

# My “reasonable service” to God? (Feast of Tabernacles)

Leviticus 23:33-43

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**Introduction:** God’s genius is reflected everywhere we look if we have eyes to see it – especially in creation, but also in His Word, in the law as He instructed the Israelites on how to know and follow Him (they needed help to interpret all their trials and tribulations – and so do we!). Three times a year they were told to present themselves before God in Jerusalem with their tithes and offerings, and each feast was packed with parables and deep spiritual truth: at Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Today coincides with the anniversary of that third feast (Sept. 29 - Oct. 6): **“On the first day you are to take branches from luxuriant trees — from palms, willows and other leafy trees — and rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days”** (Lv. 23:40). Maybe you’re more familiar with this feast from watching *The Chosen* series (it really showed how much work went into the preparations). God knew well that the communal activity of building temporary shelters together and doing life in them for a whole week would provoke lots of thought, intergenerational dialogue, family and community bonding. Living in those temporary shelters, they would be reminded of their forefathers’ desert wanderings when God had them dwelling for 40 years in tents, and the faith of the nation was forged as they moved from place to place facing common enemies, learning to depend on God for their daily survival.

**1)** The instructions in the law commanded them to live for a week in temporary shelters, which would certainly produce a time of bonding, sharing with others under the open sky, remembering they had been called as a people always on the move, ready to pick up and move on at any time. That kind of bonding is a good goal for us to keep in mind as well! Here at IBC today during our Ministry Fair, we’re in essence recreating something like that atmosphere of a grand community project that calls us all together to *find our place ...* Because we too need to take time to do things together as a family, to share the family stories of God’s faithfulness with our children! We had such a delightful time this summer taking our 15-year-old granddaughter to Texas – her first time in the U.S. We went to a lake house the first weekend, then had a big welcome party for her and for our daughter-in-law – they were both meeting most of the extended family for the first time, so explaining to them all the family connections was sometimes complicated (so we turned it into a game of Jeopardy!). We took them to a *rodeo* (that was high Texas culture), out to the cotton fields of West Texas, to the Dallas Science Museum – we cultivated the sense of belonging to each other! And we picked up and moved almost 10 times for the month we were there – pilgrim life is very unsettling (living out of a suitcase).

Even so the Israelites in the desert were always camping out, always ready to pick up and move on because they were on their way toward a permanent home in a better place. This lesson was obvious enough in the desert as they dreamed of the Promised Land, but actually it was still true when they settled there in Canaan (just harder to remember!); and it’s the same with us! So don’t settle too

comfortably in your temporary shelter, cherishing all your creature comforts to the point of forgetting where you're headed, because this body is a temporary shelter!

So during this feast the Israelites were instructed to do no "ordinary work" (customary, regular laboring); but it actually implied a lot of extraordinary work, which could be called "spiritual service" – in the streets and plazas as they built those temporary shelters, and in the temple as they brought literally hundreds of offerings and sacrifices (a very intense week!). All of it reflected the abundance of God's blessings and the harvests of their fields. So this feast was also known as the Ingathering because they brought the tithe of their harvests to the Lord. As in all their feasts, they never came empty-handed, but brought their tithes and offerings, sacrifices, gratitude and worship. They sacrificed a huge number of animals during this festival (199 bulls, rams and lambs, according to the detailed instructions of Num. 29:12-40), plus grain and drink offerings plus daily sacrifices for morning and evening, plus all the freewill offerings. So the priests were busy from morning till evening preparing all those animals – this was their spiritual service. The people also enjoyed sharing the different meals with neighbors and with others less fortunate. Even so in our gatherings, we don't come empty-handed, but with tithes and offerings, ready to share, yet no offering is more important than that of presenting our own lives; Rom. 12 calls it our **"living sacrifice."**

**2)** Of course, Christ's self-sacrifice in the face of humanity's rebellion put an end to all blood sacrifices thanks to the complete forgiveness that He incarnated. Heb. 10 explains how the blood of bulls and lambs could never cleanse the conscience, because they are not moral agents. Only a moral agent like us could receive all that merciless mistreatment and grant forgiveness ... and only a perfect Judge like Jesus would ever pronounce such a merciful verdict! But we are still invited to imitate that spirit of sacrifice Jesus embodied as we take up our cross daily, or as Paul interprets it in Rom. 12, we're to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God and this is our **"spiritual worship"** (ESV). Larry McCrary did a wonderful job expounding this passage in his sermon of Aug. 27 (visit [www.ibcmadrid.com](http://www.ibcmadrid.com)). Larry quoted pastor-theologian A.W. Tozer as saying, **"If you will not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week."** We need to let that soak in.

Other translations of the Greek here (*logiké latreía*) say **"reasonable service,"** since that first term comes from *logikós*, which can mean logical, reasonable, or rational. But *logikós* comes from **logos**, which among Greek philosophers represented the rational force and even the structural foundation of the universe, like a cosmic intelligence underlying everything; that's why it was so important in John's explanation of the Gospel. So it was definitely a "spiritual" concept as well. The second term, *latreía*, is often related to temple service or service to God in Scripture, hence its connection with worship (Rom. 9:4, Heb. 9:1, 9:6); it comes from Greek *latris*, which identified someone hired to accomplish a specific task because of being qualified or equipped to render *acceptable service*. So we're told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (holy in Christ, thus pleasing to God) so that we can perform our "reasonable service" equipped by the Holy Spirit; this is part of our worship within the Body of Christ and on behalf of His Kingdom. So our concern here is about how to put our spiritual worship into daily practice and service for God's Kingdom. Of course, this concept was closely tied to the second (Rom. 12:2): instead of being molded by our surroundings, we should be transformed through renewing our mind, meaning that God's Name, kingdom, and will become our top priority. Transformation through mind renewal is not about some self-help strategy, but about Jesus restoring the image of God in us. Here is my prayer to that end: **"Please reign in the oceans of my emotions ... and in the gyrations of my relations ... and in the collisions of my bad decisions. Come reign in the curves and the swerves of my nerves! Come fill the deep hole in my soul – Lord Jesus, reign in my brain!"** That's the only way for Him to reign in my use of time, energy, resources, and talents so that I learn to serve Him with my whole life in concrete ways. One Christian teacher gives this warning: **"We drink from a never-ending stream of trivialities, scrolling from one item to the next, which slowly causes us to lose our capacity to perceive the weightier matters of life and know the deep things of God"** (Trevin Wax). We need to wake up and get our life on track with God's priorities, so that we can do something worthwhile to manifest His presence and love to others – in

our place of work, studies, or recreation. And while you're at it, you can also help at IBC to make His name great and further His work. There are multiple ministry areas that offer opportunities to serve: hospitality, ushering, welcome team, music/worship, AV, IT/social media, teaching ministry (children, youth, university, adults), young adult ministry, women's ministry, social ministry, zone ministry, prayer ministry, evangelism, missions, building/grounds, translation, decoration, library, finance and admin. Like a human body with so many functions (Rom. 12:4-5), so is a church that seeks to bear witness for Jesus – it's a really huge thing if we take it seriously, so it takes a serious commitment from a lot of people to make a healthy community with sound doctrine, wholesome relationships, good human bonding, and a healthy witness. Pray for this! Tune in to this DNA!

**3)** The Feast of Tabernacles has good lessons to help us with this, especially as we look at its interesting parallels elsewhere in Scripture: just as the Israelites were told to dwell in tents and temporary shelters, the Son of God came to dwell in an earthly tent for a time, literally to “tabernacle” (Greek *skenóō*, Jn. 1:14). It wasn't a permanent dwelling, especially because His creatures would rise up and manifest their rejection of His authority, the rebellion that was in our hearts since the Garden of Eden, and He would respond not by giving us what we deserved, but by pouring out grace and truth on our race through His lovingkindness and forgiveness, turning the other cheek, manifesting His true Kingly stature and worth, as well as His power over life and death. And because He overcame both sin and the grave, we can be assured that when our temporary shelters wear out, we are also promised a permanent dwelling (Greek *skénos* vs. *oikodomé*, 2 Cor. 5:1). And He has promised that someday God will actually “tabernacle” among humanity (*skené*, Rev. 21:3-6), drying every tear and quenching all our thirst – at a time when the whole world will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles together in peace (Zech. 14), not in literal terms, but in the new earth and heavens when God makes all things new. That's why later Judaism would also refer to this celebration as the Feast of the Nations!

Meanwhile, it's not about focusing our faith on whatever works, i.e., whatever helps me get what I want and where I want to go! Rather, it's about getting my heart and mind in tune with what God wants, and His goal is to make all things new in us as He restores His image and likeness in us here on earth, in effect, re-humanizing us (because sin is dehumanizing!). Distraction from Him as the reason for living is what gets our neurons so confused and disoriented; He's the Hero of this story, the Genius and Champion! And such a big part of rehumanizing us happens as *we serve Him together*, both among the church body and out in the world wherever He gives us a place to represent His name. So the first decision is to answer His call, decide to follow Him when He invites us to come and drink (Jn. 7:2, 37-38), because He's the culmination of all OT prophecy, the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles; He's the restoration of God's image in us – the One who satisfies our thirst, the One who makes us truly and fully human.