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MINISTRIES

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The Tabernacle: The Courtyard and the Kingdom

The Tabernacle in the wilderness was God’s dwelling place among the Israelites after he freed them from slavery in Egypt. It can be a chore to read through the passages that describe the Tabernacle, but it turns out that the Tabernacle is full of symbolism and spiritual lessons that teach us about our relationship with God. For a quick introduction to what the Tabernacle was, we recommend watching our teaching, [The Tabernacle: An Introduction](#). In this teaching, we’re going to take a close look at one particular component of the Tabernacle: the courtyard. We’re going to examine the parallels between the courtyard’s physical features, and some of the spiritual features of the kingdom of God. Let’s get started.

The Tabernacle was a rectangular, wood-framed building, about 15 feet tall, covered with animal skins and wools. Inside the Tabernacle, over the Ark of the Covenant, was the presence and glory of God. The courtyard was the area surrounding the Tabernacle. The courtyard took up about a quarter-acre of land, and it was surrounded by “walls” made of linen curtains. In order to enter the courtyard, there was a standard that people had to meet: they had to be *tahor* (“tah-HORE”), which is a Hebrew word that means “clean” or “pure.” The way to be *tahor* is described in many parts of the Torah, but Leviticus chapters 12 through 15 contain most of the regulations about it. To briefly summarize these chapters, being *tahor* meant that a person had to avoid sexual contact, disease, dead bodies, and blood when he approached the Tabernacle. Whenever someone became unclean, which in Hebrew is called *tame* (“tah-MAY”), he had to cleanse himself by bathing in water. After a period of time, typically the next day, he would then be *tahor* or clean again, and could approach the Tabernacle. The purpose of this cleanness was to keep the Tabernacle pure and undefiled:

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.](#)

There’s an interesting spiritual parallel to these standards of cleanness. One of the things that the Tabernacle symbolizes is the body of Christ, the church (Ephesians 2:19-22). There was also a standard of purity that was required to join the church, which we find in Acts chapter 15:

Acts 15:19-20

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

These standards are not the same as the standards of *tahor*, but there are some interesting parallels. These new converts had to abstain from sexual immorality, meat offered to idols, things strangled, and blood, which sounds similar in many ways to the standards of *tahor*. So, just like those who approached the Tabernacle had to have a degree of physical cleanliness, those who entered the church had to have a degree of spiritual cleanliness. We also know that new converts were baptized—washed with water, much like those who wished to approach the Tabernacle would be washed with water. So, the spiritual standards for someone entering the church are in many ways analogous to the physical standards for someone entering the courtyard of the Tabernacle. In both cases, there was a level of purity that was required so that the Tabernacle or the church did not become defiled. As Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 5:11

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

So, again, the physically unclean could not enter the Tabernacle courtyard, and the spiritually unclean could not enter the church. This is an important lesson for the church today. Too often, churches prioritize acceptance and tolerance over God's standards of purity. This is not to say that sinners cannot be forgiven and accepted when they turn back to God—far from it! Every member of the church is a sinner that was saved by God's grace. God welcomes everyone who turns to him—all who call upon his name (Joel 2:32). But those who enter into fellowship with God must abide by God's standards. If they are not willing to do that, then they are no longer welcome. Paul wrote again:

1 Timothy 5:20

As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

And again,

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

God does not allow sin in the church, just as he did not allow uncleanness at the Tabernacle. He does not want his people, among whom he dwells, to be defiled. He wants us to be clean and pure.

Getting back to the courtyard, since we have an idea of the cleanness and purity that was necessary to enter it, let's take a closer look at the courtyard itself.

We read about the courtyard's construction in Exodus chapter 27:

Exodus 27:9-19

You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twined linen a hundred cubits long for one side. Its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. And likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long, its pillars twenty and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. And for the breadth of the court on the west side there shall be hangings for fifty cubits, with ten pillars and ten bases. The breadth of the court on the front to the east shall be fifty cubits. The hangings for the one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. On the other side the hangings shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. It shall have four pillars and with them four bases. All the pillars around the court shall be filleted with silver. Their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze. The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits, the breadth fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of fine twined linen and bases of bronze. All the utensils of the tabernacle for every use, and all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

So, the walls of the courtyard were made of fine linen cloth. These cloths were stretched between silver hooks that were attached to a total of sixty bronze pillars, each of which was five cubits, or seven and a half feet tall. (A “cubit” is traditionally considered to be about eighteen inches long). We know from two other verses, Exodus 35:18 and Exodus 39:40, that there were also cords that were attached to these pillars, and they were tied to pegs that were hammered into the ground. These cords and pegs would have held the pillars upright, so they couldn’t be blown over by the wind. The north and south walls of the courtyard were 100 cubits long, which is about 150 feet, and the western wall was 50 cubits long, about 75 feet. The east side had a multi-colored curtain that hung down and served as a “gate” to enter the Tabernacle grounds. This curtain was made of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, as well as fine linen, and it was 20 cubits long, which was about 30 feet.

What’s the symbology behind these elements of the courtyard? Well, much of the symbology of the court is connected to *righteousness*. For example, the court was surrounded by linen curtains, and linen often represents righteousness:

Revelation 19:8

it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Linen is also a reminder of the special clothes that the High Priest wore on the day of atonement. Most of the time, the high priest wore multicolored clothes, of gold, blue, purple and scarlet. He wore a breastplate filled with precious stones, and he had gold on his forehead and hanging from his tunic. These clothes were “for glory and for beauty.” (Exodus 28:2). However, on the Day of Atonement, the day he would enter the Holy of Holies to make intercession for all the people, he only wore white linen garments (Leviticus 16:4). So, the outside of the Tabernacle court reminds us of the garments that the High Priest wore when he entered the innermost holy place.

In addition to the linen, we also find righteousness symbolized in the huge curtain, the “gate” at the entrance of the court. The Scriptures often speak of the “righteous” entering through the “gate”:

Psalms 118:19-20

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the

LORD [YHWH]. This is the gate of the LORD [YHWH]; the righteous shall enter through it.

Isaiah 26:1-2

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: “We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.

Jeremiah 7:1-3

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD [YHWH]: “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s [YHWH] house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD [YHWH], all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD [YHWH]. Thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place

So, the court of the Tabernacle was a place of righteousness. It was intended for the righteous to enter into it.

Psalms 92:12-13

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD [YHWH]; they flourish in the courts of our God.

Again, we have a parallel between the Tabernacle grounds and the body of Christ. Just like it is the righteous who enter through the gate into the courtyard, it is also the righteous who enter the kingdom of God:

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 13:41-43

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Finally, we see all of the symbolism of the Tabernacle courtyard expressed here in Revelation, speaking about the new heavens and the new earth, where we will dwell with God forever. We see the temple, the city, the gate, cleanness, and righteousness:

Revelation 21:22-27

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

So this Tabernacle courtyard is a picture of God’s kingdom. It is a place of cleanness and righteousness, a place where God dwells and where those who are clean and righteous can dwell with him.

Speaking of God's kingdom, there is an interesting connection between the word for courtyard and the layout of an ancient kingdom. The Hebrew word translated as "courtyard" is *chatzer* (H2691). This same word is translated "villages" in other places in Scripture. For example:

Leviticus 25:29-31

If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, he may redeem it within a year of its sale. For a full year he shall have the right of redemption. If it is not redeemed within a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong in perpetuity to the buyer, throughout his generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee. But the houses of the **villages** [*chatzer*] that have no wall around them shall be classified with the fields of the land. They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee.

So, there is a connection between the Tabernacle courtyard and the villages surrounding a city. Again, the same Hebrew word is used for both of these things. So, what does this have to do with a kingdom?

Well, in ancient times, each city was ruled by a king. The city itself was surrounded by protective walls, much like the Tabernacle, the tent of meeting, was surrounded by walls. Inside the city was the king's palace, where the king would dwell, and this would correspond to the Holy of Holies—that's where God, the King of kings, dwelled. Outside the city were villages, where most of the people lived. These villages would correspond to the courtyard; again, the same Hebrew term is used for both. These surrounding villages, even though they were outside the city walls, were still considered part of the king's domain—they were still part of his kingdom. The king would protect these villages with his armies just like he would protect the city itself. In the same way, God protects his people with his "heavenly armies," even the people in the "courtyard," that is, the people that are just starting to enter into fellowship with him.

Psalms 65:4

Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple.

God looks after everyone in his kingdom, whether they are longtime elders and ministers or brand-new converts. We see God's zealous protection of all his people in Yeshua's teaching:

Matthew 18:4-6

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

(see also: the parable of the lost sheep in vv. 10-14, and the parable of the workers in Matthew 20:1-16)

We can have confidence that no matter who we are or how long we have been faithful, if God has invited us into his courts, then he is our king and he is our protector. He will look after us.

So, let's recap everything we've covered about the courtyard. The courtyard could only be entered by someone who was clean, separated from defilement, and washed with water. It was surrounded by linen curtains, which represent righteousness, and its entrance was a screen which was called the "gate," where only the righteous were supposed to enter. The courtyard is a picture of how people who enter God's kingdom need to be washed clean and made righteous.

This presents an obvious question: how can we be washed clean and made righteous? That's a question we address in the teachings that describe the two main items that the courtyard contained: the altar of sacrifice and the brazen laver. We invite you to watch those teachings as well.

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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