

What Does It Mean To Dwell In Booths?

The Philadelphia Church teaches that all seventy (70) — on most years — Sabbaths of God are to be observed. These Sabbaths include the fifty-two (52) weekly Sabbaths, the seven (7) annual Sabbaths, one of which is a new moon, and the eleven (11) other new moons. Annual Sabbaths and new moons will occasionally occur on a weekly Sabbath day, and a thirteenth lunar month will occur some years. Thus, the number seventy is not an absolute number, but the sum of the festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths taken singularly.

Because the Philadelphia Church observes the annual Sabbaths, disciples within the spiritual city of Philadelphia will observe the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths). For the past three-quarters of a century, one sect of Christianity developed and has continuously kept a tradition of relocating one's physical self to a temporary dwelling during the Feast of Booths. This tradition, rooted in Herbert Armstrong's reading of Leviticus 23:42–43 ("You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." English Standard Version — used throughout) has families saving a second tithe of a full ten percent of their annual income to journey to festival sites that inevitably are near vacation meccas. At these sites where God has chosen to place His name, disciples reside in temporary housing while attending church services, fellowshiping, and enjoying the geographical location chosen for the Feast. The justification for saving a full tithe and going to an exotic location comes from the assumption that Feast of Tabernacles commemorates Christ's millennial reign over humanity, that Feast-goers are to learn to live as if they were in the kingdom of God for that week. They are to dwell as kings and priests, or kingly priests for one week every year. Thus, the tradition has Feast-goers enjoying the finer things of life during this week as a sample of how life will be lived during the Millennium. And with ten percent of one's annual income available to be spent during the week, those aspects of life usually beyond the financial reach of wage earners can be enjoyed.

The assumption behind the tradition begins correctly. However, the practice of living as kingly priests misses what will be the abiding characteristic of Christ's millennial reign, this characteristic being the lack of lawlessness from having the Holy Spirit poured out upon all flesh. Throughout the symbolic day of the Lord, the Sabbath day of a spiritual creation week, human nature will be a changed nature. Even the nature of beasts will be changed: the great predators will become grass eaters. The lion shall lie down with the lamb. There will be no harm in all of God's holy mountain.

In addition, the concept of living as kingly priests misses the significance of the first clause of Leviticus 23:43 — "that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." Dwelling in booths for the circumcised nation commemorated liberation from bondage to Pharaoh and symbolized the period in that nation's history when God led His first-born son by a pillar of fire at night and from a cloud during the day.

The nation that left Egypt did not, however, enter the geographical promised land that typologically represented the rest of God (Ps 95:10–11 & Heb 3:18–19). During that period

when God was with this nation every day, God rejected this nation because of its unbelief. This nation was replaced man for man by their children: about 600,000 men on foot left Egypt (Exod 12:37), and 601,730 men [children of the nation that left Egypt] were numbered on the plains of Moab (Num 26:51). It was these children of the nation that left Egypt that entered God's rest. And dwelling in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles annually commemorates the death of the rejected nation and the selection of the new nation born in booths in the Wilderness of Sin.

Beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the concept of the natural firstborn being rejected and the second born being of or receiving the promise is consistent throughout Scripture. The Apostle Paul identifies Jesus as the last Adam, saying that the "'first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45), that sin entered the world through the first Adam, and everlasting life entered through the last Adam (Rom 5:12–17). The juxtaposition between the natural and spiritual is that of death versus life. The first, then, comes to represent death; thus, firstborns in Israel must be redeemed (Exod 13:2). They belong to God to do with as He pleases. They symbolically stand for the natural world, the natural mind, and the natural body or flesh (which the Apostle Paul identifies as the corruptible) in which disciples are today tabernacled as temples of God. Therefore, the fleshly body of every human being who has drawn breath must be redeemed, the logic behind Calvary, and the logic behind a resurrection of firstfruits at Christ's return as the Messiah and the general resurrection during great White Throne Judgment.

The Apostle Paul writes to gentile converts in Rome:

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of call—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Rom 9:6–13)

Ishmael was a child of bondage, the son of Hagar, and allegorically represented the circumcised nation at the time of Christ (Gal 4:22–31). Isaac was the son of promise and represented "the Jerusalem above that is free" (v. 26). And the circumcised nation, with exceptions, was rejected because of its unbelief. Yet, the circumcised nation was the Israel that "gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (Rev 12:5) as the first Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel. But the Israel of the Jerusalem above as the second Eve, created when Jesus breathed life into ten of His disciples (John 20:22), brings forth offspring "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17). And this second Eve will also give birth to a spiritual Cain and a spiritual Abel when she delivers during the Tribulation.

Among the children of promise (i.e., of the children of the Jerusalem that is above) represented by Isaac, the elder was hated but the younger God loved even before either had symbolically done good or evil. These two sons of promise are represented by the ten virgins,

five wise and five foolish, in the parable Jesus told in His Olivet prophecy. In this parable, the Bridegroom, based upon the amount of oil in the virgins' lamps, lets five into the marriage feast and says to the other five, "Truly, I say to you, 'I do not know you'" (Matt 25:12). All ten are virgins, or children of the promise. No sin is imputed to any of the ten, just as in the womb neither Esau nor Jacob had any sin imputed to them. Yet Jacob is loved—five virgins enter the marriage feast. Esau, as events in his life would demonstrate, never valued his inheritance; the five rejected virgins didn't value their wedding enough to have purchased oil in advance of the Bridegroom's arrival.

The two sons of promise are like Cain and Abel. When God had no regard for Cain's offering, Cain became angry. God said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Gen 4:6-7).

Cain did not rule over sin, or lawlessness, but killed his brother and was marked for doing so. During the Tribulation, the elder son of promise will hate his brother, will betray his brother, will persecute his brother, will deliver his brother up to be killed, and will take upon himself the mark of the beast. But the younger son of promise that keeps the commandments of God—all of them, including the Sabbath commandment—will be accepted by God, just as Abel was accepted.

Not all who have descended from Israel belong to Israel—in the natural or physical realm, most of the Northern house of Israel never returned to Judea. In fact, many of the Southern house of Judah never returned from Babylon. And those Israelites who didn't return (especially of the house of Israel) abandoned the Sabbath, the identifying sign of who knew God (Exod 31:13, 17) and was known of God. But in the spiritual realm, Israel goes from being the circumcised children of bondage to being the spiritual nation belonging to the Jerusalem from above. Israel goes from being the nation that left Egyptian bondage to being the nation formed by their children who were born in the Wilderness of Sin. Israel will, at the middle of the Tribulation, go from being the spiritual nation liberated from bondage to sin at the beginning of these seven years of tribulation to being the other half of humanity that has the Holy Spirit poured out upon it when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Most High and of His Christ (Reb 11:15). Israel goes from being today's greater Christian Church that as wild olive branches have been grafted onto the rootstock of righteousness—these grafted branches have continued to bear wild fruit as these branches would in the natural world—to being, during the first half of the tribulation, the natural branches grafted back onto this rootstock that is Christ Jesus. Israel goes from being the Apostle's Paul's old man crucified with Christ to being Paul's new man or creature, both old and new creatures tabernacled in the same body of flesh, residing together as the nation that left Egypt resided in the same booths as their children, the Israel that would cross the Jordan.

The pattern of the older sibling being rejected and the younger selected is contained in the phrase, The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The promise doesn't go to the natural heir, but to the heir of promise, to the heir loved by God, to the heir that by faith walks uprightly before God, loving righteousness enough to fill its lamps so that its light shines when the Bridegroom arrives.

The people brought out of Egypt did not enter God's rest because of unbelief that became disobedience when they tried to enter the following day (Heb 4:6 — compare with Num

14:39–45). Instead, their children entered the geographical land that symbolized God's rest. Under the leadership of Joshua and Caleb, the children of the Israelites that left Egypt physically swung swords and defeated in battle the peoples that possessed the hill country of Judea. Hornets as promised under the Sinai covenant (Exod 23:28) didn't drive out the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites from the hills across the Jordan as hornets drove out the two Amorite kings on the plains of Moab (Josh 24:12; Num 21:21–35). Rather, obedience to God that came with faith caused the children of the people who left Egypt to prevail militarily (Josh chptr 7).

The writer of Hebrews links the geography of Judea with the millennial rest of God, as did the Psalmist: "For forty years I loathed that generation and said, 'They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.' Therefore I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest'" (Ps 95:10–11). Physical lawbreaking is done with the hand; spiritual lawbreaking is done with the heart. And the circumcised nation went astray in their heart. They went astray spiritually even though they had seen the many miracles done in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderness; even though they had heard the voice of God uttered from atop Mt. Sinai.

Warning disciples against "an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away" (Heb 3:12), the writer of Hebrews says, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (v. 13). It is the deceitfulness of sin that caused the nation that left Egypt to rebel against God. It was the deceitfulness of sin that caused Cain to kill his brother. It will be the deceitfulness of sin that will cause the spiritual nation to rebel (2 Thess 2:3) when this nation is liberated from bondage to the law of sin and death that presently dwells in the members of disciples (Rom 7:25). The writer of Hebrews establishes the link between Judean geography and Christ's reign over the heart (i.e., mental topography) of all humanity. Physical kings reign[ed] over physical landscapes, but spiritual kings reign over the minds and hearts of human beings. The circumcised nation was ruled by an old written code, inscribed by the finger of God on two tablets of stone. This law was always outside of the holy nation as were the houses in which this nation dwelt after it entered the promised land.

Except for Joshua and Caleb, the Israelites that left Egypt dwelt in booths or tents until their deaths; they never again dwelt in houses, nor possessed orchards or vineyards. They never again experienced a sense of permanence, or an attachment to "place." Once they left Egypt, they were sojourners until they died in the Wilderness of Sin because of their unbelief. They hardened their hearts from the deceitfulness of sin. And the correspondence between unbelief and lawlessness joins the rebellion in the Wilderness with the rebellion of the spiritual nation when the man of perdition is revealed.

Before the Israelites left Egypt, they dwelt in houses (Exod 12:7, 22–23). The holy nation again dwelt in houses that they did not build when they possessed the promised land. Dwelling in booths, then, symbolizes that period of Israel's journey from physical bondage in Egypt to when Israel under Joshua possessed the promised land. Dwelling in booths does not symbolize living as rightful heirs in the promised land; it doesn't symbolize living as kingly priests. Rather, it symbolizes living by faith under the laws of God in a landscape named the Wilderness of Sin. In this wilderness, a first nation of liberated Israelites was replaced by a second nation of uncircumcised Israelites, both nations similar or identical in number.

The holy nation of Israel that left Egypt represented approximately half of the people then living in Egypt (Exod 5:5). Through the last seven plagues that struck Egypt, God made a division between the people then living in this nation that has come to represent sin, a division based upon genetics. A physical division. God liberated a physical people from physical bondage in a physical land. Then because of unbelief, this liberated nation of physically circumcised males dwelt in booths until their deaths. They were replaced by a like number of their uncircumcised children who also dwelt in booths until this second nation crossed the Jordan River and entered the promised land. Only then was this second nation of Israel circumcised (Josh 5:2–7). So this second nation of Israel had only dwelt in booths when the second covenant mediated by Moses was given—under this second covenant, Israelites were promised circumcised hearts and minds or souls [naphesh] upon returning to obedience to the laws of God (Deu 30:6). This second nation did not receive physical houses until after physical circumcision. Spiritual circumcision was only offered to this second nation upon them returning to obedience to God; spiritual circumcision required that this nation walk blameless before God as Abraham had (Gen 26:5).

The Apostle Paul introduces a law of faith (Rom 3:27) that becomes the righteousness that comes by faith. (Rom 10:6). Paul then cites the Moab covenant, or second covenant mediated by Moses (compare Rom 10:6–8 with Deu 30:11–14). The Israelite who walks blameless before God by having returned to keeping the laws of God has only to "confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead" (Rom 10:9) to be saved. This spiritually circumcised Israelite will, upon resurrection, receive an incorruptible body in which to dwell, the meaning of salvation.

The Apostle Paul's new man doesn't get to design his (or her) dwelling as he (or she) would like to have the dwelling constructed. Rather, this new creature takes over an existing corruptible body, and has to make war against the law of sin and death that resides in the flesh. If the old man lived in an upright manner, keeping the commandments and laws of God, then the new man had only to acknowledge Christ with his mouth and believe in his heart that the Father raised Jesus from the dead to be saved. But if the old man were a wild olive branch grafted onto the rootstock of righteousness, then considerable remodeling of the new man's tabernacle is necessary before Christ can reside in this dwelling.

Paul writes, "We know that our old self was crucified with him [Christ Jesus] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin....Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions" (Rom 6:6–7, 12). And this juxtaposition of inner life and outer life lies at the center of understanding the new spiritual creation that lives within the physical body or dwelling of the old creature that died with Christ. The new creature lives with Christ. Death no longer has dominion over this new creature. Yet the dwelling in which this new creature resides will die, or will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. The dwelling in which this new creature is tabernacled remains of the first Adam. The new creature is of the last Adam.

With birth-from-above (being born again or born anew), the old creature crucified with Christ dies as did the first nation that left Egypt—and the new creature born of spirit begins replacing the old creature as the second, uncircumcised holy nation replaced the nation that left bondage to Pharaoh. The transition from one nation to the other took forty years of dwelling in booths

in the Wilderness of Sin. The transition from old creature to new requires sufficient time to allow for the spiritual maturation of the new creature. And it is the forty years spent in the wilderness and this transition from a circumcised holy nation to an uncircumcised holy nation that is to be commemorated during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Crucifixion doesn't kill instantly, just as the nation that left Egypt didn't die instantly when it rebelled against God. The new needs, in this physical realm, time to replace the old.

Dwelling in booths represents the death of the old self and the spiritual maturing of the new creature. Dwelling in booths isn't about learning to live as kingly priests, or to appreciate the finer things of this physical life. It is about learning to walk blameless by faith before God. It is about putting into practice the second covenant made at Moab now that better promises were added to this covenant when the glorified Christ replaced the man Moses as its mediator.

Those disciples who are of Philadelphia will observe the Feast of Tabernacles. The teachers of these disciples should bring messages about the children of bondage being replaced by the children of promise, with specific references made to the circumcised nation that left Egypt being replaced by their children because of unbelief. However, the festival tithe—a tithe of the tithe brought to Jerusalem (1% of one's annual increase)—suggests that since disciples are temples of God, located in spiritual Jerusalem, disciples should observe Tabernacles locally. Therefore, wherever disciples regularly assemble together for weekly Sabbath services is where God has chosen to place His name. Disciples need to travel no farther from home than they regularly travel to Sabbath services. And since disciples are today dwelling in temporary abodes of flesh, disciples are free to determine for themselves whether they should relocate themselves to a physical booth so as not to forget the temporary nature of their bodies.

When liberated from bondage to the law of sin that dwells in its flesh, the greater Christian Church, like the nation that left bondage to Pharaoh, will rebel against God and will be replaced by their spiritual children. They will spiritually die in their tabernacles of flesh when God sends a great delusion over the nation (2 Thess 2:11); they will not enter God's rest because of their unbelief. They will not believe that they can walk blameless before God even after they have been liberated from bondage to sin. They will not believe that with the revealing of the Son of Man that they are now naked before God, with their only covering for sin being their obedience to God. They will not believe that the fullness of iniquity means that Christ no longer bears their sins in the heavenly realm. Thus, because they do not love and have not loved righteousness enough to practice walking blameless before God, they—like Ishmael and Esau, the circumcised nation that left Egypt and the circumcised nation in the 1st-Century—will be rejected, and will die in a wilderness of sin. And greater Christianity's refusal to observe Tabernacles sets the stage for this holy nation's rejection. The greater Church doesn't understand the significance of dwelling in booths. These five virgins have empty lamps when the Bridegroom arrives. Yes, they are virgins. Yes, they today form the larger part of the Body of Christ. But they have borne their natural fruit even though they have been grafted onto the root of righteousness.

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