

EXODUS: Lesson Five, Sinai: The Tabernacle ***Exodus 25 – 31***

Subject: God gave Moses all the instructions regarding His Tabernacle.

Main Idea: The Tabernacle was a visual that portrayed God's plan of redemption and pointed to Jesus.

Principles:

1. *God provided a means by which He could dwell among His people.*
2. *The pattern of the Tabernacle had to be followed exactly, in order that it would accurately portray Jesus' person and work.*
3. *Jesus is our great High Priest.*

Introduction

It is always a special joy for any parent or grandparent to see their child honored. When my father-in-law was nearing eighty years of age, we took him on a long trip so that he could be present when our son was pinned with his "jump wings" (a military pin given to individuals who complete the military skydiving program). Three generations of men in our family have worn this pin. The pride and joy on my father-in-law's face made the long trip well worthwhile.

The Bible teaches that God the Father wants to see His Son Jesus Christ honored, and long ago, He formed a plan that would lead to His exaltation. Through our Exodus study, we have discovered that God's plan involved the descendants of Abraham. They were chosen to represent Him to the rest of the world. One way in which they were to do this was by keeping God's Law. The Law reflected God's nature. The difficulty with this from a human point of view is that the Law had to be kept in its entirety, without failure, to truly represent God. The standard was so high that the Israelites could never achieve it. Thus, in the Tabernacle, God gave them a visual representation of His solution. Nearly 1500 years before Jesus Christ was born, the Tabernacle exalted His person and work! It pointed to Him as the solution to mankind's sin problem and the means by which we can dwell in God's presence.

In light of the Tabernacle's importance, it is no wonder that it is the focal point for a full third of the book of Exodus. The chapters covered by this lesson do not describe its construction but record the pattern given for construction. God met with Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him detailed instructions. The last chapters in Exodus (35-40) repeat many of these instructions in order to show that the work was carried out exactly according to God's plan.

I. **God’s Presence in the Tabernacle** – Exodus 24:12 – 25:8

A. Moses Ascended Mount Sinai – 24:12-18: According to 24:12, sometime after the covenant ceremony, the Lord called Moses to another meeting on Mount Sinai. On this occasion, God promised to give Moses tablets of stone with all His laws and commandments written on them (24:12). Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp, taking Joshua (who had become Moses’ aide) with him. From below, the Israelites saw the glory of the Lord on the mountain in what resembled a “consuming fire” (24:17). Moses waited six days for God to tell him what to do next. How impatient we often can be to hear from God! How quick to get off our knees! On the seventh day, God spoke, calling Moses into the cloud, where he remained for *forty days and nights* (24:18). God had an important revelation to give him: the blueprint for building the Tabernacle. If Moses’ wait was rewarded with such an important revelation, won’t we also be rewarded for setting aside time to just wait and listen for God’s voice?

B. **Instructions Regarding Offerings** – 25:1-8

- i. Motivation for Giving: God’s first instruction was to have the Israelites bring an offering. Giving is an important aspect of worship. Verse 1 emphasizes that the offerings were for God. When we give to the church, we are giving to God. The offerings were to come from “everyone whose heart prompts them to give.” Giving is meaningless when it is done solely out of obligation. The Lord asked for offerings from those Israelites who *wanted* to give as a response to all He had done. He had rescued them from bondage, provided for their daily bread, and invited them into a covenant relationship. Gratitude is the only right motivation for giving to God.
- ii. Nature of the Offerings: The offerings the people were to bring were costly items, gifts that were suitable for a king. Indeed, the nature of these offerings reminded the people that the Lord *was* their King. The blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen were the attire of royalty. Many offerings required the use of local resources. Acacia trees grew in the region.ⁱ Leather could be made from the aquatic mammals (sea cows) that are native to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba.ⁱⁱ The Israelites had flocks and herds with them, from which ram skins and goat hair could be taken. But from where would former slaves get gold, silver, bronze, fine linen, costly spices and gemstones? These were the very items the Lord had instructed them to request from their Egyptian neighbors before leaving Egypt (Exodus 12:35-36). They may have also collected such things from the Amalekites who had attacked them (Exodus 17:8-15).

- iii. Use of the Offerings: The purpose of the collection was the construction of a *sanctuary* for God, a Tabernacle (sometimes called “the tent of meeting”) in which He would “dwell among [the Israelites]” (25:8). The Lord had promised to be with the Israelites en route to Canaan (Exodus 23:20-23). The Tabernacle was an ever-present reminder of His presence.

Summary Statement: The Tabernacle was a sanctuary where God would dwell among the Israelites. To fully appreciate this, we must go back to the early chapters of Genesis where God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8), dwelling with them in undisturbed fellowship. Adam and Eve were created to dwell with their Maker (Genesis 1:26, Colossians 1:16). The worst possible disaster occurred when they chose independence. The Tabernacle revealed God’s intention of providing a means by which He could, once again, dwell among His people.

Principle: *God provided a means by which He could dwell among His people.*

Among the many, deep longings common to human beings is the ideal of “home:” a place of security, with people who love us unconditionally, where we can rest but also be productive, and where we find relief from our daily pressures and are restored. This longing is from God (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and it ultimately reflects our deep-seated desire for Him. We long to be restored to fellowship with Him and dwell in His presence.

The New Testament verse translated “the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us” (John 1:14a) literally says Jesus “tabernacled” among us! In Christ, God came to dwell with us in the flesh. Since the time of Christ, believers have the Holy Spirit indwelling them as a deposit of what is yet to come (Ephesians 1:13, 14). Once we are saved, our internal compass has finally been calibrated Godward and we feel less restless. Yet our longing for “home” awaits an ultimate fulfillment that will be satisfied in Heaven, where God will forever dwell in our midst. Without doubt, the beauty, the activities, and the fellowship we enjoy with one another in Heaven will exceed our wildest imaginations. But they alone are not what will satisfy us. We will be satisfied because God is there.

Application: Has Heaven been on your mind this week? From all appearances, those around us might say we are not as eager to live with God as we have been for our next meal or our next holiday. Jesus paid a high price to purchase our salvation and earn Heaven for us. We can join God’s program to honor Him by eagerly anticipating the gift of Heaven that awaits us.

Transition: Following God’s revelation of His plan to symbolically dwell with Israel, He gave Moses a very specific pattern for the Tabernacle and all its furnishings.

II. The Pattern for the Tabernacle – Exodus 25-27, 30-31

A. The Pattern for God’s Dwelling – 25:9

- i. What Did Moses See? The Lord told Moses he was to make the Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly like “the pattern” God would show him. The Bible does not explain exactly what Moses saw. It only makes clear that the pattern was to be followed exactly. Many have debated the nature of this “pattern.” Hebrews 8:5 tells us that the Tabernacle was “a copy and shadow of what is in Heaven” and this was why Moses had to ensure he followed the pattern. Did Moses see a drawing (a blueprint) for the Tabernacle? Did he have a vision in which he saw an actual structure that exists in Heaven? Hebrews 9:24 tells us that the Tabernacle (the “sanctuary”) that Jesus entered, the one that Moses’ Tabernacle copied, was *Heaven itself*, not a building in Heaven. Therefore, we should be careful about concluding that Heaven contains a physical temple.
- ii. Pointing Back and Pointing Ahead: The gold, the cherubim, the jewels, and the Tabernacle’s east-facing entrance are all reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.ⁱⁱⁱ Perhaps the Lord intended that Moses and the Israelites be reminded of this time in the past when God’s fellowship with His people was unbroken and He walked among them. Since Hebrews 3:5 indicates that Moses bore witness “to what would be spoken by God in the future,” perhaps the Lord also gave him insight concerning the meaning of the Tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priestly work as they related to the coming Messiah.

B. Instructions for Tabernacle Construction – 25:10 – 30:38

i. The Ark – 25:10-22

1. *Symbolism:* If we keep in mind that the Tabernacle was a representation of heavenly things, it is not difficult to see that the inner room of the Tabernacle, the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies), was a representation of God’s throne room and the Ark within it symbolized His throne. It was the place where God was symbolically present and where He would meet with Moses. The Ark was a rectangular, wooden box, overlaid with gold. Like several of the other furnishings, it had rings through which poles were inserted for transport. The poles were never to be removed. This ensured the Ark was never touched.

2. *The Cover*

- a. *Description:* What was most impressive about the Ark was its solid gold lid. It was ornately decorated with two golden cherubim – not engraved, but mounted on top, facing one another. The cherubim gazed downward at the cover with their wings spread upward. God said His presence would rest above the cover, between these two cherubim. Cherubim are special angels. They are first mentioned in Genesis 3, where they were charged with guarding the way to the Tree of Life after Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden. After that, they are mentioned more than 100 times in the Bible. Ezekiel (1, 10) and John (Revelation 4) describe “living creatures,” which Ezekiel also calls “cherubim” (Ezekiel 10:20), surrounding God’s throne in Heaven. Genesis 3:24 speaks of cherubim guarding the way to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. The references seem to suggest that the particular role of cherubim is not as messengers, like other angels, but to “remain in God’s presence to deny access by anything unholy. They are the palace guards for the King of kings.”^{iv}
- b. *Atonement:* The Bible calls the Ark’s cover a “Kapporet,” often translated as “atonement cover” or “mercy seat.” Moses later received instructions for an annual Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:1-20), on which the High Priest was to sprinkle blood on the “Kapporet,” thus making atonement (reconciliation) for the sin of the people. “Atone” is an Anglo-Saxon term that means “at-one,” separated parties brought back together. God’s presence was between the cherubim, who faced gazed downward, into the Ark. What did they see? Inside were the tablets of the Law, God’s standard.¹ When He looked at it, He would see that it was continually broken. The blood sprinkled on the cover reminded God that His Son Jesus would shed His blood to atone for sinners. By His mercy, He made a provision so that we might be “at-one” with Him and He could dwell among us.

¹ According to Hebrews 9:4-5, a gold jar of manna and Aaron’s rod that blossomed were also kept in the Ark.

- ii. The Table – 25:23-30: Just outside the Most Holy Place was the area called the Holy Place. Two of the three furnishings in the Holy Place are described next. The first is the table.
1. *Description*: Like the Ark, the table was constructed of acacia wood overlaid with gold and it also had rings in which poles were inserted. All of the dishes on the table were made of pure gold. Presumably, these were used for holding the bread, incense, and drink offerings.
 2. *Practical Purpose*: The table’s specific practical function was to hold the twelve loaves of the “Bread of Presence,” something that is explained more thoroughly in Leviticus (24:5-9). The bread was unleavened, so it was flat in form. It remained on the table for an entire week until the Sabbath, when the priest replaced them with new loaves and ate the old ones.
 3. *Symbolic Meanings*: The loaves in the Tabernacle have more than one symbolic meaning.
 - a. *God’s Provision for Their Needs*: First, they would have reminded the Israelites of the manna, God’s special provision for their physical sustenance. However, thinking of God’s provision for their physical needs would also have reminded them of His provision of His word for their spiritual health. As Moses later said, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus called himself the “Bread of Life” (John 6:35, 48) and said that we must “eat of him” to live forever. In this sense, to eat of Him is to receive Him by faith and ultimately, be granted access to the heavenly wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). After initially partaking of Jesus, we continue to “eat of Him” through our meditations on His word.
 - b. *Fellowship with God*: The table and its loaves also would have reminded the Israelites of the covenant meal they shared with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24), indicating fellowship and friendship. It pointed ahead to the communion meal enjoyed by New Covenant believers and the day in which believers of all time will participate in the heavenly wedding feast.

iii. The Lampstand – 25:31-40

1. *Description*: The lampstand was an ornate, golden, seven-pronged candelabrum, tree-like in shape, which Jewish people call a “menorah.” It was decorated with almond buds and blossoms, adding to the tree imagery. According to Exodus 27:20-21, God told Moses to use clear olive oil to keep the lamps burning. The olive oil and tree-like shape suggest that the lampstand may have represented an olive tree. Today, an olive tree or branch is Israel’s national symbol.
2. *Practical Purpose*: The Tabernacle had several layers of heavy coverings, making it dark within. From a practical point of view, the lampstand gave the priests light by which they could conduct their work.
3. *Symbolic Meaning*: Just as the Israelites were to look to God for their bread, they were also to look to Him for life and for light. Perhaps the lampstand’s tree-like appearance reminded them of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. However, the lampstand ultimately points to Christ, who claimed to be “the way, the truth, the life” (John 14:6) and “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

iv. The Walls and Frames – 26:1-37

1. *Outer Structure*: By necessity, the Tabernacle needed to be portable during Israel’s years of wilderness wandering. The construction design allowed for repeated disassembly and reassembly. The exterior consisted of elaborately decorated curtains draped over wooden frames, approximately fifteen feet wide (4.5 meters) and forty-five feet (13.5 meters) long when assembled. The wooden frames were overlaid with gold. The curtains were made of linen, decorated with cherubim, and woven with the royal colors of blue, purple, and scarlet. When joined together with loops and gold clasps (26:1-6), they gave the Tabernacle its tent-like structure. The curtains were protected by three layers of coverings: a second set of curtains (these made of goat hair [26:7]) and two layers of animal skins (26:14), the first of ram and the outermost of a durable leather (probably hides of sea cows, which would have provided weatherproofing). An elaborate curtain covered the tent’s entrance (26:36-37).

2. *Inner Veil*

- a. *A Shield for the Ark:* Inside, the Tabernacle was divided into two rooms by yet another finely woven, linen curtain or veil, decorated with cherubim. In Hebrew, this veil is called the “Parokhet.” Since no one could be in God’s presence and live, the veil shielded the priests from the Ark while they worked in the outer room. The Israelites only had access to the inner room once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Even then, access was only granted to them vicariously through their representative, the High Priest.
 - b. *The Tearing of the Veil:* At the moment Jesus died on the Cross, this inner curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51). The curtain was much too thick for human hands to rend. Furthermore, any human attempt to tear such a tall curtain would come from the bottom up, not from the top down. The writer of Hebrews explains the meaning of the torn curtain: “We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body” (10:19, 20). The torn curtain represented Jesus’ body, which was “torn” in order that we might be granted direct access to God’s throne room.
- v. The Bronze Altar – 27:1-8
1. *Description:* A courtyard, where sacrifices were made, surrounded the Tabernacle. The courtyard had two primary furnishings. The first was the bronze altar. It was largest of all the furnishings, relatively simple in design, and constructed in a fashion that made it both portable and heat-resistant. Essentially, it had four “walls” with nothing inside (27:8). Perhaps the Israelites constructed an earthen altar within the bronze altar’s hollow interior each time they relocated, in order to keep the Lord’s earlier command to build their altars of earth and stone (Exodus 20:24-25).^v A grate that could be hung on the exterior of the walls at times (for the utensils) alternatively served as the base of a grill. The altar also had rings and poles for transporting and a horn on each of its four corners. The purpose of these horns is uncertain. They may have been decorative or used for tying animals. After a more permanent sanctuary was constructed in Canaan, Solomon’s brother grabbed onto the horns as an indication that he was seeking protection from punishment (1 Kings 1:50-51).

2. *Practical Purpose and Symbolic Purposes:* The bronze altar was where animal sacrifices were made. It was the first item one would encounter upon entering the Tabernacle's courtyard, indicating that sacrifice was necessary before one could approach God. The bronze altar and its sacrifices pointed ahead to Jesus' sacrifice, which alone was able to truly atone for sin.

vi. The Courtyard – 27:9-19

1. *Description:* The courtyard was three times as long as the Tabernacle itself. Brightly colored screens formed its boundaries, preventing an Israelite from accidentally stumbling into the Tabernacle area. The Tabernacle sat at one end. The two-thirds of remaining space contained the washbasin and the bronze altar for sacrifices.
2. *Practical and Symbolic Meaning:* While the furnishings within the Tabernacle were made of gold, those in the Courtyard were made of bronze, a less costly material. To the Israelites, the meaning would have been obvious: while divine royalty existed within the Tabernacle, the space that surrounded it was more common.

vii. The Altar of Incense – 30:1-10; 30:34-38: Following the instructions for the priests' ordination, in Exodus 28-29, chapter 30 describes the altar of incense and the washbasin, the Tabernacle's final furnishings. In the interest of understanding the layout of the Tabernacle, we will consider these first and then return to chapters 28-29.

1. *Description:* The altar of incense was much smaller than the bronze altar used for animal sacrifice. Like the other furnishings within the Tabernacle proper, it was overlaid with gold. It also had rings through which poles were inserted for its transportation. Like the bronze altar, it had horns, presumably on its corners. The altar of incense was placed just outside the "Parokhet," the inner veil, in the Holy Place. Thus, while the Ark was the sole furnishing in the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place had three furnishings: the table and the lampstand, one on each side of the room, and the altar of incense, centered in front of the inner curtain.
2. *Practical Purpose:* The sacrifices made on this altar were sacrifices of incense, completing the sensory experience of any priest who entered. Later (30:34-38), a special recipe for making the incense was given. The recipe was exclusively for incense burned on this altar, and never to be duplicated for any other use. According to Leviticus 16:13, on the one day of the year in which the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place, the cloud of smoke that rose from the incense concealed the Atonement Cover on the Ark so that the priest would not die (it screened him from God's presence).

In daily practice, the incense probably helped to mask the odor of the many slaughtered animals in the courtyard.

3. *Symbolic Meaning:* The Psalmist wrote, “May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice” (Psalm 141:2). Luke 1:8-11 also seems to affirm that the Israelites understood the rising of incense as *a symbol of prayer*. These suppositions are confirmed in the book of Revelation, where John writes that the elders, while worshipping God, held golden bowls of incense, “which are the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 5:8). Later (8:3,4), John says that an angel “had much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” Notice that, just as in the Tabernacle, the golden altar was positioned before God’s throne in the heavenly scene. The privilege of prayer presupposes reconciliation with God^{vi} in Christ. Hebrews 4:16 tells us that those who have been reconciled can “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

viii. The Washbasin – 30:17-21

1. *Description:* The final furnishing was a basin for washing. Like the other furnishing in the courtyard, it was made of bronze. No description is given of its size and shape. We are only told that it was of two pieces: the bowl that contained the water and a stand on which it rested.
2. *Practical and Symbolic Purpose:* The basin was in constant use. The priests had to wash their hands and their feet before presenting sacrifices and also before entering the Tabernacle. Twice, the Lord said the priests must wash “so that they will not die” (30:20, 21). Their washing was a sign of spiritual cleansing and preparation for service. The basin was conveniently positioned in the courtyard, right between the entrance to the Tabernacle and the bronze altar. This placement had meaning. The bronze altar, located just inside the courtyard’s entrance, was a reminder of the need for blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. The washbasin reminded the priests that although atonement had been made for their sins at their consecration, their need to wash was still ongoing because they continued to sin. Although atonement was made for our sins when we receive Christ as Savior and our guilt is removed, we need to continually practice confession of specific sins so that we remain “clean.” Unconfessed sin grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

- ix. Atonement Money – 30:11-16: Chapter 30 also describes the collection of a half-shekel as an offering to the Lord anytime a census was taken. Because a census was, at the time, a counting of all men of fighting age (“those twenty years old or more” [30:14]), it was a temptation for kings to use them as an opportunity to boast of their strength. David made this mistake (2 Samuel 24). Instead, the Israelites were to trust in the Lord, to whom they belonged. As each man crossed over the line, was counted, and paid the half-shekel, he was reminded that he belonged to God. Although this was called “atonement money,” it was not for the forgiveness of sins, something we can never buy. It made atonement in the sense that it protected each paying man from the alternative punishment: a plague (30:12).

C. Two Important Provisions – Exodus 31: Chapter 31 tells of two important provisions the Lord made for Moses with regard to the Tabernacle’s construction.

- i. Bezalel and Oholiab – 31:1-11: The Lord appointed two men with whom He “filled with the Spirit of God” to oversee the design and construction process. Before the completed work of Christ and the Pentecost of Acts 2, the Holy Spirit only filled individuals specially commissioned by God for specific tasks.
- ii. The Sabbath Rest – 31:12-17: God reminded the Israelites of the importance of keeping the Sabbath. In the context of the instructions for building the Tabernacle, it served as a reminder to observe the day of rest, even while they were busy “doing God’s work” in construction. The Sabbath was a gift of rest.

Summary Statement: It was important that Moses understood the pattern and followed it exactly because the Tabernacle was such an important portrayal of the person and work of the coming Messiah (perhaps the most important in the Old Testament). It gave the Israelites insight into the means by which they could enjoy God’s presence in their midst. From our perspective in history, we see that every aspect of the Tabernacle and its furnishings pointed to and exalted Jesus.

Principle: *The pattern of the Tabernacle had to be followed exactly, in order that it would accurately portray Jesus’ person and work.*

The Tabernacle was the means by which the Lord dwelt with Israel in the days of their wilderness wanderings and settlement in Canaan. Later, after they were well established in the land, the Tabernacle was replaced by the more permanent Temple, which had the same basic structure and furnishings. In this day and age, the Holy Spirit indwells each and every believer. The New Testament says that our body is His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). We are “walking tabernacles.”^{vii} What does being His temple mean for us? What are the implications? We have only to look at the Tabernacle to see the answer. Walk through the Tabernacle with me and see that in it, our new life in Christ is so very well explained.

We enter the courtyard from the east, the direction in which Cain fled when he was cast from Eden (Genesis 4:16). East is the life of sin. Through Christ I may enter the courtyard and live in fellowship with God.

We encounter the bronze altar, an immediate reminder of Christ’s atoning, sacrificial death. Because we are crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), the bronze altar is also a reminder of our gratitude and our obligation to be a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). We are to completely surrender ourselves and daily yield to His ways. Getting up on the altar seems frightening, but once there we realize it is a blessed surrender; we no longer struggle to live God’s way in our own strength. We yield to Jesus and allow Him to do His sanctifying work.

We then come to the bronze washbasin. In Christ, we have been cleansed of our sins, but just as our bodies need daily bathing, our souls need daily cleansing through confession. We also bathe our souls clean of worldly influence by practicing spiritual disciplines. Through Christ, we are free to enjoy much, but we are not to be mastered by anything but God Himself.

We walk in through the tent, and within, we have a picture of our inner lives with Christ, the heavy drapes providing insulation from the noise outside. This is the place where we regularly retreat to be alone with the Lord. The moment we enter, we find Him waiting. There He is, the Light of the World and the Bread of Life, waiting to fellowship with you and with me! We see the lampstand, the light reminding us that God knows each of our next steps and will illuminate the path for us. We allow His light to shine deep into our hearts and also upon His written word. We see ourselves as we truly are in Him, and we grow in our understanding of the Bible’s deep and precious secrets. Our eyes fall upon the table with its bread, a reminder that He will meet our every need; love, friendship, renewal, strength, contentment -- in Him we find all of these and more!

The more we dwell here, enjoying His presence, our feet cannot help but run with joy to the golden altar of incense. We fall to our knees in thanksgiving and praise, pouring out our prayers to Him. The privilege of speaking directly to Him is rich and satisfying and refreshing, a fragrant aroma that floods the sanctuary of my heart.

We look up to see the holy Ark of God. We see the Jesus' blood covering it, and we are again filled with gratitude. Because of that blood, we live in the very presence of God, every moment of every day. That blood reminds us, "A great price has been paid so that you can approach your King, and that you might call Him 'Father'."

We may not dwell in this sanctuary physically, but inwardly, we should remain in that place. If we ever stray and find our relationship with God broken, we are free to quickly return. There is no condemnation within the Tabernacle, for by God's grace, in Christ, we remain the Temple of the Living God. One day, we will live physically in His presence, but for now, we are able to know the deep joy of having Christ dwell in us. *He is* our "home."

Transition: Exodus 28-29 tell us of the people who would work in the Tabernacle and how they were to be set apart for such an important role. These people were as important as the Tabernacle's design.

III. The Priests of the Tabernacle – Exodus 28-29

A. The Priests' Garments – Chapter 28

- i. The Priests Designated: The Tabernacle was made so that God could dwell among the Israelites. However, the people did not have access to God's presence. Only the High Priest did, as their representative, but he could not maintain the Tabernacle and make all the necessary sacrifices alone. Other priests were needed to assist him. So as a lasting ordinance, the Lord assigned the priesthood to Aaron and to his sons (28:42).
- ii. Preparation for Priesthood: The priests were to wear sacred garments that gave them honor. They were also to be set apart (consecrated) for their work in a particular manner. Exodus 28-29 describes their clothing and consecration. The priestly garments were to be made of the same beautiful colors used in the Tabernacle: gold, blue, purple, and scarlet. Aaron's sons were to wear tunics, sashes and headbands (28:40), but Aaron, the High Priest, was to have several additional, special garments that distinguished him: an ephod, a breastpiece, a robe, and a turban.
- iii. Ephod: The ephod seems to have been a type of apron with a waistband that was suspended at the shoulders by special clasps. On each of these clasps was an onyx stone engraved with the names of six of the tribes of Israel, a reminder to the High Priest that he served as the people's representative. The waistband ensured the garment did not hang loosely and impede the High Priest's responsibilities.

- iv. Breastpiece: The breastpiece was worn over the ephod and attached to it by gold chains at the shoulders and near the waist to prevent it from flapping loosely. It was a type of pouch with twelve gemstones on the exterior and the Urim and Thummim inside the pocket. The purpose of this breastpiece was decision-making. It is believed the Urim and Thummim (meaning “lights” and “darks”^{viii}) were stones used for determining God’s will. Possibly one meant “yes” and the other meant “no.” The Bible never describes the exact nature of their use.
- v. Robe: The robe worn under the ephod was solid blue and decorated around the hem with blue, purple, and scarlet tassels, shaped like pomegranates, alternating with small gold bells. These bells had a special function in ensuring that the High Priest could be heard when he entered the Holy Place before the Lord and would not die. We recall that the Israelites had been forbidden to touch Mount Sinai once the Lord descended on it. Yet every day, the High Priest entered the Holy Place, coming dangerously close to God’s presence. As he walked, the tinkling of the bells signaled his arrival. Some have suggested that the sound kept other priests aware that the High Priest had not been struck dead. The bells surely also reminded the High Priest of the peril of taking his work too casually; his life was always at stake. However, 28:35 indicates that the sound of the bells was primarily *for the Lord*. Entering the presence of a king unannounced simply was not done, thus announcing one’s presence was a matter of honoring his dignity. Of course, the Lord did not need to hear the bells to know of Aaron’s arrival. Nevertheless, the bells honored and acknowledged the Lord as Israel’s King.^{ix}
- vi. Turban: The most important thing about the High Priest’s turban was a pure gold plate on the front, attached with a blue cord that was engraved with the words “Holy to the Lord.” When the people sinned, their sacrifices were presented to the High Priest, who was their representative. The seal on his forehead confirmed for the worshipper that, since God regarded the High Priest as holy, their own gifts (sacrifices) would be accepted. The seal on Aaron’s turban is a visual of what Christ has done for us. Christ is holy to the Lord by His own merit. We do not merit salvation but God sees Christ’s holiness and considers Him as representative of all who have placed their faith in Him. Our acceptance to God is guaranteed by His holiness.
- vii. Other Items of Attire: Beneath the robe, the High Priest wore a tunic identical to the ones worn by the other priests. (The other priests wore sashes to tie down the waist of their tunics and caps to cover their heads [28:40]). Beneath their tunics, Aaron and his sons all wore linen undergarments.

B. The Priests' Consecration - Chapter 29

- i. Preparation: The priests' consecration for sacred duty required several steps over a seven-day period. Some of these steps, the washing and the first two sacrifices, were not unique to priestly consecration. In preparation for priestly consecration, a young bull and two rams were selected and several unleavened loaves were prepared, some round, some thick, and some thin. These were the makings of a special meal. Eating meat was not common and was usually a part of a celebration or sacred ceremony. The Israelites would not have had access in the wilderness to other foods (such as vegetables). Later, once they inhabited Canaan, other such accompaniments may have been added to the sacred, celebratory meals.^x
- ii. Washing: The first step was the priests' washing. Aaron and his sons were to be brought before the Tabernacle ("tent of meeting" [29:4]) and washed with water.
- iii. Dressed: Next, they were to be dressed in the specially prepared garments already described.
- iv. Anointed: Once dressed, Aaron was anointed with the fragrant oil that was made exclusively for this purpose (described in 30:22-33). Like the formula given for the incense used in the Tabernacle, the Israelites were forbidden from duplicating the formula to make their own perfume.
- v. Sacrifice for Sin: After the men had been prepared outwardly, their inward condition was to be addressed. They were sinners like everyone else. If they were to enter God's Tabernacle and represent the people before God, their sins had to be atoned. This was the purpose of the sacrifice of the bull. Before the bull was to be slaughtered, Aaron and his sons were to place their hands on the head of the animal. This was a symbol of transference of guilt: their sin was transferred onto the animal that would die in their place. The bull was then to be killed and some of its blood smeared on the horns of the altar, consecrating that part of the altar. The rest of the blood was to be poured out at the base. The fat of the bull's internal organs was to be burned as a sacrifice on the altar, but all the remainder of the bull (its organs, its meat and its hide) was to be carried outside the camp and burned. Because it was a sacrifice for sin, no one was to enjoy eating any of it. When Jesus died for our sin, he was crucified "outside the camp" (Hebrews 13:11-13) of Jerusalem.

- vi. Sacrifice for Total Dedication: Next, the first of the two rams was to be sacrificed. Again, Aaron and his sons were to lay their hands on the ram's head before it was slaughtered. Its blood was to be splashed on the altar so that the altar would then be completely covered. Then, the entire ram was burned on the altar. In most sacrifices, part of the animal was discarded, part was burned on the altar as a sacrificial "meal" for God, and the priests and worshippers ate the remainder. In this case, the burning of the entire ram indicated a sacrifice of total dedication to God.
- vii. Sacrifice of Ordination
 1. The last sacrifice was the "ordination" sacrifice (29:22) and its purpose was specifically to consecrate the priests for their work. After the laying of the priests' hands on its head, a second ram was to be slaughtered. This time, its blood was put on the priests themselves. Some was to be put on Aaron and his sons' right ears, right thumbs and right big toes, probably symbolizing hearing from God, serving God (with their hands), and following God (with their feet). Some of the blood splashed on the sides of the altar was to be mixed with the special anointing oil and sprinkled on Aaron and his sons' bodies and garments.
 2. This ram was to be sacrificed in a manner more like Israel's most common offerings: a portion burned and a portion eaten. The fat (the most aromatic portion), some of the meat, and the bread were to be waved before the Lord and then burned on the altar. This was the Lord's "food offering" (29:25). The breast was "waved" and then to be cooked and given to the priests to eat. The breast and the right thigh were to be always, hereafter, the portion given to the priests when the people brought fellowship offerings.
- viii. Completion of the Ceremony: To complete the consecration of the altar, each day for seven days, a bull was to be burned on the altar. As a reminder of the ongoing need for a permanent sacrifice, each day thereafter, year after year, a year-old lamb (ram) was to be sacrificed in the morning and again in the evening.
- ix. God's Dwelling: (29:45-46) God promised Moses that following the construction of the Tabernacle and the consecration of the Tabernacle and the priests, it would become His dwelling and the place where He would meet with Moses.

C. The Inscribed Tablets – 31:18: After the Lord gave Moses all these instructions, He gave him two tablets on which the covenant law had been inscribed by "the finger of God."

Summary Statement: The priests were to be dressed and consecrated in preparation for their service as the Israelites' representatives at the Tabernacle.

1 Peter 2:5, 9 and Revelation 5:10 affirm that all believers are royal priests. We are priests in the sense that we represent Jesus to others and we are priests in the sense that we are able to offer sacrifices of gratitude. We do not need to sacrifice for forgiveness of sins, since Jesus already did that for us by sacrificing Himself. He now lives in Heaven, seated at God's right hand, and is our great High Priest.

Principle: *Jesus is our great High Priest.*

Like the Tabernacle, the priesthood also pointed to Him. Hebrews 7:23-25 says, "Now there have been many of those [high] priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them."

Do you understand what it means that Jesus saves completely? This is our assurance that no matter what our need, no matter the nature of our enslavement, Jesus' salvation is comprehensive! He not only forgave our sins but He is daily sanctifying us. It is our assurance that He who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6).

Hebrews also tells us that as our High Priest, Jesus continually prays for us (7:25). He petitions God on our behalf.^{xi} Louis Berkhof wrote, "It is a consoling thought that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life; that He is presenting to the Father those spiritual needs which were not present to our minds and which we often neglect to include in our prayers; and that He prays for our protection against the dangers of which we are not even conscious, and against the enemies which threaten us, though we do not notice it. He is praying that our faith may not cease, and that we may come out victoriously in the end."^{xii}

Conclusion

The Tabernacle was a visual that portrayed God’s plan of redemption and pointed to Jesus. At the end of time, Jesus will be front and center. All of the applause and praise of Heaven and earth will be for Him alone. Philippians 2 puts it this way, “Therefore God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:9-11).² At present, our great High Priest is our “home.” He is saving us completely. And He is always interceding for us. How greatly we should delight in offering Him our sacrifices of praise! Considering what He has done, our sacrifices are small, but they are important because they are a means by which we can join God in honoring His Son Jesus Christ.

ⁱ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 428). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

ⁱⁱ Hannah, J. D. (1985). Exodus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 147–148). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wenham, G. J. (2003). *Exploring the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Vol. 1, p. 76). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

^{iv} Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory* (p. 817). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

^v Umberto Cassuto (1967), *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (p. 362), trans. Israel Abrahams Jerusalem: Magnes Press as quoted in Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory* (p. 858). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

^{vi} Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, pp. 457–458). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

^{vii} Stedman, Ray (Elaine Stedman, 2012). *Adventuring Through the Bible* (p. 80). Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House.

^{viii} Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (Vol. 2, p. 609). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{ix} Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (Vol. 2, pp. 614–615). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^x Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (Vol. 2, p. 621). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{xi} Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (p. 628). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

^{xii} Berkhof, Louis (1939). *Systematic Theology* (p. 403). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

²In this present age, the Holy Spirit points to Jesus and brings Him glory (Matthew 3:16-17; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:14).