

The Tabernacle Offering

A few years ago, Trish and I joined a group of church brethren at a camp-out at the Cape Lookout State Park on the lovely Oregon coast.

Our hardier souls camped in tents, and the less hardy souls – including Trish and me – stayed in a motel. As it happened, the tents were probably more luxurious than the motel!

Many brethren camp for fun each summer; and some few still camp at the Feast of Tabernacles each autumn. This of course is in complete obedience to God's commands concerning our living arrangements during His Feast:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord.’ (Leviticus 23:33-34)

But did you know that the LORD God of the Old Testament – the Jesus Christ of the New Testament – also spent some time camping?

In this article, I would like to discuss the subject of **tabernacles**.

Temporary Dwellings

Here in Leviticus 23, the English word “tabernacles” is translated from the Hebrew word *Sukkah*...which can also mean: *tents, booths, pavilions* or *cottages*. The general, overall meaning is that of a temporary shelter. Continuing in Leviticus 23:

Also 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. And 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. And 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. You shall dwell in booths {Hebrew: *sukkah*} seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths; 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.” (Verses 39-43)

Not many church brethren camp in tents at the Feast anymore as many more did in the less affluent years gone by, when Feast camping was quite common. Today, most of the brethren stay in hotels or motels for the Feast. And that's O.K.! Hotels and motels are still temporary dwellings, so the correct symbolism is still there.

Jesus camped

Did you know that Jesus Christ camped? And very frequently too! There are some implications that, as a human being, once His public ministry began, He occasionally slept outdoors - probably quite often. Did you ever wonder what he meant when He made this statement?:

And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And 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 8:18-20)

If you think about it, His entire, human, physical sojourn on earth was one 33-year-long “camp-out. At the time of His miraculous human conception, He had voluntarily moved away from His permanent, comfortable home in Heaven, where He had lived for eternity with His Father:

John 1:14:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The word “dwelt” here is translated from the Greek verb *skenoo* which literally means to live in a tabernacle or a tent. A valid paraphrase of this verse would be this:

The Word became flesh and *tabernacled or tented or camped* among us.

But Jesus’ human sojourn was not His first “camping trip” to earth. As the YHWH of the Old Testament era, He frequently lodged in temporary dwellings whenever He was visiting the Israelites. For approximately five hundred years – from Moses’ time to Solomon’s time – He dwelt in tents – probably as many as three different ones!

These tents were, of course, portable, so that He could stay with the Israelites in their travels.

He had no complaints about staying in a mere tent. As He told Nathan and David, this was according to His own will and pattern and purpose (II Samuel 7:1-13).

THREE Tent-Tabernacles?

Earlier this year (2010), we received this e-mail letter, related to the subject of the Tent-Tabernacles:

I was listening to a Feast tape given by John Plunkett on October 13th 2006. In it he mentioned, "As there had been three Tent-Tabernacles, so there were ultimately three stone temples." What and when were the three? I remember the moving tent in the wilderness and the tabernacle in the promised land, but when was the third one?

The YHVH of the Old Testament lodged in temporary dwellings whenever He visited the Israelites. For approximately five hundred years, from Moses' time to Solomon's time, He stayed in tents – portable palaces – during the times when the Israelites were travelling. The scriptures indicate that there were probably more than just one Tent-Tabernacle – possibly at least three. Consider what He said to David via Nathan the prophet when the idea of a more permanent stone temple was up for discussion:

For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought up Israel, even to this day, but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another. (I Chronicles 17:5)

For a brief period before the main – and best-known – Tent-Tabernacle was built back in Moses' time, there appears to have been an initial, temporary one. Although the pattern for the main Tabernacle was given by God in chapters 25 to 31 of the book of Exodus, its construction did not begin until the time described in chapter 35. But back in chapter 33, before the construction of the main tabernacle had begun, we read this:

Moses took *his tent* and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it "*the tabernacle of meeting.*" And it came to pass that everyone who sought the LORD went out to *the tabernacle of meeting* which was outside the camp. So it was, whenever Moses went out to *the tabernacle*, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into *the tabernacle*. And it came to pass, when Moses entered *the tabernacle*, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of *the tabernacle*, and the LORD talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at *the tabernacle* door, and all the people rose and worshipped, each man in his tent door. So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from *the tabernacle*. (Exodus 33:7-11)

The second and main Tabernacle is well known by everyone and is described more fully in the following paragraph below.

The third Tent-Tabernacle (Hebrew “ohel”) in which God dwelt is mentioned in these verses:

David built houses for himself in the City of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it. (I Chronicles 15:1)

So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. (I Chronicles 16:1)

Tabernacle offering commanded

Of the three Tent-Tabernacles, the “main” one (which was the second one) – the one that we are most familiar with – was first introduced to the Israelites in Exodus 25:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that gives it willingly with his heart you shall take my offering. (Exodus 25:1-2)

Please notice that God only wanted offerings from people who really *wanted* – *from their hearts* – to give. We’ll come back to this later. But now, continuing in verse 3:

And this is the offering which you shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats’ hair, and rams’ skins dyed red, and badgers’ skins {perhaps goats’ or seal skins}, and acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary {i.e. a sacred or holy place} that I may dwell {Hebrew ‘Shakan’ which means to rest or to lodge} among them. According to all that I show you, after the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall you make it. (Verses 3-9)

Please note that this Tent-Tabernacle pictured both God’s heavenly throne and, ironically, the frail bodies of God’s people – so write the apostles Peter and Paul (II Corinthians 5:1-8; II Peter 1:13-14).

After the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land, the Tent-Tabernacle was pitched in various places: Gilgal, Shiloh, Nob and Gibeon. At the dedication of the first stone temple, Solomon brought the original Tent-Tabernacle to Jerusalem and into the new temple (II Chronicles 5:1-5).

Tabernacle offering given

Was the Tent-Tabernacle a shoddy, second-rate structure? No! It certainly was not! Remember that it was the LORD's portable palace and was built to **His** very own design and standards!

Bezaleel, Aholiab, and other **top** craftsmen were the very best of their field and were called by name – they were hand-picked by God Himself! The materials collected for the tabernacle were all of the very highest quality: the hand-crafted acacia wood, the very finest linen, and the gold, silver & brass. Some commentators have calculated that over 15 tons of gold, silver and brass were used in its construction! For a detailed description, may I recommend that you read “The Tabernacle” by William Brown?

Where did all these materials come from? They came from the Israelites, a people who were usually so very wayward! But in this case, many of the Israelites were very keen and super-generous:

And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the LORD's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and brought earrings and nose rings, rings and necklaces, all jewelry of gold, that is, every man who made an offering of gold to the Lord. And every man, with whom was found blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair, red skins of rams, and badger {goat? Seal?} skins, brought them. Everyone who offered an offering of silver or bronze brought the Lord's offering. And everyone with whom was found acacia wood for any work of the service, brought it. All the women who were gifted artisans spun yarn with their hands, and brought what they had spun, of blue, purple, and scarlet, and fine linen. And all the women whose heart stirred with wisdom spun yarn of goats' hair. The rulers brought onyx stones, and the stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate, and spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense. The children of Israel brought a freewill offering to the LORD, all the men and women whose hearts were willing to bring material for all kinds of work which the LORD, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done. (Exodus 35:20-29)

Please notice these phrases:

- Whose heart was stirred,
- Whose spirit was willing,
- Whose hearts were willing,
- As many as had a willing heart.

Back in Exodus 25, God asked for contributions of materials and labour – but only from those with willing hearts – *not* from any who did not give willingly!

Now, this offering for the Tent-Tabernacle project was a special offering.

On each Holy Day, the churches of God take up different kinds of offering – Holy Day Offerings. But the requirement is the same. God only wants contributions from people with willing hearts. If our hearts are *not* wholeheartedly in it, then we may as well not bother, because God will reject those offerings.

This is not a “sales-pitch” to coerce you into increasing the amount of your Holy Day Offerings. All of us know by now that God really does appreciate our offerings; but He does not actually *need* them! He owns the whole universe, and all the material in it. He is able, if He wanted to, to raise up mere stones to do His work! The amount of our offerings is of secondary importance. It is best, if possible, to plan our offering amounts before the Holy Days themselves – if possible, at the beginning of God’s sacred year.

Here are the main points, asking more questions: Are *we* as keen and as willing as were those Israelites of 3,500 years ago? Do *we* have generous, willing hearts? Are *we* eager to contribute to today’s “building program” – the building of today’s Tabernacle – the Church of God? Are *our* hearts as keen and as willing as were those Israelites in *our* Holy Day offerings, in occasional general, freewill offerings, and in paying God’s tithes? But most importantly, in zealous, active participation in God’ Work – in doing our part in the preparing of Christians for the Kingdom of God and in the preaching of His gospel as a witness to the world?

John Plunkett

Building Bridges, The Church of God Canada

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada

December 27, 2010