
The Birth of Christ

by: Ronald L. Dart

Today we are going to speculate about some things that are not revealed. I'll tell you that right up front. However, in the process we will have a Bible study. You can't go very far wrong as long as you stick your nose in the Bible.

What I am going to speculate about is the time of the birth of Christ. It has been a matter of interest to scholars down through all ages. There has been an enormous amount of studying on this subject. In fact, learned men and scholars down through generations going way back to the second and third centuries, I suppose, have placed the birth of Christ in every single month of the year. Of course, all of us know that at one point in time the decision was made to celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. and it certainly had its connection with ancient Roman sun worship.

I was looking through my commentaries and I came across Adam Clark's statement and it's interesting to read. He says "It was a custom among the Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts about the Passover, and to bring them home about the commencement of the first rain. The first rain began in late October. So, we find that the sheep were kept in the open country during the whole of the summer as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks. It is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced and that consequently our Lord was not born the 25th. of December when no flocks were out in the fields". That is really simple, isn't it?

In fact, this is based on the statement in Luke 2:8 "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. {9} And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were afraid."

As Clark points out, the problem is "the sheep were kept out during the summer, and they were brought in, in the autumn. So consequently, Jesus could not have been born on December 25th. because there were no sheep in the fields at that time, nor could He have been born later than September as the flocks were still in the fields by night. On this very ground the Nativity in December should be given up."

There are so many things that we look at and there are really no facts, we have no basis for them, we have no way of being certain about them. And yet we do face some facts. The clear statement by Luke that the shepherds were in the fields with their flocks at night is a fact, and therefore it rules out December 25th., it rules out all of November, it rules out January and February and

probably March and it rules out the latter part of October in some cases as possible times for the birth of Christ.

Official Birthday

It was the Latin Church, that Clark points out, that placed it on December 25th as the birthday of the sun. Pope Julius the First placed it there. What he was probably doing was establishing an official birthday.

We lived in England for many years and it was obvious to us over there that the queen had not only her personal birthday which was the day she was born, she also had an official birthday, and on her official birthday was when all of the people took off work. There were celebrations, and everyone would drink to the queen's health.

So what Pope Julius was probably doing was establishing an official birthday of Jesus.

The gospel writers don't bother telling us about this, which is odd enough all by itself. It may be that one answer is that Christ's birth fit in with the existing expectations of the Messiah and no chronology was at all necessary. It is also possible that it fit in with an existing holy day, and that's one of the things that I'm interested in.

Pagan Origins of Christmas

One result of our preoccupation with the pagan origins of Christmas, and that is the only thing that I can call it, Christmas is a pagan holiday! One of the consequences of this is that there is no time of the year, when we regularly read and appreciate those passages of Scripture that focus on the birth of Christ.

The Birth of Christ is a Fascinating Story

The story of the birth of Christ is a fascinating one, it is of enormous interest and in fact, of great importance because of fulfilled prophecy, because of the statements made to Mary, to Zacharias, and to Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, and all those events are fascinating, in what they reveal about the Messiah, His mission, about who He was and where He came from.

Some of the greatest hymns that have ever been written, some of the most profound musically, and some of the most profound theologically are found among what we call Christmas carols.

Establishing an Official Birthday of Jesus Christ

I am going to suggest, that if there ever were to be an official birthday for Christ or a day in which we celebrated His birth, a day not tied to a pagan holiday and sun worship, but to a day that is based upon the Bible, it should be the first day of the feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:39-44, John 7:37-39). I told you that we are going to be speculating, so brace yourself.

Circumstantial Evidence

I want you to take a look at some circumstantial evidence.

Luke three and verse 21 for a case in point: "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, that heaven was opened, {22} And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased. {23} And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli."

Jesus' baptism took place when He, not when he was about 30 years of age, but when he began to be about 30 years of age. It seems to be fairly apparent what has happened here. The fact is that a man did not become, in a sense, spiritually mature, spiritually of age in Israel until he was 30. He came of age as far as his participation in the synagogue, his participation of leadership in Israel and so it was significant that Jesus had begun to be about 30 years of age at the time when he was baptized and coincidentally began his ministry. So, Jesus' baptism took place when he began to be about thirty.

Scholars are generally agreed that Jesus' ministry lasted for 3 1/2 years, right? We all know that Jesus died on the 14th day of the first month, right? At Passover, that much is an established fact (Luke 22), so if his ministry lasted for 3 1/2 years, what day of what month are you at 3 1/2 years before Passover? You are on the 14th day of the seventh month, which is the day before the first day of the feast of Tabernacles. So, the presumptive evidence walks in the door immediately that Jesus began his ministry about the time of the feast of Tabernacles.

If Jesus was born on the first day of the feast of the Tabernacles, He would have been circumcised on the 'last great day', the eight day of the feast of Tabernacles. Not terribly significant all by itself, but of passing interest at least. John the Baptist would have been born on or about Passover since he was six months older than Jesus was (Luke 1:26,36).

This would place Jesus' baptism on the 'last great day'. The logic stays with me, we are using circumstantial evidence, and we are using logic. The logic is that John was baptizing in Jordan, near Jerusalem. Jesus lived in Galilee. Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John. There were two occasions in the year when Jesus came to this area of Jerusalem. What were they? Tabernacles and Passover. We know that this was not Passover, that would've made Jesus' ministry at four years, which was not the case, none of the chronology will fit. It wasn't Passover. Logically, when He came down there to begin His ministry, was at the time of the feast of Tabernacles. Three- and one-half years before His death, when He began to be about 30 years of age. He passed his 30th birthday and He was eligible to participate in all of the affairs that grown men were eligible to in Israel. He was baptized at that time and then began His ministry.

My assumption, is that it was on the 'last great day', because He left immediately after his baptism (Luke 3:21, 4:1) for the wilderness, which is a reference by the way to the Judean Desert, and that suggests that the feast was over about the time He was baptized and He left the

area at that time, something He would probably not have done had He been baptized at the beginning of the feast of Tabernacles.

Prove anything? Oh no, not at all. I told you, we're going to speculate about things that are not revealed. We are going to look at circumstantial evidence and ponder the meaning of these things and how they might fall out to us, and as I said, if there ever were an official birthday of Christ, this is where I would put it.

Typology of the Last Great Day

Now listen to the New Testament typology of the 'last great day'. This is the study of types and symbols, relative to the 'last great day' of the feast, presuming that Christ may have been baptized on that day.

In John seven and verse 37 we read: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, if any man is thirsty, let him come to me, and drink. {38} He that believes on me as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. {39} But this he spoke of the spirit that they who would believe on him should receive the Holy Spirit which was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Jesus received the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending upon Him upon the day of His baptism, didn't He? There is a connection between the waters that symbolizes the Holy Spirit, the dove that symbolizes the Holy Spirit and Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan, which might very well have taken place on the 'last great day'.

In Matthew three and in verse 13: "Then comes Jesus from Galilee to Jordan to John to be baptized of him. {14} but John forbid Him saying, I need to be baptized by you, why are you coming to me? {15} And Jesus answering said to him, Permit it to be so now for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness and then John said okay, {16} And Jesus, when he was baptized went up immediately out of the water and the heavens were opened to him and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him." Now, the typology is not overwhelming, but then it rarely is.

But every year at this season (Note: Ron Dart is giving this message at the Feast of Tabernacles), I am forced to start looking again at the typology of the feast of Tabernacles, I do it every year. Every year that I look at it, it seems I run into something that I hadn't seen before, something I hadn't thought of before, some different awareness that I had not seen before about the meaning of it. One of the things that forces us is God telling us to proclaim these Holy Days in their seasons which means that those of us who do the preaching have got to look at them every year in their seasons. There are certain parts of the Bible we never get to ignore for very long.

The Word 'Tabernacle'

The word 'Tabernacle', I find is a rather curious word. It has entered into modern religious discussion and jargon. I remember from years gone by when we had a Baptist youth camp down

in West Central Texas. We went up to it and they had this youth camp going on out there and I was a counselor for it.

They had a lot of little hutches and they had a big building that they called the 'Tabernacle', and it wasn't a tent exactly, but it wasn't a permanent building either, it wasn't air-conditioned. It had sides that opened out and fans that blew on the inside. It was their Tabernacle where they got together in the out of doors and met before God. It's fascinating how many churches you will see in the latter part of summer beginning to hold camp meetings.

The tradition of camp meetings, of Tabernacles, of camping out, all come from this idea of tabernacling and this curious word 'tabernacle' crops up in religious vernacular from time to time.

A Tabernacle is a Tent

In both Hebrew and Greek, it comes from the concept of 'tent'. That's at the root of it. The word has a much broader use than that. In fact, it is used for semi-permanent constructions. It is used of God's place of dwelling, it is called His pavilion. Now a pavilion is a huge tent with very luxurious appointments, nothing permanent at all about it, it can be a gorgeous thing, but because of the fact that it is composed of cloth or skins or it is of temporary construction it is called by the Hebrew word or the Greek word that means tent, or tabernacle, or pavilion, or hut or dwelling. The word is not as specific as you might think.

In fact, you know how it is English, often times a word can change its meaning a great deal in how we use it in a sentence, depending if you use the verb form or the noun form. Whether you use it as an adjective or a participle, and the meanings change. The same thing happens when you start analyzing Greek words and Hebrew words as to what they mean. It really means a 'dwelling', which is what it boils down to. Usually it's a temporary dwelling.

Now we have examined, in the past, the typology of the feast of Tabernacles from a lot of different angles. Since the beginning of C.G.I., my former church association, we have expanded enormously on our understanding about what this means. We used to talk about the feast of Tabernacles picturing the millennium and Christ who comes back and establishes His kingdom and for 1000 years we're living under God's government.

We have begun to see over the years that there's a little bit more to it than that.

Meanings of the Word 'Tabernacle'

I want to turn back to Second Corinthians 5, to one of the uses of Tabernacle to help us understand what the festival means.

In Second Corinthians chapter 5 I want to look at the way people thought about the word 'tabernacle'. Paul writes to the Corinthians in verse 1 saying: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Now the words get to rolling back and forth and unfortunately Greek writers, including Paul, were not any more precise in the use of their words than we are in

the use of ours, and so it is a little tricky, when you start trying to nail them down on specifically what they mean. He uses two different words, one, the word 'house' 'oikia' (oy-kee'-ah) in the Greek which by in large means something like a house, like the one you live in, one that is more permanent. Then he uses "our earthly house of this tabernacle", and tabernacle is not permanent. That's the idea of the tent or dwelling or the semi-permanent situation we find ourselves in.

"If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Now he's talking about a dwelling, a place to live, in that sense, and he speaks of a house here on the earth being dissolved, and then he speaks of having a house that is eternal in the heavens. What does all of this mean? Listen on.

Continuing on in verse 2: "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: {3} If so, be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. {4} For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Now, this is a funny thing that he is saying here, and if you don't follow through you may miss it.

Verse 5: "Now he that has worked with us for this purpose is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. {6} Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:"

Oh, "At home in the body," I get it. If our earthly house or home of this tabernacle, this body were dissolved, we have a permanent dwelling that is not like this physical body, that can't be dissolved, that's permanent, and it is at this moment he says in heaven. It almost sounds like he is saying that we have a spiritual body up there and somehow, they were going to get in that or clothed by it. He actually mixes his metaphors as it turns out. Paul is prone to do that from time to time. He starts off talking about a house and something that you live inside of, and then he switches and starts talking about clothing, as though it's something you put on, and something you take off.

Our Tabernacle is Temporary

But the point is, this tabernacle that we live in, is temporary. Now, none of us have a lot of difficulty with that. The younger ones among us do not think about it very much. Those of us that are getting along in years, are becoming more and more painfully aware of the truth that it is temporary, it is going to be, and maybe I should say, it is in the process of being dissolved. Things start breaking down, things don't work like they should, hair gets gray, hair falls out, joints don't work like they did, it takes longer and longer to get yourself out of bed in the morning. When you hurt yourself it doesn't heal nearly as fast? As time goes on you slowly learn, "Hey, I am not going to be here forever."

You have come to the most simple and clearest meaning of the word 'tabernacle'. You're just camping out in that body that you have.

Over the years I've noticed something with my tents and camping equipment. You can go to the river or your hunting camp and you set the thing up and take it down, set it up and take it down, and the years go by and the little grommets wear out and tear loose from the tent, and then you bend the tent pole, and you tenderly straighten it out and it works the first time you do it, and you bend it again and straighten it out and it breaks. All of this stuff just keeps on wearing out. And you're reminded again and again how temporary you are.

Well, you know the feast of Tabernacles, in the sense of the constructing of a temporary booth to live in (Leviticus 23:42-43), is a reminder that we are temporary here. We are strangers, we are pilgrims, we're wandering through this land and that our home is someplace else.

Now Paul comes along and tells his readers in Corinth that we have grown in the situation that we're in. It's not that we don't want this body that we are living in, it is fine for now, but we do groan earnestly desiring to be liberated from the flesh and have a time come when we are really with God, like God, and no longer have to bear the burden of the flesh any more. So, when you look at it that way, we understand that the feast of Tabernacles, then in a sense pictures this time of sojourning here on the earth, as we struggle along in life, and realizing that we are only pilgrims and that we are not permanent, and we have no place permanent to live here.

Peter, later in one of his epistles, will speak of himself in the same way and he says "Yes, I think it's proper, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up" (2 Pet 1:13) to encourage you to live the way you should.

Now the Greek words are of some small interest here. The exact nature of the words is not important, but what they mean might be useful to you. The noun form of 'tabernacle' is skenoma and basically means a tent or a dwelling.

Jesus Camped Among Us

Let's turn back to the beginning of the book of John and I want to introduce you to a little different idea about Christ and about the feast of Tabernacles than you might have otherwise thought.

John chapter 1:1 "In in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. {2} The same was in the beginning with God, {3} All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. {4} In him was life, and the life was the light of men. {5} The light shines in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."

The message of what we read here in John is that in the very beginning there was an entity called the "Word". The 'Word' was with God and the 'Word' was God, which is rather different from our experience. Normally when you are with something you are other than the thing that you were with. In this case, you can be with God and also be God. He goes on to tell us that this 'Word' was the instrument of creation, that it was a source of light and it really identifies this 'Word' with God.

Now a few verses later in verse 14 he says, "The Word was made flesh, and camped among us and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the father full of Grace and truth." Obviously the 'Word' is Jesus Christ who came in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3).

Now the reason why it's sometimes useful to do word studies in the Greek and to go and track some of these things down, is that the connection between some of the words is just not found. You read through it and you understand what it says, but you don't understand the nuances sometimes that goes with it. The fact is that there are two very different words in Greek that have to do with the way we would say in English "I live in Tyler or I live among you, or I live here." They use in this translation the word "dwell." The problem is that there are two different expressions. One of them is the expression derived from the word 'house' and basically it means 'to find a house or a founded house.' If you live somewhere in that sense you live in a founded house, a permanent dwelling. That word is the one you normally would use when it says "He came, and he moved into our town and he lived among us. He took a dwelling here."

The other word in the Greek is the word 'skeno' and it simply means, the best translation that you will ever find for it is, 'to camp'. We all know what that means. It means if we were all camped out and someone comes to camp among us, he comes and brings his tent, his Coleman camp stove and his ice chest and we say there's your spot over there and he goes and sets up his tent, opens up his ice chest and pulls out a couple of drinks and says "Come on over." He's camping with us.

This is the exact phrase that is used for what Jesus is doing when it says, "the Word became flesh and camped among us." The word, by the way, is the verb form of the same noun that is translated elsewhere as Tabernacle.

He came and 'tabernacled', as it were, among us. Now that is one of the reasons why I think it makes a certain amount of sense, to first of all realize that it was about this time of year, feast of Tabernacles time, that Jesus began his ministry. It was about that time of year when He began to be about 30 years of age. It was about that time of year when he was baptized. It makes a whole lot of sense to assume that it was about that time of year that he was born, at the very time of year when everybody picks up and goes on their pilgrimages, sets up their tents, set up their camps and at that very time of year, the Son of God came to camp among us and for a period of time He would be among us.

Does it say something different to you that the "Word became flesh and tabernacled among us?" I think it makes sense to know that Jesus was born about the time of the feast of Tabernacles.

Camping Out

It is also interesting, at least in passing, that a man came to Jesus and said "Master, where do you live, I want to go to your house." "Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.""(Matthew 8:20). It wasn't that He had never had a house, it was that during this period of time Jesus was camping and from that time on He might stay with someone in a house, but most of time He and his friends were camping out.

Tabernacling

Now take your Bible and turn back to Acts 15. There are a lot of references in the New Testament to tabernacles and tabernacling. There are some I think of interest. In Acts the 15th chapter, some of them are just tossed to us in passing.

Acts 15:13. Now Acts 15 is the Jerusalem conference and there was a huge controversy that had come up over whether or not the Gentiles could be baptized, whether Gentiles could be a part of the church without being circumcised. After a lot of arguing, "James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: {14} "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:13-14).

Now this was from Peter's perspective and it was simply "This is what God has done." Peter, you will recall, was on the roof of his house and he got a vision from God, and he went and preached to Cornelius (Acts 10) and while he was preaching the Holy Spirit fell on all of these people. Peter's response was "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47).

James continues to say, having pointed to what Peter had told us, He said in Acts 15:15 ""And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written." It was necessary that the words of the prophets agree to this. Simply to have experienced this or to have some miracle or some event that had no foundation in the Bible or that was even contrary to the Bible would not carry any significance for the church.

Tabernacle of David

James continues to say: "With this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: {16} 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; {17} So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'"

Now this is a fascinating scripture, because when James speaks of the 'tabernacle of David', one is led to wonder, what it is that he is talking about? He didn't use the expression 'house of David', which is the word that I would normally expect to find, if he is talking about the dynasty or the ruling line or the authority of David. But remember that God spoke in the Old Testament about raising up the seed of David (2 Samuel 7:12, Micah 5:2), that Christ would be a son of David, and that Christ himself would sit on the throne of David his father. Now James says that the prophets tell us that God would raise up the tent of David which has fallen down and build again the ruins of it and set it up, so the residue of men might seek after the Lord. The way I read this frankly is that it seems that what James is saying is that Jesus is the tabernacle of David, which is raised up and restored. He is the one who in the flesh, who in the process of the time of his tabernacling among us on the earth, made it possible for the Gentiles to come to God. He said "the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things. {18} Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."

The difficulty you have with this particular passage is that you can go back and find part of that prophecy in one place and part of it in another. There is really no place where you find that entire prophecy intact. Let's just go back and take a look at a couple of prophecies that are sort of encompassed in it to see what they mean and what they say.

In Amos 9:11 "In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: {12} That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that does this."

Now when we read this in its context, it actually is talking about the restoration of the kingdom, it is not merely talking about Jesus Christ showing up on the scene providing a focal point to which the Gentiles may seek, which they were able to do. He said {13} "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. {14} And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them."

Now we are in a millennial setting. The prophecy having to do with the raising up of the tabernacle of David is millennial. Yet James said "What we are seeing here is that God sent Peter down to preach to the Gentiles. When He had poured out His spirit upon the Gentiles, this was spoken of by the prophets when it was said that "I will raise up the tabernacle of David." The Messiah would be of the seed of David. So many people of the time, and so many Jews to this day, did not expect the Messiah to come before the Messiah was to come permanently. They did not expect Him to come and camp. They did not expect Him to come and sojourn for a while. So consequently, they missed what they saw, and what they saw was that God through Jesus did temporarily raise up the tabernacle of David that was ruined.

Bethlehem Ephrathah

Micah is an interesting case in point. Micah 5:1 "Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us; They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek. {2} "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah." The word 'Ephrathah' means 'fruitful.'

"But you, Bethlehem fruitful, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me, The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." {3} Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel."

Once again, a prophecy that really looks like it's millennial. He says in verse 4 "He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth; {5} And this One shall be peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land."

This is a post-Assyrian captivity prophecy. And yet we are looking ahead to the time when Bethlehem is going to figure in this. Now what is fascinating is that all of these millennial prophecies speak of a Messiah who was to be born in Bethlehem. Everyone expected the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem and then to take the throne and to rule over all of God's enemies and establish peace upon the earth.

Why was there No Room in the Inn?

The truth is that the Messiah came and was born in Bethlehem. He was born in a manger. He was put out there because there was no room in the inn. Why was there no room in the inn? Why were Joseph and Mary there at that time? Well everybody knows that, don't they? There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all of the world should be taxed so Joseph and Mary went back to Bethlehem because he was a Bethlehemite and he had to go back there for the census and enroll at Bethlehem.

You know when a census like that came along it was not something that had to be done in some little narrow tiny time frame. I suspect that they had a period of months in which they could make their plans, get everything together, get down to Bethlehem, be enrolled and finally head back home. If you live in Galilee, you would normally go to Jerusalem once or twice a year for a festival. When would you go down to Bethlehem, which is about 5 miles from Jerusalem, in order to be enrolled? You would go at Passover or you would go at the time of the feast of Tabernacles. I suspect that Joseph and Mary had gone down to keep the feast of Tabernacles and to be enrolled at Bethlehem. And there was no room anywhere and there never is in Jerusalem or its environs at the feast of Tabernacles. It's a crowded place to be and having no place in the inn they tabernacled in a stable.

It makes a lot of sense in a way that Jesus would be born on the first day of the feast of Tabernacles or thereabouts, in a tabernacle, a makeshift place, laid in a manger and not at home.

He came here to camp out with us. He came here to tabernacle. He came not to have a permanent home, but He came to sojourn and be a pilgrim with us and to live with us for this period of time.

David Wanted to Build a House for God

Let's turn back to the Psalm 132. This is rather interesting in this light. Let's begin in verse 1: "LORD, remember David and all his afflictions; {2} How he swore to the LORD, And vowed to the Mighty God of Jacob: {3} "Surely I will not go into the tabernacle of my house, Or go up to my bed; {4} I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, {5} Until I find a place for the LORD, A habitation for the Mighty God of Jacob.""

This harkens back to the time of David when he said to Nathan "You know, I have a house to live in, and I'm not happy or comfortable about this because the house of God is lying waste." Now in this psalm it says "LORD, remember David, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, A habitation for the God of Jacob."

Up until this time God had His tabernacle and the ark of the covenant in the symbolic place of his dwelling, which was in the tabernacle, in a tent. God sojourned among Israel all this time.

God's response to David that night was rather interesting. He told David through Nathan the prophet that God is with you in anything you do. He went out and God spoke to him and gave him a message to take back to David (2 Samuel 7:1-13). He said, "You know, it was not my idea. It never entered into my mind, and I have never asked you at any time to build me a house." When God brought Israel out of Egypt and they were in the wilderness, He did say "I want you to build me a tent" (Exodus 26).

It was really appropriate that they build God a tent because everybody was living in tents. They were all camped out in the wilderness around Mount Sinai waiting for the Ten Commandments to be handed down and even in the best of circumstances they were going to be living in tents all of the way from Egypt until they entered the promised land and began to establish their own homes.

When David had gotten into the land and had built himself a house and began to see everyone else settling down and building houses, his heart smote him, and he said, "This doesn't make any sense, here's God living in a tent and we are living in houses."

The response I think, is beautiful, "I am not going to let sleep come to my eyes, I want to do this, I want to build a house for God."

Nathan said, "I am sorry, but you can't do it." It wasn't God's idea, He never wanted it, He never ask for it. "He will let your son build a house."

Psalms 132:6 "We heard of it in Ephrathah." Remember what Ephrathah means? It means fruitful. It is Bethlehem. "We heard of it in Bethlehem; We found it in the fields of the woods. {7} We will go into His tabernacle; We will worship at His footstool. {8} Arise, O LORD, to Your rest, You and the ark of Your strength." The term 'Your rest' is a millennial term looking ahead to a more permanent time.

Verse 9 "Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness and let Your saints shout for joy. {10} For Your servant David's sake, Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed. {11} The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: "One fruit of your body will I set upon Your throne. {12} If your children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon your throne for evermore. {13} For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation."

It is the place where God wants to live. Permanently? We'll see.

Psalms 132:14 "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; I have desired it. {15} I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. {16} I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. {17} There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for my anointed. {18} His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish."

These scriptures, Old Testament and some New Testament scriptures, look ahead to a time of permanence and talk about the time now being a time that is temporary.

I think it's really interesting to find that Jesus, as the Word of God, when the Word was made flesh came to camp among us and acknowledging in himself the temporary nature of everything we're doing and looking ahead to a more permanent time.

Tabernacle in Heaven

When you think about the more permanent times in the future you think about the book of Revelation. Turn to Revelation the 15th chapter and verse five "After that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened." Notice, in heaven there is a tabernacle.

It's oddly enough called a Temple of the tabernacle. Oddly enough as you read around in Hebrews and other places in the Bible where it speaks of the tabernacle and makes a comparison to the things in heaven, the implication that you read is that in heaven there is, not a Temple, but a tabernacle. There is a holy place. There is a holy of holies. There is an ark of the covenant. These apparently are in heaven because of the things that were made on earth that God commanded Moses to make were images, patterns and matches of the things that are in heaven (Exodus 25:9, 40, 26:30, Acts 7:44, Hebrews 8:5). Now that is something that you would not necessarily expect, isn't it? In heaven there is a tent or perhaps a pavilion if you wish, but still, a temporary dwelling.

In Revelation chapter 7:13 there is another reference to it. "One of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" {14} And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So, he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. {15} "Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will camp among them." Not live permanently.

It is interesting that there are only a few places where the Greek word 'skenoō' is used. You have it in John 1:14 and in Revelation 7:15, 12:12, 13:6 and 21:3 and it means 'to tent or encamp'.

All of the other places where the expression 'to dwell among' or 'to live with' is used, it is the verb form of the noun 'house' which means to make a permanent house or to found a house among them.

Here once again He comes back and says, "He who sits on the throne will camp among them." This 144,000 have God camping out with them.

Revelation 13 which is about the great beast. Let's begin in verse 6: "He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that camp in heaven."

Now, when you look at that, if you were to think in terms of a lot of what you might hear preachers preach about, and the songs that are sung about, that when we die we're going to go to heaven, that this earth is a temporary dwelling place, and we're going to go to heaven because heaven is permanent. We will walk on streets of gold in that city that is built four squares. The images that are conveyed are that heaven is permanent. Heaven is the house. You have a place prepared there and it is a permanent place, and yet when He gets around to talking about what's up there, we find a tent and people camping.

It is rather interesting finding it expressed that way, as though they are going to stay there, and in fact we know they are not. They are coming here to the earth (Revelation 21). The picture that we have of heaven is a camp.

When we get on down to the end of Revelation, here is where it really gets surprising. In Revelation 21:1 "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. {2} And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. {3} And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God (the tent, the pavilion if you will) is with men, and he will camp with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. {4} And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

It's No Surprise

Now when you think about these things, I don't think it would come as a terrible surprise for us to ultimately learn that Jesus really was born on the first day of the feast of Tabernacles, would it? Because the symbolism connected with what the festival means, the idea of a temporary dwelling, the idea of a lack of permanence, the idea that we are looking on toward a home that is way beyond anything that we will ever achieve on, around, or having to do with apparently even this planet.

It is all a tabernacle. It is all temporary and we all are looking way off in the future, and that God would come to us, and tabernacle with us at the feast of Tabernacles. I don't think that should come as a surprise to anybody.

When you go the feast this year, you might give a little thought to this passage of Scripture in Luke the second chapter and consider the fact that some of the things that were happening on that very night, under that very moon, with a big full moon in the sky shining down upon the lake, or shore, or sea or wherever you are, that on that very night, the first night of the feast of Tabernacles, that these events were coming to culmination.

Luke 2:1 "It came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. {2} (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) {3} And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. {4} Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) {5} To be taxed with Mary his

espoused wife, being great (pregnant) with child. {6} And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. {7} She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

These weren't people who didn't have a house. They were homeless at this time by choice, as I suspect, it was the feast of Tabernacles and nearly everybody was, for that time, homeless.

"They laid the child in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." {8} "There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. {9} And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. {10} And the angel said to them, Fear not, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. {11} For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

This did not happen in December. It happened sometime, if not on the day, very close to that same full moon, that we will be looking at on the first night of the feast of Tabernacles this year.

Verse 12 "This shall be a sign to you; You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. {13} And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, {14} Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. {15} And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go down to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us."

Great Old Hymns

You know, if you get out there on that first night of the feast of Tabernacles and you look up there in the sky and you think about what might have happened, in the timing of it all, here's a song that you might sing quietly to yourself on the first night of the feast of Tabernacles. "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright. Round young virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace."

I think about some of these great old hymns and all of a sudden, I realize that these people who wrote these hymns were not looking at December 25th. They weren't thinking in terms of Yule logs and Christmas trees and Santa Claus coming down chimneys. They were thinking of the second chapter of Luke. They were thinking of "Hark the herald Angels sing," they were thinking about "O little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie." They were thinking about the event where the Christ child was born, where God came into the world and for a period of time camped out with all of us.

When you think about that, you begin to realize that some of these beautiful hymns were written by someone who was so profoundly moved by the birth, the idea, that God would come among us and tabernacle in the form of a human being, so moved by the idea of what Jesus was to do, about who he was, about what he would accomplish, they sat down and wrote some of the most beautiful music that men has ever heard.

For us who are ministers who do not keep Christmas and who do not have an official birthday for Jesus Christ, we sometimes wind up preaching our sermons about the birth of Christ somewhere near Christmas Day.

For me. Not this year.

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. Do you know of anyone that actually believes that Christ was born on December 25th?
2. If by chance, the majority of Christians actually know that December 25th is really not Christ's birthday, then why do they observe Christmas?
3. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's point of counting backwards from the time of Jesus' death 3 ½ years to figure out the approximate time of his birth?
4. What are your thoughts about the possibility of Jesus being born on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles?
5. What are your thoughts about John 1:14 statement that Jesus 'camped' (tabernacled) with us?
6. There is no way to prove exactly the time of Jesus birth. However, do you agree that it makes good sense that it most likely happened around one of God's Holy days?
7. Or do you think that we should not try to figure out the time of His birth?
8. Have you ever studied the millennial prophecies?
9. Why do you think that there are matches of things in heaven that God commanded to Moses?
10. Was there anything new that you learned from Mr. Dart's sermon?