

Study #3 The Tabernacle Building

Introduction

Whereas the outer court was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide, the actual Tabernacle building, made up of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies was a mere 45 feet long by 15 feet wide. The Holy Place was 30 feet long by 15 feet wide and the Holy of Holies 15 feet square.

In the Hebrew scriptures all measurements are cited in cubits. The following table (3.1) will give you an idea of the variation in the length of a cubit according to the culture to which it applied. To complicate matters a little, there were both short or common and long cubits. The references to the dimensions of the Tabernacle are Hebrew (Short).

Culture	Inches (centimetres)
Hebrew (short)	17.5 (44.5)
Egyptian	17.6 (44.7)
Common (short)	18 (45.7)
Babylonian (long)	19.8 (50.3)
Hebrew (long)	20.4 (51.8)
Egyptian (long)	20.6 (52.3)

Table 3.1 The length of a cubit by culture

The Two Rooms

Construction

The sides of the Tabernacle facing north, west and south were made of solid wood or boards. These were made from shittim (acacia) trees that grew in the otherwise barren, dry desert. These boards were cut from the trees and overlaid with pure gold – the wood a picture of the humanity of Christ, the gold a picture of His deity. The wall facing east was a curtain or veil which permitted entry to the Holy Place to fellowship with God, an obvious symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dividing the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was a second veil. It was this second veil in the Temple at the time of Christ that was torn in two from the top to the bottom at the time of His crucifixion (Matt 27.51). This graphically and spectacularly displayed that the sacrifice of Christ had made access to God available to all who would come.

The covering of the roof and the north, west and south facing walls were specially designed according to the instructions of God and will be discussed in detail later. The curtains and coverings of the Tabernacle remind and assure us of Christ's protection for all who are within.

The Holy Place

The Holy Place contained three pieces of furniture, all of which represented Christ in some way. The golden candlestick represented Christ as the light of the world, the table of shewbread symbolized Christ as the bread of life and the altar of incense symbolized Christ as our intercessor and indicated our need to intercede for others.

The Holy of Holies

The Holy of Holies was a cube with 15 foot sides. It was the place of special worship and in it were the Ark of the Covenant which contained a copy of the Law of Moses and on top of the Ark was the mercy seat. The Ark of the Covenant represented the righteous standards of a holy God, standards that are unattainable by sinful man but which were fulfilled to the letter in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The mercy seat on top of the Ark symbolized the mercy God extends towards man on the shed blood of a substitute. Through the sacrifice of Christ He made it possible for everyone to enter the very presence of God (Heb 10.19-20) and that with boldness.

The Foundation of Silver

The Tabernacle building rested on a foundation of silver which speaks of Christ who is the foundation of every believer's life (1 Cor 3.11). According to Exodus 30.11-16 the silver for this foundation was taken from all males 20 years and older at the numbering of the children of Israel. It was referred to as the price of atonement for their souls and the protection from a plague which is a picture of sin. Money had to be taken in order to keep a plague from coming on them because of their pride. Pride in their strength in the flesh seemed to be the inevitable result of a census and that is why it was forbidden and indeed

severely punished if it was done (II Sam 24 & I Chron 24). When David disobeyed God and had Joab number the men of Israel, God moved swiftly and 70,000 people lost their lives because of it.

The ransom money was God's way of powerfully reminding the Israelites that they were merely ransomed (redeemed) men and that without this redemption they are nothing. This should serve to remind us today that we are not to depend on our own strength. Having received Christ as our Saviour we are redeemed people, bought back from the slave market of sin by the sacrifice of Christ (cf I Cor 6.20). In ourselves we are nothing, merely hell-deserving sinners, but based on the redemptive work of Christ we are empowered and enriched by Him. It is our extraordinary privilege to rest in Him and simply abide in His love (John 15.4). Paul well understood what it meant to have Christ as the central focus of His life (I Cor 2.2).

The Boards

The boards of the Tabernacle also have rich significance for us today. God gave Moses specific instructions for the making of the boards for the Tabernacle (Exod 26.15). The wood from the acacia tree, a picture of the humanity of Christ, was covered with pure gold, a picture of the deity of Christ.

The boards are also a picture of the individual believers standing in Christ. Each believer who trusts Christ stands complete in Him. The boards of the Tabernacle stood upright on the silver foundation but they were all interconnected with rods. Just as the boards were united in the Tabernacle building, so the believer is united to Christ.

Each individual board is also representative of individual believers. The board was once part of a tree that belonged in the dry and barren desert that was chopped down and stripped of its natural beauty only to be covered in gold and made part of God's tabernacle. Likewise, believers have been taken from the desert of sin and wickedness, covered in the redeeming blood of Christ and made a child of God.

The Covering of Badgers Skins

Because of the sandstorm and occasional rain that could occur in the desert, it was necessary for the Tabernacle to be properly covered. God's instructions are recorded in Exod 26.1-14.

Badgers in the middle east are a porpoise-like marine animal that were plentiful. Their skin was very durable and was used for such things as shoes. As such, badger skins provided perfect protection against the elements of the desert. This outer covering was not particularly attractive and was not reminiscent of the beauty that lay within – as such this covering of badger skin represented the humanity of Christ (Isa 53.2-3).

Just as a person needed to come to the inside of the Tabernacle to see its beauty, a person needs to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and thus enter into fellowship with Him in order to appreciate the beauty of His holiness. The exposed roofing acts as a perfect picture of the Lord's body which serves to protect us through His sacrifice.

The Covering of Rams Skins

The second layer, immediately underneath the badger skin covering was a covering of rams skin dyed red (Ex 26.14). Since there were 4 coverings in all, this covering of rams skins could not be seen from either outside or inside the Tabernacle. These red skins speak of the blood sacrifice of Christ as our substitution just as rams were used as a substitutionary sacrifice.

This covering for sin as a substitute goes all the way back to the garden of Eden. Genesis 3.21 says "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." Because of their sin, God had to cover them and an animal had to die as a sacrifice for that to happen.

Cain tried to meet this requirement but God refused to accept his offering of the fruit of the ground (Gen 4.3-5). Abel on the other hand brought "of the firstlings of his flock" (Gen 4.4) and God accepted his sacrifice because it involved the shedding of the blood of an innocent animal.

This covering of red dyed rams skin provided a safe and protected place for the priest to minister on behalf of the people who had offered a sacrifice. Only as we are in Christ are we truly protected.

The Covering of Goats Hair

The third layer was made of goats hair. In the Old Testament scriptures, the goat is representative of sin. On the day of atonement, two goats were used. One goat was sacrificed at the brazen altar, symbolizing the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ while the Priest laid his hands on the other and confessed the sin of the nation of Israel and then it was driven into the wilderness, never to return. This second goat symbolizes the work of Christ in removing our sin as far as the east is from the west. When a person trusts Jesus Christ as his Saviour, the penalty of his sins is paid forever, and he is delivered from all condemnation (Rom 8.1).

On the cross Christ paid the price for sin, just as the slain goat did on the day of atonement, and as the live goat, He carried away forever the sin of those who have surrendered their life to Him. On the part of every human, confession and repentance are absolutely necessary as well as appropriation of what Christ has done for us. Proverbs 28.13 says "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

The Covering of Linen

Exodus 26.1 tells us that the fourth or innermost layer was made of fine twined linen. Blue, purple and scarlet colours were woven into it. This was the very first layer applied when the Tabernacle was erected. While the other three layers were unattractive, this layer, which was the only one seen from within the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, was very beautiful, emphasizing again that only when we are on the inside with Christ can we appreciate His true beauty.

This linen covering represented Christ in all His glory and perfect righteousness. The white linen represents the sinless, righteous Christ. Blue, the colour of Heaven, represents His Heavenly origin and nature. Scarlet represents His sacrificial death and purple, a combination of blue and scarlet, represents His royal character; that is, His kingly and sovereign nature and stately splendour. Purple is the colour of royalty.

The linen was also embroidered with images of Cherubim, heavenly charged with the protection of the holiness of God (Isa 6.1-4). As the ministering priests looked up and saw the Cherubim, they were reminded that God was watching and protecting them.

Just to be satisfied with salvation is a lamentable state for a Christian. The more time we spend on the inside of the sanctuary at the table of shewbread, the altar of incense and the golden candlestick, the more we will come to behold and appreciate His beauty.