

In a few weeks many Jews will be celebrating *Sukkot* (aka Feast of Tabernacles). Some of the Christian denominations also celebrate this 7 day period. For those of us who were in the Worldwide Church of God, years ago, we celebrated these days as well. It was a time to cease work and live in a temporary dwelling. A time to rejoice with each other with the blessings God had provide during the year.

As much as this meant to many of us, I believe that we may have missed one important aspect of these days.

When God brought His people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, He told them to build booths and live in them seven days to remember how they lived in booths during that time. This was to remind them of how God took care of them so that their feet did not swell and their clothes did not wear out. To this day, Jewish people have observed the tradition of building a *sukkah* (a temporary shelter covered in natural materials).

For the people to retain a sense of dependency on God that they had while wandering in the wilderness, God established regulations for the booths. The booths should be made out of impermanent materials. They could not be entirely enclosed on all four sides, and at least one star should be visible through the branches used to cover the roof. It is also a tradition to fill the booth with harvest images i.e. fruit and vegetables from the garden, etc. This is to remind them of the abundance of God's blessings during that year. They are supposed to live in them for seven days.

As you sit in one of these rickety little booths and see the sky through the branches and feel the wind blow through the walls, you have a strong sense of your own insecurity and lack of protection from the elements. And that is exactly the point. **Our security doesn't come from the strength of the walls that we build around ourselves; it comes from our protection by God.**

Ironically, at the same time we are to feel insecure, there is also a feeling of being overwhelmed with the abundant blessings that He has given us. It gives a powerful understanding of what following God is like, that is a feeling radical insecurity but blessed at the same time.

The events of the last couple months have made it seem like the security of living in the world is waning. It seems it could only a matter of time until more tragedy occurs. The economy has gone flat. Many businesses are

struggling to survive. Many individuals have lost their jobs or are on extended leave or part time. It is hard in a situation like this not to feel abandoned or unloved by God.

Indeed, our spiritual ancestors, the Israelites, cursed God in their booths and accused him of bringing them out of Egypt in order to destroy them. They frequently questioned God's character. Is God really good? Does he really have our best interests in mind? Why does God let adversity plague us? How can we really be sure that God is loving and not dispassionate and cruel?

The suffering of Jesus has once and for all exonerated God from any accusation of being evil or uncaring. God could make us happy and wealthy, but it wouldn't say nearly much about his love and good intentions toward us as when he himself suffered for us.

*Now it is a rare event when someone gives up his life even for the sake of somebody righteous, although possibly for a truly good person one might have the courage to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in that the Messiah died on our behalf while we were still sinners.*

Rom 5:7-8 (CJB)

Right after the feast of Sukkot is over, the Torah Scrolls are rewound back to the beginning and the next year's reading cycle begins at Genesis 1:1 again. This is called *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing with the Torah). It is an occasion of much rejoicing, and the object of their joy is the fact that God gave them His word, the *Torah*. They literally dance around the synagogue with the Torah scrolls praising God for the scriptures.

Are we so radically convinced of God's goodness; even in the passages that we find most difficult? Studying them from the point of view of the loving kindness (*Hesed*) of God deepens our understanding of the faithfulness of our Father in heaven.

Both the lesson of the *Sukkah* - God's protection in the desert, and *Simchat Torah*, helps answer the insecurity we feel in times of worry and adversity. Are we convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt, of the goodness of God, even when it is hidden in difficult times or terrible events or hard to understand the texts? His protection in the desert, his giving of his Word, and his very own sacrifice for us finally answer that question once and for all.