

The tabernacle is the church

BY ANDY HASTINGS

It has been said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. The first verse of the 10th chapter in the book of Hebrews describes the Old Testament as a shadow and the New Testament as the very image. From the beginning of time, God has gradually revealed His plan of salvation to mankind, but it isn't until the installment of the New Testament that the world could finally and completely understand what was there in the Old Testament all along. Even though the New Testament is the final authority for the world today, complete understanding of God's will can only be accomplished when the Old and New Testaments are studied together.

Even before Adam and Eve had brought sin into the world, God had a plan for the salvation of mankind. After the rebellion in the garden, God revealed the very first crumb of that plan in the first Messianic prophecy of Genesis 3:15, "*I shall put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*" God was speaking to Satan and foretold the coming of a Savior sometime in the distant future. The birth of the Savior would be a miraculous, virgin birth (*seed of woman*, see also Isaiah 7:14), and there would be a great spiritual battle that would take place, resulting in the crucifixion of the Savior (*bruised heel*, see also Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53), but a spiritual death-blow to the *head* would be delivered to Satan (the resurrection of that Savior from the dead, see also Psalm 16:10).

From that moment forward, after that first veiled prophecy in Genesis 3:15, the Bible unfolds a continuing thread of events following the lineage of Christ, chronicling God's interaction with man through commands and prophecies that ultimately culminates in the revealing of the Messiah to the world (Galatians 4:4).

The Old Testament was filled with symbolic types and shadows of the New Testament designed to condition the world (especially the nation of Israel, since the gospel would be preached to them first) for the Messiah. Now we are going to take a look at one of the symbolic shadows of the New Testament that is found in the Old – the tabernacle.

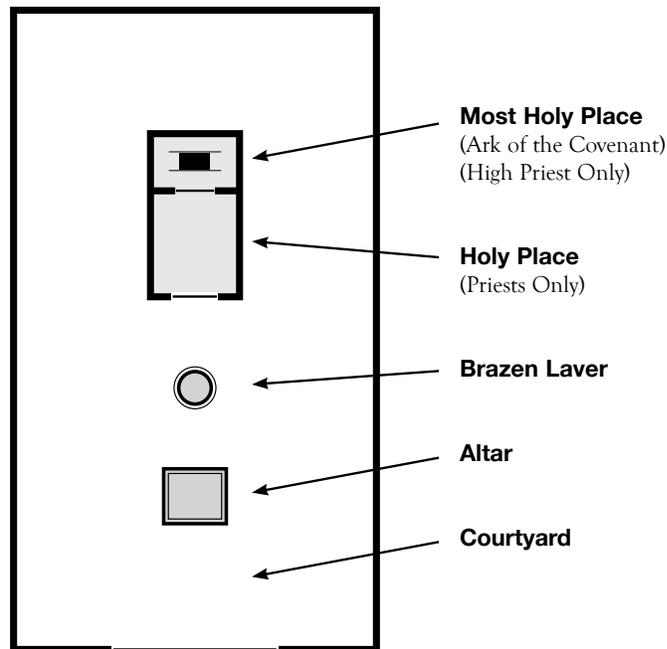


The tabernacle was a mobile place of worship for the Levitical priests as the Israelites journeyed from Mt. Sinai, through the wandering in the wilderness and finally into the promised land. The tabernacle itself was an elaborate tent surrounded by a wall of fabric, suspended by posts, with a gate at one end which allowed the Israelites to come and go, bringing their sacrifices to the priests. In the front part of the courtyard, the priests would kill, then burn the sacrifices on a big altar. A brazen laver holding clean water sat in front of the entrance to the tabernacle, and the priests were not allowed to enter the tabernacle without washing first. Only the priests were allowed entrance into the tabernacle, and only the high priest was allowed into the “Most Holy Place,” the back room of the tabernacle containing the ark of the covenant, once a year to offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people.

Regarding the Most Holy Place, the writer of the book of Hebrews says, *“But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience...”* (Hebrews 9:7-9).

The Hebrew writer clearly states that the tabernacle is “symbolic” of something. By reading further, we can see just what the tabernacle was symbolic of. *“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”* (Hebrews 9:11, 12).

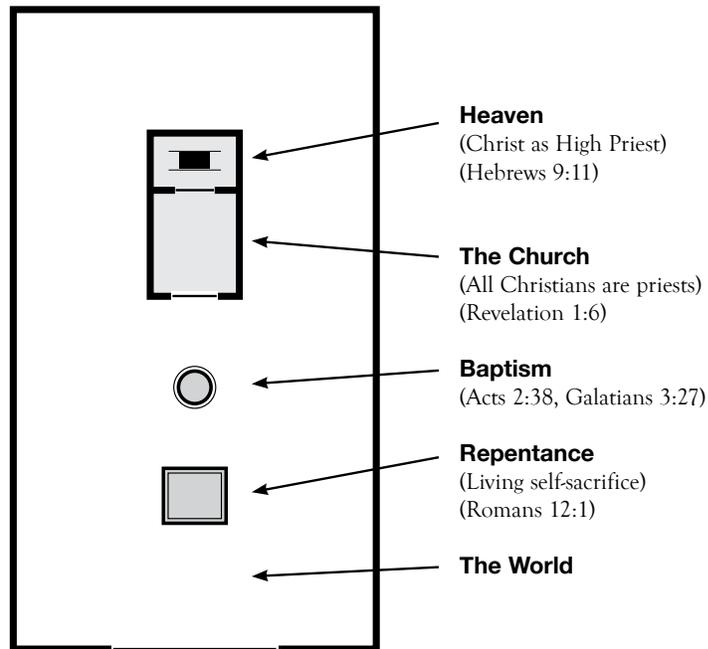
The Old Testament Tabernacle



Also Hebrews 8, verses 1-5, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’ ”

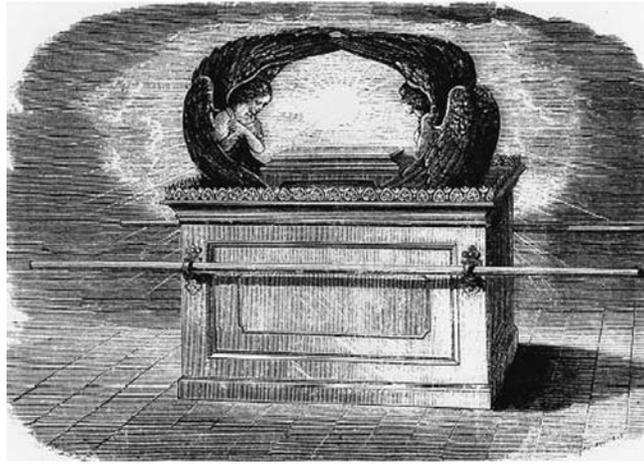
The second verse in Hebrews chapter 8 says the Lord came to erect the true tabernacle. In Matthew 16:18, Christ said He came to build His church. So the true tabernacle is the church that Christ built. Also notice verse 5 of Hebrews chapter 8, still in the context of this true tabernacle, we’re reminded what was told to Moses concerning the first one, “See that you make all things according to the pattern.” If the first tabernacle, which was only symbolic of the true one to come, had such strict instructions on the pattern to be followed, isn’t it logical that the final and true tabernacle would have a pattern as well? Some people ridicule this idea and call it “pattern theology.” The Bible simply presents it as the will of God.

The New Testament Church



The symbolism of the tabernacle is this:

1. The courtyard represents the world. They are lost because of sin and in need of God's forgiveness (Romans 3:23).
2. The altar, upon which sacrifices were given, represents repentance. Romans 12:1 teaches that our lives are to be presented to God as "living sacrifices."
3. The laver represents baptism. Just as the priests were not allowed to enter the tabernacle without first washing, neither can a person enter the church without washing away their sins (Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:27).
4. The first room of the tabernacle represents the church. Only priests were allowed into the tabernacle. Revelation 1:6 shows that all Christians are New Testament priests. Since Christianity is a learned religion, one can only become a Christian after learning the will of God. After one learns that will and obeys it from the heart, he is expected to be prepared to turn around and teach the New Law to others, just as the Levitical priests were expected to teach the Old Law (1 Peter 3:15).
5. The second room of the tabernacle, the Most Holy Place, represents heaven. Christ, our High Priest, has gone in once for all to place that ultimate sacrifice on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant and reigns in heaven as our Prophet, Priest and King where all the faithful will one day join Him (Hebrews 9:11).



If you've seen the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, then you're at least somewhat familiar with the ark of the covenant, the centerpiece of the Most Holy Place. It is where the high priest would go once a year to place a sacrifice to God upon what was called "the mercy seat" between the two carved angels on behalf of the Israelites for their sins. If the tabernacle is symbolic of the church, then what was the significance of this centerpiece of the holiest room in the tabernacle? What did the ark of the covenant symbolize?

The bottom chest-like portion of the ark is symbolic of the world. It contained (among a few other things) God's law to Israel. Man is expected to keep God's law, and the consequence of violating it is the punishment of spiritual death (separation from God). In Exodus 25:18 we read the instructions given to Moses to construct two cherubim of gold to be placed on either side of the mercy seat. The mercy seat is the flat area between the cherubim where the high priest would place a sacrifice once a year for the sins of the people. As we study the Bible, we learn that angels are many times used as messengers from God. The cherubim seem to be a warrior-type angel used to deliver God's final message of wrath upon a wicked group of people. These cherubim atop the ark represent God's final wrath on a rebellious and sinful world.

We are introduced to the cherubim in Genesis 3:24 after Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden. Cherubim are placed to guard it – no one enters it again. In Ezekiel chapter 10, we're given a description of the cherubim that are nothing like the images we see painted on the ceilings of Catholic cathedrals and cute Valentine's Day cards. In 2 Samuel 24:15, 16, after David's unauthorized census, God's death-angel killed 70,000 men in Israel for punishment. In 2 Kings 19:34, 35, in one night, the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. In Genesis chapter 19, God sends two angels to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The only thing keeping the cherubim from executing God's judgement and destroying the world because of sinful man is the ultimate sacrifice that would eventually be placed on that symbolic mercy seat.

In Matthew 26:53, during the arrest of Jesus before His crucifixion, Jesus tells Peter to put away his sword for, if He wanted, Jesus could have called more than twelve legions of angels to His aid. A legion is anywhere from 3-6 thousand. Twelve legions could have been up to seventy-two thousand angels. If the Savior had decided not to go to the cross, the universe would have been destroyed in an instant.

Many of the first-century Jews and all of the modern-day Premillennialist miss the role that Jesus played as the Messiah. They expected a political savior, someone who would militarily free the nation of Israel from its oppressors. They were short-sighted and materialistic in their view and had forgotten that the promise given to Abraham was that ALL the nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed (the Messiah) (Genesis 22:18). The great blessing was not reserved for just the tiny nation of Israel alone. Even the apostles had this false view at first and said such to the Christ after His resurrection (Luke 24:21). The Bible teaches that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the world, came to give mankind what we all desperately needed most – a way of reconciliation back to God, mercy and forgiveness of sins. He humbled Himself in the form of a man and gave His life as the final and perfect sacrifice to be symbolically placed on that mercy seat to hold off God's judgement a little longer, giving the world time to repent. Today He extends His mercy to whomever will simply believe that He is the Christ and obey His commands as contained in His New Testament. Just as the blood of the lamb, in Exodus chapter 12, allowed the Lord's death-angel to "pass over" those houses in Egypt which had the blood applied to the door, only those that have the blood of God's perfect Lamb applied to them through baptism in Christ will have the death-angel "pass over" them in the last day.

The Bible has a lot to say about God's mercy, but it also has a lot to say about a coming great day. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 says, *"... since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."*

One day the time for mercy will end, and the cherubim will be unleashed to execute God's devastating final wrath. Are you ready for that day?