

Prayer

Dear Father,

Thank you for not limiting your eternal plan to just the Jews, but instead you extended your grace to me, a Gentile. I rejoice in the knowledge that you are my God and Saviour through Jesus Christ, your Son and my friend. I thank you for the comfort of your Word made real to me by your Holy Spirit. Lead me in the way of truth and righteousness for your Name's sake, Amen.

Song: (MHB 92) *by C Wesley*

1. What shall I do my God to love?, My loving God to praise?
The length, and breadth, and height to prove And depth of sovereign grace?
2. Thy sovereign grace to all extends, immense and unconfined;
From age to age it never ends; it reaches all mankind.
3. Throughout the world its breadth is known, wide as infinity;
So wide, it never passed by one, or it had passed by me.
4. My trespass was grown up to heaven; But far above the skies,
In Christ abundantly forgiven, I see thy mercies rise.
5. The depth of all-redeeming love what angel-tongue can tell?
O may I to the utmost prove the gift unspeakable!
6. Come quickly, gracious Lord, and take possession of thine own;
My longing heart vouchsafe to make thine everlasting throne!

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Scripture

- Amos 9: 11-12
- Acts 15: 1-19

Message: David's Tent

Today we think nothing of us going to church and participating in its corporate life, enjoying the fellowship of other believers and experiencing the benefits of God's salvation. Nor do we hesitate to accept others whatever their background or ethnic and cultural connection. And we certainly don't expect the men to be circumcised! That doesn't even occur to us.

But it was not always so. There was considerable disagreement right at the start of the Christian church about whether non-Jews, that is Gentiles, could participate in what God was doing. That matter was settled in part through Peter's vision of the unclean animals and God's command to eat them, combined with the simultaneous invitation to visit the home of a Roman (IE Gentile) and preach the Gospel there. Despite that, there was still another requirement demanded of those Gentile converts, at least according to some. The new converts must be circumcised, they said, according to the custom of Moses.

David's Tent

This was all happening around 50AD, recorded for us in Chapter 12 of Acts and then chapter 15. Our focus will be on that second debate, the Council of Jerusalem, and in particular the Scriptural foundation used by the council moderator which clinched the argument in favour of the Gentiles, that is, that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised.

After the debate and discussions for and against, it was up to James to summarise and draw a conclusion, which he did. And he based his conclusion on what superficially seems somewhat obscure, namely a prophecy of Amos (9:11-12):

“In that day I will restore David's fallen tent [Tabernacle of David – AV]
I will repair its broken places and restore its ruins and build it as it used to be so that
the Gentiles who bear my name may seek the Lord”.

Why was Amos's reference to David's Tent used by James as the clincher for the inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles?

Amos

Amos lived in the eighth century BC, and the timing of his prophecy is reckoned as 763 BC.

The rituals and ceremonies of the Temple (of Solomon) would have been in full swing, and had been for nearly 200 years, and would continue for many more years. Prior to that, the Tabernacle of Moses had been in operation for nearly 500 years. But despite the longevity and significance of both the Tabernacle and Temple, Amos in his prophecy refers to neither.

Instead he refers to the simplicity of a tent, the Tent of David, and that this Tent would be restored and rebuilt. Amos connected the work of Messiah's Kingdom with the Tent of David.

What was the Tent of David?

During the time of Eli, when the Israelites were in battle against the Philistines at Ebenezer, the Ark of the Covenant was removed from Moses' Tabernacle at Shiloh (30Km away) by the Israelites and taken to the front line. Despite this presumptuous move, the Israelites lost both battle and Ark¹. Henceforth Moses' Tabernacle was bereft of the Ark, right up to its decommissioning at the opening of Solomon's Temple, a period of around 100 years. For about a century the Tabernacle of Moses functioned with all its ceremony, sacrifices and priestly ministrations without the presence of God. This included all the time of Samuel, then the reign of Saul, then David and finally the first part of Solomon's reign.

What happened to the ark? Seven months after they took it, the Philistines sent the Ark back, and it remained at Abinadab's house for probably 40 or more years during the time of Samuel, all of Saul's reign, and up to the disastrous attempt by David to take it to Jerusalem,² where David had “prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it”³. It didn't make it on this occasion. Instead, it was left at Obed-Edom's house for three months.

¹ 1 Sam 4

² 1 Chron 13

³ 1 Chron 15: 1, 3

David's Tent

The contrast between this tent of David and both Moses' Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple could not be greater. Pages of Scripture are taken to describe the wealth of materials used and the construction of each. All we are told about David's tent is that he built it.

David's second attempt to move the Ark was successful, mainly because he moved it God's way⁴. So the ark was brought to the Tent with much celebration, music, singing and blood sacrifice. This was the first and last time animal sacrifice was associated with this Tent.

So the Ark of God's presence remained in a Tent in Jerusalem (on Mt Zion) under the priesthood of Abiathar for about 36 years until the Temple was finished. There was no Holy of Holies, no Holy Place, no curtain, no blood sacrifices, no Courts for Gentiles or Women. Every one had access.

Meanwhile the Tabernacle of Moses continued at Shiloh, then Nob, then Gibeon⁵, 12Km from Jerusalem, under the priesthood of Zadok⁶, with all its traditional ceremony, sacrifice and priestly duties, with the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. All the trappings of religion were present, but the most significant thing was missing: the Holy of Holies did not contain the Ark of the Covenant. God's presence was to be found elsewhere in a simple Tent.

What happened at this Tent?

The rituals and practices associated with this Tent were unique in the history of the Jewish cult. Here David appointed Levitical priests under the priesthood of Abiathar to:

- Make petition
- Give thanks
- Praise the Lord in song, accompanied by lyres, harps, cymbals and trumpets⁷.

There burnt offerings and fellowship/peace offerings were brought. Note that burnt offerings were the only kind of offering that Gentiles could bring. So there was an emphasis on peace and fellowship with access granted to women and uncircumcised Gentiles; there was no court beyond which they could not go. God's Presence was in the midst of God's people in a simple Tent, and freely accessible to all.

It was at this Tent that David performed his role as Priest, for here he "sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord". David also blessed the people.⁸ He was operating as a type of the One who was to be The Prophet, Priest and King, at the tent.

Solomon also had an involvement with this Tent. While it was at Gibeon (IE Moses' Tabernacle) that Solomon asked for and received wisdom⁹, it was afterwards "before the ark" in Jerusalem that he sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.¹⁰

⁴ 1 Chron 15:2

⁵ 1 Chron 16: 39ff

⁶ Zadok eventually became high priest in Solomon's Temple (1 Chron 29:22). Abiathar later sided with Adonijah when he rebelled against his father David. For this, Solomon removed him from office (1 Kings 2:26-27). Abiathar was the fourth descendant from Eli, so Samuel's prophecy was fulfilled (1 Sam 2: 31-35).

⁷ 1 Chron 16: 1-6

⁸ 1 Sam 6:18

⁹ 1 Kings 3

¹⁰ See also 2 Chron 1: 3, 13

David's Tent

With the establishment of the Tent of David, David proceeded to put in place a whole range of singers, choirs and musicians, with their great variety of instruments.¹¹ The singers were ordered according to their “courses” and were to sing continually¹². Incidentally, David's tent, being prophetic of what God was going to do, provides a strong case for the use of music and musical instruments in worship, a subject that historically has triggered great debate.

Mt Zion

David's tent was pitched on Mt Zion. So it was on Mt Zion where God's presence resided within this tent of David¹³, and it was to Mt Zion that David refers in many of his Psalms.¹⁴ Moses' Tabernacle was at Gibeon, 12Km away and Solomon's Temple didn't even exist, but even when it did, it was on Mt Moriah, not Mt Zion.

Christians through the centuries have understood the significance of Zion, as demonstrated in its hymns: Zion, the City of God, where God dwells and is accessible, and where at its restored tent (Amos/James) he invites everybody¹⁵. So it was for David and his contemporaries.

Significance for the New Testament Church

Amos and James say the Tent of David is to be repaired and restored.

So this speaks of:

- No need for blood sacrifice as a condition of access
- All can come – Jew and uncircumcised Gentile
- Bringing an offering of thanksgiving and praise
- Presenting petitions before the Lord
- Praise which is to include music and singing and Psalms and rejoicing
- Musicians and singers are to be skilled and order is to prevail

And not forgetting the reason why James referred to it as recorded in Acts 15:

- God is freely accessible, all can come

Prayer for suffering Christians in Iran (from Barnabas Prayer)

Barnabas Aid contacts have reported raids on “house churches” in the Iranian cities of Isfahan and Shiraz. Several Christians were arrested, including at least one pastor. The authorities also seized Bibles and other Christian books, along with computers.

Unlike Iran's historic Christian communities who are permitted to hold church services in their own language, Farsi (Persian)-speaking believers are converts from Islam who are prohibited from worshipping. “We are witnessing a huge increase in the efforts of the

¹¹ 1 Chron 25

¹² Eg Ps 134: 1

¹³ 1 Kings 8:1

¹⁴ See Ps 9:11; 48:2; 74:2; 76:1-2

¹⁵ Rev 7:14-15

Iranian government's crackdown on house churches in Iran," a regional expert told Barnabas.

Ask that our Lord, who is near to all who call on Him in truth (Psalm 145:18), will be near to our brothers and sisters in their hour of trial.

Hymn: by Elizabeth Clephane

1. There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away, far off from the gates of gold—
Away on the mountains wild and bare, away from the tender Shepherd's care,
2. "Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine; are they not enough for Thee?"
But the Shepherd made answer: "This of mine has wandered away from me;
And although the path be rough and steep, I go to the desert to find my sheep."
3. But none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed thro' ere He found His sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert, He heard its cry – sick and helpless and ready to die;
4. "Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way that mark out the mountain's track?"
"They were shed for one who had gone astray ere the Shepherd could bring him back."
"Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?" "They are pierced tonight by many a thorn."
5. But all through the mountains, thunder-riven, and up from the rocky steep,
There rose a cry to the gate of heaven, "Rejoice! I have found my sheep!"
And the angels echoed round the throne, "Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own."

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Benediction:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA