

Pitch a Tent

By Mary Kane

People have dwelt in tents for thousands of years. In the Bible, tents are mentioned from Genesis to Revelation. To the people of Biblical times, tents were often a necessity of everyday life. Not only did tents serve as regular housing for some elements of ancient societies, but they were a sign of sojourners and foreigners. From time to time, even kings were known to abide in tents. In fact, for more than forty years the King of Kings took up residence in a tent!

For modern day technology-loving Americans, the very word *tent* can cause tremors of fear and visions of discomfort. For most of us, tents are usually considered to be items of recreation, not permanent dwelling places. When I think of tents my mind conjures images of memorable vacations with family and friends; memorable because of the hardships as well as the joys we experienced together while camping. After all, what's a camping trip without a good thunderstorm? While we did not have a lot of privacy while vacationing in a tent, we did have a lot of togetherness. Togetherness is exactly what God had in mind when He sent his Son to tabernacle (tent) among us.

*"And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us,
and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father,
full of grace and truth." John 1:14 YLT*

Before we begin our study today, please bow your heart before the Lord and ask Him to forgive you for any sin that you need to confess. Please thank Him for the grace that He has made available to us by the cross of Jesus. Now ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh and give insight into His Holy Word.

In today's study we will consider the concepts of tents and tabernacles and how they apply to our walk with Christ. One of the earliest mentions of the word *tabernacle* in the Bible is in chapter 25 of the Book of Exodus. God had recently delivered His people from a life of bondage and slavery in the land of Egypt. He had prepared a place for His people, the Promised Land, where they could live with Him in peace. Due to a lack of faith, the Hebrew people

refuse to enter the Promised Land and were sentenced to wander the desert for forty years. In order for God to fellowship with His people during their desert wanderings, He commissioned that a tabernacle/tent be built for His Holy Presence.

Please read Exodus 25:1-9

Who donated the offering to build the tabernacle?

Why was the tabernacle built (verse 8)?

Now please read Exodus 29:42-46 and record all activities that were to take place at the tabernacle (also called the Tent of Meeting).

Continual burnt offerings, which enabled fellowship with God, were to be offered there, God would meet with and speak to His people at the Tent of Meeting and God would dwell with His people in the tabernacle and be their God. What a glorious privilege.

The tabernacle was all about relationship. Ever since the first sanctuary, the Garden of Eden, was defiled by sin, God set into motion His plan to provide for a means of fellowship with His creation. The tabernacle, created and maintained according to the exacting regulations that God's holiness required, provided a place for God to meet with His people and dwell among them while they walked upon the earth. God chose to dwell in a humble tent in order to be closer to His people. Likewise, sometimes God called people to dwell in tents so they could be closer to Him. Abram (later renamed Abraham) was called by God to leave the land of his fathers and dwell in a tent so he could follow God. To gain a little background knowledge about Abraham, please read Gen. 12:1-4, 8-9.

What three things did Abram do after He arrived at the mountain east of Bethel?

He pitched his tent, built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. Abraham seriously pursued his relationship with the Lord.

Sometimes in order to deepen our relationship with God, like Abraham, we will have to leave behind the normal, the comfortable, the usual and take up our tent and follow Him. Others will think you are crazy... following God won't always make sense. Follow Him anyway.

What are you doing to seriously pursue God?

Like Abraham, God is calling you to covenant with Him and to follow Him; to leave behind your false idols of what you think will be fulfilling and pursue Him deeply. This calling will affect every area of your life as all other priorities must give way to allow God to have His rightful place in your life.

The calling of Abraham is also mentioned in the New Testament. Please read Hebrews 11:8-10.

According to verse 9, what did Abraham do?

How did he do these things?

He did them by *faith*. I can recall a few times in my life when it took a little faith to share a tent with other people.

Why would it take faith to live in a tent for an extended period of time?

I think it would take faith because a tent is very temporary type of dwelling. Usually people who live in tents do not plan to stay put for very long; a long journey is looming on the horizon. Tent living would cause a person to be very dependent upon God for daily life.

In what ways would tent life make a person more dependent on God?

As I am writing this Bible study, my nephew Jesse is preparing to walk from California to Florida. Two summers ago, Jesse was severely burned on both arms and legs at a campfire. In the months following his recovery, Jesse began to sense God calling him to walk across America in order to raise money for Rileys Children's Hospital Burn Unit. My nephew will embark on his journey in less than a week. Many nights Jesse will pitch his tent and by faith trust God to protect him from the elements, animals, and strangers. He has also had to depend on God to provide the funding to buy the necessary gear, clothing and provisions he needs to take this trip. In a very real way, tent life has caused Jesse to walk in much closer fellowship and relationship with God than his previous circumstances required. I believe that this season of tent living with God will mark Jesse's life forever.

What is the longest amount of time that you have spent in a tent?

What did you like about this experience?

What was difficult about living in a tent?

It's easy for us to think of Abraham dwelling in a tent. Most likely Abraham was no more used to a nomadic life style than we would be. Abraham had lived in large cities for most of his life. The city of his birth, Ur, "was the largest city of Shinar or northern Chaldea, and the principal commercial center of the country as well as the center of political power."ⁱ It stood near the mouth of the Euphrates River. A large temple to the moon-god Nanna was erected in Ur. The history of Ur spanned about three thousand years. The city was ruled by "divinely appointed" kings supported by a strong central government. Later in the course of Abraham's life, his father moved the family from Ur to Haran. Eerdmans Bible Dictionary states that Haran, a cosmopolitan city with a diverse population was also an important commercial center during its time. Important caravan routes linking Mesopotamia and Nineveh ran through Haran. Abraham would have had everything he needed available to him in the city markets of Ur and Haran. Due to the fact that Abraham had numerous flocks of livestock (Genesis) it is reasonable to assume that he was a herdsman by trade or at least had experience in keeping livestock. He also would have been able to make a decent living as a tradesman or farmer as the commercial opportunities afforded by Ur would have been numerous. In any case, leaving the close proximity of a big city to wander the wilderness in a tent would have been a faith stretching challenge for Abraham and his family.

Unlike Abraham, my times of tenure in a tent have been very brief—a few days or so. It's easy to put up with a little hardship for a few days—but how about for a few decades?

What would be your biggest challenge if you had to live in a tent for several weeks?

Please read verse 9 again.

According to verse 9, if someone dwelt in a tent it meant they were what?

A foreigner, an alien dwelling in a land that was not his home. Tents are not permanent structures; they indicate that one is just passing through en route to a more permanent dwelling place.

Why was Abraham willing to dwell in a tent in a foreign land?

I believe it was because Abraham preferred living in a tent, close to the Presence of God over the emptiness of worshiping false idols while dwelling in a beautiful home.

I think another Old Testament believer felt the same way. Please copy Psalm 84:10 in the space provided.

May we believe as the Psalmist that any place is better if we are dwelling with God.

If God is calling you to *live in a tent* it is because He wants you to draw closer Him. Drawing closer to God means that we must leave some things behind. When we leave some things behind we create room for a greater measure of God's Presence. Abraham endured living in a temporary structure because he was willing to wait for "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Elsewhere in New Testament, the word *tent* is refers to another type of temporary structure. Please read 2 Corinthians 5:1-8.

What does the word *tent* refer to in these verses:

Tent, in these verses refers to our physical bodies. From the original Greek *tent* transliterates as *skenos* which means “of the human body, in which the soul dwells as in a tent, and which is taken down at death.” The bodies we inhabit while on earth are not eternal. Could you imagine living forever in your present body? No thank you! As I am quickly approaching 50, it seems that each new day is marked by the discovery of another wrinkle or sag that wasn’t there the day before. I’ll take the new body please!

Let’s consider for a moment the part of the above definition which states that the body is that “which is taken down at death.” When we die, the part of us which is no longer needed, our physical body, drops off and the part of us that is living continues on without a moment’s delay; we are still completely ourselves. It’s like stepping out of a pair of coveralls; our soul steps out of our body and we are immediately in the presence of the Lord. So often we think of our body as the part that is living. But it is not the body that gives life to the soul; it is the soul that breathes life into the body.

The word *skenos* is derived from *skene* (the word used for tent in Hebrews 11:9). This Greek word is rich in meaning and application for the New Testament Christian. Let’s reflect upon several of its meanings. *Skene* means “a tent, a tabernacle (made of green boughs, *skins* or other materials); of that well known movable temple of God after the pattern of which the temple at Jerusalem was built” (emphasis mine). The tabernacle of the Old Testament housed a manifestation of the Presence of God as He traveled with His people through the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. As born again believers in Christ we also house the Presence of the Holy Spirit in these *tents* made of flesh and *skins*—He travels with us as we journey towards our Promised Land—heaven.

Skene is most likely derived from the root word *skia* which means “a shadow, an outline, a sketch.” The tabernacle that God inspired His people to create was a shadow of God’s Holy throne room in heaven. Likewise, the Promised Land (modern day Israel) is a shadow of our home—heaven, the place where we will dwell forever in the Presence of God. Also, our earthly bodies are a shadow of the new body we shall receive when we dwell with

Christ in eternity. Finally, our fragile flimsy homes we abide in on earth are just a shadow of the beautiful mansions we shall inhabit in heaven.

Think for a moment about a shadow:

Contrast how a shadow differs from the object that casts the shadow:

A shadow has no substance, it is only 2 dimensional, it has no color, and a shadow pales in comparison to the real object. Everything we have, see, enjoy, smell, taste, hear and feel is only a shadow of what those things will be like in heaven. We have so much to look forward to when we reach heaven!

Why are our bodies “groaning” according to verse 2 Corinthians 5:4?

Because our eternal spirits are housed within temporary tents. While in this body our soul is anchored to this earth and we are absent from the Lord. If we have accepted Christ as your Savior, our true home is in heaven with God, which is why we may often feel as if we do not “fit in” on earth. It is at death that we are released to be fully with the Lord. As Paul said, “To live is Christ, to die is gain.”

Like Abraham we are aliens, residing in tents, traveling through a foreign land. But do not worry, Christ has given us a wonderful promise in John 14:1-3. In closing, please reflect on these verses:

*“Let not your heart be troubled:
you believe in God, believe also in me.
In my Father’s house are many mansions;
if it were not so, I would have told you.*

I go to prepare a place for you.

*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to
Myself;*

that where I am, there you may also be.”

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ⁱ Easton, M. G. "Ur", *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Blue Letter Bible. 1897. 24 June, 1996 31 Oct 2011.
<[http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?
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