

Study 0045

Scripture Text: 2 Samuel 6:1-18

In our last study, we saw the relevance of the courtyard or the outer court, to the worship of God, in that, it was the place where the worshipper was prepared before he could approach God. We saw that it was in the outer court that the worshipper was made ceremonially clean through the blood of the sacrifice. We saw that following this preparation, the worshipper was able to stand at the door of the tabernacle, ready to meet with God. We also saw that from this point on, it was the priests who did the rest of the activities inside the tabernacle.

In this study, we shall look at the tabernacle and the items of furniture/vessels in the tabernacle, as well as their significance for worship in the Old Covenant Era. May the Holy Spirit help us in our study in Jesus' name, Amen.

The Old Covenant Era: The Sanctuary (Continued)

Besides the courtyard, the sanctuary which the children of Israel were to build also consisted of a tabernacle located within a courtyard. Within the tabernacle, there were items of furniture which played major roles in the worship of God.

The Tabernacle was essentially a tent (15 feet by 45 feet or about 4.5m by 13.5m) which was covered with curtains all around, and comprised of an inner court (the holy place) and an innermost court (the most holy place). It was also the place that was open only to the priests of the most High God. So, even though all men could worship God, only the priests could minister before God in the tabernacle; help the people to be prepared to meet with God; and, bring the petitions of the people before Him. A veil separated the holy place from the most holy place, signifying a further restriction to who could enter into the most holy place. Only the high priest could enter into the most holy place, and that was only once a year, to make atonement for himself and for the nation (the people). We shall look at the most holy place now and the holy place in the next study.

The most holy place occupied a third of the tabernacle (15 feet by 15 feet or about 4.5m by 4.5m), and was set in the western-most part of the tabernacle. Within it was the Ark of the Testimony (**Exodus 25:22**), also called the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD (**Numbers 10:33**), or the Ark of God (**1 Samuel 4:11**). The Ark of the Testimony was essentially a hollow box made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold, into which was put the two tablets of stone on which were written, The Ten Commandments by the hand of God (**Exodus 25:16, 21; 40:20**). Later additions were a sample of the manna which God gave to the children of Israel for forty years (**Exodus 16:33-34**), and Aaron's rod which budded, following a contention about who God's chosen representative was (**Numbers 17:2-10; Hebrews 9:4**). There was a lid also made of pure gold which was placed over the Ark of the Testimony. This lid was a specially crafted lid, with two Cherubims facing each other, but looking downwards, and their wings touching one another. This lid was called the mercy seat. It was on the mercy seat that the high priest poured the blood of the atoning sacrifice for his sins and for the sins of the people, when he entered behind the veil once a year.

The Ark of the Testimony together with its mercy seat represented the place of the presence of God and His throne room in the midst of His people, and signified the place where God's mercy and forgiveness for sin was obtained for the nation. The items in the Ark of the Testimony, represented God's law (the two tablets of stone), which the people could not keep; God's provision (the sample of the manna), which the people rejected; and, God's

authority and leadership (Aaron's rod that budded), which the people rebelled against. With these atrocities before God, the only way to ensure that God did not remember the sins of the people and destroy them, was for the high priest to enter into the most holy place and pour the blood of the sin sacrifice first for himself, and then, for the people. Thus, the sins of the people were covered for one year. This had to be repeated annually. It did not however, mean that the individual who had sinned would not make sacrifices for sin, this, the individual did, at the altar of burnt offering.

It was in the most holy place that God dwelt, and from where He directed the affairs of the nation, as well as give instructions to the high priest or the leader of His people (**Exodus 25:22**). A cloudy pillar rested upon the portion of the most holy place, and gave direction to the people—when the cloudy pillar lifted, the people journeyed in the wilderness, and when it stayed, the people remained (**Exodus 40:34-38**). The Ark of the Testimony preceded the children of Israel when they were going to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land, for their guidance, safety and security (**Joshua 3:3-4, 17**). It was also taken into battle as an assurance of divine victory (**1 Samuel 4:2-5**), and only the priests could carry the Ark and on their shoulders (**1 Chronicles 15:2-15**).

What made the most holy place most holy, was the Ark of the Testimony. But there came a time when the Ark of the Testimony was no longer in the tabernacle. And even though the Ark of the Testimony was not in the tabernacle, the people continued to go to the tabernacle to worship God. The problem was that God was not there! This means that the people were into religion and not relationship. David recognized the significance of the Ark of the Testimony so much so that he agonized about the correct procedure to bring it into Jerusalem (**2 Samuel 6:9**). The first time he attempted to move it from where it had been abandoned after God had single-handedly defeated the Philistines (**1 Samuel 6:1-18**), Uzzah put forth his hands to steady the Ark while it was being driven on a new cart, and was struck dead (**2 Samuel 6:2-7**). This made David so afraid of moving the Ark, that he left it in the house of Obed Edom. But when he heard of how God was blessing the house of Obed Edom (**2 Samuel 6:10-12**) because the Ark was there, he went about a diligent enquiry on how to move the Ark properly. David then moved the Ark to Jerusalem, and left it in a tent he had prepared for it (**2 Samuel 6:17**). Thus, David always consulted with God. He even appointed some of the Levites to minister before the Ark of God while it was kept in the tent he had erected for it (**1 Chronicles 16:4ff**). It was at this time also that singing and music was introduced in the worship of God. Meanwhile, the people continued to worship at Gibeon where the tabernacle was (**2 Chronicles 1:3-12**), and God still met with them.

What all this means is that the presence of God is the most important thing in worship, not necessarily some item of furniture. It didn't really matter that the Ark of God was in another place; Solomon still met with God—this was because his heart was right before God and his worship accepted by God. Indeed, the absence of the Ark of God was a sign to the people of God that He was no longer with them (**1 Samuel 4:21-22**). If God is not present, how can we say that we are worshipping Him? Furthermore, it is the presence of God that made the tabernacle holy. We can also see that worship of God must be preceded by atonement for sin, for a sinner's worship is not acceptable to God (**John 9:31**). Once sin was covered figuratively by the high priest, the nation was protected from God's wrath, thus, the atonement was a major part of the annual worship of God by the nation of Israel in the Old Covenant Era. The Ark of the Testimony was thus central in the worship of God in the Old Covenant Era, but it did not limit worship to where it was situated. For example, David worshipped God as a shepherd in the field, not at the tabernacle.

EXERCISE

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. The tabernacle was the place of abode for the priests.
2. The most holy place in the Old Covenant Era was more important than the Ark of the Testimony.
3. The access into the most holy place was actually open in the Old Covenant Era.
4. The Ark of the Testimony was God's throne room among His people.
5. God spoke to the children of Israel from the Ark of the Testimony.
6. The mercy seat was the place of atonement for the sins of the high priest and the people.
7. The mercy seat was where the people's sins were forgiven and through which God's mercy was obtained.
8. The outer court prepared the people to minister before God.
9. Music was a part of the Old Covenant Era worship.
10. If a man's heart is right with God, it does not matter where he worships God.
11. A sinner's worship cannot be acceptable before God.
12. As important as the Ark of the Testimony was in the Old Covenant Era, God is teaching us through the Old Covenant Era worship, that His presence is the key, not some item of furniture.
13. God is teaching us, today's Christians, that He cannot be bound to a location for worship.