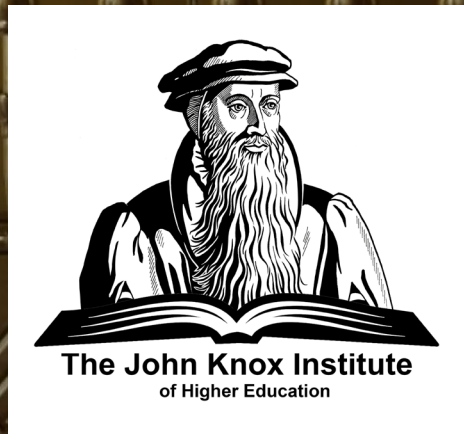


The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 3 ~
SETTING AND ORGANIZATION



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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The Tabernacle of Moses

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1. Introduction
2. The Temple Theme
3. Setting and Organization
4. The Courtyard Fence
5. The Courtyard Gate
6. The Brazen Altar—part 1
7. The Brazen Altar—part 2
8. The Laver
9. The Tabernacle Building
10. The Lampstand
11. The Table of Shewbread
12. The Altar of Incense
13. The Ark of the Covenant

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Lecture 3 ~

SETTING AND ORGANIZATION

Welcome to the third study on the Tabernacle, as it is constructed according to the pattern that God supplied to Moses, in a forty-day stay with him on Mount Sinai. Now in the next eleven sessions, we will consider the general structure and all the chief pieces of the sacred furniture God commanded Moses to construct. Yet our main focus will remain on the spiritual teachings about salvation through Jesus Christ, that are pictured in these particular parts of the Tabernacle. For this was God's main purpose in all the details of the Tabernacle. He's not just into building structures—God is in the revelation of the gospel truth. And so we begin our study today with listening to how it all started.

In Exodus 25, verses 1 to 7, we read God's first instructions to Moses about building the Tabernacle. "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering." Then God specifies—the offerings that Moses is to request and to receive from the people—precious metals, like gold, and silver, and brass. Next are fabrics or twine of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine white linen. Added are planks of wood, olive oil, spices, and precious stones. But wait a moment. Where did these former slaves have all these treasures from in that large amount?



Way back in Exodus 3:21–22, at the burning bush, God already had told Moses that the enslaved nation would not leave the country empty handed. He said, "And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: but every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth"—or liveth—"in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment"—or clothing—"and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians."

Now the word "borrow," being used in the Hebrew, has the meaning of "ask." So having served the Egyptians with rigor for many centuries, the Israelites were in the right to ask for a payment for all those years that their lives were made exceedingly bitter through the slavery. So the Egyptians would doubtless have refused at first, but after ten plagues, they were eager to part with their treasures to get rid of the Jews. And so, Exodus 12, verses 35 and 36 reads as follows: "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent"—or granted—"unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians"—of

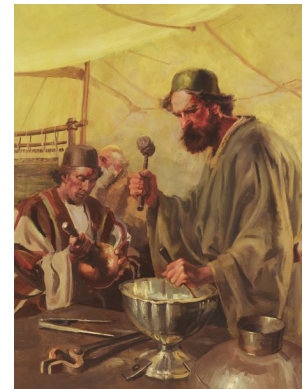
those treasures.

Now as Moses is to collect these building materials, it was clear that he was never to force them to give. He was only to receive what was willingly given. And the response of this call is amazing. The people, including the children, gave up their jewels and their treasures for the house of the Lord. Can you imagine a church where we need to exhort, like in Exodus 36, verses 5 to 7, where it says the people were so eager to give that it overloaded the workers with resources. And we read very specifically, “And Moses gave commandment—after God told him so—“and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much.” Now what a blessing! What a blessing is such a giving congregation of believers. God loves a cheerful giver, who gives joyfully and willingly for the cause of God’s kingdom. In such giving, we see the glory of our giving God. He is a cheerful giver.



Another question that needs an answer when we study this amazing building—How were these former slaves, trained only to make bricks, able to make such an elaborate structure as the Tabernacle was, while in the middle of a desert? Where did they get the experience from? Where’d they get the wisdom for this? And the answer to this is given in Exodus 35, verses 31 to 35. The main leaders, Bezaleel and Aholiab, were “filled . . . with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.”

Bezaleel’s name has a beautiful meaning. Literally, it translates from the Hebrew, “in the shadow of El” or “in the shadow of God.” And his name, therefore, reveals the secret of his skill. It is God who equipped them and the others in these artistic skills. And according to Exodus 35:34, they both also trained other in all manner of work, such as engraving, and carving, and spinning, and weaving, and embroidering. And all these different skilled people are actually nothing different from what Paul writes about in the New Testament church, in 1 Corinthians 1. Paul writes there, in verses 4 through 11 of chapter 12, about the differences of gifts, the differences of administrations and operations. He says (verse 8), “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.” In other words, all them were administered by the same Holy Ghost to do the various skills.



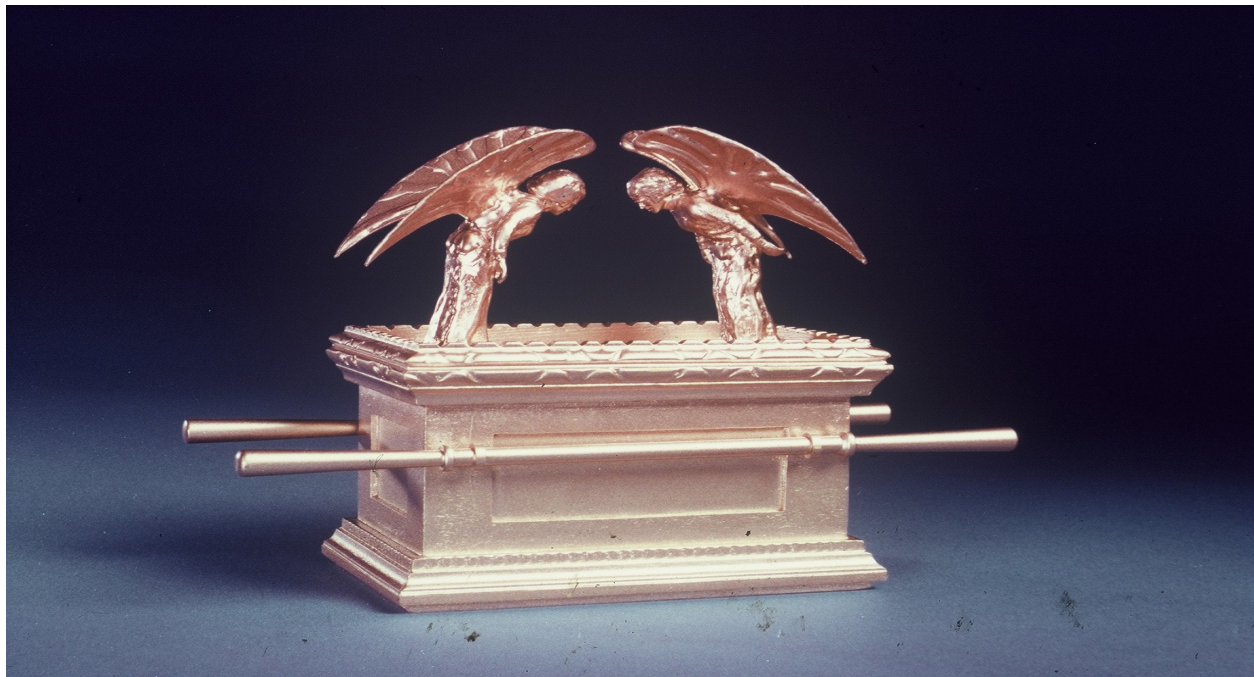
So let’s think back once more about the giving of the people. Most important is not what we give, but how we give. A willing heart of love and devotion makes even a penny a worthy gift in the sight of God. It’s therefore not coincidence that Paul follows his teaching on the gifts with a chapter on charity—1 Corinthians 13. Charity, or love, is more important than the size or the quality of our gift. Now one last question, before we draw near to the study of the Tabernacle, is the order in which we should study the Tabernacle. Should we follow the order God gave to Moses in Exodus 25 to 27? God began the Tabernacle description with the Ark, in the Holy of Holies.

The Ark is symbolic of the revelation of God’s heart of mercy and grace, in the context of holiness. The Ark is describing the source of our salvation. And from there, God proceeds to describe all the rest of the Tabernacle, that, as it were, is centered around the Ark. So God’s order was from the inside out. We can also consider the Tabernacle from the outside in, where we start with the Fence,

and the Gate, and from there, we can proceed step by step, into the Holy of Holies.

Now in our study, I have decided to follow the outside to the inside way. And the reason why I have chosen for that order is because it ties in more with the experience of salvation, in the life of every believer. It is true that salvation begins with one-sided grace in the heart of Jehovah God—in other words, in the Holy of Holies. Yet, our own spiritual journey of salvation does not begin at the Ark. It begins with us being in the wilderness, lost in sin, separated from God's communion. Now out of this lost condition, God the Father draws sinners to himself. And in this drawing, he reveals himself to us in Christ, as the way, the truth, and the life. Now it's therefore much closer to our personal experience to follow the study this Tabernacle, beginning on the outside, working towards the inside, step by step.

So, now as we proceed, let's consider the contents. Let's do a bird's-eye view to survey the Tabernacle, mostly from the book of Numbers. You'll see then that the Tabernacle is placed in the middle of the camp. All the tribes were arranged, by God's own instructions, around the Taber-

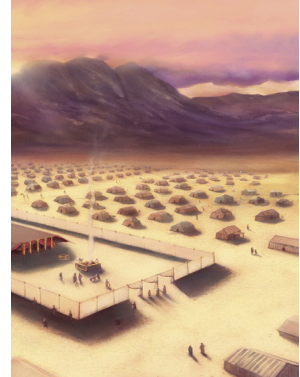


nacle, each having their own assigned place. Neither Moses, nor Aaron, nor anyone, decided on where to pitch their tent. God chose the tribe of Judah to hold the position at the east Gate—the east side. Why did he? Though we don't have answer on the why of every other tribe, there is a clear answer why Judah's tents were pitched at the east. It is from the tribe of Judah that the Messiah would be born.

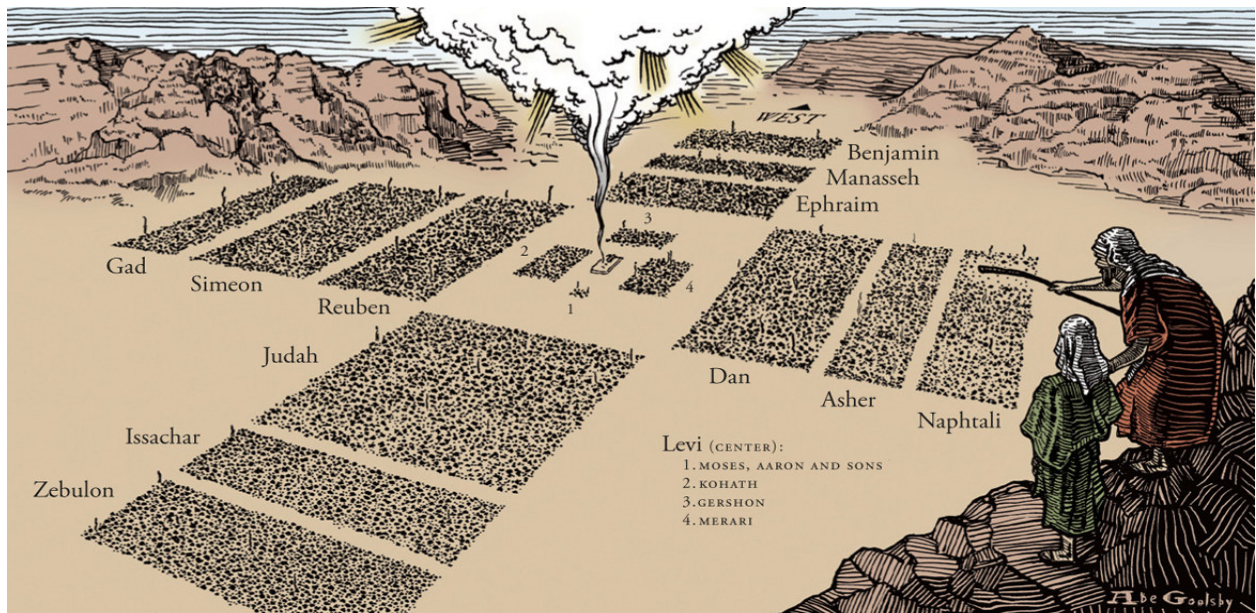
So how naturally this is pictured in the placement of the tribes of Judah at the Gate. And yet, right before the entrance of the Gate, were also the tents of Moses and Aaron. Moses represents the law. Aaron, in his priestly work, pictures the gospel. And in this, God pictured the truth that both the law and the gospel play a role in the coming to and into the Tabernacle. It was also at the east side that you would find the only door of entrance. Now the east is where the sun rises. The east was also the place where God placed the angels guarding the entrance to Paradise. You see in these details the silhouette of the Messiah's appearing.

So, how big is the camp in which this temple is, or tabernacle is placed? It's estimated that

the entire camp covers about 12 square miles, or about 30 square kilometers. This housed approximately 2.5 million people, plus the extensive herds of animals. Now obviously, over such a distance, those at the parameter of this vast tent camp needed a clear direction where the dwelling place of the Lord their God was. And God pointed this out to them by placing the Pillar of Cloud in the day and the Pillar of Fire at night, right above the very Holy of Holies. These pillars would also guide them as they traveled. We can read this in Numbers 9, verses 15 and 16: “And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony. “And at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.”



Now we know, in a desert culture, when the nomads would move around to another place for grazing their cattle, it was the sheik, or the tribal leader, who always determined where to camp. This tribal leader carried with him a long, you might say, symbolic spear. When he determined it was time to rest the entire tribe, he planted his spear in the sand, and immediately the servants would hurry to pitch all their tents around this spear, and his tent also would be pitched first of all. Now this is the same picture that God created, very familiar for the Jewish people, with the central Tabernacle, with the covering pillar of fire and cloud. God determined when to travel, and God determined when to camp. Listen to Numbers 9, verse 17 to 23. Only upon the commandment of the Lord, they journeyed or rested. And in verse 21, we read, “And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.”



Now immediately upon God’s move, the entire camp got into motion. Each individual family would be disassembling their personal tents, gathering their animals, and getting ready to move on. But also, the tent of the Lord needed to be disassembled. According to the book of Numbers, this task was assigned to the Levites between the ages of thirty to fifty. The entire tribe was divided into three groups, and were placed on either the north, the west, or the south side of the Tabernacle—so

very close to it. And when the pillar of cloud moved heavenward, two trumpets were blown for the signal to the entire camp. And among the Levites, from the priestly family, Aaron and his sons were assigned to take down the inner veil. And walking backwards, they would cover the Ark of the Lord with the veil. Likewise, all the other sacred objects in the holy place were covered with a blue or scarlet cloth, and over that, a protective cover of badger skins. The only exemption was the



Ark. Its badger skin was covered with a cloth of solid blue. Blue, as we will see, is symbolic of the color of heaven. All the smaller utensils were placed on stretchers and also covered. Everything was covered.

And only after everything was carefully covered, were the assigned group of the Kohathites to carry it outside. And God warned them not to peek when the holy things were covered. And after they had carried the sacred pieces of furniture out of the Tabernacle, the next group of Levites would get to work. According to Numbers,

chapter 4, a number of Gershonites would then dismantle the Tabernacle building first. The Holy, and the Holy of Holies. And finally, the assigned Merarites for that day would disassemble all the frames and the courtyard fence. Now while the Kohathites waited, with all the pieces of furniture carried on their shoulders, the Gershonites and the Merarites would load the Tabernacle on a number of wagons, according to Number 7, verses 1 to 9. These six wagons and twelve oxen were all donated by the chiefs, and by God's appointment, or commandment, were dedicated to serve for the transport of the Tabernacle. It's estimated that the disassembling and the assembling of the entire structure would take at least two hours, and was done by two dozen chosen men from the tribe of Levi.

Finally, when all the Tabernacle was ready for transport, the procession would begin, all following the pillar of cloud, or the pillar of fire. Even the order in which they travelled was set by God. According to Numbers 10:33 to 36, the Ark headed the procession, and "they departed," it says, "from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp. And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel."

Well lastly, before we look at the details of the building, let's not have a romantic idea about the Tabernacle ceremonies. All day long, the blood of sacrificial animals flowed upon the soil. Animals were bleeding, and the sweet smell of shed blood would mix with the smell of burning meat of the offerings on the altar. Undoubtedly, many, many penetrating smells hovered around the encampment as a daily reminder of sin and salvation, of law and gospel. And through the presence of the Tabernacle and its services, was a glorious revelation of the covenant God, Jehovah. It was also by these smells, and burning, a daily reminder that the cost for redemption from sin is great, and the price of atonement is very costly.



And so, friends, after this exploratory beginning of the setting of the Tabernacle, we are now ready to draw near to the Tabernacle itself. In our ten sessions, we will closely examine each aspect of the Tabernacle. May God open our hearts to

both his law and his gospel, for learning to see our sins and his provided salvation, as visually set before us in the Tabernacle structure. And pray, pray that God would show us his glory. Thank you.