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MINISTRIES

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The Tabernacle: An Introduction

Have you ever read through the latter half of Exodus, the part of the Bible that describes building the Tabernacle, and thought, “Why am I reading this? Why do I need to know how long these curtains were, or what they were made of? Why do I need to know exactly what the priests did? What does any of this have to do with my relationship with God?” If so, you’re not alone. These passages are long, detailed, and sometimes repetitive. Many people consider the passages that describe the Tabernacle to be the most boring and difficult parts of Scripture to read. But, as we will see, the Tabernacle is anything but boring. There is a reason that God spends so much time telling us about the Tabernacle. We’re going to get into those reasons in this teaching, and throughout our Tabernacle series.

In this teaching, we’re going to address some of the major spiritual themes that we find in the Tabernacle. Each other teaching in this series will closely examine one major component of the Tabernacle. There will be a short teaching on the Altar, the Laver, the Menorah, the Ark of the Covenant, and much more. We will also have a Concluding teaching which ties together the concepts from all of the other teachings. You can watch these teachings in any order, but as you might expect, we recommend watching the conclusion last. We hope these teachings will help dispel the notion that the Tabernacle is boring or irrelevant. As we will see, there is great spiritual depth to the symbolism of the Tabernacle, and many important lessons that it has to teach us.

So, let’s start with some basics: what exactly was the Tabernacle? The Tabernacle was a rectangular structure made of wood, metals, and cloth. Stretched over the top of the Tabernacle was a roof, a “tent” made of various animal skins and wools. The Tabernacle was surrounded by a large rectangular courtyard, which was enclosed by walls made of white linen cloth. Within the courtyard was a large altar for burning animal sacrifices, and a large round basin full of water. Inside the Tabernacle there was a lampstand, a table with stacks of bread, and a small altar for burning incense. The most important item was behind a veil, in a chamber called the “Holy of Holies;” that item was the Ark of the Covenant. On top of the Ark, there was a golden cover with figures of cherubim, and God’s glory was found between those cherubim.

Every part of the Tabernacle was designed so that it could be disassembled and moved—from the walls,

to the roof, to the altar and other vessels. The Israelites took the Tabernacle with them as they traveled through the wilderness. Later on, when they were in the promised land, the Tabernacle was replaced by a permanent structure, a temple, which was built by King Solomon.

So, that's what the Tabernacle was, but why exactly was it built? The reason Moses built the Tabernacle was so YHWH could have a place to dwell among the Israelites:

Exodus 25:8

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

How did YHWH “dwell” in this Tabernacle? Well, YHWH’s presence and glory manifested as a cloud which covered the Tabernacle, and as a bright light within the Tabernacle:

Exodus 40:34

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD [YHWH] filled the Tabernacle.

In Hebrew, the Tabernacle is called the *mishkan*, which literally means, “dwelling place” (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, entry H4908). This *mishkan* traveled along with the Israelites so that God would dwell with them wherever they went. Since the *mishkan* was the place where God’s presence dwelled, it was also the place that the people went to meet with God. This explains another one of the Tabernacle’s names, the “Tent of Meeting”:

Exodus 29:42-43

[T]he tent of meeting before the LORD [YHWH], where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.

We know from the Scriptures that God’s presence is a very special thing, and that any place where God dwells is a very special place, a holy place. There are standards that apply in God’s holy presence that do not apply in other places. For example, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he said:

Exodus 3:5

...“Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

Of course, wearing sandals was perfectly fine when Moses was anywhere else, but when he was before the burning bush, he was in God’s presence, a holy place. The standards there were different. Likewise, there were special standards that applied to the Tabernacle because God’s presence was there, and it was a holy place. This is why the Tabernacle was also called the *miqdash*, which means sanctuary or holy place (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, entry H4720).

So, what were the special regulations that applied to the Tabernacle? Well, for one, nothing unclean or impure was allowed to be there. The Torah, also known as God’s law or the law of Moses, contains many regulations about uncleanness. It describes all of the things that can make a person unclean, including bleeding, diseases, and being near someone who died. Whenever someone became unclean, they had to wash with water and become clean again before they were allowed to go to the Tabernacle. This was done to make sure that nothing unclean would ever enter the Tabernacle:

Leviticus 15:31

Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my Tabernacle that is in their midst.

Another special thing about the Tabernacle is that it was the place where the people brought offerings to God. These offerings were called *korban*, which is a Hebrew word that means to “draw near.” The offerings were given when the people approached the Tabernacle and “drew near” to the presence of God. These *korban* offerings always had to be “without blemish”:

Leviticus 1:3

If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD [YHWH].

Leviticus 3:1

If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD [YHWH].

Leviticus 4:32

If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish.

(see also Leviticus 5:18)

Let’s pause for a moment and reflect on what this all means. The Tabernacle was a dwelling place for God, where people would meet with him. This place was pure and holy, and people brought unblemished offerings there when they drew near. Already, we can see many spiritual things symbolized in this structure, and there are many terms used here that we find elsewhere in the Scriptures. For example, notice all of the “Tabernacle” language that Paul uses in this passage from Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might **sanctify** her, having **cleansed** her by the **washing of water** with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be **holy** and **without blemish**.

Paul uses numerous terms that apply to the Tabernacle, terms like “sanctify,” “cleanse,” and “without blemish,” and he relates these terms to our relationship with Jesus, or Yeshua as he was known in Hebrew. In Yeshua, the church is brought near to God, after she has been cleansed and made holy and without blemish. So, in the physical Tabernacle service, we see a picture of the spiritual relationship between God and his people. The book of Hebrews tells us that the Tabernacle was an earthly representation, a “shadow,” of a heavenly reality:

Hebrews 8:4-5

Now if he [Yeshua] were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

Other scriptures reference this also; they say that there is a “heavenly temple”:

Revelation 11:19

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple...

Revelation 14:17

Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven...

(see also: Deuteronomy 26:15; Psalm 78:69; 96:6; 150:1; Chronicles 30:27; Hebrews 9:11-12)

So, the Tabernacle's physical form is based on a spiritual reality. The way that people met with God physically in the Tabernacle provides a picture of how people meet with God spiritually.

As we saw in Ephesians, one of the things that the Tabernacle symbolized is Yeshua. In fact, we see Yeshua in every part of the Tabernacle. He is represented in the altar of sacrifice, because he was a sacrifice on our behalf:

Ephesians 5:2

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Hebrews 10:10

...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] once for all.

Yeshua is represented in the brazen laver of water, where the priests would wash, because he "washes" those who believe in him:

1 Corinthians 6:11

...But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] and by the Spirit of our God.

Yeshua is represented by the things inside the Tabernacle too: the *menorah*, or lampstand, provided light, and Yeshua is called "the light":

John 1:9-10

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

John 8:12

Again Jesus [Yeshua] spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

On the opposite side of the menorah there was a table that held loaves of bread. Yeshua is also called "bread":

John 6:35

Jesus [Yeshua] said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Matthew 26:26

Now as they were eating, Jesus [Yeshua] took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”

Another item in the Tabernacle was the altar of incense, which represents prayer (Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4). Yeshua prayed on behalf of us, that we would have access to God:

John 17:9

I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

John 17:20-21

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us...

In fact, Yeshua is still “interceding for us”:

Romans 8:34

...Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua] is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

The final item inside the Tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant, which was hidden behind a veil, and was only accessible to the High Priest. As we know, Yeshua is considered a heavenly high priest:

Hebrews 6:19-20

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus [Yeshua] has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

As the High Priest, he has “opened the way” for us to enter the spiritual holy of holies:

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus [Yeshua], by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

So, once we pass through this veil, we encounter the “Ark of the Covenant.” Yeshua is symbolized here also, because through him, we enter into a new covenant:

Hebrews 8:6

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

Hebrews 8:10-12 (quoting from Jeremiah 31:33-34)

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his

brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

Finally, on top of the ark, there was the glory of God. Again, we find Yeshua symbolized here, as he has God's glory:

John 17:5

And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

James 2:1

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua], the Lord of glory.

(see also: Hebrews 1:3, 1 Peter 4:13)

So, Yeshua is represented in every part of the Tabernacle. He is the sacrifice for our sins, the one who washes us and makes us clean, the one who lights our path, the bread that sustains us, the intercessor on our behalf, the high priest who goes through the curtain, the mediator of a new covenant, and the glory inside the holiest place.

Throughout this series, we'll be going into depth on these and other parallels between the physical Tabernacle and our spiritual relationship with God. We will see how the Tabernacle shows us the spiritual path to God. We will see what the Tabernacle teaches us about being God's people and how the Tabernacle represents God's kingdom. We will also address purity, holiness, atoning sacrifice, ministry, and many more concepts that connect with the Tabernacle. We will see how these concepts connect to ourselves as individuals, to God's people as a whole, and to our Messiah Yeshua. Finally, we will see how we can apply these things to our spiritual walk. Hopefully, this will shed some light on why the Tabernacle was so important to God, and why the Scriptures spend so many pages describing it. And maybe, when we read through those pages from now on, they won't seem quite so boring.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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