

Lesson 1. THE TABERNACLE - A PATTERN OF HEAVENLY THINGS

READING: Exod. 25:1-9; 40:1-8; Num. 2:17-34; Heb. 8:1-5

AIM: To see how the Tabernacle was assembled and furnished and to consider its divine lessons.

I. BACKGROUND

When Moses received the Law in the Mount, God commanded that a special place should be constructed where He would meet with Israel and around which they might assemble to worship Him. This was necessary for their spiritual and religious education. "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8; 29:43-46). "Sanctuary" means "a separate place consecrated for sacred (divine) use". (John 2:19, R.V.mg; Eph. 2:21).

As Israel had no fixed dwelling place, a permanent building was impossible. Therefore God designed a sanctuary in the form of a movable tent. It could be carried in sections and erected without the use of hammer and nails. It was not very large; about 13.7 m. long x 4.6 m. wide x 4.6 m. high. It was erected inside an enclosure measuring 45 m. long and 24 m. wide. (Note: A "cubit" is the measurement from the tip of one's fingers to the elbow. 1 cubit = 0.45m approx.)

2. THE "PATTERN" POINTING TO HEAVENLY THINGS. Exod.25: 1-9; Heb. 8:1-5.

In the construction of every building an architect, a plan, estimates, materials and workmen are essential (Heb. 3:4).

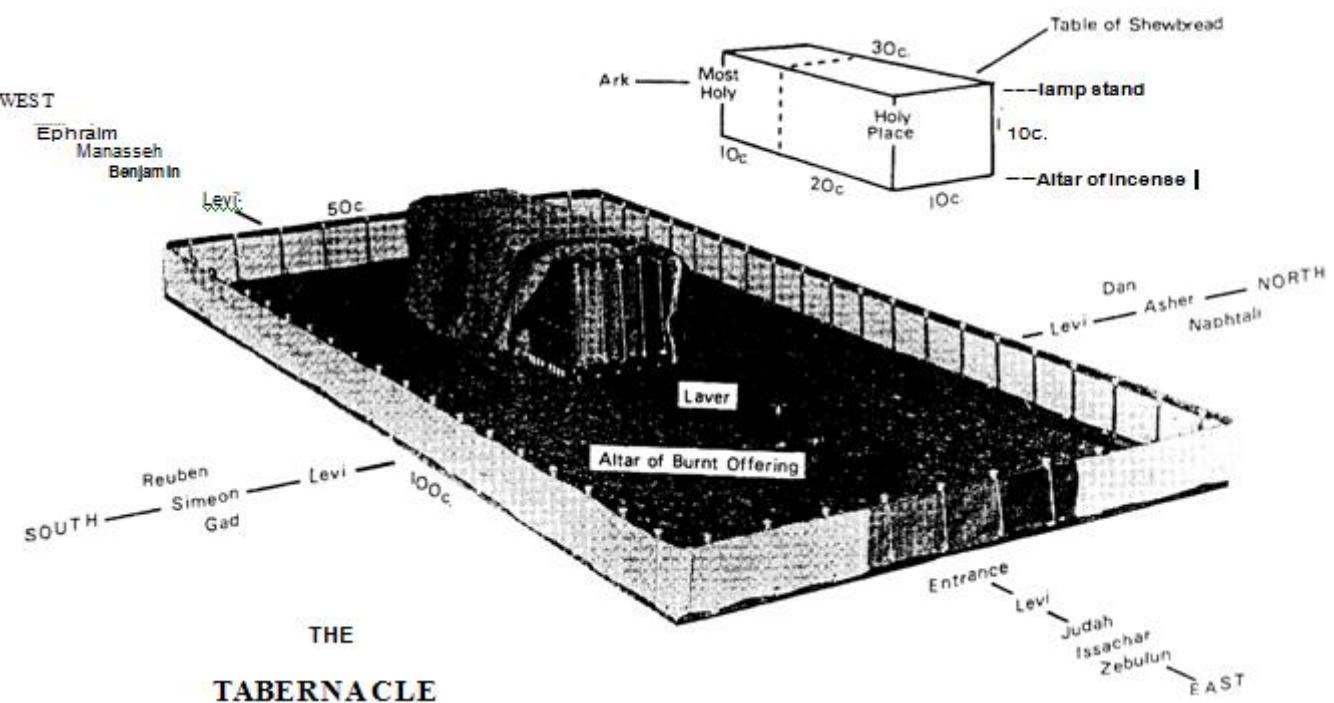
- Architect: Exod. 25:8-9.
God gave Moses a detailed specification of the Tent of Meeting or Tabernacle. Moses was told that it was absolutely imperative that he should make all things according to "the pattern which was shown him in the Mount" (Exod. 25:9 & 40, 26:30; 27:8; Num. 8:4; Heb. 8:5). This shows that whilst God delights in the worship of His people, He expects them to worship Him in the manner He has set down.
- Materials: Exod. 25:1-7.
Moses appealed for gifts and the people willingly brought treasures they had taken from the Egyptians. Only the best materials were offered - gold, silver and brass were the metals needed for the vessels; linen, wool and threads for the curtains; goats' hair, rams' skins and badger skins for the outer protective coverings of the Tent. The wood used was "shittim" or acacia grown in the desert. It was a beautiful, hard wood, particularly durable.
- Workmen: Exod. 35:30-35.
Skilled workmen led by Bezaleel and Aholiab whom the Lord gave wisdom and understanding to know how to work with the materials. The wood had to be prepared and fitted. The metals had to be molten and cast. The linen curtains had to be woven and embroidered. Women with clever fingers did this, realizing that the work was for God.

3. THE POSITION OF THE TABERNACLE. Num. 2:17-34

The Tabernacle was positioned in the middle of the camp of Israel (Num. 2:17). The diagram provided shows how the camp of Israel was set out in a square formation:

- on the east were the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun
- on the south were Reuben, Simeon and Gad
- on the west were Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin
- on the north were Dan, Asher and Naphtali.

Inside this square was another square made up of the tents of the Levites, and inside this priestly square was the Tabernacle.



It was screened from the camp of Israel by the seven to eight feet high curtain wall of the enclosure. In this way, the Israelites were separated from the Tabernacle by the Levites and priests and the courtyard wall, and this indicated that God was holy (i.e., separate). Even though Israel had been selected above all other nations, they needed to recognize this and approach Him and worship Him with reverence. So should we approach God step by step through the courtyard to the inner sanctuary where the High Priest was permitted to approach only once a year.

4. THE COURTYARD OF THE TABERNACLE. Exod. 27:1-19; 38: 9-20.

The courtyard was an enclosure made of finely woven linen curtains, supported on 60 brass pillars with fittings of silver and brass. A doorway curtain went across four pillars. It was made of finely woven blue, purple and scarlet linen and gave access to the court. Only the Israelites serving God in the Tabernacle entered through the door into the court. For us, Christ is the only way of approach to God. Christ is our Door (John 10:9). "No man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Inside the court were the brazen altar of burnt offerings, the laver and the tabernacle itself. (Exod. 40:6-8)

- The Brazen Altar (Exod. 27:1-8; 38:1-7) was made of acacia wood covered with brass, approximately 2.4m. square by 1.4m. high. In the centre was a grate where the animals brought as sacrifices were burned. The fire, first kindled by God, was never allowed to go out (Lev. 6:13). The Israelites learned that sacrifice was a vital factor in acceptable worship of God. This altar typified Christ. Through him we come close to God (Heb. 13:10), and the atoning blood of Christ secures forgiveness and redemption for us (Heb. 9:13-14). Christ is the altar, the offering, and the sacrifice
- The Laver, (Exod. 30: 17-21; 38:8) also made of brass, was for the priests to wash before ministering in the Tabernacle. It was to teach reverence for God's holiness. Only those with clean hands and a pure heart are acceptable to God. This is a lesson for us as well.

5. THE TABERNACLE AND ITS CONTENTS Exod. 26, 40:1-5

The Tabernacle was a framework of boards overlaid with beaten gold. The boards were connected with rods along the sides and fitted at the base into silver sockets. It could be entered from one end only.

There were two compartments. The first was known as the Holy Place, measuring 9m. long, 4.6m wide and 4.6m. high. The other compartment was the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. It was divided from the Holy Place by a curtain or veil.

The sides and top of the Tabernacle were covered with curtains - four of them, in fact, - to protect the contents. The first curtain was of fine twined linen, embroidered in blue, purple and scarlet. The second curtain was woven goats' hair for the protection of the fine linen. The third curtain was made of rams' skins sewn together and dyed red. The fourth curtain was made of badger skins or sealskins, which are very hard-wearing and were needed as a waterproof and sand-proof covering over all.

The items in the courtyard were of brass, whereas the articles inside the Tabernacle were of gold (see 1 Pet. 1:7). The Levite priests officiated daily in the Holy Place which contained (Exod. 40: 1-5) i) the table of shewbread, ii) the seven-branched lamp stand and iii) the golden altar of incense.

- The Table of Shewbread (Exod. 25:23-30; 37:10-16) held twelve loaves of bread which represented the 12 tribes of Israel. The bread was changed every Sabbath Day (Lev. 24:8). The old loaves were eaten only by the priests and always in the Holy Place. The Shewbread represented Christ, and he is our as "Bread of Life" (John 6:35).
- The Lamp Stand (Exod. 25:31-40; 27:20-21; 37: 17-24) was a bowl filled with olive oil ignited by a wick. It held seven lights that burned continually. The lamp stand represented "the light of truth" (II Pet. 1: 19). We must walk in this light, which comes from reading and understanding God's Word (Psalm I 19:105).
- The Altar of Incense (Exod. 30: 1-10; 37:25-29) had incense burnt upon it morning and evening. Incense is a sweet, fragrant perfume made from spices. The incense ascended to God just as our prayers ascend to God through Jesus Christ, the true altar. David said, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense" (Psalm 141:2).

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Building the Tabernacle was truly a stirring and an instructive work. It is not hard to picture the great enthusiasm of the people, "everyone whose heart stirred him up and everyone whom his spirit made willing" brought freewill offerings to the Lord for all manner of work which the Lord had commanded Moses to make according to the pattern shown him in the Mount. Such is the power of the Lord over His people who believe His Word. It operates on men and women and young people today through Jesus, His Son, who is the true pattern of heavenly things. He calls us to share His work and "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus".

REFERENCE LIBRARY

"The Law of Moses," chapters 13-15.

"The Visible Hand of God," chapter 17.

"Moses, My Servant," chapter 5.

"The Letter to the Hebrews," section 4. "The Tabernacle."

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the significance of the Tabernacle's position in the centre of the camp of Israel.
2. Explain the significance to us of the contents of the court of the Tabernacle.
3. Explain the significance to us of the contents of the Holy Place of the Tabernacle.