

The Tabernacle and God's Plan of Salvation

Part 1: Why Is THAT in the Bible?!

Did you know that the Bible mentions the words “tabernacle” or “temple” nearly 700 times? That doesn't even include the 150+ times that “sanctuary” is mentioned, or the hundreds of times the altar, mercy seat, and other items within the tabernacle or temple are mentioned.

One entire book, the Book of Leviticus, speaks mostly of the tabernacle and its ceremonies, as do large portions of Exodus, Numbers, Kings and Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Hebrews, Revelation, and many more. In fact, some of these passages seem almost obsessive in describing the details and dimensions of the tabernacle and the temple.

Why? Why does God's Word tell us so much about the tabernacle and the temple? They have nothing to do with us today, right?

Or do they?

Remember, there's no filler in God's Word! Everything in there is there for a reason. And if God tells us about something over and over again, you can bet that it's important!

We're told, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Not some Scripture. Not a lot of Scripture. ALL Scripture is profitable for us!

The Apostle Paul further wrote, “Whatever things were written before were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4).

So what about the tabernacle specifically?

The tabernacle followed a pattern. It represented the spiritual realm. It was “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’” (Heb. 8:5).

Stephen explained in the Book of Acts, “the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?’” (Acts 7:48-50).

Again, in Heb. 8:1-2, we read, “We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.”

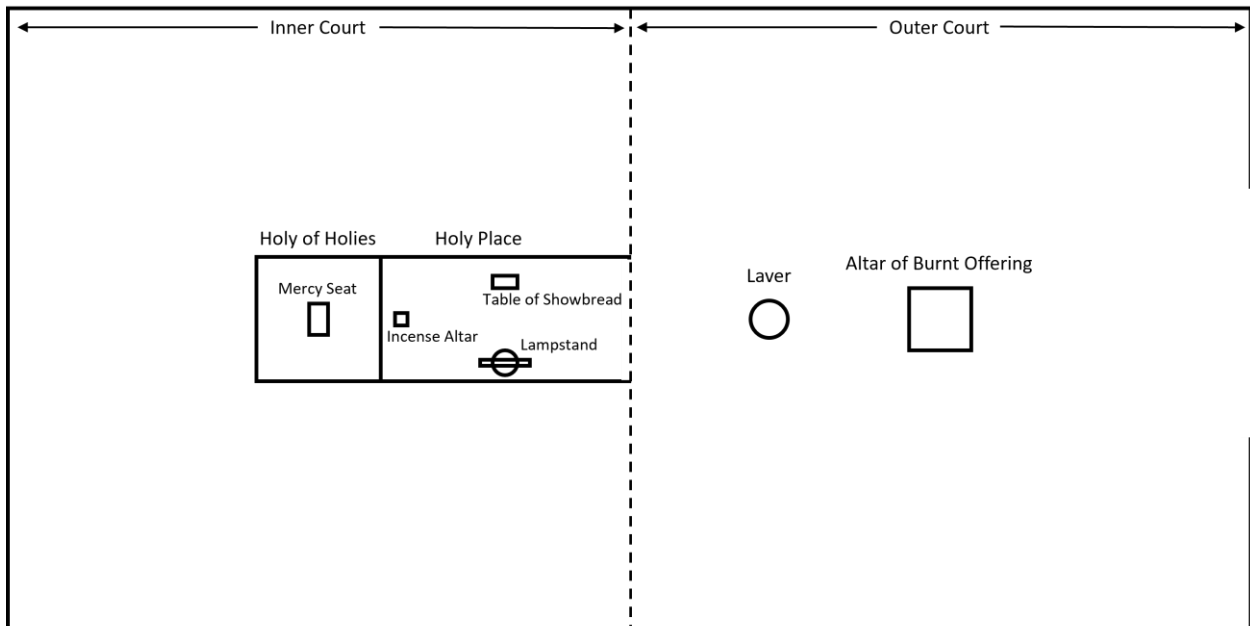
The Apostle John saw a vision of this heavenly temple, writing, “Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple” (Rev. 11:19). And, again, he wrote of the end of the age, “a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’” (Rev. 16:17).

So from these passages, we learn two things about the tabernacle/temple. Number one, it’s patterned after the heavenly. Number two, it follows a pattern that God revealed to be very important and instructed Moses to diligently follow.

Now that we know God told us about the tabernacle for a reason, and now that we have at least some inkling of why, let’s take a look at the tabernacle itself and see what else we can learn. Let’s start with the basic layout.

As you can see in the diagram, the tabernacle stood in a courtyard 100 cubits (about 150 feet) long and 50 cubits (about 75 feet) wide. God gives us the measurements, too, for a reason, but that’s beyond the scope of this article.

The Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31, 35-40)



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|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Holy of Holies: 10L x 10W x 10H | Laver: dimensions not given |
| Holy Place: 20L x 10W x 10H | Altar of Burnt Offering: 5L x 5W x 3H |
| Whole Tabernacle: 30L x 10W x 10H | Inner Court: 50L x 50W |
| Mercy Seat: 2.5W x 1.5L | Outer Court: 50L x 50W |
| Incense Altar: 1L x 1W x 2H | Entire Courtyard: 100L x 50W |
| Table of Showbread: 2L x 1W x 1.5H | Entrance to the Courtyard: 20 cubits |
| Lampstand: dimensions not given | |

A wall of curtains 5 cubits (7 ½ feet) high surrounded the courtyard. There was only one entrance, and that was on the east. One could approach the tabernacle only by entering the courtyard on the east and walking toward the west.

After entering the courtyard, one would encounter first the altar of burnt offering, then the laver for washing, and finally the entrance to the tabernacle. Within the tabernacle are two rooms, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The Holy Place contains a seven-branched lampstand, a table with twelve loaves of bread, and an altar of incense. The Holy of Holies contains the Ark of the Covenant, topped by a mercy seat and two golden cherubim stretching their wings over the mercy seat.

Now, is there a reason God wanted the tabernacle laid out this way? Yes indeed — it's a physical model of His plan of salvation!

To journey into the tabernacle, one had to start in the east and walk toward the west. The east represents the sinful ways of this world.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God banished them from His presence in the Garden of Eden, exiled them to the east, and stationed cherubim there to block them from returning (Gen. 3:24). When Cain killed his brother Abel, God again exiled him eastward (Gen. 4:16). In God's Word, the east wind is a wind of destruction and calamity (Gen. 41:6, 23, 27), just as sin causes death (Rom. 6:23). Finally, when the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of twenty-five men steeped in idolatry, they stood "with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east" (Ezek. 8:16).

In order to come into God's presence, we must spiritually turn our backs on the east and journey westward. We must leave behind the world and its ways, for "whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4).

After we turn our backs on the world (the east) and we begin to seek God, we come first to the altar of burnt offering, which lies squarely in the path to the tabernacle door. The altar, and the sacrifices offered on it, foreshadowed Yeshua/Jesus' sacrifice. The only path to the Father is through this sacrifice. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

As we read in Heb. 9:13-14, "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Heb. 10:10 adds, "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Yeshua/Jesus' sacrifice was the one, perfect sacrifice that all other sacrifices foreshadowed. No other is needed any longer.

However, in order to be saved, we must repent of our sins, accept His blood to atone for us, and partake of His sacrifice: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of

Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:16-18).

Having repented of our sins and accepted our Messiah's sacrifice at the altar, we next reach the laver filled with water. This represents baptism.

At the tabernacle, when inaugurating new priests into office, one of the first steps was to wash them with water. As God commanded Moses, "And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water" (Ex. 29:4).

Similarly, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God commanded Israel, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good" (Isa. 1:16-17).

Thus we read in Acts 22:16, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Heb. 10:22 adds, "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."

After baptism at the laver, we stand before the door of the tabernacle. The next step is to enter the Holy Place. How does this happen?

In Acts 2:38, we read, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. We've now seen the first two of these in our journey through the tabernacle: repent (the altar) and be baptized (the laver). What's next? Receiving the Holy Spirit. What happens when we receive the Holy Spirit?

1 Cor. 3:16-17 tells us, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."

Receiving the Holy Spirit means we have become God's temple, and He is dwelling within us. We have entered the Holy Place in His tabernacle. We have become priests to Him, wholly dedicated to His service.

As we find in 1 Pet. 2:5, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 Pet. 2:9 continues this thought in these words: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Repent, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That takes us from the entrance of the courtyard into the tabernacle itself, into God's presence!

Furthermore, as we can see on the diagram, the entrance to the courtyard was twice the width of the entrance to the tabernacle. Like the rest of the tabernacle, this, too, illustrated a spiritual principle, for many people could enter the courtyard, but the tabernacle was off-limits to all but a chosen few. So, too, “many are called, but few are chosen” (Mat. 22:14).

Now, let’s look at this process from another angle: God’s annual holy days. They, too, follow the pattern of the tabernacle.

As we saw already, Jesus Christ fulfilled the sacrifices performed on the altar. Not only that, but He also thoroughly fulfilled the Passover sacrifice, as established in the book *The Lord’s Passover* by this author. As 1 Cor. 5:7 tells us, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”

Jesus’ sacrifice, then, is linked both to Passover and to the altar of burnt offering. Therefore, the altar of burnt offering is also linked to Passover!

Just as Israel ate the Passover lambs each year, as well as the other sacrifices, so we also must do when we accept our Messiah’s sacrifice. As we read already in 1 Cor. 10:16-18, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?”

Thus, each year at Passover, we partake of our Messiah’s sacrifice. We eat His flesh and drink His blood, symbolized by the bread and wine, just He commanded us to do (John 6:54, 56). We partake of the spiritual altar at Passover, just as Israel partook of the physical one.

What about the laver and baptism? We know from the timeline in the Book of Exodus that Israel crossed the Red Sea a few days after Passover, and that it would have been at least during the Days of Unleavened Bread, very likely on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. What does God’s Word teach us about that? “All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). Thus Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread corresponds to baptism, which corresponds to the laver, which in turn corresponds to the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.

The next holy day, of course, is Pentecost. Now, what noteworthy event is tied to the day of Pentecost? “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-4). God sent the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

We already saw that receiving the Holy Spirit corresponds to entering the Holy Place in the tabernacle, and now we see that the day of Pentecost represents receiving the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Pentecost corresponds to entering the tabernacle.

We can see, then, three beautiful steps in God's plan of salvation repeated three times in three different ways. The altar, the laver, the Holy Place. Repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit. Passover, the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost. All spell out the process of conversion for us.

So far, we've covered the first three holy days, and four remain. We've also reached the Holy Place, but have not yet examined anything inside it or reached the Holy of Holies.

There's much more ground to cover, which means this will have to be continued another time. I hope it has piqued your interest in some often overlooked passages in God's Word!

To be continued...

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