

THE AMAZING TABERNACLE OF MOSES

MOSE'S TABERNACLE INTRODUCED

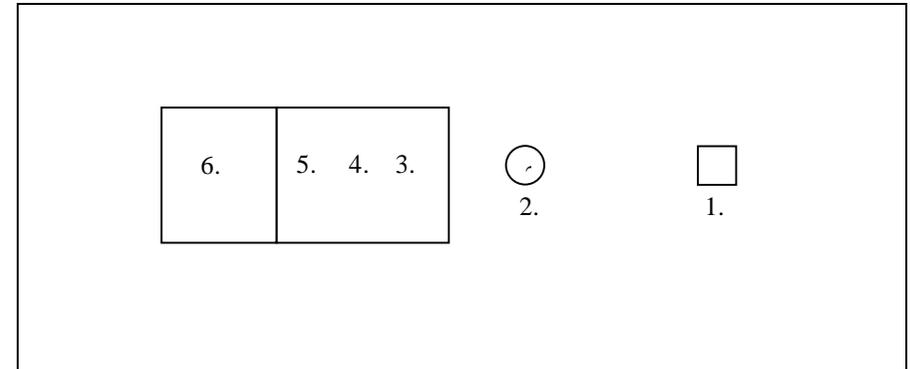
Brought up in an evangelical Baptist, I have to admit hardly hearing of, and certainly not understanding the amazing truths contained within, and patterns set by, the very first church building, Moses Tabernacle. Constructed in the Sinai Desert some 3,500 years ago, to very detailed plans and specifications prepared by the ultimate Architect, God himself, supernaturally transmitted to the Construction Manager, Moses, and built by those Israelites who were particularly devoted to their God.

Ten years ago now, when introduced to the revelations of Pentecost, I was simply 'blown away' (amazed) that God, three and a half millenniums ago, revealed Himself, the pattern of Heaven, and what was to be His unchanging pattern for the Church both present and future. For the Tabernacle reveals both the nature and purpose of Jesus, and of the New Testament Church that Jesus was to establish through His death and resurrection. Which we are part of today. And which sets out our future too!

As the detailed plans and drawings are perfectly preserved in the Bible, we still have an excellent picture of the physical form of the Tabernacle itself. In fact a replica has been built and is open to visit in Israel. One day I will get to see it. We also have God's detailed instructions on the priesthood. These were the clergy who were to be responsible for looking after the Tabernacle in which God's presence was to dwell for some 500 years or so, until Solomon's Temple was built. Some of these exciting revelations will be investigated further in succeeding chapters.

However, before we do, I felt it would be a good idea to get in tune with the times, by paying a visit to the tabernacle for ourselves, from the perspective of an ordinary citizen, such as you or me. As details of this are sketchy, what follows is one man's view of what it may have been like to visit.

LAYOUT OF MOSES TABERNACLE



1. BRONZE ALTAR
2. WASHING BASIN
3. THE TABLE
4. LAMPSTAND
5. INCENSE ALTAR
6. ARK OF THE COVENANT

Note: This illustration, indeed the whole presentation, isn't designed to give a comprehensive picture of the amazing truths that Moses Tabernacle contains. It is limited to those facts which are important in understanding the form of worship God desires us to bring to Him.

The bible gives a comprehensive 16 chapter, detailed description of Moses Tabernacle in Exodus, through chapters 25 to 40. It describes most aspects of the physical design of the structure and the furniture it contains, in considerable detail, but is much less revealing about the way the Tabernacle functioned. Further information can be gleaned from the first 10 chapters of Leviticus, and snippets elsewhere. But nowhere is there a detailed description of the daily 'happenings' in this worship centre.

There are many writings on the spiritual meanings of the intricate Tabernacle design details that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. I would strongly recommend that you consider reading these for the still 'relevant revelations' they contain. What follows however is a story, based as closely as possible on the scriptures, hopefully giving a feeling for and understanding of, some of the amazing truths the Tabernacle contains. However it is only a story, so let's not base our theology on it! It has been both fun and a challenge to compile. I hope you find it helpful in bringing Moses Tabernacle to life for you too.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF.....

Let's wander back in time - a mere 3,500 years - to the days shortly after the children of Israel had entered the Promised Land, having spent 40 long years in the Sinai Desert. No trouble to us! We don't need a time machine, only an imagination. Much cheaper and less high tech! More likely to work too!

You are now a God fearing Israelite of average means, living with your family on a small farm. You wish to repent (Say sorry to God and undertake not to do it again) for offending your neighbour last week when talking to him, well – to be honest - gossiping really, about a mutual acquaintance. You didn't mean to be offensive at the time, but now realise you shouldn't have said the things you did. Having sinned, you really want to make a Sin Offering before your Lord. For the Pentateuch, traditionally known as 'the five-fifths of the law' (1st 5 books of the bible) has been read many times to you by the priests on the Day of Atonement, and during other festivals over the years. So much so that you now know the main points off by heart!

Conveniently, the home of the Lord, His Tabernacle that Moses built some 50 years ago, is close by, only 5,000 paces or so (4km) down the road. A nice early morning walk before it gets too hot. That way you can beat the crowd, for it is not very big really and the priest gets very busy at times.

The next day, rising at the crack of dawn, you go out to your field, and select the choicest female lamb from your flock for the sacrifice. You do this gladly, full of joy to offer the very best to your God, in the very Tabernacle where His holy presence dwells. Taking the lamb in your arms, you set out as the sun peeks over the horizon, down the road leading to God's presence. The road is quite dusty, as there hasn't been much rain lately. For it comes mainly during the change of seasons.

Getting closer, the outside walls gradually materialise from within the early morning haze. With a sigh of relief you see that the majestic cloud of God's presence is stationary, billowing above the tent itself. You certainly didn't want to have to pack up and shift, today of all days. From the instructions given to Moses when your father was with him in the desert, you know the exact dimensions - 100x50 cubits. (1 cubit approximately equals ½ metre or yard – 50x25 metres or yards) About a quarter the size of a football field, you automatically estimate. Yes, half the length by half the width seems

pretty near. As you get closer, the construction of the walls comes more clearly into focus. No glasses to correct short or long sightedness in those days! You see that they are made of a strong linen material, just too tall to look over at 5 cubits high. (2½ metres or yards) Some kids are nearby who, kids being kids, peak underneath. They are quickly given the message, by one of the Levites on duty inside, to move away before getting into serious trouble.

The linen curtains, yellowing slightly now after years of battling the harsh desert elements, are hung 1 cubit above the ground, between posts, pegged back on stays, much like a modern tent. Some things never change!

However, your eyes are strongly drawn to the curtains forming the doorway, just at this very moment being drawn back, ready for the day's activities. For they are different to the rest of the wall. While made of the same linen material, they are intricately embroidered in purple, red and blue. You can still clearly remember the air of excitement and anticipation, sitting at your mother's feet as a youngster, watching these glorious designs taking shape. For she and her friends diligently embroidered all the gateway curtains for the Tabernacle from designs supplied by that divinely inspired craftsman, Bezalel. As God had instructed, His chosen group of men, those who had a real passion for building the Tabernacle, closely supervised the ladies. Bless her heart! Great memories of those desert days. How sad that mum, dad and all the others died before we crossed the river into this fantastic, fertile land. I still miss them. A real lesson not to disobey God though!

As the curtains are drawn back you see your friend Eliasaph, the Levite on gate duty that day. And naturally, you pass a few words with him. For when has a good Jew ever been short of a few words! Ahead of you, you see the awesome, imposing, sacrificial *Brazen Alter*, the central feature of the open courtyard. Not as big as you would think though, but it appears so powerful and strong, to make one question its 5x5x3 cubits measurements. (2½ metres or yards square x 1½ high) Amazing how efficiently the sacrifices burn though! And durable too! For it is only made of common acacia wood, covered on both sides with copper. Amazingly, well not really, because God knows, this combination forms the most effective fire resistant material around!

The atmosphere suddenly changes when passing through the gate. For now you are in the courtyard of God's dwelling place. In the Outer Court, where

the one and only almighty God demands the cleansing of sin through sacrifice, to come into His Holy presence. The lamb starts squirming in your arms. For she can sense the smell of death that permeates the surroundings and is scared. Looking into her innocent, pleading eyes you turn quickly away, with tears in your eyes. You can't bear to look at her again. What had she done to deserve this untimely end? Absolutely nothing! Solely your responsibility! What a sudden reminder of the awfulness of sin and God's righteous judgement! Moving now towards the Brazen Altar, towards your meeting with God – feeling absolutely devastated. Oh God, that perfect, innocent lamb's life - the price for my sin, for my life. Your legal requirement, I know. Oh God, I am so sorry for my stupid words. I won't make that mistake again! A fear filled, "awe-full" moment!

The priest attracts your attention as he bounds towards you, speedily covering the few metres from the bronze *Washing Basin*, set on its sparkling, shiny brass stand. It is so lovingly polished by the Levites that you can see your face in it. He is ready to make your sacrifice, having washed both his hands and feet in the basin's water, holy water that the Levites had sprinkled with anointing oil and blood. With mixed emotions you hand over your struggling, squirming lamb to the priest, desperate as she senses her impending death. In one movement, the priest holds down her head and expertly slits her throat, avoiding the innocent, pleading look in her panic-stricken eyes. Her bright red lifeblood spurts out in an unforgettable stream through her severed artery, her body spasms confirming the grim finality of a gruesome death. A life for a life as God's law requires. The priest dips his finger in the blood, quickly placing a touch on each of the four horns of the altar while simultaneously holding the lamb up by its back legs, it's remaining lifeblood draining out in a grim red ooze at the base of the altar. An innocent life for your life – the price has been paid for your sin.

Quickly slitting open and gutting the lamb, the priest throws the putrid smelling offal to one side for later disposal. The foul smell almost causes you to throw up! After skinning the lamb, he carefully removes all the fat from the carcass in accordance with God's instructions to Moses. The fat is placed upon the altar, producing, as it burns, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. The priest puts the carcass to one side for later cooking and consumption by himself and his sons. So overcome are you by the gruesomeness of the whole experience and the terrible price the innocent lamb had to pay for your stupidity, your unnecessary sin, that you unashamedly fall onto your

knees, crying out to the Lord your God in repentance. "My God, please forgive me, please forgive me – I won't do it again! Please God! Please God! Please God!" Surely there must be a better way!

The priest sees your distress and gently places his hand on your shoulder. "You have done well, my friend. The Lord is pleased with you. For you only see the horror of sin and sacrifice, but He shows me His glory too. Let me tell you about it.

See the tent over here. Not that big is it, only 30 cubits long by 10 wide and 10 high, (approx.15x5x5 metres or yards) but inside the glory of God is revealed. Come with me. See these layers of covering on the outside of the tent? Like everything else in this place, each has a special meaning. There are actually 4 layers, but you can only see 2 from here. Here on the outside – you can touch that one if you like – the cover is made of sea cow skins. Note the '*bluey*' colour. The oil in the skins keeps the tent dry when it rains. The oil and the blue colouring remind us of the Spirit of God (Later revealed as the Holy Spirit) who covers all our lives. Underneath is another cover of ram skins died red, a reminder of the blood sacrifice required for sin, which saddened you so much earlier. (Jesus – but He hadn't been born yet!) Look up here. This black cover, protruding over the entrance, is woven from goats' hair. That of course represents our sins of omission, of not doing the things God desires of us, rather than our known although unintentional sins, which are sacrificed on the Altar outside. You remember the sacrificial goat and scapegoat sacrificed for our sins on the Day of Atonement? Of course you do, for I have seen you there.

I am sorry that you can't come inside the tent with me, for it is just so glorious in there. But we believe that one day it will be possible for all to enter, although we don't know how. (We do now! – through the death of Jesus on the cross) But it is only from the inside that you can see the fourth cover of glorious pure white linen, with cherubim signifying God's presence emblazoned in purple, red and blue. (Colours of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). You may remember your mother and the other women embroidering them in the desert all those many years ago, when you were just a kid.

But I digress. You know, the strange thing about this cover is that you can only see part of it, the piece that crosses the roof. For at the sides of the tent are two glowing gold walls that both support and hide most of it. They are

absolutely stupendous! Just has to be the glory of God. I have never quite been able to work out what all this means though.

See this magnificent curtain here that forms the entrance to the tent. Embroidered again in purple, red and blue. God is everywhere in this place! What you can't see though, is the curtain inside. That one separates the back third, the Holy of Holies where God's presence dwells, from the Holy Place in front, where we, the priests, attend to the daily duties the Lord has us do for Him.

For we have three jobs to do twice daily. But I am getting ahead of myself. For before I go in to the tent, into the Holy Place, I must first wash my feet in the washing basin, as I did before making the sacrifice for you. It will literally cost my life if I forget! But once I have been purified in God's eyes, I can go in and carry out my tasks.

My first job is to attend to the *Table of Showbread*. This simple, yet exquisite oblong gold table, is adorned with gold mouldings, both around the edge and on the handbreadth wide gold rim that surrounds the top. Every Saturday, our Jewish Sabbath of course, I place on the table 12 loaves of bread, representing our 12 tribes, but more importantly symbolising the perfect, never ending word of God. You know, we get to eat this bread after we take it off the table at the end of the week. Remarkably, it is as fresh then as the day we put it on!

Twice daily I have to burn frankincense, set out in lines beside the 2 rows of 6 loaves. What a sweet fragrance it has. Helps keep God's word of life at the forefront of my mind. I normally do this in the early morning and again at twilight while I am attending to the rest of my duties inside.

For I am required to light the *Golden Lampstand* each evening, having first filled the cups with oil and trimmed the wicks. Some people call it a golden candlestick because of its design, but it really is a lamp, not a candle, even though it may look like one. It is so important that the oil is pure. If there is any possibility that the lamp may malfunction because of poor oil or wicks, I have to stay here all night to make sure it doesn't go out! But fortunately our oil and wick makers are most diligent, working as they are for the Lord. In the morning, as the sun comes up, I have to get out of bed and come down here to snuff the flame out. I don't mind though, as it pleases God and gives me a good, early start to the day too!

Sorry, I have got ahead of myself and not told you what the Lampstand looks like. I don't know how I forgot, as the Lampstand is simply the most intricate, breathtaking, solid gold creation I have ever seen. I don't know how Bezalel did it - the work is so fine. The seven lamps are borne on 7 branches; each branch topped with a cup in the shape of an almond flower, delicately decorated with incredible, lifelike buds and blossoms down the stem. A grand total of 66 masterpieces in all, including the cups, beaten out of a single piece of pure gold. You should see the delightful dancing images of the flames' shimmering lights reflecting from the golden walls as darkness falls. Incredible! Yes, the light of the oil of the Spirit brings divine illumination on the bread of God's word. It certainly is an encouragement to research the scriptures more deeply.

Having set up or extinguished the lamps, depending on the time of day, I then move slowly to the *Incense Altar*. Placed as it is, near the entrance of the Holy of Holies, so my mind increasingly focuses on the glory of the Lord. In some ways this altar looks like a miniature version of the Bronze Altar over here, on which your lamb was sacrificed. However it sits on a gold plated stand with a solid gold moulding around the top. The altar itself is coated with gold, not bronze, as indeed, is all the furniture in the tent.

Fortunately the temperatures required for burning incense are not as great either, so the fire can be smaller too. When I come in to the Holy Place, I bring some hot coals from the Bronze Altar, which I then use to burn the special incense the Lord has provided us with the recipe for. We aren't allowed to use this incense for anything else. It is a real pity because the fragrance is simply 'heavenly', the only word I can find to adequately describe the spiritual effect it has on me. As the fragrance permeates the air, I just have to pray out loud to my God and worship Him with all my being. It is an amazing experience to feel so close to God. I just look forward to it so much all day. It would be just wonderful if everyone could share my experience! (Now we can!)

But great though the Incense Altar experience is, it is surpassed by the sheer awesomeness of the Day of Atonement, the day I truly meet with God. This is the one day of the year that I, as High Priest, can visit Him in His Holy of Holies. I do wish I could do it more often, for there is nothing else in life to compare with it! The presence of God just envelops me. It is impossible to explain really. His awesomeness, power and majesty is overwhelming, yet

you can sense His love and caring at the same time. There is just nothing else like it. I break down and cry, yet worship Him at the same time! Inexplicable!

But I had better start at the beginning. For God has set up a system that must be followed when entering into His presence. Remember my uncles, Nadab and Abihu? They broke the rules and paid for it with their lives. You will no doubt recall that day. It doubled the workload on my dad Eleazar, and Uncle Ithimar, as for a long time they were the only priests left. But it is a bit easier now as my generation comes of age and is able to shoulder the workload. Making sacrifices is heavy, hard work, you know. But again I digress!

The main thing I have to be sure of is to follow the Lord's instructions precisely, so I don't meet my uncles' fate! I need to be personally pure, as do the people I am representing, for purity is essential to live in His presence. So firstly, He requires me to take off all my clothes – a bit embarrassing really – and wash myself in the basin before going into the Tent. There I put on the sparkling white linen clothes, to be worn only on this special day. For they speak of purity and holiness. Then I come back out into the courtyard to make a Sin Offering for myself, just as you did earlier. Yes, I need to be 100% right with God too. Taking some of the blood from my sacrifice, I fill my censer (bowl with a handle) with hot coals and select two handfuls of the special fragrant incense I talked of earlier. Now I am prepared to enter the Holy of Holies.

The sense of anticipation builds inside me as I pass through the Holy Place towards the Holy of Holies. I particularly notice that the curtain separating the areas has 2 giant cherubim woven into it, again in God's colours, purple, red and blue. Your mother's handiwork as well, I recollect. My mind ponders upon what I am going to experience inside. For God's presence lives between the 2 cherubim on the *Ark of the Covenant*. Opening the curtain, I quickly throw incense onto the burning coals, forming a cloud in the room, particularly over the Atonement Cover, so protecting me from the full glory of God. That heavenly fragrance fills the room and permeates every pore in my body. Even Moses, great as he was, couldn't look God in the face and live. So I need to be doubly careful!

I had better describe the Ark before I go on. It is an oblong box, (2½x1½x1½ cubits) made of Acacia wood, plated inside and out with gold.

Around the top it has a pure gold moulding. The lid, the Atonement Cover, with its accompanying cherubim's, forms the boundaries within which God dwells. Of course I know He is everywhere, but this is the specific place He meets with us. The Atonement Cover has to be perfect, for it to be God's dwelling place amongst us, and it is. Bezalel, the master craftsman, made it himself. It was fashioned out of a single piece of gold, shaped into a smooth, flat lid. Two large, delicately sculptured, solid gold Cherubim with outstretched wings face each other, gracefully rising up, one from each end of the cover. I only get a glimpse of it of course, because it is quickly enveloped in the dense cloud of smoke resulting from burning the incense.

The Ark contains 3 different items. The two stone tablets with the 10 commandments written on them, my grandfather Aaron's budding, almond tree staff, and a jar of the manna we lived on during those 40 long years in the desert. I haven't seen them of course, as they were placed in there well before my time. You remember the desert too of course, when you were a lad. The manna tasted great, but sometimes we can have too much of a good thing! Never grateful for what we have, are we! But getting back to the Holy of Holies. Walls of solid gold surround the room, while the roof is a continuation of the pure white, linen cover, embroidered with Cherubim's, that covers the Holy Place too. The glow of gold - the glow of God. Unbelievable!

But now, on with the action. Now where did I get too? Yes. The heavenly cloud formed by the burning incense. Immersed in the cloud, literally and spiritually, I dip my finger in the bull's blood I have brought in from my sacrifice, and sprinkle it on the Atonement Cover. Seven times more I sprinkle it on the floor in front of the Cover. "Oh Lord, how unworthy I am to come into your presence. Through this blood, I thank you that I am forgiven and can be one with you again. Thank you Father. How humble I feel, that you, Almighty God will forgive me and still accept me, even after the life I have lived." His strength and grace overcome me, and I break down and cry out in His awesome presence. "My God! My God! My God!....." I take my leave and walk back out to the Courtyard, a new man, cleansed by the grace of God, ready now to do the same thing for His, for my, people. You know the rest, for you have been at the ceremony, my friend. How the sacrificial goat and scapegoat are chosen by lot. The sacrifice of the one, the sprinkling of the blood, once again, on and in front of the Atonement Cover. This time though, on behalf of all of us Jews.

What an honour this is for me. Then followed by the release of the scapegoat into the wilderness to die rejected, carrying away all our sins.

Of course I have to again change my clothes, following the same procedure as earlier, but in reverse. For I have discovered that God is a God of order, not of chaos, and He requires His patterns to be fulfilled exactly as He sets them down.

Well, I had better get going now, for there is a quite a queue building up, waiting for me to attend to their sacrifices too. See you next time. The Lord bless you.”

The sun's now high in the sky. Not looking forward to the 5,000 pace journey home just yet, you see down the road a shaded, inviting olive grove. A great place to sit down and ponder all that has been experienced and learned. The Spirit of God settles upon you, opening up new realms of understanding of your God and His glory. At peace with yourself. At peace with God. The sun rises to its peak as you drift off into a restful, contented sleep. After all, it is siesta time!