

- *Tabernacle lessons*

The meaning of the Tabernacle continued

4. The tabernacle is a symbol of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant

Preachers get all sorts of lessons out of the tabernacle. Some get predictions of the future. Some get principles about church government. Some find it a pattern of human nature, believing that the sections of the tabernacle stand for body, soul and spirit. Some get lessons for the devotional life, and believe that praise is represented in the holy place but worship (which they think is different) is represented by the holy of holies. Each group of Christians tends to read its own special doctrines into the tabernacle. But does the Bible itself tell us what the meaning of the tabernacle is? I think it does.

The tabernacle was (1) the earthly dwelling-place of God, (2) a shadow of the gospel, (3) a model of heaven and earth. But there is more.

4. **The tabernacle is a symbol of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.** Hebrews 9:8–9 suggests that the two compartments of the tabernacle stand for two eras of time. The body of Jesus is the dividing line. When He died, the way into the holiest place was made open and the way into the ‘new epoch’ of the gospel was wide open. The last days began. The veil stands for Jesus’ flesh^[1]. Just as the veil was the dividing line between the two compartments of the tabernacle, so the person of Jesus was the dividing line between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. When the ‘flesh’ of Jesus was torn upon the cross, the veil was torn inside the temple. At that very moment the way into the New Covenant epoch was dramatically opened up. The barrier to New Covenant blessings was torn down, and the new covenant began.

[1] Hebrews 10:20

5. It represents levels of spiritual experience

5. **It represents levels of spiritual experience.** Outside in the courtyard there is, symbolically speaking, no fellowship with God. Yet although there is no fellowship with God the great altar was visible and so was the laver for washing. Before the priest went through the procedures of sacrifice and cleansing there was no access to the tabernacle. Before atonement and regeneration there is no fellowship.

- *Courtyard – no fellowship*

- *First compartment – fellowship with God*

In the first compartment were three items of furniture. They were all symbols of fellowship. The table represented fellowship with God. The lampstand represented the light of God which comes as the result of fellowship with God. The smaller incense altar represented acceptable prayer. The first compartment of the tabernacle therefore all represented different aspects of having fellowship with God.

- *The holy place – a deeper level of fellowship*

Yet there was a deeper experience of God, a deeper level of fellowship, that the letter to the Hebrews calls ‘entering the holy place’^[1]. Jesus opened up a new and living way. On the cross a way was made open to a deeper level of fellowship than had been known before. This is the point of Hebrews 10:19–22. It is a passage of Scripture addressed to those who were already Christians and were already experiencing fellowship with God. But the author of the letter to the Hebrews urges his readers to press on into a deeper level of fellowship, greater than was known under the Old Covenant.

[1] Hebrews 10:19

- *The author of the letters to the Hebrews urges us to press on – deeper*

So the three sections of courtyard and tabernacle stand for three levels of fellowship. The courtyard stood for being without fellowship. The first compartment stood for entering into fellowship. The holy of holies stood for the highest level of fellowship of all. The courtyard is representative of having no experience of God. In the first compartment, one has symbols of having fellowship with God. In the holy of holies there are symbols of the highest level of fellowship that there is, this side of heaven.

- *The two levels of fellowship correspond to the two covenants*

The two levels of fellowship correspond to epochs of time, and therefore they correspond to the two covenants, the covenant of law (via Moses) and the ‘New Covenant’ (as it came to be called) via Jesus. Of course this is a Christian way of putting it, with the hindsight of what happened after the giving of the tabernacle. And yet the principles were all there. The tabernacle did proclaim that there was no enjoyment of the glory of God at all for those outside the tabernacle. What was inside, as everyone knew, were symbols of communion

and table-fellowship. Further inside was the very presence of God. Everyone knew that. It prepared the way for what the Christian can see more clearly. The compartments stand for the invitation that He gives, that we should enter into ever-increasing fellowship with God. There are many small sections in the next four chapters, describing different aspects of tabernacle worship. It will be helpful if we have them before us:

Aspects of tabernacle worship

The materials	25:1–9 (see also 35:4–9)
The ark	25:10–22 (see also 37:1–9)
The table	25:23–30 (see also 37:10–16)
The lamp stand	25:31–40 (see also 37:17–24)
The coverings	26: 1–14 (see also 36:8–19)
The wooden frame	26:15–30 (see also 36:20–35)
The veil and the screen	26:31–37 (see also 36:35–38)
The altar	27:1–8 (see also 38:1–7)
The courtyard	27:9–19 (see also 38:9–20)
The oil	27:20, 21 (see also Lev. 24:1–3)
The garments of the high-priest	28:1–5
The ephod	28:6–14 (see also 39:2–7)
The breastplate	28:15–30 (see also 39:8–21)
The robe	28:31–35 (see also 39:22–26)
The plate, turban, coat and sash	28:36–39 (see also 39:27–31)
Garments for the priests	28:40–43
The priests' ordination	29:1–46 (see also Lev. 8:1–33)
The altar of incense	30:1–10 (see also 37:25–28)
The atonement money	30:11–16
The laver	30:17–21 (see also 38:8)
Oil and incense	30:22–38
The workers	31:1–11 (see also 35:10–19; 35:30–36:1)

Materials – a special offering

First, we have the special offering of the materials that will be used in the tabernacle^{☞1}. God instructs Moses to take an offering for God's work^{☞2}. We notice that the offering is specially and exclusively for God's tabernacle. God refers to Himself twice ('me ... for me'). Sometimes corrupt preachers organise for offerings to be taken for themselves. It is amazing how religion tends to deteriorate into a means of self-enrichment. The 'house of prayer' becomes a 'den of thieves'. This offering was definitely and exclusively for God.

• Entirely voluntary

The offering is to be entirely voluntary. There is no pressure whatsoever. Like Paul, Moses could have said 'I am not commanding you'^{☞1}. 'Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver'^{☞2}.

The offerings consists of valuable metals^{☞3} and colourful materials^{☞4}, wood^{☞5}, oil, spices^{☞6}, and valuable stones^{☞7}.

• The purpose – a dwelling place for God

God tells Moses exactly what the tabernacle is for. It will be a dwelling-place for God^{☞1}. If they will dedicate their valuables, God will dwell within the structure that will be built through their gifts. God will reside in the tabernacle; it will be His home when He is among the Israelites. 'I will dwell among them', says God.

☞1 25:1-9
☞2 25:1-2

☞1 2 Cor 8:
☞2 2 Cor 9:7
☞3 25:3
☞4 25:4-5
☞5 25:5
☞6 25:6
☞7 25:7

☞1 25:8



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