


The Church in the Wilderness

“This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us”
(Acts 7:38).

The Tabernacle, God’s Plan for Fellowship

God always has a plan! The Tabernacle was God's plan for fellowshiping with man in the wilderness. He allows us to see His plan for continued fellowship in the church.


The Tabernacle, like many things in the Old Testament, was a picture of things to come. It was an “example and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5). The Tabernacle is also described as a “pattern,” “a symbol” and/or “a type.” Each part had a special meaning. Christians are fascinated with the study of the Tabernacle.

 The purpose of the Tabernacle was so God could dwell with His people. Later the Temple was built for the same purpose.


“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

 Jesus came and dwelt among men.

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

 God continues to dwell in His people through the Holy Spirit.

“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

 One day we will go and dwell with God.

“In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3).

The Tabernacle was a portable building, a tent-like structure. In the wilderness, God's people moved from place to place. They had to have a church that could move with them.

Around the Tabernacle was an outer court. Inside were two rooms. Each morning the priest entered the first room, the Holy Place. The second room, the Holy of Holies, was entered once a year. Here God met with man. The high priest only entered on the Day of Atonement (in October) to sprinkle blood on the cover of the mercy seat.

When the Israelites set up camp, this portable worship center was placed in the center of the encampment. Later it was placed at Shiloh, a place all of the tribes of Israel could easily reach.

Israel had twelve tribes. Three tribes camped on each of the four sides of the church in the wilderness.

The first group was pitched on the east side, toward the rising sun, and was led by the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ was the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” To receive salvation, you must enter through Jesus Christ.

"Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shown to thee in the mount" (Hebrews 8:5).

"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building" (Hebrews 9:11).

Built with Stirred Hearts and Willing Hands

The willing hands of God's people constructed the Tabernacle. What a tremendous example to us.

"Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the LORD" (Exodus 35:5).

"And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments. And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing-hearted . . . and every man that offered offered an offering . . . unto the LORD" (Exodus 35:21-22).

"The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses" (Exodus 35:29).

Paul wrote, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). God must have been thrilled with the willing and sacrificial giving of His people.

There is much to learn about the Tabernacle. This lesson is not an in-depth study. However, we will look at the six pieces of furniture in the portable church. Each piece had a purpose in God's perfect plan.

Located in the Outer Court

Brazen Altar

This was the first piece of furniture where sacrifices were made for the sins of the people. It was made of shittim wood (a type of humanity) and overlaid with brass (a type of judgment). God started the fire on the altar, and it was never to go out. God gives us salvation, but we must maintain it.

The brazen altar was a symbol of the cross of Christ. At the cross Jesus made the offering for our sins, once and for all. He was the perfect sin offering. At the altar sacrifices were made for the sins of the people. No one could enter the Tabernacle without passing by the altar. No one can approach God without taking Christ as the sacrifice for his sins.

Brazen Laver

The brazen laver was a type of the second portion of the gospel—the burial of Jesus Christ. It was a type of the burial and of cleansing. Here the priest washed his hands and feet. If he had entered without doing this, he would have died.

The way to be baptized is by complete immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is easy to remember that the brass pieces of furniture were the ones outside the tent.

Holy Place

Golden Candlestick

God always includes light in His plans for His people. The golden candlestick helped the priests see. It was placed opposite the table of shewbread and was made of pure gold. The light from the candlestick was to never go out. It was the only light in the Holy Place and was the light of divine revelation. It was a type of Jesus Christ, our Light. Jesus wants us to travel the right path in obedience to His Word.

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Table of Shewbread

This table was located inside the Tabernacle. Each week twelve loaves of shewbread, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, were placed on this table. It showed the fullness of God and that He provides everything. The shewbread was food for the priest. It was sprinkled with frankincense and renewed every week. Frankincense was a gum with a bitter taste. The table of shewbread represented the Word of God. We must read the Word regularly for strength. Like the gum, the Word of God is sometimes bitter. God knows what is best for us. We cannot eat sweet things all the time.

Altar of Incense

The duties performed at the altar were the priest's last before entering the Holy of Holies. The altar stood in front of the veil. The priest burned incense on this altar every morning and evening. The altar of incense was a type of prayer and of our Intercessor, Jesus Christ. The incense was a type of our prayers and praises. It was offered daily, and we must pray without ceasing. On the Day of Atonement the priest placed blood on the four horns of the altar of incense. These horns signified power. Through prevailing prayer we have power with God.

The Veil

The veil represented the humanity of Jesus Christ. Bill Paramore writes in *The Tabernacle - God's Shadow of Salvation* that, “as the veil of the Tabernacle concealed the glory of God, which shone between the cherubim, the flesh of Jesus concealed the glory of God inside the humanity of Jesus. The Tabernacle Veil was a silent prophecy that some day God, who was Spirit alone, would appear wrapped in a veil of flesh. The invisible Jehovah was to come to earth in human form (1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 2:9).

Man could not look upon God and live, yet God wished to reveal Himself to mankind. The only way was for God, who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), to conceal Himself in human flesh. So, God created Himself a body and dwelt among men. This way man could look upon Him, but the only way they could know who He really was, was to know Him personally.”

The veil shut people out of the presence of God. This all changed at Calvary. The veil was torn from top to bottom, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the time of the evening sacrifice. At this time the priest was offering the passover lamb on the brazen altar. At this same instance, Jesus was offered as the final passover lamb on the cross of Calvary.

Holy of Holies

Ark of the Covenant

This was a rectangular box made of shittim wood and covered in gold. The lid of the ark was called the mercy seat. On each side of the mercy seat was a cherub of beaten gold. Here God dwelt. The only light in the Holy of Holies was the shekinah glory. Inside the ark were the Ten Commandments, the golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod (that budded).

The ark was a type of Jesus' resurrection power. Like Christ, the ark led the people as the priests carried it on their shoulders. When the ark stopped, the people rested. Jesus will lead us to our eternal resting place, heaven. The cherubim represented the Word of God. Their faces looked toward each other. The Old Testament looks toward Jesus. The New Testament looks back to the Old Testament.

Study Questions

1. How does the Tabernacle reveal God as a planner?

2. What was the purpose of the Tabernacle?

3. What were the two rooms inside the Tabernacle called?

4. Why was a portable church needed in the wilderness?

5. How many tribes were in Israel?

6. What one word describes the heart and spirit of those who gave to the construction of the Tabernacle?

7. What is the brazen altar a symbol of?

8. How many pieces of furniture were in the Tabernacle?

9. What is the golden candlestick a type/picture of?

10. What is the brazen laver a type of?

11. Where were the brass pieces of furniture located?

12. How many loaves of bread were placed on the table of shewbread?

13. What did the table of shewbread represent?

14. What is the incense a type or picture of?

15. What was the lid of the ark of the covenant called?

16. How is the ark of the covenant a type of Jesus' resurrection power?

17. What did the veil point to?

18. Compare the veil to the flesh of Jesus Christ.

19. How could the invisible Jehovah be seen by man?

20. Give two scriptures that show that Jehovah came to earth in human form.
