

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES— A TIME FOR REDEDICATION

*Worldwide, true Christians will keep this
year's Feast of Tabernacles September 22 to 28.
What should this Festival of God mean to us?*

By K. Neil Earle

Zeal. Con-
viction.
Commit-
ment. Urgency.

The first century Church of God had these qualities in abundance!

Notice: "And when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the

council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:40-42).

Where did the early Christians get this dynamic courage and drive? After all, they were only fallible human beings like us (Acts 10:26). Why such burning zeal, such concentrated, intense single-mindedness?

God's Spirit led them, just as Christ through His Spirit leads us today (Matt. 28:20)!

Why did that Spirit of power stir them and press them to such



Messages from God's ministers are an important part of the Feast. Above, Herbert W. Armstrong speaks at the 1982 Festival.

self-sacrificing heights? The answer directly bears upon the vital importance of this year's Feast of Tabernacles for true Christians today. It is the first-century Church's striking unity and cohesiveness that challenges us (Acts 4:32).

Spiritual pioneers

The Feast of Tabernacles is the sixth of God's seven annual festivals, the true days that God expects His people to keep today. True Christians know that the Feast of Tabernacles pictures God's soon-coming Kingdom, the wonderful world tomorrow when God's government will rule on

this earth and produce peace and prosperity for everyone.

A major key in producing that peace and prosperity will be the unity among God's children.

We in God's Church today have the same Gospel, the same desperately needed message, the same Leader, the same governmental structure as the early apostolic Church (Heb. 13:8). We have much going for us. At

this Feast of Tabernacles we need to see once and for all how important unity is in the Body of Christ and how we can increase unity.

What was the secret of the early Church's amazing cohesiveness and responsiveness?

Remember, many early Christians were eyewitnesses to Jesus Christ and His miracles (II Pet. 1:16). The unprecedented events surrounding Christ's death and resurrection — the unexplained darkness (Matt. 27:45), the Temple veil split in half (verse 51), the earthquake that rocked Jerusalem (verse 51), the literal resurrection to physical life of prominent Jewish leaders (verse 52) —

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all this made a mind-numbing impression.

Then, too, almost all early converts were Jews (Acts 2:5) well acquainted with the Scriptures, schooled to expect the Messiah in their lifetime (Acts 1:6). For a while they met in one place in the same city (Acts 2:1). Hospitality and care for new converts were vital necessities since people were lodged far from home to pick up all they could from the apostles' personal teaching (verse 42).

And one thing more: They deeply prized the Holy Days and festivals of God (Acts 2:1, 12:3). They did not miss the simplest, most basic reason for annual festivals, to gather God's people together, to weld them into a deeper, more pervasive unity (Acts 18:21).

That's why Jude called God's festivals "feasts of charity" (Jude 12, Authorized Version).

Paul trained his converts to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries" (Phil. 1:27-28).

Strength in unity

We who have an even bigger task to accomplish than the early Church did (John 14:12) have factors working for us that they didn't have. The communications revolution makes it possible for the majority of God's people to see His apostle for our day on satellite television.

Thanks to our marvelous publications media God's people can have a truly global perspective on this Feast of Tabernacles. The Church's publications school us well in advance about the worldwide scope of the Festival. From Burma to Brno, from Penticton to Peru, God's people will be pondering the same material, material designed to advertise, educate and instruct us about the spiritual high point of the year — the Feast of Tabernacles.

Certainly the potential exists for a dynamic upsurge in unity and esprit de corps at the Feast of Tabernacles in 1983.

Yet perhaps the greatest single spur to advance and amplify the unity and togetherness of God's people at this year's Festival is, as always, wrapped up in the basic message of the Feast of Tabernacles itself and, even more, how the Work we've been drafted to do fits into the majestic purpose and scope of God's sixth festival.

The coming utopia

Remember, the Feast of Tabernacles is a prophecy. It is an inspired picture of the harmony and peace that will prevail when Jesus Christ and His people finally rule this earth with the law of God (Isa. 2:3).

Numerous scriptures announce this event:

"Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:27). See also I Corinthians 6:2, Luke 19:17 and Revelation 2:26.

The Feast of Tabernacles is futuristic in its implications (Zech. 14:16). It challenges us to ponder our awesome destiny, our goal, our prime purpose in life.

And what a goal it is — to help Jesus Christ straighten out this tragic world. To start a new civilization on the earth. To give real aid to the boat people, to comfort the tormented people of Cambodia, to nourish the starving children of the third world.

Christ will do it. He can save humanity. He has the zeal, the stamina, the unrelenting strength of purpose to succeed. And we are His executive assistants, training for top positions in that government. This is our consuming mission in life! It is a goal worth sacrificing for, even suffering for if the need arises.

The Feast of Tabernacles gives us "time out," a divinely ordained pause, a respite in which to contemplate these colossal truths.

The point is: The extent to which we see how the task assigned the Church today fits in

with that overall goal is the exact measure of our zeal and motivation toward God's Work!

Let's explain that clearly.

Needed: zeal for God's Work

A merciful God will not allow the devastating plagues of His wrath to fall on an unsuspecting world (Amos 3:7). God requires that the world be warned first (Matt. 24:14). His schedule is ironclad: warning, Great Tribulation, Christ's return, Millennium. Now whom does God hold responsible for warning the earth?

"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

It is the Church's job to announce the good news (Mark 16:15). God requires this act of love and concern from us, this urgent call to sound the alarm (I Cor. 9:16).

God uses the preaching of that warning message to call others to help advance His Work further, to call those He can train for rulership with and under Christ in the world tomorrow (Matt. 13:18-23). Many benefits flow from preaching the good news of Christ's return to set up His Kingdom.

No wonder the high point of the Christian year is the week-long celebration that portrays this worldwide utopia. Christ will eventually reconcile the whole world to Himself (Eph. 1:10). One government, one Ruler, one Kingdom teaching and practicing the way of life that leads to peace, unity, harmony and concord (Isa. 25:6-7). This is God's way to fulfill His plan. The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the successful implementation of that plan. It portrays the pivotal event in Scripture (Acts 3:19-21).

Every year, at the Feast, God gives the world a demonstration of His ability to unify the world.

The Church of God is pioneering the only true solution: joyful, voluntary submission to the laws of God (Rom. 7:22). The Church is indeed the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). If it were not, then there would be no purpose for the

perpetuation of human life on this planet (Mal. 4:6). God would allow man to destroy himself (Matt. 24:22).

As Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong reminds us, the Church of God is the Kingdom in embryo. That means we must be seen practicing the way of life that works — the way of cooperation, courtesy and consideration (Acts 20:35). If the world is to be changed it must start with us (Matt. 13:31-32).

Rededicate yourself

What a calling!

How can we rededicate ourselves to that calling at this year's Feast of Tabernacles?

First, catch again the global scope and sweep of God's Work. Read about the Feast in international areas. Pray for the success of scattered brethren in far-flung corners of the world.

Follow Festival instructions and announcements (Eccl. 5:1). As Philippians 2:14 says, "Do all things without murmuring and disputing." Don't be the exception to the rules. Prompt obedience in small matters displays godly character (Luke 16:10).

Meditate upon the grand accomplishments of God's Work this year. Remember the acts of God's apostle overseas. Prepare your offering from that perspective (Deut. 16:16). Have your children prepare an offering as well (Prov. 20:11).

Participate in the organized activities at the Feast — don't be off "doing your own thing" all the time. Quiz your children about God's law and God's way of life as you drive to the Feast site. Take an interest in their spiritual development.

Enthusiasm is contagious. Be a carrier! Meet new people. Aid the less fortunate. Don't resent crowds, but be an ambassador of peace. Let peace begin with you.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a yearly opportunity to intensify the unity, morale and stalwartness of God's people.

Is anything more important? □

