
Christian Holidays: Feast of Tabernacles

by: Ronald L. Dart

Now that I am getting older, I catch myself groaning more often. There is a grunt when I bend over to tie my shoes. There is a groan when I get out of a chair where I have sat to long and my hips and legs have gotten a little stiff and I groan standing up and I stretch trying to get things moving smoothly again.

Our human bodies are like an old tent. You keep using it year after year on your vacation. The poles get bent and it starts to leak, and it has holes in it. In some ways our old bodies are a lot like our old tent.

It is not hard to imagine why the apostle Paul selected a tent as a metaphor for the human body.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1 Paul says: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. {2} For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, {3} if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. {4} For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life." (In the King James Version, the word 'tent' is translated as 'tabernacle').

Every year of his life Paul observed the Feast of Tabernacles and so it came naturally to him in his mind to use the tent, the tabernacle, as a metaphor for the human body which we carry with us through this life and which it finally wears out on us.

Feast of Tabernacles Commanded

This comes from Leviticus 23 and verse 39: "In the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a Sabbath." That means a day of rest, you take the day off from work.

Verse 40: "You shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD

your God seven days." What do you do with these palm branches? You create a little shelter for yourself.

Verse 41: "You shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations: you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. {42} You shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths." Booths are little tabernacles or shelters.

Verse 43: "So 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: I am the LORD your God."

The Feast of Tabernacles is More than a Jewish Feast

Now it is from this that many make the assumption that the Feast of Tabernacles was merely a Jewish Feast, and as it happens that is a mistaken assumption.

All down through Christianity's years you can tell where we have been sometimes by the hymns that we sing, which basically speak of the wilderness wandering, entering into the Promised Land, of crossing Jordan, all that time of wilderness wandering and living in tabernacles is compared to this life, the temporary nature of this life. The crossing over Jordan into the Promised Land is crossing over into the Kingdom of God.

Feast of Tabernacles will be Kept After Jesus Christ Returns

As I said it is a mistaken assumption to think that this is only a Jewish Feast, even in the Old Testament. There is a passage in Zechariah which follows in the last days, the return of Christ and the great war to end all wars which the battle of Armageddon is when God has basically put down all of those nations that came against Jerusalem. The prophet says this in Zechariah 14:17 "It shall be, that whosoever 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. {18} If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain." It doesn't rain down there in Egypt anyway, so they depend on the Nile River rising.

"They shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." So, this is not merely a Jewish feast. It is worldwide, and it applies in particular to Egypt.

Verse 19: "This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." This is not only a commanded festival, it has sanctions connected with it, if you don't do this, then God is going to punish you for it.

Now this is an end time prophecy, but it is plain enough that the Egyptians don't keep the Feast of Tabernacles with the same meaning as the children of Israel. The Egyptians didn't dwell in booths for forty years in the wilderness, Israel did. Yet Egypt has to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Is it possible that people have been much too quick to dismiss the Holidays of the Bible as being merely Jewish? After all, they are the ordained Feasts of Jehovah (Leviticus 23:1-2, 4, 37, 44.). They are the appointed times of the Lord, not the Jews.

Paul Kept the Feast of Tabernacles

The tabernacle was a natural metaphor for Paul to use because he was still observing the Feast of Tabernacles, all of these years after becoming a Christian. There is, for example, in Acts 18:18 this little passage: "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. {19} And he came to Ephesus and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. {20} When they desired him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent." Now all of this is travel notes. But let's notice what he says in verse 21: "But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus." Most commentators note that this feast in question almost certainly had to be Feast of Tabernacles. Paul didn't merely say that he wanted to be there, he said that he wanted to keep the feast in Jerusalem.

Christian Symbolism

The Feast of Tabernacles is not merely a Jewish holiday, it is a Christian holiday as well, and with its own set of meanings that translate over into Christian symbolism.

What are those meanings? The idea of a temporary nature of life is one of them. Camping out in the wilderness is one of them. The world is not our home is one of them. The fact that we look for a city that is permanent, that is part of the meaning. The Feast of Tabernacles is a confession that we are strangers, that we are pilgrims here below and we don't belong here. We belong to a higher kingdom. There may be more than that.

Feast of Trumpets

I often connect the Feast of Trumpets to the return of Jesus Christ. That places us in Revelation 19 in the prophecies of the end time.

Let's begin in verse 11: "I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he does judge and make war. {12} His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. {13} And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God." Anyone familiar with Christian theology knows that the 'Word of God' is none other than Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3.)

Continuing in verse 14: "The armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. {15} And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the

winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. {16} And he has on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

And then comes the great battle with the nations that have gathered against Jerusalem, a battle called Armageddon. We are talking about the return of Jesus Christ, the last events prior to the beginning of the Kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus Christ.

John says in verse 17: "I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; {18} That you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. {19} And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. {20} And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. {21} And the remnant was slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh." This is grisly stuff isn't it? This is real apocalypse here.

The Day of Atonement

Then the scene changes. The enemies of God have been defeated and they have all been done away with and their carcasses eaten by the birds.

Revelation 20:1 "I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. {2} And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, {3} And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season."

Now this is the time that people often speak of when they speak of the 'millennium.' You hear a lot among people who talk about theology of pre-millennial, post-millennial and al-millennial and the approaches that they take for the explanation of the book of Revelation. Now something happens for a thousand years. During that thousand years period Satan is bound and out of the picture and Christ seems to return before that thousand years begins because the work that has to be done starts with the binding of Satan.

Feast of Tabernacles

Then John says in Revelation 20:5 "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. {5} But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished."

And so consequently the following through of the return of Jesus Christ is compared to the Feast of Trumpets. We can compare the binding of Satan to the Day of Atonement. The natural follow up is that the Kingdom of God is established with the ruling of Jesus Christ for one thousand years with the Feast of Tabernacles.

Every year in the autumn thousands of people descend upon Jerusalem and keep the Feast of Tabernacles. A lot of people who live in Jerusalem create little booths or tabernacles on the roofs and balconies of their houses and they go out and sleep in during them this period of time. You may be surprised to know that a large number of Christian people travel to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles every year. As a percentage of Christianity that number is very small, but they have had to come to have seen what the Feast of Tabernacles means from a Christian perspective or they wouldn't be there keeping the Feast of Tabernacles.

Now you don't have to go to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Jews all around the world keep the Feast who cannot go to Jerusalem.

Now let's return to the book of Revelation to the events of the Kingdom of God where in the autumn of the year we have the Feast of Trumpets which pictures the return of Jesus Christ, the Day of Atonement which pictures the binding of Satan, then we have the Feast of Tabernacles which pictures the time in which we sojourn here in the world looking forward to the millennium, to the Kingdom of God, to the rule of Christ upon this earth. There is a curious little thing about this festival, in that it lasts for seven days and then there is an eighth day. No one knows for sure exactly what the chronology of the world since Adam till today is, as it is presented to us in the Bible, whether that information is complete or not, it is presented to us like a seven-thousand-year plan, and we have just about finished six thousand years of this. The implication of this is that you have six thousand years of man's rule, man doing his best and failing. The seventh thousand years is the rule of Jesus Christ, a time that He rules and not only He, but those who have trusted Him, been faithful to Him, laid down their lives for the word of God, those who refuse to worship the beast or his image or to receive his mark. All of the Saints live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4.) Where? Well, right here on planet earth.

The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth

Remember that little thing that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5.) Odd isn't it, most people think that being blessed is that they are going to heaven and yet Jesus comes along and says: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." And what appears to be, from the book of Revelation, is that the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven (as only Matthew refers to it in the gospel of Matthew) is here on the earth, because Christ comes here, and where He rules is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now in this passage there is this striking little statement: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5.) Now it doesn't say a word here about a second resurrection, but it sure implies it, doesn't it? First of all, all the dead who are in Christ rise first then He says that "the rest of the dead will not live again

until", which implies that they do live again, which is another resurrection. So there appears to be a resurrection at the beginning of the thousand years and a resurrection at the end of it. The one at the beginning is the first resurrection and he goes on to say in verse 6: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years." The implication is that the second death might very well have power over the balance of mankind.

Continuing in verse 7: "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, {8} And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea." There are still people down here who will go and fight with God, so the Devil gets released and goes out and gets them and brings them into a battle with God. This is hard to understand how at the end of a thousand years of God's rule, there would still be people who could be deceived and who would turn on God. Yet there is a part of me that recognizes how true it is, that people in the face of incredible evidence still seem to have an antipathy toward God which is almost impossible to explain.

Verse 9: "And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. {10} And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet were cast, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

And then comes one of the really great moments in the entire plan of God. But that will have to wait for the next time.

What Is the Feast of Tabernacles?

For eight days in the fall of the year, Christians in our tradition pause to observe "The Feast of Tabernacles." We celebrate this festival because it is commanded of God and because we see a powerful Christian significance in the feast. For us, this is not merely a Jewish holiday, but one of the "Appointed Times of God," given to remind us every year of an important part of His plan and deepens our understanding of the work and ministry of Jesus Christ.

This feast is a family pilgrimage festival, that is a festival observed away from home. We go where God's people gather and for eight days we worship, rest, play and learn together. Every day includes an uplifting worship service where we glorify God in song, in the reading and exposition of Scripture and prayer. Each day also includes workshops, seminars designed "That the man of God may be proficient and equipped to every good work" and children's and youth classes. There are plenty of opportunities for Christian fellowship, with activities designed not only for fun, but for meeting new people and for bonding with new friends.

Come and worship for one day or eight but come. You will grow deeper in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts about the Feast of Tabernacles?
2. Is it important to your Christian walk?
3. Did you know that it will be observed after Christ returns?
4. Did you know that Paul observed it?
5. What are your thoughts on Mr. Dart's explanations of Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles to their future applications?
6. What are your thoughts about the point that the Kingdom of God is going to be here on earth?
7. What are your thoughts about Revelation 20:5 where it is very clear that there is a 'first resurrection' where the dead in Christ are resurrected, but that not everyone is resurrected until after the thousand years are finished?
8. What are your thoughts about a second resurrection?
9. Why don't all Christians observe Feast of Tabernacles?
10. What makes worldly holidays seem more appealing than God's Holy Days?