



Finding Christ in the Tabernacle

THE LORD'S SANCTUARY

*“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.”
(Exodus 25:8, also see Leviticus 26:11-12)*

The Divine Pattern of the Tabernacle

In the Lord's Prayer, the Savior notes that we should pray that things may be one “on earth as it is in heaven”, Matthew 6:9-13. The Hebrews epistle teaches that the Tabernacle “is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven”, Hebrews 8:5 (NIV translation). Further, Moses is admonished by God to “make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you”, Exodus 25:9, Acts 7:44, because it symbolized heavenly truths and realities as noted in John's Revelation of the heavenly temple, Revelation 11:19, Psalm 78:69. The Tabernacle (and later the temple) was the “Gate of Heaven”, Genesis 28:17.

Yahweh (Jehovah) was very specific regarding the directions used in

building the Tabernacle, Exodus 25:9, from the size and materials to their actual construction. His instruction begins by requesting an offering from “every man that giveth it willingly with his heart”, Exodus 25:2, regarding precious metals (gold, silver and bronze), gems (for the High Priest's breastplate), color-dyed fabrics (purple, blue, scarlet and white linen) and skins, acacia wood, oil and spices, Exodus 25:3-7, a reminder of what will be offered to the Christ child in the future by the Wise Men, Matthew 2:11, as well as what the Father will offer from his heart, His only begotten son, John 3:16, and due to that love for all of us, Christ will offer himself, Ephesians 5:2, John 15:13.

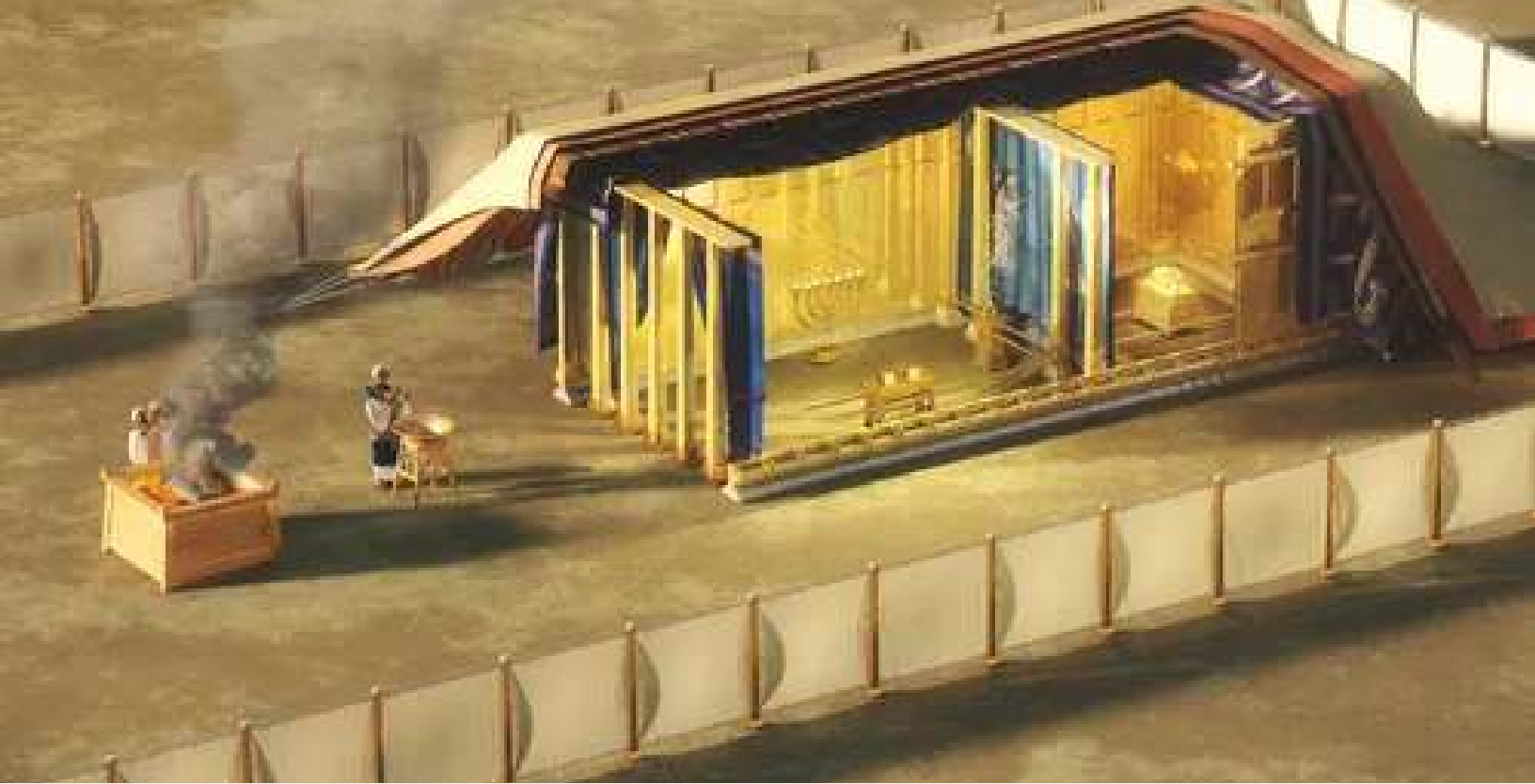
The Tabernacle perimeter courtyard was 50 cubits (75 ft) by 100 cubits (150 ft), Exodus 27:9-19.

It had sixty wooden pillars—emblematic of each person becoming a pillar in the temple, Revelation 3:12 – in between the fine-twined linen screens, Exodus 27:9-17, topped with silver capitals, hooks and rods that connected each pillar to the next one and hung each screen, Exodus 27:17. The height of the perimeter screens was five cubits (7.5 ft), Exodus 27:18. Ropes were tied to the silver hooks on the pillars and then anchored to the ground with bronze stakes, Exodus 27:19, to stabilize the perimeter wall. Bronze was associated with the bottom level of the courtyard pillars and silver with the top level. The bronze stakes symbolized stability and anchoring, Isaiah 33:20, 54:2, and referenced the promise of the Messiah, Ezra 9:8-9, and the fastening of Him in the sure place, Isaiah 22:23.

According to Jewish tradition, the gate to enter the Tabernacle courtyard was offset by 10 cubits (15 ft) from the surrounding perimeter screen-wall. It was 5x20 cubits (7.5x30 ft) high and wide, Exodus 38:18, with four pillars supporting it with three curtain/screen sections, Exodus 27:14-16, perhaps symbolizing the three qualifications of entry – walking uprightly, working righteousness and speaking the truth, Psalm 15:1-3. The gate was embroidered linen that featured the same colors (blue, purple, scarlet and white),

Exodus 38:18, as the door to the Holy Place with lion cherubim symbolically guarding the entrance. The gate may be a shadow to the verse, “The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name”, 2 Nephi 9:41.

The courtyard area was divided geometrically into two perfect squares with the Altar of Sacrifice centered in the eastern square (near the entry gate) and the Ark of the Covenant centered in the western square which contained the Tabernacle. The symbolism could be multi-layered, highlighted with the sacrifice (of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, Psalms 51:17, 2 Nephi 2:6-7, D&C 59:8) preceding the merciful judgment and acceptance, 2 Nephi 2:10, by the Lord on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant as one enters His presence.



The Instruments and Vessels leading Up to the Tabernacle Holy Place

The Altar of Sacrifice or Altar of Burnt Offering (occasionally referenced as the Bronze or Brazen Altar) was made of acacia wood and completely overlaid in bronze, Exodus 27:1-8, 38:1-7. It was 7x7x3 cubits (7 ft and 3 inches squared and 4 ft and 4 inches high). Midway inside the altar from the top down was a bronze grate to lay the sacrifices on, Exodus 27:4, with bronze pans to gather the ashes and firepans for the coals and wood, Exodus 27:3. Two sides of the altar had bronze rings applied at each end so bronze poles, Exodus 27:6-7, could be inserted to transport the altar.

Each corner of the altar had a bronze horn raised up, Exodus 27:2, symbolizing the strength, power and refuge of God. They were sanctified by the High Priest putting the blood of the sacrifice on each of them with his finger, Leviticus 4:34, 8:15.

Sacrifices on the Altar of Sacrifice (primarily in Leviticus 1-7) included five main types of offerings—burnt, meal, peace, sin, and guilt—designed for atonement, worship, gratitude and fellowship, Numbers 18:9. These included both blood-related animal sacrifices (bulls, sheep, goats, pigeons) and non-blood offerings (grain, flour, wine).

- **Burnt Offering** – was a voluntary, male animal without blemish (or bird) completely consumed by fire, Leviticus 1:1-17.
- **Meal/Grain Offering** – included flour, oil, cakes, harvest firstfruits, grain, wine and frankincense with a portion burned on the altar and the remaining given to the priests as a meal, Leviticus 2:1-16.
- **Peace/Fellowship Offering** – a voluntary animal sacrifice focusing on fellowship, thanksgiving, or a vow, where part is eaten by the priests and the worshippers, Leviticus 7:11-34, 3:1-17.
- **Sin Offering** – a mandatory offering for unintentional sins (omission) to cleanse the individual or community, with the blood applied to the altar's horns, Leviticus 4:1-8, 6:24-30 .

- **Guilt/Trespass Offering** – a mandatory offering (often a ram) for sins requiring restitution or reparation for violating rights, often involving payment of damages, Leviticus 6:1-7, 7:1-5.

The fire burning upon the Altar of Sacrifice was initially kindled by God Himself, Leviticus 9:24, 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, and due to its holy nature, the heavenly fire was kept burning perpetually, Leviticus 6:12-13. It symbolized the Savior's eternal sacrifice, Hebrews 10:12, 7:25, that impacts all mankind forever. It may also foreshadow the bestowal of the Holy Ghost as the fire that dwells within the faithful, Acts 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, which should never be quenched.



In addition to various instruments used in preparing, cleaning and maintaining the fire on the Altar of Sacrifice, special censers (large bowl-type containers/pans that could be covered and carried with either handles or short chains by the priests) were made of bronze and gold when transferring hot coals to and from the altar, Numbers 16:36-37. The gold censer was used only on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest brought hot coals from the Altar of Sacrifice to burn on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place, Hebrews 9:4, 1 Kings 7:50.

The bronze laver was a water basin and base created from the bronze mirrors offered by the women who ministered at the gate of the Tabernacle, Exodus 38:8. It held consecrated water used to wash priests' feet and hands in purifying them before conducting a sacrifice at the Altar of Sacrifice or entering the Tabernacle Holy Place, Exodus 30:19-21. Due to its reflective qualities in both water and the bronze metal, it would give priests an opportunity to see and assess their worthiness to minister in the Tabernacle ordinances, Psalms 26:6, 73:13, because only those with "clean

hands and a pure heart" could enter, Psalms 24:3-4. Dimensions of the Laver are not found in the scriptures. It was placed between the Altar of Sacrifice and the door of the Tabernacle Holy Place, Exodus 30:18, 40:7, 40:30.

Bronze (an interchangeable term with brass), silver and gold were plated on various instruments, structure and vessels of the Tabernacle symbolizing a progression from judgment, strength and cleansing (bronze in the courtyard and anchoring of the perimeter) to atonement and redemption (silver forming the pillar sockets, hooks and rails) to divine holiness (gold on all vessels inside the Holy and Holy of Holies areas).



Preparing For God's Presence By First Entering The Holy Place

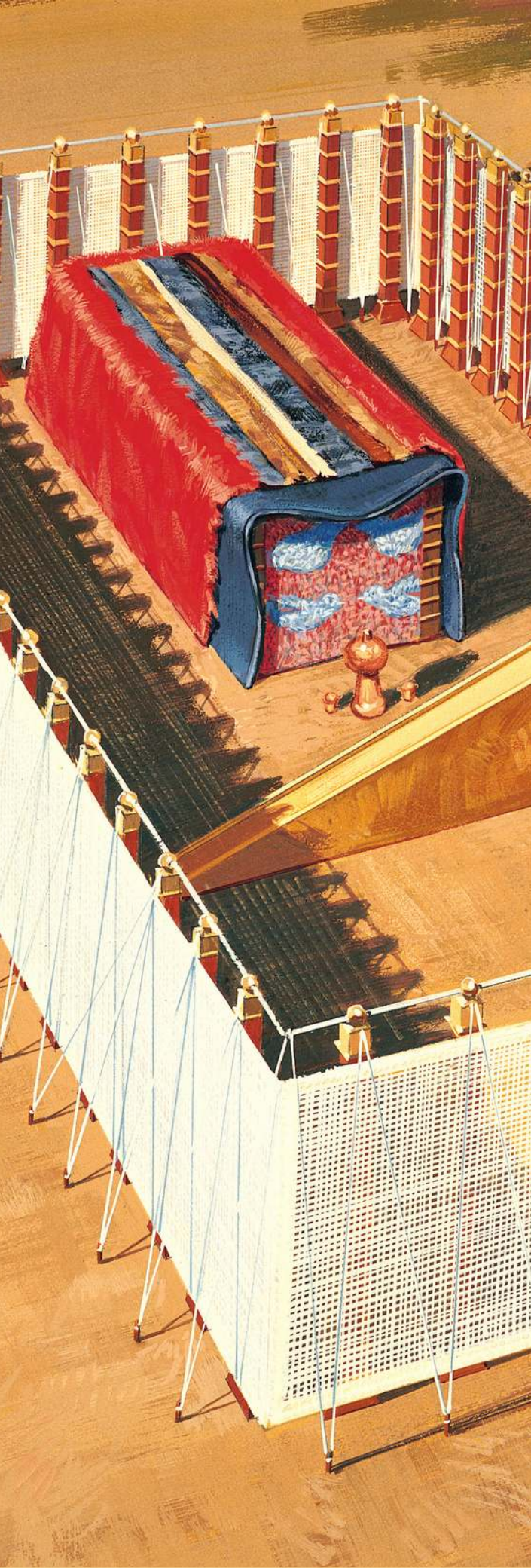
The Tabernacle Holy Place and Holy of Holies, Exodus 26:33, respectively, were 20x10x10 cubits (30x15x15 ft) and 10x10x10 cubits (15x15x15 ft). Their dimensions were calculated according to the acacia board (support structure) that was required, Exodus 26:15-25, which numbered 48 frames, all overlaid with gold. The structure interlocked each pillar board while also interlocking a separate silver-plated base to the golden pillars to further anchor them while exterior rings of gold were on each pillar so that gold-plated poles/bars could be inserted on three exterior sides to make the pillar boards one cohesive wall, Exodus 36:20-34.

The gradation of the bronze to silver on the courtyard perimeter signaled a progression of sacredness while continuing with the silver base of the tabernacle transitioning to the gold walls of the Holy and Holy of Holies

space, emblematic of the tabernacle being the high or pinnacle point where God dwelled.

Because the Lord had taken the life of every firstborn Egyptian in order to free His people, Exodus 11:4-7, 12:21-29, He consecrated the first-born of every Israelite family as His and to serve in the Tabernacle. To be freed from this responsibility, a ransom of one silver half-shekel was offered in atonement, Exodus 30:11-16. Because of that, the tribe of Levi was taken by the Lord as His own, Numbers 3:12-13, 8:13-19, and put into His service. The ransom silver was then used to cast the foundation sockets of the sanctuary, Exodus 38:25-27, 34:20, as well as the hooks and poles of the courtyard perimeter wall. With not only the first-born symbolizing the Savior, he is also likened unto a "foundation", 1 Corinthians 3:11, and called a "ransom for many", Matthew 20:28, and "bought for a price" (perhaps also inferring the silver he was betrayed with, Matthew 26:14-16, as well as the sacrifice and atonement he made) for all those who would believe in him, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.



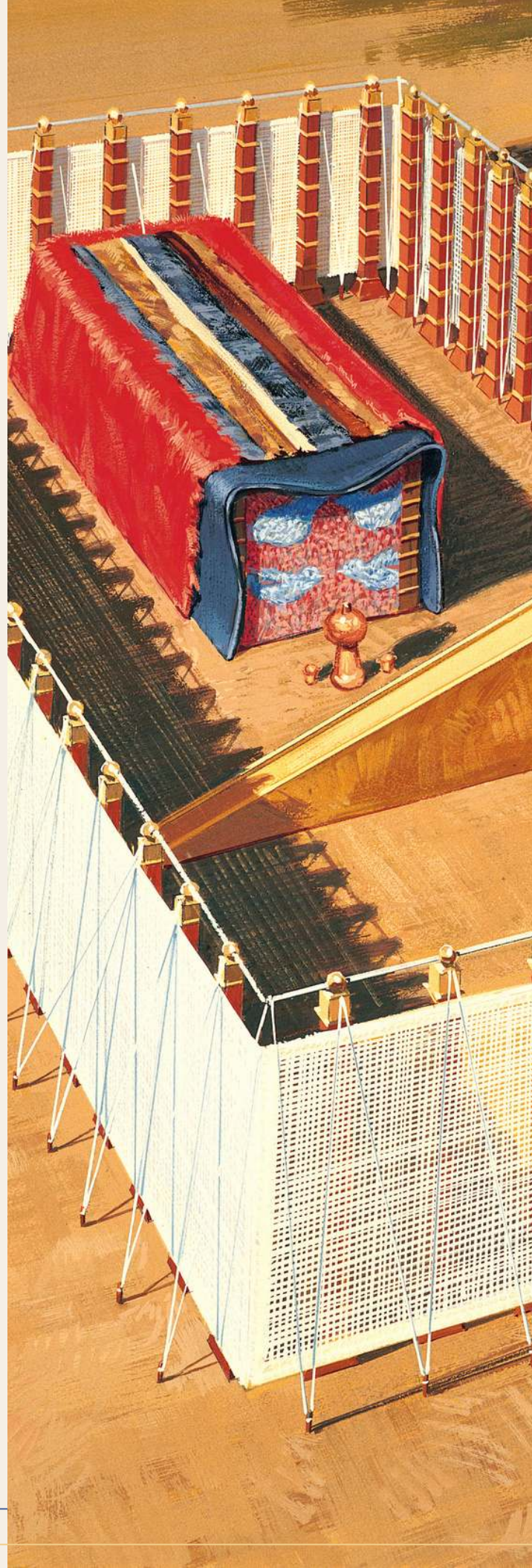


The coverings over the Tabernacle were comprised of four types, Exodus 26:1-19, each with its own symbolism and practical application:

- **Outer Covering** – badger or seal skins (sometimes referred to as porpoise skins), Exodus 26:19, were sewn together to provide durable protection from the elements on the roof of the Tabernacle. The fleshy type of covering reminds us of the Lord taking upon himself a tabernacle of flesh and blood, John 1:14. Due to the covering being relatively plain compared to the rest of the Tabernacle, it is emblematic of the Savior's description in Isaiah 53:1-3, of "no form or comeliness...no beauty that we should desire him".
- **Third Covering** – rams' skins dyed red, Exodus 36:19, covered the entire structure of the Tabernacle, except the entrance. It signaled a special, sacred structure. The ram symbolized substitution and sacrifice as amplified with the story of Abraham and Isaac, Genesis 22:1-14. The red covering reminds one of the Savior's blood sacrifice – atonement – that covers and cleanses all of the sins of those who wish to enter the presence of God, D&C 19:18, John 1:7, Hebrews 9:22, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Revelation 7:14.
- **Second Covering** – black or dark goat hair, Exodus 36:7-13, covered the inner, embroidered linen covering. While the dyed red ram's skin covering and the dark goat hair may have symbolized the two goats on the Day of Atonement – one was sacrificed with his blood to make atonement for Israel and the other

(scapegoat) had the sins of Israel placed on it and then sent into the wilderness, Leviticus 16:15-22. The dark covering also kept the outside light out and allowed only the inside light of the Menorah to fill the sacred space.

- **Inner Covering** – was made of fine linen embroidered with cherubims using the sacred colors of blue, purple, scarlet and white, Exodus 26:1-6, symbolizing heaven, royalty, blood sacrifice/atonement and righteousness or purity. With the cherubims on the walls, ceiling and entrance, the priests understood they had entered sacred space modeling heaven. Even the golden clasps connecting all the inner covering appeared as stars in the sky when the light of the Menorah shone upon them inside the Tabernacle.
- **Door** – unlike the Tabernacle courtyard gate, the entryway to the Holy Place was designed and designated as a “door”, Exodus 26:36-37, 36:37-38. The curtain door hung from a gold pole secured at the top of the entrance, Exodus 26:36-37. It reflected the embroidered cherubim who symbolically guarded entrance into the Holy Place (as well as the Holy of Holies). The significance of the “door” to the Tabernacle Holy Place is amplified when Christ declared, “I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved”, John 10:9.



The Menorah or Candlestick/Lampstand was made of pure gold, Exodus 25:31, 37:17. Though scripture does not detail its measurements, it has been estimated from ancient iconographical evidence and Jewish traditions that the lampstand was approximately up to 42 inches wide and 60 inches high. It consisted of a hollow central shaft with three hollow branches extending out of each side Exodus 25:32, 37:18. The stem and branches were decorated with almond-shaped buds which the branches extended out of, crown-shaped disks, and blossoming flowers, Exodus 37:17-24, 25:31-40. Many have felt it represented the Tree of Life given the flowers and buds design, and particularly when later renditions of it included a three-pronged or tripedal base suggesting a pattern of roots.

The Menorah had seven lamps that sat atop the branches and stem, Exodus 25:37, 37:23. They were filled with pure olive oil and kept lit perpetually, Leviticus 24:2, modeling the burning bush which Moses experienced on the top of Mount Horeb (referred to as Sinai), Exodus 3:2-5. It was along the south wall, Exodus 26:35, 40:24, and set across from the Shewbread Table, bringing to mind, “Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely”, Alma 5:34. It also is emblematic of the Savior teaching he was the life and “light of the world”, John 1:4:4-5, 8:12, 9:5.

The tree of life and its fruit visioned by Nephi and Lehi was identified as the “love of God, [that] sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men”, 1 Nephi 11:21-23.



The Table of Shewbread, stationed along the north wall of the Tabernacle Holy Place, Exodus 26:35, 40:22, was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold, Exodus 25:24, 30. It was two cubits long (3 ft), a cubit wide (18 inches), and a cubit and one half (26 inches) high, Exodus 25:23. It had an ornate crown molding around its top with four rings attached to the four corners above the legs on each length side, which had gold poles put through them for carrying purposes, Exodus 25:25-29. The Lord directed that two gold shelving structures be made that held six (unleavened) loaves of shewbread each – totaling twelve – be placed on the table, Leviticus, 24:6. The Shewbread was referred to as the “bread of the presence” (the bread that sits in the presence of Jehovah). It was the only offering in the Tabernacle that pertained to “an everlasting covenant”, Leviticus 24:8. As the priests would

gather in the Holy Place on Shabbat (Sabbath), they would eat the covenantal shewbread that was set on the golden table, Leviticus 24:8-9, and presumably (though Leviticus 10:9 forbids the priests from drinking wine, it may not pertain to the Sabbath covenantal ordinance) drink the consecrated wine offering from the gold utensils sitting on the table, Exodus 25:29-30 (refer to the NIV translation). This may be further illuminated by the Seventy elders eating and drinking a covenantal meal before the Lord, Exodus 24:9-11 (see New Living Translation). It is also reflective of Abraham covenantally , eating bread and drinking wine offered by Melchizedek, Genesis 14:18. These ordinances foreshadowed the Savior when he said, he was the “bread of life” in reference to the Manna from heaven John 6:31-35, and the “true vine” from which comes the sacramental wine, John 15:1-6.



The Altar of Incense or Golden Altar was made out of acacia wood and gold plated, Exodus 30:3. It was one cubit square (18 inches square) and two cubits high (3 ft), Exodus 30:2. Similar to the Altar of Sacrifice, it featured protruding horns from each corner on the surface of the altar, Exodus 30:3, to symbolize the strength and power of God. While an ornate gold crown was placed around the top of the altar, two sets of gold rings were placed on two sides of the altar to allow gold poles/staves to be inserted for its transportation, Exodus 30:4-5. The incense burned on the altar was a special mixture of stacte (resin from the Storax tree), onycha (derived from mollusk shells), galbanum (Syrian Fennel root) and pure frankincense (from the Salai tree), 30:34-36. It was burned on the altar in front of the veil to the Holy of Holies, Exodus 30:6.

The incense was lit every morning and evening, Exodus 30:7-8, 37:29, for a constant fragrance and light smoke, symbolizing the prayers of all the

righteous ascending to heaven and being present in the Tabernacle at the veil, Psalm 141:1-2, Revelation 8:3-4. The High Priest would also raise his hands while praying before the veil, Psalm 134:1-2, 143:5-6, pleading for the Lord to hear the words of his mouth, Deuteronomy 32:1, Psalm 28:2.

For anointing and consecration, a special mixture was put into the anointing oil for the priests and the holy vessels in the Tabernacle, Exodus 30:26-33. It included myrrh, cinnamon, calamus and cassia, Exodus 30:22-33. It was often referred to as perfume, Exodus 30:37-38, signaling all to smell the sweet fragrance of the priesthood on the priests as Jehovah's authorized representatives.



Entering The Lord's Presence

The Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) was a perfect cube (10x10x10 cubits = 15x15x15 ft), representing a perfectly balanced, flawless and complete space, reflecting the nature of God. It signified absolute divine perfection, holiness, and space where God could dwell. The cubed expression is also noted in the description of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21:10-16. Similar to the Holy Place section of the Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies acacia wood was overlaid with gold, Exodus 26:29.

The entrance into the Holy of Holies was framed with four pillars of gold-plated acacia wood, Exodus 26:32. The framework



was covered by the Veil that hung from a horizontal pole mounted on hooks across the top of the entrance pillars separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, Exodus 26:32-33. It was made with the four colors of blue, purple, scarlet and fine-twined linen detailing cherubim symbolically guarding the entrance, Exodus 26:32. It was considered the most exquisite of the three gates/doors that the priests ultimately went through to enter God's presence in the Holy of Holies.

The Veil is symbolic of Christ being the "only way" to the Father's presence, John 14:6. Its colors represent the Savior's divine origins (blue) and royalty (purple), his blood atonement (scarlet), and his purity (white linen). The Hebrews epistle explains the veil represents his flesh, Hebrews 10:19-20, where we are able to enter the "holiest" through his flesh and blood.

Symbolically, as Christ protects the holy from the profane in the imagery of the Veil, Paul urged the saints to "clothe" themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 13:14, and "put on the full armor of God", Ephesians 6:11 – with that being the Savior in taking upon ourselves his name, D&C 20:37, Mosiah 5:8-12, 3 Nephi 27:5-6, 25. This is symbolized first through baptism, Galatians 3:27; secondly by partaking of the weekly sacrament, D&C 20:77, 79; and finally in the temple endowment as well as being clothed with priestly garments – patterned after the coats of skins given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Moses 4:27, and referenced by Isaiah as the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness", Isaiah 61:10,

2 Nephi 9:14, Revelation 19:8, 2 Nephi 4:33. To enter the Father's presence, there is no other way but through the Savior, Mosiah 3:17.

The Ark of the Covenant was the only vessel placed in the cubical Holy of Holies. It was centered in the middle of the space. This sacred chest was two cubits and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and a cubit and a half high (44 inches long, 26 inches wide and 26 inches high), Exodus 25:10. It was made of acacia wood and covered with pure gold on the outside and inside with similar decorative molding found on the Shewbread Table and Altar of Incense, Exodus 25:11. Gold rings were put on its corners with gold-plated poles inserted and left on, Exodus 25:12-15.

The golden cover of the Ark had two cherubim figures hammered out of gold sheets that were attached from each end of the cover or Mercy Seat, Exodus 25:17-19. While facing

each other, the cherubim wings stretched in front of them, nearly to each other, in covering the Mercy Seat, Exodus 25:20. Placed inside the Ark were the stone tablets of the "testimony" that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, Exodus 24:12, 25:16, 31:18, Aaron's Rod, and a Golden Pot of Manna, Hebrews 9:4.

A golden censer with hot coals burning incense was brought into the Holy of Holies by the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16:12-13, to allow the sweet fragrance of incense and smoke to fill the room, symbolizing the prayers of the righteous had entered the presence of God as well as cloaking His presence to protect the High Priest.

As symbolic guardians of the most sacred – the Holy of Holies, Mercy Seat or Throne of God, The Ark of the Covenant and the contents contained inside it – the cherubim wings served as the seating throne of God with the container lid below it becoming the throne's footstool. The wings symbolized power, action and protection, D&C 77:4, 2 Samuel 22:11, while covering the Ark's lid, which is often translated as the "Place of Atonement" where the sacrificial blood of atonement was sprinkled, Leviticus 16:14. It was a foreshadowing of the Messiah's ultimate sacrifice and atonement, John 1:29.



The sacred vessels or artifacts that were inside the Ark were reminders of God's love and mercy:

- **The Stone Tablets of the Testimony** (Ten Commandments) represented the covenants, commandments and promises the Lord made with Israel. Some verses in the Hebrew Bible are contradictory as to whether it was the first set of tablets written by the finger of God, Exodus 31:18, and broken by Moses due to the golden calf incident, Exodus 32:19, or the second set, written by Moses as God dictated to him, Exodus 34:27-28 or both (second set and broken fragments of the first set), according to Jewish tradition (Talmud, Bava Batra 14b), that were stored in the Ark. It is also unclear as to whether God wrote the second set of commandments, Exodus 34:1, Deuteronomy 10:1-4, or dictated them to Moses for him to write, Exodus 34:27-28,. However, it is clear that at least one set of tablets were stored in the Ark, symbolizing the sacred nature of the covenant/testimony that God established with Israel. The Savior is the mediator and fulfillment of the divine covenant, Hebrews 12:24, 3 Nephi 15:4-5.
- **Aaron's Rod** was the same one used to demonstrate God's power over the Egyptians, Exodus 7:10-12, as well as to distinguish the tribe of Levi's right to the priesthood when the Lord caused it to blossom, Numbers 17:8. Aaron's Rod was a type of Christ

in being the true rod, Isaiah 11:1, with divine priesthood authority, Hebrew 5:4-5, 6:20, 7:3, and the power of the resurrection and eternal life, John 11:25-26.

- **The Golden Bowl of Manna** contained approximately an omer (2-2.5 quarts) of manna, Exodus 16:33-34, representative of the miraculous daily provision of food for the Israelites, estimated to be over two million people, during their 40-years journey in the wilderness. The Israelites did not know what it was when the manna was given to them, Exodus 16:15, and gave it its name which means, "what is it?" It was considered the bread of life made of coriander seed, Exodus 16:31, Numbers 11:7-8, given that it saved and nourished the children of Israel in the wilderness, Exodus 16:14-26. It was also referred to as the bread of angels, Psalms 78:24-25. It was a symbol of God's covenant to protect and provide for his covenant people. Christ declared that he was the "bread of life" and the "true bread from heaven", John 6:32-35, noting that he is the "living bread" and "if any man eat of this bread... [he] shall live forever", John 6:51. Manna was compared to the sacramental bread that each faithful believer must partake of to be part of the Savior, John 6:56-57.

Summary

Christ and his mission is found throughout the Tabernacle and its vessels being foreshadows of his incarnation, atonement, resurrection and judgment. Through the Tabernacle we are taught about a building progression to be with God from the perimeter walls through the atoning sacrifice and cleansing to the sacred meal and prayerful approach to the Veil, and finally entering the Most Holy Place. Just as the Altar of Sacrifice signaled a temporal offering, the Altar of Incense required a spiritual consecration of all things, reminding us of the progression of covenants as well as the type of priestly authority involved or required (Aaronic/Levitical and Melchizedek). As the ancient Israelites saw and experienced the power of the Tabernacle, we today can learn from it and enhance our understanding and reverence for the Savior and his eternal love for all of us.



“...Who will ascend into the mountain of Yahweh? And who will rise up in his holy place? He whose palms are innocent, and whose heart is pure, who has not sworn what is false. He will lift up a blessing from Yahweh. And righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the circle of them that inquire of him, that seek the face of the God of Jacob, Selah.” (Ps 24, Don Parry translation, BYU Studies, 32, no 4, p 58-9)