

The Book of Exodus



The Tabernacle 2

A model is something that gives a representation of the real thing. *A husband was once pleased that his wife called him a model husband – until he realised that a model is an inferior representation of the real thing.*

The most remarkable thing about God is that He never changes. As we looked at our first installment of the Tabernacle last week we saw how the people of Israel were the subject of God's grace. It was He who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

He never changes. It is because of grace that we are His people today. Israel was the forerunner and the foretaste of what God was going to do with His church so we find in Israel a model of the church. As a model, it's not quite the same but the ways of God are the same in both.

As we explored Exodus 20 we found that in entering into a relationship with Israel – a covenant they assented to – we see the standard of a holy God being laid out before them in the form of the 10 words – the 10 commandments. That was His holy standard. As we shall see in a minute, it was a standard that they were just not capable of keeping – although many Jews down the ages (and even more legalistic "Christians") have tried to keep them in order to somehow gain acceptance with God. But the 10 words if you read them already reflect the acceptance of God *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* The people were called to live who they were as the people of God - that's the standard of the 10 commandments.

But they were a nation and Torah (the Law) – formalized the covenant into a way of life which affected every part of their society. They were a people who had accepted God as their head and Torah was there to give their society structure, but more importantly, to remind them in all aspects of their daily life, that they were a covenant people and they were to honour God in every way they could, whatever they were doing.

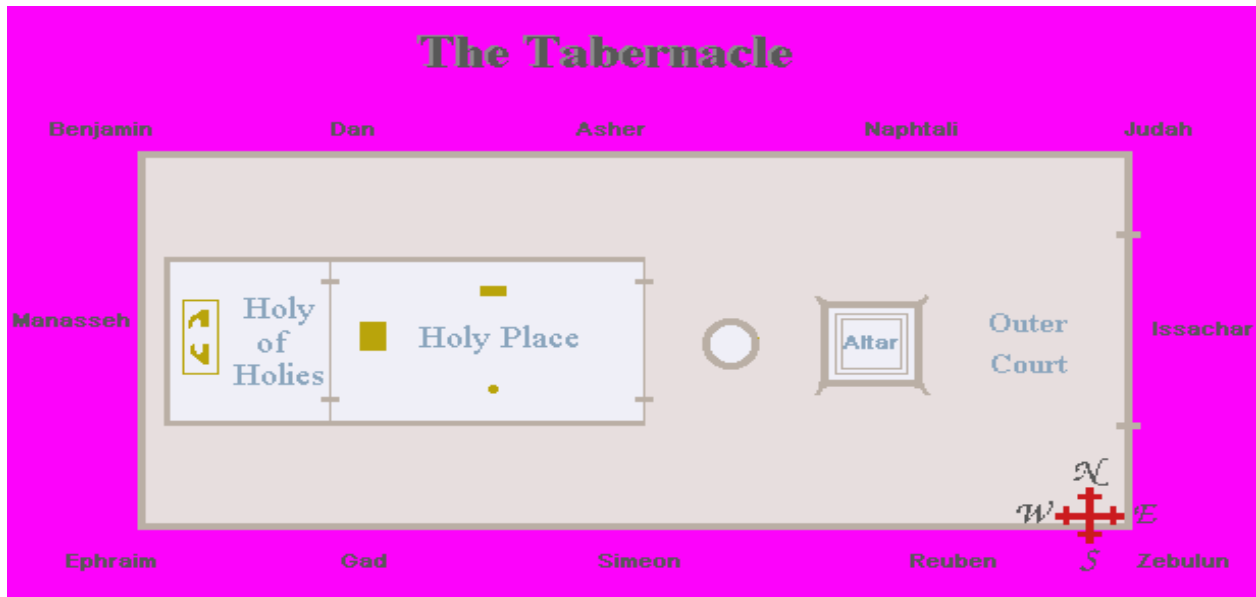
What a contrast to many aspects of modern faith. How easy it is to believe God has His Sunday bit, and his quiet time bit or his midweek activity bit and forget that Jesus should be Lord of every part of our lives. *If Jesus isn't Lord of all, then He's not Lord at all.*

But as that ever present sign that God was central to their lives, God resided in the camp, right at the centre in this special tent, the Tabernacle. We saw last week what it was like.

As you can see, what they constructed was a tent. It was enclosed in a fabric stockade in which was the tent itself and a bronze altar and a bronze ceremonial laver. We noted last week, that even though the Tabernacle was ever present and that God actually showed Himself as ever present as we shall see this week, they could not enter because of the barrier that was there. They may have been the people of God, but to have relationship with God whose presence was in the Tabernacle, they had to enter in. The same is true of us. We are redeemed, we have the Holy Spirit. But we only become intimate with God when we are prepared to enter in and approach His throne. The barrier may have only been fabric, but it was a barrier. Do you feel far from God? You may be in the camp, but you can still be separate from His presence. If we want God we must enter into His presence and as with the Israelites, we need to enter on God's terms.

The tent looks nothing from the outside. It was very much like the tents of the people. It was covered in skins on the outside to protect it from the weather. But like the people's tents, on the

inside there were fine fabrics and items in gold. The whole court/stockade was 100 cubits by 50 (175 x 87.5 feet) and the linen wall of the stockade was 5 cubits high (about 8.5 feet). In other words, it wasn't particularly enormous – about the ground area of our church site. Here's a site plan:



Camped around in orderly fashion were the tribes. Now if you look in Exodus, the description of the Tabernacle is done from God's perspective, so it starts with the commands for the Holy of Holies and ends with the door. We see the conditions required for a sinful people to approach the living God. I'm going to examine it from the other way around. We are going to approach the Tabernacle as the people of Israel did – they walked through the door into the Outer Court and then towards the Tabernacle. Each step they took from the door to the Tabernacle brought them closer to God, but what they experienced as they went into the Outer Court was all relevant to their encounter with a God who was holy.

THE DOOR

So we come to the first point. The door. It was a wide door so that people could process in. God was there but the people had to consciously access the presence of God – they had to enter and there was only one way. Why is it sometimes that we expect God to always come to us? He's the gracious one. He's given us the opportunity to approach a holy God. Why do you think that I bang on about prayer all the time. God has placed Himself in a position that He can be approached. He is the Holy One. He deserves our adoration, for who He is, for what through Christ He has done. He desired our presence. He has placed Himself in our lives, so why can't we make the effort to spend time in His presence?

The wide gate indicates an easy entrance. Have you ever watched how people go into a football ground? It's through turnstiles to make sure that someone who hasn't paid can sneak in. They are a block. It takes a while to get in and people have to queue. Not so with God. His gate is wide. It's an open gate; inviting the people of God into His presence. The Tabernacle may have been in the camp, but it was up to the people whether and how much they went to worship. As we read through Numbers and Deuteronomy, maybe their priority to do so was not as great as it should have been as they went from one crisis to the next.

God has not placed any obstacles to our approach to Him. He's there 24/7. It's up to us how much we approach Him. So if we have a poor prayer life; who's fault is that? As it says in the chorus *Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you*. There's a difference between having God in our lives and drawing close.

I sometimes think that our marriages can be like our relationship to God. You know how it is. We

can live in the same house but take our partner for granted. We move all around them – but what about those times when we draw close to one another. It's those times that are precious. They are the important times in marriage and none would disagree with that. Without them, marriages crumble. But it's those times in the hurly burly of life that means our partner gets left out. Maybe you have experienced that in your life and it's only mended by spending time together.

How often are we drawing near to God? In our daily lives? In our church life? Maybe we say "I'm too busy so God can have His bit and that's that. Without intimacy relationships collapse. Without intimacy we barely know our partner, or our desire for them grows cold. Or worse, we cease to think that spending time with them doesn't matter. It's true of God too. Sometimes we are so busy with the work of God that we don't spend time with Him. We don't enter His gates with thanksgiving or His courts with praise. We just don't enter at all. It will tell in our lives. Worst, I will tell in our church. As we become more prayer-less, so everything falls apart. Why do you think I am sometimes frustrated in the lack of corporate prayer in the church? Because it reflects in the life of the church. Do we want our church to grow? Yes. And we're going to suggest all sorts of things and schemes over the next few weeks. But I'll tell you this. If we don't enter those gates and spend time in His presence, we'll get no further than we are now. Nothing will change. We'll see no fruit and we'll bumble along as we have done. Let's enter the courts of the Lord and praise Him.

So far I've emphasized the similarities, but the Tabernacle was still a foretaste of what was to come. Getting into the courts was as far as ordinary Israelites got. Only priests could enter the Tabernacle itself and only the High Priest could enter into the most holy place. The priests were responsible for the sacrifices and the general upkeep of the Tabernacle. Priests had to be of the tribe of Levi and Levites generally were responsible for maintaining the organized spiritual life of the nation. And here's the difference. Under the new covenant, we all are priests so that we can enter into the presence of God Himself and we'll look at that next time.

THE ALTAR

27:1 "You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. 2 And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. 3 You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and firepans; all its utensils you shall make of bronze. 4 You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze; and upon the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. 5 And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net shall extend halfway down the altar. 6 And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze; 7 and the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles shall be upon the two sides of the altar, when it is carried. 8 You shall make it hollow, with boards; as it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.

The first thing people met as they entered the court was the altar. It was quite typical of the mobile nature of the tabernacle. It was made of acacia wood covered in bronze (to stop the wood burning). It had poles to carry it when the camp moved.

The purpose of the altar was simple – to bring offerings to God. Those coming to the altar brought them for various reasons. Many kinds of offerings were permitted. If you go through Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, you'll find that the people could bring offerings to God for almost every aspect of their lives. And that was the idea. Again, it was a recognition that every part of their life was given by the grace of God and bringing offerings was an expression of their things at His graciousness to them in every part of life. So the best of what they had was offered to Him.

We take God for granted don't we? As we look at all the wonderful things God gives us, we so often attribute it to our hard work or the deeds of man and don't recognize that we are who we are by the grace God has given us. In a society where we say "mine" we don't see what we have as God's provision and seek to offer up to Him of what He has given us. Yes we have harvest festivals; yes we have offerings but there are two things God wants of us that we are so often not prepared to give.

Firstly He has made us materially wealthy – how do we use the resources God has given us for His glory – our homes, our cars, our money?

But more importantly what God wants is us. You know the verse *I appeal to you therefore, brothers,*

by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1). The offering God wants is us. It all comes down to how seriously we take God as to how we offer who we are and what we have to Him.

There is another significance of the altar. It was also the place where sacrifices were slaughtered for atonement. We have understood over the last few weeks that God does not tolerate sin and as sinners, we have all sinned and come short of God's glory. For people to approach a holy God, their sin had to be dealt with. This is another difference between Israel and us. To approach God, the people could only go via priests and only with blood being shed in sin offerings. This was God's provision for dealing with their sins. Look at Lev 1:2-4 *When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock. 3 "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. 4 He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.*

Look too at Lev 17:11 *For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.* What do we learn here? The animal died in the place of the person in order to gain atonement – at-on-ment with God. This kind of sacrifice was substitutionary and allowed people to become reconciled with God.

But it was an incomplete remedy and had to be done on a year to year basis. Let's use the words of the writer to the Hebrews: Heb 10:11 *Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

Animals were not perfect substitutes. They provided a covering for sin, but they could never take them away. The atonement that Jesus achieved was once for all and freed us of sin and all its consequences. Therefore we don't have altars and sacrifices. Only one was required to permanently deal with sin.

As with other aspects of the Tabernacle, the need for sacrifice foreshadowed the fact that God's ultimate solution was the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's remember the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ because it is only on the merit of His shed blood that we can enter into the presence of a holy God. Only by grace we enter into His presence.

THE LAVER

The Laver was a large bronze dish full of water situated between the altar and the Tabernacle itself. We have understood that the priests could enter into the Tabernacle because sin was dealt with through sin offerings. But they had to be ceremonially clean too. They had to be clean before they entered God's presence.

Do we want more of the presence of God in our lives, then it involves grasping the notion that Christ dealt with our sin once for all, that He wants us to lay ourselves before Him and also to ensure that having been cleansed that we remain clean. The priests washed the extremities in the laver. It reminds me of what Jesus said when He washed Peter's feet John 13:8 *"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. We've been cleansed but we need to live holy lives by coming before God for cleansing from sin daily.*

I believe that God wants us to go deeper into Him. He wants us to desire His presence. In fact, the way we will see this church transformed is if believers yearn after the presence of God. But the desire comes from us – the desire to enter, the desire to offer ourselves, the desire to cleanse ourselves from the dirt of the world so that we can walk freely into His presence knowing that there is nothing in our lives that dishonours God and gets in the way of our communion with Him.