

# The Tabernacle as a Type of the Church of Christ

(Exodus 25-28)

*Bud Morris*

The children of Israel were God's people. In the symbolic panorama of the Scriptures, they had been redeemed by the blood of the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12), and were on their wilderness journey from the slavery of Egypt to the blessings of the Promised Land. The tabernacle was a portable chapel that God commanded Moses to make so He could meet and dwell with His people during their journey. It's symbolic lessons apply to Christians and the church rather than to unbelievers.

The tabernacle itself typifies the church, where the Lord meets with His people as they progress through the world from the bondage of sin to the heavenly blessings of sanctification through maturity in Christ (*Ephesians 4:11-16*). The Church is not a physical building where the Christ meets with His people, but the Lord's people themselves. "You are God's building" (*I Corinthians 3:9*). "You are the temple of the living God" (*II Corinthians 6:16*). Christ is the head of the Church.

## The Contribution (*Exodus 25:1-7*)

The divine discussion of the tabernacle begins with God's instructions to raise a voluntary contribution from the people of God who cared about meeting with Him. The whole concept of the church is that the people are expected to be involved. They are the church. The question is not "What do we get out of church?" but "How willing are we to get involved in the church?" I Corinthians chapter twelve goes to great lengths to point out that each Christian has been given various spiritual gifts to enable us to fulfil our individual places in the church, which is the body of Christ.

The Israelites could contribute gold, silver, bronze, dyes, materials, skins, wood, gems, onyx stones, perfumes, and lamp oil for the building of the Tabernacle. Many of these things have a fairly consistent typical meaning throughout the Scriptures:

Gold: Divinity, especially the righteous character of God	Rev. 1:13
Silver: Redemption	
Bronze or Brass: Judgment	II Chronicles 4:18, Revelations 1:15
Blue: Heavenly Character	
Purple: Royalty	Mark 15:17-18
Scarlet: The glaringness of sin, The redeeming blood of Christ	Is.1:18
Fine linen: Human righteousness	Revelations 19:7- 8
Wood: Humanity/The Cross	
Oil: The Holy Spirit	
Perfumes (Spices): Worship	John 12.3

## The Charge (*Exodus 25:8-9*)

The Lord warned Moses four times over that the tabernacle was to be built exactly the way God had instructed him to build it. The basic set-up is recorded in the Scriptures, but many of the details were simply to be according to the pattern that God showed Moses on the mountain, which is not available to us. So the church is responsible to follow the pattern given to it in the New Testament. The basic instructions for how the church is to function are mostly detailed in the book of I Corinthians. Other details can be taken from glimpses of how the church functioned in the rest of the New Testament.

### **The Craftsmen (Exodus 31:1-11 & 35:10-19)**

Constructing the tabernacle exactly according to the intricate pattern God showed Moses on the mountain would have been a daunting task. But God divinely enabled special craftsmen for the project. *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you.*

*Exodus 31:1-6*

The Apostle Paul probably corresponds best to Benzalel in the church. He was called by God on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6). He was taught of God (Galatians 1:15-18). His could say:

*For we are God's fellow workers;...you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation.*

*1 Corinthians 3:9-10*

Others were also divinely inspired to establish the church

*Now, therefore, you are...fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

*Ephesians 2:19-22*

And even in our day, each one of us is responsible to be sure we are building according to the pattern God has revealed in His word for the church.

*But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

*1 Corinthians 3:10-15*

### **The Supporting Structure of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:15-36)**

The supporting structure of the tabernacle consisted of three walls of vertical gold-plated boards one and a half cubits wide and ten cubits long (A cubit is about 1 ½ feet). The front wall, which always faced eastward, consisted of five gold-plated pillars that supported a curtain to enter by. The tabernacle was twenty boards (30 cubits) long and six boards (9 cubits) plus two special corner boards wide. This made a strong framework ten cubits (15 feet) tall by ten cubits (15 feet) wide by thirty cubits (45 feet) long.

The gold-plated boards that made up the tabernacle typify the individual believers that make up the church, the body of Christ. They are basically wooden, thoroughly human, but now clothed in the golden righteousness of Christ as believers. Each was set in two heavy silver sockets. Our place in the church is entirely on the basis of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Two silver sockets for each board may signify that we are redeemed *from* every lawless deed (*Titus 2:14*), and we are redeemed to God (*Revelation 5:9*). The whole tabernacle was supported by these silver sockets.

The boards of the tabernacle were held together by two tenons on each board fitted snugly to the next board. This may typify the mutual Christian love that joins each of us to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Each wall of boards was held straight by three rows of gold-plated bars that reached from one end of the wall to the other. The middle bar ran the entire length of the wall without any joints, and may represent the unyielding truth of God which cannot be bent to suit the whims of the assembly. The upper and lower bars actually consisted of two ½ length bars meeting in the middle, which might suggest that there are two sides to many of the issues that concern the assemblies of the Lord's people.

The front of the tabernacle consisted of an embroidered curtain of blue and purple and scarlet fine twined linen that screened off the entrance. This curtain was supported by five gold plated wooden pillars that were set in sockets of bronze, rather than silver. This suggests that individuals who take the place of pillars in the church are held to a stricter standard of judgment than the rest of the church (*James 3:1*).

The back third of the tabernacle was curtained off by the well-known veil, dividing the structure into a larger Holy Place and the smaller Holiest of All. This heavy curtain was supported by four gold-plated columns set in silver sockets. The smaller Holiest room housed the ark and the mercy seat, above which God met with His people. The veil of the temple, which was similarly divided, was torn in two from the top to the bottom, just as though God himself reached down and ripped it in two, when Christ died. The Book of Hebrews explicitly tells us that this signified that the death of Christ made it possible for man to come boldly into the very presence of God without any consciousness of sin because of the work of Christ (*Hebrews 10*).

#### **The Coverings of the Tabernacle (*Exodus 26:1-14*)**

The supportive structure of the tabernacle was cloaked in four layers of coverings, making a tent which practically concealed the gold plated infrastructure.

The bottom layer consisted of ten 4 x 28 cubit fine linen panels embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet cherubim. Two sets of five of these panels were sewed together to make two 20 x 28 cubit larger curtains. Fifty loops were sewed along the adjoining edges of these larger curtains so they could be joined together by fifty golden clasps. Together they formed the ceiling of the tabernacle as visible from the inside. The embroidered cherubim remind us that the angels comprehend the wisdom of God by observing the church in session (*Ephesians 3:10 and I Corinthians 11:10*). The embroidered layer was large enough to hang down within one cubit of the ground with one cubit hanging over the open edge of the front of the Tabernacle. Revelation 19, 7 & 8 suggests that the fine linen is a type of the righteous behavior of the individual members of the church.

The second layer spread over the tabernacle consisted of eleven 4 x 30 cubit panels of woven goat's hair that served to protect the embroidered layer from wear from the two leather coverings above it. These panels overlapped the bottom drape by one cubit (*Exodus 26:13*), and were just long enough to reach to the ground on either side when draped across the tabernacle. Five of these panels were joined together into a single twenty cubit curtain, half (10 cubits) of which was to cover the Holiest area while the other half lapped over the back right down to the ground. The remaining six panels were likewise joined together to make a single twenty-four cubit curtain to cover the rest of the tabernacle. The front panel of this curtain was either folded back along the top, or doubled over and draped two cubits down the open front of the tabernacle, covering the draping edge of the embroidered curtain (*Exodus 26:9*). These two large curtains had fifty loops apiece along their common edges. They were joined together

by fifty bronze clasps through the loops right over the veil. The appearance of this layer would have been rather unattractive, probably symbolizing the humanity of Christ (*Isaiah 53:1-2*), the head of the church. He was the perfect man who satisfied God for mankind (*1 John 2:2*), and became the human mediator between a holy God and sinful men (*1 Timothy 2:5*).

The third layer covering the tabernacle was a layer of ram's skin dyed red. While undoubtedly contributing to the stability and wind resistance of the tabernacle, it probably symbolized the glaringly sinful state of the human race (*Isaiah 1:18*). It could also typify the fact that the members are all alike redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (*1 Peter 1:18-19*). The size of this covering is not specified, but it was to cover the entire tabernacle. It was probably staked tautly out at an angle from the rigid walls rather than being draped down the walls like the layers beneath it.

The outside covering of the tabernacle consisted of individual badger, porpoise, or dugong (Sea cow or manatee) pelts sewn together. These probably would have been rather drab and varied in appearance, but very serviceable as a protection from rain of the wilderness and the dust of the desert. It probably signifies that the church is made up of countless individuals, each with his own natural flaws and variations. Thus the church appears to be a conglomeration of not so beautiful human beings (Badger skins) in the eyes of men who are all alike redeemed sinners (Ram skins dyed red) in the eyes of God. But God sees redeemed mankind in the man, Christ Jesus who is the propitiation for our sins (Goat hair cloth). And because they are born again, the redeemed are capable of pleasing God in true righteousness and the beauty of holiness (Embroidered linen).

### **The Furniture inside the Tabernacle**

**The Ark:**.....Exodus 25:10-22  
The ark was a chest of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, a cubit and half wide, and a cubit and a half high (45" long x 27" wide x 27" deep). It was overlaid with pure gold and had a decorative gold molding around the top to hold the mercy seat securely on it. There were two rings of cast gold on each side of it so two gold plated poles could be placed in them to carry the ark. These poles were never to be removed from the ark.

The ark contained a golden pot full of the manna that God gave the people to eat throughout their wilderness journey, Aaron's rod that budded overnight to establish the Aaronic priesthood (*Numbers 17:1-10*), and the two tables of stone that God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments on (*Hebrews 9:4*).

The lid of the ark was called the mercy seat. It was the same length and width as the ark, and fit into the decorative molding at the top of the ark. It was made of pure gold and had a cherub of hammered gold on each end facing the center with their wings spread over the ark. The wing tips of each cherub touched the wing tips of the other, and their faces looked downward towards the top of the ark. They may symbolize the protective function of the angels that scrutinize the meetings of God with His people. Although God allows the Devil to flout his pernicious influence on the earth for the present, the church is an enclave of the kingdom of God that is outside of Satan's domain. Thus, those who are excommunicated from the church find themselves back in Satan's destructive domain again (*1 Corinthians 5:4 & 1 Timothy 1:20*).

The ark and mercy seat together symbolize the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He was that manna that came down from heaven (*John 6:32*). He was the true priest that God ordained forever (*Hebrews 5:6*) to be the mediator between God and man. He was the Word that was God and was made flesh and dwelt

among us (*John 1 1-14*). And in the context of the church, He is the One who said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Matthew 18:20*).

The ark was placed behind the veil in the Holiest part of the tabernacle. It was there, under cover of the cherub' wings, that God promised to meet with His people and give them all His commandments. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only interface between a holy God and sinful men except for judgment, because He has borne the judgment for our sins. What a sight it must have been when the Shechinah cloud descended from heaven to rest on the ark of God in the Holiest place

The high priest was the only one allowed inside the veil to the ark, and then only once a year to make atonement for himself and the people (*Leviticus 16 & Hebrews 9:7-9*). But when Christ was crucified, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom (*Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38*). It was just as though God reached down and tore the veil in two to show us that the death of Christ opened the way into unhindered fellowship with Him (*Hebrews 10:19-22*).

**The Table:**.....Exodus 25:23-30

The table of the tabernacle was made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. It was two cubits (3 feet) long, one cubit (1 1/2 feet) wide, and one and a half cubits (27 inches) tall. There was a decorative? golden border around the top and a gold ring against the border at each corner to insert the poles to carry the table.

The table was always placed outside the veil along the north wall of the larger room of the tabernacle, towards the left as viewed from the entrance (*Exodus 26:35*). The priests were to have twelve loaves of show bread on the table at all times.

The table probably symbolizes the responsibility of the church to present Christ as the Bread of Life (*John 6:35*). As the priest placed fresh show bread on the table weekly (*Leviticus 24:5-9*), the church ministers Christ as the manna that came down from heaven to the congregation every Sunday at the Breaking of Bread service.

**The Lampstand:**.....Exodus 25:31-40

The lampstand of the tabernacle was hammered out of a talent (75 pounds?) of pure gold. It consisted of a central branch with three symmetrical pairs of branches coming out of its sides. There were four budding? almond floral bowls on the central stick, one beneath each pair of branches and one above the top pair of branches. Each of the six branches also had three budding almond bowls on it. Oil lamps at the top of each of the seven branches were mounted to shine forward from the lampstand.

The lampstand was always placed along the south wall, on the left side of the larger room of the tabernacle as viewed from the front. The high priest was to see that the lamps burned continually (*Leviticus 24:2*).

Since the lampstand had no wood in it, it probably represents Christ Himself as the Light of the World:

*Then Jesus spoke to them again saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

*John 8:12*

*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*

*John 9:4*

The high priest trimmed the lamps every morning and evening (*Leviticus 30:7-8*), but the people were to provide fuel for the lamps (*Leviticus 24:1-4*) so the high priest could keep them in order. Jesus also told the disciples:

*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven.*  
*Matthew 5:14-16*

The church is responsible to see to it that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shines unhindered within it. And the Lord Himself threatened to remove the lampstand of the Ephesian church because they had lost their first love for Him (*Revelation 2:4-5*).

**The Incense Altar: .....Exodus 30:1-10**

The incense altar was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Its top was a cubit (18 inches) square, and it stood 2 cubits (3 feet) high. It had a gold molding around the top and gold rings for inserting carrying poles at the corners like the golden altar and the table. There was also a golden horn at the top of each of the four corner of the altar.

This golden altar was exclusively for burning incense within the tabernacle. A special holy incense was compounded for it which was not to be duplicated for personal use under penalty of death (*Exodus 30:34-38*). The priests were to burn the incense on the golden altar every morning and evening when they trimmed the lamps (*Exodus 30:7-8, Luke 1:8-9*). Although no other offerings were ever burned on it, a smidgeon of sacrificial blood was placed on its horns every year on the day of atonement. Some scholars believe that the altar of incense was originally placed in the holiest part of the tabernacle (*Exodus 30:6*). But because of the imperfections of the human priesthood, God seems to have had them move it back outside the veil (*Leviticus 16:2*).

The golden altar probably symbolizes the church's responsibility and privilege for the collective worship of Christ together. As the tabernacle was filled with the odor of the incense, the church is filled with the fragrance of Christ as we break our alabaster boxes of worship at the feet of our precious Savior (*John 12:3*).

**The Courtyard of the Tabernacle (Exodus 27:9-19)**

**The Fence:**

The tabernacle was surrounded by a fence of curtains to create a courtyard fifty cubits (75 feet) wide by one hundred cubits (150 feet) long (Roughly a fourth the size of an American football field). It was constructed of finely twisted linen curtains five cubits (7 ½ feet) high stretched on posts every five cubits (7 ½ feet) around the entire perimeter. The entrance on the East side consisted of a decorative central curtain of fine twined linen embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet twenty cubits long. Two plainer fifteen cubit curtains stretched the remaining distance to the two front corner posts. We are not given the specific lengths of the individual curtains that stretched along the sides and back of the tabernacle.

We are not told what the courtyard posts were made of. They were supported on bronze bases and had silver bands and silver hooks. Although the tabernacle itself was supported on those silver bases of redemption, the outer limits of the tabernacle were based on bronze bases of judgment. Thus, Christians presenting themselves for communion at the Lord's supper are exhorted to examine themselves:

*Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* I Corinthians 11:27-29

The Lord Himself exhorted:

*If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* Matthew 5:23-24

This examination of self judgment should put an end to any ongoing sin in the believer's life. It should be recognized, made right, and forsaken. We are not to be simply hearers of the Word, but doers of it:

*If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself, goes away, and forgets what kind of man he was.* James 1:23-24

But if wickedness is not forsaken, it becomes the responsibility of the church to judge it. The Scriptures are clear that we are not to allow wickedness in our midst:

*I wrote to you...not to keep company with immoral people. Yet I did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”* I Corinthians 5:9-13

The same applies to those who refuse to yield to the judgment of the church in disputes between Christians (*Matthew 18:15-18*).

The reasons for excommunication are to get the sinner to repent (*I Corinthians 5:5*), to keep the sin from spreading throughout the assembly (*I Corinthians 5:6*), and to clear the assembly of any unholy complacency with sin (*II Corinthians 7:11*). The excommunicated sinner is to be re-admitted into church fellowship when he repents and forsakes his sin (*II Corinthians 2:6-8*).

Finally, if the church does not act, the Lord may have to remove the wicked person from the earth:

*For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we might not be condemned with the world.* I Corinthians 11:30-32

**The Wash Basin (Laveratory).....Exodus 30:17-21**

A wash basin was placed in the courtyard of the tabernacle between curtained door of the tent and the bronze altar. It was made of bronze melted down from the looking glasses of the people, and sat on a bronze base. We are not told its size or shape, but its counterpart at Solomon's temple was ten cubits (15 feet) square, five cubits (7 ½ feet) deep, and held three thousand baths (18,000 gallons) of water. Most of the temple dimensions were considerably larger than the mobile tabernacle's. The bronze altar was four times longer and wider. If the ratios were similar, the basin of the tabernacle would have been about two and a half cubits (45 inches) across and held several hundred gallons of water. That's a lot of water to find in the desert, but would have been necessary for the washing of all the bloody hands and instruments associated with the sacrifices.

The priests had to have their bodies washed at the door of the tabernacle at their consecration (*Exodus 40:12*). They also had to wash their hands and feet at the basin before they entered the tabernacle and

whenever they approached the bronze altar to offer up a sacrifice, “Lest they die.” The bronze basin symbolizes that the believer is to keep himself unspotted from the world. The fact that the bronze came from the looking glasses suggest that self judgment is a necessary part of the believers worship. When the Lord washed the disciples feet at the first Lord’s supper, Peter was told,

*He that is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean.*

*John 13:10*

**The Bronze Altar**.....Exodus 27:1-8

The altar for burning the sacrifices was made of acacia wood overlaid with bronze. It was five cubits (7 ½ feet) square and three cubits (4 ½ feet) tall with bronze horns at each of the four top corners. There was a ledge half way up on the inside which supported a grate of networked bronze where the sacrificial carcasses were placed to be consumed by the fire. Bronze rings were placed on opposite sides at each corner of the grate to insert bronze covered poles for transporting the whole altar. Its accessories included bronze basins, meat forks, fire pans, shovels, and ash buckets.

A lamb was to be offered continually as a burnt offering on the bronze altar every morning and every evening along with a grain offering (*Exodus 29:38-46*). The priests were never to allow the fire of the altar to go out (*Leviticus 6:8-14*). Other offerings burned on the bronze altar included the fatty parts of the peace offerings, the guilt offerings, and the trespass offerings. The significance of the various offerings can be oversimplified briefly as follows:

**The Burnt Offering**.....Leviticus chapter 1

The burnt offering was generally a voluntary offering of a perfect male specimen of any of the acceptable sacrificial animals from a bull down to a couple of young pigeons. After the offerer laid his hands on the sacrifice, it was killed before the altar at the entrance to the tabernacle compound. Its blood was sprinkled on the altar, where the whole butchered animal was completely burned up by the fire. The uniformed priest placed the ashes on the east (*Leviticus 1:15*) side of the altar, and then removed his priestly garments and carried them away to a clean place outside the camp (*Leviticus 6:8-13*).

The outstanding feature of the burnt offering was that the whole sacrifice ascended as a sweet aroma to God. No one ate any of it. It typifies the offerer’s appreciation of what Christ meant to God. Though He was equal to God he humbled Himself and became obedient to God all the way to dying on the cross (*Philippians 2:5-8*). He offered Himself without spot to God (*Hebrews 9:14*). Expressing appreciation for what Christ is to God is offering the burnt offering, and is probably the highest level of worship. Presenting our bodies as living and holy sacrifices completely acceptable to God by totally submitting ourselves to His good and acceptable and perfect will is living our lives as miniature burnt offerings to God (*Romans 12:1-2*).

**The Grain Offering**.....Leviticus chapter 2

The grain offering was generally a voluntary offering of flour, bread, or roasted grain. The flour was to be beaten very fine and topped with oil and frankincense. No matter how closely we examine the life of Christ, there are no flaws in it. The bread could be baked in an oven or fried on a griddle or cooked in a pan. All the grain offerings were to be salted, and no leaven (*Sin–/Corinthians 5:6-8*) or honey (Worldly pleasure) was allowed in the grain offerings. The priest was to burn a memorial handful of the grain offering on the altar, and the rest was given to the priest to eat in the courtyard of the Tabernacle (*Leviticus 6:14-18*).

The hallmark of the grain offering was that no death or blood was involved. It typifies Christ's suffering as a sinless (no leaven) man during His life on earth. Whether visible (grilled or fried in a pan) or invisible (cooked in an oven) sufferings, He was "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (*Isaiah 53:3*). Expressing our appreciation for what Christ endured for us is offering the Grain offering. Entering in to the fellowship of His sufferings (*Philippians 3:10*) and actually suffering with Him before God (*Colossians 1:24*) is living our lives as miniature grain offerings.

**The Peace Offering**.....Leviticus chapter 3  
The peace offering was a thanksgiving or a freewill offering of an unblemished male or female cow, sheep, or goat. After the offerer laid his hands on the sacrifice, the priest killed it at the door of the tabernacle courtyard and sprinkled its blood around the bronze altar. The offerer then removed the fatty parts and the breast and brought them to the altar where the priests burned the fatty parts as a soothing aroma to the Lord and waved the breast as a wave offering before the Lord. The breast was given to the priests, and the right thigh was given to the priest who presided over the ritual (*Leviticus 7:28-36*). Finally, the offerer was to feast on the remainder of the offering that day (Thanksgiving offering) and the next (Freewill offering--*Leviticus 7:11-18*). Each peace offering was offered with a grain offering.

The distinguishing point of the peace offering is that the offerer enjoyed feasting on it as well as the priests. It is more what Christ is to us. It symbolizes that Christ has brought us into fellowship with a holy God through His death. *Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3)*. Expressing our delight in our fellowship with God through Christ is offering the peace offering. Living in communion with the Lord in an attitude of thanksgiving while continually offering up the sacrifice of praise to God with our lips (*Hebrews 13:15*) is living our lives as miniature peace offerings.

**The Sin and Trespass Offerings**.....Leviticus chapter 4-6:7 & 6:24-7:7  
The sin and trespass offerings were obligatory offerings, generally for specific failures of an individual. The same rules applied to both (*Leviticus 7:7*). The sin offering seems to have been more for unintentional sins of omission, especially in the sacred rituals. The trespass or guilt offering tended to be more for sins of commission, like touching unclean things or robbery or lying, etc. Any dishonest gain required restitution with a twenty percent penalty. Sins of an anointed priest or the whole congregation had to be atoned with a sacrificial bull, and some of the blood of the sacrifice was taken inside the tabernacle and sprinkled seven times before the vail and smudged on the horns of the golden altar. The magnitude of the sacrifices for others depended more on the status and ability of the offender than on the degree of the sin. A leader offered a ram or a billy goat while a less prominent citizen might offer a nanny goat or a lamb. A very poor person could offer as little as two turtle doves or two young pigeons.

After the offerer transferred his sin to the sacrifice by laying his hands on its head, the sin or trespass offering was killed where the burnt offerings were killed. The blood was smudged on the horns of the bronze altar and the rest poured out at the base of the altar. The fatty parts were burnt as a soothing aroma to the Lord (*Leviticus 4:31*). The bodies of the offerings for an active priest or the whole congregation were burned in a clean place outside the camp where the ashes from the burnt offerings are poured out (Christ's rejection by the people--*Hebrews 13:11-14*). But the bodies of those offerings where the blood was not brought inside the tabernacle were eaten by the priest who offered them in the courtyard of the tabernacle. The cooking vessel was to be washed, or broken if it was earthen ware, and any blood spilled on the

priest's clothing had to be washed out in the courtyard of the tabernacle (*Leviticus 7:26-29*). Every trace of the sin was to be expunged.

The defining factor of the sin and trespass offerings is that they were for forgiveness for specific sins. The offering typifies the crucified Christ as the advocate for His erring people (*1 John 2:1*). His death covers the erring believers sins, however bad.

*If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* *1 John 1:9*

### **The Priestly Garments (*Exodus 28*)**

In the tabernacle, the high priest generally typifies Christ as our great high priest. Aaron's sons, the other priests, typify the Christians in the church. Christ has made us a kingdom of priests to our God (*Revelations 1:8*). The high priest was to be clothed in an elaborate set of holy garments for his duties. These included linen trousers, a blue robe, an embroidered vest with epaulets, a breastplate, a sash, and a decorative turban, each intricately designed for their symbolic significance.

#### **The Ephod.....Exodus 28:5-14**

The outer vest, or ephod, of the high priest's outfit consisted of front and back panels of fine twined linen skillfully embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet thread and gold tinsel. The fine linen portrays the human righteousness of Christ, while the embroidery reflects the various beauties of His character including his divinity. The front and back panels were joined across each shoulder by epaulets of onyx stones mounted in filigreed gold settings. The names of six of the tribes of Israel were engraved on the onyx stone on one shoulder and the names of the other six were engraved in the onyx stone on the other shoulder "*as a memorial for the sons of Israel.*" Aaron was to bear their names collectively on his shoulders when he ministered before the Lord. So Christ bears His united people, the church, before God by the strength of who He is (*Hebrews 7:24-25*). The open sides of the ephod were held together by a sash of the same material as the rest of the ephod.

#### **The Breastplate of Judgment.....Exodus 28:15-30**

The breastplate of the ephod was made of the same material as the ephod itself. When doubled over at the middle and hung from the corners with the folded side at the bottom, it was one span (about 9 inches) square. It was suspended across the front of the ephod by golden chains from the settings of the epaulets to the respective pair of corners of the breastplate. Four rows of three gemstones each were mounted in gold settings across the front of the breastplate. Each of the twelve stones was a different gem with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on it so that each tribe was represented by a different gem. Thus Aaron also bore the names of the people individually as a memorial "*on his heart*" when he went into the holy place. Each child of God is a different and uniquely precious individual with a special place close to the heart of Christ as He intercedes for us before the Father (*Hebrews 4:14*).

The folded Breastplate of Judgment hung like a pocket across the front of the ephod. The Urim ("lights") and Thumim ("Perfections") were placed inside it. No one knows what the urim and thumim looked like, but somehow they conveyed the Lord's judgments to the priest. There were gold rings at the bottom corners of the breastplate to tie it with a blue ribband to similar gold rings attached to the ephod. Walking according to our heavenly calling keeps us close to the heart of our Savior where we can discern what is that good acceptable and perfect will of God.

**The High Priest's Robe**.....Exodus 28:31-36

The robe of the ephod was made of blue material with reinforced woven borders to keep it from tearing. The blue probably reflects the heavenly walk of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth. It's sleeves and its skirts would have shown outside the short and sleeveless ephod. The hem of the robe was decorated with alternating golden bells and pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet material. The sound of the bells could be heard from inside the veil as the priest made atonement for the people once a year on the day of atonement. The bells symbolize the Lord's testimony of righteousness here on earth. But His testimony was always backed up with the fruits of the Spirit. His walk was always consistent with His words, or He never could have made atonement for our sins.

**The Tunic**.....Exodus 28:

A checkered tunic over the robe emphasized that Christ was both human and divine.

**The Turban**.....Exodus 28:36-39

The high priest's turban was made of linen (Righteousness). A golden plaque engraved with the words, HOLINESS TO THE LORD was tied across the part that covered the forehead, *"that Aaron might bear the iniquity of the holy things which the Children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts."* If Christ had not been perfectly righteous (His activities) and absolutely holy (His nature) He could not have born the iniquities of His people.

**The Garments of the (other) Priests**.....Exodus 28:42-43

All the priests were to wear linen trousers reaching from the loins to the thigh to cover their nakedness whenever they approached the tabernacle or the altar lest they *"incur iniquity and die."* Aaron was apparently to wear them under his high priestly outfit. Righteousness is a requirement for any service in the church, and lust must be suppressed by righteousness in the children of God, who are all priest in the Church (*I Peter 2:5 & 9*).

The lesser priests were also to have tunics, sashes, and turbans *for glory and for beauty*. Does our testimony reflect the glory and beauty of our great High Priest?

### **The Logistics of the Tabernacle Service**

**The Shechinah Cloud**.....Exodus 40:34-38

When the tabernacle was placed in service, the shechinah cloud descended and filled the tabernacle with the glory of the Lord (*Exodus 40:34-35*). The cloud, like the wind that sounds in the trees though you can't put your finger on it (*John 3:8*), validated the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. Is the presence of the Holy Spirit felt in the church (*I Corinthians 13:24-25*)? It will be if we earnestly seek to be led by the Spirit of God when we come together, so that we are ready to speak when He leads us to speak, and we only say what He leads us to say.

*If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.*

*I Peter 4:11*

When the cloud first descended on the tabernacle, Moses was not able to enter it. It's almost as if God was signifying that the Holy Spirit was taking over the ministry of the assembly of His people. In the Scriptures, it was not some specially ordained preacher, nor the elders, nor whoever thought he had something impressive to say, but the Holy Spirit that ministered to the assembly. He alone knows the spiritual condition and needs of everyone present, and He should be free to address them through whoever He has prepared as His mouthpiece in the assembly. The fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians

establishes the guidelines for this open format meeting where each man is free to minister as the Spirit leads. It also specifies that women are to remain silent in such meetings.

The tabernacle was the central feature of the camp of Israel (*Numbers 2:17*). The cloud of the Lord remained over it by day, and the fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up, the tabernacle was mobilized to follow its leading. And whenever it stood still, the tabernacle was erected under it. So the Spirit of God should be the guiding factor in all decisions on church direction and policy.

**The Levites**.....Numbers 3:5-4:49  
The tribe of Levi was chosen (*Exodus 33:25-29?*) to serve Aaron and attend to the needs of the whole congregation and do the work of the Tabernacle (*Numbers 3:5-12*). The Lord claimed them for Himself instead of the firstborn of all the tribes of Israel (*Numbers 3:43-51*). Each of the three divisions of the Levites had its own special duties involving the tabernacle. This may symbolize that the Holy Spirit chooses the spiritual gifts He dispenses to each member of the church so the church can function as the body of Christ on earth (*I Corinthians 12:7-12*). The Levites were conscripted to the Lord's work from thirty to fifty years of age.

**The Sons of Kohath**.....Numbers 4:1-20  
When the tabernacle was being prepared to move, the priests took down the vail and covered the Ark with it. Then they covered the vail with a layer of badger skins and a blue cloth and inserted the poles to carry the ark. They prepared the rest of the inside furnishings in a similar way so that the Levites would not die from gazing on the holy things.

When the inside furnishings were ready, the Kohathites carried them on their shoulders to the new location of the tabernacle. They were never to look at the uncovered holy things lest they die. We might think of their work as worship, which comes entirely from within and involves the holy things now that the veil is rent.

**The Sons of Gershon**.....Numbers 4:21-33  
The Gershonites were to move the curtains and furnishings of the courtyard of the tabernacle under the direct supervision of the priests. They were provided with two carts and four oxen to aid them in their work (*Numbers 7:7*). We might think of their work as shepherding and helping and encouraging, which involves the functioning of the church.

**The Sons of Merari**.....Numbers 4:34-33  
The Merariites were to transport the structural parts and the coverings of the Tabernacle under the supervision of the priests. They were allotted four carts and eight oxen to help with their work (*Numbers 7:8*). We might think of their work as teaching, which involves the structure of the church (*I Timothy 3:15*).

Today every believer is a priest and can be a Kohathite, Gershonite, and Merariite as the holy Spirit leads in the church of Christ.

### **The Day of Atonement (*Leviticus chapter 16*)**

The Holiest part of the tabernacle could only be entered once a year, and then only by the high priest on the day of atonement (*Hebrews 9:7*). This was the day that the high priest made atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, the tabernacle of meeting, the priests, and the people of the congregation. The people were

to refrain from working and afflict their souls on that day when the priest made atonement to cleanse them from all their sins (*Leviticus 16:28-34*).

The high priest had to make atonement for himself before he could make atonement for the sins of the people. He had to bring a young bull (*Leviticus 4:3*) for his sin offering and a ram for his burnt offering. The congregation had to provide two goat kids for their sin offering and a ram as their burnt offering. The high priest was to cast lots over the goats to determine which was to be the Lord's sacrifice, and which would be the people's scapegoat.

After washing himself and putting on the high priestly garments, the high priest was to kill the bull for his own sin offering. Then he was to take a censer full of burning coals from the bronze altar and both hands full of the holy incense (*Exodus 30:34-38*) inside the veil and burn it before the Lord until the cloud of fragrant smoke covered the mercy seat, lest he die. Then he returned to the altar, brought some of the blood of the bull back inside the veil, and sprinkled it on the east (Veil side) of the mercy seat and seven times on the ground before the mercy seat with his finger.

#### **The Lord's Goat:**

The high priest then returned to the gate of the tabernacle to kill the Lord's goat that was to be the sin offering for the people. He took its blood back inside the veil and sprinkled it on the mercy seat and seven times before the mercy seat just as he had done with his own sin offering to make atonement for the Holy Place because of the uncleanness and trespasses and sins of the people. Then he was to return to the bronze altar, put some of the blood of the bull and the goat on each of its horns, and sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger to cleanse and sanctify it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel. No one was allowed in the tabernacle while the high priest made atonement in it, but the people could follow his activities by the tinkle of the bells on the hem of the skirt of his robe (*Exodus 28:33-35*).

Although the narrative does not call for it here, the blood of the bull for the sin offerings for the priests (*Leviticus 4:7*) and the whole congregation (*Leviticus 4:18*) was also to be sprinkled before the veil and placed on the horns of the golden altar of incense. This may explain why atonement was made for "the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar" (*Leviticus 16:20*).

#### **The Scapegoat:**

When atonement for these things has been made, the high priest was to bring the live goat that was for the people to the altar? and lay his hands on it, and confess all the iniquities and all their transgressions concerning all their sins over it. Then he was to send the goat into the wilderness by a suitable (clean?) man, who would release it in an uninhabited area to bear all their all the iniquities on itself.

When the scapegoat was gone, the high priest was to return to the tabernacle, remove his high priestly outfit and leave it there, wash his body, get dressed, and come out to offer the rams for his own and the people's burnt offerings in the usual way to make atonement for himself and the people. It was not the sin offerings that made atonement for the Lord's people. They were used to cleanse the altar, the tabernacle, and the Holiest Place so the burnt offerings could atone for the priest and the people. The true Christian who is already washed in the blood of the (Passover) lamb does not need to be redeemed again when he sins (*John 13:10*). When He repents, what he really needs is a fresh identification with how completely the Lord has satisfied God about the question of sin, and what it cost the Lord to do it.

Finally, the high priest burned the fat of his bull and the Lord's goat for the sin offerings as burnt offerings on the bronze altar. Their bodies, skins, and offal were carried outside the camp and burned in

a clean place where the ashes of the burnt offerings are normally dumped (*Leviticus 4:12*). The man who led the scapegoat away and whoever burned the sin offerings had to wash themselves and their clothes with water before they were allowed back in the camp. It is only appropriate that those involved with the cleansing of sin feel the need for cleansing themselves (*Galatians 6:1*).

The statute of the Day of Atonement was to be an annual ritual for ever. Once it was done on the tenth day of the seventh month of each year, the Holy Place would be closed to human entrance for another year.

The significance of the day of atonement is that the Lord's people are always being defiled with both active sins and passive failures. All those animal sacrifices could never really take away the sin, but only pointed on to Christ (*Romans 3:25*). He was the perfect sacrifice who not only cleansed us from our sins in His own blood (*Revelation 1:5*) once for all (The sacrificed goat), but also bore them away Himself (*I Peter 2:24*), removing all remembrance (*Hebrews 8:12*) of the guilt (The scapegoat—*Psalms 103:12*). Thus, when the Lord was crucified, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom (*Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38*), just as though God reached down and opened the way for His people to enter into His presence. Thank God an acceptable sacrifice has finally been found.

*And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin*

*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.* *Hebrews 10:11-25*

### **The Red Heifer (*Numbers 19:1-22*)**

The ashes of the red heifer are mentioned in conjunction with the day of atonement in *Hebrews 9:13-14*. David referred to it in his psalm of repentance:

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*Psalms 51:7*

The Lord's people were to present an unblemished red heifer that had never had a yoke on it to the high priest. The relative weakness of the female sacrifice typifies the humanity of Christ, while the unblemished requirement reminds us that He knew no sin (*II Corinthians 5:21*). The sacrifice was never to have had a yoke on it because Christ was never under the bondage of the sinful human nature. He was:

*Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.  
Hebrews 7:26*

The red heifer was slaughtered before the high priest outside the camp of Israel. He was to dip his finger in its blood and sprinkle it towards the front of the tabernacle seven times. Then the whole heifer including its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its refuse was to be burned outside the camp where it was killed. The priest was to toss some cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet material? into the mist of the burning heifer. Then he was to wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain outside the camp as unclean until evening. The man who burned the red heifer was also to bathe himself and wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. Finally, a man who was ceremonially clean was to gather up the ashes of the burned heifer and save them up in a clean place outside the camp for making the Water of Separation. This man also had to wash his clothes and be unclean til evening.

This whole red heifer sacrifice was all about getting the ashes for making the water of Separation to cleanse the defiled members of the Lord's congregation. Ashes were the universal symbol of humility in the Old Testament (*Jonah 3:6 &tc.*). The ashes were not the sacrifice, but what was left over after the fire of judgement consumed the sacrifice. We must humble ourselves enough to admit we are in need of cleansing before a genuine cleansing can occur.

Whenever a person came into contact with a dead body he became defiled, or unclean for seven days. Just entering the tent where someone had died or stepping on a grave rendered a person unclean for seven days. Even the open vessels without covers inside the tent of death were unclean, and anyone who touched an unclean person or any unclean object became unclean until evening themselves. Some such defilement was necessary, as tending to a dying or dead family member. Some was noble, as comforting the bereaved. Some might be accidental or even downright careless, as stepping on a grave. Some might even be defiantly purposeful. Whatever the cause, the defiled person had to purify himself with the water of separation or be cut off from the congregation because he is defiling the tabernacle of the Lord.

Some of the ashes of the heifer were placed in a vessel and mixed with running water to make the water of separation. Then a clean person dipped the free end of a handful of hyssop (A grasslike weed) in the water of separation and splattered it on the unclean person along with the unclean things that caused his defilement on both the third day and the seventh day of his contamination. Finally, the unclean person was to purify himself on the seventh day by washing his clothes and bathing in water. He was considered clean on the evening of the seventh day.

The lesson derived from the red heifer is that this world is a corrupting environment that strives to conform the children of God to itself. We are in constant need of a cleansing application of the water of separation to transform us by the renewing of our minds so we can discern and experience the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (*Romans 12:2*). There has to be that third day's personal confession and repentance towards God before the seventh day public restoration can occur.

The ashes of the red heifer are the humiliating memory of what the Lord went through for us when He offered Himself to God as the propitiation for sin. They remind us that our sacrifice was a man who is still able to help us because He was tempted in all points that we are, but without sin (*Hebrews 2:18 & 4:15*). Mingled with the ashes of the heifer were the ashes of the cedar (Enduring) wood. They remind us of the cross that was the symbol of His rejection by this world. Can we become conformed to the world to avoid His reproach when He endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself for us (*Hebrews 12:3*)? The ashes of the scarlet were the grim reminder that it was our sins that brought Him to that cross. Can we continue to sin against the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (*Galatians 2:20*)? And finally, the ashes of the hyssop remind us that having applied the blood of Christ to the doorposts of our hearts (*Exodus 12:22*), we should have been feasting on the goodness of the

Passover Lamb (*Exodus 12::7-8*) instead of filling our bellies with the worldly husks around us that are fit only for swine to eat (*Luke 15:15-16*).

Applying the water of separation is like repenting of how sinful and worldly we have become, and coming to the throne of grace to obtain the mercy and find the grace we need to keep ourselves unspotted from the world (*Hebrews 4:16 & James 1:27*).

### ***Disclaimer***

God seems to have placed many symbolic passages in the Bible to tweak our interest. He is probably more interested in getting us to meditate on His Word than in whether or not we solve the puzzles completely correctly. Even if we get the puzzle entirely wrong, little harm is done in our speculations on symbolism if our conclusions are garnered from the rest of the Scriptures.

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