

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

ONE of the most important festivals that God ordained for His true worshippers to celebrate in this age of international distress and perplexity, the Last Day, is the Feast of Tabernacles. Yet it is the one most of those who profess to be Christians treat with utmost neglect.

The Feast of Tabernacles is an annual festival that was instituted by the Almighty God since the days of Moses the prophet during the historic journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. God's instruction was to the effect that the feast should be celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month of the Jewish year, and to last eight days. On that occasion the children of Israel were by law enjoined to make offerings to the Lord and to dwell in booths as a memorial of their experience in the wilderness when God made them live in booths under His protection. The ordinance concerning the feast is recorded at Leviticus 23: 33-43. God said: "Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye 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 ye 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 ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days it shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths 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." – Leviticus 23: 39-43.

Ingathering

Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 16: 13-17, it is written: "Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates ...and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee."

No doubt, the Feast of Tabernacles was of great significance to the Jews. It was also known as the Feast of Ingathering for the fact that it was usually celebrated when they had gathered in their crops. – Exodus 23: 16; 34: 22.

The reading of the law of God to the hearing and understanding of the people was a very important event in the celebration of the feast. This was so because of the sanctifying effect the law was capable of having on the Jews so "that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God". – Deuteronomy 31: 10-13.

When the Jews returned from Babylonish captivity and resettled in Canaan, there was an occasion when they gathered together and caused the book of the law of God to be read to the hearing of all of them. It was on the second day of that occasion when "the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites" were assembled before Ezra, the scribe, so as to understand the words of the law, that they came across the ordinance of the Feast of Tabernacles. As it is written:

"And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written."

Following this discovery from the law book, the people went all out to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles with great jubilation. The grandeur of the occasion was tremendous, and the rejoicing of the celebrants was so much that Nehemiah recorded that “since the days of Jeshua (Joshua) the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so”. The prophet then stated: “And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.”- Nehemiah 8: 14-18.

Spiritual Jews

Some people argue that the Feast of Tabernacles has nothing to do with Christianity and that it was meant for the Jews alone. They therefore ask whether we of the GKS are Jews.

What many people do not know is the fact that there are spiritual Jews as there are natural Jews. The natural Jews are those who are Abraham’s children in the flesh – that is, by the circumstance of birth. They are supposed to be the worshippers of God like Abraham their fleshly father, but the pity of it is that some of them, today, neither believe in God nor in Jesus Christ as the Saviour. On the other hand, the spiritual Jews are those who become the children of Abraham by faith notwithstanding their place of birth or origin. In this Christian Era, it is the spiritual Jews – not those in the flesh – that are acknowledged as the “Israel of God” or the children of God. – Romans 9: 6-8; Galatians 6: 12-16.

Said St. Paul: “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

(Romans 2: 28, 29) He further said: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham...So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” – Galatians 3: 7-9.

Anyone who has a vivid understanding of the Scriptures as shown in the foregoing explanation, will not ask as to whether we are Jews. Indeed, we are spiritual Jews and so too are other persons who are of the Abrahamic faith and who worship God in truth as ordained by Him through Jesus Christ. In fact, anyone who is a true Christian is a spiritual Jew.

Christ’s Participation

It is of great interest to note that Jesus Christ, the Founder of Christianity, celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles and thus set the pace for his followers. The occasion afforded him a good opportunity to discharge his functions as a great teacher of truth- “a Minister of the Sanctuary, and of the true Tabernacle”. – Hebrew 8: 1, 2.

The record of St. John about Christ’s participation in the celebration of the feast is as clear as it is fascinating. He stated that when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was close at hand, the brothers of Jesus Christ asked him to go to Judea for the feast so that his disciples might see his works. They portrayed him as one who sought to publicise himself and so they urged him derisively to go and “shew thyself to the world”. – John 7: 2-4.

Some people ignorantly argue that those brothers of Jesus were his disciples. No, they were not. It is clearly written in verse 5 that “neither did his brethren believe in him”. They were his brothers in the flesh being the children of Mary.

Jesus was a man with a mission and so he always took care to guard against the machinations of his enemies who hated him for exposing their evil deeds and whose desire was to make his mission a failure. Therefore, he told his brothers that the right time for him

to go to the feast had not yet come. He added: "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." – Verses 6-8.

After his brothers had gone to the feast, "then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret". This he did because the wicked Jews looked for a chance to kill him. But when the festival was half over, he no longer hid himself neither did he conceal his identity any more, rather he entered the temple and taught a vast multitude the doctrine of God. And when the Jews expressed astonishment at his learning and Intelligence, he declared: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. – Verses 10-17.

On the last and great day of the feast, Jesus Christ was very conspicuous in view of the active part he played. With great enthusiasm and earnestness, and in his characteristic convincing clearness, Christ directed a soul-saving message to all peoples of the earth. As it is written: "In the last day; that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." – Verses 37, 38.

From the foregoing, it is abundantly clear that Jesus Christ celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, and it is nothing short of unfaithfulness, therefore, for any of his disciples to refrain from following the example of Our Lord and Saviour by celebrating the feast.

Watchtower Society

The controversy in regard to the Feast of Tabernacles sparked off by the members of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in the forties is still fresh in our memory. They criticised the GKS for observing the feast and contended that Jesus Christ did not take part in its celebration. But in 1950, the "Jehovah's witnesses" in Nigeria were covered with shame when the hierarchy of their organisation in the United States published an article captioned, "THE REAL FEAST OF INGATHERING UNDER WAY", in the Watchtower magazine issue of July 1, 1950.

The Watchtower has the following to say: "The apostle John gives an account of Jesus' attendance at the feast of tabernacles, and of the things he said and did, which leads us to the conclusion that this visit was a very important one; and so we find it to be in showing the importance of the feast of tabernacles ... The reading of the law at the feast of tabernacles was for the instruction of the people. The religious leaders of the Jews were looking for Jesus at this time, to kill him. In view of this fact some might ask, why did Jesus expose himself publicly? He here began the fulfillment of this type. He was teaching the truth to those that would hear, thus showing them the way of life and happiness. There the type began to be fulfilled."

In spite of all this, the members of the Watchtower Society are still confused about the significance of the feast in our time!

Prophetic Instruction

Although the precedent set by Jesus Christ is enough to guide us Christians, there is a definite prophetic instruction to the effect that the worshippers of God in these last days in which we live should celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. As it is written: "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem (God's Kingdom organization – Rev. 21: 2) shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto worship the King, the Lord of host, even upon them shall be no rain (rain means the Lord's blessing). And if the family of Egypt (Egypt here means spiritually, the ungodly) go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the

plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt (the ungodly), and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.” – Zechariah 14: 16-19.

This prophecy was not meant to fulfil in the days of the prophets of old but in this last days of this evil world when all nations irrespective of race, colour or tribe are called to worship the Almighty Father through Jesus Christ. But we must point out that Christians are not to observe the letters of the law but the spirit of it which gives life. (2 Corinthians 3: 5,6) In view of this, we are not bound to keep the feast in the seventh month but at any chosen time as the Lord's spirit directs (and we observe it this year, December 15-22). And so too we do not make burnt offerings since Jesus Christ, the antitypical lamb, had been sacrificed for mankind once and for all. (John 1: 29; 1 Corinthians 5: 7; Hebrews 10: 5-12). However, we do offer spiritual sacrifice – “the sacrifice of praise to God” through the preaching of His word, giving of thanks and so forth.- Hebrew 13: 15.

In the light of the scriptural authorities adduced in this sermon, readers who are unbiased and are of goodwill will appreciate why the God's Kingdom Society celebrates the feast annually. And for keeping the feast commandment, we have always enjoyed with thanks, the blessings symbolized by rain which the Lord promised to pour upon the celebrants of the Feast of Tabernacles. – Zechariah 14: 16, 17; Ezekiel 34: 26; 1 John 3: 22.