

## THE TABERNACLE, part. 1

*Sanctuary where God could dwell in the midst.*

You'll notice on your bulletin insert is a "Where's Waldo" picture. The goal is to find Waldo, who wears a distinctive red and white striped shirt, glasses, and a wool hat - to pick him out of the crowd. Sometimes you may stare at one of these pictures for a while before finally spotting him or having a friend point him out; and when you finally find Waldo you say "There he is!"



We can do the same thing when we read

in the Old Testament. The Old Testament over and over and over again points to Christ; we might stare at an Old Testament passage for a while, we could read it over and over, but then God - whether directly, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, or indirectly through the instruction of others, will point out his Son, will help us pick him out from the crowd of characters and events and sometimes seemingly trivial details and we'll say "There he is!"

One instance of this is the Tabernacle. Elmer Towns, co-founder of Liberty University, former seminary dean and a prolific writer, has noted in one of his books, "The fullest type in Scripture is that of the tabernacle," before listing 24 types of Christ found in the tabernacle and its furnishings. Now, we are not going to look at all 24 of these, either today or in the next few Sundays in this series; but we want to look at some of these things, both types of Christ Jesus and of New Testament realities that are ours in Christ. And today we're going to look at the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant.

### **The Purpose and Placement of the Tabernacle**

Robert Shannon tells the following story: "Some years ago a church in Carter County Tennessee had an attorney draw up a deed for their property. He wrote the deed naming the Lord God Almighty as the owner. That was fine until some years later the church wanted to sell the property and relocate. But as part of the process of writing such deeds, it is necessary that it be determined that the previous owner could not be found. So the Sheriff was given the papers to sign. He swore that "The Lord God Almighty was not to be found in Carter County Tennessee." Imagine the heyday that followed when local media and churches picked up on that sensational headline - the Lord God Almighty is not to be found in Carter County, Tennessee. Thank God that he is everywhere present, and in a special way, present with his people; and in Exodus 25 we see that God wants to make his dwelling place in the middle of a wilderness with his people Israel.

God gave Moses instructions for the tabernacle; and God told Moses, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." (**Exodus 25:8**) The purpose of the Tabernacle was to serve as God's dwelling place among his people; and notice: *among* them, some translations "in their midst." God has no interest in dwelling distant from his people in some remote place outside the camp, neither is God interested in being Israel's next-door neighbor - he wants to dwell among them, in their midst; a purpose reflected by its placement. In Numbers 2, we read that the camp was configured around the Tabernacle, that God's tent was in the midst of their tents as its focal point: "The Tabernacle will be located at the center of these tribal compounds." (**Numbers 2:2**)

A couple things to learn from the purpose and placement of the Tabernacle.

#### **A. God's Desire**

First, the tabernacle is just one instance that reveals God's desire to be with us and among us, a desire that will reach perfect fulfillment in the New Jerusalem; for we read in Revelation 21, as the

New Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven, “I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, ‘Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.’” (**Revelation 21:3**) John Gill writes about “and he will dwell with them, “in person and not by his Spirit, or by faith, as before, nor as a wayfaring man only for a night.” In that day and through eternity we will rest in the personal presence of God, we will forever inhabit the New Jerusalem, in the midst of which is his throne, and we will look full into his wonderful face and bask in the dazzling brilliance of his divine glory and never suffer the least degree of separation from God.

### ***B. God's Presence***

Second, the tabernacle typifies ways in which God is even now present among us - not in the sense of Revelation 21 in which God makes his tabernacle among men and will be with them in their midst forever, but still his presence with us. First, the tabernacle - this portable temple-tent - typifies the presence of God in every believer; just as God was present in the midst of Israel, he is present in each one of us. In John's gospel Jesus promised, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (**John 14:16-17**) Every believer enjoys the abiding, indwelling presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, who takes up permanent residence in each one of us - forever with and in every child of God; and that's why the apostle Paul writes, “Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? (***How often have you heard someone say “My body is a temple;” but how often we forget the truth that the believer's body is indeed a temple, a temple of the Holy Spirit; and thus the apostle continues***) You do not belong to yourself (***No believer has the right to say, “It's my body, I will do with it as a please, because our body is not our own, we are not its owner, rather***) for God bought you with a high price (***I.e. at the price of his beloved Son***). So you must honor God with your body.” (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**) Honor God with your mouth by singing his praises, sharing the gospel, and speaking words of love and truth to others, whether gentle correction or sound instruction or encouragement. Honor God with your belly, eating so as to nourish your body and have the physical strength to serve him so long as you inhabit this crumbling tabernacle of clay. Honor God with your eyes, using them to look at his creation that declares his glory and displays his eternal power and to read his word. And so on...honor God with your ears and hands and feet because our bodies are not our own, they belong to God and they are temples of his Holy Spirit. Second, the tabernacle typifies the presence of God in his Church; after all, wherever the Church of Jesus Christ is, there is her Lord; “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Right now Christ is right here with us.

### ***God's Dwelling Place ~ Typifies the Incarnation***

Third, the Tabernacle also points to Christ Jesus. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (**John 1:14**) The Greek word here translated “dwelt” literally means “to fix one's tabernacle” and comes from the word for tent or tabernacle; in other words, God pitching his tent in Israel's midst in the Old Testament typifies God in the person of his eternal and only begotten Son pitching his tent in our midst in his Incarnation in the New Testament, making his tabernacle among men as a man.

How does the above apply to us? Very quickly:

1) **We Should Be Encouraged** - The presence of God with us now and that we will enjoy in eternity should encourage us in our daily living. Corrie Ten Boom told how as a young girl, her

father would tuck her in every night for bed; later, when she was in a concentration camp for hiding Jews, she would ask God to tuck her in every night, and she wrote, “That would bring me peace, and I would be able to sleep.” Even in the concentration camp, God was there, comforting his child. If we have been forsaken by friends and family, yet God promises, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (**Hebrews 13:5**) When we feel totally alone, we have our Lord’s assurance, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (**Matthew 28:20**) When we walk into the valley of the shadow of death, why don’t we fear? The Psalmist says, “Because thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” When we are going through financial failure, relationship ruin, death’s doorway - we are not going there alone, for God is with us.

2) **We Should Be Aware** - If we are aware of God’s presence with us individually and together as his house, as the one body of Christ Jesus under our living head and only Lord; if we lived in this constant awareness of God’s abiding presence, don’t you think that would inform how we live? If we lived in the constant awareness that God in the person of his Holy Spirit was with us and in us forever, and that our bodies were sanctified unto God who bought them as temples of the Holy Spirit, don’t you think that would affect what we watch and what we listen to and how we use our mouths and hands and feet and so on? And when we gather together for worship and fellowship, how do you think the awareness of Christ’s presence in our midst would affect our how we worship and fellowship?

3) **We Should Open** - God will not force anyone to enjoy his presence. If someone really wants nothing to do with God, if they have shut and dead-bolted the door of their heart against God, he will not kick the door in. In Revelation, Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (**Revelation 3:20**) If you want to enjoy the presence of God with you and in you now through all eternity, then open the door to Christ who stands knocking; and know that if you reject him, you automatically accept the only alternative - to spend eternity alienated from God in the torment of hell.

## **The Ark of the Covenant**

### **A. God’s Throne ~ dwelling in the Holy of Holies**

The ark of the covenant served as God’s earthly throne; and it pointed to the throne which served as its pattern - God’s throne in heaven. The Psalmist writes, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever...” (**Psalms 45:6**) and “God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.” (**Psalms 47:8**) Our God reigns - the Sovereign, Eternal King; and nothing happens outside his knowledge and will. The world seems out of control and is filled with circumstances that lie outside our ability to control - what can you or I do to stymie Iran’s nuclear aspirations, to prevent the persecution of our brethren the world over, to stave off natural calamities, etc., etc. We can’t control, but we know the one who does control.

#### **a The Ark Itself—The Incarnation**

Look at the ark itself: “Make an Ark of acacia wood...Overlay it inside and outside with pure gold.” (**Exodus 25:10-11**) Here we again see the incarnate Son of God. We have a base material - wood, which can warp or dry-rot; and we have a precious metal - gold, treasured for its rarity and non-corrosiveness; the two of them together make the ark. Likewise, in the person of Jesus Christ we have two natures - a humanity, which can suffer temptation and pain and mortality; and Deity - holy, immortal, eternal, only one God. The ark’s composition points to the incarnation.



#### **b The Ark’s Lid—The Atonement**

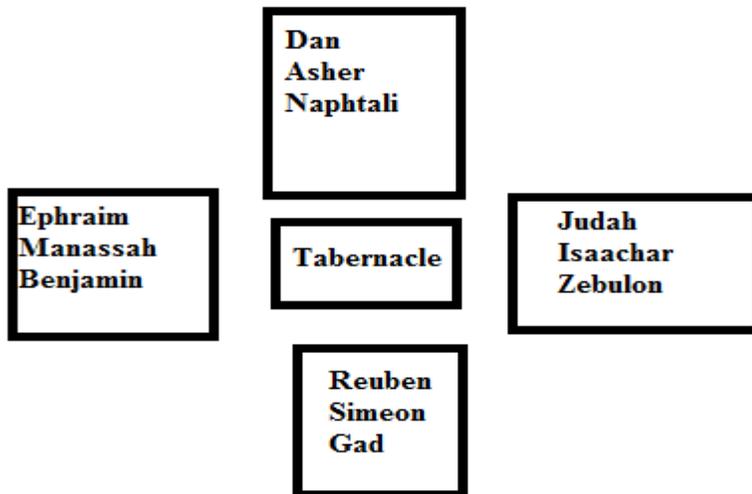
Next, look at its lid, or the atonement cover. We read, “Make an atonement cover of pure gold...” (**Exodus 25:17**) The atonement cover was where the Old Testament high priest would sprinkle the blood of bulls and goats on the Day of Atonement, for the atonement, that is the covering over or purging - of his own sins and the sins of all the people - “Then he must dip his finger into the blood of the bull and sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover and then seven times against the front of the Ark. Then Aaron must slaughter the goat as a sin offering for the people and bring its blood behind the inner curtain (*Which we will talk about on another Sunday; but inside the tabernacle there was the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place; and they were divided by this curtain.*). There he will sprinkle the blood on the atonement cover and against the front of the Ark, just as he did with the bull's blood.” (**Leviticus 16:14-15**)

The atonement cover reminds us that atonement needs to be made for sins; and the High Priest, going behind the curtain and sprinkling the atonement cover year after year with the blood of bulls and goats points to our great High Priest, Christ Jesus. “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here (*the realities pointed to by their Old Testament types*), he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.” (**Hebrews 9:11-12**) It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, and though the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place and sprinkle the atonement cover with animal blood year after year, century after century, those gallons upon gallons of blood could not make the worshippers perfect, could not purge their sins and cleanse their consciences of guilt - they were still sinful and still guilty; “but the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin,” (**1 John 1:7**) and Hebrews 9 tells us that Jesus our Great High Priest entered into the true Most Holy Place in the Heavenly Tabernacle, and sprinkled his blood on the atonement cover, his blood that does wash away all our sin and guilt.

## **CLOSING**

At the beginning, I said that Christ is to be found all over the pages of the Old Testament, and that as we looked at the Tabernacle and its furnishings we would see types of many New Testament realities and of Christ - how so many things about the tabernacle, the tabernacle itself, its sacred furnishings - they point to him. Here's one more example for this morning. We saw that Numbers 2 explains how the camp should be set up, and perhaps you've read Numbers 2 and didn't catch this before - but even the layout of the camp points us to Jesus.

"Each tribe will be assigned its own area in the camp, and the various groups will camp beneath their family banners. The Tabernacle will be located at the center of these tribal compounds. The divisions of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun are to camp toward the sunrise on the east side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners...The divisions of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad are to camp on the south side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners...The divisions of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin are to camp on the west side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners...The divisions of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali are to camp on the north side of the Tabernacle, beneath their family banners."



If we had an aerial view of the camp, we would see a gigantic cross in the wilderness. All through the Old Testament, God is pointing out the cross and his Son who died thereon, and so ought we - for without the cross and Jesus, there is no salvation.

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