

UNIT 49

THE TABERNACLE ITSELF

(Exodus 26:1-37; 36:8-38)

In many ways this is one of the hardest passages to handle exegetically because the message is rather simple but the details are many. One does not know how far to carry the details in the type. We know that the tabernacle is a type of Christ from the first chapter of John (“he tabernacled among us”); so one way to approach it all is as a place/tent where the glory of the LORD may dwell among people, and parallel that with the body of Jesus, the tent, that concealed the glory inside—which John says that they saw: “we beheld his glory.” But having said that we may have exhausted the typology, at least as far as we can confirm it with New Testament statements. I would not try to make anything out of the types of curtains, the boards, the sockets, etc., as far as typology goes.

The details to consider include these subjects: the curtains (26:1-14), boards (26:15-25), bars (26:26-28), golden overlay (26:29-30), the veil (26: 31-33), furniture (26:34, 35), hanging of door (26:36, 37), and then wise hearted craftsmen (36:8-19), and the summary (38:21-31). The wise-hearted (i.e., “skilled”) craftsmen could be a sermon by itself later in the book, because the Lord put that “wisdom” in them to do the work. It makes a nice study of the enablement by the Spirit, and leads to the New Testament spiritual gifts.

In all these details we must realize that Spirit-led craftsmen, those given wisdom or skills, were making a place of worship in which everything had symbolic meaning. The tents and veil would hide the holy LORD's glorious presence, the embroidered cherubim would signify the angels were guarding it, the boards made the construction for the ministerial operation separate from the court, etc. If we went topically, we could talk about the tent, the building, the veil, the furnishings. Each part separated the common things from God by degrees, and the closer the parts were to God the more valuable they were. One could draw some principles from this, such as the preparation of a place of worship, unworldly but conducive to holiness; the use of symbolism in worship facilities; the Spirit given wisdom for such work, and the sharing of the expense in the work.

That would be one approach. Another, and not exclusive of the other, is to

handle the theology of the holiness of God. Treat how it has to be separate from sin and the world, how it was by Christ's flesh (the tent and the veil), and how that veil was rent to make access to God open. The obvious contrast would then be that in the new covenant access to God is through Christ's broken body (= veil) to the glory of God. Whereas in the old God restricted access, in the new God opened the way into His presence. Worship now must remind people of access, whereas in the old worship reminded of the barriers of holiness. But one might also say that once a person gains access, holiness is still demanded. Righteousness may be imputed, otherwise there would be no entrance at all; but holiness must follow if one is to enter the presence.

The contextual central point of this passage, though, is the divine instruction for the preparation of a dwelling place for the LORD. The whole place signified or revealed the glorious presence of God in their midst—but it was also designed to conceal the true glory. We could say it this way:

***The dwelling place of the Lord among his people
must be prepared to reveal and conceal the power and the glory of his nature.***

This wording would certainly apply to the building of the tabernacle, or of any sanctuary, and make the point the context is making. It would also fit the typology of the passage, the incarnation, which reveals the glory of God but conceals it as well.

If God was to fellowship with His people, then that center of worship had to be made to His specifications, which were in harmony with His nature. Churches today do not retain the same structural pattern as the old Tabernacle. However, churches would do well to plan their architecture in accordance with the revealed purpose of God for such gatherings. We would say that the design of the building, the type of furnishings, and the decor must be conducive to the worship activities taking place there, if not be symbolic of them, symbolic of the presence of God in their midst. Moses was instructed to make all these things, especially the main tabernacle in this chapter, in preparation for the patterns of worship. We live in the light of the fulfillment in Christ, and so we know the spiritual realities that the Old Testament foreshadowed. While a building is not all-important, it is a necessity for smooth functioning of the worship. I think this chapter can give a lesson on preparing a functional, symbolical, ordered place of worship that is in harmony with the word of God.

Naturally, the most important part of preparing a place of worship is the preparation of the heart. The above idea can be taken in a couple of additional ways. **One**, the body of Jesus Christ was prepared according to the prescription in the word (Psalm 40 and Hebrews 10) so that worshippers now meet God in Jesus Christ. Here you need to stress the fact that the glory of God was/is in Christ Jesus, except that it was veiled by His flesh. When we see Him in glory, it will be without the tent (Rev. 1). **Two**, God's word continues to prepare the dwelling place of the LORD today, i.e., the hearts of believers which are the temples of the Holy Spirit. This second one is a metaphorical extension of the first. Christ's body is the temple (or tent), and the Church is the "body of Christ." The transforming glory of Christ in our lives must speak to the world that the Lord dwells within us. This will take constant vigilance in our spiritual walk.