

Yahweh's Dwelling Place

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you." Ex. 25:8

As the Israelites have just promised to uphold the Covenant with Yahweh, He commences to have a tabernacle constructed as His dwelling place among them. His presence within the Israelite camp will fulfill three goals:

Goal 1: Yahweh will be continuously present in the midst of their camp

Goal 2: Israel will come to Him to present sacrifices and to worship, in service to Yahweh

Goal 3: The Tabernacle is a place to enjoy fellowship with Yahweh

Yahweh reveals something of Himself and Heaven in terms understandable by Israelites.

You are probably wondering why we need such a detailed account of the instructions on how God wanted the tabernacle constructed. These details reveal important concepts about God's desire regarding his dwelling among his people. The high quality of the materials points to Yahweh's greatness and transcendence. The tabernacle would be the visible center of worship in the newly formed theocracy. Not only was it the center of worship, it was the center of government as Yahweh is God and King. The curtain separating the Holy Place from the courtyard reveals Yahweh's perfection and holiness. There is a distinct separation between the profane (common) and the sacred. The tabernacle is designed to be portable. It can move with the Israelites as they travel through the desert to the Promise Land. Yahweh is present with them wherever they go. He is not bound to a geographic location or mountain top, as are the pagan deities. Yahweh is everywhere, and present with his people. The tabernacle, its furnishings and its sacrifices

are a foreshadowing of the ultimate work of Jesus Christ in our atonement and as our High Priest.

This sanctuary is to be Yahweh's home among the people of Israel. As a home it has many similarities of the tent-homes of the Israelites. A large courtyard surrounds the Holy Place and is where the Israelites can gather for worship, fellowship meals and festivals. Within that courtyard are specific features of worship and sacrifice. The foremost feature within the tabernacle courtyard is the altar for burnt offerings. The description of the altar points to a rather large outdoor grill like surface where animals are presented as burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. In Israelite camps the cooking and eating are done outside of the tents. When the Israelites come to make their burnt offerings, part of that offering is given to the Lord, and another part is for the family offering the sacrifice to consume as a fellowship meal. The first thing the Israelites see upon entering the courtyard would be the altar for burnt sacrifice. It is a visible reminder that they can only approach God by means of sacrifice.

The lampstand in the "Tent of Meeting," or Holy Place, provides light for the Lord's servants, the priests. Yahweh is not in need of light, the priests serving him require light to tend their duties in the Holy Place. The lit lamps (which they are instructed to keep burning throughout the night) symbolize that his presence dwells among them. Yahweh is home and he is not asleep – always present.

The opulence of the tabernacle points to that fact the Yahweh is great and transcendent. He is more than a leader and commander in place of a Monarch or Military General. The furnishings are progressively more opulent the further into the Tent of Meeting. Items in the courtyard are primarily bronze. They are durable, serviceable items. They are not as expensive as what is found in the Holy Place or the Most Holy Place, but they are suitable and sanctified for their sacred function. Silver and gold furnishings and opulent fabrics woven with expensive dyes and materials are found in the Holy Place and Most Holy Place.

All the tribes of Israel are arrayed around the tabernacle in their divisions. Every tribe is in an equal position in relation to the tabernacle. No tribe is favored above another. There is no favoritism or discrimination. All peoples are equal in the eyes of God.

"Make the tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."

The descriptions recorded are summaries of instructions. Yahweh repeatedly tells Moses to follow a pattern he is to be shown by Yahweh. As a pattern, it is based on an original design. The tabernacle to be constructed is to be a copy of an original tabernacle known to God and revealed to Moses in the process of providing the instructions to build the

tabernacle. Moses is given a clear visual picture of what the tabernacle is to look like. Yahweh instructs Moses to build this tabernacle using materials readily available to the Israelites. Acacia trees were prevalent throughout the Sinai and what would become the Promise Land. Various materials from the Egyptian spoils are brought with them out of Egypt to be used in the construction of the tabernacle.

The tabernacle is an earthly reflection of Yahweh's Heavenly dwelling. The pattern he is shown is based on a heavenly tabernacle: *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)

Revelation 1:12-16; 4:1-6; and 5:8, 13-14 gives us a glimpse into the original tabernacle of the Heavenly realm, the original pattern from which Moses is directed to have constructed the earthly tabernacle. In John's Revelation we see the Heavenly Throne Room shining in the vibrancy of God's glory, glistening like jewels. In the center of the Throne Room we see the presence of God Almighty seated on his throne, surrounded by angelic heavenly beings. The glorified Son of Man is moving amongst the seven lampstands. The lampstands represent the Holy Spirit (or Seven-fold Spirit of God¹) in the earthly realm. Where there was one lampstand in the earthly tabernacle representing God's presence with one nation, in the heavenlies there are seven² lampstands representing God's eventual presence throughout the earth. In our glimpse into the Heavenly Throne Room we see the Lord Almighty and his Son in all their glory, one seated on the Heavenly Throne, the other as the eternal High Priest tending the Lampstands of the body of Christ unified with Holy Spirit. The Golden Censer (appearing in Revelation 5: 8 and 8:3-4) bears the representation of the people's prayers rising up before the Lord in the form of fragrant incense. Lastly we see the thousands upon thousands praising and worshiping in the eternal tabernacle or dwelling place of God. The heavenly choirs worship and sing praise to the Father and the Lamb:

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:
 "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
 be praise and honor and glory and power,
 for ever and ever!"

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped. (Rev. 5:13-14)

¹ Isaiah 11:2-3 detail the seven characteristics of the Spirit of God, or Holy Spirit,

² Seven being a symbolic number of completeness, fullness and perfection

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:1-10 begins with a detailed list and description of the tabernacle. The point of this passage in Hebrews is to contrast the earthly tabernacle of the Old Covenant with the completed and fulfilled New Covenant – completed and fulfilled by the High Priest and sacrificial Lamb of God, Christ Jesus. This comparison serves to point out that the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant was incomplete and pointed forward to the day when the Messiah would fulfill it wholly. The writer of Hebrews points out that the sacrificial system only dealt with the externals of sin, not the internal cleansing provided by Christ. Those who participated in the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant were justified of their sin through their faith that this system established by God, but carried out by man, was sufficient for the time. Because no internal change was effected, the sacrifice would have to be offered repeatedly. With the coming of Christ, the justification of those faithful to the Old Covenant was completed through their faith.

Verses 11-15 continue this comparison telling us that Christ, High Priest of the “*greater and more perfect tabernacle*” of the heavenly realm, completed the ultimate sacrifice as a mediator between all of mankind and God. His perfect sacrifice supplants the sacrificial blood of goats and calves and cleanses sin completely from the faithful, internally as well as externally. The involvement of the Trinity in the eternal sacrifice of Christ further emphasizes the magnitude of this redemptive offering. The “perfect” ransom had been paid for human redemption, never to be need repeating again. Christ’s sacrificial act was required *once* for *all* mankind. What cannot be completed sufficiently through the earthly tabernacle is completed wholly in the *original* and heavenly tabernacle.

As the eternal High Priest and the perfect sacrifice Christ is only the means by which we can truly approach God. The word tabernacle here in the Old Testament has a very unique relationship in the New Testament. In the New Testament Greek, “tabernacle” is *skēnē*³, meaning a *tent* or cloth hut (literal or figurative) : habitation, tabernacle. It also means *dwelling*, and is related to the verb *to dwell*. The same word, *skēnē*, is used throughout the gospels in reference to the Feast of Tabernacles, the little booths or huts the Jews would construct outside of Jerusalem for the yearly Feast of Tabernacles, a remembrance of the journey to the Promise Land. *Skēnē* is used throughout the books of Hebrews and Revelation to refer to the Tabernacle of the Old Testament.

³ Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Skēnē is used in one other very unique and special place. John 1:14 says, “*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.*” This same word, *skēnē*, or tabernacle is used to describe the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God made flesh, who came to dwell among us. In other words, Jesus the son of God pitched his human tent among us and his heavenly glory dwelled within. We have seen the glory, the same shekinah glory that rested on the atonement seat in the tabernacle of the Old Testament⁴, that same glory is “*the glory of the One and Only.*” This shekinah glory is contained within the fully human Son of Man

“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.”

Returning again to the book of Hebrews, chapter 10:1-18, we learn that the sacrificial system was temporary and pointed to what Messiah would do on the cross. The believer’s faith in the annual animal sacrifice is what justified him until Christ would come to be the final sacrifice, allowing free access to God. In that ancient and earthly tabernacle we are reminded that the sinner could only come as close to God as the altar of sacrifice. The High Priest once a year could approach the Mercy Seat, but only to present the offering of blood on behalf of himself and the nation of Israel, and had to do so repeatedly year after year. No one truly had access to God dwelling in the Most Holy Place. That access wouldn’t come until Christ entered the Most Holy Place on our part, making that perfect sacrifice, once for all, that permits all believers in Christ Jesus to have fellowship with the Father. Christ did God’s will as he obediently opened the way for fellowship between man and God, setting aside the insufficient sacrificial system of the Old Covenant in preparation for the New Covenant. Our sanctification is accomplished in Christ’s act of obedience without need of yearly repetition. It is done once for all, and we are made holy to serve God, made “perfect” through that atonement sacrifice which permits direct access to God.

As Christ is the only perfect and sufficient sacrifice, no other sacrifice is acceptable to God. There is no other avenue to a relationship with God other than through Christ’s death on the cross for our sins. No other sacrifice or system can bring a person into relationship with God. No other religion, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, no spiritual amalgam of “all gods are one” will lead a person into fellowship with God. Nothing but Christ on the cross can atone for our sins. Our confidence must be in his work as the ultimate sacrifice and the ultimate High Priest. Knowing the truth of Christ’s sacrifice, permits no other alternative: “*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the*

⁴ The same glory of the glorified Christ at the Transfiguration as well as in the Revelation 1:13-16

truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." (Heb 10:26-27) Rejecting Christ's sacrifice in knowledge of this truth will put us among the ranks of the "*enemies of God*". Rejecting Christ's sacrifice is scorning the gift of grace and fellowship offered by God. No alternative is left.