

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 the Lord at Mount Sinai. Because they were en route from Egypt to the Promised Land, the tabernacle had to be a portable building.

The first 5 Books of the Bible were written by Moses. They are called the 'Torah', the Hebrew word for 'law'. We call it "Pentateuch." The word "Pentateuch" comes from 2 Greek words that mean "five books" or "five scrolls."

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 preview of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. CURTAINS OF THE OUTER COURT

Exodus 27:9-19 "You shall also make the court of the tabernacle. For the south side there shall be hangings for the court made of fine woven linen, one hundred cubits long for one side. 10 And its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets shall be bronze. The hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be silver. 11 Likewise along the length of the north side there shall be hangings one hundred cubits long, with its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets of bronze, and the hooks of the pillars and their bands of silver. 12 "And along the width of the court on the west side shall be hangings of fifty cubits, with their ten pillars and their ten sockets. 13 The width of the court on the east side shall be fifty cubits. 14 The hangings on one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets. 15 And on the other side shall be hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets.

Exodus 27:18-19 The length of the court shall be one hundred cubits, the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits, made of fine woven linen, and its sockets of bronze. 19 All the utensils of the tabernacle for all its service, all its pegs, and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

What do you see here?

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 see in Rwanda, Africa or the homeless camp in Los Angeles. These Israelites' tents were probably black and brown due to the animal skins they used, set in contrast with the sandy and rocky colors of the desert.

In the center of their camp, you would see the white linen curtain fence 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 in an elevated position, it was impossible to see inside the tabernacle from the camp outside.

One cubit = 18"

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 judgment 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 symbolizes 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 judgment of our 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

Exodus 27:16-17 “For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, made by a weaver. It shall have four pillars and four sockets. 17 All the pillars around the court shall have bands of silver; their hooks shall be of silver and their sockets of bronze.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

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 right-

eous, 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 a man with the kindness and love of our Savior God.

C. THE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING

Exodus 27:1-8 "You shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide—the altar shall be square—and its height shall be three cubits. 2 You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze. 3 Also you shall make its pans to receive its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. 4 You shall make a grate for it, a network of bronze; and on the network you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. 5 You shall put it under the rim of the altar beneath, that the network may be midway up the altar. 6 And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. 7 The poles shall be put in the rings, and the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar to bear it. 8 You shall make it hollow with boards; as it was shown you on the mountain, so shall they make it.

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

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, 7.5 feet in width and length.

Wood is a biblical figure of a man. Acacia wood is strong and does not rot, signifying humanity without sin, that of Jesus. Bronze in the Bible speaks of God's judgment, particularly His judgment over our rebellious thoughts and words against Him. Since the wood is overlaid with the bronze, the Altar of Burnt Offering reminds us of the Man under God's judgment for our rebellion against Him. Since the wood is acacia wood, this speaks of Jesus without sin bearing the judgment 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 as well as 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 around 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. I am sure that 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 sins. However, if the animal 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

Exodus 30:17-21 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 18 "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, 19 for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. 20 When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the Lord, they shall wash with water, lest they die. 21 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations."

What do you get out of this?

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 Holy Place 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 NT 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 simply and sincerely. We need to read the Word of God, 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 Altar of Burnt Offering and the Bronze Laver.

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 our Holy God.

E. OUTER COVERING WITH BADGER SKIN

Exodus 26:14 You shall also make a covering of ram skins dyed red for the tent, and a covering of badger skins above that.

What do you see here?

This is the outermost covering of the tabernacle. The covering was made out of badger 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 outside this covering, the tabernacle looks 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 among the Christian leaders. 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 that He dwelt among us and yet the world didn't know Him as it is mentioned in John 1.

The casual external viewer would not vote the tabernacle for the "Best Looking Tent Award." It was just a dull outer covering and those boring white curtains. How often do we hear from unbelievers that "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 Holy Place that is covered with this unattractive outer covering. Such truth-seekers would be rewarded to see and know the beauty of Jesus our Lord and Savior.