

Lesson 11

God's Eternal Plan: His Sovereignty

Introduction: Last week, we saw that man is unable to worship God without His instruction, and often, even with God's instruction, man usually thinks he knows better; e.g., Cain bringing his own sacrifice. We saw ignorance of their ineptitude when the Israelites asked for a covenant based on their obedience despite their inability to keep simple commands. God answers this request. In spite of the burden of the Law, we see that we are unable to make ourselves right through law keeping. We also see beautiful pictures of the Redeemer and what the Redeemer came to free us from—seeking to be righteous by our own efforts.

The tabernacle was a transportable “tent of meeting” that God had instructed Moses to build. Even from the very beginning in Genesis 1, we have seen that God is all about relationship. He created mankind in His image so that mankind could know Him and thereby grow to love and commune with Him. As you all know, man's first obstacle to knowing, loving, and communing with God was our sin problem. God knew that would be the case and took care of it even from before the foundations of the earth (**2 Timothy 1:9**), and all things He has orchestrated either point to or foreshadow that eternal plan of redemption.

From Genesis 1 to this point in Exodus, God's promise of the coming Deliverer has become more

and more narrowed down in the sense that He would be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. Originally in Genesis 3:15, He would be the “seed of the woman.”

Here in Exodus with the instruction for the tabernacle, its furnishings, and all the sacrifices, God is making more specific the spiritual work that the Deliverer will accomplish “for all the nations.”

The Big Picture

So, here’s the picture: we have a sinful human race that is symbolized by the Nation of Israel and the completely holy, righteous, and almighty Creator God of the Universe, and they are separated by the sinfulness of the people. This is symbolized by the fact that God had Moses build the tabernacle, the place where God would dwell in the midst of His chosen people. The glory of God dwelled inside of the holy of holies, inside of the tabernacle which was located in the middle of Israel’s camp. Though He dwelt in their midst, still His presence was separated by a thick curtain due to the sinfulness of the people.

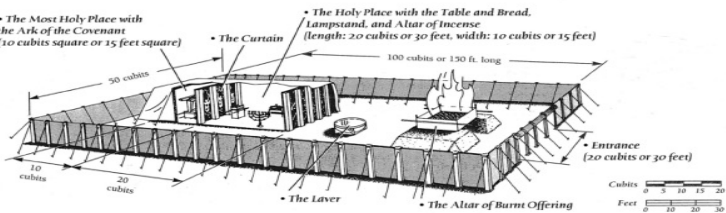
In His foreknowledge from eternity past, God knew the spiritual conditions that mankind would end up in and is the reason why He predetermined an eternal plan of redemption on the basis of grace from before the foundations of the earth.

Therefore, in order for mankind to clearly understand this eternal, spiritual plan of God, God went to great lengths through the Old Testament to create many physical pictures of those spiritual truths. The

tabernacle, its furnishings, the sacrifices, etc., stand as one of the main things God was using to reveal many details of what the future fulfillment of His eternal plan of redemption would look like.

In this lesson, we are going to look at the tabernacles' furnishings and, rather than thinking of them as individual furnishings, let's look at them as a "process"—the physical picture of the spiritual "process" that must take place in the lives of every sinful human being in order to be restored to oneness with a holy God.

The Entrance or Gate—Exodus 27:16



Looking at our diagram, you will notice that there was only one “gate” or entrance into the courtyard. The first step a person must make was to approach and enter through that one gate. This step begins with conviction. The person being convicted of their sin and therefore the need to bring a sacrifice was the only reason for a non-Levite to enter into the tabernacle courtyard. **John 14:6** – “I am the way the truth and the life, NO ONE COMETH UNTO THE FATHER BUT BY ME.”

Just like the Israelite worshiper, all believers begin with the conviction of their sin and need for a Savior. Without that conviction no one will even approach the “gate.”

The Bronze Altar—Exodus 27:1-8

Upon entering through the one gate, the worshiper would bring his sacrifice to the bronze altar to make atonement for his sin. Arriving at the altar, the person would put his hand on the head of the animal while it was killed. This symbolically, yet temporarily, put their sins onto the animal, and the animal died as their substitute. God allowed the blood of an animal to atone or cover for their sin, thereby making it possible for the worshipers to enter into God’s presence and experience and enjoy all the “benefit” of a restored relationship with their holy God. See **John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Galatians 4:3-7.**

The same is true of us. Jesus’ shed blood on the cross makes atonement for our sin and thereby restores us to oneness with God, making it possible for us to enter into His presence and experience and enjoy all of the benefit of being His children.

The Bronze Laver—Exodus 30:17-21

The bronze altar was as far as the regular people were allowed to go. After making their sacrifice, their sin was atoned for, but the benefits and privileges that resulted from having your sin atoned for were then carried out symbolically by the Levite Priests. The

priests functioned as a mediator or representative of the people. All of this was just a physical foreshadowing of the real atonement and resulting relationship that was yet to come through Christ. After making the sacrifice for the individual, the priest then had to go to the laver and wash himself. This washing purified him and enabled him to enter the tabernacle and carry out the rest of his duties on behalf of the people. See **Ephesians 5:25-27**.

Without first having the sacrifice at the bronze altar, the washing at the bronze laver would have been irrelevant. The same is true of us. One must first accept Jesus' death on the cross as the payment for his sin in order to be in a position where it's even possible for him to be "washed by the water of the word." If you are not a believer, only a very small part of God's word is relevant for your life and, therefore, it's impossible for your life at that point to be changed and transformed by studying God's word. This in turn means that the next steps which are to be taken (symbolically) inside the holy place are even more impossible and irrelevant for the person (unbeliever).

Inside the Holy Place

Every day the priests would enter into the holy place to serve or commune with the Lord. Their entrance into this room took place only after there was a sacrifice at the altar followed by a ceremonial washing at the laver. Then and only then could they enter into the holy place and carry out their duties

that symbolized the future believer's spiritual privileges and communion with God.

There were three items placed within the holy place to symbolize the believer's privilege and communion with God. First was the table of showbread (**Exodus 25:23-30**). Once a week on the Sabbath, the priests placed twelve loaves of bread made from fine flour upon this table. The twelve loaves symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel and served as a symbol of God's relationship with Israel as the result of the everlasting covenant He had made with them. This provides a physical picture of our spiritual relationship with God. See **John 6:35, 47-51; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**.

As our "bread of life," Jesus is our source of life and source of relationship and communion with the Father. All through the Bible, eating food and dining at the table are symbols of relationship and fellowship. Because of Jesus and His finished work, we have been restored to oneness with God and are therefore able to experience and enjoy intimate communion and fellowship with Him. Keep in mind that this intimate communion only comes after the sacrifice at the altar (accepting Jesus' death on our behalfes) and the washing at the laver ("growing in the grace and knowledge of Him" through His word – **2 Peter 3:18**).

The Altar of Incense—Exodus 30:1-10

The priests burned incense on this altar every morning and evening. The incense was made from a

special recipe that God had given to Moses and this was the only place that anyone was ever allowed to burn this specific incense. Also, they were not allowed to burn a different recipe upon this altar. It had to be the one that God had prescribed. It appears that this burning incense was a symbol of God's people praying to and praising Him. There are many places in the Old Testament where God points out that Israel was burning incense to idols and other false gods (**Isaiah 65:3; Jeremiah 44:8, 18; Hosea 11:2**).

According to **Exodus 30:10**, the incense altar owed its standing to the blood of atonement that came from the sacrifice made upon the bronze altar. Also, the holy fire which caused the sweet aroma to ascend was that which had first descended and consumed the sacrifice on the bronze altar (**2 Corinthians 2:14**).

This provides a tremendous physical picture of spiritual truth for us today as believers. The ability for us to offer up "acceptable" prayer, praise, and worship to God is provided through Christ's death on the cross (the bronze altar) and our growth in the grace and knowledge of God (washing of the laver).

Our "right" to pray, praise, and worship God comes through the standing that we received the moment we accepted Christ as our Savior, but the desire, heart, and ability to pray and sincerely praise, honor, and declare God's worth will be in direct proportion to our growth in the knowledge of Him and His grace.

As you know, it was the fire or the coals that caused the incense to burn and the fragrant aroma to be

emitted. Through the scriptures, fire is often associated with the Holy Spirit and judgment (**Philippians 3:3**).

As the Holy Spirit continues to do His work within us bringing us to the “end of ourselves” and causing us to judge ourselves in the sense of recognizing and admitting our fleshliness, the more we will be enabled to walk in the Spirit and become more and more conformed to the image of Christ. The more conformed to the image of Christ we become, the more our lives and actions will be a fragrant aroma to God.

“It will save years of frustration and effort for one to understand that prayer can never be learned or developed. Prayer is the outflow of the new life; as one grows, as the cross frees the new from the old, there is growth of effective prayer. Without the cross, prayer becomes a mere religious formality...As the cross works in us, keeping in the place of death every assertion of the old man, and everything in our old natures that is against God, our spirit finds a clear way up to fellowship at the throne.

Away from the cross, prayer becomes nothing more than an ecclesiastical ordinance or a religious exercise expressed in devotional phrases; and I beg of you, when you read a book on prayer, find out the place in it which the author gives to the cross, and you will be able to estimate its value.” G. Watson

The Lampstand—Exodus 25:31-40

The table of showbread and altar of incense speak more of the believer's relationship and interaction with God. The lampstand speaks more of the believer's functionality and purpose while remaining here on earth. Throughout the scriptures, light is always a picture or symbol of truth. Jesus is the "light" of the world and He is also called the "truth." He is the truth and therefore the source of all truth (**John 1:1-9**). See also **Matthew 5:14-16; Ephesians 5:8-18; Colossians 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9**.

With this lampstand in the tabernacle, we have the symbolism of the light, but there is also the symbolism associated with the oil that it contained as its fuel for the light. Most often through the scriptures, oil is associated with the Holy Spirit. This physical picture provides a clear image of the Holy Spirit's role and ministry in our lives today. See also **John 16:14; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18**.

The more the Holy Spirit continues to process us, teaching us to walk less in the flesh and more in the Spirit, the more conformed to the image of Christ we will become in the daily living out of our lives. The more conformed to the image of Christ we become, the "brighter" our lives will shine forth the life of Christ to all those around us. Without the sacrifice (bronze altar, cross) and without the washing (laver, God's Word, and Holy Spirit's ministry), all of these things will be totally impossible and irrelevant.

Symbolism of the Priesthood

In taking a brief look at the Levitical Priests, rather than looking at the symbolism in what they wore, etc., I just want to take a quick look at their position and services.

First and foremost is the fact that the Levites were chosen solely by the sovereignty of God. They didn't do anything to earn this position. God simply told Moses to take his brother Aaron and Aaron's sons and separate them from the rest to be Priests unto the Lord (**Exodus 28**).

After choosing the first generation of priests, all other future priests became priests by birth; i.e., just by the fact that they were born into the tribe of Levi.

They were "separated" or set apart from all the rest of Israel for special service unto the Lord. This being set apart for God's purpose and use carried with it both privilege and responsibility.

Their main role was to function as "mediators" between God and man. In order for them to function properly in that role, their "holiness" that was symbolized by strict standards for remaining ceremonially clean had to be strictly adhered to.

- **Read 1 Peter 2:4-10.**

Once again, the tabernacle, the priests, their roles, the sacrifices, and the furnishings all provide us with a pretty clear physical picture of Christ, His finished work, and some of the privilege and responsibility

that comes along with the position that we have received in Christ.

As believers, none of us became God's children or were placed into Christ because of anything we did to deserve it, but it was all of God and through grace. We, too, become "believer-priests" through birth, our second spiritual birth. As children of God/believer-priests, we, too, have received great privilege and great responsibility.

1 Peter 2:9—the only way we can effectively "proclaim the praises of Him Who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light" is for us to maintain our "holiness" or "spiritual cleanness" by continuing to learn and grow to walk less in the flesh and more in the Spirit.

1 Peter 2:11-12—The role of priests was to mediate the relationship between God and the everyday Israelite. This passage tells us that, as we walk in the Spirit manifesting the life of Christ, there are those who will be affected by the transformation of our lives and will result in their glorifying God.

Jesus is our High Priest. He is our merciful and faithful high priest (**Hebrews 2:17**); He passed through the heavens and sympathizes with our weaknesses (**Hebrews 4:14-15**); He was chosen by God (**Hebrews 5:5, 10**); He is our high priest FOREVER (**Hebrews 6:20**); He holds His unchangeable priesthood forever (**Hebrews 7:23-28**); He is our high priest Who is seated in heaven (**Hebrews 8:1**); He is the high priest of a tabernacle made without hands who offered His own blood and not just that of bulls and goats (**Hebrews 9:11-12**).

- **Read Hebrews 10:19-23.**

Discussion: Remember, Jesus is the tabernacle, the sacrifice at the bronze altar (as well as all other offerings and sacrifices that were to be made), the High Priest, the bread, and the once a year sacrifice whose blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. All these things point to Him and His finished work. Hints to Christ can be seen throughout the Old Testament as God prepared the way for His Deliverer to come, whether through prophecies or types, the finger of God pointing to Christ is easily discernible throughout the Old Testament.

What do these facts reveal to us about God? **His heart for humanity, His desire for a relationship, His desire for mankind to be redeemed and receive eternal life.**

To go deeper into this topic, read through Lessons 24 and 25 in the full Knowing God curriculum.