

## THE TABERNACLE

*Exodus 26-27*

The children of Israel reached Sinai three months after they left Egypt, and they remained there almost a year. The departure does not come until Numbers 10:11. The pupils should get a clear idea of this year at Sinai and what it accomplished. The giving of the laws and especially the establishment of the external forms of worship welded the people into a nation.

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### Doctrinal Points

*What the orderly life is.*

*Every individual is a church in least form.*

*The uses of formal worship.*

*The ancient Jewish Church in the historical series.*

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### Notes for Parents

When they left Egypt under the leadership of Moses and the pillar of cloud and fire, the Israelites were just an unorganized horde of people bent on escaping from a bondage which had become unbearable. After three months in the wilderness they came to the great mountain called Sinai, which stands up abruptly out of the plain. There the pillar of cloud and fire stopped and they camped in the plain, and there they stayed for nearly a year.

During that time the Lord formed them into a nation by giving them an extensive code of laws to govern everything they did. The difference between this code and the codes which govern nations today was that religion was its center. The first thing given to them was the ten commandments. These commandments were not new. Most of them are found in codes of laws which existed before the time of Moses. And that is just what we should expect, for they are not man-made laws but the laws which are the very foundation of human society, laws given to mankind by God from

the very beginning. It was to establish this very fact that they were again spoken by the living voice of the Lord Himself to the children of Israel from amidst the fire and smoke on the top of Mount Sinai.

Afterward the Lord gave Moses the plan on which the tabernacle was to be built and all the directions for its furnishings and for the worship that was to be carried on in it. The tabernacle was to be erected in the center of their encampment and carried at the center of their line of march. The tabernacle, like our churches today, was the “house of God,” His dwelling place among men. It was to be the center of their life, just as worship of God should be the center of our lives, reaching out into and directing everything we do. Did you ever stop to think that if we do not look to the Lord for guidance in our daily lives, we are really setting ourselves up in place of God?

The tabernacle in the center of the camp of Israel is a picture of the Lord’s unselfish love and His truth at the center of our life. The older children are studying the meaning of the three divisions of the tabernacle and of some of the other details of its construction and furnishing. Such a study will help them to see how they can build their own characters into a house of the Lord. Recall what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians (I Cor. 3:16): “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

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### Primary

The description of the tabernacle will interest the younger children. Emphasize the colors and the embroidery. This is a good lesson in which to present the thought of the church as the Lord’s house and to discuss why we go to church. Working on the basis of the plan of the tabernacle, describe as many as possible of the details of its construction and furnishings. Stress especially the three parts, and the use of the three metals.

You know, don’t you, that the church is called the Lord’s house? The Lord is near to us all the time, although we can’t see Him, but He is especially near in church because there’ we are

thinking and talking about Him and trying to learn what He wants us to do.

When the children of Israel stayed on in Egypt for so many years, they forgot all about the Lord and how to worship Him. So before they had been in the wilderness very long, He brought them to the foot of a great mountain called Mount Sinai and had them camp there. Then He called Moses up to the top of the mountain and told him that He was going to give the people the laws by which they were to live and all the directions for their worship. Then the Lord came down upon the mountain in fire and spoke the ten commandments so that all the people heard them.

Afterwards He told Moses just how to build the tabernacle, the house in which they were to worship Him. You know that the children of Israel were traveling through the wilderness; so they could not have houses and churches like ours. They had to live in tents, and their church had to be a tent, too.

The tabernacle was about forty-five feet long and fifteen feet wide.

What were the walls made of?

What was it covered with?

What was the entrance?

Another curtain, called the *veil*, divided the tabernacle into two parts.

The inner part was called the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, and the other part was called the Holy Place.

Outside was an open court surrounded by curtains hung on posts.

All the wood in the tabernacle was covered with gold.

The bases on which the boards were set were of silver.

The posts for the outer fence and their bases were of bronze.

Your teacher will show you a plan of the tabernacle and help you to understand it.

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### Junior

The Juniors can be given an idea of the meaning of the three parts of the tabernacle in our lives, and if they grasp this readily the teacher may go on to speak simply of the meaning of the furnishings in each part. The literal facts, however, are of first importance with this age group.

What is a tabernacle?

Why was the first church of the Israelites a tent?

The tabernacle itself was about fifteen feet wide and forty-five feet long, and the court which surrounded it was about seventy-five feet wide and a hundred and fifty feet long. A cubit is the length from the elbow to the tips of the fingers, or about a foot and a half. All the materials for the tabernacle and its furnishings were brought to Moses by the people as free-will offerings, and we read in Exodus 36:1-2 that the Lord put wisdom in the hearts of certain men to do the work properly.

The tabernacle proper was divided into two parts by a beautiful curtain called the *veil*. The inner division was a cube and was called the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. The other division was called the Holy Place.

What were the walls of the tabernacle made of?

What were the bases for these walls made of?

The boards were so made that they would fit together when they were placed upright in the bases, and they were held together by long bars which ran through rings of gold. So the tabernacle could be set up and taken down very quickly. When they camped it was always to be set up in the center, and when they marched it was carried in the center of the line of march. Only the Levites, the descendants of Jacob's third son Levi, could handle the tabernacle.

What three coverings were made for the top of the tabernacle?

What was the fence around the outer court made of?

What was used to cover all the wood of the tabernacle?

What were the bases for the boards made of?

What were the posts on which the curtains of the outer court were hung and their bases made of?

Notice that the couplings of the inner covering of the tabernacle were of gold, but those of the outer covering were of brass or bronze. Try to remember the three metals used in the tabernacle and where they were used, because when you are older you will learn that there was a very deep reason in this. The wood used is thought to have been the wood of the thorny acacia tree. Study the chart with the last lesson to see what the furniture of the tabernacle was and where each piece was placed.

Now look up John 2:18-22. The tabernacle, like the temple which followed it, was built to be the dwelling place of the Lord with men. When the Lord Himself was on earth, the human body in which He lived was His dwelling place, and so He called it the temple also. But we can have a dwelling place of the Lord in us, too, and this is a heavenly character which is also a temple of the Lord. Look up I Corinthians 3:16. This temple in us is also divided into three parts. Our “Holy of Holies” is our inmost heart, where the Lord reaches us and speaks to us. Our “Holy Place” is our mind, where we think about the Lord and about what we ought to do. And our “outer court” is our behavior, which is open for everyone to see. You notice that the only piece of furniture in the Holy of Holies was the ark, and you will remember that the ark was a chest made to hold the two tables of stone on which the ten commandments had been written by the finger of God. Now look up Deuteronomy 6:6, Psalms 40:8 and 119:98, Isaiah 51:7, and Jeremiah 31:33. Can you see how clearly we are taught what is meant in our lives by the ark’s being in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle?

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### Intermediate

The correspondence of the tabernacle as a whole, of its three divisions, and of the three metals used and the place of each in the structure makes a well-ordered and on the whole simple lesson. The teacher, however, should also familiarize himself with the meaning of the articles of furniture and may add these if he has time.

After about three months in the wilderness, the Israelites came to Mount Sinai and camped on the plain at the foot of the mountain. There they remained nearly a year. You may easily see that after hundreds of years in Egypt, the latter part of which was spent in slavery, they were not a very well-organized people. Since they had forgotten even the name of their God, they must also have forgotten all that had been told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about how their God wanted them to live and to worship. At Sinai, therefore, the Lord gave them first the ten commandments.

These all the people heard, for they were given by the living voice of the Lord from the top of the mountain from the midst of fire and smoke. Then Moses was called up into the mountain and given detailed laws for their conduct and worship. These laws are found in the books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and especially in the book of Leviticus. They are often called the Levitical laws, because the members of the tribe of Levi were set apart to have charge of the worship.

Among the instructions given Moses at Sinai were those for the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle. The tabernacle, as well as the temple which followed it, was to be the dwelling place of the Lord among the Israelites. From the mercy seat above the ark in the Holy of Holies the Lord spoke to the high priest. The pillar of cloud and fire stood over the tabernacle throughout the times when they were camped. The tabernacle pictures the dwelling place of the Lord in each one of us, and in its inmost sense it pictures the divine humanity of the Lord in which He dwells forever with men. So the pattern of the tabernacle becomes the pattern of life by which we ought to form our characters, and its every detail is full of meaning for us.

We cannot study all these details in a single lesson; so let us think of the three divisions and of the three metals used. The three divisions were the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the outer court. These correspond to will, thought, and outward act in us. The Holy of Holies was concealed by a veil which was never withdrawn. The people never saw within it. In the same way, our inmost heart is concealed from view; even we ourselves seldom see what is really there. The Holy place was also veiled, but by curtains which were moved frequently as the priests went in and out in the service of the tabernacle. In the same way, our thoughts are in general concealed, but people are constantly getting glimpses of them in our conversation and in the expressions of our faces. The outer court was open to all, as is our outward life. The chart found with the last lesson will show you what furniture was in each division of the tabernacle. Each piece, of

course, has its correspondence.

Now think of the metals used. All the wood—which corresponds to what Swedenborg calls “corporeal [physical, bodily]” good, the kind of natural impulse which makes us hate to pass a beggar on the street without giving him something—had to be overlaid with gold, which pictures genuine love coming from the recognition that the Lord alone is good. The inner covering was joined with fastenings of gold, to picture the power of true love to unify the whole life. The bases which supported the walls of the tabernacle proper were of silver, the symbol of truth which must support our emotional as well as our intellectual life. But the fastenings of the third covering—the one of rams’ skins—were made of brass or bronze, and so were the pillars and their bases on which the curtains of the outer court were hung. Brass or bronze pictures natural good, the kind of good which tries to make conditions in the world better. This kind of good is the foundation of the outward life and its unifying element.

We must note also the fact that everything used in the building and furnishing of the tabernacle was a free-will offering from the people, which pictures the fact that nothing really becomes a part of our character which we do not freely choose. The whole development of a spiritual character in us comes as we freely give ourselves to the service of the Lord and the neighbor. We should note, too, that the Lord “put it in the heart” of certain chosen ones of the people to do the work and gave them wisdom for their task. If we really want to serve the Lord, He will show us how from day to day.

*Basic Correspondences*

- the tabernacle = the life planned and lived according to the Lord’s directions
- the Holy of Holies = the inmost heart
- the Holy Place = the thoughts
- the outer court = the outward life
- gold = love to the Lord
- silver = truth

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brass or bronze = natural goodness

wood = corporeal good

[physical good, good of the body]

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Senior

The lesson to be impressed at this age is that of the well-ordered life in which religion is at the center. We know that young people frequently drift away from the church when they leave home and their early associations. They need to think of the church as their own individual responsibility wherever they are, to be carried with them as the directive and organizer of all their plans and activities.

We are told specifically several times in the Word that the tabernacle and everything in it was made according to the pattern shown to Moses “in the mount” by the Lord Himself. And it is evident from several statements in the Epistles that the Lord showed His disciples that this was also the pattern of a heavenly character (see, e.g., Hebrews 8:5).

The three divisions—the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the outer court—refer to the heart, the mind, and the outward life. Every detail of the structure and its furnishings pictures some essential detail of a heavenly character. The three metals—gold, silver, and brass or bronze—for example, were used in exactly the places where their correspondents—love, truth, and natural good—must be used to consecrate, unify, and support the character. The curtains of “fine twined linen” are interpreted for us in the letter of the Word itself, “for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:8).

Swedenborg tells us that this fine twined linen is truth from a celestial origin, that blue signifies the celestial love of truth, purple the celestial love of good, and scarlet spiritual good or the good of truth. And the cherubim, like those on the mercy seat and those set to guard the gates of the Garden of Eden, picture the guard set by divine providence “lest heaven be approached and injured by the hells.” The curtains of goats’ hair signify the external of heaven, or truths from external celestial good; the rams’

skins, external truths; and the badgers' skins, external goods. Perhaps these terms seem obscure and the distinctions between them hard to draw, but they are of profound meaning. We can think of the coverings of the tabernacle as the degrees of truth which clothe and protect our inner motives and thoughts, and can get some idea of their complexity by trying to analyze our efforts to express some deep feeling or some beautiful flash of inspiration which has come to us.

The fact that all the wood used had to be overlaid with gold reminds us that our natural kindly impulses must always be glorified by genuine love to the Lord if they are to serve in the building of true character. Otherwise they serve only to build up our self-satisfaction. And the careful description of the necessary bases and pillars and of the many loops and clasps and bars which joined the whole together emphasizes the fact that true character must be founded on sure truth and built into a consistent whole. We are reminded of the house founded on a rock and of Jerusalem "builted as a city that is compact together." A heavenly character which can make us a dwelling place of the Lord is not formed by wandering through life governed by the impulses of the moment or by what other people will think of us. It is not formed by merely "meaning well." It is formed only by studying and conforming to the "pattern showed at the mount."

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### Adult

The effort has been made in the notes for the Adults to outline the construction and furnishings of the tabernacle and merely to suggest their meaning. The teacher will use his judgment as to the points which his particular group will be most interested in discussing.

The commandments were given to the children of Israel from Mount Sinai as the essential basis of their life, and they are equally for us the only foundations for a good and happy life. We recall that after the giving of the manna the Bible story tells of the Israelites' thirsting and being given water out of a rock at Rephidim:

of the attack of their first enemy, the Amelekites, which they met successfully because Moses, with the help of Aaron and Hur, kept his hands uplifted to the Lord; and of the visit of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, under whose advice Moses appointed various leading men to handle the lesser complaints and problems of the people. They reached Sinai after about three months' journey and camped there, and all the people heard the giving of the commandments. These commandments were not new. They had been known and recognized as essential from the beginning of the church on earth. They appear in the laws of pagan as well as of Jewish and Christian peoples, having come to them through traditions handed down from the Ancient Church. They were given again from Sinai with so many signs and wonders to impress upon us that they are the laws of God and not man-made laws. In our lesson today we find that they are to be given a permanent place at the very center of our life. Other things besides the commandments were also given to Moses by the Lord at Sinai: many laws and rites, and especially the plans for the tabernacle and its furnishings and for the worship to be carried on in it. The Israelites remained about eleven months at Sinai, and during this time they were to serve the world for all time as a picture of a life organized according to true order, with worship of the Lord at its center and reaching to every activity of the daily life. The tabernacle was the center and symbol of their national life. It was the center of their encampment and was carried in the center of their line of march, and in both cases every tribe had its appointed station with reference to it. And we recall that from the time when it was first set up, the pillar of cloud and fire rested upon the tabernacle.

All the details of the tabernacle cannot be taken up in any one lesson, or even kept in mind; but all, to the very least, have a meaning which may become clear and helpful to us at some point in our lives. We are all familiar with Paul's statement: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" As the tabernacle and its ceremonies were the center of the whole life of Israel, so the worship of the Lord—our religion—should be the center of our

whole life, reaching out into every least thing we do. The plan of the tabernacle is the plan according to which our lives should be built. We see the outward act, but within that is the thought which taught us how to perform it, and within the thought is the desire that inspired the thought. We may take a simple example from a familiar sport such as tennis. First there must be the desire to play tennis, then knowledge of the game and of how to go about playing it, then the practice. We sometimes think of practice as the all-important thing, that if we play often we shall inevitably come to play well. But this is not true. Much practice may confirm bad playing habits as readily as good ones, making it impossible for one to be a really good player. Furthermore, even given accurate knowledge of technique and much practice, if the impelling motive is not sound, failure may result. If we go into the game from a desire to make ourselves conspicuous, or if our desire to win is stronger than our love of fair play and willingness to recognize excellence in our opponent, we may easily spoil our game by playing to the gallery or by losing our temper. This is true in everything we do. Right action can come only from true thought, and true thought can come only from pure motive. This brings us back to the tabernacle.

The Most Holy Place stands for our inmost heart. Only the commandments of the Lord should be found there. Our inmost desire in all things should be to obey and serve the Lord. His laws should be “written upon our hearts.” If they are, He will speak to us from the mercy seat of our conscience, from between the cherubim which represent the protecting power of the Lord. Here all should be gold—pure love—except that the foundations must be truths learned and obeyed, as the sockets or bases of the tabernacle wall throughout were of silver. Only occasionally did the high priest enter the Most Holy Place. In the same way, we are seldom able to penetrate our inner motives, but we are permitted to do so occasionally when we need to hear the voice of the Lord in a special way.

The Holy Place was not public either, though the priests entered

morning and evening to burn incense and to tend the light. Here, too, the analogy holds true: our thoughts of the Lord are not open for everyone to see, yet they must never be neglected. In our minds there must always be an “altar of incense” (an attitude of prayer and humility), a “candlestick” (recognition that all our light comes from the Lord), and a “table of shewbread” (acknowledgment of the Lord as the giver of all good). Gold is the metal here, too: our thoughts must be loving thoughts.

The people could see all that went on in the outer court. Our external lives are open to view. The metal here is brass or bronze—natural good—but the curtains which form the wall are fastened together with silver—particular truths which make our outward life a consistent whole. Here, too, the priests minister continually with washings and sacrifices. The necessity of the laver is easily seen: the need for constant cleansing of the outward acts according to truth. The great altar stands for the principle that we are to do good not because it pays, nor with the idea of self-exaltation, but from love to the Lord and a desire to advance His kingdom. We usually think of sacrifice as meaning “giving up” something. It often does involve giving up things which seem desirable to us, but this is incidental. The real meaning of sacrifice is “to make sacred.” All that we do in our external lives should be made sacred by being offered to the Lord through the acknowledgment that whatever good we may seem to do is really done by Him through us, and is not in any sense our own.

Thus the tabernacle becomes for us a picture of what our lives should be: the commandments of the Lord in our hearts, working out through our thoughts into our daily lives, cleansing and setting everything in order so that we shall be in very truth temples of the living God. The tabernacle in its highest sense is a picture of the Lord’s perfect divine human life. It is this life which is the real “pattern shown in the mount,” and without this pattern we cannot form our lives wisely.



### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 9643: “The reason why the bases were of ‘silver,’ and the planks were overlaid with ‘gold,’ was that by the ‘planks’ is signified good, and by the ‘bases’ truth, and good has power and thus support through truth . . . also that ‘gold’ signifies good, and ‘silver’ truth . . . That good has power through truth, is because truth is the form of good . . . for where there is quality, there is form.”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Where were the ten commandments given? *Mount Sinai*
- J. What other laws did the Lord give Moses at Mount Sinai?  
*conduct and worship*
- P. What was the tabernacle? *tent church*
- J. What were its walls made of? *boards covered with gold*
- J. What was used to cover the top? *animal skins*
- P. Into how many parts was it divided? *three*
- J. What were they called? *Holy of Holies, Holy Place, outer court*
- P. What was in the Holy of Holies? *ark*
- P. What were in the Holy Place? *table, incense altar, lamp*
- J. What formed the wall of the outer court? *curtains*
- J. What two things were in the outer court? *laver, altar*
- J. What three metals were used in the construction of the tabernacle?  
*gold, silver, bronze*
- J. How and where was each of them used? *gold covered wood, silver fastenings, bronze sockets*
- J. What was the veil? *inner curtain*
- P. Why did the Israelites have to worship in a tent? *nomads*
- I. What does the tabernacle represent? *orderly human life or character*
- I. What do the three divisions represent? *will, thought, actions*
- S. What is pictured by the ark’s being in the Holy of Holies? *God’s law written in our hearts*