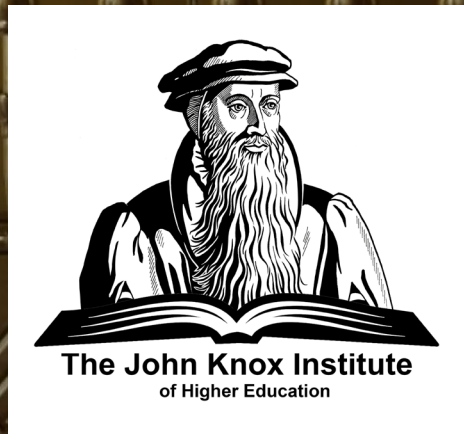


The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 9 ~
THE TABERNACLE BUILDING



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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Lecture 9 ~

THE TABERNACLE BUILDING

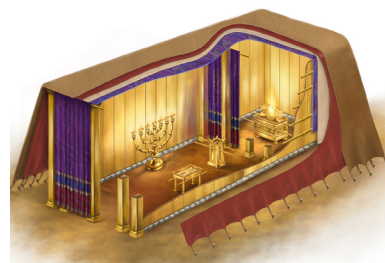
Welcome to our next session on the Tabernacle study. This time we will concentrate our attention on the actual Tabernacle Building. In very detailed instructions, Moses was told about this in Exodus 26. And God instructed Moses to prepare the various coverings, and gave him the exact number of the boards which will make the walls, and spoke about the two curtains which separated the Holy and the Holy of Holies.

And as Shema, our Jewish lad, stood at the entrance of the courtyard, he did not see any of these details inside this special building. For there was none could enter, except the officiating priests. So Shema did notice that before any of the priests entered, they first washed themselves carefully at the Laver. And then he saw how a priest took some of the hot coals from the Brazen Altar, carried them in a golden bowl towards the building, and he then disappeared behind the curtain.



And when that happened, he also noticed that everyone that was standing at the Gate or the priests that were in the Courtyard stood still, and waited for the priest to exit. And it appeared that everyone actually prayed. After the priest came out, he blessed the waiting congregation. These words are found in Numbers 6, verses 24 to 26.

Now, in this study, let's hear what Shema heard, as one of the priests described the details of the sanctuary to him. He, as one of the sons of Merari, was assigned to take down and put up the building when God instructed them to move on. And he told Shema that the sanctuary building was divided into two different rooms. The larger room was called the Holy Place. It had a rectangular shape of about 10 meters (32 feet) by 5 meters wide, and 5 meters tall. Now you could consider this to be the front entry to the second room—the most important room. The second was the smaller room, and it's called the Holy of Holies. It measured a perfect square [cube] of 5 by 5 by 5 meters. This room was God's dwelling place. It was his throne room. Exactly above that rose a pillar of cloud or fire which would stand when the building was resting.



This building had to be movable, so how was it constructed? In Exodus 26, we read that 48

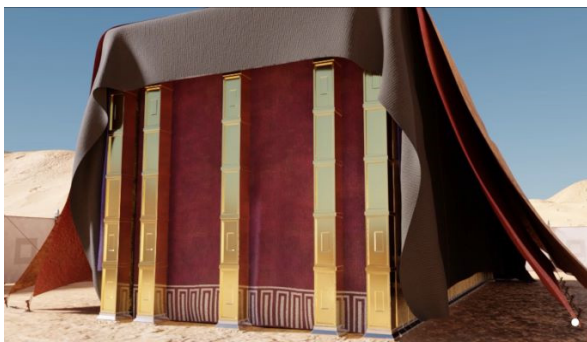


boards formed the walls on the south, the north, and the west side. And each of them was constructed of Shittim wood, covered this time with gold. They stood next to each other, side by side. They were secured with cross bars sliding through three rings on each board. And to stabilize them, Moses was instructed to make silver sockets. On the east side, the wall consisted of five pillars with a huge curtain hung on them. The entrance to the Holy of Holies was also a curtain, but this time, attached to four pillars.

To complete the building, the Lord instructed Moses to make a roof. And this roof was made of four large coverings of various fabric. Three of them were made out of ten sections, except the third one. That one was made of eleven sections, and the eleventh section kind of hung over the backside of the Tabernacle. All the others, they ran across from the north to the south, without hanging either at the front or at the back sides of the building.



So let's now think together about the spiritual truths again that are pictured in this building. First, we'll consider the 48 boards: 48 is four times twelve. Twelve is an important number. Twelve was the number of the tribes of Israel.



Twelve is the number of the apostles of Jesus. In Revelation, John saw twenty-four elders around the throne. It's therefore safe to conclude that these boards standing side by side are the spiritual picture of God's church—his gathered saints. At one point, each believer was like those boards used to be, before they were placed in the Tabernacle there. For the boards were made out of Shittim tree, which is a rather unsightly desert tree, growing and surviving in the arid deserts made them twisted and

gnarly. Makes me think of Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 1, 2, and 3, where Paul described sinners living in the desert of sin, separated from God and Christ. It describes us all, before being regenerated, whether we live in the world, or are part of a Christian church. Now before God's quickening grace, we were all spiritually dead and living in trespasses and sin. We all were dominated by a spirit which is not God's Spirit. We were all strangers of God, and to his sanctifying influences. Yet, one day, the woodsman cut down the Shittim tree and began to make a straight board. So sinners are taken in the hand of God. In God's time, God took us in his hand of salvation. And Paul wrote about this beautifully in Ephesians 2, verses 4 and 5: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)."

So after having cut down the trees, the craftsman got to work. Now to make a straight board out of such a tree would not have been an easy task, as there was nothing straight about the wood. This pictures again the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. It is his work to straighten out, as it were, our hearts and our affections, and our minds. He alone turns a sinner into a saint. Through teaching,

through the trials, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God begins to conform us more and more to Jesus Christ. Slowly but surely, Christian character is developed by the Holy Spirit. We grow in grace, we grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that process, friends, is not easy, just as making a straight board, now that was hard work. The carpenter ran across gnarls and twists, and strains of the wood. And as the wood dried, and it wants to bend, it doesn't give. And so, actually this portrays the work of sanctification.

Now we meet with the sap of our selfishness. We meet with the knots of hardness of heart, and the habits that are wrong, and we discover twists, and out-of-shape aspects in our own thinking, or our own desires. Even harder it is to grow in the fruit of the Spirit—how to be gentle, and how to be humble, how to be compassionate and forgiving, even to those that are hard to live with, or how to be joyful and submissive when we run into difficulties. Rather, all those are the fruits of the workmanship of the great Redeemer. Listen to how Paul put that, in Ephesians 2:10—“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

So when the carpenter was finished, the board was still not perfect. Yet, all the imperfections were covered with a sheet of shining gold. And now nothing, nothing of the remaining imperfections were seen anymore. The only thing you saw is gold. Friends, what a beautiful, spiritual truth is pictured in these boards covered with gold. Even the best of the saints of Christ continue on this earth as poor and needy with indwelling sin—how easy it is to stumble. When is there ever a day, when we say we felt kind enough, or we felt joyful enough, or we felt loving enough. When is there ever a day we never did entertain a tempting sight. Never is a sincere child of God satisfied with his



level of holiness while on earth. Recently, I read a quote which was so true. The author wrote: “If we think we are enough holy, enough loving, and enough joyful, and thankful, and faithful, and gentle, then either we are deceiving ourselves, or we are in heaven.” Well, what we see within ourselves, God does not see in us anymore, if we are, by faith, in Christ. He sees his children as covered with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He sees everyone of them complete in him. God sees them righteous, gold, on the basis of Jesus Christ's merits. And that is the truth pictured in these gold-covered wooden boards.

Paul wrote in Romans 3:22, in words God wrote in the Tabernacle in these wood and gold boards. He wrote this: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.” Now hear how Isaiah went from “Woe is me” to “I rejoice,” as he learned to see the spiritual truth of these gold-covered boards in his life. Seeing the glory of the Lord, he felt unclean: “Woe is me! for I am undone;...for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” And later, in Isaiah 61, verse 10: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” See, this is the truth about every believer. Our human woodiness is covered with the divine gold-ness.

Well, another thing to notice is that no board stood on its own. The 48 pieces were held together by a number of bars running through the rings on each board. And with that picture in mind, consider how Paul described the church. Ephesians 2 again, verse 19 to 22: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners”—the individual desert tree, living by yourself, for yourself—but we are “now fellowcitizens with the saints, and [we are] of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner

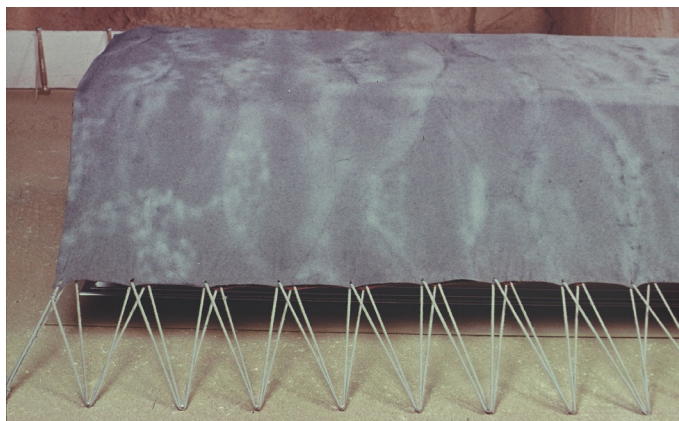
stone”—and then it comes—“in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” The boards stood side by side. None leaned forward or backward. They were fitly framed together, as they were, standing shoulder to shoulder. None stood taller or smaller. All were not in the same position, but each were in the same condition.

Now there is a beautiful unity pictured in these 48 boards of this building. Sadly, this picture is not always visible among God’s children now. And therefore, again and again, we as believers need to heed the exhortation Paul gives in Ephesians 4, verse 3: “Endeavouring”—brethren—“to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” And the unity is in the details of verses 4 to 6: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are all called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” So we learn together as believers not to look upon another, or to despise others, or to be jealous. And so we remember that each board was a vital part of the building. And can we remind ourselves that every believer has his or her place in God’s kingdom. What will remain imperfect here, however, will one day be perfect, united as one church in the glory of the new earth.

Well next, we already saw that the boards were held together with the bars running through three rings attached to each board. Now, could those three rings be a picture of the Triune God, each Person contributing to the work of salvation. The Father elected the church. The Son redeemed them. And the Holy Spirit sanctifies the church.

There is one more significant detail about the boards. Remember they were placed on silver sockets. The silver of these sockets was obtained in a very special manner. According to God’s instructions in Exodus 30, verses 11 to 16, the silver was obtained from the price of a ransom, or from the redemption money. It says, “When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD.” So everyone twenty years old and above were to give half a shekel of silver. And this money was called “the atonement money.” It was melted into the sockets for the boards and the pillars. Undoubtedly we may read a reference again to Jesus Christ and his atoning work of redemption. Every believer is built on that foundation of Jesus Christ, for the entire church rests upon the security of his finished work. Our redemption is secure through the blood merits of Jesus Christ.

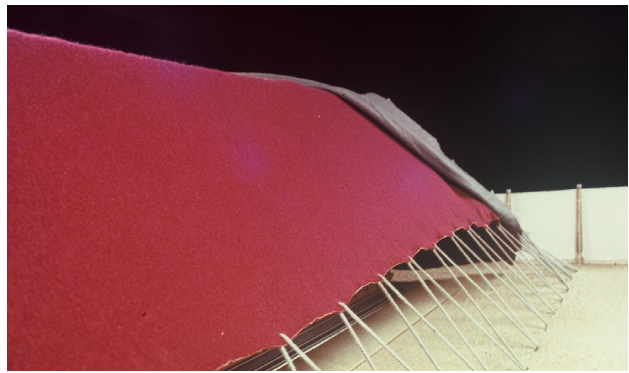
So lastly, let’s look at the four coverings that covered the Tabernacle Building. There’s an outside covering made of badgers’ skins. That was probably some sea animal that was found abundantly along the waters of the Red Sea. The outer layer was practically intended for the protection of the glaring sun and the searing desert winds, and the occasional rain. It actually might have given the Tabernacle a rather unattractive appearance from the outside. Isn’t that exactly how the people saw Christ Jesus, as Isaiah 53, verse 2



tells us: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” Unbelievers, whose eyes are blinded by the gods of this world, do not see the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Was it not so with us also, before God’s Spirit opened our eyes? Though unattractive, this outer covering was very effective, which formed a protective barrier

against all the outside influences of the sun, and the wind, the sand, and the rain. And again, that aspect highlights the work of Jesus Christ. He is our covering. He is our shield, to all who place their trust in him.

The second covering underneath the first was made of rams' skins that were colored bright red. The ram was the animal Abraham saw in the bushes in Genesis 22. It was the animal of substitution. It was the animal of consecration for Aaron and his sons as they were ordained in the priesthood, as described in Leviticus, chapter 8. So this second layer points to Jesus work as the consecrated servant of God. He made himself of no reputation. He humbled himself. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross—the ultimate sacrifice. And in that, he provided a covering for all his people, and that's how they covered the Tabernacle.



The third covering was made of goats' hair. The common goats were black haired. The goat was also the animal used for sin offering. So this covering points to Jesus' life as the sin offering. I said earlier, it is striking that this covering was composed of eleven sections, and all the others were made of ten sections. The eleventh section was visible at the backside. It hung down, and it may have practically been to protect the backside of the Tabernacle. But, it could also be a reference to Jesus' public ministry. For thirty years, he was hidden as he lived in Nazareth.

It was only the last three years of his life that Jesus Christ became public. And yet, during all the thirty-three years of his life, he is the substitute for his people. He atoned in his life for the sins of infancy, childhood, and adulthood. And so truly, he is a complete Savior.

The innermost covering was of fine-twined linen, embroidered with the same colors, as seen in the entrance Gate. This is the one we see from the inside. And as you learned, every color highlight one of the aspects of Christ's glorious Personhood and ministry. We are informed by the sacred Word that on this covering, angels were pictured. As it were, the angels were looking from above down into the sanctuary. Were they curious? Were they watchful? Were they rejoicing? Probably all three. As we read Ephesians, chapter 3:10, Paul refers to the angels, and what they learned about what was hidden, also for them, from the beginning of this world. He writes: "To the intent"—in

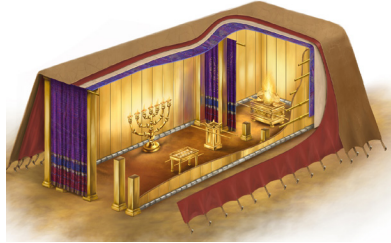


the church—"that now unto the principalities and powers"—angels—"in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Likewise, Peter referred to the angels in a remarkable phrase, in 1 Peter 1:12. Not only were the prophets curious about what they were writing in the Bible, but also the angels were curiously desiring to look into those things. And doesn't Hebrews 1:14 remind us of the angels' ministries? "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to

minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" And isn't it beautiful to see how the various details of this original Tabernacle pictured New Testament truths long before it.

That brings us then finally to the first and the second veils of the Tabernacle, separating the

Holy and the Holy of Holies. Again, the same colors were used. It's referring to Christ, as we already covered. But there remains a curious "why?" The first veil was attached to five pillars, and the second veil, leading into the Holy of Holies, is attached to four pillars. I don't believe that, with God, details are random or unneeded. I wonder whether this is a reference to the fact that the Old Testament gospel was actually introduced by the five books of Moses, but the real glory of



the New Testament is that the gospel is opened with four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, setting out before us Jesus Christ. So far then about the Tabernacle Building.

In our next four studies, we will consider each piece of the sacred furniture found in this building. May God bless this overview and introduction to the study of this inner sanctuary of God and his people.