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Tabernacles...*humanity in the flesh*

The Festival of Tabernacles is an age-old divinely inspired festival that has relevance to all mankind throughout history

by James McBride

Many Christians share the understanding that the Biblical *Festival of Tabernacles* is a 'type' of the millennial reign on Earth of Jesus Christ. The festival has, however, layers of meaning that shed light on the entire history, past, present and future, of mankind.

The Festival was outlined by the LORD to ancient Israel as they departed Egypt, but existed long before. The 'ten tribes' lived in tents for their forty years spent in the wilderness, and the Festival, in one of its aspects, commemorates this. But it does have wider relevance for all of mankind.

To state the obvious, we humans are totally dependent for our life on the nourishment derived from our food. We are physical beings. It's not surprising, then, that mankind celebrates this. It's in the religious calendar of ancient faiths—and in the form of our autumnal 'harvest festivals' is firmly planted to this day in Christianity.

The ancient Canaanites of Biblical notoriety, for example, observed spring, summer and autumn festivals dedicated to the in gathered harvests. It's a time of thanksgiving to the Deity for earth's bounty. Not surprising, then, that the nation of Israel also observed 'harvest festivals' - Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles.

A Divine Plan

When our first parents rejected God's guidance they lost the right to live in Paradise—and direct access to their and our Creator. The LORD had literally walked and talked with them in the Garden. Having through their awesome sin rejected the divine way they had to leave 'the Garden'. They still had to till the soil, but there are indications in the record that it was no easy task. All of nature was topsy-turvy. Some commentators have suggested that for some seventeen centuries earth yielded its harvest reluctantly, and there may have been no defined seasons.

Only after the terrible world-shaking trauma of the Flood did 'mother nature' settle to the regular seasonal pattern on which we still depend.

The merciful LORD did not abandon mankind but instituted access to Himself through sacrifices. All nations developed a sacrificial system. We have a detailed record of the system inspired by God in the record of the nation of Israel and described in Leviticus chapter 23. Their significance was for all mankind—Adam's progeny down the centuries and to this day.

Sacrifice was, of course, a mere substitute for reality. They pointed forward to the one through whom sin could be conquered. Each sacrifice appointed by God had significance in the future life, death and work of Jesus. The sacrifices made by other nations obscured their true significance and were often corrupted, as among the Canaanites, to human sacrifice—a practice forbidden by God. Before the time of Moses, Israel had observed both sacrifices (Exodus 5:3) and festivals (v. 1).

Festival Reality

God's annual festivals similarly look forward to Jesus the Messiah and His divine plan for all mankind. They have as much significance in today's world as anciently. Probably more, as the end of the age approaches when they will have their final fulfilment.

There are hints in the Biblical record that they were observed in some form by the people of God long before Moses. As with sacrifices the nations corrupted the festivals and obscured their significance. This is true with the modern form of Christianity, which ignores the divine festivals and substitutes pre-Christian ones, as Easter, Christmas, All Hallows, the various saints' days.

At 'the Exodus' from Egypt the nation of Israel had the

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chance to put sacrifice behind them and experience the reality. They agreed to what was a spiritual ‘marriage covenant’ with the LORD, and to become a ‘kingdom of priests’ (Exodus 19:6). By this Covenant God did not require sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:22-24). But Israel soon embraced idolatry and, in consequence, were ‘divorced’. A sacrificial system, administered by a Priesthood, was re-instated until the birth of Christ made them unnecessary. [Check out the article **The Law of Life**]

Providence

Within Judaism to this day the Festival of Tabernacles is observed in part as a remembrance of the forty years they wandered in the wilderness. During those years they lived in tents—temporary dwellings, booths or ‘tabernacles’ - and experienced direct divine provision for every material and spiritual need. The LORD was with them daily, visible in a pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night. Their food and drink was miraculously supplied, and their clothing didn’t wear out. To this day within Judaism there is annually an observance representative of their long period of wandering.

The festivals, then, are an expression of thanks for ‘harvest home’, for divine provision of every need: food, shelter, God’s presence. They are no less significant for Christians of every race, and an appropriate observance amid the secularism of the world today. All outside the Christian faith can experience the same benefits by entering into the same Covenant.

As did the early church of God, it is appropriate to annually observe this ‘pilgrimage’ festival. It honors the Creator and is a reminder of His great plan.

Humanity in a Nutshell

Death is a guaranteed exit for all of us. Life is brief, temporary, a puff of vapor. The Festival of Tabernacles is, for all mankind, a picture of our brief existence. Not only for individuals or for nations but also for mankind in the flesh. A time will come when there will be no more flesh with all its trials and tribulations and when Earth will be peopled by a race of spirit beings. But not yet. That—Eternity—is represented by another festival.

Tabernacles is a snapshot of all of this. It is a *seven-day* festival picturing the whole of our physical existence as the human race—from man’s beginnings separated from God till Eternity begins. It encompasses every age of man right through what is known within Christianity as ‘the Millennium’ - the thousand-year reign on Earth of Jesus Christ as King of all kings, and LORD of all religious ‘lords’. During that time the physical survivors of man’s destructive activities in these last days, and their off-spring, will re-build a peaceful and prosperous world under the guiding hand of Jesus Christ at the head of a

supervisory army of the Spirit-born saints from all ages of man.

The prophet Zechariah was inspired (*ch 14*) to record that the entirety of mankind, from every nation, every faith, will be required—under duress if necessary—to observe The Feast of Tabernacles: *‘And it shall come to pass that everyone 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’* (*ch 14:16*).

The Devil Bound

Satan will be ‘locked up’ during the Millennial period, and released only *after* the thousand years are complete. It will be a test for this evil spirit as to how its lengthy years of confinement will have changed it. John again: *‘And he [an angel] laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent which is the Devil and Satan and bound him a thousand years...that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be fulfilled’* (Revelation 20:2, 3).

This evil spirit will then seek to once again—as now—deceive mankind. It will be a ‘cut-off point’ for the final generation of the thousand year reign of Messiah: will they worship Jesus—or this evil being?

Fate of the ‘Unsaved’

Many ponder the fate of all those who, down the centuries before and after the lifetime of Jesus, have never ‘accepted Christ’, or had opportunity to do so. ‘Tabernacles’ also includes, represented by its last day, the resurrection from their graves to physical life of all those who have died without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. [*request the article When Someone Dies*]

In their flesh they will be given opportunity to live a godly life, to be transformed by the divine Spirit, to experience life without the malign influence of Satan. Recorded the apostle John: *‘The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished’* (Revelation 20:5).

Prophetic Week

In parallel to the seven annual Bible festivals, there is also a ‘prophetic week’. The seven-day week is a strangling as far as the calendar is concerned. It doesn’t accurately tie in with movements of either sun or moon. It was, of course, the time assigned to the material Creation. The LORD ‘worked’ for six days—and rested on the seventh. The latter He humanely set aside as a day for man to rest from his daily toil and to fellowship with Him, to recharge our physical and spiritual ‘batteries’.

To further His plan He chose a godly man, Abraham and his progeny through his son Isaac, to raise up a godly nation, Israel. The sign (like a wedding ring!) of His

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Covenant with Israel—and it remains to this day for all His people—was the seventh-day Sabbath.

The apostle Peter gives an interesting insight. He tells us: *'a day represents a thousand years'* (II Peter 3:8). Each day of the literal week, that is, has prophetic meaning with each day representing 'a thousand years'. Man, having rejected divine guidance, has six 'days' to work—a notional six thousand years—to do his own thing: form governments, educate, devise religions *etc.* All without reference to his Creator. Then there would be a 'seventh day' lasting a thousand years for us to 'rest' and to allow Messiah to clear up the mess we have made.

This seventh 'day' represents the Millennium. During this time of God's direct rule the physical layer is mankind 'at rest' with Christ as King of kings, while the spiritual layer is the reign of Messiah with the resurrected saints as spirit beings.

Mankind in the Flesh

Tabernacles, in sum, covers the whole time man *in his flesh* has existed and will exist on Planet Earth. It encompasses the 'six thousand years' of human civilization during which we have ruined earth and pillaged its resources, time and again killed our fellow man in needless violence and wars.

It includes, too, that 'thousand years' of the direct hands-on rule of Jesus Christ as symbolized by the seventh day of the prophetic week, the Sabbath. And it embraces the period during which the dead will be resurrected, the veil of deception lifted from their eyes and have opportunity, for the first time, to become part of the divine Family.

There are, then, various layers of significance to this divinely-inspired annual festival that are important for all of mankind through all generations.

Tabernacles...

- is a festival representing the temporary presence on Earth through the centuries of all humanity in the flesh as we are born, live and return to dust
- is a remembrance by Israel's descendants of their time of their pilgrimage through the wilderness following their miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt
- reminds them of 'tabernacling' - living in temporary

dwelling in tents—during that time

- is an annual reminder to Christians that we, too, are '*strangers and pilgrims*' on earth, surrounded by a world that rejects God's way of life and 'enslaves' mankind
- and that Christians, through Jesus, have been freed from bondage to that world system
- is an autumnal 'harvest festival' of thanksgiving for God's bounty and provision of our material needs
- is a time for 'holy convocations' - assembling to hear God's Word proclaimed, and for fellowship with those of like mind
- incorporates the reign of Jesus Christ (represented by the seventh day of the prophetic week) over physical humanity as He restores Earth to its pristine beauty
- and teaches all who survive the coming time of awesome trial on Earth the true way to peace and prosperity
- includes those who experience, after the 'thousand years', Satan's final attempt to deceive and to usurp the authority of Jesus Christ
- encompasses the time of resurrection from death to physical life of all who have never been exposed to the good news of God's plans for us.

Closing Day

But that's not all there is to God's interest in mankind. The seven day Festival of Tabernacles is immediately followed by a final 'closing day'. It is an annual gathering of the people of God. Tabernacles encompasses mankind's earthly sojourn in the flesh. That will end. The plan of God is for all who will to join him in His spirit-born family, and this *life* is 'boot camp'. After Tabernacles all that remains will be spirit—each fit to accompany God through the coming ages.

The *Closing Day*—the eighth day of the Festival — represents that time. Eternity.

[*to learn more about this exciting future - and how you can be there - request the articles: **After the Resurrection and What Do You Mean Repent?***]

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