

EXODUS:  
Studies in the Tabernacle  
*Session One: Background.*

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**E**XODUS DIVIDES NATURALLY into three parts. The first part gives the history of the nation of Israel from the time that Jacob's family emigrated to Egypt until God delivered them from the subsequent bondage they endured under Pharaoh "that knew not Joseph", and up until they arrived at the Sinai desert [chapters 1 to 19]. The second part deals with Moses climbing up into the mountain and the giving of the Law [19—24] The third part is concerned with the Tabernacle [25—40]. It is this third part that will be our focus in this series of studies.

**W**E CANNOT STATE WITH CERTAINTY the number of people who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, then 80 years of age, and Aaron 83 years We do know, however, that 600,000 men, besides women, children, and a large mixed multitude took their departure from the "land of bondage" [Exodus 12. 37-38], so we can estimate the whole number at about two and a half millions of people.

They were led in their journeyings by a pillar of cloud [thunder-cloud] by day, which became a pillar of fire in the night. Of course they did not tramp along every day and every night. They often pitched their camp and would stay for long periods in certain places. Nor did they just set up their camp haphazardly; God gave specific directions as to the ordering of the camp by their Tribes. While Israel was encamped at Mount Sinai, the unorganized multitude was assembled by tribes families and given their proper locations in the camp and on the march.

In the camp three tribes were assigned places on each side of the Tabernacle. Each of these three tribes encamped and marched under their own banner or ensign, so that whether in camp or on the march, each tribe could be instantly located

The tribe of Levi was set apart for the service of GOD to care for, protect and transport everything belonging to the Tabernacle as they travelled. This required that these sons of Levi, and their families, the Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merarites, must be camped around and close to the Tabernacle.

**T**HE DETAILS FOR THESE ARRANGEMENTS are not found in Exodus but in the fourth Book of Moses, Numbers. Yet in order to understand the Tabernacle and its significance it seems sensible to give time and space to gathering these facts together. God is a God of order and purpose; there is design, beauty, wonder and purpose in the way our orderly God arranges things.

When the children of Israel broke camp and travelled in the wilderness, the tribes to the east under the banner of Judah moved out first (Numbers 2. 9) The tribes on the south side of the tabernacle, under the standard of Reuben, followed them (v16). Then came the Levites who camped immediately around the Tabernacle. Following the Levites came the three tribes who were camped on the west side of the Tabernacle, under the standard of Ephraim, and bringing up the rear of the march were the three tribes who encamped on the north side, under the banner of Dan.

**T**HE ENSIGN OF JUDAH was purple and carried the logo of a LION. Purple is the colour of royalty. It speaks of the Kingdom and of the King. Equally the Lion prophecies of Christ, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." The character and mission of Jesus are set forth in the Gospel of *Matthew* from this perspective.

The standard of Ephraim was white and bore the emblem of a CALF, or bullock. Scarlet symbolizes the sacrifice of the suffering Saviour and of His humble service obediently rendered to His Heavenly Father. So do the head of a Calf, or bullock. The calf was the sacrificial offering. The bullock was the beast of burden, rendering silent and faithful service. Thus the Gospel of *Mark*.

The standard of Rueben was white carrying the emblem of a MAN. Pure White symbolized the perfect, sinless manhood of the Man CHRIST JESUS, so beautifully set forth in the Gospel of *Luke*.

Finally the standard of Dan was the blue of the sky, the home of the EAGLE—the picture it bore—which symbolizes the Son of GOD, who came down from GOD out of Heaven, and is presented this way in the Gospel of *John*.

**W**E TURN OUR ATTENTION now to the "Tabernacle" itself. The word itself means dwelling-place, but more particularly a *tent*. The people were living in tents, and the Lord wanted to be with them:

*The people must make a sacred Tent for me, so that I may live among them.*

—Exodus 25. 8 GNB.

Israel was beginning a new era, so the Lord gave the people the Tabernacle as a permanent sign that he lived among them and was part of them. He was the very centre of their national life. This tabernacle was known as the **tent of meeting** (39. 32), for it was the place where God met with his people. It was also called the **tent of the testimony** (38. 21), to remind the people that within it, in the ark, was the testimony of God, the law, that was to guide and control their lives.

Yet while God dwelt among his people, he also, in a sense, dwelt apart from them, for they were sinful and he was holy. They could not come to God directly. They had to come first to the priests and offer sacrifices, then the priests approached God on their behalf. The contrasts between the limitations of this old covenant and the perfections of the new covenant through Jesus Christ are presented in the New Testament book of Hebrews. But until God's purposes were fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the laws and ceremonies of the old covenant helped people to understand God and to understand themselves.

God did not design these laws and ceremonies as a means by which people might earn salvation. Rather they were part of the developing plan of God that showed people, stage by stage, a revelation which reached its climax in Jesus Christ.

This Tabernacle was to be a **palace**—the royal residence of the King of Israel. In it he would dwell among His people, receive their petitions, and issue His responses.

But it was also to be a **place of worship**, in which God was to record His name and to enshrine the symbols of His presence.

**I**N HIS INTRODUCTION at the beginning of his Gospel, speaking of Christ, the Apostle John tells us that "*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*". The word *dwelt* in the original text is *tabernacled*—so that he "*pitched his tent*" among us.

This is significant in that much of what we learn about the Tabernacle points to Christ.

**T**HE TABERNACLE WAS DESIGNED so that it could be easily put together, taken apart and transported, for the people of Israel took it with them on their journey through the desert to the Promised Land. It was erected every time they set up camp, and they pitched their own tents around it as directed.

Simply described, the Tabernacle consisted of a wooden box-like frame covered with a cloth and protected from the weather by a tent that covered the whole. The timber-framed structure hidden under this tent consisted of two compartments. The first of these, which was entered through a curtain, was called *The Holy Place* and contained three pieces of furniture: a *table*, a *lampstand* and an *altar* on which incense was burned.

A second curtain separated this Holy Place from the smaller rear section, which was called *The Most Holy Place* or *Holy of Holies*. This part was the symbolic dwelling place of God and contained the Ark of the Covenant.

This structure was set in a large area surrounded by a sort of fence. The area within this 'fence' and around the Tabernacle was known as *The Court of the Tabernacle*.

**W**E MUST TAKE NOTICE that although the Lord told Moses to make him a Tabernacle, the account does not begin with the details of the tent itself. Rather we are told about the furnishings that will go inside the two "rooms" within the "tent". And first of all we are introduced to *The Ark of the Covenant* which was the sole furnishing in The Most Holy Place—the representation of the Divine Presence.

The Ark has the place of most prominent importance. It was made of acacia wood, speaking of the humanity of Christ as a Root out of dry ground. But it was overlaid with gold, which emphasizes His deity, for He is God over all.

Because the ark was to be carried by means of staves, there were two rings of gold attached to the ark on each side. The staves were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, and those were slipped through the rings in order for the ark to be carried. The priests did not touch the ark, but carried it by the staves (vs.12-15). This continued until the temple was built, when we read that "they drew out the staves" (1Ki\_8:8) because the ark was then in its proper resting place.

The testimony God would give Israel (the law written on tables of stone) was to be put into the ark (v.16). This reminds us that in contrast to all others, the Lord Jesus could say, "I delight to do your will, O my God, and your law is within my heart" (Psa\_40:8).

**T**HIS GOLD-COVERED WOODEN CHEST was fitted with a tight-fitting lid which was called *The Mercy Seat*. The Mercy Seat was made of pure gold, for it symbolized the Throne of God—the place he occupied amongst his people. No representation was ever seen on the Mercy Seat, for God is invisible. As the throne of God, this "seat" represents absolute dominion, authority righteousness, truth, yet amazingly it is called, not the "*Justice Seat*", but "*The Mercy Seat*."

On each end of this Mercy Seat was a cherub facing inwards with his wings spread above each one, so that their faces would look downward to the centre of Mercy Seat with their wings overshadowing all. The cherubim were integral to the mercy seat being hammered from one piece of gold. Looking down upon the Mercy Seat would indicate the vital interest that God's righteousness takes in the value of the blood sprinkled there.

This was the only seat in the Tabernacle, the place where God would meet with Israel, though none of Israel except the high priest once a year, could enter there.

Remember that God placed two cherubim at the gate of the Garden of Eden, each with a flaming sword to prevent man reaching the Tree of Life. Here on the Mercy Seat are two cherubim focussing on the blood—where justice kept men out, the blood invites them in!



AS WE MOVE OUT from the Holy of Holies into the Holy Place we discover it contains three pieces of furniture. These are: The *Table of Shewbread*, the *Golden Candlestick* [properly, lampstand] and the Golden Altar, also known as the *Altar of Incense*.

The Table was inside the holy place, on the right side as one entered the tabernacle. Again the Manhood of the Lord Jesus is emphasized by the acacia wood, and His deity by the complete overlaying of gold.

The twelve loaves that were put on the table (Leviticus 24. 59) speak of communion or fellowship involving the twelve tribes of Israel in their fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Therefore the table is symbolical of the Lord Jesus as the Sustainer of fellowship. The dishes, pans, pitchers and bowls used in connection with the table were all made of pure gold, for the fellowship of the saints of God is to be on a divine level, that is, "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1. 3).

This table was in the holy place, speaking of heaven itself, therefore prefiguring Christ himself, glorified in heaven and sustaining His saints in fellowship both with the Father and also with one another.

**T**HE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND was placed on the left side of the sanctuary as one entered. This was made of one piece of beaten gold. The lampstand is distinct from the light, for it is really the light-bearer, and speaks of Christ as the Sustainer of all testimony for God. Light is the very nature of God: "God is light—therefore the humanity of Christ (the acacia wood) is not involved in this at all, but only pure gold. As the eternal Son of God He sustains all testimony for God.

There was a central stem in this stand, and six branches proceeding from that stem, three on either side. Seven is the number of *completeness* or *perfection*.

On each of the six branches there were three cups or bowl shaped ornaments, like almond blossoms, each one evidently nesting a knob (possibly a bud) and a flower. It is thought likely that this compares with Aaron's rod that "put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds". The lesson of resurrection is unmistakable. The almond is the first tree in Israel to blossom, speaking of Christ as "the firstfruits".

On the central stem there were four of these sets of almond ornaments.

The seven lamps, one at the top of the stem and those at the ends of the six branches, were to be arranged in such a way as to give light that would draw attention to the lampstand itself. It would also shed light on the table of showbread and on the golden incense altar.

So then, the light of God shines primarily upon Christ Himself, whether as the Sustainer of the **Light**, or the Sustainer of **fellowship**, or the Sustainer of **worship**, of which the golden altar speaks. He is revealed in all His beauty. Besides this, however, He is the Revealer: He shines for the blessings of others.

The lampstand then portrays Christ as the Sustainer of **testimony**, of which the light speaks. This testimony must necessarily have its basis in the truth of the Word of God, just as is plainly stated in the words of the Lord Jesus, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18. 37).

The lampstand was formed in one piece out of one talent of gold.

At present-day prices, the cost of this would be over half a million pounds sterling!

