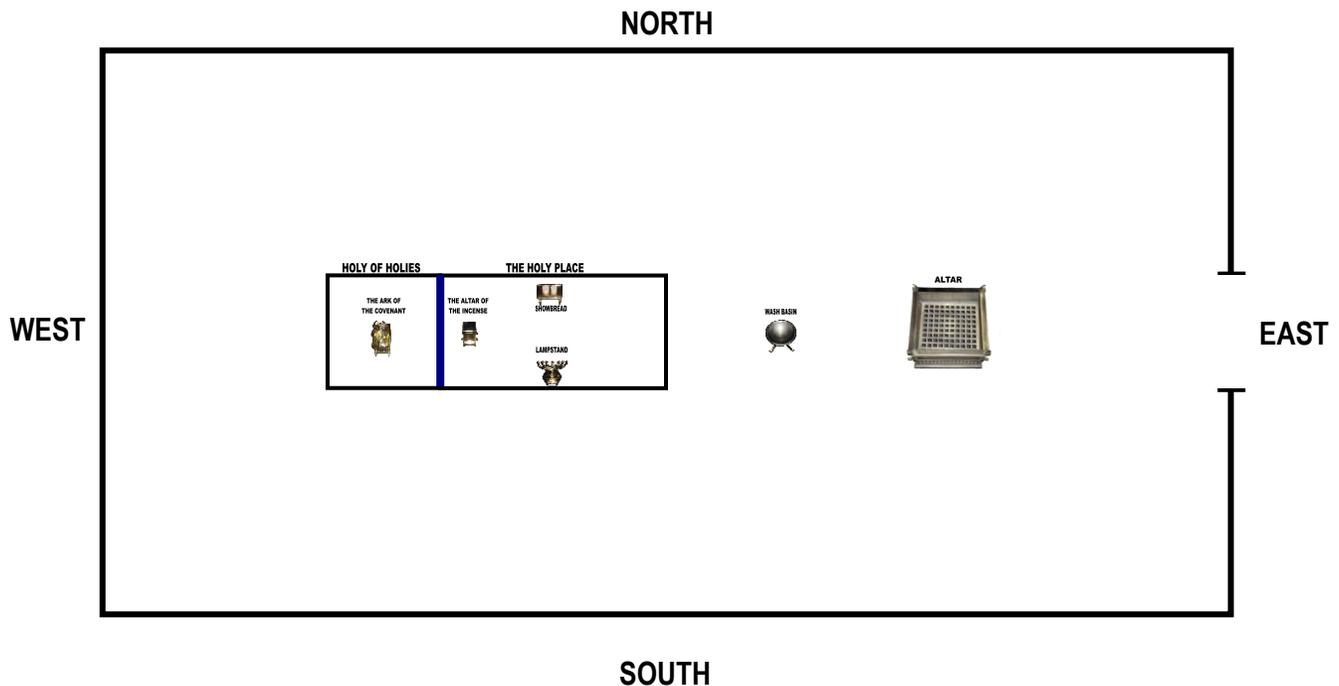


## The Tabernacle

### What was the Tabernacle?

The tabernacle was a portable temple or dwelling place of God. It represented the presence of God among the Israelites from the time they left Egypt until they settled in Canaan and built a permanent temple under the reign of Solomon.

It consisted of a curtained courtyard with a tent inside that contained two rooms. Everything about the tabernacle and all its furniture depicted their relationship with God. All aspects represented both a barrier that existed between them and God due to sin, but also the hope of restored relationship, ultimately fulfilled by Jesus Christ. This session will only attempt to scratch the surface of this understanding, but the topic really deserves much deeper study.



The ultimate goal is to be able to enter the Holy of Holies, the throne room of God. However, between us and the throne room are many barriers that need to be dealt with in order to make access to the presence of God possible.

As you come to each aspect of the tabernacle, discuss the barrier it represents, the hope it provides and how this hope was fulfilled by Jesus Christ

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**THE TABERNACLE as a whole : Exodus 25-30**

**BARRIER:** We cannot see or walk with God.  
Though God was travelling with the Israelites through the wilderness, the tabernacle was a clear picture that they could not simply walk into the presence of God. They were cut off from him, unable to walk with him or talk face to face. This was in contrast to the fact that God used to walk with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8).

**HOPE:** God has made a way to dwell among us despite our sin.

**Jesus is the True Tabernacle**

***John 1:14***

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [tabernacle] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The actual Greek word is not “dwelling” but “tabernacle”. The tabernacle was a portable/mobile dwelling place for the glory of God as the Israelites wandered through the wilderness. Jesus is the new revelation of the glory of God. He is Emmanuel: God with us.

The idea is also that Jesus is leading us into a new exodus experience, but instead of appearing as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, he appears as a man who reveals the glory of God in a personal way.

The Israelites set up their camp surrounding the tabernacle so that it was always at the centre. In the same way, if we are to follow Jesus, he must be at the centre of our lives.

**THE COURTYARD WALL & GATE (150' x 75' x 7')**

**BARRIER:** You cannot approach God any way you desire.  
The twelve tribes of Israel camped around the tabernacle, three tribes on the north, three on the west, the east and the south. The tribes could not simply enter the tabernacle at a point that was most convenient to them. They had to walk to the east side and enter through the one gate.

In our culture there is an errant belief that there are many ways to God. The tabernacle speaks strongly against this idea. The Israelites could not approach God however they wished; they could ONLY come the way he prescribed, from the very direction he described. Otherwise, there would have been gates all around the tabernacle, one for each tribe's specific location. There was only one entrance, only one way to the presence of God.



**HOPE:** God has made a way into his presence.

Jesus is the Gate

**John 10:9 (NIV)**

*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.*

**John 14:6 (NIV)**

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Interestingly, in Revelation 21:13, the New Jerusalem is describe as having twelve gates of access to the throne of God. Since Jesus made a way to restored relationship with God, we have unhindered access to God's throne.

**THE ALTAR** (9' x 9' x 6')

**Why do you think the altar is the first thing an Israelite encounters as he enters the tabernacle?**

The very first thing people would see once coming into the tabernacle is the altar – DEATH. Imagine what it must have been like. How many sacrifices would have been acted out there? Imagine the blood stained ground. Imagine the smell. The picture of Death was not only a concept but a reality you could see, smell and participate in by bringing an animal for slaughter. All of this was because our sin deserves the death penalty.

**BARRIER:** Death is the consequence for our sin.

**HOPE:** God has provided a means to offer a substitute sacrifice.

Instead of us paying the penalty of death, God permitted an animal to be brought in our place. For many, the idea of sacrifice carries with it a sense of loss, but this would not have been the understanding of the Israelite. The fact that an animal could be offered for death, instead of one's self, would have been a huge blessing, a gift of grace, a joyful surrendering. It was only when one forgot the severity of their sin that the sacrifice became an onerous thing.

Jesus is our Substitute Sacrifice



**John 1:29 (NIV)**

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

**1 Peter 3:18 (NIV)**

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*

## **THE WASH BASIN**

The basin provided a very practical service as well as a spiritual one. The priests, after spending a day slaughtering animals would be covered with blood. They had to wash both hands and feet before entering the Holy Place, otherwise they might die before the Lord (Exodus 30:17-21). Washing in the basin would have removed any blood that was on their hands and feet and symbolically cleansed them so they could enter the Holy Place.

**BARRIER:** We are unclean before God.

We are spiritually and morally unclean before God and as a result we cannot enter into his presence.

**HOPE:** God has provided a means to purify us.

By symbolically washing the priests hands and feet, God was saying he would provide a way for them to be spiritually cleansed.

### **Jesus Cleanses Us**

**Hebrews 10:22 (NIV)**

*let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

**Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV)**

*... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

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## THE LAMP STAND

The lamp stand provided a very practical purpose as well as a spiritual one. It was dark in the tent. A priest walking in to perform his duties would need to be able to see what he was doing. But even more so, he would need to see the way to the throne room of God.

One branch in the middle with 3 branches off it to each side.

It gave light to the priests in a dark place to enable them to:

- a) have fellowship with God and
- b) intercede on behalf of the people for their sin.

**BARRIER:** We are walking in darkness and cannot find our way to God.

When one walks in darkness they are not able to find their way to God. They are hopelessly lost. They can not discern truth or which way to head in life.

**HOPE:** God has provided a light to show us the way.

### Jesus is the Light

***John 8:12 (NIV)***

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

## THE SHOWBREAD (3' x 1.5' x 2'3")

**Why do we usually have food at any social gatherings? What role does food play?**

Food brings people together and is a facilitator of fellowship. When people eat it release endorphins in the body, giving us a sense of well-being. When we do this together it creates a sense of community, family and oneness.

There were twelve loaves of bread set out every week (representing the twelve tribes of Israel). The bread was to be eaten at the end of each week, ONLY by the priests and in the Holy Place.

It was called showbread because it was always in God's presence and was symbolic of God's desire for fellowship with us, in his presence.

**BARRIER:** We cannot have fellowship with God.  
Our sin creates a barrier in our relationship with God. We have actually declared ourselves to be his enemies in our minds and behaviour.

**HOPE:** God has provided a means for fellowship to occur.



Jesus makes Fellowship Possible

**John 6:35 (NIV)**

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."*

**1Corinthians 1:9 (NIV)**

*God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

**THE ALTAR OF INCENSE (1.5' x 1.5' x 3')**

The Altar of Incense was positioned right in front of the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. Every morning and evening the priests were to place incense on this altar resulting in a fragrant smoke that would fill the tent. The incense was figurative of the prayers and intercession of the Israelites going to God as a sweet aroma.

A special formula was used that was not to be used for any other application. Blood from the altar of sacrifice was to be placed on the horns of the altar of incense every year. It was only through sacrifice that worship and communication with God was made possible.

Nadab & Abihu once offered unauthorized incense and fire came out and consumed them (Lev 10:1-3).

**BARRIER:** Communication with God is disrupted by our sinfulness. The Israelites were not able to simply ruin into the throne room of God and throw their requests at him. Scripture tells us, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:18). Our sin interferes with our worship and our dialogue with God.

**HOPE:** Through a substitute sacrifice our prayers can go up to God.

Jesus is our Intercessor

**Hebrews 7:25 (NIV)**

*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

Through Jesus' sacrifice, we now have one who intercedes before the Father on our behalf and brings our prayers to him.



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## THE VEIL

According to rabbinic literature (the Mishnah), the curtain may have been a hand-breadth thick (approx. 4 inches). The veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies). Only once a year was the High Priest allowed to enter past the veil into the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the sins of Israel and pray on their behalf.

**BARRIER:** We are separated from the throne room of God.

**Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)**

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

Because of our sin we cannot enter into the presence of God. We cannot come before his throne.

**HOPE:** The throne of God is nearby, just behind the curtain.

### Jesus removes the Barrier

**Mark 15:37-39 (NIV)**

*With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.*

<sup>38</sup> *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*

<sup>39</sup> *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"*

**Hebrews 10:19 (NIV)**

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,*

## THE HOLY OF HOLIES (15' x 15' x 15')

This is the throne room of God. Its dimensions form a perfect cube. No one could enter this room apart from the High Priest, once a year. To do so would result in immediate death.

**BARRIER:** No one is able to enter the throne room of God.

**HOPE:** A representative can go before God on our behalf. Once a year, the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place and offer atonement. He had to wash himself, put on special clothing, burn incense so the smoke would fill the room and shield his eyes, and bring blood to make atonement for Israel's sins.

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## Jesus Brings Us to God's Throne

### **Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)**

*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

It is interesting to note that the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, coming out of heaven is described as a perfect cube (Revelation 21:15-17). If the New Jerusalem is a picture of the people of God, then we are now the Holy of Holies – the dwelling place of God. We are restored as God's representative rulers. In a sense, his throne room is located wherever we are, as his people.

## THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

### **What is an ark?**

An ark is described as something that provides protection or salvation. Noah's ark was essentially a large box that provided salvation for mankind.

### **What is a covenant?**

A covenant is essentially a relationship contract for life.

### **What was the Ark of the Covenant?**

The Ark of the Covenant was a box that represented the Israelite's Covenant relationship with God. It was through the covenant relationship with God that the Israelites received salvation and were called the people of God.

The lid of the Ark was called the Atonement Cover (Mercy Seat) and represented the seat of God's throne. The box is considered God's footstool (1 Chronicles 28:2).

Once a year the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place and sprinkle blood from the altar onto the Atonement Cover (Leviticus 16:14).

### **What does the word "atonement" mean?**

To make atonement means to make amends for one's crimes. It also conveys the idea of removing the wrath of judgment.

**BARRIER:** Covenant with God requires the shedding of blood for our sins. Covenant always requires the shedding of blood and should covenant be broken the death penalty would be invoked. That's why yearly, the High Priest needed to bring the blood of the sacrifice to the Ark of the Covenant to atone for our sin.

**HOPE:** God has established covenant with us and has provided a substitute sacrifice.



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Jesus provides our Atonement

**1 John 2:1-2 (NIV)**

*<sup>1</sup> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

**1) Manna:**

**What was manna?**

As the Israelites escaped from Egypt and entered into the wilderness, it did not take long for them to realize provision in the wilderness was very sparse. They collectively started to grumble and complain, distrusting God's provision for their journey (Exodus 16). In response, God provided miracle bread that would appear as wafers on the ground in the morning. These wafers could be ground and used for bread or a variety of cooking options. However, God only provided enough for each day and the Israelites were to trust him for new provision the next day. Any food they kept over night would spoil and rot, except on the sixth day when they were to collect enough for the Sabbath as well.

**Barrier:** Rejection of God's provision.

The Israelites grumbled about God's miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness. This was symbolic of their ongoing, consistent discontentment with how God graciously provided for them.

**Hope:** God will meet our every need through faith.  
Interestingly, God provided manna for every day of the forty years in the wilderness until the very day they crossed the Jordan River and stepped into the Promised Land.

Jesus is our Provision for Life

**John 6:48-51 (NIV)**

*I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. <sup>50</sup> But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

The Lord's Prayer is interesting in that it asks God to give us each day the bread we need to survive. It does not ask for the next day. It implies a trust that God will provide what we need for each day and we do not need to worry about tomorrow.



## 2) Aaron's Budding Staff:

Israel rose up against Moses and Aaron questioning their right to rule over them (Numbers 16-17). After some extreme confrontation experiences, God settled the issue by having a representative leader from each tribe write their names on their staff and then place them in the tabernacle (Tent of Meeting). Whichever staff sprouted in the morning would be God's indication of his approved leader. The next day Aaron's staff had not only sprouted, but had fully blossomed and produced almonds, firmly establishing his role as High Priest over the people.

**Barrier:** Rejection of God's appointed leadership.  
The Israelites rejected Moses and Aaron as leaders over the Israel nation, claiming they also had every right to lead. They were forgetting that Moses and Aaron were both appointed by God to these positions.

**Hope:** God provides leadership.

### Jesus is our High Priest

#### **Hebrews 6:19-20 (NIV)**

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

Like the staff that was once dead and then was brought back to life, producing much fruit, Jesus also died and was brought back to new life, producing much fruit. This act of resurrection authenticates him as having the right to be our God-appointed leader through life.

## 3) Stone Tablets:

When Moses received the Law from God at Mount Sinai, he presented it orally to the people. At that point they affirmed covenant relationship with God. He then went back up the mountain in order to receive the "hard copy" summary of that law from God. Forty days later when he returned down from the mountain, he discovered that the people had already broken the terms of the covenant and in response he smashed the tablets. God then had him go back up the mountain for a second copy, but this copy Moses had to create himself.

**Barrier:** Rejection of God's holiness. (Exodus 32)

**Hope:** God establishes covenant with us despite our sinfulness



Jesus offers us a new covenant

**Hebrews 9:15 (NIV)**

*For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

**What strikes you most about how God established the Mosaic Law and specifically the tabernacle?**

**We have not had time to reflect on other aspects of tabernacle worship (priesthood, offerings, laws, etc.), but every one of these are pictures that reveal the barriers to and the hope of a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.**

**How might this affect how you read through the Old Testament?**

**HOMEWORK:**

**Spend some time this week reflecting on all God had to do to make it possible for you to be reconciled to him.**