel overburdened with physical, mundane cares, then this Feast of Tabernacles is for you!



“If you only had my problems,” some people tell Christ's ministry, “then you'd be miserable, too.” Not necessarily. The

simple truth is that we all have our crosses to bear (Luke 9:23). And if we'd only rouse ourselves to see it, we'd discern that many of our brethren have it much worse (I Cor. 12:26).

As for the world — would any of us really change places with the people in war-torn or poverty-stricken countries, or the pitiful humans ebbing out their precious days at the end of a plastic tube? Or the thousands of Third World mothers who, before this day is over, will watch their children slip into tired comas as starvation enters its last phases?

Think — analyze — appreciate!

We must put ourselves more into God's great Feast of Tabernacles, a feast of rejoicing. To do so we must understand why God commands us to rejoice.

Why rejoice?

We must rejoice with purpose, not just imbibe a meaningless round of steaks, wine, sight-seeing and partying, perhaps ending up too tired to attend the crux of the whole Festival, the preaching services.

Why rejoice? Because even our attendance at the Feast is a demonstration of the most basic requirement for world peace — the willingness to submit to God's government (Isa. 9:7). Keeping the Feast is, in essence, an act of faith — our faith that God has the answers to the world's problems.

After a nightmarish but mercifully short dark age just ahead of us (Matt. 24:21-22), God will joyfully give the order sending Jesus Christ to this weary planet (Acts 3:20). Jesus' mission? Nothing less than the physical and spiritual restructuring of the human race (Isa. 42:1-4). Christ's return is the most enormous rescue operation in history.

What a prospect! Refugees, displaced persons, concentration-camp prisoners, scarred and

maimed victims of the war to end wars, all in need of shepherding to Palestine (Isa. 49:12-18). The rebuilding of the “waste places” will start there (Isa. 52:9-10).

Well-organized, ecologically integrated communities will spring up under the direction of the God Family (Mic. 4:4). Broad avenues lined with healthy, fragrant trees will shade youngsters and senior citizens (Zech. 8:3-5, Isa. 41:17-19). Rustic community centers in park settings will play host to church services, socials, youth activities, weddings — vital components in the abundant life (Isa. 61).

Notice: “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, and for the young of the flock and of the herd . . . Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. 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).

Now *there* is hope — a vision worth hanging on to (Rev. 3:11). But it shouldn't surprise us. Our God is called “the God of hope” (Rom. 15:13). He radiates it (John 2:17). His Word is charged with it (Jer. 23:29). Notice:

“Thus saith the Lord; Again there shall be heard in this place . . . even in the cities of Judah . . . The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good . . . and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it” (Jer. 33:10-11, 9).

What a sparkling picture! God commands the Feast of Tabernacles as a sure token — an act of faith — that utopia is coming. We are to celebrate the world tomorrow in advance. Now project yourself ahead: Who will



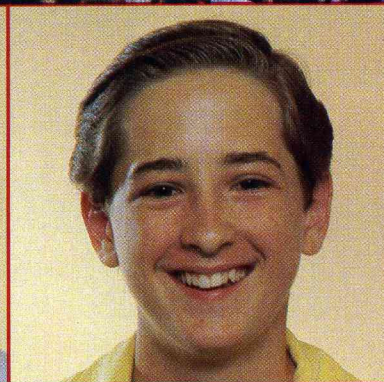
conduct the vital Sabbath services, the Bible studies giving key instruction to keep things "on track"? Who will organize the construction of halls, coordinate urban renewal and farm policy, streamline traffic and industry?

We will! That is our calling (Rev. 1:6). "Do ye not know," Paul asked, "that the saints shall judge the world?" (I Cor. 6:2).

Preparing to teach

Yet we are supposed to learn the right approach to God and His government right here and now as physical human beings (I Pet. 2:9). Developing the right attitude is the core curriculum of the world tomorrow (Matt. 5:5). We must learn God's way so well that we can teach it to millions of others in the Millennium.

Having the right attitude toward authority changes everything for the better (Isa. 66:2). When we look around the Feast site and see 500, 1,500 or 5,000 of God's people meeting together in harmony and order, do we ever think: "This is a miracle! You



can't even control 15 human beings without God's Spirit."

That is another great reason for rejoicing at the Feast: The order, loyalty and unity of God's people, thousands upon thousands strong, demonstrate to God at every Feast site that human beings, with God's Holy Spirit, are governable, that humanity is worth saving after all.

And proving that is part of our vital mission at the end of this age! Read Malachi 4:6 again and really understand it.

When God's people submit to headquarters by attending their designated site, accepting transfer rejections in good spirits; when we follow directions at the Feast site instead of always making ourselves the exception to the rules; when we hustle punctually to services; when we pay extra atten-

tion to the sermonettes and sermons and have children who do so as well — that gives God Himself 100,000-plus reasons for rejoicing (I Sam. 12:22).

But do we? Does the significance of what we are doing ever dawn on us? Do we ever think: "Like a mighty army moves the Church of God! This is exciting — God's government really works. And I'm part of it! I've seen the future, already. God's Spirit can change this old world after all!"

Ambassadors for the Kingdom

Aren't these excellent reasons for real rejoicing at this Feast of Tabernacles? Infused with godly hope and vision, we should resolve to act as ambassadors for the Kingdom of God (II Cor.

5:20). A key part in this we have already covered — following instructions.

Another important part we all have to play is to prepare, mentally and spiritually, to endure some inconveniences at the Feast. There are no perfect Feast sites, for the Church itself is still imperfect. Resolve now, well ahead of time, to accept trials and setbacks as challenges, hurdles to overcome, prods to our resourcefulness, stimulants (Jas. 1:4).

Be thankful for sticky problems (Rom. 5:3). A terrible rainstorm canceled the Festival Fun Show at Jekyll Island in 1964. But did it dampen the spirits of God's people? Not on your life! More fellowshiping took place that night than at any other time during that Festival — and all in a rain-drenched tent.

businesses. Some are Ph.D.s. Some have fought wars in far-flung parts of the world. Some are pressured ladies with hostile mates waiting at home. Some are single parents walking the financial and emotional tightrope. Many are strangers, lonely, widows and new members who don't know a soul.

And you can help. Maybe your family has a little time on its hands. Perhaps as a single adult you have a little extra second tithe. Why not set aside some time for some of the loners you notice? This is a foretaste of your role in the Kingdom of God.

It's living like Jesus Christ: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

we should all understand that there are scores of new members with children trying to "learn the ropes," or teens not yet convinced that this is for them. The Feast is an excellent time for us all to learn the big picture: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth" (Rom. 14:4).

Give people the benefit of the doubt. Nothing short-circuits our own joy like petty criticism and self-righteous nit-picking (Gal. 5:15). Learning to understand and tolerate other people is a requirement for successful community relationships, an essential character trait required in those called to government posts in the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps now we grasp more clearly the dynamic lessons and principles permeating each Feast of Tabernacles!

The fact is that humanity has lost the art of successful human relationships. Yet each Feast site is a miniature community, after all, a minute foretaste of an organizational pattern based on God's law of give. The lesson? Enjoying other people, learning to tolerate their idiosyncrasies, submitting to order and directions — all this is pioneering a way out for a hopeless humanity (Isa. 59:9, Matt. 5:14).

God's kind of Christianity works! It transforms people. It leavens community relations (Matt. 13:33). It will change the world, ultimately.

As one dedicated, highly motivated, submissive implement in God's hands, God's people will write another lesson of order and unity at the 1982 Feast of Tabernacles. The stakes are high: Can God take multiple thousands of human beings, give them His Spirit and produce not just unity and order, but rejoicing?

If so, we have discovered the practical keys to peace on earth. What a challenge — what a calling! Will we grasp it more clearly this year at God's great Feast of Tabernacles, a feast of joy? □



More blessed to give

Hundreds of brethren each year find that the Feast of Tabernacles was the pivotal experience to bring them out of themselves a little more — the time they learned more deeply how much more blessed

it is to give than receive (Acts 20:35).

Perhaps an unsung area of service to the entire Church is the extra efforts at child training that parents can make before the Feast. No one appreciates undisciplined children or those who insist on a trip to the facilities just after the opening prayer.

Older children passing notes or reading paperbacks or other books during the sermons or young children playing with noisy, distracting toys can subtly undermine the morale and attention of those there to focus on the vital messages God's ministers specially prepare for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Explain these points to your children before the Festival.

Of course, when hundreds and hundreds of God's people gather

"Peculiar people" (I Pet. 2:9)? Yes! Peculiar and unconquerable (Rom. 8:37).

Some get frustrated at the mammoth crowds at some Feast sites. They abandon as hopeless one of the special benefits of the Feast of Tabernacles — the mutual support and strength derived from active fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:14).

Try this. Rather than selfishly resenting the big crowds, take the brethren one at a time. Radiate warmth and affection for those around you (Prov. 15:15). A little leaven does leaven the whole lump, after all (I Cor. 5:6).

These people at the Festival are our brethren, every one of them purchased with the shed blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Some have their own successful