

The Tabernacle Furnishings

(Exodus 37:1-29, 38:1-8)

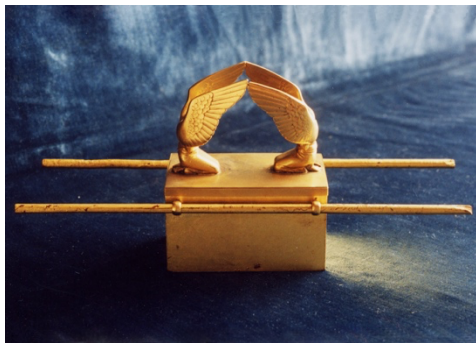
[Note: Photos of the Tabernacle are copyrighted by the Glencairn Museum and used with permission.]

The Tabernacle

What kind of place for worship did the ancient Israelites have? It had to be a moveable building because they were still traveling. The Lord told the Israelites to build a beautiful tabernacle with four coverings over it. The walls were made of acacia wood and covered with gold. Inside the tent there were two rooms divided by a curtain called "the veil." Four colors were used in this veil. It was artistically woven in blue, purple, scarlet and white linen with beautiful cherubim or angels with wings on it. Surrounding the tabernacle was an outer courtyard which was bordered by more hanging cloths. This arrangement was patterned after a tabernacle in heaven and was to be a holy place for worship. It would always be kept in the center of the Children of Israel, while they were traveling and when they stopped to camp. This is because worshiping the Lord should always be at the heart of all we do. In this lesson we will learn about the pieces of furniture inside the tabernacle and in the court and how they were used for worship.



The Ark of the Covenant



The most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle was a sacred chest that was kept in the Holy of Holies. This chest or ark held the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. How long is a cubit? (The length from the elbow to the end of the fingers or about 18 inches.) The ark was two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide and high (three feet nine inches long, two feet three inches wide and high). There were rings on the ends through which long wooden poles covered with gold were put in order to carry the chest. The ark had a crown of gold around the top edge. The ark was made of acacia wood covered with pure gold inside and outside. It had a lid of solid gold, called "the mercy seat." On the mercy seat were two cherubim, also of solid gold. It was here upon the mercy seat, between the wings of the cherubim, that the Lord spoke to Moses. No one else entered the Holy of Holies except the high priest once a year.

Each of us must have an ark in our lives. It is built in our minds. The Lord speaks to us there in our conscience. And we can hear the Lord in our conscience when we think about what is right and wrong. Our conscience needs to hold the treasure of the Ten Commandments. That is why it is so important to learn the commandments and try to live by them. Our conscience gains strength with every truth we learn and try to live.



The Table of Showbread



In front of the Holy of Holies was the other room of the tabernacle where the priests came every day to perform their worship rituals. The Holy Place was a large room. Three pieces of furniture were in it. First there was a table that held holy bread. It was called the "table of showbread." Fresh bread was always on this table. The Israelites used unleavened bread, the flat bread with no yeast in it that they ate at the Passover.

The table of showbread was made of acacia wood and covered with gold. It also had a border or crown around the top of it and four rings in which poles were inserted to carry it. The dishes that held the bread were made of gold. Do you see a similarity to the ark of the covenant?

The unleavened bread stands for the Lord's love and the good that comes from Him each day. The table stands for our willingness to receive this good from the Lord. Just as the priests put fresh bread upon this table in their worship, so we need to receive new love from the Lord each day.

The Lampstand

The second thing in the Holy Place was a large lampstand made of solid gold. It had seven branches and on each branch there was an oil lamp also made of gold. What purpose do you think a lampstand would serve in the Holy Place? Oil lamps give off a warm, glowing light. The people brought the finest olive oil, and the priests trimmed the wicks and lit the lamps every evening so that the Holy Place would be lit until morning.

Oil stands for love. We are like lampstands when we love the Lord and learn truths from the Lord's Word. The "light" or truth comes from the Lord alone and will show us the right path to take in our life.

The Altar of Incense

The third thing in the Holy Place was the altar of incense. It was also made of acacia wood covered with gold. It had a crown of gold around it and four horns, one at each corner. It had rings and poles of gold so it could be carried. Sweet-smelling incense was burnt upon it both in the morning and in the evening.

This altar stands for our worship of the Lord. When we worship the Lord and say our prayers to Him, it is like the gentle smoke of incense rising up. The Lord happily receives our prayers.

The Altar of Burnt Offering



The entrance at the front of the tabernacle was covered with a curtain of blue, purple, scarlet and white linen. You could see this curtain when standing in the outer courtyard. The courtyard was large, and its walls were made of white linen curtains hung on poles. The entrance to the courtyard faced east. It was here that the priests led the people of Israel in worship to the Lord. The people would bring animals to be sacrificed and the priests would offer these on the big altar of burnt offerings.

Did you notice that all the furniture inside the tabernacle was made of wood covered with gold? It must have looked beautiful in the bright light from the lampstand. In the outer court the furniture was made of brass or copper. This metal is a bit darker in color than the soft yellow of gold. The altar of burnt offering was a large altar and the top of it was a grate also made of brass. There were four horns, one on each corner, and rings so that it could be carried with poles. When people brought animals to be offered on this altar, they were thanking the Lord for all He had done for them. Burnt offerings were made every morning and evening and also at other times.

The Laver

There was another important thing in the courtyard. It was a large laver or basin to hold water. The priests washed their hands and so that they would be clean when

they went into the tabernacle or when they offered burnt offerings on the big altar. This laver was also made of brass. The water in it stands for the Lord's truth. We use the Lord's truth to make our minds clean. As we read the Lord's Word, we put clean or good thoughts into our minds and He washes away the bad ones.



Pattern for a Heavenly Life

Did you notice that each part of the tabernacle could be taken apart and carried by the priests of Israel? The tribe of Levi was put in charge of worship, so the priests were called Levites. Many precious things were used to build the tabernacle. Emanuel Swedenborg was once allowed to see a tabernacle in heaven. It was exactly like the one the Lord commanded Moses to build. This beautiful tabernacle is like us when we are doing our best to do what is right and allow the Lord to lead us. Then we too will have a spiritual tabernacle built in our minds where the Lord can be with us and protect us from evil.