

7. Jesus and the Tabernacle - Part 1

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The Tabernacle was a structure built by the children of Israel under the supervision of Moses, around 1450 B.C. The layout of the Tabernacle and the materials of its construction were specified in great detail to Moses by God at Mount Sinai. Because they were in route from Egypt to the Promised Land, the Tabernacle had to be a portable construction.

The first five books of the Bible were written down by Moses. They are called the 'Torah', the Hebrew word for 'law'.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The word 'truth' here is 'aletheia' in Greek, meaning 'reality'. The 'truth' John speaks of is Jesus Christ as the Word, who was God and who became flesh and 'dwelt' among us. As we studied before, the Greek word 'dwelt' translated 'tabernacled'.

Therefore, the Tabernacle is a picture, a foreshadow of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. CURTAINS OF THE OUTER COURT - Ex 27:9-19

If we could be at the wilderness where these two million Israelites camped around, we would find that their camp was more orderly fashion than the refugee camp you would find in Rwanda, Africa. These Israelites' tents were probably black and brown, set in contrast with the sandy and rocky colors of the desert.

In the center of their camp, you would see the white linen curtains of the Tabernacle's Outer Court, approximately 150 feet long, 75 feet wide and 7.5 feet tall. It was so noticeable against the surrounding rather drab colors of the camp and wilderness. The tall, white, fine twined linen curtains made a separation between the outside world and the beauty that was contained in the Tabernacle. Unless you are on an elevated position, it was impossible to see inside the Tabernacle from the camp outside.

In the Bible, white linen signifies righteousness according to Revelation 19:8. Because God is righteous, we find that the Levites, who God called to be priests to serve Him in the Tabernacle, were instructed to wear fine white linen garments in Exodus 28:39-43.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

Our sins have separated us from God. Therefore, the white linen curtains of the Outer Court remind us that we are separated from God, due to our sins, because He is righteous.

The fine white linen curtains of the Outer Court were supported by pillars, at least 56 of them. The pillars were set in base sockets of bronze and capped with silver tops.

The bronze base sockets symbolize God's judgement on those who sin against Him according to Numbers 16:29-39.

The caps on top of the pillars, the hooks and bands around the linens were made from silver which symbolize the ransom price God placed on each of the children of Israel according to Exodus 30:11-16.

God sacrificed His only Son, Jesus the Lamb of God at Calvary, as the final Passover Lamb during the Feast of Passover in 33 AD, in order to redeem mankind, that is to buy us back from sin.

When we see the white curtains of the Outer Court, we are reminded that our sins have separated us from God. Just like the curtains of the Outer Court, the righteousness of Christ is supported by His judgement of sin and capped by His desire to redeem us, to bring us – the unrighteous ones – back to God.

B. THE DOOR OF THE OUTER COURT - Ex 27:16-17

The Door of the Outer Court was a large curtain, made of fine linen, colored in blue, purple, red and white. The curtain was supported by wooden pillars that were based in brass sockets, with silver bands and hooks, just like the other pillars of the Outer Court curtain. The door curtain was fastened to the pillars with gold hooks.

Each of the colors has a significance:

- Blue indicates heaven and godliness. It points to the Gospel of John.
- Purple signifies Royalty. It points to the Gospel of Matthew.
- Red signifies the blood of Jesus who was sacrificed for us. It points to the Gospel of Mark.
- White signifies purity and humanity without sin. It points to the Gospel of Luke.

These four colors are woven together to become the complete Door, just as the four Gospels combine to give a complete picture of Jesus. Jesus Christ is pure and righteous, kingly and godly, and this is how He as a man can be our ransom, the Door for us to enter into God's presence in the Tabernacle.

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

The Door of the Outer Court is the only way in, yet it is inviting and attractive. The Door speaks of both the compassion and the kingliness of Jesus, His nature as both God and a genuine man, woven together as a beautiful tapestry of the appearing to man of the kindness and love of our Saviour God.

C. THE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING - Ex 27:1-8

The Altar of Burnt Offering was the first item to be seen after entering through the Door into the Tabernacle's Outer Court. It was made from acacia wood overlaid with bronze, it is 4.5 feet high and 7.5 feet in width and length.

Wood is a biblical figure of man. Acacia wood is a strong and does not rot, signifying the humanity without sin, that of Jesus. Bronze in the Bible speaks of God's judgement, particularly His judgement over our rebellious thoughts and words against Him. Since the wood is overlaid with the bronze, the Altar of Burnt Offering reminds us of man under God's judgement for our rebellion against Him. Since the wood is acacia wood, this speaks of Jesus bearing the judgement of God for us on the cross.

At the Altar of Burnt Offering the priests sacrificed various Offerings to God. Some offerings were for their own sins and for the sins of the people. The offering had to be without blemish. This foreshadows the Lord Jesus, who was examined by Pontius Pilate, who declared "I find no fault in Him at all."

The blood of the offering was poured out round the base of the altar, foreshadowing the Lord Jesus, whose precious blood flowed out when His side was pierced on the cross by a Roman spear. The whole concept of blood sacrifices would be quite disturbing to the 21st century western mindset.

According to the righteous requirement of the law, we should die for our sin. However, if the offering dies, then there is atonement for our soul for one year according to the OT law. But Jesus became our Atoning Sacrifice once and for all.

After animal's blood was poured out, the burnt offering was entirely consumed by burning, the only products being ashes and aroma. The burning offering was a pleasing, sweet smelling aroma to God.

D. BRONZE LAVER - Ex 30:17-21

The Bronze Laver was a large bronze basin containing water. The Bible does not record its size or dimensions.

Having entered through the Door of the Tabernacle's Outer Court, the priests had to wash their hands and feet at the Bronze Laver before they could either enter into the Sanctuary Building or make any offering to the Lord at the Altar of Burnt Offering. God warned Moses that if the priests did not wash they would die. It is a serious requirement that we "wash" as we come to handle any of the things of the Lord, because those who believe in the Lord Jesus are considered priests in the New Testament sense.

After having believed in the Lord Jesus and experienced that He is the Door through which we enter into God's kingdom, we should come to Him every day in a simple and sincere way. We need to read the Word of God in the Bible so that we can live by Him and we need to confess our sins to God, because He is faithful and righteous to forgive and cleanse us. When God forgives, He forgets. This is the combined experience of the Bronze Laver and the Altar of Burnt Offering.

It is important to read the Bible, because the Word of God washes us, our "hands" and "feet", especially from the filthiness of the world around us. The Word of God gives us God's perspective on our human conduct and thoughts in the world. The word for washing is "laver" in Greek. As we read His Word, we will need to confess and ask His forgiveness and cleansing. Only then we are qualified to approach the Sanctuary Building.

E. OUTER COVERING WITH BADGER SKIN - Ex 26:14

This is the outermost covering of the Tabernacle.

The covering was made from either badger or seal/dolphin skin. This covering formed a thick, protective and weatherproof layer over the Tabernacle. No amount of baking heat from the sun or wind driven sand storms or rain could disturb the treasure contained within the Tabernacle.

From the outside this covering made the Tabernacle look ordinary and unattractive just like Jesus' appearance. It represents the human side of Jesus.

Isaiah 53:2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

Today there is much temptation to be fashionable and image conscious. Not so with Jesus. What He possesses is real and eternal. He looked like an ordinary person from the outside. But when we get to know Him through His Word, He is full of glory, grace and truth. It is no wonder why the Word said that He dwelt among us and yet the world didn't know Him in John 1.

The casual external viewer would not vote the Tabernacle for the best tent award. It was just a dull outer covering and those boring white curtains. How often do we hear "Christianity is dull and boring"? Such people have mostly not even glimpsed the Door to the Tabernacle's Outer Court. But to those who do make their way to the Door of the Outer Court, observe its character and pass through, what they see is the Altar of Burnt Offering, the Bronze Laver and then the Door to the Sanctuary that is covered with this unattractive outer covering. Such seekers would be reward to see and know the beauty of Jesus our Lord and Savior.

F. COVERING OF RAM SKINS DYED RED - Ex 26:14

Since a ram's skin is not red naturally, but had to be dyed to become red. This reminds us once more of the great significance of blood shown throughout the fabrics of the Doors and Coverings of the Tabernacle. Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah some 750 years before His crucifixion.

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

Jesus paid with His blood the price our sins exacted in God's eyes, so He could redeem us. However, the emphasis here is not merely on individual redemption. The covering lies across the boards of the Sanctuary Building, which are fitted and built together. The upright boards standing together signify God's people.

Speaking of a ram, do you remember it was a ram caught in the thicket that God provided to be sacrificed in place of Isaac in Genesis 22:8-13? Abraham prophetically declared, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." Jesus just did that. The ram therefore speaks of consecration and obedience to God.

This covering represents the character of Jesus from the Book of Matthew.

G. COVERING OF GOATS' HAIR - Ex 26:7-13

Altogether there were 11 curtains of woven goats' hair, measuring 6 feet wide by 45 feet long for each, held together by 50 bronze clasps. This covering made a "Tent" over the Tabernacle.

Goats were particularly important on the Day of Atonement a.k.a. Yom Kippur.

Two goats were selected by lot, one for sacrifice and the other to be sent out into the wilderness. The blood of the sacrificed goat would be taken into the Holy of Holies by the High Priest, as required by God to forgive the sins of the children of Israel, because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness according to Hebrews 9:22. Then the High Priest would lay his hands on the head of the other goat and confess all the sins of the children of Israel before it was sent out into the wilderness, signifying that God would forget all the sins thus confessed. Here is the origin of the 'scapegoat'.

This covering represents the character of Jesus from the Book of Mark.

God desires to remove from His people not only the guilt of sin, but also His memory of that sin, so that we may be reconciled to Him.

H. CHERUBIM EMBROIDERED COVERING - Ex 26:1-6

The covering embroidered with Cherubim was the innermost covering over the Sanctuary. It was this covering that formed the actual Tabernacle. The Cherubim embroidered covering also formed the ceiling of the Tabernacle. There were 10 curtains individual curtains to begin with, each 42 feet long by 6 feet wide. Five curtains were then coupled together with one another, and likewise the other five. Then these two of five curtains were looped together, using 50 golden clasps.

The Book of Exodus does not give us the precise pattern of the embroidery, but we are told that the coloring was blue, purple, scarlet and white and that the embroideries were Cherubim angels.

The Cherubim are there reminding us, perhaps, of two things:

1) The Cherubim were placed at the east of Eden to keep the way of the tree of life. To 'keep' in Hebrew means to "observe", keep watch over, preventing Adam and Eve from returning to partake of the tree of life. Here in the Tabernacle, the Cherubim are overseeing what goes on inside the Sanctuary.

2) The Cherubim are among those in heaven who bow the knee to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

I. THE BOARDS AND BARS OF THE SANCTUARY - Ex 26:15-30

The Boards and their Bars were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, as were the pillars of the entrance Door to the Sanctuary. There were twenty Boards on each of the North and South sides and six Boards on the West side of the Tabernacle. The Boards were held together by five Bars, the middle one of which passed through the center of the Boards.

God specifies to Moses the size of each Board, the number of Boards, the fact that they are to be standing upright, how they are fixed into silver sockets to stand, the number of Boards on each wall and how to strengthen the corners are all specified.

There were two 'extra' Boards, strengthening the corners of the western side. This west-facing wall is called the 'thigh' in Hebrew according to Exodus 26:23, implying strengthened standing in the body of Christ. These extra Boards strengthened the corners, the weakest part of the structure, in the same way as the pillars at the Door of the Sanctuary and the Veil.

The Boards each had an individual standing in the two silver sockets, but they were strongly connected together by the Bars. There were five Bars, four of which passed through rings on the outside of the Boards, plus the middle Bar which passed through the center of each Board.

God's plan of salvation and His purpose in building are not individualistic in the Book of Exodus. The wood may have come from different acacia trees, but all the Boards ended up fashioned and fitly framed together in one structure, that was God's dwelling place according to Ephesians 2:21. As member of the church of Jesus Christ, we need to work together and stay together.