

The Tabernacle

by Evangelist Sam R. Ensor, December 2012

Considered by many the *crown jewel* of Old Testament typology, the tabernacle is not only a glorious portrait of God's presence with Israel during the wilderness wanderings, but also a remarkable, visible foreshadow of the person, work and deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. M.R. Dehaan declared, "There is no portion of Scripture richer in meaning, or more perfect in its teaching of the plan of redemption, than this divinely designed building!" Of looking at the tabernacle, Stephen F. Olford said, "As we anticipate the study before us, we can be assured of a feast of good things!"

Text: Exodus 25: 1-9; 29: 43-46; Hebrews 8: 1-5

God's Purpose for the Tabernacle

When the instructions for the tabernacle were given to Moses, the dazzling descriptions of the structure itself tend to draw us away from the sheer magnitude of the logistical difficulties facing Israel in the wilderness. It is estimated by some that the number of pilgrims in the midst of a hostile land numbered between two and three million! That was the population of the entire State of Tennessee in 1950!

Consider just how many people that is. Moving fifty abreast, such a column would extend for more than forty miles! The encampment of that many spread out more than twelve miles each night. The provisions required to sustain them were estimated to be equal to thirty boxcars of food and three hundred tankcars of water, *daily!*

Israel was a nation of men, women and children who had endured four hundred and thirty years of Egyptian idolatry and abuse. They had seen the awesome power of an *invisible* God, the judgements against the false idols of their oppressors. They were miraculously delivered at the Red Sea, and witnessed the utter destruction of the armies of the Pharaoh. What's more, their leader (Moses) was a man who spoke poorly and tended to disappear in frightful fashion (Exodus 24).

There was no mention of a tabernacle given while the people were in Egypt, nor was it ordered prior to the crossing of the Red Sea. Why? Simply put, a ***Holy God*** will not dwell in the midst of a land of *idolaters* but only with a separated, redeemed people! That principle remains; His people are to be a separated, sanctified people (2 Corinthians 6: 17-18). The tabernacle would be, then, a place of *absolute holiness*, suitable for His divine glory, and where God would appear to man in *grace!* Whether Old Testament or New, salvation has *always* been by grace, through faith in shed blood. His plan was, and is, love, mercy and forgiveness.

This *tent of meeting* was to serve as the place where God's *sovereign power* was made approachable by sinful men in faith. It would be a place of sacrifice for sins, an introduction to the *Lamb of God*. It would be a place of worship and communion, of obedience and surrender to God's will, and of hearing the Word of God.

God wants a place within every heart, a holy place where we meet with Him; a place of communion to seek His love and kindness, mercy and grace; a place to spend time alone with Him. If you have never given Christ your heart, you are robbing yourself of what God designed and desires to share with you.

The Command Given To Moses

The tabernacle was to be the abiding symbol of God's presence with His chosen people, a visible manifestation of the *invisible* God, just as our Lord was the visible presence of the Father, and just as Christians are to be the images of the *indwelling* Spirit of Christ. The first order of business was to gather the required materials, so God instructed Moses to *take up an offering* (Exodus 25: 1-7). Not just what the people had *to spare*, but their most valuable possessions! The Lord expected them to give their best, and believers today ought to be willing to do the same.

But, you might think, weren't these the impoverished, abused people who had been enslaved in Egypt? Where did they get such riches? Well, God had a plan; nothing ever *occurs* to Him! He arranged for the Egyptians to give the Israelites many gifts as they departed, what amounted to everything that would be needed, and more, for the tabernacle! (Exodus 12: 35-36). Call it "*back wages!*"

The one stipulation for the offering was that it be accepted only from those who gave of a *willing heart* (Exodus 25: 2). It is the same for Christians today, for God loves a *cheerful giver!* (2 Corinthians 9: 7). Then, the privilege of constructing the intricate elements of the tabernacle was entrusted to these same *willing hearts* (Exodus 25: 8). It is established early in the Scriptures that the Lord will not use *selfish* people!

Moses was provided a divine *blueprint* (Exodus 25: 9). In every detail this structure was to be a perfect place for God to dwell among His people; only in the *fulness of time* did we see the riches of its typology of the promised *Lamb of God*. To this end, the workmen were not permitted to "*do their own thing.*" The patterns were dictated in detail and were to be followed precisely as God gave them. God even selected the workmen to accomplish each task, enduing them with the wisdom, skills

and talents to excel in the performance of their duties (Exodus 31: 1-6). In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit likewise imparts *spiritual gifts* (1 Corinthians 12: 4-11), to whomever He chooses, to carry out the ministries of the church!

Of the materials to be wrought for the building, one particularly has been the object of the Bible revisers' *corrections*: brass is named in the King James Bible, and the *experts* scoffingly point out that in the era known as the *Bronze Age*, brass was unknown. So what *was* that material? In the Scriptures, brass symbolizes *judgement*, and the tabernacle was a place of judgement; not bronze, but brass. So what did the wisdom and skill of the workmen produce? **BRASS!** Let God be true, and every man a liar!

The Materials Used For The Tabernacle

It has been estimated that the approximate value of the materials used today would equal twenty-five million dollars!

Text: Exodus 31: 1-11

Four elements are mentioned which symbolize the Person of Christ. Gold is a type of His *deity*. Silver represents His *atonement*; it would be given by the people as a memorial for the atonement of their souls (Exodus 30: 16). Brass typifies *divine judgement*; it was fire-resistant, just as our Redeemer was faithful *in the fire*. Lastly is shittim (acacia) wood, which typifies the *humanity* of Jesus; the *Root out of dry ground*, spoken of in Isaiah 53: 2.

Twelve precious stones, each representing one of the twelve tribes of Israel, were to be mounted in the High Priest's *ephod*, the sacred vestment worn over his heart. These were mounted in four rows of three stones (Exodus 28: 17-20). They were the sardius, topaz and carbuncle; the emerald, sapphire and

diamond; the ligure, agate and amethyst; and the beryl, onyx and jasper. They were placed so to signify God's people carried close to His heart, and are mentioned again in Scripture, shown in the *shekinah* rainbow of glory surrounding God's throne in heaven (Revelation 4: 2-3). They are revealed in splendor in the *Holy City*, New Jerusalem, presented to the *Lamb's bride*, the church (Revelation 21: 10-21).

The colors incorporated into the design were of divine origin. Blue was chosen to symbolize a *heavenly kingdom*. Purple represents *royalty*, for Christ is the *King of Kings!* Scarlet typified *blood*, sacrificed on the altar for sin; it is seen in the *scarlet thread of redemption* throughout the Scriptures.

The fabrics used in the structure included linen, which represents divine *purity*, imparted by grace; goats hair, the first covering over the holy place, which typified *simplicity* and *poverty* (for our sakes Christ became poor, that we might become rich, 2 Corinthians 8: 9), rams skins dyed red, which stood for *devotion* and *consecration*, even unto death, and badgers skins, that plain *exterior* fitted over inner *glory!*

Very precious among the elements was the anointing oil, which in service in the holy place brought *light* and represented the presence of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2: 27). Two types of spices were used in the service of the tabernacle: first were the principal spices, which were for the anointing of the tabernacle proper, and they symbolized the *holiness* of the Lord. The second type were the sweet spices, which were burned as an incense and typified the *fragrance of heaven*. These were reserved strictly for the work of the priesthood and comprised the following: stacte, which is known in the Bible as the *balm of Gilead* (Jeremiah 8: 22); myrrh, which was an oil used in the *anointing for death*; frankincense, the oil of *consecration*, and lastly, onycha, a sweet savor, which represents the *prayers of saints*.

The Structure Of The Tabernacle

Text: Exodus 26: 1-32; 27: 9-18

The tabernacle was *portable*, a moveable tent-like structure designed for pilgrims on the march. It was so complex that the Levites appointed 8,530 men over the age of thirty to transport and care for it. It was always erected with its entrance gate facing east, symbolizing the promise of the *second coming* of Jesus Christ, who, returning in power and great glory, will enter the millennial temple through the *Eastern Gate* (Matthew 24: 27).

The *sanctuary* was situated inside a beautiful enclosed *outer court*, which measured approximately one-hundred fifty feet long, by seventy-five feet wide, by seven and one-half feet tall. This fence was a linen curtain. Linen represents the *righteousness of saints*. The curtain was supported by sixty brass-covered pillars of shittim wood, spaced seven and one-half feet apart, twenty on each side, and ten at each end. Each pillar sat on a bottom socket of *beaten brass*, conveying the story that everything done for God begins with *judgement*. The pillars were crowned with a *silver capital*, which symbolizes *redemption* and *service*. The curtains were secured along the bottom so that no one could *crawl under* and were of sufficient height that no one could *see over*.

The *only way in* was **through the Eastern Gate**, which represents Jesus Christ, the *Door!* (John 10: 9). It was thirty feet wide, comprised of four sections, each woven of blue, purple, scarlet and white. It alone gave access to the sacrifices and offerings, just as our Lord Jesus is *the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14: 6).

Once inside the gate, the Israelites met the priests at the *brazen altar*, a large structure measuring approximately seven and one-half feet in width and length by four and one-half feet

in height. It was constructed of wood overlaid with brass, again symbolizing the *judgement of sins*. Four *horns* of pure brass were fashioned at the corners, representing God's *power in judgement*. These horns were anointed with the blood of the sacrifice for consecration of the offering. A perpetual *fire* burned, typifying a *continual priestly work*. It portrayed the *high priestly work* of the Son, who is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

Between the brazen altar and the sanctuary stood the *brazen laver*, a basin of polished brass, made from the *looking glasses* of the women (Exodus 38: 8). It expressed the Biblical submission of *outward* beauty (1 Timothy 2: 9-10) to the *inner adornment of the heart*, or beauty that comes first from within. No particular size or design is given for the laver. It rested upon a *lower foot* of brass, which, with the laver was continually supplied with pure water. The priests could not enter the sanctuary from the brazen altar without washing both their hands and their feet, an order performed again when they left the sanctuary. This was for *cleansing* and stood for the *washing of water by the Word* (Ephesians 5: 25-26). God's Word cleanses and sanctifies the believer. Its position between the altar and the sanctuary signifies that there is no service, no worship, without cleansing!

The tabernacle proper, or *sanctuary*, was situated behind the brazen laver and was a magnificent structure measuring approximately forty-five feet in length by fifteen feet in width, and was about fifteen feet tall, not counting the tent-like coverings above it. It was divided into two compartments, the first being the *holy place*, occupying the first thirty feet of the sanctuary, and the *holy of holies*, which made up the rear fifteen feet of the structure. It was foursquare, as is the *gospel of Jesus Christ!*

The walls were formed of wooden boards covered with gold, each about two feet, three inches in width by fifteen feet tall. They were aligned twenty boards on each side and eight along the rear. The front, or *Eastern Gate*, was a beautiful woven curtain of most intricate, delicate needlework. Between the holy place and the holy of holies hung the *veil*, a heavy curtain woven and reinforced – about the thickness of a man's fist, made of blue, scarlet and purple.

The fabric and skins for *coverings* were draped in divine order over the top of the sanctuary, extending eighteen inches below the top of the walls and secured by cords drawn tightly. Was this tent-like covering to keep the *light* out? No, they were fitted to protect the people outside from dying from exposure to the *shekinah glory* of God within!

Three objects were placed in the holy place. The *candlestick* stood on the left side. Made of one piece of solid gold, it consisted of three bowls on each side and one on the central stem for a total of seven, each about the size of a man's heart. They were filled daily (daily filling of the *Holy Spirit*), with *beaten*, never *crushed* olive oil (Isa. 53: 5), which symbolized Christ, the light of the world.

The *table of shewbread* stood on the right side. It represents Christ, the *Bread of life* (John 6: 35). Twelve loaves of unleavened bread were placed on the table in two stacks each Sabbath, and were given to Aaron and his sons to eat while in the holy place (Leviticus 24: 5-9). The significance of the loaves is to not "*muzzle the ox!*" If you minister to *holy things*, God has provided for you to *help yourself to the shewbread!*

The *altar of incense* was situated just before the *veil* leading into the *holy of holies*. Coals from the brazen altar were placed there daily, and the *sweet incense* (the sweet savour of Jesus Christ!), was burned, symbolizing the *prayers of the saints*. The Book of Revelation reveals that our prayers are kept in

golden vials as an *odour* acceptable to God (Revelation 5: 8).

The *holy of holies* was behind the veil and was entered only by the *high priest* one time in the year, on the *day of atonement*. Only one article stood in this most holy place, the *ark of the covenant*. It was a wooden box overlaid with gold. Inside were placed the *tables of the law*, a pot of *manna* (meaning literally, “*what is this?*”) and Aaron’s *rod that budded*, which bore witness that God had the power to bring *life* from *death*.

Over the ark was the *mercy seat*, a solid gold cover with an intricate gold border the height of a *man’s hand*. At each end of the mercy seat was a golden *cherubim* angel of pure gold, with wings extending toward one another and whose faces looked down upon the mercy seat. They represented *justice* and *judgement*, the picture of God’s wrath vindicated in mercy (the *law* within covered by *mercy* above). It was where the blood atonement was offered and accepted by God.

Comparing The Old Testament To The New

Text: Hebrews 9: 1-28

There are similarities in the Old Testament and New Testament. Both have a *covenant*; the old was *Mosaic*, the new is *grace*. Both have a *tabernacle*; the old was *worldly*, the new is *heavenly*. Both have a *blood sacrifice*; the old was *animals*, the new was *Christ’s own blood*. Both have a *high priest*; the old was a mere man, the new is the God-man. Both have a *mercy seat*; the old was for *atonement*, the new is for *redemption*!

The New Testament is distinct from the old in profound ways. It has a *new covenant* (Hebrews 9: 15-17) of redemption from sins and the promise of an eternal inheritance for the saints in heaven. This covenant is the *last will and testament*

of Jesus Christ for His church, and upon the *death of the Testator* at Calvary (Hebrews 9: 16), the testament was enacted. Not in the *sweet by and by*, but *right now*! The Bible clearly teaches, *now* *are we the sons of God*... (1 John 3: 2).

Another New Testament distinction is its *heavenly tabernacle* (Hebrews 9: 11-24) into which Christ entered with His own blood to pay the ransom for sins. Unlike the offerings of the old tabernacle which could never take away sin, our Lord Jesus Christ shed His *perfect blood* and offered it on the mercy seat on high! Those who say that it is not important whether Christ was *virgin born* are ignorant of the truth that if He had been born of an *earthly father*, He would have inherited the father’s *fallen nature* and could never have died, the innocent for the guilty, because He would have been no different than any other man, and God would have refused the offering at the cross!

The distinction between the old and new covenants is most clearly understood by comparing the blood sacrifices. In the old the blood of bulls and goats stood in type only and could never take away sin (Hebrews 10: 4). But Christ’s shed blood, applied to the heart, *washes away* sins (Revelation 1: 5) and *purges* man’s conscience of *dead works* (Hebrews 9: 14). Through faith in His shed blood, believers are justified by grace, and the *sins of the past* are cleansed also (Romans 3: 24-25). Suppose, if it *were possible*, for a person to stop sinning and from that moment forward to never commit another sin. Could he go to heaven? No, because of the sins of his *past*. This passage assures believers that the sins of the past are washed away. By faith we understand also that Christ’s shed blood even now *continually cleanses* us (1 John 2: 2).

The events surrounding our Lord’s death on the cross bear evident testimony that the Father, executing *justice* in the death sentence, was *satisfied* (propitiation), accepting unconditionally the offering of His own Son’s blood as full,

final payment of the sin debt of mankind. The sign of God's approval and the beginning of the new covenant was the *renting of the veil* from **top to bottom** (Matthew 27: 46-51). Thus, the *new and living way* was opened (Hebrews 10: 14-20) so that believers have direct access to the throne to *obtain mercy and find grace to help...* (Hebrews 4: 16).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the **Great High Priest**, the *Mediator* (Hebrews 9: 15), of the new covenant (Hebrews 4: 14-16). A mediator is one who is *equal to both parties*. He is man's *Kinsman-Redeemer* (Ruth 3: 1- 4: 10) and also *God the Son*, coequal in every respect to the Father. As the *Advocate* (1 John 2: 1-2) for believers, He *intercedes* for us with the Father and has *never lost a case!* What a Saviour!

Does He argue that the charges leveled against believers by the devil (Revelation 12: 10) are *untrue*? No. His defense is justly that He suffered and bled and died for the child of God, and that the debt has been propitiated (*satisfied*). Isaiah 53: 11, promised, *He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied*. That was good enough for God! Now, the Son is *seated*, that is, the work is finished! Propitiation also means *mercy-seat*. It is where the precious blood of Christ was applied *in heaven!* It is also where the saints of God come to make our petitions known unto Him. From the cross to the heavenly tabernacle, "*mercy there was great, and grace was free; pardon there was multiplied to me,*" ring the words of William R. Newell's wonderful hymn "*At Calvary.*"

In the Old Testament tabernacle, God's grace was manifested in *withholding His wrath* by the sacrifice of the *pascal lamb*. In the New Testament, His grace is extended in the sacrifice of the *Lamb of God*. It was not the withholding of His wrath, but rather the full execution of the death sentence against sin. This grace, the *unmerited favor* of God, was shown by doing for man what he could not do for himself and did not deserve. Jesus Christ bore our sins, paying our sin-debt in full,

and when sinners repent (*turn away from sin*) and by faith invite Him into their hearts, *all sins are gone!* In the *sea of God's forgetfulness!* And the Father, who is a **perfect Gentleman**, will never bring them up again!

The work of redemption is miraculous! The *new birth* imparts salvation to eternal life, an inheritance reserved in heaven for the saints. A Christian becomes a *new creature* (2 Corinthians 5: 17), *old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*. It is God's assurance of a glorious future, a heavenly home. And it is *reserved*, already ours. Remember, the *Testator* has died! The *will is already in effect!* What a day that will be!

In Conclusion

The old tabernacle was a magnificent manifestation of God's presence among His people in pilgrimage. As a designer of homes for over forty years, I have learned to appreciate the artistic beauty and craftsmanship of fine homes, but *nothing on this earth* can compare to the splendor of the *heavenly tabernacle* which God is preparing for His Son's *bride*, the New Testament church! It will be where *heaven comes down in glory*. Best of all, it is where our Lord will be!

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. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.
(Revelation 21: 3-5)