

Old Testament Survey: 5

The Desert House

Introduction

Last study we very quickly covered the moment from when God's people came up out of Egypt and journeyed to the Promised Land. We just mentioned and glossed over a very significant part of Exodus in that session which we are going to back pedal a bit in this study and look at - The Tabernacle.

As we look at this we can only give a brief overview of the structure and symbolism – a full study would take many weeks to complete. But it is significant for our understanding of the Old Testament.

The Tabernacle was a tent-like structure which was dedicated to God for His presence. It was comprised of three parts – The Outer Courtyard, The Holy Place, and The Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies as it sometimes referred to). God gave Moses specific instructions (a pattern) for its construction and the furnishings it contained. God is a God of order and pattern.

Exodus 25.8-9

The Tabernacle was to be the place where God dwelt and met with His people. Hence it is referred to by its full name The Tabernacle of Meeting. The word tabernacle literally means a residence – this was God's dwelling place among men. The tabernacle was situated in the midst of the camp with three tribes of Israel camped on each of its four sides – God truly dwelling in the heart of His people.

The Tabernacle speaks to us of:

Heaven - God dwells in Heaven

Jesus Christ - God dwelt among men in the person of Jesus (John 1.14)

Church - God by His Spirit dwells in the Church – His people (1 Corinthians 6.19)

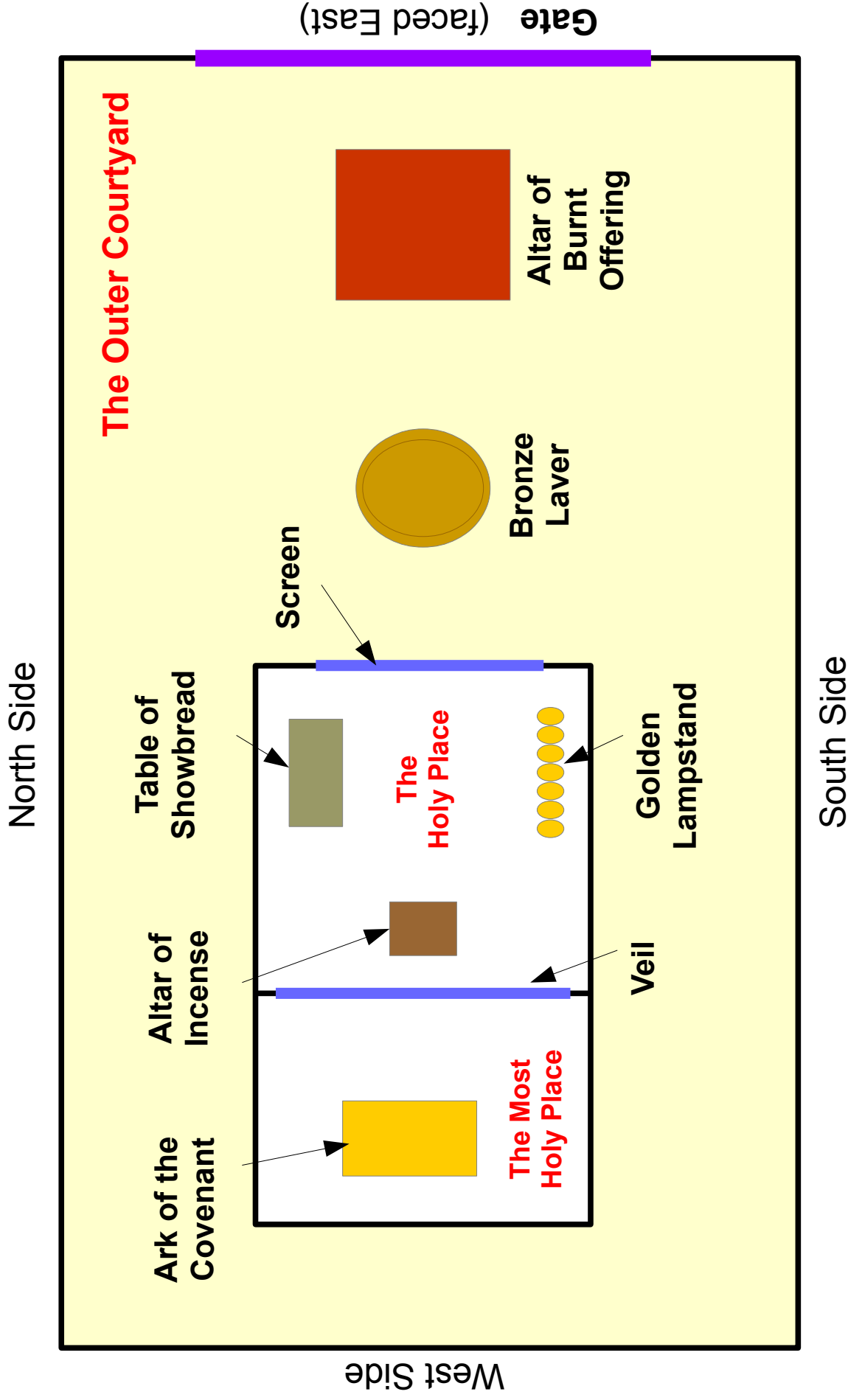
Plan of the Tabernacle – on the next page is a plan of the Tabernacle which you should constantly refer to as you study these notes and the Scriptures that go with them.

The pattern of the Tabernacle and it's symbolism all point to Jesus.. As you look at the plan from above you will notice that even the furniture is laid out in the shape of the cross.

In the image (right) you can see what The Tabernacle structure probably would have looked like.



Plan of the Tabernacle of Meeting



THE OUTER COURTYARD

Exodus 27.9-19

The courtyard was 100 cubits long by 50 cubits wide (a cubit is usually understood to be about 18 inches = 1½ feet = 0.45 metres). It had no external covering and the desert sand was its floor. Around the perimeter stood 60 bronze pillars – 20 each for the north and south sides and 10 each for the east and west sides. Between each pillar there were 5 cubits of fine twined white linen.

The Hangings (Curtains) of the Court

These were made of fine white twined linen. The Bible identifies white linen as a symbol of righteousness. In the Tabernacle it represents the righteousness of God and also the righteousness of the saints.

The curtains also had the practical effect of dividing between those on the inside and those outside – the righteous and the unrighteous. Every person in the world occupies one of two positions either 'saved' or 'lost', 'in Christ' or 'without Christ'. In Christ we have a security – knowing the love of God, knowing that nothing or nobody can separate us from God's love.

The Pillars of the Court

The 60 pillars that stood on the perimeter, to which the curtains were hung, formed a complete unbroken wall (except for the entrance gate). This symbolises the Body of Christ, the Church, made up of many members but one complete united body.

The pins and cords that supported the pillars and kept them upright are symbolic of the promises of God (pins) and faith that lays hold of the promises (cords).

The pillars did not stand directly on the desert sand but in bronze sockets. This teaches us that we do not stand on our own but on Jesus Christ the foundation stone. God's word is the foundation of the church and there is nothing that can prevail against it – not even hell (Matthew 16.17-18). These sockets, pins and cords provided stability.

The Gate of the Court

The only way into the Tabernacle courtyard was through the one gate on the eastern side. This is great symbol of Jesus the Door (John 10.9). Any Israelite wanting to approach God had to come through the gate, so with us, we can only have access to God the Father through Jesus the Door (John 14.6).

The Gate was four times long as it was high, it was suspended on four pillars and displayed four colours. Four is the universal number, this shows us that the Gospel of Christ is universal, open to all. It is not limited by race, colour, class or religion. All can come to God but through the one way - Jesus Christ.

The four colours woven into the fabric of the Gate were purple, blue, scarlet and white and show us four truths about Jesus.

- *Purple* – the royal colour. It represents Jesus as the King of Kings.
- *Blue* – speaks of heaven and the deity of Jesus. Jesus is God (John 1.1)
- *Scarlet* – speaks to us of the humility of Jesus, especially His obedience to the cross. The red colour reminds us of Jesus blood that was shed for us.
- *White* – represents righteousness. Jesus is our righteousness and in Him we are made the righteousness of God.

Exodus 27.1-8

The Altar of Burnt Offering

As you came through the Gate into the Courtyard you are faced with the Altar of Burnt Offering or Altar of Sacrifice. The Altar of Offering was the basis of the entire Levitical system. It was the place of sacrifice, millions of animals were slain, rivers of blood flowed as sacrifices were made for sin. It speaks to us of the cross where Jesus was slain, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29). This is the basis of our faith in God.

Exodus 30.17-21

The Bronze Laver

Between the Altar of Burnt Offering and the main structure of the Tabernacle was the Bronze Laver. No specifications for the construction of this piece of furniture are given in the Bible except that it was to be made of bronze. It contained water for the priests to cleanse themselves before entering The Holy Place. It speaks to us of a daily cleansing from the defilement of sin arising from our daily walk. The psalmist asks the question '[Who can stand in His holy place?](#)' (Psalm 24.3-4), only he that has clean hands and a pure heart – those who have been cleansed from sin.

In the New Testament Paul writes of our cleansing by '[the washing of water by the word](#)' (Ephesians 5.26), God's word cleanses us, this is symbolised by the water that was in the Laver.

The Laver was made of highly polished bronze that were once used as mirrors by the women (Exodus 38.8) who willingly gave them for the making of the Laver. This highlights the need for us to look into the mirror of the word of God so we can judge ourselves. God's word searches deep within us and reveals who we really are (Hebrews 4.12).

Like all the furnishings of the Tabernacle, the Laver speaks of Christ, in this case He is the Living Word.

THE SANCTUARY (MAIN BUILDING)

Exodus 26.15-30

The framework of the sanctuary of the Tabernacle was made up of 48 boards that were overlaid with gold. Each board was locked into two silver sockets by two tenons, then a series of bars held the boards in place.

The Boards

These boards are representative of the *History of God's People* and show the work of Christ for His church through redemption. The boards were cut from trees before being gathered by the feller (evangelist) and brought to the Tabernacle. They were stripped of bark and foliage, cut and overlaid with gold thus signifying what Jesus Christ did for us. He stripped us of everything that was of self and clothed us in His righteousness.

The bronze of the Tabernacle was seen by the outside, but the gold boards were only visible from inside the Tabernacle – this shows us how God sees us in Christ.

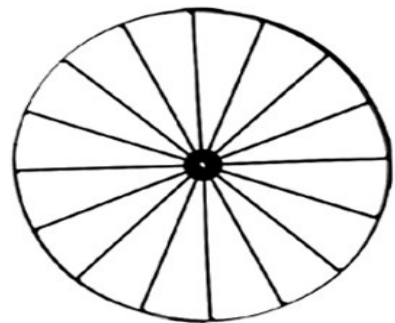
The Sockets

The sockets are representative of the *Security of God's People*. Each board stood in two silver sockets. The silver to make these sockets came from an offering – the ransom money (Exodus 30.11-16). This teaches us that the price was paid for our salvation with the precious blood of Christ Jesus. The ransom money was the same for all rich or poor, just as the blood offering of Jesus is the same for all.

The Bars

The bars represent the Unity of God's People. They connected the boards together to form the building. There were three sets of five bars, one set on each side of the sanctuary except the east side - again these were overlaid with gold. Unity is a key to blessing (Psalm 133.1-3) and is important for the Body of Christ.

There was also a middle bar (v28) which passed through the middle of the boards probably to lock them all together and form a sturdy framework. This speaks to us of the presence of Christ in the midst of His people. Jesus said that where we gathered together, united in His name, He would be in the midst of us (Matthew 18.20). Jesus in the centre is an important part of unity, this can be illustrated using a wheel with spokes, like an old cartwheel, with Jesus as the hub and the spokes as the brethren. The closer the spokes get to the hub (Jesus) the closer they get to each other.



Exodus 26.1-14

The Coverings and Curtains

The Inner Curtains (The Exaltation of Christ)

There were ten curtains in made of fine twined linen with blue, scarlet and purple threads. These colours represent the same as they did for the Gate. The curtains formed the first covering for the sanctuary and were only visible from inside. They symbolised the exalted Christ. In the temple the prophet Isaiah saw the exalted Lord, He was '[high and lifted up](#)'

(Isaiah 6.1), we too see a risen, exalted Christ because God has highly exalted Him (Philippians 2.9).

The Curtains of Goats Hair (The Substitution of Christ)

Next there were eleven curtains made from goats hair. These acted as a tent over the Tabernacle and covered the inner fine linen curtains. These curtains symbolised the Substitution of Christ, i.e. Christ died in our place. The goat was the symbol of atonement and we read in Leviticus 16 that on the Day of Atonement two goats were taken, one was sacrificed and the blood sprinkled, the other was taken out of the camp to act as a scapegoat to die and bear the sins of the nation. Christ was our scapegoat – He was led out of the city and died bearing the sins of the world.

The Curtains of Ram Skins (The Consecration of Christ)

For the final two sets of curtains no direct instructions were given to their size or how they were coupled.

On top of the curtains of goats hair were another layer of curtains. These were made from ram skins which were dyed red. They symbolise the Consecration of Christ. Exodus 29.26 mentions the 'ram of consecration', the red dye points to the truth of the obedience of Jesus to the point of death (Philippians 2.8).

These curtains were completely hidden from view. Consecration is like that, it involves yielding the heart and will, both of which are unseen, and it is worked out in the secret place of the Most High God.

The Curtains of Badger Skins (The Humility of Christ)

There is some uncertainty as to what is meant by badger skins, some translations suggest goat skins, others dolphin, porpoise or even seal skin. Another possible translation was the skin of a deer or antelope. Whatever it was the curtains that were made from this leathery material provided an all weather protection for the Tabernacle.

The Bible mentions in Numbers 4 that the vessels of the Tabernacle were wrapped in badger skin for transportation. The only other reference, apart from those to do with the Tabernacle, can be found in Ezekiel 16.10 and it is this reference that gives us one clue to the symbolism.

[“I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk.”](#)

The 'badger skin' was a strong, durable leather suitable for shoes, perhaps the shoes that the Israelites wore coming out of Egypt were made of this for they did not wear out. This verse associates the badger skin with shoes and therefore with walking. Our walk should be one of humility, walking humbly before God (Micah 6.8). When applied to Jesus it points to His self humbling attitude (Philippians 2.5-6)

Exodus 26.36-37

The Screen / The Door

The screen which acted as the door of the Tabernacle was woven of fine linen with blue, purple and scarlet thread (the symbolism is the same as in the Gate, and we will see again in the Veil).

There was only one way into the presence of God and this is represented by the three entrances in a straight line from the east side of the curtains of the Outer Courtyard. - The Gate, then the Screen/Door, then finally the Veil.

These three entrances teach us of the grace that is ministered to us through Jesus and in particular three things we have in Him according to Romans 5.1-2

- **PEACE** - “therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” - symbolised by *The Gate*. Our peace is with God, we have been cleansed from our sins and that gives us right standing with Him
- **PRIVILEGE** - “through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” symbolised by *The Screen*. Our privilege is that of access we can come to the Father in Jesus name.
- **PROSPECT** - “and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” symbolised by *The Veil*. Our prospect is one of hope, we can come within the veil to the mercy seat and find grace to help in times of need.

THE HOLY PLACE

This was part of the Tabernacle that only the priests could go. The Israelite was confined to the Outer Courtyard. We can rejoice today that we have been made priests and kings to God (Revelation 1.5-6) and have been brought near by His blood thus giving us access to God (Ephesians 2.13)

Exodus 25.23-30

The Table of Showbread

The Table of Showbread was placed on the north side of the Holy Place. It was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and also had a gold moulding. All the utensils associated with it were also made of pure gold. These two materials, wood and gold, represent the dual-nature of Jesus. He is very God and very man

More significantly is what was on the table rather than the actual table itself. Every Sabbath the priests would place twelve loaves of unleavened bread, baked of fine flour and placed in two rows of six (Leviticus 24.5-9)

The bread speaks of the Person of Christ –

- He is the Bread of Life (John 6.35)
- the fine flour represents His spotless, perfect life.
- The baking of the bread meant it had to pass through the fire – a symbol of the suffering and death of Jesus

- The twelve loaves show us that Jesus is our representative to the Father – He is our Advocate, our Great High Priest, Our Intercessor. The number twelve in Scripture is a representative number i.e. the twelve tribes represented the whole of God's people; the twelve apostles represent the church. The word 'showbread' literally means *bread of faces* and shows us that Jesus is presenting His face before the Father on our behalf.

Exodus 25.31-40

The Golden Lampstand

Directly opposite the Table of Showbread stood the Golden Lampstand, this was a grand piece of craftsmanship, a seven stemmed lampstand. It was shaped out of one piece of gold weighing one talent (approx 75lbs or 34kg) – the main stem, the branches, the bowls, the ornamental knobs and flowers. The seven lamps were arranged in such a way that the light shone in front of the Lampstand.

Light has always been associated with the Word of God (see Psalm 119.105; 2 Peter 1.19). Jesus is also known as the Light of the World (John 8.12) – the Living Word is the Light of the World.

The oil that burnt in the lamps is symbolic of the Holy Spirit who brings revelation and illumination of God's Word to our spirit. He guides us into all the truth.

The ornamental flowers on the Lampstand, the almond shaped knobs and bowls are symbolic of the fruitfulness that the Word produces in us.

That this was hammered and shaped out of one piece of gold signifies wholeness especially where God's Word is concerned.

- The entirety of it is truth (Psalm 119.160)
- ALL of it is God breathed (2 Timothy 3.16)
- We must not add anything to it or take from it but leave it as it is – whole (Revelation 22.18-19)

One of the important priestly ministries was to dress and tend the lamp every evening and morning. This only serves to show us the importance of feeding on the word on a daily basis.

Exodus 30.1-10

The Altar of Incense

The Altar of Incense stood directly in front of the Veil. As it's name suggests it was an altar on which incense was burned. The incense was to be made according to a strict recipe (Exodus 30.34-38). It was forbidden for it to be copied or used for any other purpose. Nothing else was to be offered on this altar – no other types of incense, nor a burnt offering, drink offering nor grain offering. The incense was to burn daily once in the evening and once in the morning.

Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest was allowed to sprinkle the

blood of the sin offering on the horns of this altar before going within the Veil.

The Altar of Incense represents the worship of the Church. We are to continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13.15). The sacrifices we offer are prayer, praise and worship.

- *Prayer* – an exercise in which we are occupied with a need or petition
- *Praise* – an exercise in which we are occupied with the answer and supply of a need
- *Worship* – an exercise in which we are occupied with God Himself

The incense represents the worship of God's people which fills Heaven's throne room just like the fragrance of the incense filled the Holy Place. Our prayers are received in heaven by Jesus, our Great High Priest who in turn presents them before the throne in all the fragrance of His own most precious name.

Exodus 26.31-33

The Veil

As with the Gate and the Screen, the Veil was woven of fine white linen with blue, purple and scarlet thread.

Verse 33 tells us that the Veil served as a divider between the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place. The Veil separated the Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat from the rest of the Tabernacle. The Veil kept sin from the presence of God. No one was allowed to pass beyond the Veil into the Most Holy Place except the High Priest; and then he could only do this once a year, on the Day of Atonement, bearing the blood of the sin offering. If this blood was accepted then the sins of the people were atoned for, if not then the High Priest died in the presence of God.

The Veil is representative of Christ, more significantly with His death. Jesus carried His own blood before the Father as a once for all sacrifice. At the point of His death the Veil, which was then located in the Temple, was torn in two from top to bottom opening up the way and giving access to every person into the presence of God (Mark 15.38)

The rent veil signalled the cancellation of the Levitical system of sacrifice and heralded the start of a new better covenant. Notice that the Veil was torn from top to bottom – impossible when attached to a rod. This shows us that it was a work of God, and He did it.

THE MOST HOLY PLACE (or HOLY OF HOLIES)

Exodus 25.10-16

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was the first thing God told Moses to make. It was a chest made

out of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. It also had gold mouldings around it. In the Ark of the Covenant were placed three items – the Tablets of the Law (Ten Commandments), Golden Pot of Manna, and Aaron's Rod that budded (Hebrews 9.4). It would appear that the Ark was made to hold these things and the Tabernacle constructed to hold the Ark.

It speaks of the Person of Jesus Christ – who He is and not so much what He has done.

The Ark had the position of chief place in the Tabernacle and shows us that Christ has the Pre-eminence in all things (Colossians 1.18)

Exodus 25.17-22

The Mercy Seat and Cherubim

The Mercy Seat and Cherubim which stood at both ends of it were made out of one piece of pure gold. It formed the lid of the Ark of the Covenant and therefore was made to fit. The work of making the Mercy Seat was assigned to a skilled artisan called Bezalel (Exodus 37.1-9)

We have just seen that the Ark of the Covenant represented the Person of Jesus but the Mercy Seat represents His work in the presence of God i.e. His High Priestly Ministry.

The Mercy Seat was God's throne. He was known as the God who dwelt between the Cherubim (1 Samuel 4.4). It was the meeting place between God and the High Priest when he carried the blood of atonement before the Lord.

We ought to remember that for Israel the Mercy Seat was a place, but for us the Mercy Seat is a person - Jesus