

The Book of Exodus



The Tabernacle 3

Reading – Hebrews 9:1-14

We saw in our two previous explorations of the Tabernacle that we have in Israel a picture of what God was going to do to the whole human race through Christ. It is a model which represents the ways of God and how He deals graciously with mankind.

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.

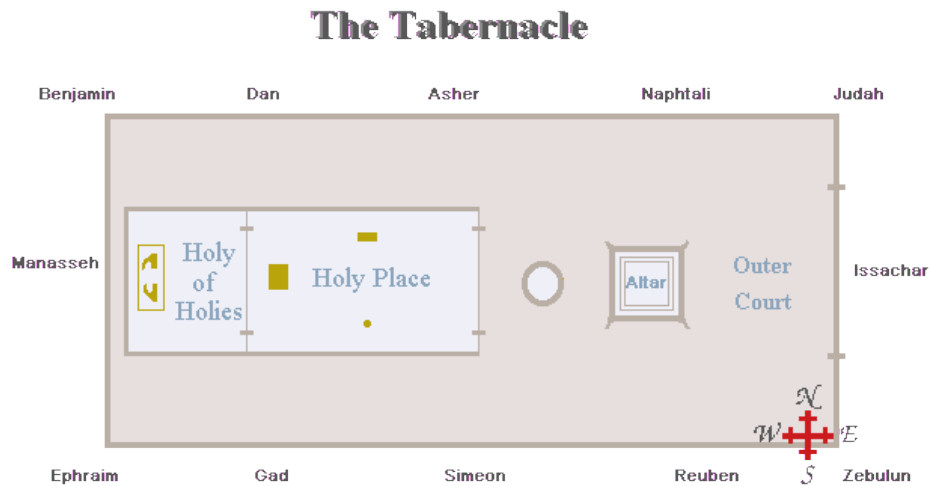


As you can see, what they constructed was a tent. It was enclosed in a fabric stockade in which was the tent itself and a bronze altar and a bronze ceremonial laver. They may have been the people of God, but to have relationship with God whose presence was in the Tabernacle, they had to enter in. Unfortunately, they couldn't get further than the outer court - only the priests could enter. Only the high priests could actually go into the most holy place. Unlike the people of Israel, we are made priests - we can get right into the presence of a holy God.

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. Inside the tent was divided into two, with the Holy of Holies containing the Ark of the Covenant concealed by a veil. The priests who

entered saw three pieces of furniture, the candlestick, the table of shewbread and the altar of incense.

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 the presence God. We may be redeemed people, but we have to make that conscious effort to approach God.

We saw last time that the reality of the altar is that we only come to God because our sin has been dealt with by the shed blood of Christ. But likewise, God wants to lay ourselves on the altar and become living sacrifices. The laver reminded us of the fact that even though we are cleansed by the blood, we still need to wash our hands and our feet, because our walk in the world dirties them and we need to come afresh to God daily and ask for His cleansing so that we are fit to be in His presence.

So often we think that we can behave as we want and still come into God's presence. Harboring sin in our lives is an abomination to God. We can't enter into the presence of God with the taint of sin, and we explored that in our session on James this morning. Sin has to be dealt with. So what do we experience as we walked into the Tabernacle itself. As you can see from the diagram, it was divided into two parts, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Priests were allowed into the first chamber but only the High priest was allowed in the Holy of Holies. Here's how the writer to the Hebrews puts it *7 ...only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.* Let's look in more detail

THE STRUCTURE



We have already seen how the Tabernacle was nothing to look at from the outside. It was just more weatherproof than the rest of the tents. It had two layers of skin on the outside, then fabric which covered gold covered acacia wood. Inside, the priests would have experienced these gold walls, although there were curtains of blue, purple and scarlet fabric with cherubim embroidered into it. The outside maybe didn't look like Buckingham Palace, but inside it was grand. It illustrates to us how nothing compares to being in

the presence of God.

One of the things I believe we must learn as a church is to stop looking at the outside and enter into the beauty of the presence of God. Sometimes prayer can look an unappealing thing. We get people to a Sunday service, but somehow prayer seems less appealing. Spending time with God at home can also seem unappealing. We may think to ourselves “why waste time praying when we can be serving”. There is nothing more precious than being in the presence of God. Being in His presence prepares us more for service than almost any other act. So often our prayers are snatched times, prayer meeting infrequently attended, or stuck in as an afterthought. It says to God and says to the world of how we feel about spending time with God. And then we expect Him to bless us.

We are priests, we can go into the holy presence of God, cleansed by the blood of the lamb, with the knowledge that He forgives confessed sin and with the knowledge that He wants to take us and mould us and make us more like Him. Yet we don't enter into that holy place. It isn't because we're not super-Christians – that way into His presence is open to all – it's just that so often we deprive ourselves of His presence by not entering in. That's the tragedy of so many Christians in Britain today! Is that you?

Do we want to see more of the presence of God in our lives? Do we want to see more of the presence of God in our Church. Then we need to spend more time in the holy presence of God. We'll have no problem then finding what our vision is. We'll have no problem serving Him. We'll have no problem with the harvest, because He'll grant us it.

We have freedom to enter – let's enter.

So as we enter into that first chamber, we see three pieces of furniture – a lamp stand, a table with loaves on it and an altar of incense. What are they about?



THE LAMP STAND

The lamp stand had seven lamps in it and they were kept burning. It was a grand object – made up as it was as a solid piece of gold. The Jews still use the lamp stand – the menorah – as a symbol of modern Israel. There are speculations as to the significance. Some have likened the seven holders to be buds representing the tree of life. Buds represent new life and atonement, which is what the Tabernacle stood for.

The lamps illuminated the inside of the Tabernacle and particularly the table of shewbread. It also reminds us of a God who is light and in Him is no darkness. And of course, Jesus is the light of the world. When we are in the presence of God, we are in the presence of light.

We are reminded that Jesus is the light of the world: *John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Paul says *Eph 5: 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.* Just as He is light, we are light.

The same picture of seven candlesticks appears in Revelation. Here they represent churches because the seven churches of Asia were meant to be lights. The priests illuminated the lights in the Tabernacle so everybody who went in there would see the things of God illuminated.

Our lives – our goodness, righteousness and truth – should illuminate the things of God so that people can see Christ in us. When we are people that spend time in the presence of God, so we let our light shine before men.

THE TABLE OF SHEWBREAD

The table was not very long – about 3 or 4 feet and was again acacia wood overlaid with gold. On it was laid twelve loaves of unleavened bread to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. The bread was replaced weekly and was then used as food by the priests. The shewbread reminded the priests of the goodness of God to His people because He gave them life.

Peter calls us 1 Pet 2: 5 living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. *As priests, we are ministering to the Lord through faith in Jesus' blood and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Our food, in addition to some of the offerings, is the fresh bread on the golden shewbread Table: Jesus as the Bread of God who came down from heaven to give LIFE to the world, crowned with glory and honour.¹ John 6:48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*

We remember that just as Jesus is the light of the world, He is the Bread of Life. Israel got bread in the desert and it sustained them but apart from two, none who left Egypt made it to the promised land. The Bread of Life is different. As we go into the presence of God around the table we remember that Jesus gave his flesh for the life of the world. So in Christ we see more perfectly that we have life through Him.

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

The other item in the Tabernacle was the altar of incense. Unlike the bronze altar on which a whole range of sacrifices were made, the smaller altar of incense was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and was placed in front of the veil which blocked the way to the Most Holy Place. The altar was not one of sacrifice for sins, but to make the inside of the Tabernacle fragrant. There was a lot of animal skins in the tabernacle and the frankincense based spices gave it a fresh aroma as it was burnt morning and night. It was the offering of a pleasing aroma towards God. The priests could not get into the presence of God without sacrificing on the bronze altar and washing themselves, once they did that, they could produce this aroma.

As we come into the presence of God, he loves to hear our worship and for us to bring our prayers. The altar of incense is a picture how our worship and prayer is a fragrance to our God and He desires to hear them as we approach His presence. I've encouraged you to pray several times even tonight. Why pray? Because God finds it a sweet-smelling aroma when we pray and worship Him. He finds pleasure in it – what a pity we find it so difficult when we have a God so willing and longing to hear our prayers!

THE VEIL

Between the two chambers was a veil. Only the High priest could pass through it into the Holy of Holies. Under the Old Covenant, that was as far as all but one person got. Under the New, we all have boldness to enter the Most Holy place. The symbol of the ending of the system was when the veil in the temple was torn in two when Jesus died – indicating His finished work breaking down this partition.

¹ Martyn Barrow, www.domini.org/tabern/sbrdtabl.htm

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT



In the Holy of Holies there was one piece of furniture – the Ark of the Covenant. It was a box made again of acacia wood, covered with pure gold and the top was formed as a seat topped by cherubim. Inside were three items that were all symbols of how God had rescued them from Egypt and taken to the promised land: Aaron's rod that budded, a gold jar of manna and the stones on which the covenant had been written. We see in the rod, the miraculous provision of God in rescuing them, in the manna, the way in which God sustained them in their journey and in the stones the covenant which God made with them. In Christ we see the saving, sustaining and promising God who has taken us from death, is leading us through this land and who will give us eternal life.

But most important was the function of the ark. Let's see what the writer to the Hebrews adds: *But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.* There were plenty of sacrifices available for sin offerings. But once a year the High Priest went into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat for himself and the people. That covered for the sin of the nation and affirmed the covenant. The mercy seat was just that. It was a mark that they had a God who was merciful and would forgive sin if they approached Him in penitence. But it involved the shedding of blood. It had to be done again and again because the blood of bulls and goats was insufficient to deal with sin permanently.

That's the wonder of the second covenant – our Great High priest has entered the Most Holy Place as it were, with blood – His blood. The writer to the Hebrews puts it much more eloquently than I: *8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. 10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order. 11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

We live under that new order and by the blood of Christ we can enter into the Most Holy Place and meet God the Father who is rich in mercy because we plead the shed blood of Christ. Let me conclude with some more from Hebrews as we go into Communion, praising the Saviour who has died and who leads us into the very holy of places.

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We have an amazing privilege to enter into the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. Tonight, let's not enter in lightly, but thankfully, calling on God's mercy and with clean hands and prepared hearts to share together in this meal Jesus gave us.

