

What We Can Learn From Booths

A Yearly Reminder of Our Pilgrim Status

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If I were to bring up the word *booth* in normal conversation most people would probably think of one of several things: a phone booth (for you Superman fans), maybe a ticket booth, a voting booth, a restaurant booth (we will probably be spending a lot of time in restaurant booths over the next week or so), or maybe we might think of an exhibition booth such as those at a trade show. Those who attended college in Big Sandy would probably think of "Booth City" and the booth in which they spent a great deal of time in study and other things. Some may have even misheard and began to think of Captain Morgan or Jim Beam. No, we have not come here to keep the Feast of "Booze"; it is the Feast of *Booths* or the Feast of Tabernacles. If we know anything about the words, we know that a booth and a tabernacle are very similar. Any good dictionary will show this.

Booth came into the English from Old Norse; we do not hear about that too frequently. We may have assumed it came down to us from Old English or something like that; but *booth* came down from Old Norse, and it simply means "a dwelling." Even back then, back in the pre-A.D. 1000 Dark Ages, it had the connotation of being a temporary shelter, an impermanent place. Just from the length of the word *tabernacle* we probably know where it originated. It is from the Latin, and it means "tent" or "hut," also implying a temporary shelter. The two words are basically synonymous. One just comes out of the Old Norse and the other comes out of the Latin. Usually, in these cases in which there is a simple word, it comes out of the Old English or Old Norse or something like that, as with *booth*. If you want a really complex word to sound erudite and intellectual, use the word *tabernacle*.

The Hebrew word *sukka* (sometimes spelled *succa* but pronounced with the hard *K* sound) is the singular form of the word and means "a tabernacle, hut, temporary dwelling." If you know anything about the Jewish observation of this time, you know that they call it Succoth. This is the Feast of Succoth. This is the plural form of the word, meaning "Feast of Tabernacles." There is nothing unusual about that, nothing strange; it just means Feast of Tabernacles—just like what we are now keeping.

We have come to understand God's instructions concerning living in booths these eight days in its more general meaning: that it refers to temporary dwellings. There are some who say that you have to live in a hut constructed of branches of some sort, or that you have to live in a tent or something like that. However, we have always taken it in its more general sense. As long as it is temporary and it is not your own place, then it is

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just fine.

We often go to a place that is far away and you cannot return to your own place every night, anyway. Most of us, then, rent a hotel or motel room, and some few still camp in either a tent or camper or an RV. When there were more Feast sites back in the Worldwide days and there was a Feast site where there was a regular congregation, people would still actually leave their homes and go to a motel. Even if it were only five minutes down the road, they would still keep the Feast as if they were truly traveling a thousand miles away. I remember in Pasadena and surrounding areas that people would rent their homes out during the Feast and make a little money.

God does not do anything capriciously. His every instruction contains lessons to enhance our spiritual understanding and our wisdom. In other words, this festival is not called the Feast of Booths just because God thought that it was a neat name, or because, on a whim, He thought that it would be nice to call it the Feast of Booths and make everybody live in a tent. There is a reason behind what He does. Thus, when God commands us to dwell in temporary dwellings for eight days at the Feast, He means for us to take away definite lessons to apply—not just now at the Feast, but in our daily walk toward the Kingdom of God. In a little bit, we are going to get to some of those lessons that we can learn from booths.

Before we get to that, though, I want to lay a little foundation. During the Feasts and Holy Days, the place we go for that foundation is Leviticus 23. We will read part of the section on the Feast of Tabernacles, which, I think, is by far the longest section in Leviticus 23.

Leviticus 23:39-43 "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a Sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a Sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for 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 for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

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There are a few details here that put our dwelling in booths during the Feast into perspective. I want you to notice in verse 39 that, right off the bat, it tells us on what the Feast centers: the end of the harvest. The harvest has come, and the people have gathered in the fruit of the land; and now they have a festival in order to celebrate God's blessings, the bounty that God gave to them. They praise God for all that He has given them throughout the year. Not only could they thank God for the fruit of their labors, but they could also enjoy them. This was the time in Israel when all of the larders were full, and the grain silos were full. The storage bins were full of apples and oranges or whatever it was that they had—wine and grapes and that sort of thing that had just been harvested (it would have been new wine, of course). They had all of this bounty to enjoy and to feast upon. They were ready by this time, too, for some enjoyment and feasting and fun and fellowship because they had been working their tails off for months to bring the harvest in and now they were ready for a bit of a break. Therefore God gave them a festival in which they could do that; and in many respects, this verse 39 dwells on these physical aspects of the Feast.

However, as we have come to understand in New Testament times, there is a spiritual aspect to this Feast, as well. We not only feast on the physical food and the bounty that God has given us, but we have a wonderful opportunity during the Feast to have a harvest of spiritual food where we get instruction—spiritual instruction from God's Word—every day for eight days straight. The way the Feast falls this particular year, we have three days—two Holy Days and the Sabbath—on which we receive this instruction both morning and afternoon. Therefore, we have this wonderful opportunity to fill our stomachs and, at the same time, fill our minds. This all comes from God, and we have to remember that.

Verse 40 expands on this primarily from the physical side, but as I said, the spiritual overtones are still there. This is where we start getting into the idea of booths. The Israelites were supposed to go out and gather boughs, branches of various trees, and weave them into a booth, a shady booth of one kind or another. This was supposed to remind them of the harvest they had just taken in, and in turn stir them to rejoice before the Lord.

Picture this: they make a booth. They put it up and then go feast, as do we. Then, they would come back after the feasting and, because it was dark, they would go to bed. They would wake up early the next morning and open their eyes and see the boughs of these leafy trees—as it says here, "the fruit of beautiful trees, palm trees and willows of the brook." They would look and see, perhaps, a branch that they had pulled from an orange tree. It was still green with leaves, and they would look up and think to themselves (if they were a thinking type of people), "You know, this is a wonderful land

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in which we live. We have the perfect climate for growing citrus trees and because of this we get loads of fruit every year. Are these oranges not delicious? God sure is good to us, is He not?"

This is why God wanted them to use all these different kinds of trees. They might wake up on another morning facing the willow branches. If they started thinking about the willow tree branch and the willow tree, they might think, "You know, this willow tree would not grow anywhere but where there is plenty of water. Willow trees love water. Just think: if we were out in the desert, we would not have willow trees. But God has brought us into a land that is well-watered, and willow trees can grow here. Is that not amazing? God is pretty good to us, is He not?"

Then on another day, it was another tree. They could go through all eight days waking up every morning and thinking about the bounty that God had given them—not just the fruits or the vegetables but also the hardwoods and softwoods. They could think about the blessings that had been given them in the land by simply observing the boughs they had plucked from whatever types of trees they had used to construct their booths. They could think about the wonderful life they had because of God's blessings. Really and truly, God had brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. God had not left them in a barren, treeless, and waterless wilderness. He had fulfilled His promise.

God gets to this in verse 43 when He says that He wanted them to dwell in booths "that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." Then He says, "I am the Lord your God." He wanted them, every Feast after they had made their booths, to think about their situation compared with what the Israelites had to go through when they were redeemed from Egypt. Then He says, "I am the Lord your God."

What did He want them to think about in putting those two bits together? He wanted them to think, "Aha, you know what? They had it pretty bad, but God did bring them out of Egypt. And then He brought them into the land. And all that He said He would do came to pass. Not one thing that He promised did He fail to do." He was *their* God. They were supposed to think about these things as they dwelt in booths.

We could look at this in a number of ways. We could think of it in terms of what God had done to release their forefathers from slavery and how He provided all that they needed on that forty-year wilderness wandering. As I mentioned, this was to remind them of what kind of God they served. They served a God of liberty, a God of providence, a God of might, a God of security and leadership—a God who keeps His promises down to the letter. It was also to remind them, as I have been intimating here, that their own

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circumstances were far better in the land than what their forefathers had gone through out in the wilderness.

Just think about some of the things God did for them out in the wilderness. They would stop somewhere with no water and He then sent Moses to hit a rock and *whoosh!* Out would gush some water! There was enough to quench the thirst of—how many people?—two, two-and-a-half million plus all the livestock! This was not a trickle! This was not one of those wells that you dig out in the desert and you wait for it to fill up slowly—a seep-well. No, this was a gushing river! It had to be to quench the thirst of all those people! God did nothing small.

When He gave them food to eat, He sent them whole flocks of quail! I am not talking about going out in the woods to hunt in the grass where one or two would fly up. This was, perhaps, a flock of millions of birds that He would send on a wind; and the people would go out and, basically, pluck them out of the air! When God made them walk that long distance, He provided an umbrella for them so that they would not get burned from the sun. He did it Himself in the pillar of cloud. He rained manna on them for forty years without fail—except on the Sabbath, of course. Everything He did, He did big!

When they battled, He sent Aaron and Hur after Moses, and they would hold his arms up—and Israel would win. Other times, He would find some other way to do it even though the Israelites were untrained in war. They had to cast off the weaponry of the Egyptians; they had inexperienced generals—but they won because God was with them.

Everything that God did for them He did big and they were able not only to survive but to thrive under those conditions. However, we read time and time again that Israel never appreciated all those things that God did for them. If you were to walk into the midst of those two and one-half million Israelites and just pick one of them out and ask him, "What are your feelings about your present situation?" he would say, "Well, we have been wandering all this time, and I feel kind of unsettled. I do not know if we are going to get there. It is an awfully long way, and we have been out here for an awfully long time. Things just do not look too good.

"We have heard that this Promised Land is somewhere to the north of us, but Moses keeps going south. I do not know what is wrong. Our leadership is suspect. You just cannot get good leaders these days! He goes away for forty days here and forty days there. I think he has a woman, but why she camped up on Mount Sinai we will never know! This is an awful place in which to wander! There is hardly a tree out here. The sun is always out; it is out nineteen hours a day. It is hot. Water is at a premium. It is just

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an awful thing! Sand gets in your sandals and between your toes; you know how that is!

"I just wish we would get where we are going and get there soon. I hear that the Amalekites are massing. If we do not get there soon, they are going to come and massacre us! We do not have a chance! We do not have a fort here. We do not have any walls. That Moses fellow just keeps saying, 'Trust in the Lord.' He sounds just like every other preacher. We are all likely to die out here!"

Truer things have never been said! They complained terribly about all their supposed privations, and they became weary of their wandering, feeling that it would never end. Yet God wanted the generation of Israelites who were in the land (let us call them the present generation) and who were keeping the Feast of Tabernacles to compare their own situation, their own conditions, with what their ancestors went through in the wilderness. He wanted them to come to the inescapable conclusion that they had it good—really good!

Even though God took care of them in the wilderness, there were, nonetheless, privations; there were things through which they had to go. When God brought the people into the land, though, it was a good land and there was plenty to do. There was work for everyone and, if you were willing to work, you could make a good living. God set it up so that you had your own land. Even if you went through a bad spell and had to sell your land, you would get it back at the Jubilee and you could start over again. He had set everything up so that life was good. "We have festivals every few months. We get to eat a lot. In the one festival He says, 'Go get the strong drink; whatever your heart desires!' God really takes care of us!"

However, He wanted them—and, of course, He wants us—to think about the stark contrast between what life could be like and what life is like because God has blessed us. Not only has He blessed us, but He has *really* blessed us! We need only to sit down and think about how it could be and how it was for some.

In verse 42, God explicitly commands, "All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths." Some commentators basically brush this off, saying that it just means all Israel; but God does not say things without a specific meaning behind them. "All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths." A native Israelite, then, suggests one who is born under the covenant, one who has a special covenantal relationship with God, one who has been blessed because he has become a part of this covenant and because he has started to understand God—those who have begun to walk together with God toward the destination, whatever they understand that destination to be.

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For us, our destination is the Kingdom of God. This is saying that someone who has such a relationship, someone who is under the covenant, has much to learn about this relationship—both its obligations and its rewards—by living in a booth for a week. God wanted every Israelite under this covenant to do this every year in order to learn certain lessons.

Before we go into those lessons, I want to tell you one thing that I *do not* think it is: I do not think that God intended the booth to elicit from us a feeling of privation. If you and I were to have to go out there and pluck branches off a tree and make a booth, we would think that it was pretty bad. We would say, "Man, that Capitol Plaza is looking better all the time. I will not complain when I turn on the cold water and it comes out warm. I will not complain about the kids running down the hall. The beds are nice compared to an earthen floor. It is a little drafty in this booth and the wind just whips through."

Remember, this is the Feast of Tabernacles! The Feast of Tabernacles is the Feast in which we can really live it up! We can live it up out of a booth just as well as a hotel room. I have heard that some of the best times in Church of God history took place in the old Piney Woods out in Big Sandy where people camped and fellowshiped and ate together and had sing-alongs and you-name-it! They had a wonderful time, and they did not care that they stumbled back to their tent or whatever it was late at night, fell into their bed, and went to sleep; because when they got up the next morning, they were off to services again.

They hardly spent any time in that place, anyway. It was not a place of privation, nor was a booth supposed to be a place of privation because the Feast of Tabernacles is about living it up in a way that pleases God. Because we appreciate the blessings He has given, He gives us instructions that teach us how to have whatever our hearts desire. As long as it fits within His proper code of conduct, He says, "Go for it! This is your time to have a really good time and to enjoy the blessings, the fruit of your labor. If you want the wine, have some wine. If you want a good steak, go for it. If you want to have a strong drink, have a strong drink. Keep it within the bounds, but this is the Feast of Tabernacles. It is a feast; enjoy it!" God has given these blessings to be enjoyed—and instructions for so doing.

What do we do in our motel rooms? We sleep there. We get ready there. We might entertain there once or twice during the Feast and have somebody over for a snack or something to drink. We put all of our stuff there, and it is a good thing that these rooms are big. That is about it. We do not do a whole lot more there. There are some things we can learn from staying in temporary dwellings; but I do not think, first of all, that it is about privation because it is about the other thing: it is about abundance.

Number one: the first lesson that we can learn is a sense of impermanence.

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

It is easy to think of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, upon whom God founded the nation of Israel and who we believe are among the most righteous men who have ever walked this earth—certainly Abraham is the Father of the Faithful—as being wealthy and settled individuals, but this is hardly the case. When I was in college, Richard Case taught a class in biblical geography, and it was our job as students to buy a map book. We would have to, as part of our assignments, trace the journeys of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I can recall this correctly, we would trace, let us say, in blue the journeys of Abraham. We would squiggle all over from Ur down to Haran and down into Israel. It would go through Israel and then head back up. He was all over the place: Beersheba, Hebron, you name it!

Then we would have to do the journeys of Isaac. He did not go quite so far, but he had a lot of little journeys in which he and his men dug lots of little wells and then got run off, and then they would go and dig some more wells. He was all over, too. Jacob was just *boing, boing, boing*—all over! He would go here and there, wherever Laban was. Then he would come back through. Bethel was one place he was well-known, and Penuel was another place.

We finally had three very distinct lines in this map book, and they looked like little spider webs. There were trails everywhere these men went. They would stop in one place for a while and live and trade and do what they did. Their flocks would be on one hill and Lot's flocks would be on another hill—the better hill. They would go here and there and everywhere, but they had no permanent dwelling place. These men lived a long time!

Abraham left Ur when he was seventy-five years old because God told him to go to Canaan. He packed up and went, but he lived for one hundred years more. Isaac lived to be 180, and Jacob lived to be 160 or so years. They lived long lives. Could you imagine living, like Isaac, 180 years in a tent? I am sure it was a nice tent—the finest black goat hair tent he could find—and he had the money to pay for it. Nevertheless, he lived in a tent.

I do not know if there was a more righteous man than Isaac, except maybe his dad and certainly Jesus Christ. Isaac was a paragon of virtue—and God made him live in a tent for 180 years. Maybe he got Sarah's tent; at least, that is what we understand. I do not think that we would put up with living in a tent. Of course, there is no way to do that these days. Since God says that eighty years is our limit, we do not have that opportunity. Even so, these men lived in an unsettled and impermanent manner. They did not own any land except their burial plots. They were strangers and pilgrims and sojourners in a land that was not theirs. It had been promised to them, but God did not give them the land—the title deed, let us say—at that time.

Many other faithful servants of God lived in tents for long stretches of their lives. Moses and Aaron lived at least forty years in tents. Moses lived, perhaps, eighty years in a tent. He was out keeping Jethro's flocks. Think of David. He must have had a little pup tent or something out there keeping the sheep, unless he came in every night. That is certainly possible, but I would imagine that, as he watched over the sheep, he stayed out in the elements. Plus, since he spent a great deal of his time at war, there was a military tent in which he had to live for long stretches. I am sure that many of the prophets were itinerant and walked all about Israel and just slept wherever they could. The apostles were not just confined to Israel; they walked all over the known world! They most certainly slept in tents, in inns, at the side of the road, and wherever they could as they preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

The history of the Church itself is one of moving from place to place to place, whether it was an alpine village or coastal city or wherever it was. The Church has had to move on. It could not get settled in one place for very long before persecution came and forced them to go to some lesser-inhabited place or to a place where the Word of God had not before been heard. Thus, we see that a settled existence has been rare for God's people right from the beginning.

Did you notice there was one Person I kind of skipped over? Well, here He is:

Luke 9:57-58 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him [Jesus], "Lord, 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."

Even our King, our Lord, our Master, our Savior did not have a permanent place to live. He lived in temporary dwellings all throughout His ministry. This man who said that he

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wanted to follow Christ was told, "Okay, are you willing to live as I do?" This is a warning to us that we had better accept the fact that a settled life may be and probably is out of the question.

We may live in the same place for many years in the same house and in the same town, but our lives will be full of turmoil. That is the unsettled existence of a Christian. God will send tests and trials of our faith. We will feel as though we are like some of these people we have seen in the Bible, those who had no settled existence. We will feel as though we are always on edge. We will feel as though we are always on the move. We will feel as though we do not know what is going to hit us next. This is par for the Christian course.

As you go through this Book, you do not find very many prophets and apostles and saints who lived in one place for very long or who were just settled. Elisha was on the run and going here and there because of famine. He was off to Syria and other places. Obscure men about whom we do not know much, such as Jonah, went to Assyria but wanted to go to Tarshish.

It is hard to find an example of a person in the Bible who lived a settled life, because that is not the way God works. As I said, this is par for the Christian course. When we think about it spiritually, we should not worry about this present evil world and our settled existence in it because it is not our inheritance. Our inheritance is the world to come. This world seems permanent; it seems real, solid. The things that happen certainly happen in it. However, we have to have a different perspective. This is one of the lessons of living in a booth that we have to learn: we have to have a sense of impermanence.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction [have you ever heard about Paul's *light affliction*? You might want to check out what he considered "light affliction"], which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

If we have any idea about living a settled life, we are in for a big disappointment because God wants us looking beyond what we can see, what we can feel, and what is the around and the about. He wants us looking forward to when we will really be settled:

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in the Kingdom of God. Booths help us to remember that.

The second one: God wants us to learn a sense of movement. This is very similar to the other one—a sense of impermanence—but this one has a little bit different emphasis. Let us go to the "journeys of the children of Israel" chapter—the wanderings of the children of Israel.

Numbers 33:1-3, 5-29 These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the Lord. And these are their journeys according to their starting points: they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians...Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Succoth [booths]. They departed from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. They moved from Etham and turned back to Pi Hahiroth, which is east of Baal Zephon; and they camped near Migdol. They departed from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, went three days journey in the Wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah. They moved from Marah and came to Elim. At Elim were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there. They moved from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. They moved from the Red Sea and camped in the Wilderness of Sin [I wonder why they called it that]. They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. They departed from Dophkah and camped at Alush. They moved from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. They departed from Rephidim and camped in the Wilderness of Sinai. They moved from the Wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth Hattaavah. They departed from Kibroth Hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. They departed from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. They departed from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon Perez. They departed from Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah... Libnah... Rissah... Rissah... Kehelathah... Kehelathah... Mount Shepher... Mount Shepher... Haradah... Haradah... Makheloth... Makheloth... Tahath... Tahath... Terah... Terah... Mithkah... Mithkah... Hashmonah...

Do I need to go any further? Were the children of Israel settled at all, or were they moving? This all has a point. If you like I will read further in the chapter—those were hard words, by the way; that was probably the hardest stretch of reading I have ever

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done in my whole life—but the point is that they were headed somewhere. This might seem to be the roadmap from Hades because if you were to look at where these places actually were located, it is a zigzag line going all over the Sinai Peninsula—and we only got through the first few years of their wandering. We read to verse 29 and the following 20 verses chronicle still more wandering. They went a long way and they kept moving!

This point—He wants us to learn a sense of movement—while resembling the last one—developing a sense of impermanence—emphasizes that we are seeking a goal while we move. We are not just unsettled; we are not just moving; we are moving toward something. Even though we zig here and zag there, and we take two steps back and three steps forward and then ninety-two steps back, and then we kind of get one hop and a jump here and there, and then we scootch over and we move over this way and then that, and then finally we are back to where we started. Then we can start over and do it right this time and maybe go four steps forward and two steps back and then—do you get what I mean? We wander all over the place. We have no idea where we are going in the near term, but we are moving toward a goal.

God knows where the goal is. God told Moses, "I am going to use you to lead these people to the Promised Land and you will not know where you are going. But I will take you there; just follow. The cloud will lead you in the way to go."

By the way, Charles Whitaker had a wonderful article about zigging and zagging in the *Forerunner*; it was actually called *In Brief* back then. I think it was 1993, and it was about following the puck and Wayne Gretzky and all that. Go look it up; it was a very good article.

Exodus 40:34-38 Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle [This was just after they had finished putting all of the tabernacle together and had all the accoutrements in there and the cloud covers the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord fills it and things are fine]. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle [showing that He was with them]. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys [and we now understand about all their journeys]. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up, for the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

For forty years, that cloud never left them. Think about it: if you were Joe or Jane Israelite, you would have had no say about when you moved or when you stayed or where you went. God led them, at His will, for the whole forty-year journey. He had a huge signpost out there saying, "This is the way," and they followed the signpost for the whole way.

They would come to a nice place (or not) and set up camp and stay the night. They may have awakened the next morning just to find the whole camp packing, and off they would go. Then maybe they would come to a rotten place (or maybe not; you never know out there in the wilderness) and set up camp. Then they would get up early the next morning, thinking that they were going to pack it up and go again—but this time they would sit there. Maybe they would stay there the next day, too, and then the next week, and then the next month. Did you know that there were some places they stayed for years at a time? Kadesh-barnea was one of them. You never knew. They would go at God's will; they would stop at God's will; but they were headed toward the Promised Land the whole time. Whether they went or whether they stayed, they were headed toward one specific goal.

Some of us have experienced this at the Feast. There was one Feast in which it seemed like half of the Church got a room for the first evening and then the next day they had to move somewhere else because the hotel staff had gotten a few wires crossed. Some have had to move from one hotel to another in the middle of the Feast.

Years ago in the Worldwide Church of God, when my dad was a traveling speaker for the Feast of Tabernacles for two years, we got to fly up to Anchorage, Alaska. Halfway through the Feast, just after we had gotten settled and thought, "Hey, this is a pretty neat place," we had to hop on a plane and fly down to Eugene, Oregon. We had to keep the rest of the Feast there. It was not so bad if you were a kid. "Hey, this traveling thing is pretty fun!" Of course, we did not have any friends in either one of those places; it was a very unsettled Feast. We would get to one place and feel as though we had just gotten situated and then we would have to pack up and go—four days at one Feast site and four days at another. That is how life is.

That movement, when we were doing it back in the '80s, was all part of a plan. We knew it was coming. We knew that halfway through the Feast we would have to get on a plane and go to the next place. That was just the way it was. God had a plan for Israel: He brought them into the land. He has a plan for all of us and each of us: He is going to bring us into the Kingdom of God. We do not know the way all of the time. We have to follow the cloud or the pillar of fire; but if we have faith, we know that He is not going to steer us wrong.

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Ezekiel 34:5-6 "So they [the sheep of Israel] were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them."

This is a prophecy for the Church of God. We are wanderers, in a sense—scattered over the face of the earth—but we are not wanderers without a goal. We are going somewhere. Peter calls us *pilgrims* in I Peter 1:1 and then he calls us *sojourners and pilgrims* in chapter 2 and verse 11. It is from this that we come to understand some of these prophecies of which we are talking in the Old Testament. We are going through this now. We are scattered sheep on every hill. Many of you live hundreds of miles from the nearest member, and it does not seem as though anybody is coming to seek you and put you into a larger flock where you happen to be. We make the best of the situation.

The Feast of Booths should remind us that we are the Israel of God in the wilderness of this world. We are wandering, at God's will, toward His Kingdom, which is our Promised Land. God keeps us moving in the right direction, whether we realize it or not and whatever the circumstances may be. He is still at it today. Despite the circumstances, we just have to follow that pillar of cloud and fire.

The third and final lesson that God wants us to learn from booths may seem, at first, to be a strange one: He wants us to learn a sense of loyalty.

Genesis 12:1, 4 Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you [now notice He did not say where they were going at this point. He just said, "Leave, I will show you the land."...]...So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a

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heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Abraham, especially, typifies the Christian pilgrim. He heads out for the land of promise in faith that God will get him there. It is always interesting to look at the way things are worded. God says, "Abraham, go to a land to which I will lead you." Abraham says, "Yes, Lord"; he picks up his stuff and out the door he goes! It seems like there is this certain motivation behind Abraham's actions. Whenever God said something, he responded, "Ah, sure; okay, I am out the door. Bye!" and he went! You do not get any hemming and hawing with him. Abraham trusted God to take him to the place where He said He was going to take him.

Like Abraham, God does not give us a roadmap to His Kingdom. Do you remember Him handing you one from on high when you got baptized? Did any of us hear, "Okay, we are going to do two years at your present job and then, due to new management, you are going to be fired because you insist on keeping the Sabbath. Then your car is going to break down. Your wife, during this time, will have four children. I am not going to tell you if they will be one after the other or if they will come in a 'glob.' Year six your house is going to burn down and, by the way, your car is breaking down again. If you have faith and get to year seven, I will give you a break. I hope you have been paying your third tithe through all of this because, unless you do, I am not going to give you that break in the seventh year. Oh, did I mention that neighbor—that neighbor who plays the rock music in his garage until all hours of the morning? Oh, and his friend, the one with the souped-up Mustang, they love fixing that thing in the middle of the night. They will seem to have a lot of carburetor problems. And that muffler just will not work."

This is what I am saying. God did not tell us at the very beginning where our Christian road was going to take us. He just said, "I am calling you out of this world to follow me and, if you have faith, I will get you where you need to go." That is what He did with Abraham. He told Abraham, "Get!" and he got! His was a wonderful example of faith. If we really have faith, we will follow His lead despite what the circumstances appear to be; despite what others say; despite what we may think we know about how things are going, about all the dangers on the road ahead or about all the good things on the road ahead; even despite all our own plans. We are loyal, if we do this, to something greater than all of these things.

Paul, in Hebrews 11—especially in verse 14—puts loyalty in terms of a homeland, of one's patriotism for the fatherland or the motherland depending, upon which nation you are from. We are Americans. We are Canadians. We are French. We are Dutch. We are

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South African. We are Trinis. We are Australians. We are Filipinos. There are people from other places, too: Vietnam, Mexico—there are people, in this Church, from many lands. I do not know how they feel about their homelands.

Many Americans seem to have this in-bred sense of patriotism. We will wear red, white, and blue just about anytime someone mentions "firecracker" or "The Star-Spangled Banner." We just love being Americans. We wear it on our sleeves and people all over the world hate us for it. It is just part of our national character; we are a very patriotic people.

Those of us in this room and those of us who are listening have transferred our loyalty to God and to His Son, Jesus Christ. No longer are we patriots in the sense of the word that most people would understand. Now we are Christians first and always. Although many of us live in the land of our birth, yet we are seeking another country. That country is the Kingdom of God and our motto is and should be, "God first in everything!" It is no longer even, "God and country." It is "God—period!" That is our whole life. He is our whole life. The road ahead toward His Kingdom is our whole life.

Let us look at Solomon's dedicatory speech and prayer for the temple in I Kings 8. The ark is being brought in, and Solomon gives a prayer of dedication and also blesses the congregation. We have not quite entered God's rest; but Israel, at this point, had rest from her enemies and this is with what he begins:

I Kings 8:56-61 "Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised [Remember what I talked about earlier: We are supposed to think back as we look at the leafy branches in our booth and remember that God had fulfilled every promise He had made to the children of Israel. Solomon now repeats that]. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses. May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the Lord, be near the Lord our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day may require, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other [Remember, that was part of what was said in Leviticus 23. He said, "I want all native born Israelites to dwell in booths so that they remember these things that happened, I am the Lord your God." This is a similar thought]. Let your heart

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therefore be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day."

We have not yet entered into our rest, but He has led us and blessed us all this way to this point. We should take some time during this Feast of Tabernacles to look back on the way that He has brought us. Do not dwell on all the bad things; dwell on what God has done. He has thrown bad things at us, but they are tests. He wants to see whether we will be loyal to Him and if we will continue to walk in His way and to keep His statutes and commandments. Use this time to really appreciate how God brought you along the way to this point. I am certain that after really reviewing that—really crediting to God what He has done—our loyalty to Him, our faith in Him will be strengthened because we will then remember and see what God has done for us. As I mentioned in my idea concerning the booth, we will say, "Yes, I am glad that God has brought me to this point and not left me out in the wilderness to dry up and die." The booth is to remind us that, though we are in transit to another, better place, our Guide will lead us perfectly if we will but faithfully follow Him.

In Deuteronomy 8, we read God's review of Israel's journeyings:

Deuteronomy 8:1-9 "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. And you shall remember [this is what I was getting at] that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord [Do you want a clue? There is the roadmap!]. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him [which is what we are learning at the Feast of Tabernacles]. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing [Is this not what we are supposed to be learning in this Feast

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because we have just come through the harvest? Is God not good to us?]; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper [it is not just the produce, it is the land itself and all that it contains].

We have an even greater promise ahead of us than this: "the meek shall inherit the earth." We have an inheritance of eternal life with God in His Kingdom. Though our travel is long and onerous, when we arrive at the Feast, we can leave behind the strains and travails of the past few days and enjoy the pleasures of friends and food and fun and, of course, fearing God. (There are those four *F*s—they are a mnemonic alliteration: friends, food, fun, and fearing God. That is the Feast of Tabernacles for you).

The same will be true when we arrive in God's Kingdom. We will forget the arduous trek, the privations, the unsettled nature of living in booths, and we will truly enjoy the blessings of eternal life.