
Christ in the Tabernacle

Exodus 24:1-18

“The Tabernacle – Part 1”

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The scene is the wilderness of Sinai. In front of you is a linen fence and as you go through the gate you see before you a large tent. In front of the tent is an altar on which an animal is being killed. All around you is the sound of large numbers of people come to offer sacrifice for sin, the sound of animals, punctuated by a cry as another is slaughtered. Over the altar flows blood jarring your senses with its warm scent mingled with the smell of burning flesh. In the midst of the heat of the altar and the day mingled with the overwhelming sounds and pungent odors you participate in the sacrificial system that Yahweh has established. Sometimes you wonder what this is all about anyway. Why would God demand this kind of Worship?

A. B. Simpson introduces his work on Christ in the Tabernacle this way:

“ The Tabernacle is the grandest of all the Old Testament types of Christ. It was all one great object lesson of spiritual truth. In its wonderful furniture, priesthood, and worship, we see, with a vividness that we find nowhere else, the glory and grace of Jesus, and the privileges of His redeemed people. And as in the architect’s plan we can understand the future building better, even, than by looking at the building without the plan; so, in this pattern from the mount, we can understand as nowhere else, that glorious temple of which Christ is the corner-stone and we also, as living stones, are built up in Him a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to “offer sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” ”¹

This is the question we need to answer, “Why would God demand this kind of Worship?”, before we look the symbolism of the Tabernacle, an Old Testament picture of the work of Christ. Additionally, we must also take a little bit of time to touch on the issue of Typology and Biblical interpretation.

I Why a Sacrifice?: Before we start, we must answer the question of our Hebrew friend, “Why the sacrificial system?” and consider how it relates to the aspects of Tabernacle in the wilderness and later Solomon’s Temple.

We have talked about the Law in a number of previous studies. Now it is time to look back at the implications of that law. The law covered all aspects of life; religious, moral, social and civil; and there was no way to avoid breaking it in some aspect or another. In fact Paul makes it clear God had a specific intent for the law:

¹ Simpson, A. B., *Christ in the Tabernacle*, Christian Publications, Harrisburg, PA, p. 5-6.

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20).

The purpose of the Law was to show man just how short he falls from God’s standards. And therefore there was the need to find an answer to man’s failure.

Sacrifice had been offered up before the establishment of the Tabernacle, but with that structure the system had all its rules defined in conjunction with the setting up of a physical representation of the death of Christ as the sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

Across the altar, across the sacrificial system, across the Law, across the Old Testament, across the entire Scripture are written the words of Hebrews 9:22:

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

So for hundreds of years blood is poured out on the altar, but now this is no longer necessary;

“But now he (Christ) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” ... “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:26, 14).

A. Preparation for obedience: And so God calls Moses, the leaders, and the elders of the body to come up to worship Him from afar, from a distance. They are worshiping Him in conjunction with the receiving of His ordinances. And here we see the difficulty of Judaism from its history. The people could only worship God from afar. They were never able to have direct access to Him. This is what we have been blessed with, Christ having become our high priest, direct and always available access to the Father. This is what was pictured with the rent of the veil of the Holy of Holies in the Temple at His death.

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51).

Only Moses could come directly before the Lord and in this way he is a type of Christ, serving as mediator between God and the people of Israel. It was in this function he told the people all God required of them. *Can you imagine how you would feel hearing all God expected? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by what you see as God’s requirements for you? How do you deal with this concern when it arises? How appropriate is this fear? Keep in mind, the response of the Children of Israel both times Moses gives the ordinances is: “We will obey.” They were confident they would be able to obey God’s commands. Do you think you would really perceive things any differently?*

Having given God’s words, and recorded them, what was Moses’ response to the ordinances? *Why do you think he would immediately require sacrifice?* These offerings were burnt offerings and peace offerings. But, with them comes the sprinkling of the blood. The blood is spilled on the altar, it is sprinkled on the people. The blood sealed the covenant between the Lord and the people, that is their promise to obey God’s ordinances.

“This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep’” (Hebrews 9:18-20).

It was to be the blood that would be spilled to show the forgiveness of God for sin, looking towards the day when the only efficacious sacrifice was to be made, the shed blood of Christ. So, the blood which flowed over the altar, the book and the people would soon be flowing over the altar of the Tabernacle, later the Temple and finally the cross of Christ. The cleansing hinted at here would become a reality through the death of the Lord.

B. Preparation for construction: Now the time has come for Moses to return up the mountain to receive first to receive the Tablets of the Law, the commandments from God’s “own hands” and secondly God’s plans for the Tabernacle. These plans were to include not only blue prints for the structure, but instructions for the garments of the priests and the rules for the performance of sacrifice. We will look at the first in detail, the second we’ll touch on and the last won’t be covered in this study.

Notice, by the way, who goes with Moses as he again approaches the mountain. Included are Aaron, who will one day be high priest, and the seventy old men, the elders of the nation. Also included are the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. These men, who are in the company of those chosen to see a manifestation of the Lord, will one day become priests themselves, and then be struck dead by God for violating His ordinances of worship.

So God made manifest His presence to this group and I would think since this is an anthropomorphic manifestation of God, we are dealing with the preincarnate Christ. This is probably done to reinforce the relationship of God to the nation, and also to reinforce Moses’ position as mediator for the Hebrews. This is one of those passages that is so difficult the best thing to do is simply to let it lay.

One would also have hoped these men would have been properly impressed with the importance of obedience to the Lord and would have kept things in good order while Moses was up the mountain. They had the Law and had said they would obey. But as I’m sure you’re aware it was during this time the sin of idolatry broke out in the camp.

Joshua is seen here as a servant of Moses assisting him as he prepares to go before God. He will become more visible as time proceeds until he replaces Moses as the leader of the nation.

So Moses went up the mountain and waited on the Lord for six days. On the seventh God called out to Moses and as the people watched the clouds closed around Moses. He was not heard from for forty days. *You can understand why the people got restless.* But they had seen the workings of God to such an extent that they should have been able to wait on Him without getting into any trouble. Fat chance!

Now it is worth summarizing here what we have seen. First, God has provided the people with His laws. These are His standards and He expects them to obey them. The people with

an ego similar to Peter's say, "of course we will be obedient." If you read ahead you will find that in no way were these people to be found obedient.

Second, God, intending the law to be a mirror showing men their inability to keep His commandments provides a sacrificial system to ritually cleanse them from their sin. The Tabernacle was to be provided as the site of the sacrificial system. The intent of the sacrifice though, wasn't to provide forgiveness, or salvation, instead, as we will soon see, it was to be a picture provided to the people of what God's plan for their salvation really was.

God spelled out quite clearly sin engendered a penalty and that without blood there was no way that the sin could be paid for. God was preparing the groundwork for the sacrifice of Christ by instructing the people in the importance of the shed blood.

As we'll see in this study God gave to Israel, and us, a clear picture of how He had planned for the salvation of the nation. Christ in His own teachings clearly identifies Himself with the Temple, but the nation was unwilling to see what God had placed before them.

You may want read, or at least skim, Chapters 25-27 to give yourself the background of the study for next week. I would also recommend that you read Hebrews 9 as it is the New Testament foundation for much of what will be said in this series.

II Biblical Typology: There are a number of kinds of types within scripture, and we will see that the Tabernacle itself is a type. This is why we need to understand how Scripture uses types. Let's define what we mean here by the use of the word Type = *A person, place, event, or thing that pictures doctrines of Scripture.* The following are examples of what we identify as types in the Bible:

- Person - Melchizedek - as identified in Hebrews 7:9-17 is a picture of the Messiah.
- Place - Babylon - in Scripture is seen as a picture of false religion, Revelation 17: 5.
- Thing - The Serpent lifted up in the Wilderness - identified as a picture of Christ on the cross, John 3:14.
- Event - Jonah in the great fish is seen as a picture of Christ's death burial, and resurrection, Matthew 12:39.
- Religious Institution - The Passover in all its aspects is a picture of Christ sacrificial death on the cross, Exodus 12, John 1:29.

Now, we have seen many of these examples over the years and studied them in some depth. As we've noted there are times we can be dogmatic as to the interpretation of a type. There are other times that we cannot be dogmatic, but simply have to say such and such appears to be a type, meaning what ever.

The basis for dogmatism is interpretation grounded in Scripture. If we can find a type in one place in Scripture explained in an other, then we can be dogmatic, i.e. the serpent in the wilderness, as we've already noted. The type is found in Numbers 21:8 and the explanation of the type, a picture of Christ, as we have already seen is in John 3:14.

Where we cannot be dogmatic, is though the interpretation of the type is reasonable, it is not verified elsewhere in Scripture. One of the best examples of this is Joseph as a type of Christ. The parallels are obvious, rejected by his brothers, married to a gentile (the church), savior of his own people, and of the world in general. Now it is safe to use Joseph as a type of Christ, but we cannot be dogmatic about this view because there is no statement in Scripture stating that Joseph is a type of Christ. I hope this makes clear what we mean by types.

Based on this background you can see how we come to the position that the Tabernacle is a picture or a type of the work of Christ for our salvation. There are a number of verses that tie Christ into the Tabernacle.

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God”” (Revelation 21:3);

and again in John 1:14:

“The Word became flesh and was tabernacled among us”

Finally, lets take a look at the passage that ties Christ's current work directly to the pattern of the Tabernacle. Hebrews 9:1-10 and 23-25. We will refer back to this passage as we go through the study.

“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order.”

“It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.”

III The Tabernacle: As we look at the structure of the Tabernacle and its furnishings, I think you'll see how these are pictures of Christ, but understand that a few of the explanations may seem as if we're reaching, and possibly we are. Remember, the types may not carry down to the last "nut and bolt."

Most importantly, we find the great Christian doctrines. What we are seeing is "Theology Prewritten." All that we need to know for Salvation, God has pictured within the structure of the Tabernacle. It was by faith in the redemptive work of God that the Old Testament saints were saved, not law. They were saved on the same basis we were, but they looked forward to the work of Christ, and I cannot help but think that not just the writings, or the prophets, or the poets were the basis of that knowledge, but the Tabernacle itself as well.

I do see a possible danger here with the interpretative approach and that is trying to read something into every last thread. Dr. McGee in his study takes the opposite position,

*"The treatment of this thesis is from the standpoint of the furniture. No time has been spent in hair-splitting interpretations of the meaning of the tent pins, bars, and bolts. However, we firmly believe that there is meaning in the minutest thread..."*²

Now while I may agree God may have put meaning into every aspect, I question whether we are able to do the whole justice, without straining the patience of the listener. We will spend most of our time looking at the furniture, but we may go into more detail than Dr. McGee.

It's interesting to note that only one chapter of Scripture deals with the creation of the World while fifteen chapters in Exodus (25-40) deals with the Tabernacle. By the way the entire book of Leviticus deals with service at the Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle is a figure or a shadow of better things,

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship" (Hebrews 10:1).

It and the law are to serve as examples and patterns for us.

"They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."" (Hebrews 8:5)

"The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. ... For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence" (Hebrews 9:8-9, 24).

² McGee, J. Vernon, The Tabernacle—God's Portrait of Christ, Reprinted by the Church of the Open Door from Bibliotheca Sacra, Los Angeles, CA, 1967, p. 3.

And finally,

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11),

which speaks of the fact that the wilderness experiences of the Hebrews are to serve as examples for us today.

As we've said, the law was simply given so all could see man's imperfections, his shortcomings against God's standards. The Tabernacle then is a picture of how God would solve this problem. The Tabernacle **was not** the solution.

The main theme here is man's moral guilt before God and the need of a blood sacrifice, which as we've seen is the same blood that flows throughout the Scripture.

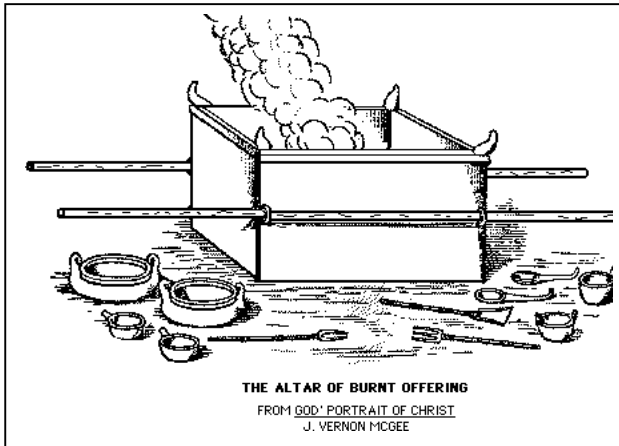
Some commentators relate the Tabernacle to the church and Christian life. While this is an invalid interpretation, it is a valid application and we will try to apply it to ourselves.

The main function of the structure was to give the Hebrew the concept of God's presence dwelling amongst them. Obviously they didn't believe God lived there, but that He made His presence known there.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

One last point, in the Exodus account the order of listing of the items of the Tabernacle is in the reverse of the way we're going to look at the structure. We're taking a guided tour just as a Hebrew would have if he could have visited the Tabernacle some Saturday Morning.

“For the wages of sin is death, ...” “and according to the Law, ... all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” ... “but now once at the consummation He (Christ) has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” ... “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” and so we know that “... the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” so let us remember that for which we wait. “So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation.” and as Christ says, ““Yes, I am coming quickly.’ amen, Come, Lord Jesus.” (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:22; 9: 26,14; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 22:20).



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