

TABERNACLE (1)

The tent that served as a place of worship for the nation of Israel during their early history. On Mount Sinai, after the Lord had given the commandments, judgments, and ordinances to Moses, He instructed Moses to construct the tabernacle. This was to be a center for worship and a place where the people could focus upon the presence of the Lord. This tabernacle was to replace the temporary tent that had been pitched outside the camp (Ex. 33:7–11). God began the description of this building by giving His people the opportunity to participate in its construction. They did this by giving an offering of the needed materials, including a combination of rare and beautiful fabrics and precious metals, along with supplies easily available in the wilderness.

After describing the offering (Ex. 25:1–9), the Lord proceeded to specify in minute detail the pattern for the tabernacle. He began by giving a description of the holiest item in the entire structure: the ARK OF THE COVENANT (Ex. 25:10–22). Other items in the tabernacle for which the Lord gave minute construction details included the seven-branched lampstand (Ex. 25:31–39); the intricate curtains of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:1–25); the veils, and the screen (Ex. 26:1–37); the large bronze altar of burnt offering (Ex. 27:1–8); and the hangings for the courtyard (Ex. 27:9–19). A brief recipe for the oil to be used in worship is given in Exodus 27:20–21, followed by a description of the priests' garments and consecration (Exodus 28–29). Directions for making the golden incense altar are given in Exodus 30:1–10. After a brief statement about a tax assessment (Ex. 30:11–16), the Lord told Moses to build a bronze laver (Ex. 30:17–21).

Mixed in with these instructions about specific items of the tabernacle are plans for the architecture and design of the building. The tabernacle was in the form of a tent 10 cubits wide and 30 cubits long. It was to be set up with its only entrance toward the east. The tent consisted of a wooden framework made of 46 identical planks 10 cubits long and 1 1/2 cubits wide; there were 20 planks each on the north and south sides. Six of the planks were on the west end, along with two additional planks that were 1/2 cubit wide. All of these planks were acacia wood plated with gold.

Over this framework were four separate coverings that made up the roof of the structure. The first covering was made of fine-twined linen of blue, scarlet, and purple with intricately portrayed CHERUBIM. The second covering was of pure white goats' hair. The third was of rams' skins dyed red. The topmost covering was of material referred to in the NKJV as badger skins. Other English translations suggest that this should be translated porpoise skins, skins of sea cows, or possibly leather. The tent constructed in this manner was then divided into two rooms divided by an intricate veil of blue, scarlet, and purple linen embroidered with cherubim.

The inner, western room was called the HOLY OF HOLIES. It was 10 cubits square, and it contained only one piece of furniture—the holiest item in the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was a chest made of acacia wood covered with gold, 2 1/2 cubits long and 1 1/2 cubits in width and height. In addition, a gold border extended above the top of the ark to keep the lid stationary. The ark also had golden rings on each side so it could be transported with poles that were placed through the rings. The lid of the ark was called the MERCY SEAT. Upon it were two gold cherubim that faced each other. The ark contained a copy of the stone tablets with the TEN COMMANDMENTS, a gold pot filled with MANNA; and Aaron's rod that budded.

The outer, eastern room was called the Holy Place. Ten cubits wide and 20 cubits long, it was entered through the blue, scarlet, and purple linen curtains that served as a door. This door was always aligned toward the east. It contained three items. On its western side, next to the veil, was the altar of incense, or golden altar, one cubit square and two cubits high. Upon this altar, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, the morning and evening incense was burned.

On the southern side of the Holy Place was the seven-branched golden lampstand, or candlestick, comprised of a pedestal, a shaft, and three branches extending to both sides of the shaft. This lampstand was made of a talent of fine gold. On the northern side of the Holy Place was the table for the SHOWBREAD, or bread of the Presence. This table was made of gold-covered acacia wood two cubits long, one cubit wide, and one and one-half cubits high.

Surrounding the main building of the tabernacle was a spacious courtyard 100 cubits long in its east-west direction and 50 cubits wide from north to south. This courtyard was surrounded by a fence five cubits high, formed of bronze pillars with silverwork, resting in bronze sockets, placed five cubits apart, and hung with fine linen. In the western half of this courtyard the tabernacle itself was to be pitched, and in the eastern half stood two items—the altar of burnt offering or the great bronze altar, and the laver.

The description of the actual building of the tabernacle is recorded in Exodus 35–40. The workers were first enlisted. Then the building of each item of the tabernacle is described in Exodus 36–39. The record of the tabernacle's construction occurs in Exodus 40. Up to this time, the nation of Israel had used a temporary tent called the tabernacle of the congregation; it is mentioned in Exodus 33:7–11. The tabernacle continued to be called the tabernacle of the congregation, among other names, after its construction. When the Israelites pitched camp in the wilderness, the tabernacle was to be placed in the center, with the Levites camping next to it (Num. 1:53). Then the tribes were to be arrayed in specific order on the four sides of the tabernacle (Numbers 2).

1Ronald F. Youngblood, general editor; F.F. Bruce and R.K. Harrison, consulting editors, *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary: An authoritative one-volume reference work on the Bible with full color illustrations [computer file], electronic edition of the revised edition of Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary, Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.*

Responsibilities for the care and moving of the tabernacle were delegated to various families of the tribe of Levi (Num. 1:50–52; Numbers 3–4). The Levitical family of Kohath was to disassemble the structure and cover the tabernacle furnishings with the badger skins. The tapestries were the responsibility of the family of Gershon. Merari's family had charge of the boards, pillars, foundations, pins, and cords. All these Levitical families were commissioned to care for the sanctuary. The first day of tabernacle worship is described in Numbers 7–9. The guiding pillar of cloud and fire rested upon the tabernacle when the people were encamped. When the people were on the march, with the pillar serving as their guide, the tribes that camped on the east of the tabernacle were first in marching order. These were Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The tabernacle was carried by the assigned family members of Gershon and Merari.

The next group in the marching order were the tribes that camped on the south of the tabernacle. These were Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. Following these, the family of Kohath carried the holy objects of the tabernacle. Then came the tribes that camped on the west of the tabernacle. These were Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. The rear guard of the march was composed of the tribes that camped on the north of the tabernacle. These were Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

When the tribes were camped, two silver trumpets were used to summon the tribes to gather at the tabernacle. The tabernacle was also the place where the 70 elders advised and counseled the people (Num. 11:16). It was also the place of specific judgments (Num. 12:4) and appointments (Deut. 31:14).

During the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, the tabernacle remained at Gilgal, while the ark of the covenant was evidently carried from place to place with the armies of Israel. The ark was reported at the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 3:6), at Gilgal (Josh. 4:11), at the conquest of Jericho (Josh. 6:4), at the campaigns against Ai (Josh. 7:6), and at Mount Ebal (Josh. 8:33). The tabernacle was finally placed on the site it was to occupy during the duration of the period of conquest and judges, at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1). Here the tribes were assigned their territorial allotments.

As the years passed, certain other structures were added to the tabernacle while it remained at Shiloh. These included living quarters for the priests and Levites who served at the tabernacle. By the end of the period of the judges, during the administration of Eli, at least some of the attendants lived on the premises (1 Sam. 3:3). During the Israelites' battle against the Philistines at Aphek, the ark of the covenant was removed from the tabernacle and taken into battle. Lost to the Philistines, it finally came to rest at Kirjath Jearim (1 Sam. 4:1–7:1). It remained here until the time of David's reign.

With the departure of the ark, the tabernacle lost some of its esteem in the eyes of the Hebrew people (Ps. 78:60). During the reign of Saul, the tabernacle was at Nob (1 Sam. 21:1). From the latter part of David's reign throughout the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the tabernacle was at the high place of Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:39; 21:29). When the Temple was completed, Solomon had the Levites bring the tabernacle to Jerusalem (1 Kin. 8:4; 2 Chr. 5:5), presumably to be stored in the Temple area.

The New Testament uses some terminology and concepts drawn directly from the tabernacle. The supreme event of all the ages is the existence of God's son in human form. The Bible declares that the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" (Greek word rendered as "dwelt" in the NKJV) among us (John 1:14). In his final speech, Stephen accepted the Old Testament account of the tabernacle as historical (Acts 7:44). In Romans 3:25, Paul used the word "propitiation," which might also be translated "mercy seat." Titus 3:5 probably refers to the laver. Revelation 8:3–5 speaks of the golden incense altar. In Revelation 13:6 and 15:5, reference is made to the heavenly tabernacle. Practically every feature of the tabernacle is found in the Book of Hebrews.

TABERNACLE (2)

The tabernacle was the *tent of Jehovah*, called by the same name as the tents of the people in the midst of which it stood. It was also called the *sanctuary* and the *tabernacle of the congregation*. The first ordinances given to Moses, after the proclamation of the outline of the law from Sinai, related to the ordering of the tabernacle, its furniture and its service, as the type which was to be followed when the people came to their own home and "found a place" for the abode of God. During the forty days of Moses' first retirement with God in Sinai, an exact pattern of the whole was shown him, and all was made according to it. Ex. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 39:32, 42–43; Num. 8:4; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5. The description of this plan is preceded by an account of the freewill offerings which the children of Israel were to be asked to make for its execution.

I. THE TABERNACLE ITSELF.—

1. *Its name.*—It was first called a *tent* or *dwelling*, Ex. 25:8, because Jehovah, as it were, abode there. It was often called *tent* or *tabernacle* from its external appearance.
2. **Its materials.**—The materials were—(a) Metals: gold, silver, and brass. (b) Textile fabrics: blue, purple, scarlet, and fine (white) linen, for the production of which Egypt was celebrated; also a fabric of goat's hair, the produce of their own flocks. (c) Skins: of the ram, dyed red, and of the badger. (d) Wood: the shittim wood, the timber of the wild acacia of the desert itself, the tree of the "burning bush." (e) Oil, spices, and incense for anointing the priests and burning in the tabernacle. (f) Gems: onyx stones and the precious stones for the breastplate of the high priest. The people gave jewels, and plates of gold and silver and brass; wood, skins, hair, and linen; the women wove; the rulers offered precious stones, oil, spices, and incense; and the artists soon had more than they needed. Ex. 25:1–8; 35:4–29; 36:5–7. The superintendence of the work was intrusted to Bezaleel, of the tribe of Judah, and to Aholiab, of the tribe of Dan, who were skilled in "all manner of workmanship." Ex. 31:2, 6; 35:30, 34.

2William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet, *Smith's Bible dictionary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997.

3. **Its structure.**—The tabernacle was to comprise three main parts—the tabernacle more strictly so called, its tent and was to be of red ram-skins and seal-skins, Ex. 25:5, and was spread over the goat’s-hair tent as an additional protection against the weather. It was an oblong rectangular structure, 30 cubits in length by 10 in width (45 feet by 15), and 10 in height; the interior being divided into two chambers, the first or outer, of 20 cubits in length, the inner, of 10 cubits, and consequently an exact cube. The former was the *holy place*, or *first tabernacle*, Heb. 9:2, containing the golden candlestick on one side, the table of shew-bread opposite, and between them in the centre the altar of incense. The latter was the *most holy place*, or the *holy of holies*, containing the ark, surmounted by the cherubim, with the two tables inside. The two sides and the farther or west end were enclosed by boards of shittim wood overlaid with gold, twenty on the north and twenty on the south side, six on the west side, and the cornerboards doubled. They stood upright, edge to edge, their lower ends being made with tenons, which dropped into sockets of silver, and the corner-boards being coupled at the top with rings. They were furnished with golden rings, through which passed bars of shittim wood, overlaid with gold, five to each side, and the middle bar passing from end to end, so as to brace the whole together. Four successive coverings of curtains looped together were placed over the open top and fell down over the sides. The first or inmost was a splendid fabric of linen, embroidered with figures of cherubim in blue, purple, and scarlet, and looped together by golden fastenings. It seems probable that the ends of this set of curtains hung down *within* the tabernacle, forming a sumptuous tapestry. The second was a covering of goat’s hair; the third, of ram-skins dyed red; and the outermost, of badger-skins (so called in our version; but the Hebrew word probably signifies seal-skins). It has been commonly supposed that these coverings were thrown over the wall, as a pall is thrown over a coffin; but this would have allowed every drop of rain that fell on the tabernacle to fall through; for, however tightly the curtains might be stretched, the water could never run over the edge, and the sheep-skins would only make the matter worse, as when wetted their weight would depress the centre, and probably tear any curtain that could be made. There can be no reasonable doubt that the tent had a ridge, as all tents have had from the days of Moses down to the present time. The front of the sanctuary was closed by a hanging of fine linen, embroidered in blue, purple, and scarlet, and supported by golden hooks on five pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold and standing in brass sockets; and the covering of goat’s hair was so made as to fall down over this when required. A more sumptuous curtain of the same kind, embroidered with cherubim, hung on four such pillars, with silver sockets, divided the holy from the most holy place. It was called the veil (Sometimes the *second veil*, either in reference to the first, at the entrance of the holy place, or as being the veil of the second sanctuary. Heb. 9:3.), as it hid from the eyes of all but the high priest the inmost sanctuary, where Jehovah dwelt on his mercy-seat, between the cherubim above the ark. Hence “to enter within the veil” is to have the closest access to God. It was only passed by the high priest once a year, on the Day of Atonement, in token of the mediation of Christ, who with his own blood hath entered for us within the veil which separates God’s own abode from earth. Heb. 6:19. In the temple, the solemn barrier was at length profaned by a Roman conqueror, to warn the Jews that the privileges they had forfeited were “ready to vanish away”; and the veil was at last rent by the hand of God himself, at the same moment that the body of Christ was rent upon the cross, to indicate that the entrance into the holiest of all is now laid open to all believers “by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” Heb. 10:19–20. The holy place was only entered by the priests daily, to offer incense at the time of morning and evening prayer, and to renew the lights on the golden candlesticks; and on the Sabbath, to remove the old shew-bread, and to place the new upon the table.

II. **THE SACRED FURNITURE AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE TABERNACLE.**—These are described in separate articles, and therefore it is only necessary to give a list of them here.

In the outer court. The *altar of burnt offering* and the *brazen laver*. [ALTAR; LAVER.] 2. In the holy place. The furniture of the court was connected with sacrifice; that of the sanctuary itself with the deeper mysteries of mediation and access to God. the first sanctuary contained three objects: the *altar of incense* in the centre, so as to be directly in front of the ark of the covenant, 1 Kings 6:22, the *table of shew-bread* on its right or north side, and the *golden candlestick* on the left or south side. These objects were all considered as being placed before the presence of Jehovah, who dwelt in the holiest of all, though with the veil between. [ALTAR; SHEW-BREAD; CANDLESTICK.] 3. In the holy of holies, within the veil, and shrouded in darkness, there was but one object, the *ark of the covenant*, containing the two tables of stone, inscribed with the Ten Commandments. [ARK.]

III. **THE COURT OF THE TABERNACLE**, in which the tabernacle itself stood, was an oblong space, 100 cubits by 50 (*i.e.*, 150 feet by 75), having its longer axis east and west, with its front to the east. It was surrounded by canvas screens—in the East called *kannauts*—5 cubits in height, and supported by pillars of brass 5 cubits apart, to which the curtains were attached by hooks and fillets of silver. Ex. 27:9, etc. This enclosure was broken only on the east side by the entrance, which was 20 cubits wide, and closed by curtains of fine twined linen wrought with needlework, and of the most gorgeous colors. In the outer or east half of the court was placed the altar of burnt offering, and between it and the tabernacle itself, the laver at which the priests washed their hands and feet on entering the temple. The tabernacle itself was placed toward the west end of this enclosure.

IV. **HISTORY.**—“The tabernacle, as the place in which Jehovah dwelt, was pitched in the centre of the camp, Num. 2:2, as the tent of a leader always is in the East; for Jehovah was the Captain of Israel. Josh. 5:14–15. During the marches of Israel, the tabernacle was still in the centre. Num. 2. The tribes camped and marched around it in the order of a hollow square. In certain great emergencies it led the march. Josh. 3:11–16. Upon the tabernacle abode always the cloud, dark

by day and fiery red by night, Ex. 40:38, giving the signal for the march, Ex. 40:36–37; Num. 9:17, and the halt. Num. 9:15–23. It was always the special meeting-place of Jehovah and his people. Num. 11:24–25; 12:4; 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6; 27:2; Deut. 31:14.” During the conquest of Canaan the tabernacle, at first moved from place to place, Josh. 4:19; 8:30–35; 9:6; 10:15, was finally located at Shiloh. Josh. 9:27; 18:1. Here it remained during the time of the judges, till it was captured by the Philistines, who carried off the sacred ark of the covenant. 1 Sam. 4:22. From this time forward the glory of the tabernacle was gone. When the ark was recovered, it was removed to Jerusalem, and placed in a new tabernacle, 2 Sam. 6:17; 1 Chron. 15:1; but the old structure still had its hold on the veneration of the community, and the old altar still received their offerings. 1 Chron. 16:39; 21:29. It was not till the temple was built, and a fitting house thus prepared for the Lord, that the ancient tabernacle was allowed to perish and be forgotten.

- V. **SIGNIFICANCE.**—(The great underlying principles of true religion are the same in all ages and for all men; because man’s nature and needs are the same, and the same God ever rules over all. But different ages require different methods of teaching these truths, and can understand them in different degrees. As we are taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the tabernacle was part of a great system of teaching by object-lessons, and of training the world to understand and receive the great truths which were to be revealed in Jesus Christ, and thus really to save the Jews from sin by Jesus dimly seen in the future, as we clearly see him in the past. (1) The tabernacle and its services enabled the Jews, who had no visible representation of God, to feel the *reality* of God and of religion. (2) The tabernacle, as the most beautiful and costly object in the nation, and ever in the centre of the camp, set forth the truth that religion was the central fact, and the most important, in a person’s life. (3) The pillar of cloud and of fire was the best possible symbol of the living God—a cloud, bright, glowing like the sunset clouds, glorious, beautiful, mysterious, self-poised, heavenly; fire, immaterial, the source of life and light and comfort and cheer, but yet unapproachable, terrible, a consuming fire to the wicked. (4) The altar of burnt offering, standing before the tabernacle, was a perpetual symbol of the atonement—the greatness of sin, deserving death, hard to be removed, and yet forgiveness possible, and offered freely, but only through blood. The offerings, as brought by the people, were a type of consecration to God, of conversion and new life, through the atonement. (5) This altar stood outside of the tabernacle, and must be passed before we come to the tabernacle itself; a type of the true religious life. Before the tabernacle was also the laver, signifying the same thing that baptism does with us, the cleansing of the heart and life. (6) Having entered the holy place, we find the three great means and helps to true living—the candlestick, the light of God’s truth; the shew-bread, teaching that the soul must have its spiritual food, and live in communion with God; and the altar of incense, the symbol of prayer. The holy of holies, beyond, taught that there was progress in the religious life, and that that progress was toward God, and toward the perfect keeping of the law, till it was as natural to obey the law as it is to breathe; and thus the holy of holies was the type of heaven.—ED.)

Tabernacle (3)

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| <p>A. <i>Descriptive of:</i>
 Moses’ administrative office Ex. 33:7–11
 Structure erected at Sinai Ex. 40:2, 35–38
 Portable shrine containing an idol Acts 7:43
 Tent prepared for the ark by David 1 Chr. 16:1–43
 Heavenly prototype Heb. 8:2, 5; Heb. 9:11, 24
 Holy city Rev. 21:3</p> <p>B. <i>Sinaitic, constructed:</i>
 By divine revelation Ex. 25:8; Heb. 8:5
 By craftsmen inspired by the Spirit Ex. 31:1–11
 Out of contributions willingly supplied Ex. 25:1–9
 For the manifestation of God’s glory Ex. 25:8; Ex. 29:42, 43
 In two parts—holy place and Most Holy Ex. 26:33, 34; Heb. 9:2–7
 With surrounding court Ex. 40:8
 Within a year’s time Ex. 40:2, 17</p> <p>C. <i>History of:</i>
 Set up at Sinai Ex. 40:1–38
 Sanctified and dedicated Ex. 40:9–16
 Moved by priests and Levites Num. 4:1–49
 Camped at Gilgal Josh. 5:10, 11
 Set up at Shiloh Josh. 18:1
 Israel’s center of worship Jdg 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3, 9, 24
 Ark of, taken by Philistines 1 Sam. 4:1–22</p> | <p>Worship not confined to 1 Sam. 7:1, 2, 15–17
 Located at Nob during Saul’s reign 1 Sam. 21:1–6
 Moved to Gibeon 1 Kin. 3:4
 Ark of, brought to Jerusalem by David 2 Sam. 6:17
 Brought to the Temple by Solomon 1 Kin. 8:1, 4, 5</p> <p>D. <i>Typology of, seen in:</i>
 Christ John 1:14
 God’s household Eph. 2:19
 Believer 1 Cor. 6:19
 Heaven Heb. 9:23, 24</p> <p>E. <i>Typology of, seen in Christ:</i>
 Candlestick—His enlightening us Rev. 1:13
 Sacred bread—His sustaining us John 6:27–59
 Altar of incense—His intercession for us John 17:1–26; Heb. 7:25
 Veil—His flesh Heb. 10:20
 Ark (wood and gold)—His humanity and deity JOH 1:14</p> |
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3Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson’s topical Bible index [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.