

SEEING
JESUS
IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

A FASCINATING LOOK AT THE
OLD TESTAMENT TABERNACLE

ADRIAN ROGERS



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A Fascinating Look at the Old Testament Tabernacle

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	7	
CHAPTER ONE		
Camping with God: An Overview of the Tabernacle.....	9	
CHAPTER TWO		
Christ: The Beauty of the Tabernacle.....	19	
CHAPTER THREE		
The Brazen Altar: Divine Grace.....	33	
CHAPTER FOUR		
The Bronze Laver: The Washing of the Word.....	43	
CHAPTER FIVE		
The Golden Lampstand: Christ, Our Sight.....	55	
CHAPTER SIX		
The Table of Showbread: Christ, Our Sustenance.....	65	
CHAPTER SEVEN		
The Altar of Incense: Christ, Our Supplication.....	77	
CHAPTER EIGHT		
The Veil to the Holy of Holies: Jesus, Our Door.....	89	
CHAPTER NINE		
The Ark of the Covenant: Christ, Our Security.....	99	
CHAPTER TEN		
The Mercy Seat: A Picture of Jesus.....	109	
CHAPTER ELEVEN		
A Well-Dressed Priest: Christ, Our High Priest.....	121	
CHAPTER TWELVE		
A Clean Conscience: Jesus, Our Cleansing Agent.....	131	
CHAPTER THIRTEEN		
Seven Feasts: Celebrating Jesus.....	143	
Other Resources.....		157
Additional Titles by Adrian Rogers.....	161	

INTRODUCTION

Where Will You See Jesus?

The story of Jesus is found throughout the whole Bible. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is communicated in the entirety of God's Word: Old Testament and New Testament, from Genesis to Revelation.

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly pointed to the coming Messiah. You find Him in the Garden in Genesis 3:15 as the Seed who will bruise Satan's head. He is the ark of salvation carrying Noah and his family to salvation. He is caught in a thicket at Mount Moriah in Genesis 22 as the substitute sacrifice. He is there in the lamb's blood on the doorposts in the Israelites' quarters of Egypt in Exodus 12, taking on Himself the destruction of the oldest son as the angel of death passes over God's people.

But did you know you will also find Him in the tabernacle. The portable worship center the Israelites carted through the desert was also part classroom where God taught the people of God about the coming Messiah and all He would accomplish.

In this book based on a series of messages, Adrian Rogers pulls back the curtain to reveal the details about the tabernacle that point to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Chapter by chapter, you will see Him in every room and in every artifact. You'll learn more about how to worship Him in spirit and in truth. And you'll learn to always look for Jesus in unexpected places.

CHAPTER ONE

Camping with God: An Overview of the Tabernacle

To come to Jesus, you must come through Him.

—Adrian Rogers

As we begin our study of the tabernacle, it may help for you to get a picture in your mind of what it may have been like. I heard one man describe it as, “Camping with God.” In essence, the Tabernacle was a sanctuary for the Jews while they were in the wilderness.

Let’s discover a little more about this sanctuary by reading Exodus 25:1-9. In this first chapter, we will learn about the tabernacle in the broadest sense. Then, in each of the next twelve chapters, we will look at more specific details about God’s desert home.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats’ hair; ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate. And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all

that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.

These verses remind us that God says, “Stick to the plans. I’m going to show you precisely how I want you to make this sanctuary. The pattern is very important.” Also notice the words of Exodus 25:40, “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

God reiterates. He repeats things when He wants to emphasize them. The words, “Make them according to the pattern,” are important because they teach a spiritual lesson. You will see that God’s precise pattern for the tabernacle in the Old Testament pointed to Jesus Christ.

Consider the words of Hebrews 8:1-2, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.”

In the Old Testament, the high priest was a prophecy of our High Priest, Jesus. Hebrews 8 tells us that Jesus was and is, “a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” Therefore, we look at the things that are happening in the Old Testament and note that they are but shadows, types, prophecies, pictures, predictions, illustrations, amplifications, and things that point to great spiritual truth in the New Testament. So many of these Old Testament symbols point us to incredible New Testament truths.

So, pay close attention as we journey through this study of the tabernacle.

The Dimensions of the Tabernacle

The tabernacle consisted of three parts: an outer court, and within that an inner court, and within that the Holy of Holies.

The outer court was 75 feet by 150 feet in size. Most average homes are built on a lot about this size. Additionally, the outer court had a fence around it. The fence was 7½ feet high. The outer court of the tabernacle had a gate that faced toward the east. This gate was very wide; it stood 30 feet across to represent that the way to God was wide open for all to enter.

In this outer court there were two pieces of furniture. First, there was a brazen altar (also called a bronze or brass altar) and there was a

laver. The laver was a great basin that people washed in. The word “lave” means to bathe. In our society, we sometimes use the word lavatory to denote a bathroom or a place to bathe.

Within the outer court was a tent-like structure called the inner court that was 15 feet wide, 15 feet high, and 45 feet long. The front part of the inner court was 15 feet wide, 15 feet high, and 30 feet long. It was twice as long as it was high or wide—in it were three pieces of furniture. On the north, there was a table. To the south, there was a lampstand known as a menorah. In the rear right in the center was an altar called the altar of incense.

Finally, behind the front part of the inner court was another very small room. It was 15 feet by 15 feet by 15 feet. This room formed a perfect square—a cube. Within this room, called the Holy of Holies, were two pieces of furniture: the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat of God.

In future chapters, we will explain what all of these rooms and pieces of furniture signify. For now, let’s look at three basic truths about the tabernacle.

First Basic Truth: The Tabernacle is a Description of Deity

The tabernacle is a description of Jesus Christ.

To begin with, we see that the tabernacle is a shadow of Jesus. In John 1:14a, the Bible says when speaking of Jesus, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” It could be read, “The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us.” Jesus was a tabernacle in which the Shekinah glory of God dwelt. As we will see throughout this book, every detail of the tabernacle speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you had seen that tabernacle from the outside, you would not have said, “My, how beautiful.” When you saw the Old Testament temple that stood there on the temple mountain like a mountain of snow itself overlaid with gold, you said, “How beautiful.” But when you saw the tabernacle, you didn’t say, “How beautiful.”

It was as plain and drab as it could possibly have been. Around the tabernacle was a plain white fence, 7½ feet tall. The outer court was nothing to write home about. It was simple and rather normal. However, when you went inside the tabernacle and saw the light streaming from the seven-pronged lampstand, you would have taken a deep breath and said, “It’s beautiful.”

Further, as you observed all sorts of woven work and gold and shimmering beauty and purple and scarlet and blue and white colors and needlework, you would have said, “This is one of the most beautiful sights I’ve ever seen.”

Immediately, we catch a glimpse of our first picture of Jesus. So many people were not and are not impressed with Jesus. Do you know why? People who are not impressed with Jesus are simply seeing Him from the wrong side.

The Bible says in Isaiah 53:2, “And when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” In other words, when you look at Him through the natural eye, people say, “Well, the peasant from Galilee.” Yet, when you come in the door and see Jesus from the inside, you behold the King, and He is beautiful. It all depends. Do you know Him? Have you really seen Him?

Some people wonder why we get excited about Jesus. They don’t understand why we are so enamored with Him. It’s likely because they don’t know Him like we do. The only way to know Jesus is for God to show Him to us by His mercy and grace.

The natural man cannot perceive Jesus with his natural senses. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, we read, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

As you read this book and learn about the tabernacle, I pray that you will see more of Jesus. If He isn’t beautiful to you yet, you may need to enter in through that door and you’ll see the tabernacle from the inside and not from the outside. The only way to really see the tabernacle and to see Jesus is from the inside. You must come through the door. In John 10:7, Jesus said about Himself, “I am the door.”

To come *to* Jesus, you must come *through* Him.

Second Basic Truth: The Tabernacle is a Blueprint of the Believer

The second thing I want you to notice about the tabernacle is that it is a blueprint of the believer. If you recall, the tabernacle had three rooms: the outer court, the inner court, and the innermost court. These rooms picture the triune nature of man. For you see, man is a house of three rooms.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23b, the Bible teaches, “and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our

Lord Jesus Christ.” With your body, you have your physical life. With your soul you have psychological life. The Greek word for soul is the word we get the words psychology, psychiatry, and psyche from. Then with your spirit you have spiritual life. John 4:24 expresses it this way, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” All of us, as humans, have three kinds of life: physical life, psychological life, and spiritual life. Each of these aspects of our lives is pictured by the tabernacle.

What does that outer court represent? It represents the body, the part of each other that we see. When you consider the furniture in the outer court, it is all related to the body. The outer court contained the brazen altar where sacrifices were made. In Romans 12:1a, we are told, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice.” God wants us to lay down our bodies in service to Him.

Next, in the inner court, we see the representation of the soul. This court was the place of worship and fellowship, those things needed by the inner person. The believers were able to communicate soul to soul in the inner court.

Finally, we look to the innermost court, which was also called the Holy of Holies. This was the inner sanctum, and it represents the spirit of a person. God’s Shekinah glory dwelt in that back room, in that Holy of Holies. Similarly, God’s Spirit dwells in the inner spirit of a man or woman who knows Him. God’s Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I am a child of God (see Romans 8:16). That Holy of Holies was the place of deepest, individual, personal communion. It’s where we commune with God Almighty.

In John 14:17, we read, “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

So, you see, you are a tabernacle.

Third Basic Truth: The Tabernacle is a Shadow of Salvation

The third thing we can learn from the tabernacle is that it is a shadow of salvation. In simple terms, the tabernacle tells us how we can come to God.

Let’s think about the furniture that is in the tabernacle and what it pictures. As you walk through the door of the tabernacle, you would

see the brazen altar. Then you would come to the laver. Walking past the laver, you would approach the table of showbread. On this table would be loaves of bread.

Next, if you turn to your left, you will see the lampstand glowing and burning. It would be made of gold, and it would have seven prongs in it. Actually, it had one main stem representing God and six branches representing man.

As you walk a little further, you would see an altar of incense, and there would be smoke going up—sweet smelling, perfumed smoke burning all the time. Continuing on, you would walk right on in to the Holy of Holies. In this innermost court, you would see two more pieces of furniture: the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat.

Interestingly, if you look at all of these pieces of furniture together, they form the shape of the cross. Starting at the foot of the cross, you come right on through. I don't think that's by chance or by accident, though some may. The sequence of these pieces of furniture is very logical and yet very spiritual.

How the Tabernacle Furniture Speaks of Christ and Salvation

First, the brazen altar speaks of Christ, our sacrifice, because it was there the blood was shed. The animal was offered there.

Next as you come to the laver, you are washed in this place. What does this speak of? This speaks of Christ, our sanctification. Christ is our sacrifice and our sanctification. The Bible says, in 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." In Christ, we are cleansed by His blood and washed by the water of the Word (see Ephesians 5:26).

Moving forward, we look at the significance of the showbread table. What does this piece of furniture represent? Christ is our sustenance. Not only does He forgive us, not only does He cleanse us, but He also sustains us. And we must feed on Him. He is the bread of life.

Next, we look to the lampstand. What does it represent? Christ is our sight. He is the light of the world. In Him we find substance and sustenance, and we also find sight. It is in Christ that we can see. As the Bible teaches us in John 3:5, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Then, we come up to the altar of incense. This incense is sending up sweet, perfumed smoke. What does this represent? Symbolically, it stands for prayer. In Revelation 5:8 we read, “Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” The sweet smells rising are our prayers. The Lord is teaching that just as the smoke ascended from the tabernacle up and into the nostrils of God, so also our prayers are to be like a sweet smell to Him. Our prayers are to be a savor continually rising up to God.

In addition, we learn we can pray through Jesus and in His name. The Bible teaches us that Jesus prays for us. In Hebrews 7:25, we read that Jesus, “always lives to make intercession for them.” The altar of incense speaks of Christ, my supplication, the One *to* whom I pray, and the One *through* whom I pray.

Next, we come right into the Holy of Holies. This place represents Christ, our satisfaction, our all in all. When you come the way of the cross, when you start with the blood and come past the laver and feed on the bread and walk in the light and pray in the spirit, then you will know something of the communion in that innermost cube. The inner room represents Christ, our satisfaction.

Comparing the Old and New Testament Symbols

Perhaps you are wondering if I’m correct regarding meaning and symbolism. Let’s look at some instances in the New Testament and compare them to these references in Exodus.

First, look at John 1:29, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” That is Christ, our sacrifice—the Lamb of God, the sacrificial lamb.

Now consider the words of John 3:5, “Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” What was in the laver? Water. This is not talking about baptism now. Don’t mistake it. It is talking about being born again by the washing of water, by regeneration, the washing of the word of God. Christ washes us because He is our sanctification.

Continuing on, look at John 6:35 as we think about the bread. The Bible says, “And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He

who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

Then, consider John 9:6-7 and the story of the healing of the blind man. “When He [Jesus] had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.”

Jesus tells us He is the light of the world. John 9:39 reads, “And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.’” Jesus is our sight. He is our golden lampstand.

Moving to the altar of incense, we discover a New Testament reference in John 14:13-14, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.” Christ is our supplication. He is our altar of incense.

When you come to the Lord to pray, friend, do not come to God and offer Him little. Don’t be trite or flippant. Instead, come with both hands full of the incense of His dear name and offer that to God. Christ is our supplication. He promises, “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

Next, we get to the mercy seat of God. In John 17:20-23, we read this heart-felt prayer of Jesus for believers:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Have you ever thought about how much God loves you? These verses in John teach us that He loves us as much as He loves His dear Son, the Lord Jesus. Standing here in the Holy of Holies, we think about our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is our satisfaction. We are in Christ, and Christ is in us. Christ is in God, and God is in Christ. Together, we

are at the mercy seat worshipping and communicating in the sweetest way we could possibly know.

Closing Thoughts About the Tabernacle Overview

Do you think it just happened by chance that we walk through the tabernacle and walk through the Gospel of John the same way? Do you think these events just came by chance, beginning with the altar and going to the water, the bread, the light, the prayer, and then going on into the Holy of Holies? Absolutely not! No man could have written a book like the Gospel of John apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray together as we close this chapter:

Father, we pray that You would continually speak to us and help us to realize that when Jesus died, the veil was torn so that we might enter into the Holy of Holies and dwell in the Shekinah glory. Father, we pray that if there are those who have seen the tabernacle from the outside, but have never seen it from the inside, that they might see the King in His beauty. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.