

Why I Keep the Feast of Tabernacles

By Raymond F. McNair

How many professing Christians have even so much as ever heard of the Feast of Tabernacles?

Few in today's "Christianity" realize that Christ, His apostles and the New Testament Church of God all observed the Feast of Tabernacles. Why, then, don't those who profess to be Christians follow Christ's steps by keeping this Festival and the other feasts of God instead of the holidays of this present evil world — many of which originated in ancient paganism?

What are God's feasts?

Notice God's instructions to Moses:

"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" (Lev. 23:1-2).

Notice that these instructions came from God Himself. He, when referring to the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, calls them "the feasts of the Lord." "Even these are my feasts," declares the great God!

Why, then, do the vast majority of ministers today dare teach that these God-ordained festivals are merely the "feasts of the Israelites" or scoff at them as Jewish observances?

In this same 23rd chapter of Leviticus, God clearly orders His people to observe the weekly Sabbath as well as all of His commanded annual feasts. In three places, He commands that these "feasts of the Lord" be observed "for ever" (verses 21, 31, 41). The Hebrew word *olam*, rendered for

ever in the English translations, means "eternal" or "everlasting."

The Feast of Tabernacles

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying . . . The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. . . on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you . . . it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein" (verses 33-36).

Because God commanded "an offering made by fire unto the Lord" for "seven days" (verse 36), some have concluded that the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles are no longer to be kept, since animal sacrifices are no longer commanded during this New Testament age.

But this is not sound reasoning. Animal sacrifices were offered on every day of every week (Num. 28:3-4), not just during the Feast of Tabernacles. True, Jesus Christ was sacrificed and became the Christian's substitute "passover" (I Cor. 5:7), ending the need for animal sacrifices. But Christ's sacrifice no more did away with God's annual Holy Days than it would have done away with any of the other days of the week. Christ's sacrifice did not mean that the followers of God were no longer to keep God's weekly or yearly Sabbaths.

In which month of God's sacred calendar was the Feast of Tabernacles to be observed? "And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month [corresponding roughly with our October] ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work, and ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days" (Num. 29:12).

Notice that the Feast of Taber-

nacles was always observed after the great fall harvest: "Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite [God's ministers], the stranger [or foreigner], and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates" (Deut. 16:13-14).

Though there was a serious purpose behind this Feast, it was intended to be a time of great rejoicing before the Lord.

"Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the Lord thy God in the place which the Lord shall choose: because the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice" (verse 15).

During the Feast of Tabernacles God's people were to have all sorts of wonderful foods and delightful drinks to cheer them (Deut. 14:22-29).

Furthermore, at these commanded convocations, God instructed His people to make offerings in thankful appreciation to the Giver of all gifts.

"Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks [Pentecost], and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee" (Deut. 16:16-17).

If all of Israel's males assembled before God to keep His commanded feasts, would that not have posed a great danger for the nation? Notice

this significant promise by God: "And thou shalt observe . . . the feast of ingathering at the year's end. Thrice in the year shall all your men-children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire [to invade] thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year" (Ex. 34:22-24).

When the people of Israel faithfully obeyed God and kept His commanded festivals, God blessed and prospered them, and He also protected them from foreign invasion. However, Israel did not long continue to keep God's commanded festivals, and He let gentile nations destroy them, carrying them into captivity in other nations (Ezek. 20:12-24).

The rebellious 10 tribes of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) were taken into captivity by Assyria in about 721 B.C. They never returned to their homeland in Palestine. The Jews (of the Southern Kingdom of Judah), after their 70-year captivity, did finally resettle in the promised land.

Realizing that their fathers had gone into captivity because they didn't keep God's commanded feasts, the returning Jews decided to keep the festivals of the Lord diligently.

"And Nehemiah . . . and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day [the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles] 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).

The people of Israel, including the Jews, had not kept the Feast of Tabernacles since the time of Joshua, just after they entered the promised land (verse 17). But from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah forward, the Jews kept God's annual Sabbaths, including the Feast of Tabernacles.

Christ kept this Feast

The Jews persevered in keeping God's commanded feasts for the next 500 years, until the time of Christ. Jesus also kept God's feasts, and these included the Feast of Booths.

"Now the Jews' feast of taber-

nacles was at hand" (John 7:2). Shortly before the Feast began, Christ told His brethren to keep the Festival: "Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast . . . But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought him at the feast . . . Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught" (verses 8-14).

Did Jesus Christ remain for the entire Feast? Certainly!

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (verses 37-38).

Yes, Jesus Christ kept the Feast of Tabernacles with the Jews, as He also kept the other commanded feasts with them. By so doing, he was "leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (I Pet. 2:21).

Apostles kept God's feasts

The book of Acts clearly reveals that Christ's apostles continued keeping the feasts of the Lord after the New Testament Church of God began in A.D. 31. Notice, for example, the celebration of Pentecost in Acts 2 and the keeping of the Days of Unleavened Bread in chapter 12, verses 3 and 4.

But did Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, also keep God's feasts?

It was Paul who was observing the Feast of Pentecost, an annual Sabbath, mentioned in Acts 16:13 and 20:16. Paul and his company also observed the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6), and he kept the Day of Atonement ("the fast") mentioned in Acts 27:9.

But did Paul ever keep the Feast of Tabernacles? He certainly did.

Paul, in about A.D. 50, traveled from Asia into Europe and began preaching the Gospel at Philippi "on the day of weeks" — Pentecost, according to the inspired Greek text (Acts 16:13). After spending a few weeks at Philippi (verse 12), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), Berea (verse 10) and Athens (verse 15), Paul came to Corinth in the late summer of A.D. 50 (Acts 18:1). He spent several Sabbaths teaching in the synagogue

(verse 4), and continued holding meetings in the house of Justus (verse 7) for "a year and six months" (verse 11). This brings us to sometime during the spring of A.D. 52. After a riot in Corinth had been quelled, Paul "tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria" (verse 18). By now it was well into the summer of A.D. 52, which means that the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost were both past. The major autumn Feast of Tabernacles was fast approaching.

"And he [Paul] came to Ephesus . . . When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast [of Tabernacles] that cometh in Jerusalem" (verses 19-21). Notice that he felt impelled to "keep" the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem.

Since Paul kept God's commanded festivals, including the Feast of Tabernacles, why do some claim that he taught it wasn't necessary for gentile Christians to keep God's Holy Days? Never once did he say this.

"Ye observe days"

Some misunderstand and pervert the meaning of Paul's statement in Galatians 4:10, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years." Is Paul here labeling the observance of God's Holy Days unnecessary?

Remember, Paul is talking to gentile Galatians who had never observed God's commanded Holy Days. They had, however, observed (as did all pagan nations) certain days, months, times and years. This is what Paul was scolding the Galatians about. "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain," said Paul (verse 11). "How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (verse 9). Paul was decrying the Galatians' tendency to hold to their former pagan observances.

Many also misunderstand the meaning of Paul's statement in Colossians 2:16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of [margin, *in part of*] an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days." Was Paul abrogating God's command to keep His feasts?

(Continued on page 33)

Why Keep Feast

(Continued from page 8)

Notice. Paul was telling the Christians at Colossae not to let anyone take them to task regarding how they observed God's Holy Days or the Sabbath. He did *not* say, "Let no man therefore keep an holyday, or the new moon, or the sabbath day."

A better translation of this verse would read as follows: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in part of [not "in respect of"] an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* [not in Greek text] of Christ [should judge] you in these matters."

In other words, it was the Church ("the body of Christ") that was to judge the Christians at Colossae, not outsiders, in the way they observed God's commanded Holy Days and the weekly Sabbath. The Colossians were right in keeping God's Holy Days, no matter what any non-Christians said. Nothing whatsoever is said about not keeping the days.

Whose feasts?

Another text often distorted to imply that God's commanded feasts should not be kept today is Isaiah 1:14, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them."

We have seen that the "feasts of the Lord" as given in the Bible are spoken of by God as "my feasts" (Lev. 23:2). Here God is attacking what He refers to as "your appointed feasts."

Through the prophet Isaiah, God was condemning the many humanly devised feasts that the Jews had, of their own accord, added to the list of those God had given them.

Would God command His feasts for "for ever" and then turn right around and abolish them?

God did not do away with His own feasts, but the way they were then being observed by His people was displeasing unto him — was as "iniquity" (Isa. 1:13).

Why keep these days?

So why do I keep the Feast of Tabernacles?

Because God calls these Holy Days "the feasts of the Lord" and commands that they be observed "for ever."

I keep the Feast of Tabernacles because Jesus Christ did, setting an example for all believers who would follow His steps.

I observe this important Feast because the New Testament Church of God did, as recorded in Acts.

I keep the Lord's feasts because Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, observed them and commanded the gentile converts to keep them.

I keep "the feasts of the Lord" because the Word of God prophesies that all nations will observe the Feast of Tabernacles in God's soon-coming Kingdom, or reap dire consequences for not doing so (Zech. 14:16-19).

I observe God's Feast of Booths because it pictures the great millennial harvest of humans on this earth, during the wonderful, utopian rule of Jesus Christ for 1,000 years.

I observe the Festival of Tabernacles because for 30 years my family and I have found it to be the most wonderful, joyous time of the entire year — a time of physical and spiritual feasting. Unlike Christmas and other so-called Christian festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles is *not* a time when there are endless family quarrels, fights, murders, adulteries, drunkenness, indebtedness and heartaches of every description.

I observe God's wonderful Feast of Tabernacles because that is the time when all of God's people get away from their daily cares, their mundane pursuits and from the many evil ensnarements of the devil's world, and fellowship with people of like mind for one happy, glorious week.

By keeping the Festival of Tabernacles (like scores of thousands of God's people), I am able to be rejuvenated both physically and spiritually. For an entire week, my family and I can enjoy the best food, drink and fellowship possible. This festive week is a time of great rejoicing, mixed with sober reflections of God's way, of His Word and of His great master plan for all mankind.

Why do I observe God's Feast of Tabernacles?

Because I love God, fear that great Being and want to please Him by "keep[ing] his commandments, and

do[ing] those things that are pleasing in his sight" (I John 3:22).

And — I enjoy being a pioneer! Isn't it much better to voluntarily keep the Feast of Tabernacles now, than to be forced to do so later?

When the world keeps this Feast

Bible prophecy reveals that the world will never experience universal health, happiness, peace and prosperity until God's government is restored to this earth. When that government is restored, will mankind continue to observe its present pagan holidays, or God's feasts?

"And it shall come to pass," says God, "that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16).

What will happen if some nations decide they don't want to observe the Festival of Booths?

"And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain" (verse 17).

If a nation refuses to observe this important Feast and God visits that country with severe drought, what will happen if the nation still won't keep this Festival?

"And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (verse 18).

Will God be impartial in meting out His judgments upon Egypt or any nation that refuses to keep His commanded Feast of Tabernacles?

"This shall be the punishment," says God, "of Egypt, and the punishment of *all nations* that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (verse 19).

Today, thousands of God's people meet annually to observe the Feast of Booths — the largest convocation on earth. It is truly a time of joyful feasting — a time of rejoicing in good, clean Christian fun and fellowship, while we for one week experience a little of what the soon-coming Kingdom of God will be like! □