

# The Tabernacle

By Al Felder

(Hebrews 9)

Not long after Moses had lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, God required Him to collect an offering of gold, silver, and other precious materials from the people in order to build the tabernacle. One interesting point about this command is that the Israelites had been slaves in the land of Egypt for some four hundred years, how did they have all of these precious materials to contribute to the building of the tabernacle? Well, if you read in the book of Exodus 12 you will find that the Egyptians gave the Israelites these precious materials as they were leaving. God had completely humbled the Egyptians with the plagues that He had brought upon them, and the Israelites left the land with great riches. God in turn required that they give some of this great wealth for the building of the tabernacle. They obeyed his command, and many estimate that the tabernacle would have been worth well over a billion dollars today.

Under the Law of Moses, the tabernacle was to be a representative dwelling place for God. It was the place where God met with man, and the various services He required were carried out. God gave Moses very specific instructions regarding the tabernacle and its services. *“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 shewed to thee in the mount.”* (Hebrews 8:5) God gave Moses the design of the tabernacle, the materials that were to be used, and all of the significant details pertaining to its construction and its services. Absolutely nothing was left up to Moses decision, or the peoples for that matter.

As was the case with many things under the Law of Moses, the tabernacle was a representation of something else. It was a shadow, a figure, or a type of something. Basically, it was a pictorial illustration of what exists today under the New Covenant.

The word tabernacle means a movable building. It was constructed so that it could be taken down and carried from place to place as the children of Israel journeyed to the Promised Land. It was 45 feet long from east to west and 15 feet wide from north to south.

The building itself was constructed of boards 15 feet long and 2 feet thick. Each board was overlaid with gold. The boards had silver sockets used to lock them together as well as gold staples through which golden bars were passed, and gold rings at the top through which a cord passed. All of these features fastened the building together and made it sturdy.

The building was divided into two compartments by a veil crossing from north to south. The first compartment was called the holy place. It was 30 feet long and 15 feet wide. The second compartment was called the most holy place, and it was 15 feet squared. The tabernacle was surrounded by a fence made by suspending a curtain on pillars. The fence

enclosed an area 150 feet long from east to west, and 75 feet wide from north to south. This area was referred to as the outer court. Both the outer court and the tabernacle had one entrance on the east side.

As we begin to get into specifics concerning the tabernacle and its services, we are going to pair each item with its true image under the New Covenant. As we do this, it is important to keep in mind that every piece of the building was by God's design. Every item of furniture was built according to God's instructions and placed exactly where He told Moses to place it. All things had to be according to the pattern.

The first part of the tabernacle that we would approach would be the outer court. The outer court was an area that was open to all. Both Jew and Gentile could enter into this area. In other words, it was a place that was open to all people. It was a representation of the world.

The tabernacle itself was only for the priests. In order to enter the holy place the priests had to go through the proper steps so that they would be qualified. As you went through the eastern gate to the outer court, the brazen altar was the first item you would find. It was upon the brazen altar that all of the burnt sacrifices were made. *"And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself, and for the people: and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them; as the Lord commanded."* (Leviticus 9:7) Before a Levite could become a priest and enter into the holy place, he had to have a sin offering made for him upon this altar.

Washing in the laver was the next part of the priest's consecration ceremony. The laver was located directly between the brazen altar and the tabernacle. It was at the laver that the priests washed themselves so that they would be pure. *"He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on."* (Leviticus 16:4) The priests would lay aside their old clothes before washing, and after they had washed they would put on their priestly garments and enter the tabernacle.

The tabernacle itself represents the Lord's church today. The Levitical priesthood represents those who are Christians. *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 2:5) Today all who obey the gospel of Christ become a part of a royal priesthood in which they may serve God, but they must go through a consecrations process just like the Levites had to go through under the Law.

The sacrifices that were made upon the brazen altar represented the ultimate sacrifice that was made by Christ. *"Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself."* (Hebrews 7:27) Christ gave Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for all. Any person who wishes may benefit from His sacrifice.

Next, the priest had to wash in the laver. God specified that the laver be placed between the altar and the tabernacle. Today baptism is the washing that a person undergoes to become clean, and God has placed it between the sacrifice of Christ and the entrance to the church. *“<sup>3</sup>Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? <sup>6</sup>Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”* (Romans 6:3, 6) Just as the Levites did under the Law of Moses, we place aside our old garments and become cleansed of all impurities.

After the priests had been washed they put on their priestly garments. Likewise, it is only after we have been washed in the blood of Christ through baptism that we can put on our priestly garments. *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* (Galatians 3:27) Upon doing this a Christian has been made spiritually pure and is ready for service unto God.

As I stated before, the tabernacle represents the Church. In particular, the holy place was a representation of the Church. *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16) It was in the holy place that the Levites entered for the purpose of serving the Lord. Today, those who obey the gospel and become members of the body of Christ are expected to serve God.

Once inside the holy place the priests would wait upon the table of showbread. Every Sabbath the priests would eat the loaves that had been placed upon this table. Today we have the Lord’s Table from which God’s people eat on the first day of the week. *“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.”* (Acts 20:7) Every Sunday when we observe the Lord’s Supper we do so in the exact manner that God has commanded us in order to remember the death of Jesus.

The next piece of furniture within the holy place was the candlestick. The candlestick had a central stem and six branches, three on each side. It provided the only light within the tabernacle, and God gave instructions for it to burn continually. Its true image today is the only source of light for the Lord’s Church, the word of God. *“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, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”* (2 Peter 1:19) We draw knowledge and strength from the word of God, and we are also charged with the task of proclaiming and defending the word of God. Just as the Levites were charged with the task of keeping the candlestick continually lit; our lives, words, and attitudes are to be reflectors of the word of God to the world around us.

Just before the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place was located the altar of incense. Every morning and evening the Levite priests would burn incense upon the altar while the people were outside the tabernacle praying. This altar was a representation of the prayers of the Lord’s people. *“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a*

*golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”* (Revelations 8:3) As John was given this vision, he was able to see the very throne room of God. There, just before God’s mercy seat was located the altar upon which incense was burned where the prayers of the Lord’s people were offered.

Beyond the altar of incense we have the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place. The most holy place contained the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat of God. It was a representation of the throne room of God. Once a year the High Priest would enter into the most holy place in order to make the atonement sacrifice for the people. Christ being our High Priest accomplished this for us. *“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”* (Hebrews 9:12) Christ is in heaven, and He has offered the atoning sacrifice for us.

The veil itself was a representation of the flesh of Christ. *“By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.”* (Hebrews 10:20) This veil represented the separation that existed between God and man. Before the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; the way to heaven had not been made clear.

Upon the death of Christ the veil was torn. *“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.”* (Matthew 27:51) When the veil was torn upon the death of Christ, it signified that the way to heaven had now been made clear to all men.

In closing, there is one final point to make. As the children of Israel traveled from camp site to camp site, God gave very specific instruction that the tabernacle was to be placed in the center of the camp. This can be found in (Numbers 2, 3). Three tribes camped on each side of the tabernacle. This was done for the purpose of making the tabernacle and their service unto God the center of the life of an Israelite.

Today, we have the Lord’s Church. We have an awesome responsibility and obligation to take care of the services that God has given us. *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”* (Hebrews 10:25) God has given us a command that we as His people assemble ourselves together upon the first day of the week in order to worship Him. We like the Levite priests under the Law of Moses have certain acts which we must perform. Also, just as they had to do all things according to the pattern that they had been given, we too must follow God’s instructions today.