



With His own hand, God wrote the Commandments on two stone tablets and gave them to Moses (Exodus 31:18). God told the Israelites to build a tabernacle as a place for Him to dwell with His people. The tabernacle is a picture of Jesus, the Messiah who was yet to come.

Day #1: Free Will Offering

God had provided for His people. He provided freedom and safety from the Egyptians. He provided water, meat, and bread in the desert. Now, God told Moses to ask the Israelites for an offering. It was the first time the Israelites had the opportunity to choose to give something to God.

+ *The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to bring Me an offering. You must receive the offering for Me from all whose hearts move them to give. Here are the offerings you must receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and bright red yarn, and fine linen; goat hair ram skins that are dyed red; the hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the lights; spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet-smelling incense; onyx stones and other jewels for the linen apron and chest cloth. Have them make a sacred tent for Me. I will live among them." - Exodus 25:1-8*

God told Moses to have the people to use these items to build a Tabernacle. The word Tabernacle means "tent, place of dwelling, or sanctuary." The tabernacle would be a sign that God was with His people. When God asked the people to give **if they wanted to**, not because they had to, what do you think happened? The Bible says, "The people continued to bring free will offerings morning after morning." The men and women brought more than enough for the Tabernacle. In fact, they brought so much that Moses had to order them to stop (Exodus 36:6)!

Just a few months before this time, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. They had been slaves for 400 years. Slaves do not own gold and silver. Where did their offerings come from? Remember the night of the last plague and the Passover, when the Israelites left Egypt in the middle of the night:

[The Israelites] did just as Moses had directed them. They asked the Egyptians for articles that were made out of silver and gold. They also asked them for clothes. The Lord had caused the Egyptians to treat the people of Israel in a kind way. So they gave them what they asked for. The people of Israel took many expensive things that belonged to the Egyptians. - Exodus 12:35-36

It was by God's hand that the Egyptians gave valuable items to the Israelites. Everything the Israelites owned came from God! They were merely giving back a portion to God.

***** Likewise, everything we own is a gift from God. You may think your parents work for what you have. But God gives the ability to work. He gives a healthy body, intelligence, and creativity. Even having a job is a gift from God (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19). List the abilities God has given to the members of your family in order for you to have what you need.

Day #2: The Plan

God asked for specific items to be given for the building of the tabernacle. It was up to the people whether or not they gave, but *what* they gave was up to God. God gave Moses very detailed plans for the building of the tabernacle.

+ *Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. - Exodus 25:9 (NIV)*

God was so specific about the details of the tabernacle because **it was a symbol of heavenly things** (Hebrews 8:5; 9:11). In other words, God wanted His people to learn more about Him, their need, and His provision. God would use the tabernacle to do that. Each item had a certain meaning.

Exodus 36:2 tells us, "[Moses] sent for every skilled worker to whom the Lord had given ability and who wanted to come and do the work." They built the Tabernacle according to God's plan, right down to the inch. This sacred tent was designed to be put up and taken down over and over again. When the Israelites traveled toward the Promised Land, they would take the tabernacle with them.

God's plan had many parts to it. There was a large **courtyard** around the tabernacle. Just inside the courtyard gate was a **bronze altar** on which burnt animal sacrifices were made. Near the altar was a **basin** for washing. Further inside the courtyard, there was the **tabernacle**. It was a framework covered with animal skins. Not everyone could enter the tabernacle. The tabernacle was divided into two parts. The front part was called the **Holy Place**. It was a special place where priests burned incense and did other ceremonies. Inside of it, there were some special pieces of furniture. There was a **lamp stand**, a **table of bread**, and an **altar of incense**. At the far end of the Holy Place was a thick curtain. On the other side of the curtain was the **Holy of Holies**. Only the High priest could enter the Holy of Holies. Inside of it was the **ark of the covenant**. Each of the items in the tabernacle had a special significance. We will look at these in detail in the days to come.

***** Seeing the workers come to build the tabernacle reminds us there is much more we can offer to God than money and possessions. We can do work for His kingdom. Notice in Exodus 36:2, Who is it that gave the workers their ability? Discuss an offering of service you can give to God.

Day #3: The Courtyard

There was an outer **courtyard**. It was rectangular in shape. The north and south sides were 150 feet long and the east and west sides were 75 feet long. The courtyard walls were made of fine linen fabric stretched out on posts that had bronze bases and silver bands and hooks. The only entrance into the tabernacle was on the wall that faced east. The curtain for the entrance was embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. All of the Israelites were allowed to go into the courtyard.

Just inside the courtyard entrance was the **bronze altar**. It was 7 1/2 feet long, 7 1/2 feet wide, and 4 1/2 feet high. It was made of acacia wood and covered in bronze. There was a horn on each of the four corners. There were bronze rings in which the Israelites could slide poles so they could carry the altar when they traveled. On this altar, the priests would offer an animal to God for the forgiveness of sins. To gain forgiveness for his sins, and those of his family, each man was required to bring an animal to the altar. The animal had to be a male without any sickness or flaws (Leviticus 1:3).

The man must place his hand on the head of the burnt offering. Then the Lord will accept it in place of him. It will pay for his sin. - Leviticus 1:4

Day #3 continued:

The man had to kill the animal. Then the priest would sprinkle its blood around the altar before burning the animal. It seems strange to us that God would require this. But the Bible tells us that our sin leads to **death** (Romans 6:23). The **life** of the animal is in its blood, and that life covered the death of man's sins.

The life of each creature is in its blood. So I have given you the blood of animals to pay for your sin on the altar. Blood is life. That is why blood pays for your sin. - Leviticus 17:11

This sacrifice had to be repeated year after year after year after year (Hebrews 10:1). Many years later, God, in His goodness and mercy, provided a Savior to be the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

We have been made holy because Jesus Christ offered his body once and for all time. - Hebrews 10:10

In essence, the altar of burnt sacrifices was a symbol of the cross. Jesus was bound to the cross the way a perfect animal was bound to the altar. Both led to men being made right with God, but Jesus' sacrifice was the final, permanent sacrifice, fully acceptable to God (Hebrews 10:12).

At the foot of the Bronze Altar was a **basin**. It was a large bowl filled with water. The priests were instructed to wash their hands and feet when they entered the tabernacle, and when they offered a burnt offering (Exodus 30:19-21). Washing the hands and feet was a symbol that man had to be pure before he could approach a holy God (Hebrews 10:22). Washing with water only makes one *physically* clean. It is a symbol that we are not clean until God forgives our sin (John 13:8).

Have you placed your faith in Jesus? Do you trust that He is God's Son and that His sacrifice takes away your sin? The Bible tells us if we know we are a sinner and believe that Jesus is God and came to die in our place, we will be saved (John 1:12).

Day #4: The Holy Place

Inside the courtyard was the **tabernacle**. This was a framework of acacia wood covered in gold. It was 15 feet wide and 30 feet long. The framework was draped in special curtains. On the outside, the framework was covered with the hides of sea cows. But inside, the curtains were beautiful works of skilled embroiderers. The curtains were made of fine linen in blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, with cherubim, or winged angels, embroidered into them. (See Psalm 61:4.)

The tabernacle was divided by a thick curtain placed about two-thirds of the way toward the back. The front portion was called the **Holy Place**. God chose Aaron and his sons to be His priests (Exodus 40:12-15). Only the priests could enter the tabernacle. They entered the Holy Place daily to follow God's instructions. In the Holy Place, there were three pieces of furniture.

First, there was a **lamp stand**. It was made of pure gold. It stood tall with one lamp in the center, and three branches coming out of two sides, for a total of seven lamps fueled by olive oil. There were no windows in the Holy Place. There was no other source of light with which to see the beautiful inside of the tabernacle. Likewise, the Bible calls Jesus, "The true light that gives light to every man," (John 1:9). Jesus came to earth to be the Light in a world that was in utter darkness because of sin (John 1:5). No one can see God's kingdom unless he trusts in Jesus (John 3:3).

When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." - John 8:12

Next, there was a **table of bread**. It was made of acacia wood covered with gold. Like the bronze altar, it had a gold ring on each of the corners, so the Israelites could slide poles into them to carry the table. The priests were to keep 12 loaves of unleavened bread on the table at all times. They would replace the bread with fresh bread every Sabbath day. The priests were to eat the bread as part of their duty to the Lord (Leviticus 24:8-9). This was a holy communion between God and man, and was a picture of the communion to come.

Day #4 continued:

Then Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. No one who comes to Me will ever go hungry. And no one who believes in Me will ever be thirsty." - John 6:35

Lastly, there was the **altar of incense**. It was a small square altar made of acacia wood covered in gold. It, too, had gold rings and poles for carrying it, and gold horns on each corner. This altar was placed right in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. God told Moses that Aaron must burn fragrant incense on this altar continually. Nothing else was to be offered on this altar. But once a year, Aaron was to pour blood onto the horns as a sin offering for the people. This was most holy to God (Exodus 30:7-10). The Bible often refers to incense as a symbol of our prayers (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8). Just as God wanted the incense to burn day and night (Exodus 30:7-8), He wants us to pray at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Have you ever thought of your prayers as an offering to God? Try to imagine your prayers lifting up to God just as a sweet smell floats up from a lit candle.

Day #5: The Holy of Holies

We have learned that there was a thick curtain, or veil, that separated the back one-third of the Tabernacle from the front. This part was called the **Holy of Holies**, or **Most Holy Place**. Inside this sacred place was the **ark of the covenant**. Try to remember the arks we have seen so far in the Bible. We saw the ark of Noah. It was used to save Noah and his family from the destruction of the earth (Genesis 7:7). Then there was the ark of baby Moses. It was used to save the life of Moses from the cruel order of Pharaoh who sought to kill all the Hebrew boys (Exodus 2:3). Both arks were used to preserve something valuable in order for God's plan to be fulfilled. God told Moses to have the workmen build an ark - a chest out of acacia wood, covered in gold. It had a special gold cover that had two cherubim on top with their wings spread upward. God told Moses to place three very important items inside the ark. It held the tablets of the Ten Commandments (a symbol of God's perfection and requirements), a jar of the manna God provided in the desert (symbolizing God's provision), and Aaron's staff (as a sign not to rebel against the Lord, Numbers 17:10).

Finally, the work was completed. Then God's glory filled the tabernacle.

Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. - Exodus 40:33-34 (NIV)

Each time the cloud of God's glory lifted, the Israelites would pack up the tabernacle and move on.

The Holy of Holies was a most sacred place. Here, in this special place, God came to be near His people. Because God is perfect, sinful man cannot see Him. The thick curtain shielded sinful man from a holy God. Only the high priest could enter this place, and only one time each year. Before he could enter, he had to wash himself, put on special clothing, carry blood for the atonement of sins, and burn incense so smoke would shield his eyes from a direct view of God (Hebrews 9:7, Leviticus 16:13).

We see that the thick curtain was a *physical* barrier between God and man. (Remember, the Bible says the tabernacle is a picture of heavenly things.) What is the true barrier between God and man? Isaiah 59:2 says, "Your sins have separated you from your God." When Jesus, who was perfect, without sin, chose to die on the cross, He took away our sins (1 John 3:5). At that very moment, the curtain that separated God from man was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:37-38). Because of what Christ did, we have direct access to God. We can approach God boldly in prayer.

Brothers and sisters, we are not afraid to enter the Most Holy Room. We enter boldly because of the blood of Jesus. - Hebrews 10:19

The Bible calls Jesus the High Priest that did not have to bring the blood of an animal, because He gave His own perfect blood (Hebrews 9:11-12).

We do not have to wait for a certain day of the year, or go through a priest to pray to God. Everyone who puts their trust in Jesus has been made a priest to serve God (Revelation 1:6). God's presence is ALWAYS with His people. Offer a prayer to God now thanking Him for the freedom we have in Christ.