

The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 1 ~
INTRODUCTION



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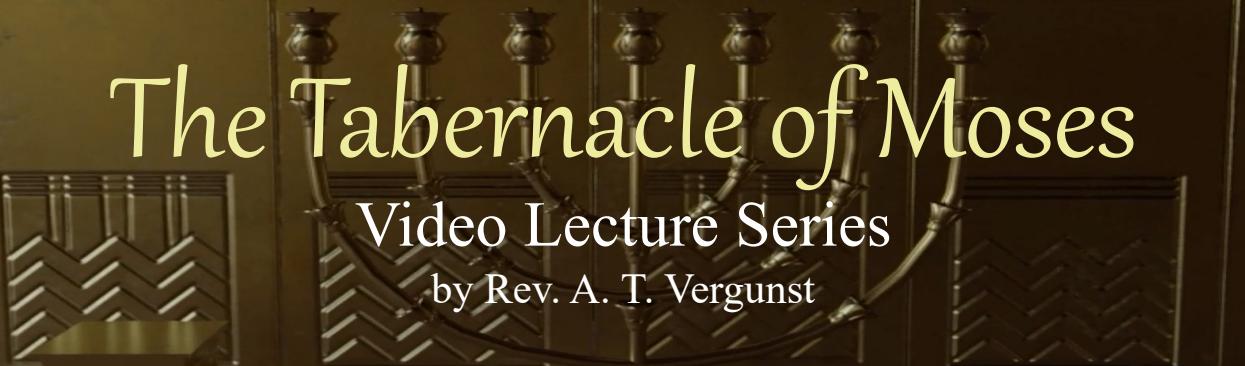
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Rev. A. T. Vergunst is minister of the Gospel at the Reformed Congregation of Carterton, New Zealand, a congregation of the Reformed Congregations of New Zealand.

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Lecture 1 ~ INTRODUCTION

Well, dear friends, with great joy and desire do I answer the request to make this in-depth study of the Old Testament Tabernacle. Throughout the lectures, you'll be shown a number of images of a life-size Tabernacle which has been reconstructed. And these images will help you to somewhat visualize the Tabernacle that God commanded Moses to build.

The Tabernacle—we can compare that to a children's Bible. In a children's Bible, we try to add pictures of the scenes to help the child remember or understand the story. We all know that a picture is worth a thousand words. And so likewise, God designed the Tabernacle to help the people of Israel to understand his teachings on both the law and the gospel, or on the whole way of salvation.

In a very beautiful manner, the Tabernacle illustrates the main doctrines of the New Testament of salvation in a variety of ways. Let me, for example, think of the general set up, the division of the entire Tabernacle in the Holy, and the Holy of Holies; or, if you look at the finer details and the very placement of the various pieces; or, if you examine the various actions of both the Israelite and the priest. But mostly, you will see that the Tabernacle is one glorious portrayal of the person of Jesus Christ and his ministry, and the importance, the centrality of his work in redemption.



So, what do we hope to cover in this course? First, we'll begin with an introductory study on the Tabernacle, and the temple symbolism as well in the entire Bible. And secondly, we will focus on every aspect of the Tabernacle, beginning of course with the entrance gate, and ending all the way, in the very heart of the Tabernacle, which is the Holy of Holies. And thirdly, as we look at all these individual items, I will weave in some of the teaching on how we, as a believer, experience the various gospel truths that are displayed in this glorious building. And my hope is that the fruit of our study may be, as someone once said with intense joy and solemn impression, "I have been to the mountain of God, and I have seen the glory of the Lord God."

So perhaps the most surprising, we are going to begin our Tabernacle study in the book of Exodus, in chapter 20. Now that chapter records the awe-inspiring giving of God's holy law, by the Lord God himself. And after the Israelites observed God's glory, they were more than awestruck. They were literally terrified. We read in the Scriptures, "And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off" (verse 18). The Hebrews author even added that Moses



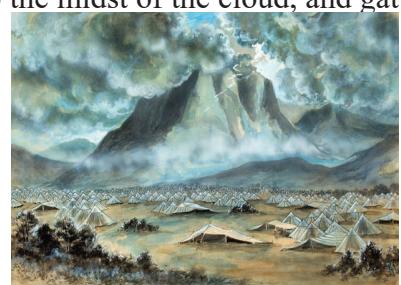
himself was deeply stirred: “And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake” (Hebrews 12:21). Everyone instantly recognized—we cannot dwell in the presence and nearness of this holy majesty, the Lord our God. And therefore, the Israelites fell back, and they begged Moses to speak to them instead of God, for they were afraid to die if God would speak again. (verse 20)

So Moses complied, and he drew near to the Lord on Israel’s behalf in a pleading prayer. In response, God gave Moses the instructions to make an altar, and observe what the Lord promised in verse 24 of Exodus 20: “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” This last sentence is most amazing. God promised to come, to dwell with them, no more in that majestic glory as we saw on Mount Sinai. No, he would come and dwell through the means of an altar—an altar with various sacrifices. And his coming was to bless them. The altar Moses built served as a temporary altar until the Tabernacle was completed. So therefore, we could see that altar as the forerunner, the predecessor of the actual Tabernacle.

Now it’s crucial for us all to understand the important connection between the law and the provision of the gospel, as seen in that chapter of Exodus. God, in his holy majesty, is not only unapproachable by us unholy men, no, he also himself cannot dwell among us in his great and glorious holiness. But now to make both possible, for him to dwell among us, and for us to approach to him, God ordered Moses, “Construct this Tabernacle.”

So let’s turn then to Exodus 24, verses 1 and 2. We read there how God summoned Moses into his presence. And though at first, Aaron, and Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy elders all joined Moses, it is Moses alone who ultimately is commanded to draw near to the Lord on the mount. In verse 15, we read it: “And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount.” For six days, Moses was alone and silent in the presence of this glory of the Lord God, which was still abiding on Mount Sinai.

And then, on day seven, the silence was broken, when the Lord summoned Moses to draw near to him. And we read then, in verse 18: “And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.” It’s in these forty days and forty nights that Jehovah God dictates to Moses the exact details of the Tabernacle building, which we must assume Moses wrote down meticulously then, or perhaps later. He spoke to Moses in Exodus 25, 8 and 9: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.”



So don’t miss the repeat of this very lovely revelation of God’s goodness. He commanded this Tabernacle to be built so he might dwell among them. Nothing—nothing of this Tabernacle was left up to the creativity or the ideas of the builder. It is noticeable that twenty times the record records, “as the Lord commanded Moses.”

What a joy must have swept over Moses, when the Lord unveiled this glorious plan for this Tabernacle he was to build. What a privilege to have Jehovah, the God of the universe, to dwell among them, not in the solemn appearance of that burning bush that Moses saw earlier in his life;

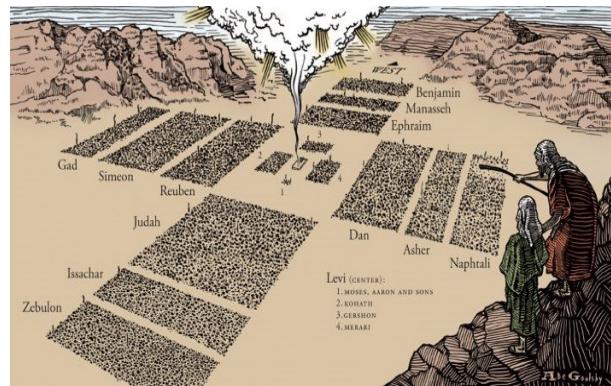
and also not in the majesty of the lightning and the thunder, as witnessed on Mount Sinai. But instead, in the quiet beauty of the Tabernacle of the Lord God.

It will be agreed by us all that, for Moses and the Israelites, the Tabernacle was an object worthy of all attention. And we don't know for sure how much the common Israelite understood of all the significance of the Tabernacle. Now that is hard to answer for us. We don't even know whether all the priests and the Levites, who worked in this Tabernacle, grasped the full spiritual significance of the Tabernacle, and later of Solomon's Temple.

But you are right to ask, why should we, living in the New Testament time, devote a detailed study to this ancient building that doesn't even exist anymore. Let me share these five reasons for us to devote our attention to this part of God's revelation. The first is that God himself devoted more attention to the Tabernacle than to any other subject in the Bible. While the Holy Spirit devoted one single chapter to the creation of the universe, there are fifty chapters over all these books devoted to the Tabernacle and its services. God spent six days creating the world, yet it took him forty days to detail, line upon line, the design of the Tabernacle to Moses. I think that even those facts make it clear that the Tabernacle was very important to God, friends, and anything important to God is worthy of our study. And as Paul writes that "all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness," well then certainly, these fifty chapters of God's word should be profitable for us spiritually somehow.

Now the second reason to study the Tabernacle is because it is a visual revelation of God's own glorious character. Friends, ignorance of God's character or his attributes leads to destruction. And therefore, the more attention that we can give to study the glory of God's character, the stronger Christians we will be. Now, many of God's glorious attributes are visualized in the Tabernacle details as much as possible. Approaching the Tabernacle was approaching a place where you could almost breathe holiness. The formidable and the sparkling white fence and then the ever-burning fire on the altar; and the strictly-forbidden access into the Holy by all the common people; and then the inaccessible Holy of Holies, except for the high priest once a year; and on top of that, the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire—they all underline the same truth: The Lord our God is holy.

And yet, the entire building in the midst of the camp reveals God's love, and mercy, and grace, as well, the attribute of his wisdom. He's made a divine provision to be able to dwell among these people. But love itself cannot cancel a broken law. Love cannot just cancel guilt. Justice and truth demand that a sinner who broke God's law ought to die. The truth that mercy cannot be exercised without God's justice is clearly pictured in the demand of the sacrificial offerings which are consumed by the continual fire in the brazen altar.



We see it in all the details of the grand structure, the sum of God's wisdom in his method of salvation in redeeming sinners. And Paul quotes, in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Now this truth, though it is true about heaven, in the context of that chapter, it is not speaking about the

glory of heaven. The Apostle referred, in that Scripture, to the wisdom of God, in him designing the way and the method of salvation. No human intellect could ever answer how a holy and just God could pardon a guilty sinner and receive him in his holy presence. None of the princes or the wisest of the world ever came close to answering how God can be gracious to sinners without compromising his other attributes of truth, holiness, and justice. And friends, in our study of the Tabernacle, you see the details of God's magnificent wisdom—how he can exercise mercy, at the same time, maintain justice.

In Exodus 35:31, we read how God filled Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah “with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.” Now, if the workman carrying out the designs God needed such divine enabling, how much more was the wisdom of him who designed it.

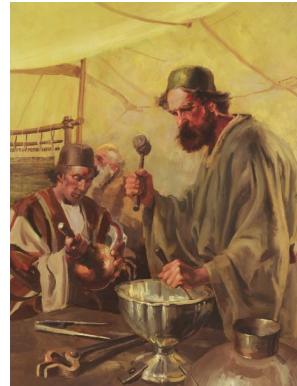
And that brings me to the third reason for devoting our study time to this portion of God's revealed truth. The Tabernacle, friends, is the greatest type of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Well, let me briefly explain what I mean with a type of Jesus. A type can be compared to what we call a silhouette. A silhouette, you know, is a little shadowy portrait of a person. They either picture a person's face, or they picture a person sideways. A silhouette is not a crystal clear picture, but it just highlights some of the main characteristics of a person's face. So let's say you are introduced to a number of silhouettes of a person you don't know. Having become familiar with these silhouettes, you'll easily recognize him or her, once you see them in real life.

Well that scenario describes the case, or should describe the case, for the Old Testament Jews. As they had grown up with the types, or the silhouettes, of Jesus in the Old Testament, they should have been able to recognize him when he finally came. No, it is clear, even then, special teaching was needed, as for example, as illustrated to the couple on the way to Emmaus, in Luke 24. It was only when Jesus opened their understanding that they may have said to each other, “How could we miss what he has now showed us about himself in the Old Testament Scriptures?”

Silhouettes also work the other way. Let's say you are familiar with a person. You'll easily recognize that person you know, when you see him or her in a silhouette, by the shape of the nose, the hairstyle, the chin, the gestures identifies immediately the person you know. You see, that's what we should experience when we study the Tabernacle. Having learned about Jesus Christ in the New Testament pages, you'll begin to see him everywhere, in the details of history, of prophecy, and in the Tabernacle.

For example, with the New Testament light in mind, let me ask you a few questions. What does it mean that the Tabernacle has only one door? Why could you only enter the Tabernacle via the camp of Judah? Or, what is the significance of the four colors that are consistently used in the Tabernacle? They were white, blue, purple, and scarlet. Or, what is the significance that nearly all the pieces of furniture were made of wood and bronze on the outside, or wood and gold on the outside? And why was the one in bronze, and why was the other one in gold? Now hopefully, these questions are just whetting your appetite about delving deeper into the details of this divine building. And the more familiar you become with the Tabernacle, the more familiar you will become with the person of Jesus Christ, and all that he means to us in the work of salvation.

Now the fourth reason justifying a thorough study of the Tabernacle is that it is a visual representation of all the great themes in the experience of salvation. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans



15, verse 4, that “Whatsoever things were written afore...were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures”—that were written before—“might have hope.” Now, we cannot exclude the Tabernacle from that passage. In the Tabernacle, we see, as it were, before our very eyes, answers on questions like this: How is God’s plan of redemption a provision of one-sided grace? or, How can a holy God receive me, a sinful person? How can I, as an unholy sinner, have communion with God, when I am guilty? or, If we are saved by faith in Christ, what now really is the role of faith? or, How is justification and sanctification related, and yet different from one another? or, What is now the connection between the cross of Calvary, and the intercession of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God the Father? Or, maybe another question is, What is the glory and what is the purpose of the church of God—the assembly of the saints? And finally, What is really the heart, the heart of the glory of God? These are theological questions, and they are all answered in the Tabernacle structure in a very simple, a physical gospel, like a children’s Bible.

And so, fifthly, a very thorough study of the Tabernacle and the ceremonial laws, detailing the various sacrifices—which I will not include in this series—will open your eye for all kinds of passages of the rest of the Scriptures. For example, when we know the various details and the meaning of the Tabernacle structure, it will help you to understand various references and sayings in the Psalms and in the prophets. Like if you want a short example, in Psalm 141, verse 2, David prays, Lord, “Let my prayer be set before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” It will also help you to understand the rich gospel teachings in the book of Hebrews, and much of the symbolism in the book of Revelation. For both of these books are totally built on the imagery of the Tabernacle.

So, you be the judge. Have I made my case for a thorough study of the Tabernacle? Now that is a worthwhile effort, even though the building is long gone. And I am confident that when you walk with me in this tour of the Tabernacle, it will strengthen your grasp of the astonishing and the comforting beauty of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, may God bless us and assist us all, as we go through this study.