

Types and Shadows

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The Tabernacle of Moses

One of the most elaborate types in the Old Testament is the Tabernacle of Moses. This was the tent that Moses set up after receiving the Law on Mount Sinai.

The Tabernacle of Moses was also called by two other names:

- ⌚ The “tabernacle of the congregation” (KJV) or the “tent of meeting” (NIV)
– [Exodus 29:42,44](#).
- ⌚ The “tabernacle of witness” (KJV) or the “tent of witness” (NIV) – [Number 17:7](#).

This tabernacle was a temporary solution, designed for use during Israel’s travel through the wilderness and during its conquest of Canaan. This is why it was a tent – it was designed to be dismantled as the people of Israel broke camp and put back together again each time they made camp.

But why this solution at all? What was the purpose of the Tabernacle of Moses? After all, it wasn’t a meeting place in the strictest sense of the word, like our modern church building or synagogue, where people could assemble to worship God. Let’s have a look, then, at the reason why God ordered the Tabernacle to be built in the first place.

A Tapestry of Types

[The Tabernacle of Moses](#)

[The Tabernacle of David](#)

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The Plan of God

An understanding of the word “tabernacle” itself reveals its purpose. The Hebrew word *ohel*, translated “tabernacle” by the *King James Version* and “tent” by the *New International Version*, literally means “dwelling” or “a dwelling place.”

[Read Exodus 25:8](#)

[Read Exodus 29:44-46](#)

The Tabernacle of Moses was constructed to house the presence of God – to be a place where God could reveal himself to the people of Israel and dwell among them. Now it's important to understand that God does not have a physical body ([John 4:24](#)). He doesn't actually *need* a dwelling (note [1 Kings 8:27](#); [Isaiah 66:1](#)), for he is present everywhere ([Psalm 139:7-10](#)). Yet Scripture reveals that God desires to have his *manifested* presence reside in the midst of humanity.

It was in this sense that the Tabernacle of Moses functioned as two expressions of God's presence:

- ⌚ It was a visible *symbol of God's presence* dwelling among his people
- ⌚ It was the container of **God's glory** – his *manifested* presence – on earth

This dual function of containing God's *presence* and *glory* is significant, as we will see when we examine the fulfillment of the type in the New Testament.

Read Leviticus 26:11-12

This is the ultimate promise of God to humanity and the principal reason for the construction of the Tabernacle of Moses. God said:

“I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”

From the beginning of time, God has desired to make his dwelling among his people – to live with us and to walk with us. In [Revelation 21:3](#), we hear the final declaration shouted in a loud voice from the throne of God:

“...Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

This is what God has been after all along. And *this* was the purpose for which the Tabernacle of Moses was built:

- ⌚ So that the dwelling of God could be with mankind
- ⌚ So that God could be their God

The Cloud

Read Exodus 40:34-38

The pillar of cloud represented the glory of God. When it descended on the Tabernacle of Moses, God's full glory filled the structure, to such an extent that not even Moses could enter the Tabernacle. This is significant if you understand what Moses had experienced to date.

- ⌚ Moses had requested to see God's full glory and his request had been denied ([Exodus 33:18-20](#)), for God said, “...you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live” ([Exodus 33:20](#), NLT*).

- ➲ God, however, had allowed Moses to see the hindparts of his glory (**Exodus 33:21-23; 34:5-7**).
- ➲ Even this limited exposure to God's glory caused Moses' face to shine, so that Aaron and the rest of the people of Israel had to make him wear a thick veil over his face, to protect them from the dazzling glare (**Exodus 34:29-35**).

This makes the statement of **Exodus 40:34-38** even more remarkable. As the *New Living Translation* renders **verse 35**:

"Moses was no longer able to enter the Tabernacle because the cloud had settled down over it, and the Tabernacle was filled with the awesome glory of the Lord."

The glory of the Lord that filled the Tabernacle was a far greater, much more awesome manifestation of God's glory than that which Moses had previously experienced on the mountain. There he had been shielded by the hand of God and by the covering of the cleft into which he had been placed. There he had only witnessed the "train" (KJV) or the "back parts" (YLT*) of God's glory.

What manifested in the cloud that descended upon the Tabernacle of Moses, however, was *not* just the hinder parts of God's fading glory. This was the *full* glory of God, what God had called his "face" – the full searing radiance of God's manifested presence that "no one may see...and live" (**Exodus 33:20**). This was why Moses was no longer able to enter the Tabernacle, for this was why the Tabernacle had been built in the first place – to house the full revelation of the awesome glory of God.

The Shadow of the Heavenly

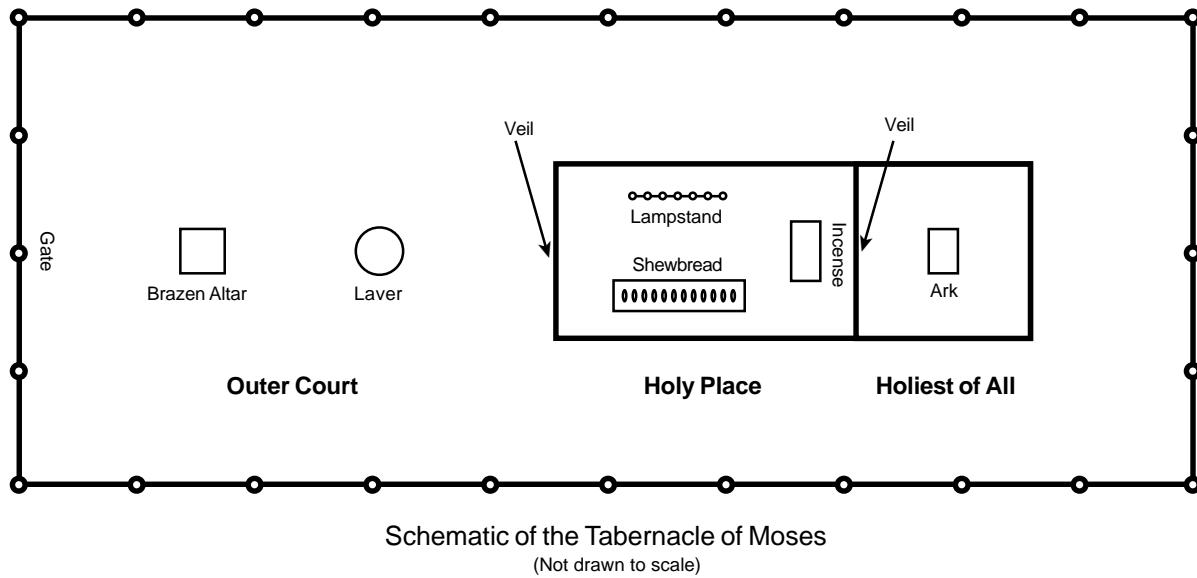
Read Exodus 25:9

The Lord gives Moses explicit instructions to "[m]ake this tabernacle and all its furnishings *exactly* like the pattern I will show you." In **Hebrews 8:5**, the writer explains *why* God gave this command.

"[The high priest and priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'"

The pattern that Moses as shown for the Tabernacle was based on the pattern of "what is in heaven." The Tabernacle of Moses was designed as "a copy and shadow," a mirror reflection of a heavenly reality. Thus by studying the detailed instructions of the Tabernacle, we can see a glimmer of the reality of that which is in heaven.

* YLT = Young's Literal Translation.



The Compartments of the Tabernacle

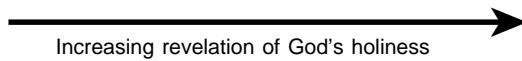
The Tabernacle of Moses was built specifically to facilitate the ceremonies and rituals detailed in the Law of Moses. Its structure was ritual-based. And so as we look at the compartments of the Tabernacle, we must understand the rituals and offerings that they were designed to facilitate.

The Tabernacle had three divisions:

- ⌚ The Outer Court
- ⌚ The Holy Place
- ⌚ The Most Holy Place

Each division had a specific function in relation to God's manifested glory and represented a graduated scale of holiness.

Outer Court ➔ Holy Place ➔ Most Holy Place



Each division was also entered by way of a gate or door, which restricted two things:

- ⌚ **Sight** – those outside the compartment could not see what was inside the next compartment.
- ⌚ **Entry** – only those permitted to enter a compartment of the Tabernacle could do so.

Let's take a look then at the three divisions of the Tabernacle of Moses and what they represented to God and to the people of Israel.

The Outer Court

The Outer Court made up the bulk of the Tabernacle's floor plan. It was uncovered, thus totally open to the sky, and was what *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* calls "a glorified picket fence construction," draped with fine linen, black goats' hair cloth, ram skins (dyed red) and dugong skins.

There were two main articles of furniture in the Outer Court:

- ⌚ The altar of sacrifice
- ⌚ The laver

The Holy Place

The second division of the Tabernacle was called the Holy Place. This was part of the covered section of the Tabernacle, and only a priest was allowed to enter this inner sanctum.

There were three main articles of furniture in the Holy Place:

- ⌚ The table of shewbread
- ⌚ The seven-branched lampstand
- ⌚ The altar of incense

The Holiest of All

Read Exodus 26:31-33

The innermost compartment of the Tabernacle, and the ultimate focus of all its rituals and ceremonies, was the Holiest of All, also called the Holy of Holies and the Most Holy Place. The Holiest of All was a room in the shape of a perfect cube, divided from the Holy Place by a thick veil of blue, purple and scarlet, embroidered with figures of cherubim ([Exodus 26:1](#)). The sole article of furniture in the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant.

Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and even he only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

The Furniture of the Tabernacle

Now let's take a closer look at each of the articles of furniture found in the three compartments of the Tabernacle.

The altar of sacrifice

Read Exodus 27:1-8

This altar stood near the entrance of the Tabernacle, and was the first thing encountered by an Israelite upon entering the Outer Court. The altar of sacrifice was also called "the brazen altar" because it was overlaid with bronze, and "the

altar of burnt offering.”* The altar had four horns at its four corners, pointing out to the four corners of the earth.

This type has its principal fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, the means by which our sins are remitted and through which we find peace with God.

The laver

Read Exodus 30:17-21

The second and final piece of furniture in the Outer Court was the laver – a large bronze basin on a pedestal, filled with water. Before entering into the Holy Place, the priests would wash their hands and feet at the laver.

This type is fulfilled in two aspects of Christian experience:

- ⌚ The waters of baptism ([Acts 22:16](#))
- ⌚ The washing of the water of the Word ([Ephesians 5:26](#))

It is perhaps interesting that the two articles of furniture in the Outer Court – the altar of sacrifice and the laver – represent blood and water, a combination that holds great significance in the New Testament (see [1 John 5:6-8](#)).

The table of shewbread

Read Exodus 25:23-30

The twelve cakes of shewbread (or “Presence-bread,” so called because it was placed continually before the Lord’s presence) represented the twelve tribes of Israel and the unity of the nation. The shewbread was eaten by the priests and replenished every Sabbath.[†]

The significance of the shewbread to the people of the Old Testament was that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” ([Deuteronomy 8:3](#); [Matthew 4:4](#)). In that sense, the table of shewbread represents to us the very same thing that it represented to Israel – the Word of God coming continually and daily into our lives. As the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* explains it:

“With this view of the nature, we have a natural and adequate sense of the meanings and importance of the shewbread, in the economy of the temple ritual and service. It was a continual reminder to the worshippers of the truth that man does not live by bread alone, emphasized by the fact that these most holy offerings were afterward eaten. It was the Old Testament version of the prayer, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’; and in the fact that the holy table was never for a moment left without some loaves lying on it, we have the symbol of man’s continued and unbroken dependence upon God. Even during the travels of the table of shewbread with the tabernacle, the ‘con-

* We will be studying the burnt offering, together with the other types of sacrifice prescribed by the Law, in [ES107-04](#).

† In [1 Samuel 21:4-6](#), we find the story of David and his men entering the Holy Place and eating from the table of shewbread, a story that is used by Jesus ([Matthew 12:3-4](#)) to refute the Pharisees’ accusation that he violated the Sabbath.

tinual bread' was required to be in its place thereon (**Numbers 4:7**)."¹

The type represented by the table of shewbread is fulfilled in the continual, daily Word of God coming into our lives. There is also a foreshadowing of the communion table, since wine was poured out before the Lord in the Holy Place at the time of the burnt offering (**Numbers 28:7**).*

The seven-branched lampstand

Read Exodus 25:31-40

Opposite the table of shewbread was the *menorah* – a seven-branched candelabrum. The Holy Place was completely enclosed, with no natural light, so a special light was needed. This was the function of the seven-branched lampstand.

The lampstand represented to Israel her calling to be a people of light, and its type is fulfilled in the New Testament in exactly the same way. Just as Jesus called himself “the light of the world” (**John 8:12; 9:5**), so we are now called “the light of the world” (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

“The light which ‘symbolizes the knowledge of God is not the sun or any natural light, but an artificial light supplied with a specially prepared oil; for the knowledge of God is in truth not natural nor common to all men, but furnished over and above nature.’”²

The oil that perpetually fueled the lampstand represents the continual anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is this anointing that enables us to be the light of the world.

Read Revelation 1:12-13,20

John’s vision of Jesus standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands draws strongly from the typology used in the Tabernacle of Moses. Here the golden lampstands are interpreted as being the seven churches of the province of Asia Minor. This is a clear interpretation by the New Testament itself of the type represented by the seven-branched lampstand in the Holy Place.

Here are some further interesting observations:

- ⌚ In **Revelation**, the seven lampstand branches are portrayed as seven separate lampstands, but God has always intended that individual churches be branches stemming from the center shaft, which is Christ himself.
- ⌚ The lampstands were not candlesticks. A candle burns by consuming itself, whereas the lampstand in the Tabernacle burned a perpetually-supplied oil. In the same way, we don’t burn ourselves in order to function as the light of the world (or we run the risk of burn-out). Rather, we burn the oil of the Holy Spirit, which continually flows from the throne of God (note **Zechariah 4:1-6,12-14**).
- ⌚ In **Matthew 25:1-10**, Jesus speaks of the need to continually keep our lamps trimmed with fresh oil.

The altar of incense

Read Exodus 30:1-10

The altar of incense was positioned right in front of the final veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holiest of All. On this altar, incense was burned before the Lord, and the altar of incense played a special role in the Day of Atonement ceremonies, the one day the High Priest entered through the veil into the Holy of Holies.

The Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is absolutely clear that the altar of incense represents prayer.

Read Psalm 141:2

Read Revelation 5:8

Read Revelation 8:3-4

John specifically interprets the incense as being “the prayers of the saints.” Not only this, but John’s description of heaven shows a “golden altar before the throne.” This golden altar is none other than the altar of incense. But this is not the “copy and shadow” used in Moses’ Tabernacle. This is the real thing – the pattern in heaven that was copied on earth (read again **Hebrews 8:5**).*

The three items of furniture in the Holy Place are types that are fulfilled in the New Testament reality of the three-fold priestly ministry of every believer:

- ⌚ **The table of shewbread** – ministry within the Church
- ⌚ **The seven-branched candlestick** – ministry to the world
- ⌚ **The altar of incense** – ministry to the Lord

The Ark of the Covenant

Read Exodus 25:10-22

The Holy of Holies had but one purpose: to contain and shield the Ark of the Covenant. This small box, made out of acacia wood and overlaid with gold, had a lid of solid gold called the “mercy seat” (KJV) or “atonement cover” (NIV), upon which the High Priest sprinkled the blood of atonement during the Day of Atonement ceremony. At either end of the Ark stood cherubim made of solid gold, with wings outstretched over the mercy seat and with faces turned toward it (**Exodus 37:7-9**).

Once again, this is a picture of a heavenly reality. It appears that the throne of God is also covered by the overspreading wings of cherubim. Satan himself, before his fall, was called “a covering cherub” (KJV) or “guardian cherub” (NIV) – one of the cherubim whose wings overspread the throne of God.

Read Ezekiel 28:14

* This does not mean that there are literal altars, lavers, tables and lampstands in heaven. Remember that these are simply types and images being used to describe spiritual realities. However, it would appear that heaven does have the basic pattern of an Outer Court, a Holy Place and a Most Holy Place, the latter being the very throneroom of God.

Within the Ark of the Covenant (also called the Ark of the Testimony) were three items of special significance to the people of Israel:

- ⌚ The stone tablets of the Law – representing the holiness of God
- ⌚ A golden pot of manna – representing the Word of God*
- ⌚ Aaron's rod that budded – representing the anointing of God†

The Ark of the Covenant represented the manifested presence of God. It was the focal point of the Tabernacle structure and of the Tabernacle rituals.

The New Testament Fulfillment

We've made a brief inventory of the various compartments and items within the Tabernacle. Let's now look at the antitype – the fulfillment of the types found in the Tabernacle of Moses.

A Picture of Christ

Read John 5:39

The Scriptures, Jesus said, point to him. **Luke 24:27** tells us:

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

All the major types of the Old Testament find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, like thousands of fingers pointing in one direction – Christ. **John 2:19-22** records this landmark statement by the Lord:

“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days’...But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”

This declaration by Christ was made in the Outer Court of the Temple, which was modeled on the same pattern as the Tabernacle of Moses. Jesus was declaring himself to be the Temple or Tabernacle. Everything that these structures represented was now fulfilled in him.

Read John 1:14

The Greek word translated “dwelt” (KJV) and “made his dwelling” (NIV) literally means “tabernacled.” It is in Christ that the original purpose of the Tabernacle of Moses – to contain the manifested presence of God – is fully realized. Jesus is Immanuel – “God with us” (**Matthew 1:23**).

Read Colossians 1:19

* Moses himself equates natural manna with spiritual manna – “every word that comes from the mouth of God” – in **Deuteronomy 8:3**.

† You can read the story of Aaron's budding rod in **Numbers 16:1-17:11**.

A Picture of the Church

Read Ephesians 2:20

God has planned for his Church “to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” As the Body of Christ, we are a spiritual Tabernacle that houses the presence of God, revealing his glory to the world.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:16

Do you remember this quotation? It is an echo of **Leviticus 26:11-12!** The purpose for the building of the Tabernacle of Moses, stated in that verse, has now been fulfilled in Christ and in his Church:

- ⇒ So that the dwelling of God could be with mankind
- ⇒ So that God could be our God

The Tabernacle of Moses was a shadow of what was fulfilled in Christ and his Church. In Christ, we “are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (**1 Peter 2:5**). As the *Explorer’s Bible Study* explains:

“The tabernacle and its implements were significant of the truth which belonged to the future, or to the time of fulfillment. By its symbols, the tabernacle and its services were a sermon, or rather a collection of sermons. By its type, the tabernacle was prophetic of its fulfillment in the New Testament.”³

Read Hebrews 9:1-5

The study of the Tabernacle of Moses could consume a whole module in itself, so rich are the types it contains. We’ve only conducted a cursory examination of the Tabernacle in this lesson and can echo the words of **Hebrews 9:5**:

“But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.”

We do, however, encourage you to begin digging for yourself into the rich storehouse of types found in the detailed description of the Tabernacle of Moses. And keep an eye open for more insight as you read the book of **Hebrews** in your morning study.

Read 2 Timothy 2:7

¹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.1, Deluxe Edition.

² *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.1, Deluxe Edition.

³ *Explorer’s Bible Study*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.1, Deluxe Edition.