

The Tabernacle in the Wilderness

This study on the Tabernacle in the Wilderness is very important because it reveals to us the master plan that God had for His people way back in the Old Testament. From the instructions given to Moses regarding the materials used to construct each piece of furniture to the detailed directions for the use of each reveals the plan of redemption that God had for His people. The symbolic representation of each piece of furniture speaks volumes of the unity found throughout the Word of God.

The Hebrew word for “tabernacle” is “mishkan” which means “dwelling place”. The Tabernacle symbolized God’s presence with His people and an establishment of a place of worship. It was God’s designated “home” among the Israelites in the wilderness. This fostered a restored relationship between God and His people. Its specific design was given to Moses by God. Everything about the tabernacle and its furniture represented something far greater than just that physical space filled with those physical items. Let’s take a closer look.

The Tabernacle was like a mobile temple which could be disassembled and assembled in a short amount of time. This allowed the tabernacle to accompany the Israelites throughout their 40-year wilderness journey. After they entered into the Promised Land, Israel would eventually build a permanent temple under the reign of Solomon. Each piece of furniture represents the plan of salvation, which is humanity’s path to God. Each piece of furniture also represents each step Jesus fulfilled in His Plan of Redemption for the lost.

The outer court of the tabernacle represented humanity’s accessible approach to a Holy God symbolizing the initial stage of spiritual journey. It was a place of worship, confession, sacrifice and atonement. The first article of furniture in the outer court was the Brazen Altar. The Brazen Altar was made of wood overlaid with brass. The type of wood used was a durable decay-resistant wood. This represented the enduring nature of God towards His people. The brass represented the judgment of God.

Upon this Brazen Altar, the priests would offer daily sacrifices of lambs and bullocks. The altar was a place of death and the shedding of blood. The priest had to stop here first before proceeding any further to perform any other priestly services.

The Brazen Altar represents the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made at Calvary. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was our perfect sacrifice who paid the price for the sins of the world on the cross. (Jn. 1:29, Heb. 9:28, I Pet. 2:24) It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. (Lev. 17:11)

This Brazen Altar also represents the first step a believer must take as he seeks to become a child of God which is repentance. Repentance making a decision to “die-out” to sin and to this carnal nature. Repentance involves a 180 degree turn from sin and walking away from God to facing and walking towards God in our everyday life. (Acts 3:19, I Jn. 1:9) Just as the priest offered sacrifices upon the brazen altar every day, so we, as born-again believers, must continue to offer our bodies a living sacrifice to the Lord every day. (Rom. 12:1-2, I Cor. 15:31)

The second piece of furniture in the outer court of the tabernacle was the Brazen Laver. This is where the priest must stop to wash before ministering in the tabernacle. The Brazen Laver was made of brass covered with looking glasses which reflected the image of the approaching priest. (Ex. 30:20-21) Jesus, who is our faithful High Priest, was baptized by John before beginning His physical earthly ministry. Jesus Himself fulfilled this segment of the Law to wash first before ministering. (Matt. 3:16)

The Brazen Laver represents the waters of baptism which is the second step of a repentant sinner’s rebirth experience. The repentant sinner can see himself as he is as he approaches the waters of baptism. He sees himself in need to have all of his sins washed away in the Name of Jesus Christ through the waters of baptism. (Acts 22:16, Acts 2:38, I Peter 3:20-21) Just as the words of Moses commanded the priest to wash that they die not, the last words of Jesus were this also in Mark 16:16. (I Cor. 6:11)

In the inner court, three pieces of furniture were located. One of these was the Table of Shewbread. There were twelve loaves of shewbread placed on the table. Every Sabbath, the fresh loaves replaced the previous loaves. These previous loaves were then eaten by the priests. This act symbolized the twelve tribes feasting with God. The priest would receive strength and vigor from the shewbread. This shewbread was made without leaven. Leaven always symbolized sin in the Bible.

The shewbread also represents the sinless bread which came down to us from heaven, that is Jesus Christ. (John 6:33) Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35) We must continue to receive strength to grow in Christ by eating the bread of life. Jesus is the source of our spiritual life and satisfaction. Just as the shewbread had to be renewed continually, so we must continue to let the Word of God renew our spiritual life continually. (I Peter 2:2, John 6:58)

The next piece of furniture in the inner court of the tabernacle was the Golden Candlestick. This Golden Candlestick consisted of seven lights. In the Scriptures, the

number seven always represents perfection or completeness. These seven lights had to be kept lit continually. They were never to go out. This light also enabled the priest to see as he ministered inside the inner court. Without the light from the Golden Candlestick, the tabernacle would be in total darkness.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world". (John 8:12) Without Him in our shining in our lives, we would be in complete darkness. It is through Jesus that we receive the light of understanding about the treasure we possess in these earthen vessels. (II Cor. 4:6-7) It is through Jesus Christ that we become the light to the world. (Matt. 5:14,16) We must also keep our light burning continually. (I Peter 3:15)

The last piece of furniture in the inner court was the Altar of Incense. Every day the priest would bring fire from the Brazen Altar and offer incense to the Lord on the Altar of Incense. Notice the fire for the incense was brought from the altar of sacrifice. The priest was alone, shut in with God, when he offered this daily sacrifice of incense.

The Altar of Incense was made of wood overlaid with pure gold. The wood represented humanity and the gold represents Divinity. This is a perfect way to depict the way God was manifest in flesh to take away the sins of the world. The Bible describes our prayers as incense coming up before God. (Ps. 141:2, Rev. 5:8, 8:3-4) Just as the priest was shut in alone with God, we are admonished to do the same in prayer. (Matt. 6:6, Rom. 8:26-27) Our prayers must be backed up by our sacrifices. (Jn. 15:7, I Jn. 3:22) We are also admonished to pray without ceasing, that is to always walk in an attitude of prayer. (Luke 18:1, I Thess. 5:17, I Chron. 16:11) Jesus also prayed for us in the garden. (Jn. 17:20)

Beyond the inner court was the Holy of Holies which was the most sacred inner sanctum which housed the Ark of the Covenant. The Holy of Holies was separated from the inner court by a very heavy thick veil which represented a significant barrier between the presence of God and humanity. The Holy of Holies was considered the dwelling place of the divine presence or the Shekhinah glory of God where God met with His people. This is where the High Priest would go in only once a year with the blood of a bull and goat, which he would sprinkle on the Mercy Seat, to make atonement for the sins of the people.

This ceremony served as a powerful symbol and a foreshadowing of the final perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross which provides eternal redemption and cleansing from sin. When Jesus breathed His last breath on the cross, this thick strong elaborate veil was torn from top to bottom. (Matt 27:51) This literally took an act of God, a true divine intervention which signified that God had removed the barrier between God and sinful humanity by the sacrifice of Jesus. Now there was direct access to God for everyone who desires to live in His presence. (Acts 20:28)

In Conclusion

We can clearly see the plan of redemption that God put into motion way back at Mt Sinai with the giving of the Law.

The pattern of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness is a type of the new birth in the New Testament. Jesus, our faithful High Priest, fulfilled the whole role of the Old Testament priesthood thus becoming the mediator of the New Testament. (Heb. 9:11-12, 15)

Because the way has been made available, we too can repent of our sins. There is no other way to enter into the presence of God except by way of repentance which identifies with the death that Jesus died on the cross. (the Brazen Altar). After repentance, we too can choose to receive remission of our sins through baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ. (washing at the Brazen Laver) As we begin to feed on the Bread of Life (Shewbread) and continue to let the Light of Jesus guide our lives, (Golden Candlestick) we begin to offer up prayer and worship to the Lord. (Altar of Incense) All these things bring us directly into the presence of the Lord and we will receive the promise of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. (The Holiest of Holy)

We can come to the conclusion that the Tabernacle's symbolism shows us that God has always desired to have a relationship with His people. The entire system of the Tabernacle foreshadowed the salvation provided through Jesus Christ. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross rendered the requirements of the Old Testament Tabernacle obsolete. The Bible tells us that the Law was a shadow of good things to come. (Heb. 10:1) The New Everlasting Kingdom of God is this new good thing that has come. Our High Priest has returned without sin and has brought salvation to us. (Heb. 9:28)

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