

The Tabernacle
Exodus Series Lesson 7
Carol Martin (1993)

Generally speaking, most Christians today do not understand the principles of salvation as related to Old Testament saints. Last week we talked about the Law and salvation and grace, and this week we have some valuable lessons to learn from the Tabernacle. Worship was certainly different in the Old Testament as compared to the New Testament; however, the principles are identical.

The Tabernacle was not just a 40 year span of worship in the wilderness. It was used some 650 years until Solomon's Temple was completed. Even then, the pattern and procedures remained the same.

In examining the structure and significance of the Tabernacle, let's not lose sight of an important fact. Moses ascended Mt. Sinai eight times (twice for a period of 40 days). The Tabernacle pattern was shown to Moses on his sixth trip. When God gave Moses the Law on stone tablets, He also gave him the revelation of His reconciliation. Through the "shadow" of the Tabernacle, God would demonstrate how He would extend mercy without abolishing the perfect law. Law and mercy went together. The Tabernacle was the gospel in pictures. God didn't have two gospels; rather, when Christ came He revealed the gospel shadow that was concealed in the Tabernacle.

Now it may have been God's will to begin construction immediately, but we know that Moses came back down the mountain to a crisis of idolatry. We'll study that in a few lessons. So it was another 42 days before construction began and it took some seven months to complete (remember they had plenty of manpower plus not much else to do) and to consecrate it before the pillar of cloud descended and the Shekinah glory of the Lord's presence filled the Holy of Holies.

There is so much to touch on, I think I'll break it down into three parts:

- 1) The construction itself
- 2) Some typology in the Tabernacle
- 3) The picture of Christ in the Tabernacle

When we looked at the floor plan in this week's lesson, we started at the altar of burnt offering and worked our way in to the location of the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. Let's not overlook, however, that Scripture starts with the building of the Ark where God would manifest Himself (He made the first move) and works outward to the brazen altar where He meets man. This is the pathway Jesus took - from the throne to the cross; from glory to sacrifice.

But let's stay with the picture of sinful man approaching a holy God. **Note: In 1993 I had transparencies of how the Tabernacle looked taken from a book by Paul Kiene titled The Tabernacle of God in the Wilderness of Sinai. No doubt there are now pictures available on the internet; however, this will be how it was presented in 1993.**

Transparency #1 - Here's a picture of the Tabernacle plan. As you can see, this is looking down and you can see the angel wings covering the Mercy Seat.

Transparency #2 - Here's a clearer view. First of all, we see the Tabernacle courtyard was always set up with the opening facing east.

That's significant because:

- 1) Israel had just left Egypt where the sun played a significant role in their religion and worship, Lest the people confuse God with any worship of the sun, the Levites entered for the morning sacrifice from the east with their backs to the sun.
- 2) The tribe of Judah was assigned to camp directly in front of the eastern opening - Christ would enter history through the tribe of Judah.
- 3) Listen to Ezekiel 43:1-5 . . . The man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. . . The Second Coming of Christ is prophesied to come from the east.

Transparency #3 - This is an overall view of the Tabernacle setting. Notice the outer curtains were white linen about 8' tall between brazen pillars secured by silver hooks and stabilized with brass pins in the sand so it wouldn't blow away in the wind.

The dimensions were originally given in cubits (an ancient measure based on the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger - about 18 inches). This is for free -- but do you know that if you make a fist with your thumb inside, the distance around is your sock size? (Just bring the heel and toe together) Anyway . . .

In the outer court was the bronze altar and the laver and then the Tabernacle itself. This artist put tables for the priests to eat at since the offering had to be eaten in a "holy place" (not necessarily The Holy Place). But Scripture doesn't mention picnic benches.

Transparency #4 - There was a beautifully ornate "door" to the courtyard made 40' long and decorated with needlework of blue, red and purple. To approach the place of sacrifice, you had to encounter the door.

Back to Transparency #3 - Once inside, the brazen altar was about three yards square and about 4 ½' high. It was overlaid with brass because sin had to be dealt with by fire. There were horns on the corners (see Psalm 118:27) to possibly bind the sacrifice and blood was applied there. Several utensils were used by priests to deal with the ashes and the blood, and there were censers for lighting the fire.

Beyond the altar was the laver used for rites of purification (a large wash basin used by the priests to wash hands and feet before ministering in the Holy Place). Now this was not made from the brass given in the freewill offering, but from mirrors of the women. (Ex. 38:8) When we look into the water of God's Word, we see our defilement reflected, don't we? It had a stand and a base. Unlike the rest of the "furniture," Scripture doesn't give us any shape and size detail.

Dominating the court was a rectangular tent (called the Tabernacle) divided into a Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

Transparency #5 - You may see any number of pictures of the Tabernacle that all have different roof lines, but this gives a good visual of the four coverings. Notice too in these pictures the rings and poles that hold things together or are a permanent part of construction for ease of transporting.

The outermost covering was the waterproof covering made of badger/porpoise or sea cow skins (depending on your translation). No size is given, but certainly it was the largest to cover all that was under it.

Next we see the rams skin dyed red (again no size) but probably smaller. That's a striking thing to look at, isn't it?

Third was the covering of goats hair curtains. There were eleven in all (over 62 feet long). It was divided into two sections of 6 and 5 joined by 50 brass hooks.

The decorative fourth curtain was of fine linen and was the only one seen from the inside of the sanctuary. It was colorfully embroidered in blue, purple and red design with cherubim. There were ten curtains joined again in the middle with 50 gold rings through blue loops.

Transparency #6 - **No commentary**

Transparency #7 - Now entering the Holy Place through the hanging curtain . . . to the north side (right) was the Table of Showbread. It wasn't very big (27" high, 3' long

and 18" wide). It kind of reminds me of the teaching rule, "Put the cookies on the bottom shelf." (meaning where people can reach it) The bread of life was within easy reach and fully accessible even to spiritual babes.

Of course, twelve loaves in some arrangement (stacked or laid side by side) were put out each Sabbath and the bread that was removed was eaten by the priests.

To the left was the candlestick or menorah. The candlestick is central to the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, but that's another story. It was gold and beautiful and kept burning with oil.

Directly in front of the veil was the altar of incense (again, small - 18" square but 3 feet high). The location tells us the only approach to the presence of God is through prayer. It guarded the Holy of Holies.

Transparency #8 - This depicts the Holy of Holies. The Bible doesn't tell us much about the thickness of the veil, but Jewish historians say it was so thick no man could possibly tear it.

The Ark of the Covenant held the stone tablets of the Law and the Mercy Seat was the lid. The cherubim wings touched and overshadowed the Mercy Seat. It was there that God would dwell with His people. (Remove transparency) So there's a good picture - the wilderness Tabernacle was both functional and portable.

When we think of the typology of the Tabernacle, obviously some things have already come to your mind. But it's important in looking for types and antitypes that we use wise guidelines and not over-spiritualize God's Word to such an extent that it distorts the plain meaning.

There's a popular saying, "The New Testament is in the Old concealed and the Old is in the New revealed." The whole Tabernacle is a gospel picture:

- Bronze Altar -- shows forgiveness through blood
- Laver -- type of baptism/cleansing
- Showbread -- our strength/sustenance/communion
- Candlestick -- light of understanding / oil of the Holy Spirit
- Veil -- once separated from God, now the way is open
- Ark -- righteousness / God's standard
- Mercy Seat -- grace

Now the next time you read Hebrews 4:2 that says, "For we also have the gospel preached to us, just as they did . . ." - you'll know the Old Testament saints had the gospel preached to them through the type of the Tabernacle.

Briefly, here is how we see Christ in the Tabernacle:

1. The Eastern Gate of the Court symbolized Christ as the Door to heaven (John 10:9).
2. The Altar of Burnt Offering (the Brazen Altar symbolizes the Cross of Christ (Hebrews 10:4-12).
3. The Laver of Brass symbolizes Christ as the One that cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7)
4. The hanging curtain at entrance to the Tabernacle proper symbolizes Christ as the only entrance into full fellowship with God (1 John 1:7).
5. The Table of Showbread symbolizes Christ as the Bread of Life (John 6:35).
6. The golden Candlestick symbolizes Christ as the light of the world (John 1:9; John 3:19; John 8:12).
7. The Altar of Incense symbolizes Christ as our Intercessor (Hebrews 7:25).
8. The Veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) symbolizes the body of Christ that had to be rent before we could enter into the very presence of God (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19-20).
9. The Ark of the Covenant enshrined the divine Law; Jesus kept that Law for us and by His indwelling life and presence, we are seen by God as perfectly righteous.
10. The Mercy Seat symbolizes Christ who saves us and keeps us saved by the power of His shed blood (John 14:6).

Well, perhaps a couple of quick lessons:

- 1) Israel's freewill gifts teach us a lesson. We should be willing to give of wealth, service and skills and also be assured that God will enhance all of those for His glory.
- 2) There were three places a priest could stand in the Tabernacle environment that gives us a thought about where we stand in our Christian life:
 - a) Within the courtyard: Typical perhaps of many who have just entered into Christ but who have not yet begun to mature in their spiritual relationship with Jesus.
 - b) Within the Holy Place: In personal fellowship with Jesus who is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Mediator between God and Man. Spiritual growth is assured in this climate.
 - c) Within the Holy of Holies: Perhaps you felt the awesome joy of His presence and the flood of His grace in the intimacy of just knowing and appreciating Him. The profound truth that the door is open all the time - the veil is gone. We need to enter and dwell with Him there.

