

The Outer Court of the Tabernacle

Lesson Scope: [Exodus 25-31](#)

References in brackets refer to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

God revealed to Moses, on Mount Sinai, the divine plan for the construction of the tabernacle. Since the earthly tabernacle was to be an example, or "shadow," of the heavenly tabernacle, God firmly admonished Moses with these words: "See ... that thou make all things according to the pattern sheaved to thee in the mount" (Hebrews 8:5).

The provision of the tabernacle was another step in God's unfolding plan and desire to dwell among His people. It made possible a means of access or approach to a holy God by unworthy man. God's plan has culminated in the coming of His own Son to earth, our Emmanuel, who has fulfilled all that the tabernacle typified. Today, God indwells the believer through His Holy Spirit. But someday He will personally dwell with His redeemed servants (Revelation 21:3).

The tabernacle was designed to be a portable structure, carried by the Levites as the people journeyed. At the heart of the tabernacle was the inner sanctuary. The outer walls and furnishings that surrounded the sanctuary comprised the outer court.

The tabernacle and its furnishings pointed forward to Christ and His work of reconciling sinful man to a holy God. The outer court illustrated the distance between God and man and the only way to reach God.

The truth of the familiar quote "What is in the Old concealed is in the New revealed" will become readily apparent in this inspirational and devotional study. Even the small details of God's Word, recorded by divine inspiration, are significant. The study of types and shadows of the tabernacle worship brings added richness to our understanding of New Testament doctrine.

It is well to keep in mind some cautions in a study of types and shadows. A type is usually limited in the scope of its fulfillment. For example, the Bible character Joseph is a type of Christ in offering forgiveness to his brethren. But Joseph did not die for his brethren, as did

our Lord Jesus.

Another caution to note is this: while an Old Testament type may add meaning and perspective to its antitype in the New Testament, we always establish doctrinal truth by the fulfillment of the type, and not by the type alone.

Lesson Aim: To study types and shadows from the tabernacle and its furnishings.

Theme Verse: [Hebrews 10:22](#). Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Lesson Text

A Sanctuary for God's Presence

[Exodus 25:1-2](#) The LORD said to Moses, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.

[Exodus 25:8-9](#) And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. ⁹Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

[Exodus 26:1](#) “Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them.

[Exodus 26:7](#) “You shall also make curtains of goats’ hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make.

[Exodus 26:14-15](#) And you shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams’ skins and a covering of goatskins on top. ¹⁵ “You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood.

[Exodus 26:18-19](#) You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; ¹⁹ and forty bases of silver you shall make under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons;

[Exodus 26:29](#) You shall overlay the frames with gold and shall make their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and you shall overlay the bars with gold.

An Altar of Atonement

Exodus 27:1-2 “You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. ² And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze.

The Outer Court of Separation

Exodus 27:9-12 “You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twined linen a hundred cubits long for one side. ¹⁰ Its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. ¹¹ And likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long, its pillars twenty and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. ¹² And for the breadth of the court on the west side there shall be hangings for fifty cubits, with ten pillars and ten bases.

Exodus 27:16-18 For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. It shall have four pillars and with them four bases. ¹⁷ All the pillars around the court shall be filleted with silver. Their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze. ¹⁸ The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits, the breadth fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of fine twined linen and bases of bronze.

The Laver of Cleansing

Exodus 30:18-20 ¹⁸ “You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, ¹⁹ with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. ²⁰ When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die.

Questions for Study

A Sanctuary for God's Presence

1. How did God intend the tabernacle to enhance His relationship with His people?

2. List some ways that Christ is foreshadowed in the design, colors, and components of the tabernacle.

An Altar of Atonement

3. What is significant about the location and structure of the altar?

The Outer Court of Separation

4. Why did there need to be a barrier surrounding the outer court? What do the courtyard wall and the single entrance symbolize?

5. In what way is separation unattractive? In what way is it beautiful?

The Laver of Cleansing

6. What was the consequence of failing to wash at the laver?

7. Why is cleansing essential in every approach to God?

8. What preparations should precede our worship?

Analyzing the Passage

In His instructions to Moses for the tabernacle construction, God first outlined an itemized material list (25:1-9). These supplies were all obtained through freewill offerings from the Israelites, with one exception. God also required an additional silver ransom money (30:11-16; 38:25-28). This atonement money was used for making the sockets of silver in the foundation of the tabernacle and also the fillets in the courtyard pillars. Silver signifies the price of life and redemption.

Gold, used only on the inner furnishings of the tabernacle, symbolizes divinity and holiness. Brass, used for the courtyard pillars and sockets, speaks of judgment. The shittim wood that was overlaid with brass or gold typifies the humanity of Christ and the believer. Fine-twined linen speaks of righteousness.

The single gate of the courtyard typifies Christ, our only access to God (John 14:6). The four pillars of the gate could well prefigure the four portraits of Christ in the Gospels. The material used in the gate—the fine twined linen—was similar to that in the courtyard wall. But the gate also contained three additional colors: blue, purple, and scarlet. These colors portray Christ in their symbolism. Blue denotes heavenly things, purple is associated with royalty, and scarlet is the color of blood and of sin, atoned through Christ.

The tabernacle was to be pitched in the center of the camp, with three tribes encamped on each of its four sides. The dimensions of the enclosed courtyard of the tabernacle measured approximately one hundred

fifty feet by seventy-five feet.

Principles and Applications

A Sanctuary for God's Presence

1. God desires to dwell and fellowship with His people (25:8). God's intense love and interest in His people moved Him to devise a way to draw near to us. Our response should be an earnest desire to draw near to God (Hebrews 10:19-22).

2. The tabernacle, a pattern "of heavenly things," was to be constructed strictly according to God's blueprint (25:9). God spelled out in detail much of the design of the tabernacle and its furnishings so that the earthly replica would clearly represent its heavenly pattern (Exodus 25:40). God's building program in our day calls for each of us to be care-1111, obedient builders (1 Corinthians 3:9-11).

3. The tabernacle was plain without, but glorious within, typifying the veiled glory of Christ (26:1, 7, 14). Only the priests, who had made adequate preparation, could view the glory of God displayed in the holy place. Likewise, only redeemed sons of God can witness Christ's glory (John 1:12, 14). The natural man sees only the common humanity of Christ (Isaiah 53:2).

4. Wood overlaid with gold typifies the union of humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ (26:15, 18, 29). Jesus took on humanity in order to live as an example and to die as a sacrifice for sinful man. Yet "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

5. Redemption is the basis for separation from the world (26:18-19). The boards for the tabernacle wall, separating the holy place from the unsanctified people outside, rested on sockets of silver. Redemption from sin, typified by the silver sockets, is the reason why we are separated from the world and separated unto God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

An Altar of Atonement

6. The brazen altar points out that the only way to fellowship with God is through sacrifice (27:1-2). The brazen altar was the first item that an Israelite encountered who passed through the gate of the outer court. For the repentant sinner who enters the gate of salvation, his first encounter must be cleansing by Christ at Calvary.

The Outer Court of Separation

7. The outer court symbolizes how sinful man is separated from a holy God (27:9-10). "Having no hope, and without God in the world" is the tragic condition of man outside of God's provision of salvation. But God has opened a way for sinful man to be "made nigh by the blood of Christ." (See Ephesians 2:12-14.)

8. The gate toward the east is symbolic of the one way to God through His risen Son, the "Sun of righteousness" (27:16). A beautiful picture is portrayed in the sacrifices being offered in the morning as the sun rose, shedding its beams of light upon the sacrifice and those at the altar. How much like our Lord, illuminating those who exercise saving faith in Him (Malachi 4:2). The risen Christ is our only way to God and the gate to heaven (John 10:9).

The Laver of Cleansing

9. The laver is a type of the Word of God (30:18-20). The required washing at the laver is symbolic of man's need for inner cleansing. Jesus told His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). To maintain spiritual life and fellowship with God, we must daily apply the sanctifying Word of God to our lives.

Important Teachings

1. God desires to dwell and fellowship with His people (25:8).
2. The tabernacle, a pattern "of heavenly things," was to be constructed strictly according to God's blueprint (25:9).
3. The tabernacle was plain without, but glorious within, typifying the veiled glory of Christ (26:1, 7, 14).
4. Wood overlaid with gold typifies the union of humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ (26:15, 18, 29).
5. Redemption is the basis for separation from the world (26:18-19).
6. The brazen altar points out that the only way to fellowship with God is through sacrifice (27:1-2).
7. The outer court symbolizes how sinful man is separated from a holy God (27:9-10).
8. The gate toward the east is symbolic of the one way to God through His risen Son, the "Sun of righteousness" (27:16).
9. The laver is a type of the Word of God (30:18-20).

Answers to Questions

1. How did God intend the tabernacle to enhance His relationship with His people?

God's desire was to dwell among His people (25:8). The tabernacle provided a place where God would "meet with the children of Israel" (29:43), through the work of priestly intercession. The tabernacle stood as a tangible witness of God's presence in the midst of His people, reminding them of His desire for their worship and loyal service to Him. It also provided a central location for the offering of sacrifice to God. Here sin could be covered, God would be satisfied, and man could be at peace.

2. List some ways that Christ is foreshadowed in the design, colors, and components of the tabernacle. tabernacle God's desire was to "dwell among" His people

The courtyard of the tabernacle was designed with one entrance, typifying Christ as the only way to God, salvation, and heaven (John 14:6). The gate of the courtyard was approximately thirty feet wide and seven and one-half feet high, signifying ready access for all who chose to enter. Jesus' death on Calvary provided a way that all people could have the opportunity of salvation (John 12:32).

The colors of the curtains at the gate of the outer court represent aspects of Christ. Blue typifies Christ as the heavenly one. Purple, the color of royalty, represents our Lord as King (John 19:2-3). Scarlet, symbolizing sin (Isaiah 1:18) as well as blood—the atonement for sin—points to the shed blood of our redeeming Lord. The white linen typifies the righteousness of Christ and His saints (Revelation 19:8).

The tabernacle curtains and coverings typify Christ's veiled glory (26:1, 7, 14). These were plain and unattractive on the exterior, but were exquisitely glorious within.

3. What is significant about the location and structure of the altar?

The altar of sacrifice was the first object the Israelite encountered after entering the courtyard through the gate. Likewise, the repentant sinner who enters the door of salvation first encounters Christ, by faith, at Calvary. Atonement for sin is the primary essential for fellowship with God.

The altar was made of wood, overlaid with brass. Wood speaks of the humanity of Christ, who suffered for our sins in human form (1 Peter 2:24). Brass typifies judgment. Christ's death on Calvary satisfied God's

judgment for sin (Isaiah 53:11). The horns of the altar signify power—power in the blood!

4. Why did there need to be a barrier surrounding the outer court?

What do the courtyard wall and the single entrance symbolize?

The outer court wall served the practical purpose of denying access to those who were unprepared to enter. It also kept out straying animals and blocked the view of the holy proceedings within.

The courtyard wall symbolizes the barrier that sin has caused between a holy God and sinful humanity (Isaiah 59:2). The single entrance points to Christ, the only way sinful man can be reconciled to God.

5. In what way is separation unattractive? In what way is it beautiful?

Separation, like the outer covering of badger skins on the tabernacle, appears unattractive to the casual onlooker. The carnal mind sees separation from the world as being restrictive, and altogether without any attractive purpose.

The beauty of the inner coverings of the tabernacle, interwoven with color and depictions of cherubim, symbolizes the fellowship of the redeemed ones with their God. "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!" It is a sacred privilege to be separated from the world and separated unto God as His own people (1 Peter 2:9-10).

6. What was the consequence of failing to wash at the laver?

God instructed Moses, "They shall wash with water, that they die not" (Exodus 30:20). For the priest to enter the holy place without first washing at the laver meant certain death. A Christian who continues to neglect his reading and hearing of the Word of God will, likewise, experience spiritual death. Wash or die!

7. Why is cleansing essential in every approach to God?

Even as redeemed children of God, we sense our personal unworthiness to approach unto a holy God. We live in a sin-contaminated world and sense the possibility of being marred by sin, because of our sin nature. Like Isaiah, we first need the sanctifying work of God, in order to commune with Him (Isaiah 6:5-7).

8. What preparations should precede our worship?

God is jealous of our sincere worship. This requires careful preparation of our heart before God. We ask Him to search us through His Word, and reveal the condition of our heart. We also seek His cleansing from every sin that may lurk within our heart (Psalm 139:23-24).

Then like the children of Israel, we also prepare our offering to give to God. Through Christ, we offer "the sacrifice of praise" which is "the fruit of our lips" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Summarizing the Lesson

The study of the tabernacle in the wilderness impresses upon us two great truths: the holiness and glory of God, and the hopeless condition of sinful man. The divine provision of the tabernacle with its sacrificial system, as well as its fulfillment by the redemptive work of Christ, should move us to worship with the words of the song: "Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan! / Oh, the grace that brought it down to man! / Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span / At Calvary!"

Research Guide

1. Study the heavenly pattern of the tabernacle that apparently was shown to John on the Isle of Patmos. The following references all appear in the Book of Revelation.
 - A. Temple of the tabernacle (15:5)
 - B. Altar of sacrifice (6:9)
 - C. Seven golden candlesticks (1:12)
 - D. Golden altar of incense (8:3-4)
 - E. Hidden manna (2:17)
 - F. Ark of His testament (11:19)
2. Read Exodus 35-40 for additional details when the actual building of the tabernacle was done.