

# Moses Wilderness Tabernacle

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## Forward

The tabernacle was God's home on earth. He filled it with his glory—the overpowering sense of his presence.

Almost 500 years later, Solomon built the temple, which replaced the tabernacle as the central place of worship.

God also filled the temple with his glory (2 Chron. 5:13-14). But when Israel turned from God, his glory and presence departed from the temple and it was destroyed by invading armies (2 Kings 25).

The temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. God's glory returned in even greater splendor nearly five centuries later when Jesus Christ, God's Son, entered it and taught. When Jesus was crucified, God's glory again left the temple.

However, God no longer needed a physical building after Jesus rose from the dead. God's temple now is his church, the body of believers.

The priest entered the Holy Place each day to commune with God and tend to the altar of incense, the lampstand, and the table with the bread of the Presence.

The Most Holy Place was where God himself dwelt, his presence resting on the atonement cover, which covered the ark of the Testimony.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the curtain in the temple (which had replaced the tabernacle) tore from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), symbolizing our free access to God because of Jesus' death. No longer did people have to approach God through priests and sacrifices.

## Chapter 1



### **Lessons we can learn from the tabernacle's construction.**

Exodus 25:1-2 The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel that everyone who wants to may bring me an offering.

The children of Israel, or Israelites, were the descendants of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel after he wrestled with the angel (see Genesis 32:24-30). Jacob's family had moved to Egypt at the invitation of Joseph, one of Jacob's sons who had become a great ruler under Pharaoh. Jacob's family grew into a large nation.

As foreigners and newcomers, their lives were quite different from the Egyptians. The Hebrews worshiped one God; the Egyptians worshiped many gods.

The Hebrews were wanderers; the Egyptians had a deeply rooted culture. The Hebrews were shepherds; the Egyptians were builders.

The Hebrews were also physically separated from the rest of the Egyptians: They lived in Goshen, north of the great Egyptian cultural centers.

## **Acacia wood used extensively in the construction of the tabernacle**

Exodus 25:10 And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

Much of the tabernacle and its furniture were made of acacia wood. Acacia trees flourished in barren regions and were fairly common in Old Testament times. The wood was brownish-orange and very hard, making it an excellent material for furniture.

Acacia wood is still used in furniture-making today. A cubit is about 1 1/2 feet or .43 meter.

## **Why the curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.**

Exodus 26:31-33 “Across the inside of the Tabernacle hang a special curtain made of fine linen, with cherubim skillfully embroidered into the using blue, purple, and scarlet yarn.

Hang this inner curtain on gold set into four posts made from acacia wood and overlaid with gold. The posts will fit into silver bases.

When the inner curtain is in place, the Ark of the Covenant behind it. This curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

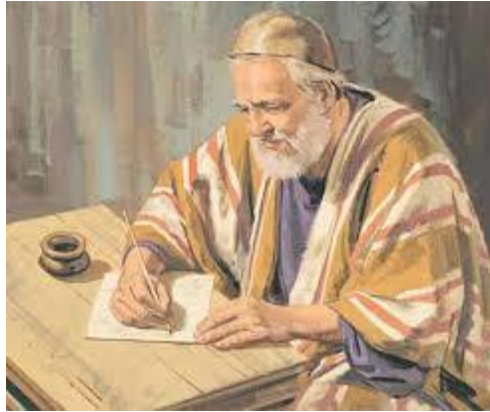
This curtain separated the two sacred rooms in the tabernacle—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

The priest entered the Holy Place each day to commune with God and to tend to the altar of incense, the lampstand, and the table with the bread of the Presence. The Most Holy Place was where God himself dwelt, his presence resting on the atonement cover, which covered the ark of the Testimony.

Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place. Even he could do so only once a year (on the Day of Atonement) to make atonement for the sins of the nation as a whole.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the curtain in the temple (which had replaced the tabernacle) tore from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), symbolizing our free access to God because of Jesus' death. No longer did people have to approach God through priests and sacrifices.

## Chapter 2



### Origin of priests and Levites for the tabernacle

Exodus 28:1

And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.

God was teaching his people how to worship him. To do so, he needed ministers to oversee the operations of the tabernacle and to help the people maintain their relationship with God. These men were called priests and Levites, and they could only be members of the tribe of Levi.

Exodus 28-29 gives some details about priests. Not only was a priest from the tribe of Levi, but he also was a descendant of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. Priests had more responsibilities than Levites. As high priest, Aaron was in charge of all the priests and Levites.

The priests performed the daily sacrifices, maintained the tabernacle, and counseled the people on how to follow God. They were the people's representatives before God and thus were required to live worthy of their office.

Jesus is now our high priest (Hebrews 8). Daily sacrifices are no longer required because he sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins.

Today ministers no longer sacrifice animals. Instead they lead us in prayer and teach us about both the benefits and the commandments that characterize our new life as Christians.

### **Cloth used in construction of the tabernacle**

Exodus 36:8-9

The skilled weavers first made ten sheets from fine linen. One of the craftsmen then embroidered blue, purple, and scarlet cherubim into them.

Each sheet was exactly the same size—forty-two feet long and six feet wide.

Making cloth (spinning and weaving) took a great deal of time in Moses' day.

To own more than two or three changes of clothes was a sign of wealth. The effort involved in making enough cloth for the tabernacle was staggering.

The tabernacle would never have been built without tremendous community involvement. Today, churches and neighborhoods often require this same kind of pulling together. Without it, many essential services wouldn't get done.



## **The Ark of the Covenant**

Exodus 37:1

Next Bezalel made the Ark out of acacia wood. It was 3 3/4 feet long, 2 1/4 feet wide, and 2 1/4 foot high.

The ark (also called the ark of the Testimony or Ark of the Covenant) was built to hold the Ten Commandments. It symbolized God's covenant with his people.

Two gold angels called cherubim were placed on its top. The ark was Israel's most sacred object and was kept in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle.

Only once each year, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood on the top of the ark (called the atonement cover) to atone for the sins of the entire nation.

## Chapter 3



### **Building the tabernacle required the unique gifts of many**

Exodus 38:21

Here is an inventory of the materials used in building the Tabernacle of the Covenant. Moses directed the Levites to compile the figures, and Ithamar son of Aaron the priest served as recorder.

In building the tabernacle, Moses laid out the steps, but Ithamar supervised the project.

We all have different talents and abilities. God didn't ask Moses to build the tabernacle but to motivate the experts to do it. Look for the areas where God has gifted you and then seek opportunities to allow God to use your gifts.

### **Relationship to the temple**

Exodus 40:34

Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glorious presence of the Lord filled it.

The tabernacle was God's home on earth. He filled it with his glory—the overpowering sense of his presence. Almost 500 years later, Solomon built the temple, which replaced the tabernacle as the central place of worship.

God also filled the temple with his glory (2 Chron. 5:13-14).

But when Israel turned from God, his glory and presence departed from the temple and it was destroyed by invading armies (2 Kings 25).

The temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. God's glory returned in even greater splendor nearly five centuries later when Jesus Christ, God's Son, entered it and taught.

When Jesus was crucified, God's glory again left the temple. However, God no longer needed a physical building after Jesus rose from the dead. God's temple now is his church, the body of believers.

### **Why sacrificing wasn't allowed outside area of the tabernacle**

Leviticus 17:3-9

If any Israelite sacrifices a bull or a lamb or a goat anywhere inside or outside the camp and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tabernacle to present it as an offering to the Lord, that person will be guilty of a capital offense. Such a person has shed blood and must be cut off from the community.

This rule will stop the Israelites from sacrificing animals in the open fields. It will cause them to bring their sacrifices to the priest at the entrance of the Tabernacle, so he can present them to the Lord as peace offerings.

That way the priest will be able to sprinkle the blood and burn the fat on the Lord's altar at the entrance of the Tabernacle, and it will be very pleasing to the Lord.

The people must no longer be unfaithful to the Lord by offering sacrifices to evil spirits out in the fields. This is a permanent law for them, to be kept generation after generation.

"Give them this command as well, which applies both to Israelites and to the foreigners living among you. If you offer a whole burnt offering or a sacrifice [9] and do not bring it to the entrance of the Tabernacle to offer it to the Lord, you will be cut off from the community.

Why were the Israelites prohibited from sacrificing outside the tabernacle area?

God had established specific times and places for sacrifices, and each occasion was permeated with symbolism. If people sacrificed on their own, they might easily add to or subtract from God's laws to fit their own life-styles.

Many pagan religions allowed every individual priest to set his own rules; God's command helped the Israelites resist the temptation to follow the pagan pattern. When the Israelites slipped into idolatry, it was because "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 17:6).

The goat idols (also called demons) were objects of worship and sacrifice in ancient times, particularly in Egypt from which they had recently escaped. God did not want the people to make this kind of sacrifice in the desert or in the Promised Land where they were heading.

## Chapter 4



**Lampstand**

Numbers 8:1-4

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron that when he sets up the seven lamps in the lampstand, he is to place them so their light shines forward."

So Aaron did this. He set up the seven lamps so they reflected their light forward, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The entire lampstand, from its base to its decorative blossoms, was made of beaten gold. It was built according to the exact design the Lord had shown Moses.

The lamps provided light for the priests as they carried out their duties. The light was also an expression of God's presence. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). The golden lampstand is still one of the major symbols of the Jewish faith.

## **Tabernacle was moved to Shiloh**

Joshua 18:1-2

Now that the land was under Israelite control, the entire Israelite assembly gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tabernacle.

But there remained seven tribes who had not yet been allotted their inheritance, with a written report of their proposed divisions of

With most of the conquest behind them, Israel moved their religious center from Gilgal (see the note on +Joshua 5:8-9) to Shiloh. This was probably the first place where the tabernacle was set up permanently.

The Tent of Meeting was part of the tabernacle and was where God lived among his people (Exodus 25:8). Its central location in the land made it easier for the people to attend the special worship services and yearly feasts.

The family of Samuel, a great priest and prophet, often traveled to Shiloh, and Samuel was taken there when he was a small boy (1 Samuel 1:3, 22). The tabernacle remained in Shiloh through the period of the judges (about 300 years).

Apparently the city was destroyed by the Philistines when the Ark of the Covenant was captured (1 Samuel 4-5). Shiloh never lived up to its reputation as Israel's religious center, for later references in the Bible point to the wickedness and idolatry in the city (Psalm 78:56-60; Jeremiah 7:12-15).

Seven of the tribes had not yet been assigned their land. They gathered at Shiloh, where Joshua cast lots to determine which areas would be

given to them. Using the sacred lottery, God would make the choice, not Joshua or any other human leader.

By this time, the Canaanites were, in most places, so weakened that they were no longer a threat. Instead of fulfilling God's command to destroy the remaining Canaanites, however, these seven tribes would often take the path of least resistance.

As nomadic people, they may have been reluctant to settle down, preferring to depend economically on the people they were supposed to eliminate. Others may have feared the high cost of continued warfare.

It was easier and more profitable to trade for goods than to destroy the suppliers and have to provide for themselves.

## Chapter 5



### **Attendance required at religious feasts.**

1 Samuel 1:3

Each year Elkanah and his family would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at the Tabernacle. The priests of the Lord at that time were the two sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas.

The tabernacle (Tent of Meeting) was located at Shiloh, the religious center of the nation (see Joshua 18:1).

Three times a year all Israelite men were required to attend a religious feast held at the tabernacle: the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16).

Elkanah made this pilgrimage regularly to fulfill God's commands. (See Exodus 23:14-17 for the regulations concerning the pilgrimage, and see the note on +Exodus 40:34



## **Tabernacle Located at Gibeon**

Joshua 5:8-9

After all the males had been circumcised, they rested in the camp until they were healed.

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the shame of your slavery in Egypt." So that place has been called Gilgal to this day.

Located about two miles northeast of Jericho, Gilgal was Israel's base camp and their temporary center of government and worship during their invasion of Canaan. Here the people renewed their commitment to God and covenant with him before attempting to conquer the new land.

At Gilgal the angelic commander of the Lord's army appeared to Joshua with further instructions for battle and encouragement for the conquest (Joshua 5:13-15). After the conquest, Gilgal continued to be an important place in Israel. It was here that Israel's first king, Saul, was crowned (1 Samuel 11:14-15).

## **Gathering at the tabernacle to consult with the Lord**

2 Chron. 1:2-5

He called together all Israel—the generals and captains of the army, the judges, and all the political and clan leaders.

Then Solomon led the entire assembly to the hill at Gibeon where God's Tabernacle was located. This was the Tabernacle that Moses, the Lord's servant, had constructed in the wilderness.

David had already moved the Ark of God from Kiriath-jearim to the special tent he had prepared for it in Jerusalem.

But the bronze altar made by Bezalel son of Uri and grandson of Hur was still at Gibeon in front of the Tabernacle of the Lord. So Solomon and the people gathered in front of it to consult the Lord.

The Tent of Meeting, or tabernacle, that Moses had built centuries earlier (Exodus 35-40) was still in operation although it had been moved several times.

When Solomon became king, the tabernacle was located at Gibeon, a town about six miles northwest of Jerusalem.

All the tabernacle furniture was kept at Gibeon except the ark of God, which David had moved to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13; 1 Chron. 15-16).

David wanted the ark, the symbol of God's presence, to reside in the city where he ruled the people. The tabernacle at Gibeon, however, was still considered Israel's main religious center until Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem.

### **Difference between the tabernacle and the temple**

1 Kings 8:1

Solomon then summoned the leaders of all the tribes and families of Israel to assemble in Jerusalem. They were to bring the Ark of the Lord's covenant from its location in the City of David, also known as Zion, to its new place in the Temple.

Solomon gathered the people not just to dedicate the temple, but to rededicate themselves to God's service. Solomon could well be speaking these words to us today: "But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time" (1 Kings 8:61).

What was the difference between the tabernacle and the temple, and why did the Israelites change from one to the other?

As a tent, the tabernacle was a portable place of worship designed for the people as they were traveling toward the Promised Land. The temple was a permanent place to worship God after the Israelites were at peace in their land.

To bring the ark of the Lord's covenant to the temple signified God's actual presence there.

## **Chapter 6**



### **KEY TABERNACLE PIECES**

#### **Ark of the Covenant**

A golden rectangular box that contained the Ten Commandments  
Symbolized God's covenant with Israel's  
Located in the Most Holy Place

#### **Atonement**

##### **Cover**

The lid to the Ark of the Covenant  
symbolized the presence of God among his people

##### **Curtain**

Curtain that divided the two sacred rooms of the tabernacle—the Holy  
Place and the Most Holy Place  
Symbolized how the people were separated from God because of sin.

## **The Table**

Presence and various utensils were kept on this table a wooden table located in the Holy Place of the tabernacle.

## **Bread of the Presence**

Twelve loaves of baked bread, one for each tribe of Israel  
Symbolized the spiritual nourishment God offers his people

## **Lampstands and Lamps**

A golden Place, which held seven burning oil lamps lampstand located in the Holy place. The Lampstand lighted the Holy Place for the priests

## **Altar of Incense**

An altar in the Holy Place in front of the curtain  
Used for burning God's special incense and symbolic of acceptable  
Prayer

## **Anointing Oil**

A special oil used to anoint the priests and all the pieces in the tabernacle. This is a sign of being set apart for God

### **Altar of Burnt Offering**

The bronze altar outside the tabernacle used for the sacrifices  
Symbolized how sacrifice restored one's relationship with God.

### **Basin**

A large washbasin outside the tabernacle used by the priests to cleanse themselves before performing their duties

Symbolized the need for spiritual cleansing

#### **References:**

**Holy Bible: King James Translation**

**Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.**

**Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007.**