

UNIT 52: THE COURTYARD (Exodus 27:9-19; 38:9-20)

The courtyard of the tabernacle was to be 150 feet long, and 75 feet wide, enclosed by hangings of white linen, 7 1/2 feet high, held up by 60 pillars of wood. At one end there was an entrance 30 feet wide, covered with a screen of white linen, embroidered with colors. The description in the text is not without problem, however, since the distribution of the pillars cannot be easily figured.

I doubt very seriously that you would ever deliver an exposition on the courtyard of the tabernacle by itself. Probably you would include this section with the discussion of the tabernacle proper. But the writer's pattern so far has been: ark, table, lamp, and then their container (the tabernacle); then the altar, and its container (the court). The small altar and the laver will be added later. You could focus on the courtyard, and survey everything within, and then make the link to the Garden of Eden and the pattern of worship (see my discussion in *Recalling the Hope of Glory*). This would be a great opportunity to show the eternal plan of God for worship.

The courtyard is the place of worship for the people. They did not enter the tent, but they did enter "His courts." So while the courtyard does not interest us too much, it would the Israelite. Here the sacrifices were made, the choirs sang, the believers offered their praises, they had their sins forgiven, they came to pray, they appeared on the holy days and festivals, and they heard from God. This area was sacred because God met them here; they left "the world," so to speak, and came to His dwelling place. The Christian does not think in terms of holy ground, but does have places where worship has become meaningful. When one enters a sanctuary where worship has taken place for years, one knows this is not like normal places. The lines of Eliot in "Little Gidding" speak to this:

"You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
where prayer has been valid."

The place was a religious community set apart for intercessory prayer.

One of the most fascinating sights to visit in Israel is Shiloh. It is not always on the itinerary because it is north of Jerusalem in the West Bank. But on the site there is an observation tower. From it you can look down on the excavations of the ruins—but if you look on the other side of the hill, you will see a flat field, untouched and at first glance not very interesting. But it is out of place—a flat field on the side of a hill. The hills do not do that naturally. It is marked off by some boundary stones. If you pace it off, it is the exact dimensions of the courtyard. Here the Tabernacle stood in the days of Eli and Samuel. The place has remained untouched by development or promotion for over 3000 years. This is Shiloh.