

REAL PEOPLE, REAL GOD:

Bezalel and the Tabernacle

A Tabernacle Build With New Hearts

“Then all the congregation of the people of Israel...came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the Lord ‘s contribution to be used for the tent of meeting...So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects...everyone who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats’ hair or tanned rams’ skins or goatskins...silver or bronze...[and] acacia wood... And every skillful woman...whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats’ hair. And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breast piece, and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord.” **Exodus 35:20-29**

It’s not as if God needs a home. The whole world is His dwelling place!

“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool, what is the house that you would build for me? And what is the place of my rest?” **Isaiah 66:1**

But God chooses to become accessible to Israel and dwell with them in a “house” that they build with their own hands—with their “stuff.” Piece by piece, thread by thread, Israel builds God’s dwelling.

God has given them an opportunity to *possess* Him, like He plans to *possess* them—as He told Moses on Mt. Sinai...

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” **Exodus 19:5-6**

A Shadow of Eden and Heaven

As we recount the details of the Tabernacle furnishings, take note of the similarities between each sacred piece and the bits and pieces we know about the Garden of Eden and God’s throne

room in heaven. I think you'll see that God's new dwelling place on earth mirrors Eden and heaven in subtle yet meaningful ways.

Who Will Build It?

Who on earth would God commission to build a perfectly heavenly dwelling place for Him on earth? He chose two men whom He empowered by His Holy Spirit to complete the job:

“Then Moses said to the people of Israel, ‘See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel...and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab...He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer.’” **Exodus 35:30-35**

How would Bezalel and Oholiab have felt? Humbled? Frightened? Honored? Ill equipped? Probably all of the above. There are only a few times in the Old Testament when the Spirit of God is specifically mentioned as having filled someone with a specific skill or ability or word, but these men would need God's supernatural wisdom and skill to complete the detailed work of preparing God's home on earth. Isn't it amazing that Christ-followers today are filled with the same Spirit that equipped the skilled workers of the Tabernacle?

The Tabernacle

That Tabernacle itself had three parts: The tent had two parts: 1) Most Holy Place, and 2) Holy Place; and 3) the courtyard (a curtained fence) surrounding the holy places.

The entrance of the courtyard/tent faced *east*, with the likeness of *cherubim* woven into the curtains separating the Israelites from God's earthly presence...just like at the entrance to the Garden of Eden...

“After he drove the man out, he placed on the *east side of the Garden* of Eden *cherubim* and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”
Genesis 3:24 (*emphasis* added)

Most Holy Place

Ark – Made of acacia wood; one of several furnishings made of this particular wood and overlaid with gold. Many folks think it's a foreshadowing of the crucifixion present in the Tabernacle (acacia was decay resistant and bore thick thorns; the Cross—a wooden structure—bore Christ to the grave with a crown of thorns, but His body saw no decay).

Mercy Seat – One piece of pure gold forming a seat with two winged cherubim rising over it on either end. God’s presence rested on the seat between the wings of cherubim. Imagine how difficult it would be to fashion one large piece of gold into a flat “seat” with two cherubim (which would undoubtedly be quite ornate) rising up one either side. This is a piece that would have required great skill and *patience*. And how fitting, for God would show great patience in dealing with His stiff-necked people.

(From Ezekiel’s vision of heaven) “Then the ***glory of the LORD*** departed from over the threshold of the temple and ***stopped above the cherubim***. While I watched, the ***cherubim spread their wings*** and rose from the ground.” **Ezekiel 10:18–19** (*emphasis added*)

Holy Place:

Altar of Incense – Also called the Golden Altar. It sat right next to the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place and was to be managed (flames stoked and incense burned) by the High Priest *only*.

Incense of the altar was a special recipe, known and used only by the priests for this singular purpose. A holy purpose. A sacred scent. An aroma meant for God alone. In both the Old and New Testaments, incense in general came to symbolize the prayers of God’s people.

Aaron and future high priests were responsible to keep this incense fire burning 24/7, and again...it was a picture of the heavenlies:

“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” **Revelation 8:3-4**

Table of Showbread – one loaf of bread for each of the twelve tribes of Israel that was replenished and presented to the Lord (with incense) each Sabbath. After the priests switched out the week-old bread for the fresh bread, Lev. 24:9 tells us they were invited to eat the old bread in the presence of the Lord as a fellowship meal (reminiscent of the meal eaten by Moses, Aaron, his two sons, and the 70 elders on Mt. Sinai – Ex. 24:11). I would guess even week-old bread tastes fabulous when eaten in God’s presence!

It’s interesting to note that the ingredients needed to make a single loaf of Showbread was the exact amount of manna to be gathered for an individual for the Sabbath.

Golden Lampstand – Another item that was to be fashioned of a single piece of gold, the Golden Lampstand was the single source of light in the Holy Place and would have reflected stunningly off the other golden pieces (table and altar of incense). Fashioned as a symbol of the Garden of

Eden's Tree of Life, the lampstand bore almond buds and blossoms (some translations say it even included the nuts) to represent all growing cycles.

It, like the Altar of Incense, was required to burn continually using olive oil as fuel. Where would the Israelites find olive oil in the middle of the wilderness? Only God could provide—as only God will provide the light in His eternal home:

“There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.” **Revelation 22:5**

Courtyard:

Outside the Tabernacle proper was a “fence” of curtains that protected the Tent of Meeting (and God's presence) from the people. Inside that courtyard were several important furnishings...

Bronze basin (bronze laver)

Located, directly outside the Holy Place (first chamber of Tabernacle proper), the Bronze Basin was a large pool of water in which the priests washed their hands and feet as a symbolic cleansing before making an offering to the Lord for the people.

I love the Bronze Basin for a couple of reasons. Besides the fact that it was a great big tub of water in the middle of the desert, it also reminds us of the rivers mentioned in the heavenlies and the Garden of Eden. But the coolest thing about this Bronze Basin is the way it was constructed:

“They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.” **Exodus 38:8**

So every time the priests washed their hands and feet before presenting an offering on behalf of someone else, they had to look in a mirror—checking their own hearts. We would do well to wash in the bronze basin with our own lives. We should wash our hearts clean before confronting sin in the lives of others.

Altar of burnt offering (bronze altar)

Next in the courtyard, between the basin and the entrance to the camp, stood this bronze altar (not gold). This becomes a crucial article, seen by the whole camp, from beyond the courtyard's curtained entrance. It's most crucial detail is the horn on each of its four corners used to secure the offering on the altar. Remember another sacrifice that was secured or “tangled” by its horns?

“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.”

Genesis 22:13

“Cozy” Overview

Do these pieces of the Tabernacle remind you of a home? A place to wash and purify yourself. A place to eat together with God. A warm light that burns through the night. Yes, it’s holy, but there’s also something about it that seems...homey and cozy. God’s dwelling place. Holy, but somehow not unlike our dwelling places. A place to relate. Another example of our REAL GOD *revealing Himself* to and *relating* to His REAL PEOPLE.

Holy Homecoming

However, lest we think this Tabernacle too cozy...listen to the description of our REAL GOD coming “home” to dwell among His REAL PEOPLE...

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.”

Exodus 40:34-38

The glory of the Lord is so powerful that even Moses can’t go in. This is the same Moses who talked with and walked with and met with Yahweh and saw His glory! So while this Tabernacle might be “homey,” it’s definitely holy because our very holy God dwells there.

Let that sink in...God dwelling among humankind! He hasn’t dwelt among them since the Garden.

The People’s Response

The last time God showed up, the Israelites trembled with fear, remained at a distance, and begged Moses to be their go-between. This time, it’s a very different scene after Yahweh speaks to the people from the cloud of His presence.

“**Aaron** lifted his hands toward the people and ***blessed them***. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down. ***Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting***. When they came out, they ***blessed the people***; and the ***glory of the LORD appeared to all the people***. Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when

all the ***people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.***” Leviticus 9:22-24
(***emphasis*** added)

By blessing the people and entering into the cloud-covered tent with Moses, Aaron begins his official leadership. ALL the people react with joy and reverence to God’s presence and fall facedown at the sound of His voice. It’s a fantastic picture of wholehearted obedience that can celebrate God’s overwhelming presence.

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