

Jesus: Our Great High Priest Forever
(Week 16)
Hebrews 8:13-9:12
“The Tabernacle of Moses”

Introduction

After God had spoken with Moses for forty days upon Mount Sinai, *The Bible* tells us that when Moses descended back down to the people, his face shown so brightly that He had to wear a veil so that the people would not be afraid of him (***Exodus 34:29-35***). The reason that his face was glowing brightly was because after being in God’s presence for so long, his face actually reflected God’s radiance. What an amazing sight that must have been to behold, as well as, a bit scary I imagine. No wonder Moses felt the need to cover his face, he didn’t want to frighten the Israelites. But you see, the glow on Moses’ face began to fade in time, for he was not filled with God’s radiance, he had merely reflected it. And a reflection is only a temporary image of something else. The reflection in your mirror will look just like you, as long as, you are standing in front of it, but, as soon as you walk away, the reflection is gone. Reflections are temporary, but the real thing... well, that’s permanent.

Just like the face of Moses, The Old Covenant, with all it’s rituals, was just a temporary image meant to point to something much greater. The Old Covenant was merely an earthly representation of a heavenly truth. *The Old Testament* was never intended to be the final word from God, but rather, it was given as a temporary “reflection”, if you will, to a much more perfect truth. The Law of Moses was given to point us to Christ, Who is the radiance of God’s Glory in bodily form.

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.” ***Hebrews 1:3 (a)***

You see, Jesus wasn’t a “reflection” of God’s glory. He **WAS** God’s glory. Now Moses, as great a man as he was, could never hope to hold a candle to The Son of God! In Christ, we find a better covenant and a better High Priest. *The Old Testament* was good, because it was given by God, but it was never intended to be permanent. Jesus was always the final plan. And, it is in Him that we find a better Covenant. When our spiritual “eyes” have been opened to this fact, then we can see clearly how everything in *The Old Testament* was specifically designed to point us to Christ. The writer of *Hebrews* longed for his readers to experience this spiritual “enlightenment”, so they would understand that The Law of Moses, although it was very good, was designed to pass away in favor of a superior reality.

“By saying a New Covenant, He has declared that the first is obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old is about to pass away.” ***Hebrews 8:13***

How prophetic were these words of truth! For they were written a mere four years before the Temple in Jerusalem would be completely destroyed by the Romans, and the ritual sacrifices of Judaism would fade into history. The Mosaic Covenant had served its purpose, and that purpose was to be a reflection of something far better, something from Heaven itself. Even today, the religion of The Jewish people is an empty shell of what it once was. Though many still refuse to let go of The Old Covenant and would do most anything to see its revival, it has faded just like the glow on Moses’ face. And Why? Because God has determined that its proper time and place has come and gone. Out with the Old and in with the New! Jesus, offers us a better and lasting covenant.

This week, we will take a look at the Tabernacle of Moses, and how it too was carefully designed by God Himself in order to foreshadow the reality of the better Covenant that was to come. The Tabernacle was meant to be an earthly picture of a Heavenly Sanctuary. It was a temporary structure, built by human hands to be but a reflection of a Temple created in Heaven by none other than God Himself. Every single component of the Tabernacle had a spiritual significance that can only be fully understood in the person of Jesus Christ. He is The LORD of the tabernacle. Let us then, closely examine The Tabernacle of Moses, discovering both its Shadow and the Substance (reality) that it represents.

The Tabernacle of Moses (The Shadow)

God created the entire universe in six days. The scriptures bear witness to this truth in the book of *Genesis*. In fact, two whole chapters of *The Bible* are dedicated to God's magnificent creation. Would you like to know how many chapters of Scripture are dedicated to the design and construction of The Tabernacle of Moses? Around fifty. That is FIFTY whole chapters dedicated to the Tabernacle, and only two describing the creation of the entire universe! I think that we can be safe in assuming that God placed a great deal of emphasis upon the Tabernacle, wouldn't you agree? Fifty chapters... There are many books of *The Bible* that do not have fifty chapters including the book of *Hebrews* (it has only 13).

God wanted Moses to construct The Tabernacle based on His exact and specific instructions. Why? Because it was intended to represent a heavenly reality of eternal significance. You see, even this old world is going to one day pass away, but God's throne... That is forever my friends, and God gave Moses a glimpse of that forever, when he was on the mountain for those forty days. *The Bible* tells us that Moses was so consumed by all that God had shown Him that he went without food, or even water, for the entire time that he was upon the mountain! God gave Moses a little foretaste of heaven, and Moses was so overwhelmed by it all, that nothing else even mattered. And God wanted His instructions for the Tabernacle to be followed to the very letter, so that the shadow of things to come would be perfectly set in place.

"These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the Tabernacle. For God said, 'Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain.'"

Hebrews 8:5

Although the writer of *Hebrews* does not go into great detail about the significance of each component of The Tabernacle for us, he has made it clear that everything it represented was crucial to our understanding of the New and better Covenant. He even describes some of the features (in part, but not all) in detail for his readers.

"For a Tabernacle was set up, and in the first room, which is called the holy place, were the lampstand, the table, and the presentation loaves. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the most holy place. It had the gold altar of incense and the Ark of The Covenant, covered with gold on all sides in which was a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. The Cherubim of glory were above The Ark overshadowing the mercy seat. It is not possible to speak about these things in detail right now."

Hebrews 9:2-5

He wasn't ready at the time to speak of these things in detail, but today, this is exactly what we are going to do. We are going to take a "virtual tour" of the Tabernacle of Moses. We will examine in detail every piece of "furniture" and describe both their appearance and function. After we have done so completely, then we will examine their spiritual significance as well.

1. The Outer Court

Around the entire perimeter of the Tabernacle was a wall constructed of heavy material. On the east side of the court was a single doorway, which served as the only entrance into the outer court. Everyone was allowed to enter into the outer court, which had no covering and was open for all to view.

2. The Altar

Once inside the outer court, the first thing you would see is a great altar, upon which the daily sacrifices were offered up to God. Twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening, sacrifices were burned upon the great altar. Not to mention all the other sin offerings, as well as, the great offerings sacrificed upon The Day of Atonement.

3. The Bronze Laver

The next thing we see on our "tour" is straight ahead at the entrance to "the tent of meeting". It is a great bronze basin filled with water for the ceremonial cleanings of the priests of God. The priest were instructed to "cleanse" themselves before entering the tent of meeting. No person, except for the priests, could go past the bronze basin and into the tent.

4. The Holy Place

The first section of the tent of meeting was called "The Holy Place". As we stated earlier, only priests were allowed inside the actual tent of meeting. Within the holy place, the priests were continuously at work throughout the day. There were three items of furniture inside the holy place: The Lampstand, The Table for the bread of presence, and the altar of incense. All three of these items were made of wood and overlaid with pure gold

5. The Lampstand

Seeing as how the tent was covered by thick cloths and enclosed from the outside by thick curtains, it was very dark inside the holy place. The lampstand was placed just to the left as you entered into the tent. It was built as a single shoot like the trunk of a tree with three branches coming out of each side. On the branches were little golden buds, so that the lamp itself resembled a flowering almond tree. As the branches curved upward, they were perfectly aligned across the top and were trimmed with wicks, which were fueled with specially consecrated olive oil. It was the responsibility of the priest to keep this lamp fueled and burning at all times, for it was the only source of illumination inside the tent.

6. The Table of The Bread of The Presence

To the right side of the tent and just across from the lampstand was a table overlaid with gold that held the "bread of the presence" (*Lechem HaPanim* which literally means "bread of the faces"). Twelve fresh loaves of this bread were placed upon the table every Sabbath. The priests were allowed to eat the week old loaves as they replaced them each Sabbath. The twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel, who were chosen by God to remain in His presence (before His face) as He provided for their daily bread.

7. The Altar of Incense

Straight ahead and standing directly in front of the veil that separated the Holy Place from The Holy of Holies was The Altar of incense. It was the object nearest to The Ark of The Covenant. Upon this golden Altar, fragrant incense was burned by the priest that caused its smoke to rise up before the veil. This incense represented the "sweet smelling prayers" of God's people going up before His Throne.

8. The Holy of Holies

Behind the great veil, lay the smallest chamber of the Tabernacle, it was only 15x15 feet, and there was a single piece of furniture that was placed in this room... The Ark of The Covenant, representing the very Throne of God in the midst of His people. Only the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies, and then, only once a year on the Day of Atonement, when He would bring in coals from the altar of incense, as well as, the blood of the sacrifices, first for himself and a second time for all the people.

Inside The Ark was the Ten Commandments, The Jar of Manna, and The Staff of Aaron, which had come to life and budded when God confirmed Aaron as His High Priest.

This concludes our "virtual tour" of The Tabernacle, designed to be a mere shadow of a better covenant that was yet to come. Now let us examine the Substance that it so wonderfully represents.

The Son of God (the Substance)

Now, we know that The Tabernacle was designed to mirror the true sanctuary in Heaven (***Hebrews 8:5***). That being said, I do not know anyone personally, who has ever seen that particular sanctuary, and this is why I believe that the author of *Hebrews* says that he was not able to discuss this in any detail (***vs. 9:5***). However, there is something else that is marvelous about The Tabernacle of Moses in that it not only points to something (The True Sanctuary of Heaven), but to SOMEONE as well. And that someone is none other than Jesus Christ. Let us now retake our virtual tour of The Tabernacle and look again with our "spiritual eyesight".

First, the Tabernacle was a tent which is by definition a temporary dwelling. The Word of God tells us that Jesus was God, and yet for a brief time He "tabernacled", made his dwelling, among men (***John 1:14***). The Greek word that John uses for "dwelt" is "*Skenoo*", and it means to encamp or to dwell in a tent. You see, Jesus, The Eternal and Infinite God, took up a temporary residence in a human body. God "camped out" among us, clothed in a "tent" of human flesh.

Second, The Tabernacle had only one way in, although everyone was welcome to enter into the outer court, they could only do so by a single doorway on the eastern side of the structure. Jesus is The Door (**John 10:9-16**). It is only through Jesus, that we can have access to the “Courts of God”.

Third, as soon as you enter the outer court, the first thing you will behold is the Great Altar, for without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin (**Hebrews 9:22**). The first thing that all of us must acknowledge in order to enter into the presence of God, is the sacrifice that He has provided for us all, the sacrifice of His Son. Only by the Blood of Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice, can we find true forgiveness of sin and a clean conscience (**Hebrews 9:9**).

Fourth, once you pass the Altar of Sacrifice, you come to the bronze laver, which tells us of the cleansing that we receive when we trust in Jesus. This is no mere “ritual cleansing”, but a true and complete washing of The Spirit and The Word, that sanctifies us and conforms us to the image of Christ Himself!

Fifth, Because we have trusted in Christ and are washed completely and forever clean by His precious blood, we now can enter into the holy place. Why? Because He has made us to be a **“kingdom, priests to serve His God and Father” (Revelation 1:6)**. We now serve our God in priestly service.

Sixth, in the Holy Place, there was only one source of light, without it the priests would have been serving in darkness. The only way that we can follow Christ and know His will, is for Him to illuminate our path. We live in a dark place for the present time, but Jesus is our only source of light in this fallen world. He makes it possible for us to know Him and do His will. As we obey His Word and abide in Him (as the branches connected to his lampstand (**John 15**), He enlightens the path for us.

Seventh, with The Lampstand on our left and The Table of The Bread on our right, we are reminded of Jesus, The Bread of Life, Who not only illuminates our path, but provides for us our “daily bread”. When we seek first His Kingdom, it is He that sees to it that our every needs are supplied (**Matthew 6:33**)!

Eighth, now straight ahead, we see the Golden Altar of Incense, where Our Great High Priest Forever takes our prayers into the Holy of Holies, when we pray in His name! He is our great intercessor, and thanks to Him, our prayers are a sweet smelling aroma before the throne of our Holy God.

Ninth, we now come to the Veil and The Holy of Holies: When Jesus cried out **“It is Finished”** upon the cross, the temple veil was ripped in two from top to bottom. Jesus, our great High Priest, entered into the true sanctuary in Heaven, not the copy mind you, but the real thing. He presented His own blood before the Father’s throne, as payment in full for our eternal redemption (**vs.11-12**). Thanks to Jesus, we are saved... Forever!

Tenth... one last and final thing: If you look carefully at how the furniture of The Tabernacle is arranged from the first Door, and the Great Altar, all the way through to the Holy of Holies, you will find that it is in the shape of a Cross! You see, it was always God’s plan to give His one and only Son as a propitiation for sin, Who became the Mediator of The New and Better Covenant! The Old Covenant was but a reflection of the **better** one that was to come. And, unlike the glory that faded from Moses’ face because it was just a reflection, Christ, the very glory of God, now lives within us! For those who are wise enough to put our faith in Him, His light will never fade, and we shall shine like the stars in the heavens (**Daniel 12:3**). Now that we can see with spiritual eyes what the “Tabernacle Courts” truly represent, this very famous Psalm becomes all the more clear:

“Let the whole earth shout triumphantly to The LORD! Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs. Acknowledge that The LORD is God. He made us, and we are His — His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His GATES with thanksgiving and His COURTS with praise. Give thanks to Him and bless His name. For The LORD is good, and His faithful love endures FOREVER; His faithfulness, through all generations.” **Psalm 100**

Thanks to Christ, we now have access to each and every one of His Tabernacle Courts. He has made us a kingdom of Priests! So let the redeemed of The LORD say so!

And ALL of God’s people said... TRUTH!!!