

The banner of a house

When the children of Israel camped in the wilderness they were arranged under the standard of their father's house. This banner or flag determined the character and work of each house. The standard of the lion represented the kingship. The banner of the ox referred to the priesthood. The standard of the man signified the ministry of the prophet. And the eagle referred to the fatherhood of God Himself who bore them on eagle's wings. From the Day of Pentecost, the church was to continue likewise. They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. We could suggest that these were the four banners under which the church was to continue and to grow.

The book of Numbers tells us that each household was to camp at a distance from the tent of meeting. We know that this tabernacle was the centre of the corporate worship of the whole nation. And the tent of each household was the province of their own family life. The sanctification of both things had to be observed. Likewise in the New Testament, the believers were continuing with one mind in the temple and breaking bread from house to house. Both of these aspects of Christian life are essential to the increase of the kingdom. Every household was to prepare its offering in their own house, and having done so, they were to bring it down to the altar of the tabernacle and present it before the Lord. If they found this to be onerous and decided to offer it in their own house, then they incurred the blood-guilt of that offering. It is critical that we do not confuse the character of our own worthy house with the Lord's house.

References:

Num 1:52 Num 2:2
Acts 2:42, 46 1 Cor 11:27
Lev 17:8-11

Further Study

Acts 2

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 8

Types of houses

At this stage of our Christian walk, we are being challenged to be worthy houses. In one respect, this is not difficult at all if we obey the word of a messenger and bring forth the fruit of that word. It is our hope that this word will be life to us and, accordingly, define our work. Like the four banners under which the Israelites camped, it is apparent that there are four types of houses in the New Testament – teaching houses, shepherding houses, evangelistic houses, and praying houses. Perhaps the most prolific is the house of prayer. Immediately before His ascension, Jesus instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. As a consequence of this, they were with one mind, continually devoting themselves to prayer. They were in the ‘upper room’, but we don’t know whose house this was. We know there were one hundred and twenty persons gathered along with the women, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers. This is the first account of a household after the resurrection of Jesus.

Sometime later after the death of James, the brother of John, Peter was arrested and imprisoned. The book of Acts accounts that prayer was being made fervently for him by the church of God. At the same time, an angel of the Lord brought about Peter’s release and he immediately went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. We cannot be sure whether this was the same house where the one hundred and twenty were gathered on the Day of Pentecost, nor can we be certain of the identity of Mary who is referred to as the householder. Nevertheless, we know this was a worthy house; a house of prayer.

References:

Luke 24:49 Acts 1:14-15
Acts 12:5, 12
Num 2:2-3, 10, 18, 25

Further Study

Acts 12

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 9

Cornelius and his house

A house of prayer can be likened to the houses of Israel which camped under the banner of the eagle. We know that it was according to this grace of Christ that the Lord brought about a great deliverance for the nation of Israel, bringing them to Himself on eagles' wings. Wherever people gather together to pray, great deliverance is wrought. This is the work of the heavenly Father to bring us to Himself. We must lift up our eyes and behold the fields white for harvest. We might suggest that the first work of a worthy house is to beseech the Lord of the Harvest in prayer, crying out to Him that labourers will be sent forth. The Lord attributed this virtue to Cornelius and his household. The prayer of the righteous man avails much. According to the apostle James, the prayer and vow of the righteous will deliver them.

Sometime later, when there were prophets and teachers gathered at Antioch, Barnabas and Saul were among them. They were praying and fasting and it was in this context that the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. Like Cornelius, our prayers and alms ascend as a memorial before the Lord. This is the purest expression of worship. When the apostle Peter came to his house, Cornelius accounted that 'four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, and he said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God".' It was this prayer of Cornelius which activated a great doorway for the Gentile nations to be brought near to the Lord.

References:

Ex 19:4 Isa 40:31
Acts 13:2 John 4:35
James 6:16 Prov 15:29
Acts 10:4, 30-31

Further Study

Acts 11

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 10

Houses of prayer

There was a time when Paul sought to preach the word in Asia, but he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. The door into that particular region was closed, but at the same time, another door was opening. In a vision during the night, Paul saw a man of Macedonia standing and appealing to him to come over and help them. Having arrived in that region, Paul immediately went looking for a place of prayer. And he sat down and began speaking with the women who were assembled. Among them was Lydia from the city of Thyatira. She is referred to as a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul and she, along with her household, was baptised that day. And she urged Paul saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay'.

Not long after this, Paul and Silas were fiercely persecuted, beaten and imprisoned. The similarity with Peter does not escape us. After baptising the jailer and his household, they returned to the house of Lydia. From there, they saw the brethren who encouraged them and then they departed. There can be no doubt that a worthy house of prayer and worship is a sanctuary for the messenger. Sometime later, the apostle Paul devoted himself completely to the word. However, the Jews resisted him and blasphemed. When Paul left them, he went to the house of a man name Titius Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. He again found refuge in a house of prayer. The account continues, 'Crispus, the leader of the synagogue believed in the Lord with all his household and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptised'.

References:

Acts 18:5, 8
Acts 16:6, 9, 14-15, 33, 40

Further Study

Acts 16

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 11

A little sanctuary

It has not escaped our attention that houses of prayer and worship are sanctuaries to those who are sent as messengers. But more than this, it is from these houses that the Lord encourages the messengers to continue. The house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God, was strategic towards the continuing ministry of the apostle. It was there that the Lord said to Paul, 'Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent'. As a consequence of this, Paul settled there for eighteen months teaching the word of God.

At this time, the Lord is asking many of us to receive the word of the messenger. And as a consequence, He is asking us to establish worthy houses of prayer. When Peter sought refuge in the house of Mary, the whole church was praying. It is significant that this woman referred to as 'Mary' was the mother of John Mark. This household produced a son in the faith and he became the ministry companion of the apostle Paul. It is our earnest desire to see sons in the faith come forth from worthy houses of prayer. The effect of Mary's house was substantial, and indeed continual, throughout the course of Paul's ministry. We know that John Mark faced a difficult season, but he was restored and became of great benefit to Paul.

King Solomon appealed to the Lord that his eyes would be open to His temple night and day. The name of the Lord was in that great house. And it was concerning this house that Solomon said, 'Listen to the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray toward this place'. A little sanctuary, a place of refuge, is created in any house that prays toward the Lord's house.

References:

Acts 18:7-11 2 Chron 6:21
2 Tim 4:11 Ezek 11:16
Acts 12:12, 25

Further Study

Acts 18

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 12