

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Praying Through the Tabernacle

(Dr. Stephen Trammell, Executive Pastor, Champion Forest Baptist Church)

Horseshoe Drive Baptist Church in Alexandria, Louisiana, is a fixture in my spiritual formation. My mother played the piano and my grandmother played the organ every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening. Several spiritual markers were established in my life through the ministry of that vibrant local church and took place in the main sanctuary. I became a follower of Jesus Christ during a revival meeting there. I identified with Christ through believer's baptism there. I surrendered to preach, was licensed to preach, and ordained to the gospel ministry there. Twenty-one years ago, Tonya and I were married there. As you can imagine, that sanctuary at my home church has a special place in my heart.

There is another sanctuary that has become special to me over the past seven years. Let me explain. Seven years ago I was pastoring in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and I was going through a dry season spiritually. My prayer life had maneuvered into mediocrity and my passion for prayer had eroded to the place of monotony without meaningful communion. Perhaps you have been there at some point in your journey. Well, the Lord prompted me to share my plight with one of my trusted mentors. In brokenness and humility, I opened my heart to unveil my spiritual condition to a wonderful man of God who believed in me and had a gift of drawing out the best in me. He graciously encouraged me with promises from God's Word and he went on to introduce me to the concept of praying through the Old Testament Tabernacle. I had never heard of that concept before. When I returned to my office, I immediately began to study the Tabernacle in the Old Testament and to learn about the purpose of the Tabernacle and the meaning of each of the furnishings within the Tabernacle. In my research, I came across a delightful brochure on the Campus Crusade for Christ website explaining the concept of praying through the Tabernacle. The sanctuary God established in the Old Testament became dear to my heart as my prayer life began to soar. For the past seven years, I have been praying through the Tabernacle every morning and enjoying unbroken fellowship with God at a refreshing new level.

In this lesson, I want to introduce you to the concept of praying through the Tabernacle by exploring portions of the Old Testament and the New Testament in order to gain an understanding God's intended purpose for the Tabernacle. "An earnest and prayerful study of the tabernacle, and the purpose it served, cannot fail

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to increase our knowledge of the grand truths of redemption.”¹ From our modern day perspective on the Bible, we do need to exercise caution as we explore the Old Testament Tabernacle and the New Testament implications. In Mark Lanier’s insightful lesson on the Old Testament Tabernacle, he explained the necessity of exercising caution when finding pictures, images, and archetypes in Old Testament figures and stories.

Perhaps the most compelling New Testament interpretation of Old Testament events or fixtures is found in the book of Hebrews as it relates to the tabernacles Israelites constructed in the wilderness. As we consider the tabernacle in this lesson, we will observe lessons and parallels give in New Testament Scripture. We will also see several other apparent relationships that seem present, but once we leave the illustrations of Scripture, we tread lightly through the other pictures!²

In learning how to pray through the Old Testament Tabernacle, we are not going to worship the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Instead, we will allow seven features within the Tabernacle to become a guide for our prayer time each day. You may be familiar with the ACTS model of prayer where you spend some time in **A**doration of who God is and then move into a time of **C**onfession of sin before moving into a time of **T**hanks-giving, followed by **S**upplication through prayer. In this prayer acrostic, you simply move from one focused-time of prayer to another. Praying through the Tabernacle is similar, but involves seven movements or stations instead of four.

THE TABERNACLE

God revealed to Moses the architectural dimensions, interior design, and precise function of the Tabernacle. “Only two chapters of the Bible are devoted to a description of the creation of the world and mankind, but 50 chapters are devoted to a description of the Tabernacle and its related ministries.”³ Can you envision an estimated two million Jews encamped in an area that would take up about twelve square miles? If you lived on the outskirts of the encampment, then you would have to walk nearly six miles to bring your sacrifice to the Tabernacle. From the distance, you would be able to view God’s glory cloud descending from the sky down into the Most Holy Place.

¹ Brown, William. *The Tabernacle: Its Priests and Its Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 3.

² In his Old Testament survey series, Mark Lanier taught an engaging lesson on The Tabernacle. You can view his lesson online via <http://www.biblical-literacy.com/lessons/old-testament-survey/lesson-18-the-tabernacle/>

³ Levy, David M., *The Tabernacle: Shadows of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), 7.

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.⁹ Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it (Ex. 25:8-9 ESV).

The Tabernacle was mobile. It was designed in such a way that when God's glory moved, the Tabernacle could be moved to accommodate God's presence. "Moses constructed, at God's instructions, a place where the holy God would come in the midst of his people. Jesus has changed the situation. He has now made us a holy people who can dwell in the midst of God!"⁴ Did you know that you are "the walking Tabernacle" of God's presence?

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:19-20 ESV).

God demonstrated in the Old Testament through the Tabernacle that His desire is to dwell with His people. As His Tabernacle, God has chosen to dwell in you permanently. He indwells you by the Holy Spirit. You are His priceless treasure. What kind of Tabernacle are you being for His presence to dwell? Have you allowed Him to move into every area of your life? Have you given Him full control of your life, your desires, your ambitions, and your fears?

The Altar of Burnt Offering

You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits.² And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze (Ex. 27:1-2 ESV).

When you think about relationships, there are different levels of intimacy. Some relationships are emotionally distant and surfaced whereas some relationships have the capacity to be more consistent and feature an element of closeness. Then there are those relationships where the interaction is meaningful, transparent, and magnetic.

The Encarta Dictionary defines the word *intimacy* as a close personal relationship; a detailed knowledge resulting from a close or long association. One of my favorite definitions of intimacy is: "in to me you see."

⁴ Mark Lanier's survey of the Old Testament Lesson 18, The Tabernacle, and p.11.

God desires intimacy with you. In the Old Testament, the portrait of intimacy was the formation and utilization of the Tabernacle. God made a way for His people to experience intimacy with Him through a religious relationship.

As you enter the Tabernacle, the first item you encounter is the altar of burnt offering. The New Testament equivalent is the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice for your sin. As you pray through the Tabernacle, spend some time at the "altar of burnt offering" to praise God for His ultimate love gift and for Jesus being willing to pay the penalty for your sin.

You determine the level of intimacy with God. As you draw near to God, He will draw near to you (James 4:8). God took the initiative to provide the way for you to enjoy an intimate love relationship with Him through faith in Jesus. What are you doing with the relationship God has made available to you?

The Basin of Water

The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁸“You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, ¹⁹with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet” (Ex 30:17-19 ESV).

The second step to intimacy with God involves "the basin of water" found in the Old Testament Tabernacle. We are touring the furnishings within the Tabernacle. After acknowledging God's gift of salvation through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross as symbolized by the altar of burnt offering, we now move to the basin of water.

The basin of water represents our cleansing provided by the shed blood of Jesus. In our prayer time, we move from praising God for His salvation gift to confessing sin and receiving His forgiveness.

How can a Christ follower stay clean while living in a dirty world? You stay clean by consecrating your life before the Lord daily. Being conscious of your sin is not enough to obtain cleansing. Confess your sin specifically and say the same thing about your sin that God says about it. After David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba, he acknowledge his sin before God,

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me (Psalm 51:3).

And John affirms in the New Testament,

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9).

Confess sin specifically and confess sin instantly. As soon as the Holy Spirit convicts you of specific sin in your life, confess it without hesitation. Don't give the devil a club to hit you with. Choose to stay close and clean by practicing instant confession of sin. Don't allow sin to linger.

Receive God's forgiveness and walk victoriously in the strength Christ provides. You are a new creation.

The Table of the Bread of the Presence

You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ²⁴You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it... And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly (Ex. 25:23-24, 30 ESV).

Where do you go for nourishment? How do you refuel your soul after you have depleted your emotional love tank? Is there a place to receive nourishment?

As we tour the Old Testament Tabernacle, we find the place for nourishment is the Table of the Bread of the Presence. It speaks of communion, fellowship, and nourishment.

As clarified in the New Testament, we don't go to a *place* for nourishment. Instead, we go to a *person*. Jesus! He is our Manna from Heaven! He is our daily bread! "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst'" (John 6:35 ESV). Jesus is our source!

Think about seasons when you did not know how you would make it another day and Jesus showed up with abundant resources. Reflect on the transitions in your life where Jesus provided a way for you when there seemed to be no way.

Jesus is the ultimate way-maker! He is all you need! Surrender to His tender care. He will see you through. He has already been where you are going.

Spend some time in prayer acknowledging your dependency upon Jesus as the bread of your life. He is your "daily" bread. Present your fears and your

frustrations to the Lord in prayer and receive nourishment for your soul. Jesus is your life!

The Golden Lampstand

You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it... You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. ³⁸ Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. ³⁹ It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent of pure gold. ⁴⁰ And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain (Ex. 25:31, 37-40 ESV).

Have you ever driven through a neighborhood in December to behold the captivating path of luminaries? It is so moving to capture the sight of the streets outlined with paper bags illuminated with candles flickering in the night.

The Golden Lampstand illuminated the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. It provided light to the table of the Bread of the Presence and the Altar of Burning Incense. The lampstand had seven oil lamps that provided light for the priest to serve.

A candle consumes itself whereas an oil lamp consumes the oil. Jesus has positioned us to be His light in this dark world. The Holy Spirit is the oil that fuels our gracious illumination.

You have been saved by the grace of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a luminary for the Lord. Is your neighborhood a brighter place because of your influence? Is your school or workplace different as a result of the light of Jesus shining through your life?

Jesus has made you the light of the world. Don't hide His light. Allow His light to shine through you today in the interactions you embrace as well as the interruptions you face. Is the light of Jesus shining through you? You are a luminary for the Lord.

The Altar of Burning Incense

You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. ² A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. ³ You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and

its horns. And you shall make a molding of gold around it...And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you (Ex 30:1-3, 6 ESV).

Invest a few moments of time in taking an inventory of your life. What are you offering up to God? How are you allocating your time and your energy? Are you living to bring glory to God in all things?

In the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, we have identified the Table of the Bread of the Presence and the Golden Lampstand. The next item is the Altar of Burning Incense. As you come to this feature in praying through the Tabernacle, begin to worship God and to intercede for others. Present specific requests to God and pray with passion for those God places on your heart.

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2 ESV).

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name (Heb. 13:15 ESV).

As you pray, your prayers rise like burning incense. As you live out your faith in Christ, your life becomes an aroma pleasing to God. As you offer your body to God for His glory, you are expressing worship to God.

Obedience to God demonstrates your passion to please Him and to honor Him with your life and your lips. Does your conversation honor God? Does your conduct move God's heart?

The Curtain

And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.³² And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver.³³ And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy (Ex. 26:31-33 ESV).

In the Old Testament Tabernacle, only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place. He would enter through the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The High Priest was granted access.

The wonderful news is that God has given every believer access into His Presence. How did He provide the way? “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split” (Matthew 27:50-51 ESV). Notice how the sacrificial death of Christ granted access for every child of God.

God initiated the process to bring us into position to be reconciled. God has granted us access to His presence.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:19-22 ESV).

How will you respond to God's provision? What will be different about your daily pursuit? Establish a standing meeting with God each day and grow in your daily intimacy with Him.

The Ark of the Covenant

Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant” (Heb. 9:3-4 ESV).

Being "in Christ" changes everything. Your position in Christ gives you direct access to God. In the Old Testament Tabernacle, only the High Priest was granted access into the Most Holy Place that contained the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:10-11, 22).

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail (Heb. 9:1-5 ESV).

Now every child of God has the privilege of approaching God with freedom and confidence. What makes that possible? Our position in Christ that is a result of our faith in Christ gives us direct access to our Heavenly Father.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:13-14 ESV).

When I pray through the Tabernacle each morning I choose to stop speaking to God and simply wait before Him as I enter the Most Holy Place. I often quote Samuel by saying, “Speak, LORD, your servant is listening.” It is at this time that God begins to place people on my heart that He wants me to intercede for. Also, this is the specific time that God will bring truths from His Word to my attention that He wants me to focus on for the day.

CONCLUSION

In next week’s lesson, we will explore some practical ways to pray through the Tabernacle in order to enhance your prayer life. You will learn how to pray specifically and intentionally. I will share some overflow from my personal prayer journey with God. My prayer is that your daily walk with God will be renewed and that you will experience personal revival.

Until next week, begin to carve out some time each morning to spend unhurried time alone with God. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to simply be still before God and wait for Him to speak. How long should you wait before the Lord? Wait long enough for Him to reveal His thoughts to you. As you obey, God will show you the way. Walk in the light God gives you and enjoy daily intimacy with Him.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. Establish a daily standing meeting with God.

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” Mark 1:35 (ESV)

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James 4:8 (ESV)

2. Pray through the Tabernacle daily.

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Heb. 4:14-16 (ESV)

3. Practice God’s presence throughout the day.

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.’” John 5:19 (ESV)