

Lesson 12 – 17 April 2011

The Outer Court of the Tabernacle

Lesson Scope: [Exodus Chapters 25 through 31](#)

Lesson Focus

"That I may dwell among them." Herein is expressed the entire purpose of the tabernacle. Not only did it provide a physical, earthly location for God's presence among His people, but it also provided a means whereby a people could be made fit for God to dwell among them. This is the central theme of the Bible. God first dwelt among His people in this manner, and then Emmanuel came to dwell among them and to perform all that the tabernacle typified. Finally, the Bible closes with a blood-washed throng dwelling with God in heaven.

The tabernacle was a large, portable place of worship. At the heart of the tabernacle was the inner sanctuary (studied in the next lesson). All that surrounded the sanctuary comprised the outer court.

The remaining chapters of Exodus deal primarily with the actual construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings. In this tabernacle and with these furnishings the people of God would worship for many years. Hebrews 8 and 9 tells us that the tabernacle setup was a pattern drawn from heavenly realities. In fact, the Old Covenant, including the tabernacle, was a "shadow of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). A shadow is cast by something more substantial than itself. The Old Testament foreshadowed the New Testament.

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

Many, many types can be pulled from the different features of the tabernacle. As a rule, the parts of the tabernacle with a definite purpose in the Old Testament worship have definite corollary in the New Testament. The parts of the tabernacle that are more cosmetic or structural may inspire interesting ideas, but the ideas should not be indulged in overmuch. Stay focused on the tabernacle as a meeting place for God and man.

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.

The Tabernacle and Curtains

[Exodus 25:1-2](#)

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ²Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.”

[Exodus 25:8-9](#)

“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. ⁹According to all that I shew thee, *after* the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make *it*.”

[Exodus 26:1](#)

“Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle *with* ten curtains *of* fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: *with* cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.”

[Exodus 26:7](#)

“And thou shalt make curtains *of* goats' *hair* to be a covering upon the tabernacle: eleven curtains shalt thou make.”

[Exodus 26:14-15](#)

“And thou shalt make a covering for the tent *of* rams' skins dyed red, and a covering above *of* badgers' skins. ¹⁵And thou shalt make boards for the tabernacle *of* shittim wood standing up.”

[Exodus 26:18-19](#)

“And thou shalt make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards on the south side southward. ¹⁹And thou shalt make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards; two sockets under one board for his two tenons, and two sockets under another board for his two tenons.”

[Exodus 26:29](#)

“And thou shalt overlay the boards with gold, and make their rings *of* gold *for* places for the bars: and thou shalt overlay the bars with gold.”

The Brazen Altar

[Exodus 27:1-2](#)

“And thou shalt make an altar *of* shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof *shall be* three cubits. ²And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass.”

The Outer Court

[Exodus 27:9-10](#)

“And thou shalt make the court of the tabernacle: for the south side southward *there shall be* hangings for the court *of* fine twined linen of an hundred cubits long for one side: ¹⁰And the twenty pillars thereof and their twenty sockets *shall be of* brass; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets *shall be of* silver.”

[Exodus 27:12](#)

“And *for* the breadth of the court on the west side *shall be* hangings of fifty cubits: their pillars ten, and their sockets ten.”

[Exodus 27:16-18](#)

“And for the gate of the court *shall be* an hanging of twenty cubits, *of* blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework: *and* their pillars *shall be* four, and their sockets four. ¹⁷All the pillars round about the court *shall be* filleted with silver; their hooks *shall be of* silver, and their sockets of brass. ¹⁸The length of the court *shall be* an hundred cubits, and the breadth fifty every where, and the height five cubits *of* fine twined linen, and their sockets *of* brass.”

The Laver

[Exodus 30:18-20](#)

“Thou shalt also make a laver *of* brass, and his foot *also of* brass, to wash *withal*: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. ¹⁹For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: ²⁰When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD:”

Questions for Study

The Tabernacle and Curtains

1. What did God expect the tabernacle to contribute to His relationship with Israel?
2. What do the tabernacle's components, colors, and arrangements foreshadow of Christ?

The Brazen Altar

3. What did the altar symbolize by its location and composition?

The Outer Court

4. Explain the practical and symbolical significance of the barrier around the courtyard with its single entrance.
5. In what way is separation unattractive? In what way is it beautiful?

The Laver

6. Why is cleansing essential in every approach to God?
7. What preparations should precede our worship?
8. What dangers accompany a casual approach to worship?

Analyzing the Passage

Exodus 25:1-9 is an introductory passage itemizing the complete materials list for the tabernacle construction.

The tabernacle was covered with two layers of curtains beneath two additional coverings of skins. The inner curtain was made of fine twined linen—blue, purple, and scarlet—with cherubim woven into it. This was a very beautiful and symbolic creation, visible only to those inside the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was to be set up in the center of the camp, with three tribes encamped on each side of it. The fence surrounding the tabernacle was made of fine linen hung from posts seven and one-half feet high. This Courtyard measured approximately one hundred fifty feet by seventy-five feet.

The laver (Exodus 30:18-20), situated between the tabernacle and the altar, was filled with an unspecified quantity of water. Every priest was to wash here before ministering in any service of the Lord.

Principles and Applications

The Tabernacle and Curtains

1. God desires to dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8). Physical proximity communicates interest. A father wants to be with his family. A shep-

herd wants to be with his flock. God wants to be with His people. Jesus has come to prepare a place for us, that where He is, there we may be also. As difficult as it is for our minds to fathom God, we can be assured of two truths; one is that He desires to dwell among, with, and within His people and the other is that His desire to be with man reveals that He seeks a loving relationship with man.

2. The tabernacle, a pattern "of heavenly things," was to be constructed strictly according to God's blueprint (Exodus 25:9). Much of the tabernacle design was spelled out in detail to Moses. Perhaps we can see God's grace at work in the fact that the entire project was to be built of such a small variety of materials, things that were readily available to the Israelites in the wilderness.

3. Overlaid with gold, the boards of the structure suggest an interaction between holiness and earthliness (Exodus 26:15, 18, 29). This could apply to the believer, in that each of us is a common person touched by grace. It could also apply to the nature of Jesus Christ, both fully human and fully divine. Perhaps even the earth, sea, and sky are seen here, so common yet so beautiful.

The Brazen Altar

4. The altar attests that the way to fellowship with God is through Christ's offering (Exodus 27:1). Sacrifice is the only way to approach God, either in search of His mercy or as an expression of our gratitude. The New Testament is quite emphatic about the place of an Old Testament altar today; it is no longer needed. "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" (Hebrews 13:10).

The Outer Court

5. The outer court reminded the worshippers that sinful humanity is separated from the holy God (Exodus 27:9-10). Man cannot approach God on any other than God's terms. One does not accidentally find fellowship with God. Rather, at every angle, we are reminded that God is unreachable, except by way of the path of sacrifice.

6. The gate facing eastward symbolized the one way to God through His risen Son, the Son of righteousness (Exodus 27:16). Although the lesson text does not mention that the gate faced east (see Exodus 27:13-15), the very idea of the fires of sacrifice answering to the face of the rising light of God's providence is comely. The English homonyms sun and son also add a dimension as we draw inspiration from the Son of God, who enlightens our hearts and minds.

The Laver

7. The laver teaches us the need for holiness in worship (Exodus 30:18-20). It would seem that the laver served as a work sink for the priests involved in bloody sacrifice. While that may have been a part of its usefulness God's stated purpose for the laver was that the priests should wash "when they go into the tabernacle." In this fashion, they were able to purge their hands, feet, and labors of any trace of unsanctified or casual elements. Repeatedly, God's Word tells the saints to avoid trampling on His grace, to not take the Name of the Lord in vain, and to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Important Teachings

1. God desires to dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8).
2. The tabernacle, a pattern "of heavenly things," was to be constructed strictly according to God's blueprint (Exodus 25:9).
3. Overlaid with gold, the boards of the structure suggest an interaction between holiness and earthliness (Exodus 26:15, 18, 29).
4. The brazen altar attests that the way to fellowship with God is through Christ's offering (Exodus 27:1).
5. The outer court reminded the worshipers that sinful humanity is separated from the holy God (Exodus 27:9, 10).
6. The gate facing eastward symbolized the one way to God through His risen Son, the Son of righteousness (Exodus 27:16).
7. The laver teaches us the need for holiness in worship (Exodus 30:18-20).

Answers to Questions

1. What did God expect the tabernacle to contribute to His relationship with Israel?

This tabernacle placed God's presence in the center of the camp and, hopefully, in the center of Israel's attention and interest. There they could offer their worship and sacrifices, and there the priests could mediate for the people. The tabernacle and its ministry were an ever-present reminder of Israel's dependence on and responsibility to God.

2. What do the tabernacle's components, colors, and arrangements foreshadow of Christ?

The tabernacle had a drab exterior but a glorious interior. Jesus lived on this earth as a common man (Isaiah 53:2) but with the inner glory of the Son of God. The gold-plated wooden boards also illustrate the same truth.

White, fine-twined linen illustrates righteousness; purple symbolizes royalty; red typifies the blood of redemption; blue is the heavenly color. Silver is often associated in Scripture with redemption, brass with judgment. The laver illustrates the cleansing power of Christ, the Word.

3. What did the altar symbolize by its location and composition?

The brazen altar foreshadowed Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary. No one can enter God's presence apart from Jesus' work of redemption through His shed blood. The wood suggests Jesus' humanity; the brass suggests divine judgment. The four horns illustrate the power of the blood that is available for the people of all nations.

4. Explain the practical and symbolical significance of the barrier around the courtyard with its single entrance.

To enter the courtyard, except through the one gate, meant death. The fence protected the people by keeping them out. The single gate of the court portrays Christ as our only means of access to God. The hangings of the gate on four pillars illustrate the four Gospels and their respective portrayals of Christ.

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

Separation can be unattractive by separating us from what our carnal impulses desire. The flesh is at enmity with the Spirit. Separation can be beautiful as we sense our consecration to the God of wisdom and love. Separation unites more than it separates.

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

God commands man to be holy as He is holy. He will not fellowship with any sin or works of darkness. Our daily walk in this world brings us into contact with contaminating influences. We must be free from them as we approach God.

7. What preparations should precede our worship?

We should pray that God would assist us in our worship. We should prepare to hear the truth and to ignore distractions. We should be ready to spend time, even in silence, in consideration of truth. We should prepare an offering. We should make provision for our earthly needs at an earlier time so as to enable us to be unhindered in worship.

8. What dangers accompany a casual approach to worship?

Casual worship has a hardening effect, leaving one increasingly insensitive to and uninterested in spiritual things. These attitudes influence others negatively as well.

Summarizing the Lesson

The tabernacle was a part of the temporary Old Testament, yet it was symbolic of eternal realities. Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant with His blood. We can gain much inspiration by meditating on God's wisdom in the plans for the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the literal center of Jewish life in the wilderness. Likewise, worship is the center of the Christian's life today.

Research Guide

1. Study the spiritual uses of the different articles in the tabernacle.
2. Read Hebrews Chapters 8 and 9 to see how some Old Testament typology was fulfilled.
3. Study Revelation Chapters 4 and 8:1-5.