

The Inner Sanctuary of the Tabernacle

Lesson Scope: [Exodus 25-40](#)

References in brackets refer to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

The common Israelite never went beyond the outer court of the tabernacle. Only the chosen priests, after careful preparation, were permitted to enter the holy place, to perform the daily service before God. Only the high priest passed beyond the veil into the most holy place, once a year, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

The priests entered into the holy place of the tabernacle through a Five-post doorway. This door may typify the five writers of the epistles of the New Testament. Entrance at this point represents the believer moving Forward from the Gospel plan, as seen in the four-post outer gate, into the Fuller doctrine of God.

Within the tabernacle, the priests' daily activities at the altar of incense and before the table of showbread foreshadow the believers' relationship to Christ. This place of worship and fellowship for the priests points forward to our privilege today to "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was God's chosen place of meeting His people. The sanctuary pointed forward to Christ, who provides a greater dimension of fellowship with God today.

This lesson is rich in types pointing to Christ and His redemptive work. You will need to be selective in how much time to spend in discussing each of these types. Keep the lesson practical by emphasizing our responsibility to enter into fellowship with God in our daily walk of life.

While we, as New Testament believers, can enter into God's presence today with confidence and assurance, our approach to God must always be in humility, with reverence and godly fear. The casual type of worship that relates to God on a human level is a reproach to God and brings His judgment.

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

Theme Verse: [Hebrews 9:24](#) For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Lesson Text

The Ark of Communion and Mediation

[Exodus 25:10-11](#) “They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹ You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it.

[Exodus 25:16-18](#) And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you. ¹⁷ “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ¹⁸ And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat.

[Exodus 25:21-22](#) And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. ²² There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

The Table of Fellowship and Lampstand of Light

[Exodus 25:23-24](#) “You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ²⁴ You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it.

[Exodus 25:30-32](#) And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly. ³¹ “You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. ³² And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it;

The Veil of Demarcation and Altar of Intercession

Exodus 26:31 “And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.

Exodus 26:33-34 And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. ³⁴ You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place.

Exodus 30:1-2 “You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. ² A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it.

The Consummation and Glory

Exodus 40:33-34 And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work. ³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Questions for Study

The Ark of Communion and Mediation

1. Why was the ark the most sacred furnishing of the tabernacle?
2. What do the ark and the mercy seat typify about Christ and His work?

The Table of Fellowship and Lampstand of Light

3. What truths about Christ and the believer does the table of show-bread portray?
4. In what way does the lampstand point to Christ?

The Veil of Demarcation and Altar of Intercession

5. What was the purpose of the veil? What did it typify?
6. What does the odor ascending from the altar of incense symbolize?

The Consummation and Glory

7. What did the Lord communicate by covering the tabernacle with a cloud and filling it with glory?
8. How can God's people be assured of His presence today?

Analyzing the Passage

God gave direction for building the tabernacle beginning with the most

holy place and moving outward. But man's approach in worship was in the opposite direction, starting at the outer gate and progressing toward the inner sanctuary.

The interior of the tabernacle was a place of exquisite beauty and glory. The inner curtains contained rich colors and depictions of cherubim interwoven in the tapestry. All the furniture was made entirely of gold, or else covered with pure gold. Light from the flame of the lampstand reflected from the golden surfaces and the linen curtains.

The term candlestick (25:31) is better understood as "lampstand." This instrument of light, the only light in the tabernacle, was made of one beaten work. It had a center stem, with three branches on either side, making it a seven-branched lampstand.

The word shewbread (25:30) comes from a Hebrew word that means "bread of the face, or presence" because the bread was set in the presence of God. The twelve loaves set upon the table represented the tribes of Israel. The bread was replaced weekly on the Sabbath with fresh loaves, and the priests ate the bread that had been sitting in the holy place (Leviticus 24:5-9).

Principles and Applications

The Ark of Communion and Mediation

1. The ark in the most holy place is a type of the glorified Christ in the presence of God (25:10-11). The children of Israel considered the ark a sacred emblem, for it represented the presence of God among them. The ark typifies Jesus, who was God's presence upon earth in human form, when He dwelt among men.

The ark is also symbolic of the throne of God, where He manifested His glory between the cherubim. Christ is now ascended to heaven, seated at the right hand of God, and crowned with glory and honor. He is now "in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24).

2. The divine law of God is eternal, precious, and enduring (25:16). God's Law preserved in the ark represents Christ, who is the eternal Word of God. Today the message of God's Word is preserved in the hearts of God's people as we cherish its precepts, obey its commands, and love its truth.

3. The mercy seat signifies propitiation through Jesus Christ, and is the only way for man to meet God (25:17-18, 21-22). Through the sprin-

klings of sacrificial blood upon the mercy seat, God accepted a yearly atoning, or covering for sin (Leviticus 16:14-16). The Day of Atonement pointed forward to the shedding of Christ's blood that redeems man to God (Hebrews 9:12). The blood-sprinkled mercy seat symbolizes forgiveness and cleansing for our sin as we come in repentance to Christ (1 John 2:1-2).

The Table of Fellowship and Lampstand of Light

4. The table of showbread speaks of fellowship with, and sustenance through, Christ, the Bread of Life (25:23-24, 30). The priests' weekly routine of eating the showbread in the holy place expressed their close fellowship with God. This ceremony foreshadowed the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the memorial of His broken body (Matthew 26:26).

Our fellowship with Christ, through His Word, provides spiritual nourishment that fully meets our need. He is "the bread of life" that satisfies the hungry soul (John 6:35).

5. Jesus is the only Light of the world (25:31-32). There were no windows in the tabernacle to allow outside light to shine in. The only light in the sanctuary radiated from the golden lampstand. This divinely appointed light points to Jesus, who said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Worldly light, with its humanistic glitter, has nothing to offer the believer, whose heart is illumined by God.

The Veil of Demarcation and Altar of Intercession

6. The veil typifies the flesh of Christ, whose physical death has opened the way into God's holy presence (26:31, 33-34). At Jesus' death, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain" (Matthew 27:51). This signified the "new and living way" that was opened for believers to enter "into the holiest" (Hebrews 10:19, 20).

7. The altar of incense typifies prayer and worship before the throne God (30:1-3). The placement of this altar at the entrance of the most holy place signifies the importance of prayer as we worship the Lord.

The incense offered at this altar symbolizes the prayers of God's people (Revelation 8:3-4). Like the fragrant odor of incense ascending off the altar, so the prayers of the faithful rise as a sweet savor to God.

The Consummation and Glory

8. The glory of God speaks of God's presence and blessing (40:33-34).

The cloud filling the tabernacle was a visible sign to Israel that God accepted their obedience and worship. He was pleased to dwell among His people as they were faithful to Him. By faith, we can also be assured of God's presence and acceptance. The peace of God and the witness of His Spirit, victory over sin, and answered prayer are evidences of God's indwelling presence and power.

Important Teachings

1. The ark in the most holy place is a type of the glorified Christ in the presence of God (25:10-11).
2. The divine law of God is eternal, precious, and enduring (25:16).
3. The mercy seat signifies propitiation through Jesus Christ, and is the only way for man to meet God (25:17-18, 21-22).
4. The table of showbread speaks of fellowship with, and sustenance through, Christ, the Bread of Life (25:23-24, 30).
5. Jesus is the only Light of the world (25:31-32).
6. The veil typifies the flesh of Christ, whose physical death has opened the way into God's holy presence (26:31, 33-34).
7. The altar of incense typifies prayer and worship before the throne of God (30:1-3).
8. The glory of God speaks of God's presence and blessing (40:33-34).

Answers to Questions

1. Why was the ark the most sacred furnishing of the tabernacle?

The ark represented the presence of God. God told Moses, "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat" (25:22). The blood of atonement was sprinkled yearly on the mercy seat upon the ark to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

2. What do the ark and the mercy seat typify about Christ and His work?

The ark in the most holy place, where God's presence rested, is a type of Christ who is "in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). The ark contained the law of God embodied in the Ten Commandments on tables of stone. The prophetic words of Christ from Psalm 40:8 are "thy law is within my heart." Jesus Christ is the living Word.

The blood-sprinkled mercy seat typifies the work of Christ on Calvary

that satisfied the judgment of God for sin (Isaiah 53:11). Christ presented His own blood in "the holy place" (Hebrews 9:12). We find mercy and redemption through Him.

3. What truths about Christ and the believer does the table of showbread portray?

The priests' weekly ceremony of eating the bread in the holy place expressed close fellowship with God. They also experienced physical nourishment by eating the showbread. Christ, who is the Bread of Life to us, feeds our souls with spiritual sustenance. We are spiritually sustained by the truth of His Word.

The table of showbread also foreshadows the Last Supper, where Jesus instituted the memorial of His broken body (Matthew 26:26).

We partake of the bread, the emblem of Christ's broken body, and thus enter into His suffering and death.

4. In what way does the lampstand point to Christ?

The only light in the tabernacle was from this divinely appointed instrument of light. No windows in the tabernacle admitted outside light. Likewise, Jesus is the only Light of the world. Other worldly light has nothing to offer the child of God, who is illumined by the Holy Spirit.

The lampstand was made of solid gold, of one beaten work. It was a priceless work of art. The refining and beating of the gold typifies the suffering of Christ, so that spiritual light could be shed upon all men.

5. What was the purpose of the veil? What did it typify?

The veil hung as a barrier between a holy God and sinful man. It was a reminder that man could not enter the presence of God without the blood of sacrifice. It veiled the glory of God from sinful man.

The veil typifies the flesh of Christ, which was His sinless, human body. When Christ died at Calvary, the veil was rent, signifying that the way was now open into the presence of God through faith in Christ's shed blood. (See Hebrews 10:19-20.)

6. What does the odor ascending from the altar of incense symbolize?

This symbolizes the prayers of God's people ascending to Him as a sweet savor (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4). The priests made intercession for God's people at this altar. Our prayers of intercession for others ascend as an offering to God. Christ, as our great High Priest, intercedes for us before the Father.

7. What did the Lord communicate by covering the tabernacle with a

cloud and filling it with glory?

By this visible sign, God revealed that He had accepted Israel's obedience and worship as it related to the tabernacle system. The cloud revealed that God's presence and blessing rested here in the midst of His people, as they were faithful to Him.

8. How can God's people be assured of His presence today?

We do not have visible proof of God's presence today as Israel did when they saw the cloud of God resting upon the tabernacle. Instead, we trust that He is present among us, as we fear Him. We have the witness of God in our spirit and know His power for victory over sin. We sense God's presence in the church when there is unity of heart and soul. When God's Word brings conviction of sin and spiritual growth in the believers, we are assured that God's presence is among us.

Summarizing the Lesson

The blood of Jesus has opened for us "a new and living way" of fellowship with God that was only foreshadowed in the tabernacle system of worship. In light of the greater privileges we enjoy as New Testament believers, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22).

Research Guide

1. Meditate on the message of the hymn "In Thy Holy Place" from the Church Hymnal, #167. This hymn takes the theme of the tabernacle worship and blends its symbolism with New Testament worship.
2. Read Hebrews 8-10 for a description of the tabernacle worship, with its fulfillment in Christ.
3. Read the article "Ark of the Covenant" in Unger's Bible Dictionary.