

JANUARY 29

Exodus 25, 26, 27, 28

Today you encountered the instructions that God gave Moses for the building of the Tabernacle - the place where the presence of God would dwell with His people. God's Word to Moses was very specific. *"Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you"* (25:8.) And the instructions He gives are detailed in the extreme. What we have in these chapters is nearly an architectural blueprint, and over in chapters 35-38 there is an almost identical repetition said here, as the actual building of the Tabernacle is recorded.

There are five different names given in the Old Testament to the Tabernacle. Each one tells us something about its nature or function. In verse 8 of chapter 25, God says, "Make a sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them." That word points to a holy place." It comes from the same word as our English word "holy." In the next verse it is called a tabernacle - a dwelling place". There is an interesting allusion to that word in the New Testament in John 1:14, *"and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* But what it really says is *"the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us."* The Tabernacle was the first place where God "dwelt" among men. Later He dwelt among us in the Person of Jesus Christ. Revelation 21:3 says that in the end *"He will make His dwelling place among men."* The third name is in the next chapter and it is tent" -- a temporary or collapsible dwelling". The Tabernacle there in the wilderness was portable.

The Jews never believed that the Tabernacle was God's home, or that it "contained" God, or that God was only where the Tabernacle was. The New Testament understanding of Acts 7:48 that *"God does not dwell in temples made by hands"* was probably understood right from the start, but the Tent of Meeting," which is the fourth name given to the Tabernacle, (which occurs in chapter 29,) was a physical place where Israel through Moses could meet with God.

Finally, the Tabernacle was called the Tent of Testimony, (Exodus 38,) where the Ark of Testimony, which contained the Tables of the Law, was kept.

There is no question about the fact that the Tabernacle was meant to point toward Christ. When we read the Book of Hebrews a bit later in our study we will discover some more of the specific ways in which God planned for the Tabernacle to point us to Christ.

There were three parts to the Tabernacle - an outer court, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Instead of restating much of what you read I thought I'd just give some highlights.

The outer court was entered through a gate and if we estimate its size in feet, we have a court of about 150 X 75 feet. The four sides were supported by pillars (20 to the long sides, 10 to the short side) from which curtains were hung.

The building itself had two sections, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. It was about 45 feet long and 15 feet wide. The front part was the Holy Place and the back part, separated by a veil, was the Holy of Holies, which was a 15' X 15' cube. The first furnishing you encountered as you entered the outer court was the altar of Burnt Offering. Probably the most significant thing about the altar was its location just inside the gate. That was a stark reminder that before you came into the presence of God, something must be done about your sin - there must be a sacrifice, atonement must be made. That bloody altar would not be a pleasant sight, but it would remind the people of God in a very vivid way of how hideous sin really is. Today we need not ever look at a bloody altar or smell the burning flesh or lay hands upon a sheep as the priest slits its throat in our presence. I'm glad of that, but remember, the first steps into fellowship with God take us past a very ugly scene - a Savior dying a hideous death upon a cross. That is because of the hideous nature of our sin.

The second piece of furniture mentioned in our reading today is the table upon which the Bread of the Presence was placed. This table was covered with gold and had upon it 12 loaves (one for each tribe of Israel) which were a perpetual thank offering to God. ." We remember through this not only the manna from heaven, but also the fact of God's provision.

On the left or south side of the Holy Place was the Golden Lampstand. Even when the lamps, which were fueled by pure olive oil, were being trimmed, the light was never allowed to go out. This reminds us of the way that God lights our way by his truth.

There were curtains blocking the entrance to the Holy Place, and from the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies. Any Israelite could come with sacrifice in hand into the outer court. Only the priest could enter the Holy Place and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies.

Inside the Holy of Holies there were only two things: The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat, which was actually a part of the Ark. It was a chest about 4' long and just over 2' deep. It was built to contain the two Tables of the Law. A pot of manna and Aaron's rod (the 'rod of Moses' that became 'the rod of God' and finally was called 'Aaron's rod') was also put into the Ark.

The lid was pure gold and it was called the "Mercy Seat" (NIV, 'atonement cover'), flanked on either end by cherubim of gold. It was at this Mercy Seat that God's Shekinah Glory rested, and this is where He met Moses.

Moving on to chapter 28 we read about the establishment of the Aaronic Priesthood and detailed instructions about the garments that the priests in Israel were to wear, as was the case with the Tabernacle. There are once again these detailed instructions regarding clothing. The priests are to have "sacred garments" to give them dignity and honor. There was a sense in which the clothing of the

priests was meant to elevate them in their own eyes and in the eyes of the people, and place them in a class above the rest of the nation. Their vestments were for glory and for beauty. Now I want you to understand that this distinction was valid. The priests were mediators. They stood between God and the people. They offered the sacrifices. They prayed the prayers. They represented the people to God.

Today, we don't wear these vestments because God has made all of us into a kingdom of priests. A priest was a mediator between ordinary people and God. No longer are pastors necessary to intercede for the people. WE all have direct access to God with nobody standing in our way. We still need pastors, but we no longer need priests. Do you remember what the New Testament says? It says, *"there is only one Mediator now between God and man. It is Jesus Christ."* It also says that every blood-bought child of God is now, because of Christ's finished work, a priest, and all of us now have access to the very presence of God Himself. Therefore the Apostle writes, *"Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."* The writer of Hebrews says, *"By a new and living way"* (that is, through Christ and through His sacrifice) we can go into the Holy of Holies and meet with God!! I may be your pastor but I am not your priest! You are a priest (if Christ is your Lord) and you serve under Jesus Christ our great High Priest, just as I do.

As for the six specific garments detailed, there are few points I wanted to mention.

The ephod, bore the name of Israel's 12 tribes. Because he wore the name of every tribe, the priest was aware of and always ministering for every tribe of his nation.

The breastplate of decision fastened onto the ephod by rings and threads of gold and blue.

The urim and the thummim were often used by the High Priest in times of crisis to determine the will of God. "Urim" means "light" and "thummim" means "perfection", and we know that they were used by the priest to get direction from God. We don't have devices like the urim and thummim today, but the principle remains the same: James says, *"If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask and the God who gives liberally to all who ask and he will give it."*

The robe worn under the ephod had one really interesting feature - the bells in the hem of the garment. As the priest went through his duties, he was invisible to the people waiting outside, but they could hear the bells. Ministering before the Lord was very serious business. If the bells stopped sounding it meant that the priest wasn't moving. God had struck him down dead because of sin. The sound of the bells as the priest left the Tabernacle was a cause for great rejoicing. It meant that God had accepted the sacrifice.

The fifth piece of clothing mentioned is the turban. It had a gold plate attached to it that said, "Holiness to the Lord." That is what the whole of Israel's worship was all about. The undergarments are the last items mentioned. They are necessary so

that the priests will have appropriate modesty and humility as they ministry before the Lord.

You know, God pays a lot of attention to detail, symbol and artistic expression. Each of these elements points us to him. This is always important, but particularly so in a society that was mostly illiterate. Art and symbol pointed to him. They also created a point of discussion between parents and children, teachers and students to discuss the character of God.

God is about excellence in all things. Beauty, order and symbol consistently points to him.

Isn't God's word fun to discover? This is Mark Ashton hoping that you discover more of God with every reading of his word.