

Bible Devotions: Lock Stock & Barrel
Devotional Reading for Outdoorsmen
(Old Testament)

Leviticus 23:42-43

Living in Tents, Reenacting History

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.

I can't get my wife to tent camp anymore. Oh, we've done it before. In fact, as newlyweds in Ohio we went to Mohican State Park and camped out. But that's been about it, except for a couple of other times when she buckled under peer pressure and went camping with some friends from church (and me). You must understand, however, that we lived and breathed camp ministry for many years. She earned the right to upgrade to hotels. When I suggest tent camping now, she justifiably says, "Forget it!"

"Forget it!" is precisely what the children of Israel did with God's command to dwell in booths, or tents, for seven days (the term can also be translated 'hut' or 'tabernacle'). The command was rediscovered after many years of neglect when Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Moses (Nehemiah 8:14-15).

The ancient historian Josephus called this commemoration "a most holy and most eminent feast" (Whiston, 1987). God called it the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:34) and commanded it to be celebrated annually. It was a reminder for the Hebrews of how God protected their forefathers in the wilderness after they had fled Egyptian captivity.

The tents were not made from ordinary material like goat's hair and sewn fabric. Enough is known from Leviticus 23:40 and Nehemiah 8:15, and tradition, to lead us to conclude that these *booths* were fabricated from the boughs and branches of trees.

Imagine this scene: You live in a nice cottage on the edge of town. The Feast of Tabernacles is almost here. You unpack the pieces of booth you stored in the shed out back. Wait a minute, that's not right! The Bible says that the Israelites had to find fresh branches. Your commemoration has to be as authentic as possible, like purist Civil War re-enactors using authentically made equipment.

The scene continues: You've found fresh branches. So far, so good. After painstakingly weaving and binding the pieces into the shape of a livable-looking hut, you set it up in the street in front of your home. You can't go inside the comfort of your cottage. You have to live in the tent for seven days.

Don't worry, no one will run you down. The streets will be filled with other booths. Everywhere you look booths pop up. Tables are set with fresh fruits and the party begins. There's worship, fellowship, celebration, singing, rejoicing, and giving of tithes and offerings to the Lord (yikes!). Everyone is celebrating. No one is working. It's one big event. Ol' Josephus was right.

The celebration reminds you that your forefathers left Egypt without conventional tent-making material. You learn that surviving in the wilderness means that you have to make do with whatever's out there and you have to make do with it today. There's no time to weave fur and fabric into comfortable lodging. Most of all, you learn that God made your ancestors dwell this way to show that He is Lord.

The lesson for Christian outdoorsmen today is this: God provides and He's good at it. In a miraculous way, He provided plenty of *branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook* for thousands of booths for thousands of days (Leviticus 23:40). If you think about it, the trees had to be growing for perhaps hundreds of years if there were to be enough to go around without devastating the landscape. The whole time the children of Israel were in bondage, God was growing millions of trees in just the right places to shelter them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.

It's a great lesson on His omniscience. Just think, what's He doing now to provide for your need tomorrow? What's He done already that you won't realize for many, many years?

Bible Devotions: Hook Line & Sinker (study guide)

Leviticus 23:42-43
Living in Tents, Reenacting History

HOOK

1. What is your favorite historical reenactment to watch (or that you'd like to watch)?

2. Describe two types of tents (if you can, an old style and a new style).

3. List the supplies you would need if you had to live in a tent for seven days.

LINE

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What Biblical event would you like to reenact? Why? What would you learn from it?

Describe a time when a need was miraculously provided for you. Explain how you recognized God's hand in it. Did the event prepare you to help someone else? How?

SINKER

Take a few minutes to write your thoughts on this devotional. Reflect on your own experiences.

Key words: tents God's provision God's omniscience
