



## The Tabernacle

Exodus 25-31

We have followed a journey, both in physical and spiritual terms of the people of Israel from Egypt to Sinai and their entering into a formal covenant with Yahweh. Like the New Covenant, the Old we discovered was one of grace – God had mercy on who He had mercy without merit. He made them His people and all they did was make that step of faith to leave Egypt and head for the promised land. The journey led them first to Sinai. They knew His presence with them day and night by the presence of the pillars of cloud and fire, but now He was going to be manifest amongst them in another form. Here we have a holy God who desires to reside amongst His people and as they lived in tents, then Moses was commanded to make a tent - a Tabernacle - which would then be in the middle of the camp. Now you see the importance of order. The Torah, based on the foundations of the Ten Words was designed to place God at the centre of their daily lives, because God was going to be literally at their centre.

And for us in the New Covenant? Like the people of Israel we have been we have been given God's written Word - all of it, not just the five books of Torah - as the order of our lives and the church. And God tabernacles not amongst us but within us because God resides at the centre physically by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "Don't you know" Paul said "that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit". You and I are a holy place - we must live like we are. And this amazing tent that God commanded Moses to construct speaks so prophetically of a way which God was going to reveal in a much fuller way about about 1800 years later in Christ.

In one sense the Tab is a model of Christ. 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. Jesus Christ – He's the real thing and the Tab points to something that was going to be perfectly fulfilled in Christ.

*Exo 25:1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. 3 And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, 4 blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, 5 tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, 6 oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 7 onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece. 8 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.*

What an interesting mixture. There's all the fine things you'd expect - the precious metal and stones, the fine linen, but also wood and skins. The Tabernacle was to be a tent just like theirs. Let's have a look at what it was like and we'll start to explore it.

### Picture of the Tabernacle

As you can see, what they constructed was a tent. It was enclosed in a fabric stockade in which was a bronze altar and a bronze ceremonial laver. 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 building. Here's a site plan:

### Site Plan

What do we learn from this? Straight away, we understand as I have already said, that we have a God who desires to dwell amongst His people. It's an irony really. We have a God who is righteous and is angry at sin. Yet we have a God who loves us and still desires to live amongst us. God accepts us and continues to dwell with us even though we fall so short of His righteousness. And it certainly was true of them too. On one hand they were chosen of God, but on the other hand, they sinned by being unable to keep the law that was handed down to them at Sinai. But God still dwelt amongst them and worked His purposes out through their weakness and failure. And the Tabernacle represented the way in which that could happen. We'll see over the coming weeks just how much that the tabernacle is so prophetic about Christ.

So how does that work. Over the next few evening sessions I'm going to explore the Tabernacle from the outside in, and we'll see that they meant under the Old Covenant and what meaning they can have under the new.

## THE CAMP

Map of the Tab in the camp.

So where was the Tab – bang in the centre of the camp. 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 of God, but what they experienced as they went into the Outer Court was all relevant to their encounter with a God who was holy.

But, the first feature of the tabernacle was that people faced as they got to the Tab was the linen wall. It was a barrier that prevented ordinary people from casually approaching.

## LINEN WALL

As we look towards entering the presence of a holy God, we realise that our way is barred by a barrier just as theirs was by this linen stockade. God is holy and sin means that a barrier exists between us and God. God still desires us even in our fallen-ness, but sin limits how much we have fellowship with Him and how much He can use us. We need to go through that barrier and into His presence,

Sin ruins our relationship with God and damages our relationships with one another - it brings decay and death. It needs to be dealt with so that we can enjoy His holy presence.

But in that linen wall, there was a way in.

## THE GATE

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?

## TURNSTILE

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.

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.

So what did the priests see when they got inside.

## THE ALTAR

*1 "Make an altar out of acacia wood. It is to be square, 2.2 metres long and 2.2 metres wide, and it is to be 1.3 metres high. 2 Make projections at the top of the four corners. They are to form one piece with the altar, and the whole is to be covered with bronze. 3 Make pans for the greasy ashes, and make shovels, bowls, hooks, and firepans. All this equipment is to be made of bronze. 4 Make a bronze grating and put four bronze carrying rings on its corners. 5 Put the grating under the rim of the altar, so that it reaches halfway up the altar. 6 Make carrying poles of acacia wood, cover them with bronze, 7 and put them in the rings on each side of the altar when it is carried. 8 Make the altar out of boards and leave it hollow, according to the plan that I showed you on the mountain.*

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 want 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 know 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: *11 Every Jewish priest performs his services every day and offers the same sacrifices many times; but these sacrifices can never take away sins. 12 Christ, however, offered one sacrifice for sins, an offering that is effective for ever, and then he sat down at the right-hand side of God. 13 There he now waits until God puts his enemies as a footstool under his feet. 14 With one sacrifice, then, he has made perfect for ever those who are purified from sin.*

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. That's why communion is often a time when we focus on our sins and ensure that we are cleansed ready to enter God's presence. There is a difference

*Psalm 24: 4:1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; 2 for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. 3 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.*

It's an interesting passage. The priests could only enter the holy place under the Law. But the Psalmist prophetically goes beyond that to those of us who can now enter that holy place because of Jesus. We still need to have the clean hands and pure heart. Let's pray, recognising this.

3.

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. The Tab is so prophetic of the God's way of redemption and the NT is full of its imagery as we see the fulfilment of what the people of Israel had in the desert fulfilled in Christ.

We will recall that God chose to dwell amongst His people and the symbol of that was the Tabernacle. It was His tent that was the centre of the camp and reminded them of His central position.

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, most couldn't get further than the outer court - only the priests could enter. Only the high priest 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 - and we go with our Great High priest - the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 buildings. 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.

Camped around the Tab 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 examining it from the other way around from our perspective. We have already approached 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 in the Most holy Place. 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. But *"if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* 1 John 1:9

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 (the Most Holy Place). 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 9:7 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 – more like 10 Downing Street maybe. It illustrates to us how nothing compares to being in the presence of God. Entering into His presence seems such a simple act – so simple that we so easily neglect it – but oh how precious it is when we enter in! For the priests stepping out of the sunlight and into the gloom of the Holy Place, their eyes slowly would accustom to the gloom of the windowless interior lit by lamps. The yellow of the lamps would show the rich interior in all its glory.

One of the things I believe we must learn as the people of God 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 times infrequently attended, tacked quickly after discussion in house groups, 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. Draw your own conclusions because they are as obvious as it looks!

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 nearly enough – do we? It isn't because we're not super-Christians - the 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!

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 of 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 of seven lamps. 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. Seven of course is the perfect number in Scripture.

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. When 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 main 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 us to pray several times even tonight. Why worship and pray? Because it finds it a sweet-smelling aroma when we worship Him. He finds pleasure in it - what a pity we sometimes find it so difficult when we have a God so willing and longing to hear our voices praising Him!

### 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.

### 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.

This is the core of the Tabernacle and it represents the core of our faith. This was not missed on the writer to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 9:1-15

But most important was the function of the ark. Let's see what the writer to the Hebrews adds: *The priests go into the outer Tent every day to perform their duties,7 but only the High Priest goes into the inner Tent, and he does so only once a year. He takes with him blood which he offers to God on*



*behalf of himself and for the sins which the people have committed without knowing they were sinning. Heb 9:6-7*

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: Heb 9:8-14

*8 The Holy Spirit clearly teaches from all these arrangements that the way into the Most Holy Place has not yet been opened as long as the outer Tent still stands. 9 This is an illustration which points to the present time. It means that the offerings and animal sacrifices presented to God cannot make the worshipper's heart perfect, 10 since they have to do only with food, drink, and various purification ceremonies. These are all outward rules, which apply only until the time when God will establish the new order.*

*11 But Christ has already come as the High Priest of the good things that are already here. The tent in which he serves is greater and more perfect; it is not a tent made by human hands, that is, it is not a part of this created world. 12 When Christ went through the tent and entered once and for all into the Most Holy Place, he did not take the blood of goats and bulls to offer as a sacrifice; rather, he took his own blood and obtained eternal salvation for us. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a burnt calf are sprinkled on the people who are ritually unclean, and this purifies them by taking away their ritual impurity. 14 Since this is true, how much more is accomplished by the blood of Christ! Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will purify our consciences from useless rituals, 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 this.

*Heb 10:19 We have, then, my brothers and sisters, complete freedom to go into the Most Holy Place by means of the death of Jesus. 20 He opened for us a new way, a living way, through the curtain — that is, through his own body. 21 We have a great priest in charge of the house of God. 22 So let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, with hearts that have been purified from a guilty conscience and with bodies washed with clean water.*

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 words or 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. What's interesting about legalists is that so often only emphasise the part of the law that suits them. Before Christians I saw a programme by Loius Theroux about a "Baptist Church" in the USA which is strongly legalistic and wage hate campaigns against homosexuals, politicians, the army and things they see as ungodly. Yet they don't see their own exclusivism and gospel devoid of love as being anything other than virtuous. Its no surprise to find that they are not a growing church!

But the 10 words if you remember 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 where we often see life as an inconvenience to our spiritual existence, or worse, see such as just something we do. Spirituality and life are two things that should be intertwined as a believer. To use an old catchphrase; 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 his own 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 also 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 picture

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 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 presence 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 others.**

*Preached by Mark Reid in four sessions November/December 200MRBC Felixstowe  
© Mark Reid 2008*