

The Book of Exodus



The Tabernacle 4

We saw in our three 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 have seen already, 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.*

We saw in my last instalment how the interior of the tabernacle was the holy place where only the priests could enter and the Most Holy Place was accessible once a year by the High Priest. But we see from Hebrews 9 that we are part of a new order in Christ. 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.

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. Another name for the Tabernacle was the Tent of Meeting. Moses originally had a Tent of meeting outside the camp where he met with God and the divine presence was indicated by a cloud descending on to the tent (Exodus 33). But when the Tabernacle was consecrated, the Tent of Meeting became the Tabernacle itself and the cloud resided over the tent day and night (it was lit with fire at night) and that reminded the people that God was constantly present in their midst.

That's a wonderful picture of the Holy Spirit isn't it? We see pictures of the Spirit in cloud and fire. He marks out the place in which He is present. He is the wind. He is the fire. The people knew that God was with them because they could see the effects of the Spirit day and night. If the Spirit is within us as God's people; then shouldn't we be aware of His presence day and night. Shouldn't others be aware of His presence.

One sad fact about the Tabernacle was it was in the centre of the camp for 40 years. The cloud was there, the fire was there, but the people still sinned. Even though the tangible presence of God was in the centre of the camp, they still sinned. You think to yourself “if they saw the presence of God, how did they justify their behaviour when they grumbled about their quality of life, when they chickened out of entering Canaan, when they intermarried with surrounding nations. And didn't God judge them!

And as we examine our lives, we see we aren't any different. We've experienced the presence of God. We've maybe experienced the power of the Spirit in a tangible way, yet we still sin. The morning series in James has exposed our sinfulness. How can we escape the righteous anger of a just God! Let's use the opportunity of the Lord's table to come in repentance for the way in which we have acted even though God has graciously dwelt in us by His Spirit. Let's not insult His grace this evening but come in penitence around His table,

Our other sessions on the Tabernacle have very much focused on Jesus and what He has achieved for us on Calvary and we saw how He opened up the way into the most Holy Place last time. Tonight's session is about the presence of God through the Holy Spirit.

31:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, 2 "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts-- 4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, 5 to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. 6 Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you: 7 the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent-- 8 the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, 9 the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand-- 10 and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests, 11 and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you."

The Tabernacle was a remarkable structure – made more remarkable by the way that God raised up Bezalel and filled him with His Spirit so that he may have a creativity like no other man. All the physical elements had to be made by someone and these people just weren't hired hands, but recognised that God had given them gifts of creativity and practicality. Gifts of the Spirit aren't just the miraculous or the spiritual, but to be creatively practical. Never see being practical as being second-class in the work of God. Only Bezalel had the description of being filled with the Spirit, not Aaron, not Moses.

It's funny how often it is people with “at the front” ministry that clamour to exercise them. Yet there are plenty of people with practical gifts they are ignoring because they aren't “spiritual” enough. It's funny how it seems that many people pressure me to want to do something out the front on a Sunday morning, but they don't exactly rush to offer their gifts in cleaning the church and putting a new coat of paint on to make this place fit for worship. This does not take away from the people who do these practical tasks: it's just that they are not the only ones called to be practical – they are acting in obedience God's call to serve the fellowship.

We all have the necessary equipment to do the work of God and God blesses – and judges – on what we do with it. Let's not spurn gifts given by the grace of God because people don't see them or we don't think they are worthy enough. In the end, our deeds have an effective audience of only ONE. What honours Him?

There were other people involved with the tabernacle: the priests. There was one High priest (Aaron) and his sons served as priests. Others from the tribe of Levi acted as priests too. It again shows that service is a calling. The levites were called and had a position of ministry in the community. They had a different role from Moses. Moses could enter into the Tent of Meeting because he was a Levite and from the priestly Aaronic family. Even though He communed with God, it was not for him to enter into the Most Holy place. Only Aaron could. Each had their calling and role. The same is true for each of us. God has given us gifts and callings for Him in this fellowship. Let's use them to His glory, whether they be high profile or unseen. God sees and He is the judge of the world. It's not what is done, but what is done in obedience that counts before a holy God.



The High Priest - outfit



The Breastplate

The High Priest (of which Aaron was the first) had a particularly symbolic outfit. Here's a description from Lev 8:7 *And he put the tunic on him and girded him with the sash, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him; and he girded him with the artistic band of the ephod, with which he tied it to him. 8 He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. 9 He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.* Each had a symbolic function on the high priest, which befitted his critical role in the life of the nation of having the responsibility of leading tabernacle worship and entering the Most Holy Place.

- **The Ephod**

The ephod was an apron like garment the high priest wore which was woven with gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns. They reflected the colours of the fine cloth the tabernacle entrance doors and veil/curtain into the Most Holy Place were made. The high priest had unique access into the presence of God and the ephod colours reflected this. He represented a link – an entrance - between the people and a holy God because it was he that entered into the holy presence. The same picture of of an entrance is also true of our Great High Priest. Hebrews 10: *19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.* Hallelujah! Our Saviour gives us a unique entrance into God's presence. We no longer have a tabernacle; we enter into the presence of God through a person, which is why the name of Jesus is authoritative and precious to us – because it is the name that allows us into the presence of a holy God. So claim it!

But there was another bit to the ephod. It had a pair of what were like epaulettes – shoulder strips – in which was inlaid precious stones with the tribes of Israel written on them. Why? What do we usually use shoulders to represent? Carrying weight. Firemen rescue people by carrying them on their shoulders. Workmen carry heavy loads on their shoulders too. Our Saviour rescues us by carrying us on His shoulders. We rely on Him carrying our weight to rescue us. The High Priest went into the Most Holy Place, as a representative of Israel – he was Israel and it was on the satisfactory nature of the sacrifices he brought that atonement was made. And in front of us this evening we have the sacrifice of Christ. We come into His presence this evening, not in our own strength and righteousness, but on His shoulders. He carries us because we have no ability to walk ourselves into the presence of God in our own righteousness.

- **The Breastplate**

As well as having the ephod, the high priest also had a breastplate. again, this was inlaid

with precious stones, 12, representing each tribe. They were over his heart. Exodus 28: 29 *So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgement on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before the LORD.* 30 *In the breastpiece of judgement you shall put the U'rim and the Thum'mim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; thus Aaron shall bear the judgement of the Israelites on his heart before the LORD continually.* They were there so he knew who he was representing as they were over his heart. Our Great High Priest, knows our names. We're not part of a club, but special to Him.

There were two other precious stones, the Urim and the Thummim. It's not altogether clear what these were, probably some kind of precious stones as they are "lights" but what we do know that the priests used them to discern the will of God as we just read. Our Great High Priest is someone who doesn't have any problem communing with the Father.

- **The Turban and Crown**

But this wonderful picture of our Great High Priest doesn't end there. Aaron wore two hats – a turban and a crown. The turban was made of fine white linen and the crown was of gold and "Holy to the Lord" was engraved on it. White linen signifies righteous deeds. This is used in connection with the saints in Revelation 19:8 *Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.* (*Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.*) Our High Priest goes into the presence of the Father with His righteous deeds. He did not have to bring someone else's blood to come into the presence of God as the High Priest did. He is already righteous and did not require to do so. Our High Priest is also crowned with glory and honour. He is "Holy to the Lord" and crowned with glory and honour! For the high priest, the crown represented not his kingship but ours is a priest and king.

Let's reflect on one last aspect of the Tabernacle before leaving it. There were other priests who served in the tabernacle. They were also dressed in special garments of fine linen with white turbans. They had to be purified and prepared to enter into the Tabernacle. Even though they did not go into the Most holy Place, they were still in a holy one and they had to be righteous. We have a Great High Priest, but we are also priests. Rev 1:4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

We are priests. A priest had a right to go into the presence of God. A priest had the right to represent others in the presence of God. Are we fit for God's presence this evening? We are shortly going to come around the Lord's Table. Are we fit to be there. We have been saved, yes – but we need to go to the laver as it were and wash ourselves afresh in the blood of Jesus. We are also going to use our priestly authority later to intercede for others. God has made us a privilege. Let's use that privilege. Let's thirst after being in God's presents where we have a right to be. Let's use that fact to build up the church of God as we enjoy His present and as we minister to one another.

