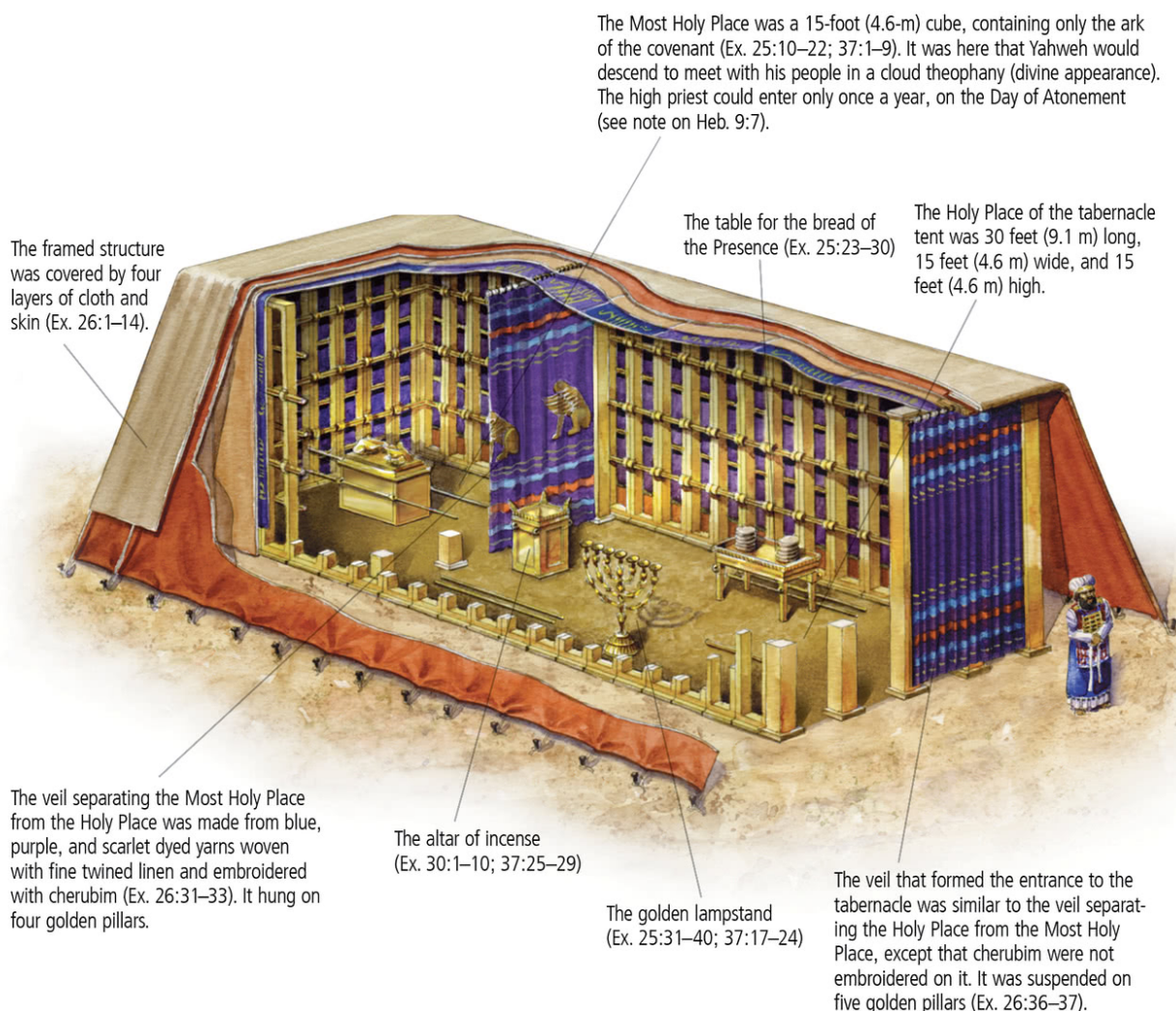


Worship by God's Design - Studies on The Tabernacle

Midweek Teaching Series

Part 4 - The Holy Place

Read: Exodus 25: 23-40



The Most Holy Place

Our studies so far have taken us behind the curtain to the Most Holy Place, where the ark of God would sit. The ark was perhaps the most important component of the tabernacle and its furniture and the clearest symbol of the divine presence. The Lord promised to meet His people at the ark, above its mercy seat, and when it was not being transported, the ark was placed in the Most Holy Place, where God made His presence most felt under the old covenant. In Exodus 25:22 God says to Moses,

There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

There was no other furniture behind the curtain and it was only once a year when the high priest could enter and approach it, on the Day of Atonement.

The next part of the Tabernacle was called the Holy Place. The Holy Place is where the high priest and other priests would carry out their duties to enable the worship of the Children of Israel and it housed three pieces of furniture: the lampstand, the altar of incense and the table for the bread of the Presence. These

pieces of furniture had significant purpose for the Children of Israel in their worship of God and point to a coming Messiah who would redeem God's people.

A Table for Bread



Exodus 25: 23-30 describes what has been called the “table of showbread” or the “table of the bread of the Presence” because the priests placed bread on it. According to Exodus 25: 23-24, this table was made of acacia wood covered with gold with similar but smaller dimensions than the ark of the covenant, being about thirty-six inches long, eighteen inches wide, and twenty-seven inches tall, assuming that one cubit equals eighteen inches. Like the ark, the table had a ring on each of its legs so that two acacia wood poles covered with gold could be inserted, one on each side of the table, for transporting it. Unlike the ark, the table probably had its poles removed whenever the people came to a resting place and set

up the tabernacle as the text does not say that the poles could never be taken out of the rings. Like the ark, the table featured a decorative moulding on its edges. Various dishes used to hold incense and drink offerings for use in worship were placed on the table (v. 29).

“You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the LORD. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due.”

Leviticus 24:5–9

The bread of the Presence (v. 30), was also placed on the table. Leviticus 24: 5-9 gives us more information about the bread and tells us that Aaron—the high priest—arranged twelve loaves on the table every Sabbath and that Aaron and his sons—the priests of Israel—alone could eat it. Most likely, the bread reminded the Israelites of God's provision of bread in the wilderness and for the Lord sustaining their crops and thus their food more generally. That there were twelve loaves may point to the twelve-month or yearly agricultural cycle, and it probably also pointed to the twelve tribes of Israel themselves as an offering unto the Lord. Exodus 6:7 tells us clearly that Israel belonged to God and the bread became a visible reminder of this.

The bread points us to what we celebrate as Communion. The ultimate fulfilment of all covenant meals is the Last Supper Jesus celebrated with his disciples. The Lord's Supper is a meal that allows us to celebrate and remember God's new covenant with his people. As Luke 22: 19-20 tells us,

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

The Lampstand of Pure Gold

In the Holy Place there would be a lampstand to provide light. This lampstand was to be made of pure gold and to consist of one piece. In other words, it was not to be made of different components that could be disassembled for transporting the lampstand and reassembled when the tabernacle was again set up. Most likely, the various components of the lampstand were fashioned separately and then fused into a single piece with heat and hammering, as that was the common means of creating ornate gold sculptures in those days.



From the description of the lampstand in verses 32–36, we see that it resembled

a stylised tree with almond blossoms, having a single trunk and three branches attached to each side of it. Seven lamps of pure gold were also made to be placed in the cups on the lampstand, one lamp on each branch and the trunk, and they were set there to provide light in front of the stand. This was for the benefit of the priests so that the priests could see what they were doing. As the priests did their work in the tabernacle under the illumination of the lampstand, they—and all Israel by extension— would be reminded that true light and life are found only in the presence of God. John 1: 4-5 points this out by saying of Jesus Christ,

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The passage concludes in verse 40 with a reminder that the Israelites had to fashion the tabernacle components exactly according to the Lord's directions. As we know Christ as the light of the world and as our Saviour, we must follow his commands in all of life, even under the new covenant. Matthew Henry comments,

"All his ordinances must be administered according to his institutions. Christ's instruction to his disciples (Matt. 28:20) is similar to this: Observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Application for Today

The two pieces of furniture in the Holy Place point us to Jesus and how we live for him and worship him today. The table for the bread of the presence points us to his sacrificial death on Calvary's cross. As we know in Old Testament worship the sacrifice for sin was made on the Day of Atonement, once a year, so that the people as a community would know forgiveness. Christ's death was once for all, as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

As we worship today we must always recognise what Christ has done for us so that we can be assured of the forgiveness of sins.

The lampstand of pure gold points us to Christ's ministry at work in our lives. As Jesus himself says in John 8:12,

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

He is the light that not only illuminates our way, but shines the light of truth so that we may know what his good and pleasing will is.

Questions for Further Study

1. What significance does the Lord's Supper have for you?
2. How do you live daily in the light of the Saviour?
3. How can greater understanding of the Holy Place draw you closer to God as you live for him?