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The Tabernacle of Moses

Exodus 25-27; 30-31; 35-40; Hebrews 8:1-7 9:23-28

“Who serve a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the Tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “That you make all things according to the pattern which was shown to you on the mountain.” *Hebrews 8:5*

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. And behold the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.” *Matthew 27:50,51*

To understand the Holy Temple in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus it is important to have knowledge of the Tabernacle of Moses, which became the prototype of the future Temple structures. After Moses led the children of Israel out of bondage from Egypt, the nation spent one year at Mt. Sinai. On the mountain, God gave him the Ten Commandments and very detailed instructions to construct the Tabernacle (which was to be the place where God was to dwell with His people) and offer us a ‘blueprint’ or ‘pattern’ that reveals God’s love toward us through the life of Jesus Christ.

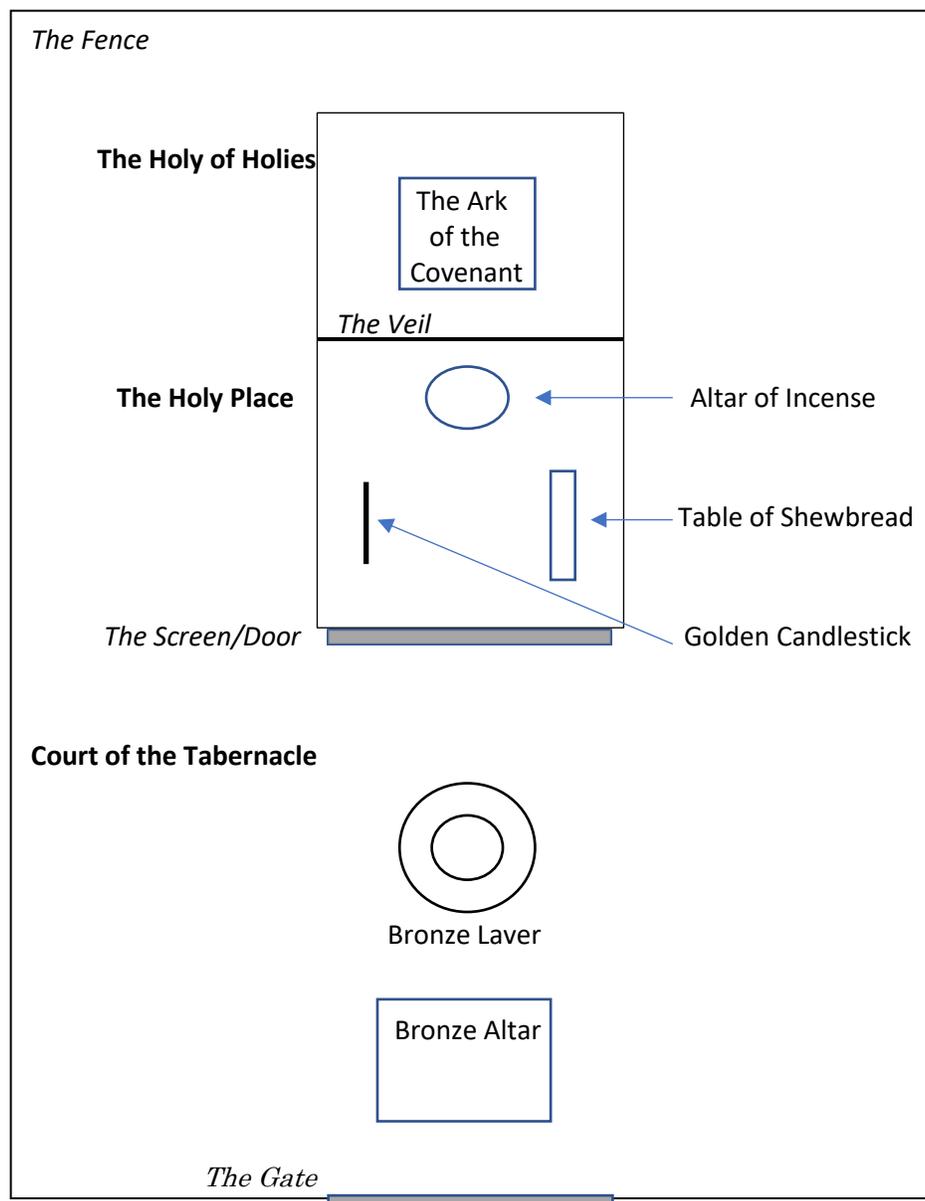
Everything about the Tabernacle revealed God’s plan for salvation and how sinful man would be able to have an intimate relationship with a Holy God. Every minute detail had meaning and purpose. There were fourteen different kinds of material used to create and build it. The colors, numbers, measurements, materials, animal skins, furniture, precious metals, designs – everything God directed Moses to build and create had eternal significance.

For example, the ‘fence’ (100 cubits x 50 cubits) separated the Tabernacle from the outside Godless world. There was only one way into the Courtyard (through a series of curtains called the Gate – *Jesus is the way*); only one way into the Holy Place (a series of curtains called the Screen or Door – *Jesus is the truth*); and only one way into the Holy of Holies (a curtain called The Veil – *Jesus is the life, John 14:6*) It was in the Holy of Holies where humanity (High Priest) met and had fellowship with God.

The Tabernacle:

- The place where God was to dwell with His people
- Revealed that the holiness of God needed to be separated from the sinfulness of humanity
- The 'earthly' Tabernacle is but a 'shadow' of the one in Heaven
- Revealed a specific 'pattern' that needed to be followed to have an intimate personal relationship with God
- Illuminated prophetically the ministry and teachings of Jesus

The Tabernacle of Moses



The Colors

Gold – holiness, purity
Blue – heavenly, divine
Purple – royalty, suffering
Scarlet – sacrifice, blood
White – purity,
righteousness

The Coverings

Badger's skin
Rams skin (dyed red)
Goats Hair
Fine woven cotton

The Materials

Gold – holiness, purity
Silver – redemption
Bronze – God's judgement
and examination
Acacia wood – Jesus'
humanity

The Furniture

Altar of Burnt Offering – acacia wood overlaid with bronze / the grating – pure bronze (*Exodus 27:1-8*)

Bronze Laver – completely made of bronze with mirrors holding spring water (*Exodus 30:17-21*)

Golden Lampstand – solid gold providing the only light in the Holy Place (*Exodus 25:31-40*)

Table of Shewbread – acacia wood overlaid with gold (*Exodus 25:23-30*)

Altar of Incense – acacia wood overlaid with gold (*Exodus 30:1-10*)

Ark of the Covenant – acacia wood overlaid with gold/
Mercy Seat and Cherubim – pure gold (*Exodus 25:10-22*)

Altar of Burnt Offering (Bronze Altar)

Upon entering the courtyard of the Tabernacle, the first piece of 'furniture' was the sacrificial altar. Animal sacrifices were offered on the altar and the blood of the animals were sprinkled on the four brass horns by the attending priests. The significance of being bronze is that it represented God's judgement and/or examination. The first 'step' to having an intimate personal relationship with God is to understand that "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin,*" *Hebrews 9:22*. Thus, upon entering the Tabernacle the animal sacrifices became the 'substitute sacrifice' for our sinfulness. Christ was crucified and paid the penalty for sin and became that sacrifice in our place. Even in the later Temples of Jerusalem, everyone who wanted to approach God had to bring a sacrificial offering to the Altar. An important note is that the fire for the burnt offerings were never allowed to go out and the first fire was lit from Heaven (*Leviticus 6:5,6*)

Scripture nuggets:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Galatians 2:20

“Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” Romans 12:1

Bronze Laver

Before the Levitical priests could enter the Holy Place, they were required to wash their hands and their feet. Failure to do so would result in instant death upon entering. It was necessary to be symbolically cleansed and pure to enter God’s presence. This task was performed daily by the priests. It is necessary for us to be ‘cleansed daily’ if we are to have a proper communion with God living out the life of sanctification (GK: *hagiosmos* – ‘being set apart’). Inside the basin portion of the laver were mirrors and the priests were instructed to only use spring water.

Scripture nuggets:

“If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8,9

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2

“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:5

The Tabernacle Structure

The actual Tabernacle consisted of a ‘structure’ made up of acacia wooden planks overlaid with gold, intermixed with a series of curtains and furniture. The first room was the Holy Place and then the Holy of Holies (separated by the Veil). It is significant to note that there is no solid top to it but is underneath four different types of coverings: Badger’s skin on the outside; then rams skin dyed red; then woven goats hair; then the innermost covering were ten fine linen curtains embroidered with colorful cherubim. From the outside the Tabernacle looked dull and unappealing (the badger’s skin). But when the priests moved inside the Holy Place they saw a rich variety of colors and furniture overlaid with pure gold. To the outside world, the Christian life may seem dull and unappealing but to many who follow Jesus their lives have an inner beauty that the world does not (and cannot) understand.

The Holy Place

This is the first enclosed area of the Tabernacle. This room symbolizes living, worship, and service that is ‘set apart’ from sin to serve God. The five pillars of acacia

wood overlaid with gold at the entrance is the first instance God commanded Moses to use gold (representing holiness and the righteousness of God). This room consisted of the Golden Lampstand, the Table of Shewbread, and the Altar of Incense.

The Table of Shewbread

Every seven days the priests placed twelve loaves of bread (always on the Sabbath day) on the table. Then the old bread served as food (for only those priests who served God inside the Holy Place). To the nation of Israel in the wilderness this represented gratitude to God for supplying their daily bread as they were dependent upon Him for food. Each morning in the deserts of Sinai God provided the nation with manna (the bread of angels, Exodus 16) to give them nourishment. To the Christian, this represents our dependence upon Jesus (and His Word) for our spiritual nourishment.

Scripture nuggets:

“Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst.” John 6:35

“But He answered and said, “It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4

Golden Candlestick (Lampstand)

This piece of furniture was opposite the Table of Shewbread and is the only piece of furniture completely made of solid gold. It held seven lamps on top of six almond branches, each with bowls (almond blossoms) having a wick and oil for burning. This was the only light source in the Holy Place. The candlestick represented more than just physical light but ‘enlightenment’ for those who come to God in holiness. Numerous times in Scripture oil was used to symbolize the Holy Spirit.

Scripture nuggets:

“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” 1 John 1:5

“And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:5

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” John 14:6

Altar of Incense

Representing prayerful worship, this was the third piece of furniture in the Holy Place and was positioned directly in front of the Veil that separated the room and the Holy of Holies. On top of the Altar was a golden plate where the incense was burned morning and evening (continuously) surrounded by a golden wreath signifying the need for the child of God to be in perpetual prayer, praise, and worship. It is our duty to honor God with thanksgiving and worship. The attending priests would take coals from the Bronze Altar for the incense to burn and it was described as a perfume of sweet smelling aromas. The importance of this piece of furniture and its purpose is that it was directly before the Veil, the nearest thing to the Holy of Holies. It should also be noted that this Altar had four horns made of gold, whereas the four horns on the 'outside' Altar in the Courtyard were made of bronze.

Scripture nuggets:

“And walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” Ephesians 5:2

“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” Psalms 150:6

“O magnify the LORD with me and let us exalt His name together.” Psalms 34:3

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The Veil

This curtain 'veiled' the immediate presence of God from the officiating priests in the Holy Place. It was beautifully colored (blue, scarlet, purple) and embroidered with white Cherubim. The curtain hung just behind four golden pillars with silver bases. (In comparison, the five pillars of gold at the 'Door' in front of the Holy Place had bronze bases). In the Tabernacle of the wilderness only Moses and the High Priest (Aaron) could enter the Holy of Holies through the Veil. Thereafter in the Jewish Temples of Jerusalem, only the High Priest could enter through the Veil, and that was only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

The Holy of Holies – Ark of the Covenant

The divine presence of God was in this inner chamber. As the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he offered up the sins of the people by sprinkling the blood of the sacrificed lamb on top of the Mercy Seat. As God looked upon the blood, His 'seat of judgement' became a 'seat of mercy'. Thus, by the grace of God, a covering for the sins of the people was satisfied. In this room there were no golden candlesticks – God Himself was the Light.

Basically, the Ark of the Covenant was a golden box. Inside the Ark were three items: Ten Commandments – Exodus 20:1-17 (representing obedience to God’s commandment and laws); Aaron’s staff/rod – Numbers 17:1-12 (representing obedience to God’s authority); and a pot of manna – Exodus 16:32-34 (representing obedient surrender and/or fellowship). Over the golden box and at each end of the Mercy Seat (also called the Atonement Cover), were two golden cherubim. In heaven the actual cherubim were the guardians of the very habitation of God and His throne. As these two golden cherubim spread their wings over the Mercy Seat their eyes were focused upon the golden cover where the atoning blood would be splattered. Thus, their gaze was not upon the High Priest but upon the blood of the sacrifice. Today we are able to approach God because He is focusing on the blood of Jesus that was shed and not our sinfulness.

Scripture nuggets:

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrew 4:14-16

“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, this is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Hebrews 10:19-22

