

Israel's Tabernacle

The Meeting Place Between God & Man

**A Guide to Understanding the
Message Behind the Mystery**

Published by
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The Tabernacle of Witness in the Wilderness



An Introduction

In the Book of Exodus, God gave Moses instructions for building what the Bible calls *“the Tabernacle of witness in the wilderness.”* (Acts 7:44) The purpose of this peculiar structure was to provide *a meeting place between God and man*—a place for the Israelites to worship God, indeed, a place to communicate with the almighty Creator himself. Numbers 17:4; 2 Kings 17:35-36

As precious as that scenario is, a question still presents itself to the thinking mind: *Why should a 21st Century Christian care about a 3,600-year-old Jewish relic? For that matter, why should a modern-day Jew care about this ancient artifact?*

The Tabernacle was replaced more than 3,000 years ago with the completion of Solomon's Temple. Though there was a striking beauty to certain aspects of this structure, most of it was hidden to all but the few.



The ceremonies associated with this edifice have been considered by many as peculiar and even barbaric. Nevertheless, God Himself set this arrangement in place for a grand purpose, and there are numerous references to it throughout His Word. Thus, there are many reasons why the serious student of the Bible should give the Tabernacle of Israel careful attention. Indeed, the study

of the Tabernacle of Israel will shed light on the past, present and future destinies of all who have lived—Christians, Jews and even non-believers. As will be seen, God's love for His creation is shown within the design, ceremonies and structure of the Tabernacle.



A Solid Scriptural Foundation

To claim that the Tabernacle arrangement given to Israel holds valuable truths of importance to Christians is a remarkable premise which must be proven. That proof is abundant in God's Word. To discover the foundation for believing that the Tabernacle of the Israelites would have significance to the Christian, one must begin with a basic and important concept—*Bible symbolism*. Understanding symbols used in the Scriptures is a basic key to unlocking important lessons.

John the Baptist used just such symbolism when he exclaimed: *"Behold the Lamb of God!"* (John 1:29) Obviously, this statement could not be taken literally. All reasonable minds must conclude that the word *"Lamb"* in this context is symbolic. John, using symbolic language, was equating Jesus Christ to the Passover lamb of the Mosaic Law given to Israel at the time of their exodus from Egypt.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul provided a second witness in this matter of symbolic language. He clearly stated that *"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."* And, the Apostle Peter described Jesus as *"a lamb without blemish..."* 1 Peter 1:19



The Book of Revelation contains numerous references to Jesus as *the Lamb*—25 times in 24 verses. For example, it is exclaimed of Jesus: “*Worthy is the Lamb!*” (Revelation 5:12) And, the water of life is spoken of as “*proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*” Revelation 22:1



There are many other references in the Bible giving direct explanations of similar symbols. *Fire*, for instance, is a symbol of *purging* and *purifying* (1 Peter 1:7); *clouds* are a symbol of *trouble* (Zephaniah 1:15) and *water* is a symbol of *truth* (Ephesians 5:26). For the purpose of this study, however, we are most interested in the beautiful picture lessons of the Tabernacle itself. The Book of Hebrews is filled with such lessons which bring to light the grand purpose of the *Tabernacle in the wilderness*.

The Tabernacle as a Type

The Apostle Paul makes several clear statements which teach that the Tabernacle arrangement was symbolic. We find one such concise declaration in Hebrews 9:11: “...*Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect Tabernacle, not made with hands...*”

Thus, there is Scriptural confirmation in the New Testament which describes the symbolic *spiritual* application of the Tabernacle. When speaking of the priests who served Israel’s Tabernacle, the Apostle Paul provided this reference: “*Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.*” Hebrews 8:5



The words *example*, *shadow* and *pattern* help us to understand the nature of Tabernacle symbols as objects with specific characteristics, providing pictorial illustrations of the things symbolized. The New Testament Greek uses a word to describe this concept: “*tupos*” meaning *type*.

What does a *type* mean in a practical sense? To understand the answer to this question, we must go back to the example of a lamb. A lamb is meek and submissive. A lamb does not open its mouth when being led to the slaughter. These *characteristics* apply to Jesus in a powerful way in Isaiah 53:7: “*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*” This scripture is repeated in Acts 8:32 where it specifically refers to Jesus as that lamb. Thus, in a *type* or illustration, the lamb has specific *characteristics* which can be applied to Jesus.



The Apostle Paul makes an even broader application of the use of *types* in Scripture with these words: “*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition...*” (1 Corinthians 10:11) He repeats this application in Colossians 2:17 stating that those things which happened to Israel were “*a shadow of good things to come.*”

The entire Jewish arrangement is, therefore, identified by Paul as symbolic. He tells us that these symbols contain important and relevant lessons for us as Christians. He emphasized the serious nature of these *types and shadows*. Because God took them very seriously—the usual penalty for failing to observe the features of the *type* was death. (See Exodus 28:43; Leviticus 10:1, 2) Thus, it behooves the disciple of Christ to look into the instructions of the Scriptures to learn the symbolic meaning of the Tabernacle arrangement.

The Tabernacle Layout



An Overview

The Tabernacle building itself was a simple box-like structure, 10 cubits wide, 10 cubits high and 30 cubits long. That corresponds to 15 feet wide, 15 feet high and 45 feet long. It was not imposing in size—being smaller in height, width and length than the average home. This building was divided into two compartments. The first was called *the Holy* and was 20 cubits long. The second was called *the Most Holy* and was a perfect cube measuring 10 x 10 x 10 cubits.

Gold covered the interior walls of the Tabernacle structure. These beautiful gold-covered walls were hidden from outside view by a series of coverings, some of cloth, some of animal skins.

Surrounding this structure was a large enclosed area called *the Court*, which was 50 cubits by 100 cubits. The curtain surrounding this courtyard was 5 cubits high—about 7-1/2 feet. This curtain prevented those outside in *the Camp* area from seeing into *the Court*.



The furnishings, the manner in which they were used, and other clues from the Bible lead us to the following conclusions about this fascinating arrangement designed and instituted for our instruction by God Himself:

(1) The Court

represents *the condition of faith*, entered into by all of those who recognize the sacrifice of Jesus.

(2) The Holy

represents the present dwelling place of all “*New Creatures in Christ Jesus*”—Christians. 2 Corinthians 5:17; These follow in the footsteps of Jesus and serve God in the present life through a *covenant* made with Him by *sacrifice*. Psalms 50:5; 1 Peter 2:21

(3) The Most Holy

represents the *presence of God*—even Heaven itself—*the meeting place between God and man*.



The Tabernacle Layout **Three Conditions**

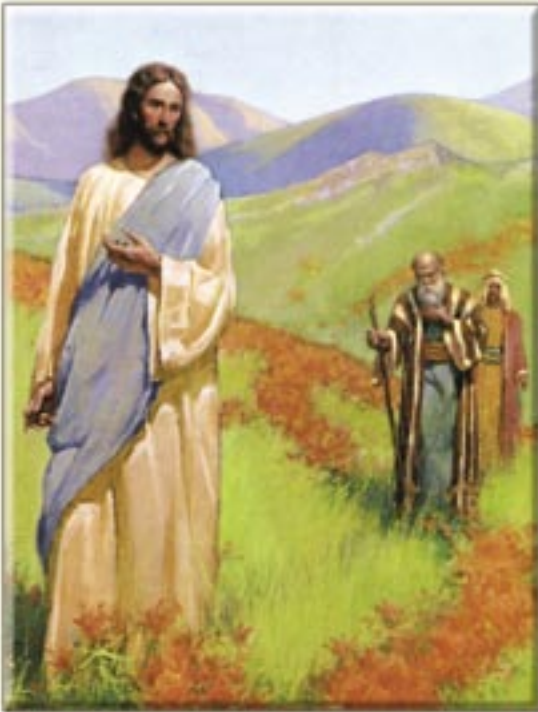
Thus far we see three separate and distinct *conditions* portrayed by three different *locations* in the Tabernacle layout. These conditions beautifully portray the *path* of the Christian. This point is one of the most important lessons of the Tabernacle, showing clearly—by way of *types* and *shadows*—the pathway that is before every Christian.



Jesus speaks of this pathway, and of these three conditions: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* He goes further with these words: *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.”* (John 6:6 and 44) Thus, Jesus is the only means of entering upon this pathway which leads to the presence of God.

The Apostle Paul connects this thought of the Christian’s path with Tabernacle symbolism in these words: *“Every High Priest taken from among men is ordained... And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”* (Hebrews 5:1-4) In essence, this is stating

that we come to God through Jesus Christ, by being *drawn* of the Father, by being *called* of God. We are called to be partakers of the *heavenly calling*; to be members of that same priestly profession with our Lord Jesus. We thereafter enter into the service of God pictured in the Tabernacle. *“Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren... holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”* Hebrews 2:11; 3:1



To begin, then, no one can enter into *the Court condition*, except by a faith in and recognition of the sacrifice of Jesus. This first step in the path is called *“the way.”* Our drawing to God begins with this recognition of Jesus’ death on our behalf.

But the journey does not end there. We must go on even further if we are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We must become members of that same profession—*sacrificing priests*—doing service in *the Holy condition*, the condition of *light and truth*.

But no one can enter into *the Holy condition*, except by a full surrender of their will, to do the will of God, even as Jesus their forerunner. Once again, the words of the Apostle Paul connect this to the Tabernacle picture in Hebrews 10:7-9: *“Lo, I come to do thy will O God...”*

This surrender of the will is shown in two ways in the Tabernacle arrangement. First, it was shown by the *consecration of the Priesthood*. (Leviticus Chapter 8) The word consecration means *setting apart for holy service*. All the priests had to be consecrated; set apart or fully devoted to the service of God.



This *setting apart for holy service* is also true in the reality—the *anti-type*. All those who would enter into the service of God must follow in the footsteps of Jesus and fully devote themselves to the service of God. During the present time, this is only accomplished through a *covenant by sacrifice*. As the Aaronic priesthood was a *sacrificing priesthood*, so we must sacrifice our *justified* life in order to enter into the service of God.

Secondly, as delineated in Leviticus 16, this surrender of the will was shown in the sacrifice of the animals on the *Day of Atonement*. Paul states in Hebrews 13:11-13 that one of these animals (*the bullock*) represents Jesus, and the other (*the Lord's goat*) represents his followers. *"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without [outside of] the Camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the Camp, bearing his reproach."* The presenting of these animals for sacrifice, therefore, represents sharing in the sufferings of Christ.



The Revelation of Jesus to John ensures that those who are faithful in their covenant by sacrifice, even unto death, will receive the crown of life at the end of their Christian journey. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." (Revelation 2:10) And the Apostle Paul confirms this promise in 2 Timothy 2:11, 12: "For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; If we suffer, we shall also reign with him..." For all such, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

The Tabernacle Furnishings **A Further Corroboration**

The furnishings of the Tabernacle emphasize and corroborate the foregoing lessons most beautifully. The size, construction and materials of each piece point out specific *attributes of nature and character* in a Christian's life.



The first object seen by anyone entering *the Court* is *the Brazen Altar* upon which *the bullock and the Lord's goat* were sacrificed. This forcefully depicts the sacrifice of Jesus and his followers.

This *Brazen Altar* denotes two important aspects of believing in Jesus. It is one thing to accept Jesus as our savior—it is yet another to walk in his footsteps. *"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake..."* Philippians 1:29

These two aspects of what is first seen in *the Court* identify two classes of believers. Those in *the Court condition* may all have an appreciation for Jesus' sacrifice, but they are not all sacrificing priests, permitted to enter into *the Holy*. (Numbers 4:19, 20) Only the *High Priest* and the *under-priests* were permitted to continue on past *the Court*.

To make progress from *the Court condition* to *the Holy* of the Tabernacle as either the *High Priest* or an *under-priest*, it was necessary to wash with water at the copper *Laver*. Thus pictured in the *type* is the cleansing of our hearts and lives of sin—“*by the washing of water by the Word.*” Ephesians 5:26



These three steps—the recognition of Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins, the willingness to participate in that sacrifice and the washing by the water of the Word of God—are essential to the followers of Christ. They now have been *justified by faith* in him and have something to offer in sacrifice. “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*” (Romans 12:1) Only those who become *sacrificing priests* (symbolically) have a right to enter into *the* (symbolic) *Holy*.



Once the priests have entered into *the Holy*, they have the opportunity of partaking of the *table of shewbread*. Symbolically, this golden table, which holds two stacks of six unleavened bread-cakes would picture the privilege that the priesthood has in partaking of the spiritual nourishment. The strength and refreshment derived from the Word of God is appreciated only by those who serve in this *holy condition*. Jeremiah 15:16; John 17:17



These priests also have the privilege of benefiting from the light of the *golden candlestick*—a further symbol of the enlightenment we receive from the Word of God through the holy spirit. *“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”* (Psalm 119:105) The Apostle Peter reassured Christians that *“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place...”* 2 Peter 1:19

Yet one more privilege is afforded this symbolic priesthood—the footstep followers of Christ. These have the privilege of offering incense at the *golden altar*. This *golden altar* shows the privilege of sacrifice, including the heartfelt sacrifice of our lips in prayer, praise and thanksgiving to God. Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 8:3



Still a further step is illustrated in the Tabernacle. Entering into the golden room of *the Most Holy* represents heaven itself. Here the presence of God was shown above the *Ark of the Covenant* by the miraculous *Shekinah glory light*.



"Give ear, O shepherd of Israel... thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." Psalm 80:1; Exodus 40:34-38



Those who finish their *covenant by sacrifice*—being *"faithful unto death"* as was Jesus—enter into *the Most Holy* by means of his blood. This is the resurrection of the *new and living way* consecrated for us by him who said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life..."* Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 10:19, 20; John 14:6

Another Illustration **The Blessing of the People**

Leviticus 9:23

Another beautiful picture-lesson is shown within the Tabernacle arrangement. It is, in some ways, the most important, but, in other ways, it is the most overlooked. This picture, or *type* calls to mind three critical questions. What was the purpose of the priesthood? Why did they sacrifice? Who benefited from these sacrifices?



Some Christians do see the lessons that have been illustrated by *type* and *anti-type* in *the Court*. They appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus, but they do not see their privilege of becoming *footsteps followers*—members of the priestly profession—*sacrificing priests*. Others see the *anti-typical* privileges and blessings inside the Tabernacle but fail to realize that these illustrate God’s promise to Abraham: “*In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*” Genesis 28:14

Careful study of the symbolisms found in the Tabernacle provides clearer understanding of the plan of God and a

broader appreciation of salvation. “Moses and Aaron... came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people.” (Leviticus 9:23) Yes, those in *the Camp*—the vast majority of the Israelites—were separated by the linen curtain which kept the activities of the Tabernacle from view, yet, they benefited by these activities. So too, those pictured outside in *the Camp*—the world of mankind—benefit from this sacrificing priesthood. This illustrates God’s mercy—the wonderful future destiny of not only Christians, but of every man, woman and child who has ever lived! 1 Timothy 4:10



In the *type*, only a small number among the Israelites were Levites—those permitted to enter into *the Court*. Even fewer, taken from among the Levities, were *sacrificing priests*, permitted to enter *the Holy*. And only the *High Priest* was permitted to enter *the Most Holy*. The purpose of this priesthood was to offer sacrifices *for the people*. Those sacrifices were to *atone* for sin—not merely the sins of the priests, but the sins of “*all the people*.” Not until all the sacrificing was finished, did the blessing come to the people in *the Camp*. The sacrificing priests were the instruments of God’s merciful plan to accomplish the blessing of all others.

What is the Lesson for Christians?

Responding to *the call* to become footstep followers of Jesus is voluntary. Not all are called, and only a relative few answer this call. *“Many are called, but few are chosen.”* (Matthew 22:14) As has been shown in the Tabernacle arrangement, the purpose of the *call* of a few now—*the priesthood class*—is for the blessing of *all* in the future. The role of this heavenly class is to bring *all* into *atonement* (at-one-ment) with God.

Again, it is important to understand this point—the nation of Israel surrounding the Tabernacle, represents the world of mankind—those outside of fellowship with God. They do not see the sacrifice of Christ, yet the purpose of the Tabernacle sacrifices was to bless *all* the people.

When the call of the Church, the footstep followers of Jesus, has finished its work—and the sacrificing of this symbolic priesthood is all finished—only then will the blessing of all the families of the earth take place. Then the promise originally given to Abraham will be fulfilled: *“In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”* Genesis 22:18

The fulfilling of this grand promise has been made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus, who *“...tasted death for every man.* (Hebrews 2:9) *“Who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time.”* (1 Timothy 2:6) This is truly *“good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”* Luke 2:10



As God covered the *type* and hid its beauty under curtains and rough, unsightly skins, so the glories and beauties of spiritual things are seen only by those who enter *the consecrated condition—the Royal Priesthood*. These enter a hidden but glorious state which the outside world fails to see or appreciate. Their glorious hopes and also their standing as *New Creatures* are hidden from their fellow men. Their activities seem incomprehensible to those without.



Soon, however, the amazing illustration of the blessing of those in darkness will begin to take place, and, as in the *type*, so in the reality, all the people will learn to appreciate the sacrifices made on their behalf. At that time, whosoever will, may obey and live forever in happiness and communion with their loving Creator. Isaiah 26:9; Revelation 22:17

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Revelation 21:2-4

The Tabernacle

What lone mysterious abode is this,
Surrounded by a wall of spotless white;
By day an altar in the wilderness,
A silent watcher on the plain by night?

Who dwells within its consecrated veil,
To secular and alien feet denied?
Who answers when the priest, white-robed and pale,
Sprinkles the blood by *bulls and goats* supplied?

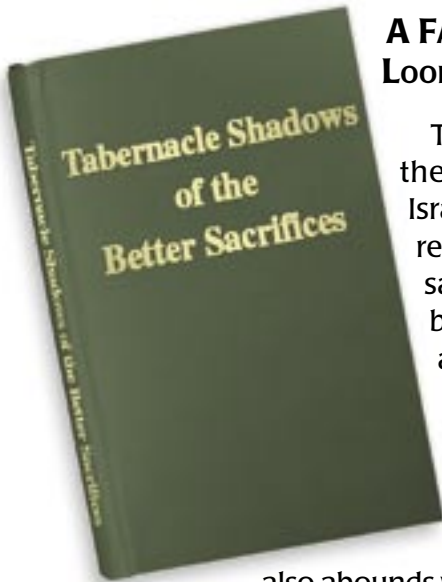
Think you that He of name omnipotent
Required for naught these oft-repeated rites,
Or gratified mere vanity by scent
Of incense, broidered robes and altar-lights?

Nay, verily! The curious tapestries,
The vessels wrought of silver, copper, gold,
The ceremonious modes of sacrifice,
All *better things* of Gospel times foretold.

And happy he whose reverent gaze discerns
What *types and shadows* could but dimly trace:
His offering on the golden altar burns,
He solves the mysteries of *the Holy Place*.

Upon the blood-stained *mercy-seat* he reads
Atonement sealed by him who went before,
And from the open heavens the Father speeds
The riches of his love and grace to out pour.

Tabernacle Shadows of the Better Sacrifices



A FASCINATING AND COMPREHENSIVE LOOK INTO THE TABERNACLE OF ISRAEL

To the casual reader of the Bible the account of the Tabernacle of Israel may seem a chronicle of no real import for Christians today. The sacrifice of bulls and goats upon a brazen altar may seem to be just another meaningless tradition. But, the Apostle Paul explains that this drama, played out among the Jews for over 500 years, was not only a "schoolmaster" designed to lead them to the Messiah, but

also abounds with significance for the Christian—***"a shadow of good things to come."*** Galatians 3:24; Hebrews 10:1

Yes, the Tabernacle arrangement of the nation of Israel speaks volumes to the Christian! To further study about the instructions for the Tabernacle arrangement, read Exodus 25-27. For the construction of the Tabernacle, read Exodus 35-40. For the fulfillment of these types and shadows, read the Book of Hebrews. And for a valuable study guide to these and other fascinating scriptures relating to the Tabernacle of Israel, order a copy of

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