

A Sanctuary for the Lord

Exodus 25-27

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The tabernacle is a place set apart for God's dwelling. His presence is at the center of Israelites' community. God's people come to worship the Lord and to receive forgiveness there. The tabernacle foreshadows Christ's coming to provide permanent redemption.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Israelites had resided in Egypt for 400 years, they did not know how to worship God. At Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the Law, where there was clear instruction as to how they were to worship God and how they were to live in harmony with one another.

As they travelled to the Promised Land, God commanded Moses to make a tabernacle, where He could dwell in and where His people could worship Him. It had to be a movable place of worship because God's people were journeying through the wilderness. The word, "Tabernacle," means a tent of meeting, where the people would come to meet the Lord. This morning, I will be covering Exodus 25-27. God goes into much detail about the structure of the Tabernacle and all the elements in it. Since we have three chapters to go through, I will only give you the highlights. Let me give you an overview of the tabernacle, then I will look into each of the elements of the Tabernacle, which points to Christ.

A. Overview of the Tabernacle

1. General Overview

The Tabernacle is 150' x 75', which is about half a football field. It has a 7.5 ft curtained fence around it to set God's holiness apart from the rest of the camp. The fence was held up by brass poles. It could be easily dismantled and assembled as the Israelites traveled. There was one 30 feet entrance gate made of different colored curtains.

The tabernacle was situated in the center of their camp. The twelve tribes of Israel were stationed around the Tabernacle. God wanted His people to know that He had come to dwell among them. God Jehovah was with them wherever they would go. God was not only the center of their community physically, but also spiritually. In John 1:14, it says that The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. This verse speaks of Christ being incarnate as a man to identify with us. The Greek word for "dwell" is the same word as for "tent of meeting" or dwelling. In other words, when Jesus became the God-man, he "tabernacled" among us

When we place our trust in Christ, He dwells within us. The Bible says that we are the temple of God. Jesus is called "Emmanuel," which means God is with us. He is always there for us. (1 Peter 5:6-7) "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

Why is the Tabernacle so important? It helps us to understand the pattern of worship our Holy God requires of us. It is a clear foreshadowing of Christ's coming to provide permanent redemption.

In the first section of Exodus 25, God commanded His people two things: 1) Bring an offering to the Lord as an act of worship. 2) Build a sanctuary for God, which is the Tabernacle.

2. Generous Giving

As we turn to Exod. 25:1-2, “The Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to bring to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.” In order to build the tabernacle, resources were needed. A list of items were recorded from verses 3-7, which included gold, silver and bronze, yarn, fine line, animal hair and skins, acacia wood and olive oil. We see the people responded eagerly in appreciation of the Lord. They gave so generously that they had more than enough (Exod. 36:5)

In Exod. 3:21-22, you might recall that God prophesied to Moses that when Pharaoh let His people go that the Egyptians would be so eager to send them off that they gave them gold, silver, as well as clothing. God had blessed His people. Now, it was an opportunity to give back to the Lord to build His sanctuary, the Tabernacle. They did not give out of obligation, but gave with a willing heart, recognizing how much God had given them. Likewise, may we recognize how God has blessed us. May we give generously with a willing heart. We are in the midst of a building campaign with our Pearland Campus. This is an opportunity to give to God’s building.

[Let us read verses 8-9, “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” God, being the architect of His dwelling place, wanted His people to follow some detailed instructions that He would be giving them on the construction of the Tabernacle. We will see this in the rest of this chapter and the next two chapters.

3. Detailed Instructions

There was a purpose and reason for every aspect of the tabernacle. God is an orderly God and He wanted His people to obey Him and follow his detailed instruction exactly. [The Tabernacle can be divided into three major sections, the inner courtyard, the holy place and the Holy of Holies. I would like to describe each of these sections and what is in it and why it is important. Let us look at the first section, the inner courtyard.]

B. Elements of the Tabernacle

1. Inner Courtyard

a. Altar

Once a person enters the Tabernacle through the gate, the first thing they would see is the brazen altar. They are reminded that they are separated from God because of their sin. They cannot approach a holy God without being cleansed. The Bible said, “Without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission of sin.” The wages of sin is death, in order for us to be redeemed, we either have to die or we offer up an unblemished animal sacrifice to die in our place. Here at the altar, the Israelites sacrificed animals to atone for their sins.

The word “altar” means a place of slaughter or sacrifice. According to Ex.27:1-8, this altar is made of acacia wood, 4.5’ high; it is to be square, 7.5’ x 7.5’. The altar is overlaid with bronze. Bronze is often symbol of God’s righteousness and judgment in the Bible. There were four horns on the four corners of the altar, which were used to tie down the animal sacrifice.

The animal sacrifice was temporary. In order to receive forgiveness, the offender needed to offer up sacrifice to God regularly. Jesus, the Messiah, came to become the perfect sacrifice to die on the cross to take away our sins once and for all. No other

sacrifices were needed because God's wrath had been appeased. Christ came to provide permanent redemption. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin on our behalf. If we trust Him, we will be saved. If you have not placed your faith in Christ, I invite you today so that you can be saved. This altar is the foreshadowing of the Cross of Christ. [The next element in the inner court is the laver, which is recorded in Ex. 30:17-21.]

b. Laver

It was a wash basin used only by priests in the tabernacle, where they cleansed their hands and feet in the water. Coming into the courtyard, a priest must first offer up a sacrifice for himself at the brazen altar before they approach the laver of bronze, which was located between the altar and the door of the holy place. Before God's servant could serve in the holy place, they needed to be cleansed also.

APPLICATION: God takes sins seriously. Too often, we take it lightly. Sin does separate us from God. 1 John 1:6, "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth." The laver speaks of separation from the world through confession of sin and cleansing by the Word. Although we have trusted Christ and have received forgiveness, we still yield to sin. Therefore, it is necessary for us to confess our sin regularly. In 1 John 1:9, it says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." [The second section beyond the inner courtyard is the tabernacle tent, which consists of two chambers, the outer chamber, which is the larger of the two chambers, is called the Holy Place and the inner chamber called the Holy of Holies.]

2. Holy Place

The Holy Place is the front room, where priests conducted rituals that honor God. It was 30 feet by 15 feet and is 15 feet high. The entrance into the tabernacle tent was a beautiful veil made of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, which was hung from five golden pillars. The blue color stood for the heavens above. It was the symbol of the heavenly character of God. The purple color represented royalty. Jesus would come to be the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. The scarlet represented sacrifice. The coming Messiah would offer Himself as a sacrifice to pay the penalty of man's sins. The regular worshippers were not permitted to enter the tabernacle tent. Only the priests, who represented man before God, received permission to go inside.

Once the priest gets inside, he would see the table of showbread on the right, a golden lampstand or the menorah on the left, and an altar of incense ahead of them. It is located just in front of the veil separating the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

[Let's take a closer look at each of the three furniture. We will start with the table of showbread recorded in Ex. 25:23-30.]

a. Table of Showbread

The priests placed 12 loaves of unleavened bread, which represented the 12 tribes of Israel, to be placed in two piles of 6 each on the table. This pictured the fellowship and communion of God with His people. Every Sabbath, the bread was removed and eaten by the priests inside the Holy Place, and replaced with fresh loaves. The table of showbread reminds us of God's provision for his people.

Jesus, who claims to be the Bread of Life, will provide spiritual food for all who believes in Him through the Living Word, Jesus, and the Written Word, the Bible. (John 6:51) says “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.” The table here also reminds me of the communion table, where believers in Christ gather together to remember what Christ has done for us as we partakes the bread and the wine. [The second furniture in the Holy Place is the golden lampstand recorded in Ex. 25:31-40.]

b. Golden Lampstand

The lampstand had a center column with three branches extending outward from each side. At the end of each branch was a flower-shaped cup that held a measure of olive oil and a cloth wick. It was the responsibility of Aaron and his sons to keep the lamps burning continually as recorded in Exod. 27:21. This light source weighed one talent or about 75 lbs of solid gold. Inside the Holy Place, there was no window. The only source of light was from the lampstand.

The lampstand foreshadowed the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who claims that He is the “Light of the World.” He said that whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). The lampstand also pointed to the written Word of God. In Ps. 119:105, it says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Application: If we want God to guide us, we need to go to the Lord and His Word for direction.

The lampstand speaks not only of Christ, but also of the Church. It reminds me when Jesus said, “I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Jesus commanded His followers to shine for Him. In (Mt. 5:16), it says, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” The only way the world will see God is through Christ’s followers. We are to imitate Christ so that others will see Christ in us. [The final furniture in the Holy Place is the Altar of Incense.]

c. Altar of Incense

Incense is a common biblical figure for prayer. Ps. 141:2 says, “May my prayer be set before you like incense.” As the priest in the tabernacle offered incense for Israel, so we have today in heaven a great High Priest, who is there to intercede for us. Jesus says in John 17:9, “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.” We can find comfort that He is interceding for me and He is listening to our prayer. Here in the Holy Place, the priests would enjoy a wonderful time of communing with God.

In summary, in the holy place, the table speaks of fellowship, the lampstand represents light for service, and the altar of incense represents worship. Now we move into the second chamber, the Holy of Holies, which consists of the veil, the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat. All three of these things intertwined together.

3. Holy of Holies

a. The Veil

b. The Ark of the Covenant

c. The Mercy Seat

God dwelled in the Holy of Holies. The veil separated God from the rest of His people because God, being holy and His people being sinful, they were separated. The veil was one of the most beautiful objects of the tabernacle. It was woven from fine linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. On it were cherubim, angelic beings, who protected the throne of God.

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest offered up a special sacrifice on behalf of the nation of Israel for all the sins that had not been forgiven. The high priest parted the veil and entered the holy of holies with the blood from a special sacrifice and sprinkled it on the mercy seat, which is the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the Ark of the Covenant was the Law. When God looked down at the Ark of Covenant, He would see the Law, which His people had broken. Therefore, they deserved to die. When the high priest sprinkled the blood over the Mercy Seat, it covered over the broken law underneath. The word atonement means cover over. Now, God saw that the payment of sin was fulfilled and the people were forgiven for that year. It was only a temporary solution. It needed to be repeated year after year.

Jesus Christ would come to be the perfect sacrifice that takes away the penalty of sin forever. After Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin, the four inch veil that separated God from man was torn from top to bottom showing that man could now have direct access to God when they place their trust in Jesus Christ. We are made worthy to stand before God as God credited us with Jesus' righteousness. The tabernacle foreshadows Jesus fulfilling the sacrificial system and providing us with permanent redemption in Christ.

CONCLUSION: The tabernacle was to be built as a dwelling for our holy God. Before man could have a relationship with the Lord, he needed to offer up a sacrifice to pay the penalty of his sin on his behalf at the altar. That is also true for the priest, who then went over to the laver to be cleansed before he could fellowship and serve the Lord in the Holy Place. The High Priest once a year during the Day of Atonement could go into the Holy of Holies to spend intimate time in the presence of God as he sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, which covered the broken law. As a result, the people's sins were forgiven for that one year. Christ came to be the perfect sacrifice to give us permanent redemption.

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