

by Ernie Klassek

A member from the Perth, Australia congregation describes his experience learning about the Feast of Tabernacles.

I was about six or seven years old when I first heard the word “Laubhüttenfest.” German for “Feast of Tabernacles,” it meant something exciting for me, because “Laubhütten” means “huts made of leafy branches,” and “Fest” means “a feast—a time to celebrate.”

My parents and the gypsies in the basement of our drab block of flats in Berlin would talk about this Feast, but an elderly German couple became particularly interested when a Jewish family invited them for a meal during that Feast (Deuteronomy 16:14). The Jews, especially those bearded men with their black suits and hats, and how they decorated their balconies with greenery for a whole week in early autumn, have remained among my memories from the 1930s. The last time I saw them, they were herded into a police van by black-uniformed SS men late at night. My mother was crying.

More than two decades went by before this Feast was called to mind, first when I read about it in an English Bible, and then in German, because “Tabernacles” didn’t mean anything to me, whereas “Laubhütten”—“huts of foliage”—did.

When I looked up a Greek text, this word described “tents,” dwellings for people on the move or camping, and I wasn’t surprised since the King James Version refers to the tents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as “tabernacles” (Hebrews 11:9). I wondered how, high up on a mountain, Peter would have made three huts of foliage, or three tents, as tabernacles for Jesus, for Moses and for Elijah (Matthew 17:4).

In Exodus 25, I read that the Lord told Moses to build a sanctuary in the form of a large, portable rectangular tent, called a tabernacle. I found the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23:34, 40 and 42, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: “The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD . . . 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 dwell in booths [tents] for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths.” In verse 41, they were told to keep it as a feast to the Lord forever in their generations. Sure enough, those Jews in Berlin were keeping this Feast in the 20th century, just as their ancestors, the children of Israel, had kept it long ago, in temporary dwellings.

Over time, I learned more about the Feast of Tabernacles: Solomon, probably the wealthiest king ever, offered burnt offerings to the Lord for the Feast of Tabernacles (2 Chronicles 8:12-13). At the end of 70 years of captivity in Babylon, people from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi—by order of Cyrus king of Persia—kept the Feast of Tabernacles when they returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 3:4, Nehemiah 8). Jesus, of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5), went to Jerusalem to observe what the apostle John aptly called “the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles” (John 7:2). The whole of the seventh chapter of John is devoted to telling us in detail what Jesus taught and how His teachings were received during the seven days of the Feast.



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A temporary dwelling provides a valuable lesson for the people of God.

The apostle Paul said to the Jews in Ephesus, “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing” (Acts 18:21). In those days, traveling by sailing ship and overland (mainly on foot) to get to Jerusalem for one of the Feasts of the Lord (Leviticus 23:4) may have been a rare or even once-in-a-lifetime event for the widely-scattered descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel, Jews as well as non-Jews (Acts 2:9-11; 26:7; James 1:1). In this day and age, the Lord has His disciples, of many races and languages, who use every manner of fast communication and travel, traversing continents to diligently teach all nations to observe all things as He commanded them, sure of His promise, “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). And look what the Lord will do at the end of this age and the beginning of a new one, when He descends from heaven and comes to earth (Acts 1:11) and all the saints (Zechariah 14:5) will be with Him: He will teach all nations to come to Jerusalem and keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and every generation will keep it from year to year (Zechariah 14:16-19) for 1,000 years.

In the most glorious age of all ages, God will figuratively pitch His tent, His tabernacle, among people: John saw a new heaven and a new earth, and the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heav-

en from God, and he heard a loud voice from heaven saying: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4). And just as His saints in every nation on earth are even now Jews inwardly (Romans 2:29) and imitate Christ in all things (1 Corinthians 11:1) those people of all nations at the beginning of Christ’s reign on earth, together with everybody from every generation, once redeemed, will also walk through the twelve gates leading into the great city (Revelation 21:10-12; 22:14) the holy Jerusalem—the gates with names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, because our Father and our Elder Brother want all people from every age, gathered around the tabernacle, to be in Their big, happy family (Ephesians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Oh, how I look forward to seeing my parents there, and the gypsies, the elderly German couple, and the Jews—as well as the former SS men—from the 1930s: from the time when I first heard the word Laubhüttenfest—Feast of Tabernacles! **UN**