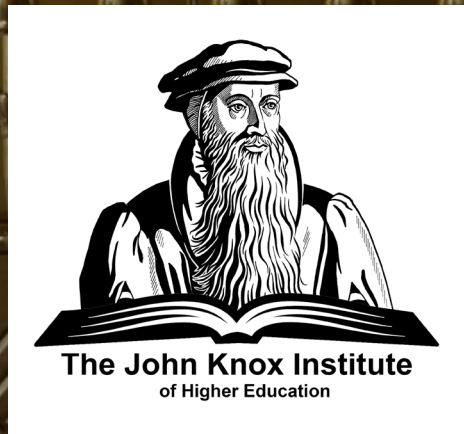


The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 11 ~
THE TABLE OF SHEWBREAD



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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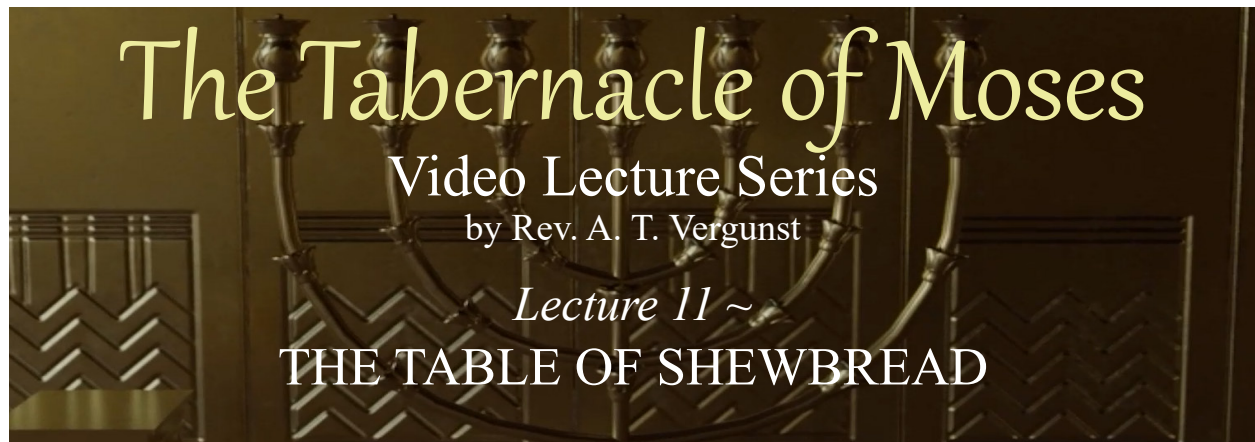


The Tabernacle of Moses

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Welcome again to our next study on the Tabernacle. In this session, we will study the Table of Shewbread. And that will cover the teachings from Exodus 25, and also from chapter 37, and from Leviticus chapter 24.

Now by way of introduction, let's think for a moment again about the whole word "salvation." The riches of God's salvation are more extensive than the universe is big. Salvation, which this whole Tabernacle is speaking about, means to be restored in a relationship with our Creator, God. It is to be reconciled with the Lord of heaven and earth. It means to be forgiven, to be accepted with our holy God, on behalf of Jesus' merits. But it also means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit, to become a new creature. It is to be filled with the indwelling Holy Spirit leading us through this life. And so salvation, friends, is to have a relationship with the Triune God. And in this life, through faith in his word, and in the experience of his Spirit, but after this life, it will be in personal communion through Jesus Christ, who then will be the living Tabernacle. Now such communion will not be in the setting of a wilderness journey, or in a fallen and sinful world, but in the new earth, under a new heaven, called the spiritual kingdom.

So, this incredible good news of the gospel is that God desires communion with sinners. He wants to dwell among his creatures, and he made provision for that in his own Son, Jesus Christ, the spiritual Tabernacle. Now let that truth chase out the dark views of God we have embraced in our thoughts. Let's seek and approach God with the conviction that he seeks and desires our reconciliation with him, for that is ultimately the whole message that God proclaims in this building in the midst of the Israelite camp.

As we considered earlier, the Tabernacle reveals not only his divine goodness, and his grace and love, it also is the sum of divine wisdom. No human mind, no matter how intelligent, could have come up with God's solution on the question of how a holy and just God can receive an unholy and guilty sinner back into his own grace. But God, in his infinite wisdom, revealed to us a God-honoring way in which he is able to embrace and to pardon the guilty. Paul referred to that in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9: "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." Out of his infinite being, flows the plan of salvation, based on the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

Let's give now our attention to this Table of Shewbread. Shema, our Jewish boy, he asked the priests what else there was inside the Holy Place besides the Lampstand. So, while the priest took him along in his thoughts, he shared with him the following details. "Shema," he said, "when I come from the bright sunlight into the Holy Place, I am greeted by the golden light of the Lampstand. And in that light, your eyes will be drawn to a table that is on the right wall.

“The Table is not big—it’s about a meter long, maybe 57 centimeters wide, and about 75 centimeters tall. It’s an unusual table, though a beautiful table, for instead of a flat top, this table has a border of about 10 centimeters around it, and this border is decorated with a crown, it looks like a crown all around it. And since this table had to be carried, it was supplied with these two gold-covered staves which were placed alongside the table, and always were in there. And then, Shema, we have several specific utensils that have been made for the use of working with this Table—several bread pans, and covers, and cups, and bowls. But the most important part of this Table is the Shewbread on top of it.



“Each Sabbath day, we receive twelve new breads that are to be placed on the Table. According to God’s commandment, the breads are made of the finest flour that is available. Six in a row, they are standing on the Table till the next Sabbath day. And after we’ve placed them there, these two stacks, then we pour frankincense over the bread. And this has the practical result of preserving the bread while it is sitting on the Table for seven full days. But it also dedicates the bread to the Lord. It is Shewbread before the Lord. The next Sabbath, we replace the bread with fresh loaves. And then, Shema, we may eat the old loaves on that day. We may not take any of it home—it’s for us to eat. Our Lord said, in Leviticus 24, verse 9: “And it shall be Aaron’s and his sons’; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the LORD made by fire by a perpetual statute.””



So, let us draw the spiritual teachings from this sacred object. First, let’s consider the details of the Table. You could expect, indeed, a revelation of Jesus Christ. Secondly, let’s give the attention to those twelve loaves of Shewbread. And as we’ve discovered time and again, the key in everything in this Tabernacle is the central Person of the entire Scripture, Jesus Christ. God intended the holy structure to be the most visual presentation of the glory of Jesus Christ. It’s really the gospel in the Old Testament.

And the Table does that again, in the wood and the gold structure. Maybe now we are familiar with how that is picturing Christ’s dual nature. The two natures of the Savior are critical for having made him a suitable Mediator between God and us—fully God, and real, sinless man—human, made to bring divinity and humanity together. But there’s one more aspect of Jesus Christ that is vividly pictured in the wood and the gold structures I haven’t mentioned yet. You know, the wood and the gold are really close together—as it were, one structure. And yet, the wood and the gold

always remain separate.

So it is with Christ. His divine and his human natures are never mixed. His divinity remained fully divine, though it was joined most intimately with the human nature. Just think of it. He was omniscient in divine nature, yet he had a limited human understanding. In Mark 13:32, his words indicate his humanity, limited in knowledge. He says, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son [of man], but the Father.” Think of it—he’s omnipresent in his divine nature, and yet he was only at one place at one time in his human nature. He was eternal in his divine nature, yet Jesus had a birth day in his human nature. Though he was omnipotent, Almighty, as the God of heaven, yet he was wearied, and he sat down at the well. His human nature always remained fully human, though united to his divine. He was the Son of man, though he was, at the same time, mysteriously, the Son of the Highest. It is the Son of man who died on the cross. And yet, Acts 20:28 tells us that it’s the blood of God that purchased the church. It is the Son of man that tasted the full wrath of God against sin, yet it was his divine nature that upheld him under it. For his divine nature didn’t need to grow, but his human nature did. Luke records, in Luke, chapter 2, that the child Jesus grew and he waxed strong in spirit, filled with increasing wisdom. So it’s critical in all our teaching, in all our thinking, that we keep Christ’s natures strictly separated, yet we may and we cannot separate them as we think of Christ. Never think of Jesus as deity possessing humanity, for that will deny his real humanity. But neither are we to think that his humanity was simply indwelt deity. No, the two natures were mysteriously united, together in one Person.

Having this uniqueness made him the true bread from heaven. The priest told Shema that the Table was also decorated with this crown on the rim. Over and over, God keeps emphasizing this glory of his Son who has come in the flesh as the bread. Friends, he that walked on earth is the same One Isaiah saw as the Lord God on the throne in Isaiah 6. He deserves our worship and our trust. And the question for you and me is, are we truly worshipping this God-man, Jesus Christ? Do I trust him as the One who is able to save me to the uttermost because of his dual nature, being the Son of God, being the Son of man? For if he’s not God, how could he substitute for you and for all fellow believers, and for this innumerable multitude? If he was not real man, how could he take the place of a man? And if he was not an innocent man, how could he be a substitute for the guilty?



So secondly, let’s give our attention to these twelve loaves of bread on the Table. First, the twelve loaves of bread are called Shewbread. The word “shew” has the meaning of “face” or “presence.” So it can be read as “the bread of his presence.” Not only are they stacked in God’s presence, but they symbolize God’s presence with his people. The command of God in Leviticus 24, verse 8, is: “Every sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually.” And notice they were loaves not to be shown to men, but shown to the Lord. There were therefore in the first place for God’s own delight. Now this sets out a rich thought we often forget as we think about the whole of the gospel. The work of Christ pictured in the bread is not, in the first place, for the salvation of sinners. It is to the glory and to the delight of God himself. Though Christ is the delight of his people, never omit to remember that he is, first and foremost, the delight of his Father.

The Father spoke from heaven, in Matthew 3:17—“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” His work is pleasing to God, and in that truth actually lies all our hope. For separated from Jesus Christ, we remain unclean, and unacceptable, and unfit for the communion with God Almighty. But in him, and because of him, we can be pleasing to God. There’s another thing—that truth is again represented in the frankincense. Each time, when those loaves were placed on the Table, they were topped with the frankincense, spreading its beautiful fragrance before the face of the Most High.

And I must keep reminding us that we are made acceptable in the Beloved. Everything of him is beloved. Salvation, according to Ephesians 1:6, is to the praise of the glory of the grace of God. And Jude emphasized this so beautifully in the closing words of his Gospel epistle, when he writes: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

Now secondly, the Shewbread highlights the sinlessness of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Leviticus 2:11, we learn that God forbade that any leaven to be part of the grain offerings. The reason was that leaven, or yeast, was the symbol of sin in the Bible, and therefore was to be absent of any of the offerings. This little but significant fact is a preview of the sinlessness of our Lord and Savior. We have a high priest, who is holy, who is undefiled, who is separate from sinners, and yet he’s made higher than the heavens—Hebrews 7:26. In 1 Peter 1, verse 19, he is exalted as the “lamb without blemish, without spot.” And why is that important? It is because only being sinless or blameless could he assume the place of the guilty and carry the punishment for our sin.

Now thirdly, the Shewbread is one of the simplest pictures of Jesus Christ. In John 6, the Lord identified himself as the bread of heaven. He said: “but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he”—Jesus—“which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” (John 6:32–33). He also says later, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). And in John 6:48–50, he adds: “I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.” Now if you take a moment to read all of John 6, you can see that he contrasts himself with the earthly bread he had made the day before. But he is contrasting himself also with the manna that rained down upon the Jews in the wilderness journey. The manna in the wilderness was a wonderful gift of bread which fed the living, and kept them from dying. But the bread God gave in Jesus Christ his Son is totally different. It does something no normal bread can do—it makes life. Here’s how Jesus put that in John 6, verse 33: “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and gives life unto the world.” Friends, he is the only bread that gives life to the dead.

Another rich meditation is found in tracing the journey from seed to bread. You know, a seed that was sown dies in the ground first. And then it grows as a plant, and it forms an ear of grain, it ripens, and it gets harvested. And finally, the grain is ground together, baked, and only then is it bread. Now this whole process from seed to bread is a picture of the journey of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became the bread for sinners. In John 12:24, Jesus says: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” Think about how Christ was sifted, how he was ground in the mills of justice, and experienced the wrath of God upon sin. And this he did, to become the bread of life, to feed the poor, but also to give life. So let us take care to chew in meditation upon the work of Jesus Christ, for such a meditation that will strengthen us to run the race of our life.

Now fourthly, the Shewbread was to be eaten by the priests, within the sanctuary, according to Leviticus 24:9, where it says, “And it shall be Aaron’s and his sons’; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the LORD made by fire by a perpetual statute.” Now likewise, we believers are to feed our soul with the Lord Jesus Christ. For the believers are, according to 1 Peter 2, and verse 9, a royal priesthood. So as each Sabbath was set aside for the priests to feast on the Shewbread, so, brethren, are we called to feed our soul with the living bread. And only when we nourish our souls with the divine truths of our Lord and Savior, will you and I experience the spiritual strengthening. We cannot function physically without actually partaking of food and drink. And just as our bodies are not strengthened by looking or admiring food and drink, well, so it is spiritually. We need to make it our own. How? Through the act of eating and drinking. And so it is spiritually. Hearing about, and thinking about, and speaking about Jesus Christ, that is not the same as spiritually feeding on the Savior and on his saving work. And only when we, by faith, embrace his Person, and his message, and his promises, will we be able to be like Paul, in Philippians 4, verse 13, when he said: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Be therefore committed, friends, weekly in a church gathering, where you are fed with the truths of Jesus Christ, the living bread. Flee those places where you are fed the empty husks of feel-good teaching or man-centered emphases, to build up yourself. No, seek faithful, Biblical teaching. No, that will not make you feel good about yourself, but instead, it will diagnose us, it will show us our sinfulness, our inability even to heal ourselves, but it will hold up before us the rich Savior of a poor and needy sinner, and how they are brought together through the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit. Well, seek such a ministry, and then you will be a blessing indeed for others. So, may God bless us, and draw us ever nearer to himself.