

MAKING THE TABERNACLE

The Children of Israel built the Tabernacle as a place for the Lord to be present with them. We all need the Lord to be close to us. We need to build a place for the Lord in our hearts, just as the Israelites built the Tabernacle. We do this when we really love the Commandments of the Lord and live according to them. If we try to do what is right and allow the Lord to lead us, then we, too, will have a Tabernacle built in our mind, where the Lord can be with us and protect us from evil.

Now, the Lord knew that the Children of Israel needed the Ten Commandments. So He commanded Moses to tell the people all His Commandments. Moses also told the people that the Lord wanted them to build a beautiful Tabernacle. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the Lord had opened his spiritual eyes and shown him just how the Tabernacle was to be built.

A Tabernacle is a tent. The Tabernacle that the Lord wanted the Israelites to build was to be their church. It was to be built in such a way that it could be taken apart and carried with them when they went on their journeys.

First, Moses asked the Children of Israel to bring free-will offerings or gifts of things from which the Tabernacle could be made. No one *had* to bring a gift but could if he wanted to. Moses said, "Take from among you an offering unto the Lord. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the Lord." They were to bring gold, silver and brass; and linen of blue, purple, scarlet and white. They were also to bring rams' skins dyed red, badger skins, shittim wood, oil and spices. They were to bring onyx stones and other precious jewels. From all of these gifts they were to make the Tabernacle.

And the people were willing to give all these things! They brought the gold, the linen and the skins. They brought silver, brass and shittim wood. The women spun the linen threads into fabric so curtains could be made. The rulers brought the precious jewels, the spices and the oil. Every man and woman who was willing, brought these gifts to the Lord. They brought more than enough gifts and, at last, Moses told them to stop.

Two men were chosen by the Lord to be in charge of building the Tabernacle. The Lord put wisdom in their hearts. The name of the first was Bezaleel. He was to be in charge of working with the gold, silver and brass. The name of the second was Aholiab. He was in charge of all the work of making the curtains and embroidery. First, they made ten curtains of linen to cover the Tabernacle. The colors of these curtains were blue, purple, scarlet and white. They had beautiful cherubim embroidered on them in gold. These curtains 'were joined with blue loops and golden clasps. Next, they made eleven curtains of goat's hair and joined them with loops and clasps of brass. Then they made two more coverings for the Tabernacle—a covering of ram's skins, dyed red, and a covering of badger skins. There were four coverings in all.

Now, they needed to make the walls of the Tabernacle. These walls were made from many boards of shittim wood, covered with gold. For each board the people made two sockets of silver

to hold them upright. They put four rings in each board, and made bars of shittim wood to go through the rings and hold all the boards together.

These boards made the three walls of the Tabernacle. The four coverings were stretched over these walls to form a tent. The Tabernacle was thirty cubits long, ten cubits wide and ten cubits high. A cubit is about eighteen inches—so the Tabernacle was forty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide and fifteen feet high.

The tent had two rooms in it, divided by a curtain called “the veil.” This veil was blue, purple, scarlet and white linen. It also had beautiful cherubim (angels with wings) embroidered on it with gold. The room at the back was like a cube. It was ten cubits long, ten cubits wide and ten cubits high. Ten cubits is fifteen feet. This room was called the “Holy of Holies.” It was the most important part of the Tabernacle. There, the Ten Commandments were to be kept in a beautiful golden box called “the Ark of the Covenant.” Only the Ark was kept in the Holy of Holies.

The Ark was made of shittim wood, covered over with pure gold. 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. Each of us must build an Ark in our mind—a place where the Lord’s Commandments can be with us. This is our conscience. It is in our conscience that the Lord speaks to us—telling us what is right and wrong.

In front of the Holy of Holies was the second room in the Tabernacle. It was called the “Holy Place.” In it, the priests worshiped the Lord in special ways. It was quite a large room—twenty cubits long (30 feet), ten cubits wide (15 feet) and ten cubits high (15 feet). There were three special things in it.

First, there was a table on which there was holy bread. It was called “the table of shewbread.” There was always to be fresh bread on this table—unleavened bread with no yeast in it. This bread stands for the Lord’s love and good that He gives us each day. The table stands for our willingness to receive this good from the Lord.

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. These lamps gave light in the Holy Place. They were to be lit every evening and burn until morning. We are like lampstands when we learn truths from the Lord in His Word. But the “light” or truth comes from the Lord alone, and it will show us the right path to take in our lives.

The third thing in the Holy Place was the “altar of incense.” Sweet-smelling incense was burnt upon it both in the morning and in the evening. This altar was made of shittim wood covered over with pure gold. It stands for our worship of the Lord. When we worship the Lord and say our prayers to Him, it is like the smoke of incense going up. If we love the Lord and love all people, then our prayers go up to the Lord and make Him happy.

The entrance at the front of the Tabernacle was covered with a curtain of blue, purple, scarlet and white linen. You would see this curtain if you walked toward the Tabernacle. Outside the Tabernacle there was a large courtyard, one-hundred cubits long (150 feet) and fifty cubits wide (75 feet). The walls of the courtyard were made of white linen curtains hung on stakes or “pillars.” The entrance to the courtyard faced the east and had curtains of blue, purple, scarlet and white linen.

In this courtyard 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” which was in the courtyard in front of the Tabernacle. This altar was not made of gold, but of shittim wood covered with brass. It stands for the Lord’s love for us and our love for the Lord. When the people brought animals to be offered on this altar they were thanking the Lord for all He had done for them.

There was another important thing in the courtyard. It was a large basin or “laver” which held a lot of water. The priests washed their hands and feet at this laver 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 this laver stands for the Lord’s truth. Only if we use the Lord’s truth can we be made clean. We all need to be cleaned from evil and from the bad habits we have.

The people also made special clothes for Aaron, the older brother of Moses who was going to be the High Priest. The most important thing they made for him was a beautiful breastplate. It was about eight inches square. They set twelve precious stones in gold on this breastplate in four rows, three stones in each row. On each of these precious stones was the name of one of the tribes of Israel.

The breastplate was used by the High Priest whenever he spoke to the Lord. He would ask the Lord a question, and the Lord would answer by flashes of light coming out of the stones. For this reason, the breastplate was called the “Urim and Thummin”—or the “Lights and Perfections.” The flashes of light would not come from all of the stones at once, but from one or more at a time. The High Priest knew what each stone meant, so he could read the Lord’s answer in the flashing lights. Sometimes, the Lord would also speak with a living voice while He gave the flashes of light.

When all the work on the Tabernacle and its furnishings had been finished, everything was brought to Moses. Moses looked at everything and saw that all things had been done just as the Lord had commanded. Then Moses blessed the people of Israel.

There were still two very important things to do. The Lord had commanded Moses to anoint every part of the Tabernacle and all its furnishings. “Anoint” means to pour a little holy oil upon a thing or person. Moses obeyed the Lord and anointed everything in the Tabernacle. This made the Tabernacle and all its furnishings holy and set aside for the worship of the Lord. Moses was also commanded to bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the Tabernacle and wash them there.

Then he put their priest's clothes on them and anointed them. This made Aaron and his sons priests of the Lord. They could now lead the people of Israel in worshiping the Lord.

Then the Lord told Moses to set up the Tabernacle. He told him to set it up on the first day of the first month of the year. This was one year after they had escaped from Egypt. What a wonderful way to start a new year—setting up a place to worship the Lord!

Moses did just as the Lord commanded. First, he set up the walls of the Tabernacle with their boards and sockets. Then he stretched the four coverings over the walls. Next, he took the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written and put them in the Ark. He then carried the Ark into the Tabernacle and put it in the Holy of Holies. Next, he set up the veil (curtain) that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. Remember, the Ark was the only thing in the Holy of Holies.

The next thing Moses brought into the Tabernacle was the table of shewbread. He put it on the north side of the Holy Place and set the holy bread on it. Then the seven-branched golden lampstand was brought in and put on the south side of the Holy Place. Moses lit the lamps for the first time. The golden altar of incense was placed in front of the veil and Moses burnt sweet incense on it for the first time. He also hung the curtain at the door of the Tabernacle. Then everything in the Holy Place was ready.

Now Moses put the big brass altar of burnt offering in front of the door of the Tabernacle, some distance away. He offered a burnt offering on it—again, for the first time. He next set the brass laver between the Tabernacle and the altar of burnt offering. He put water in it for the first time. Moses and Aaron—the High Priest—and his sons washed their hands and feet at the laver. The last things Moses set up were the curtains and pillars of the courtyard all around the Tabernacle. He also hung curtains of blue, purple and scarlet linen at the entrance to the courtyard.

Now a very wonderful thing happened. A bright cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. Even Moses was not able to enter the Tabernacle because of the cloud and the brightness of the Lord's glory. This meant that the Tabernacle was now the Lord's house. (Later, of course, Moses and the priests were able to enter the Tabernacle.)

All of this was a great miracle. The cloud was the same cloud that had led the Children of Israel out of Egypt. Remember how the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night had safely led them? Now, this pillar stood over the Tabernacle. During the day it was seen as a cloud, and at night it looked like fire. This showed that the Lord would always be with the Children of Israel—just as He is always with us in His Word. This cloud also showed the Israelites when to make a journey. When the pillar moved they were to pack up everything, including the Tabernacle, and follow it. When it stopped, they were to set up the Tabernacle again, and camp around it. They did this for many years as they wandered in the wilderness.

We all need a special place to worship the Lord. It may be a church building, or a special place in our home where we have family worship. Whenever we open the Word and, pray to the Lord, He is there, and we can worship Him with all our hearts. This is the great lesson of the story of the Children of Israel making the Tabernacle.