

OUR TEXT – Hebrews 9:1-5

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.'

For this lesson I give credit and grateful thanks to the blog of Hal Warren of Bible.org for much of the following descriptions, interpretations and Scripture references.

Note: All the dimensions of the Tabernacle and its furnishings are given in the Bible in the measurement of a cubit, which best scholarship has determined is equivalent to 18 inches, or 1 ½ feet – the approximate length of a man's fingertips to his outer elbow. Today, we will give all measurements in feet.

THE TABERNACLE STRUCTURE

The Tabernacle was a portable tent 45 feet long, 15 feet wide and 15 feet high. It was commissioned by God, through Moses, to be built by the Israelites as a dwelling place (lit: tabernacle) for Himself. The elaborate details of its size and furnishings and functions are given in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. The Tabernacle traveled with the Israelites through the 40 year wilderness and then through the time of Joshua and Judges into the time of King Saul and David until the permanent temple was built by Solomon. Thus it was in use for about 500 years (c. 1450-950 B.C.). As we study its form and function, we will also discover, as did the Hebrews author, that there are multiple implications and obvious references to the Messiah – Jesus and our relation to Him as His followers today. Thus, studying the Tabernacle to to study and learn of Jesus.

The Tabernacle was located within the much larger outer court which was 150' long by 50' wide (very approximately the size of the main part of our Hope parking lot). In that outer court were two items: (1) the brazen altar, on which were sacrificed the animals brought for a sin offering and (2) the laver, which was a large basin of water where the priests would cleanse themselves before entering the Tabernacle.

The framework of the Tabernacle was provided by 48 upright support frames made of acacia wood. Each frame was 15' high and 2 ¼ feet wide and though not specified, about 1 cubit, or 18", thick (curiously, an exact miniature of the dimensions of Noah's ark!). There were 20 frame boards along the south wall, 20 along the north wall and 8 along the back wall. The front of the tabernacle had no frames since this was the entrance, and was supported by five pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold and set in bronze bases, all covered with a curtain. Each frame piece was constructed of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold, attached together by rods overlaid with gold that held the whole together. All this is stipulated in Exodus 26.

These golden walls of the Tabernacle were kept from touching the Earth by a solid silver block like foundation at their base (Exodus 26:19). Pure gold represents the Holiness of God who cannot touch sin, silver represents the price paid for redemption (Numbers 18:16) and Earth (dirt) represents fallen man (2 Corinthians 4:7). Symbolically, this tells the story of our mediator Jesus the God-Man making a way for fallen man (dirt) to connect back to God the Father (pure gold) by becoming our payment for redemption (silver) (1 Timothy 2:5. Hebrews 9:15). It also represents that the foundation of our lives and the church is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ!

Note also that the higher you go in the tabernacle, the more precious the material. Also we will see that the closer you get to the Holy of Holies the more precious the material. As you go upwards and

inward you go from bronze to silver to gold covering to solid gold. And likewise, **we find higher and deeper spiritual riches as we seek more intimacy with God, drawing near to Him.**

Four curtains served as the roof and outer covering of the tabernacle. These curtains prevented any natural light from entering the Tabernacle and prevented anyone from accidentally touching the Tabernacle. These curtains were not only multiple protection, but symbolic.

√ The outermost curtain was made from the skin of a marine animal (perhaps a dolphin) and protected the tabernacle from the harsh desert climate (Jesus our protection)

√ Inside this was a curtain of ram's skin dyed red (Jesus our substitute - shedding His blood for sin)

√ Inside this was a curtain of black goat's hair (Jesus our scapegoat – becoming sin)

√ The innermost curtain was made of fine linen (Jesus our righteousness – we are made perfect in His sight)

THE TABERNACLE INTERIOR

The interior of the Tabernacle was divided into two rooms: The Holy Place (30' long by 15' wide) and the Holy of Holies (a perfect cube of 15' by 15' by 15'). It was separated by a massive, thickly woven curtain of blue, purple and red with angelic cherubim woven into the fabric. It hung from the ceiling, 15 feet above, with no opening. The only way to pass was to go around a side. The outer court (outside the tabernacle) was the place of men. The Holy Place was the place of priests, for only priests in the line of Aaron could enter, and the Holy of Holies was the place of God, and only the High Priest would enter therein once a year on the Day of Atonement.

From within the Holy Place, the golden wall frames allowed the priests to see through to the innermost white linen curtain covering, upon which were cherubim, as if peeking through the walls. Also on the ceiling hung curtains with sewn-on images of cherubim. So inside the Holy Place the priests were surrounded by angelic cherubim on all sides and the ceiling. Angels all around!

The lost people of the world that have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord will have entered the Outer Court via the narrow gate called "The Way" (Matthew 7:13,14). Then they are to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) and die to self at the Bronze Altar (Matt 16:24,25), then start the process of removing sinful desires from their lives at the Bronze Laver (John 17:17. 2 Peter 1:4). Once they have laid down their life and chosen to give up a lifestyle of sinful desires then they will gain entrance to the Holy Place via the door called "The Truth." That is, Christians that DO choose a selfless life will enter into their calling to be Priests unto God (Revelation 1:6) and will be ushered into the Holy Place. The Bible calls the Christians that enter here spiritual, as opposed to those of flesh (that is, the Christians that remain in the outer court) (1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Hebrews 5:12-14) .

Then, only the priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place. But now all believers are called to be priests unto God serving under the Great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:6 .Hebrews 2:17). The Holy Place represents the place or soul of man. It contains 3 pieces of furniture that were attended to by the priests daily: the Golden Lampstand, the Table of Showbread, and the Golden Altar of Incense. These three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place have symbolic significance for the priestly believer, as we shall see.

THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

As we enter the Holy Place we see on our left along the South side of the tabernacle stands a lampstand (menorah) beaten and formed out of one piece of pure gold. Therefore, it is the only piece of furniture in the Tabernacle that is solid gold. It consists of an upright shaft with three branches extending from each side with a lamp atop each branch for a total of seven lamps (Exodus 25:31-40). The central shaft and branches are decorated with golden almonds and flowers (Exodus 37:17-24). The seven lamps provide the only light in the Holy Place and burn continuously with pure olive oil supplied by the priests (Exodus 27:20). The oil represents the Holy Spirit (compare Luke

4:18 with Hebrews 1:9). The almonds represent God watching over His Word to perform His will (Jeremiah 1:11,12). The flowers represent the beauty and creativity of God. The pure gold represents the holiness of God. The lampstand itself represents the church of God that we as priests are to tend (Revelation 1:12-20).

Just as the priests tended the lamp daily supplying oil, so we as present-day priests of God must ever be filled with the Spirit of God (Ephesians 5:18) and keep our wicks trimmed (like the virgins of Matthew 25:8), symbolically meaning to be ever spiritually alert and ready for action.

The Golden Lampstand is symbolic of the spiritual illumination of our mind, that aspect of our Christian walk that ever acknowledges the inner light and power of the Holy Spirit

THE TABLE OF SHOWBREAD

The Table of Showbread is located to our right along the North side of the Tabernacle directly across from and illuminated by the Golden Lampstand. Remember, there was no other source of light in the Holy Place other than the Golden Lampstand. The light from it is reflected off of the walls that are made of boards of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. **Just as the Priests could not see the bread without the illumination of the Golden Lampstand - we cannot see God's provision for our lives without the illumination of the Holy Spirit.**

The table is made of acacia wood and is overlaid with pure gold (Exodus 25:23-26). It was 3' x 18" x 27" high. It has rings on each corner for inserting the gold covered acacia wood poles that are used to carry it. There are plates, pitchers, and cups all made of pure gold. Twelve small cakes or loaves of unleavened bread were placed on gold plates in two rows of six each (Leviticus 24:5-9). There is one cake representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The cakes remained on the table for seven days and then were eaten by the priests, at the table on the Sabbath, for they were holy and not to be regarded as common. Then they were replaced by fresh bread. The solid gold bowls contained frankincense that was burnt at the eating of the bread as an offering by fire to the Lord. (Leviticus 24:7). The solid gold pitcher and cups were for wine to be drunk with the bread as a drink offering (Numbers 4:7).

Showbread literally means the bread that will cause God to "show up." Symbolically, Jesus is our bread (our provision) that those who partake of Him will receive eternal life (John 6:35. John 6:47-51). Eating of the bread symbolizes the "eating" of the Word of God, as given through the tribes of Israel. The frankincense represents our prayerful attitude (Revelation 5:8) as we partake. The drinking of the wine is symbolic of the blood of Jesus making His Word alive and accessible to us (Leviticus 17:11, 1 Corinthians 11:25).

Therefore, the Table of Showbread contains the following message for us today: when we priests (again, all believers are called to be priests (Revelation 1:6)) come together in unity and prayer to partake of Jesus our one "Bread of Life" and pour out our lives as a sacrificial offering - **then God will "show up" in our midst** (Matthew 18:19,20. 1 Corinthians 10:17).

Furthermore, this table not only represents our union with Christ but our unity with others. The loaves are all adjacent to one another in two rows of six. In the Bible, six is man's number so this represents man in harmony with man (1 Corinthians 10:16,17). Whenever we come together in Jesus' name partaking of Him, we are drawn closer together in fellowship and unity.

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

Located directly in front of the veil that leads to the Holy of Holies, at the West end of the Holy Place, stands the Altar of Incense. It is also made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold. It measures one and one-half feet square and three feet high. It is transported by two poles inserted into two gold rings attached to two corners of the altar (Exodus 30:1-10).

The altar is used to burn incense in the morning and evening so that the fragrance is continually rising up to God. When the morning batch of incense was exhausted, the evening batch was lit. The incense represents the prayers of us His saints (Revelation 5:8). The continual burning of incense depicts praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). No other sacrifices were to be offered on this altar of gold - only the sweet smelling incense (Exodus 30:9). Then annually the blood of atonement was to be put on the four horns that were on the top four corners of the altar. This blood on the horns of the altar is symbolic of the power of Jesus' blood to save even to the four corners of the Earth. That is, this altar is available to all, not just some elite group of Christians (1 John 2:2. Revelation 7:1). Note this altar is not made of bronze, which would be symbolic of judgment, but of gold – symbolic of God. So, the Golden Altar is not about paying the price for sin but rather "praying" the price for intimacy with God.

The Golden Altar of Incense is the closest piece of furniture to the entrance of the Holy of Holies. Therefore, it is nearest to the heart of God. As we wait before God, talk with God, long for God, we are drawing near to His presence. It is here we ever say "not my will, but Thy will be done."

The Golden Altar is also symbolic of the ministry of Jesus as our Great High Priest always offering intercession for us His Saints ([1 John 2:1](#). [Hebrews 7:25](#). [Hebrews 4:14-16](#)).

Interestingly, in the Old Testament the Altar of Incense is in the Holy Place in front of the veil. Yet now in Hebrews 9 it is said to be in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 40:26. Hebrews 9:3,4), associated with the Ark of the Covenant. This depiction by the Hebrews author shows that our prayers result in Jesus our Great High Priest ushering us into the presence of God the Father by the New Covenant (Hebrews 4:14. Hebrews 6:19). The altar thus is at the "doorstep" of the Holy of Holies.

THE THREE FURNISHINGS IN THE HOLY PLACE

We find but three items of furniture in this Holy Place. And this should cause us pause to consider the significance of three - the number of God. And indeed, with only little effort we note that the three items are symbolic of the Holy Trinity (as is often true whenever we encounter the number three in the Holy Scriptures). The Golden Lampstand with its illumination by oil is representative of the illuminating Holy Spirit. The Table of Showbread is representative of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom we are encouraged to find our spiritual sustenance. And the Altar of Incense is representative of our blessed Heavenly Father, to whom we offer our prayers and find the bidding to enter His Holy presence in deeper intimacy.

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT AND MERCY SEAT

Within the Holy of Holies was but one piece of furniture – The Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was a beautiful, ornate box, or chest, three feet, 9 inches long (2 ½ cubits), and 2 feet, 3 inches wide and high (1 ½ cubits). It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold outside and inside. Placed on top of the Ark as a lid was The Mercy Seat, or Throne of God (Exodus 25:10-22) made of solid pure gold. Atop the Mercy Seat were two Cherubim of solid gold, one at each end and facing one another. They were to stretch forth their wings covering the Ark. Four golden rings were attached to the sides, through which two poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold could carry the Ark when it was transported. These poles were so on one would touch the Ark, lest they die. These specifications are found in Exodus 37.

The Mercy Seat was the Throne of God from which God would speak (Exodus 25:22). It was the place of covering sin, the point over which rested the cloud and fire of God's Presence. The Hebrew word translated "mercy seat" means "a covering". It is from the same root as the word translated "atonement". The only place in the Bible where this word "kapporet" is used is for "mercy seat". This distinguishes the Mercy Throne as a protective

covering. The Ark covering the place of both (1) covering (atonement) for sin, and (2) of the Testimony of the Lord. In the way the Ark was the protective covering of the nation. (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

For us, Jesus is our Ark of protection and Lord of Mercy who covers all our sin such that “God remembers them no more.” Thus we who are His followers have our sin not just “covered” but forgiven, never to be remembered (Hebrews 8:12). By the shed blood of Jesus we can now boldly enter the very presence of God and commune with Him.

THE ITEMS WITHIN THE ARK

The “Ark of the Covenant” literally means “the supernatural protection (ark) of the Mosaic Covenant. So, within the Ark was to be placed and protected “The Testimony which I shall give you,” the Lord told Moses (Exodus 25:21). **There were three items placed inside:** (1) the Tablets of the Covenant (that is, The Ten Commandments), (2) a golden pot containing manna from the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites (Exodus 16:32-34) and (3) Aaron’s rod that had budded (Numbers 17:1-11). Also, the author of Hebrews confirms these three items as being in the Ark (Hebrews 9:2-5).

These three items were representative of the Old Covenant and testify to its greatness for the people of Israel. The tablets represented God’s Law, the manna represented God’s provision and the budding rod represented God’s life poured out upon His people.

As we stated earlier, the presence of three items should cause us to consider the Trinity of God. And this all the more when we have three items placed within the one item of the Ark which is the very heart of God. **Here we literally have depicted the Three in One.** The tablets depict our Heavenly Father, the Lawgiver, who has now written the law in the heart of believers (Jeremiah 31:33). The Manna represents Jesus Christ, our bread of life and heavenly spiritual nourishment. Aaron’s budding rod represents the Holy Spirit, the One who quickens us from death to life and inhabits our very being with the Eternal Life of God, causing each believer to “bud” and grow in conformity to the image of Christ.

INTERESTING SPECULATION (A POSTLUDE)

Interestingly, the outer wall of the Tabernacle Courtyard was 100 cubits in length, 50 cubits in width, and 5 cubits in height (Exodus 27:18). If we add the two longer walls (100+100) to the two shorter walls (50+50), then we find that the Tabernacle Courtyard had a perimeter of 300 cubits. Furthermore, if you multiply 300 cubits by 5 cubits (the wall height), we find that the wall itself was 1500 square cubits. The Courtyard had the Bronze Basin and the Brazen Altar which is where Jews brought their ritual sacrifices to offer to God. In other words, the Courtyard might represent the Age of the Law and Prophets. From Moses receiving the Law on Mount Sinai to the resurrection of Christ was approximately 1500 years.

The Holy Place was 20 cubits long, 10 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high or 2000 cubic cubits. The Holy Place contained the seven branched Golden Lampstand (the Church), the Table of Showbread (Holy Communion) and the Alter of Incense (the prayers of the saints). So the Holy Place might represent the Church Age, which to this point is approaching 2000 years in duration (from Christ’s death to now).

The Holy of Holies had dimensions of 10x10x10, or 1000 cubic cubits. Might this represent the Millennial Kingdom of Christ which will last a 1000 years? During this time, Jesus Christ will rule and reign from the Mercy Seat in Jerusalem. Speculation? – yes, but very intriguing.

To borrow the words of Paul in Romans 11:33: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”