

Our life in the tabernacle (Part 1 of 3)

This is a three-part series that attempts to show how all the stages of our life in pursuing salvation are mirrored in the tabernacle, the associated courtyard, and the twelve tribes who surrounded the whole structure in the wilderness.

Think of it like this: God's purpose is to some day dwell on earth with man. This sounds incredible but we know it is true because we are told that He will one day tabernacle among us on the earth!

“Behold, the *tabernacle* of God is with men, and *he will dwell with them*, and they shall be his people, and *God himself shall be with them*, and be their God.” (Revelation 21:3)

However God only wants to dwell with certain men and women. He wants to dwell with those who have approached Him in the right way. By approaching God in the way He has asked shows faith in Him, and we can only be saved if we have faith:

“Without faith it is *impossible* to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

Individual men and women have complete and total free choice whether they want to live in the future with God or not. For those who want to, there are conditions; they must approach Him in the way He has shown us in His Word.

So to put it simply, God wants to live with selected men and women in the future here on earth. We all have the choice whether to accept God's offer of salvation or not – but if we want to live in the presence of God for ever on earth, we *must* approach Him in the right and only way.

All this is very clear from the Scriptures, but what has it to do with the tabernacle, the courtyard and the twelve tribes who surrounded it?

Well, imagine that God has created a symbolic model of what we have discussed so far. There is a journey we must go on to reach Him. Where is God in this symbolic model? He is dwelling in the Most Holy Place – in the tabernacle. So our journey to dwell with God must be somehow involve getting into the Most Holy Place. In effect the Most Holy Place is symbolic of God dwelling here on earth.

So where does our journey start? It surely starts outside the Most Holy Place, outside the tabernacle, outside the courtyard and amongst the tribes that surround it. We begin in this article by looking at this aspect. The following article looks at the next part of our journey – into the courtyard. The final article examines our life in the tabernacle – and beyond.

So let's consider life outside the courtyard. Who was there and what were they doing?

Well as we have said there were the twelve tribes camping around the tabernacle. These people represent not only the Jews but *all* nations. Matthew 24:30 speaks of “*all the tribes* of the earth”.

We all begin life amongst the tribes of the earth. It is up to us individually to decide if we want to take a journey to meet God.

So where were these tribes? They were in the wilderness. Those in the wilderness are in inhospitable territory. The wilderness is a place of temptation and testing. Remember that Jesus was tempted and tested in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1). The world itself is a place of temptation and testing.

For many living in the wilderness – living in their tribes (nations) and the family groups – the tabernacle would not even be seen. They would have camped several miles away from the

tabernacle. Remember there were millions of people. So it is for many in the world. They do not even realise that there is a tabernacle. They do not realise that there is a journey one can take to meet God. They are totally unaware that God, His plan and His purpose are in the centre of everything.

So what would make someone decide to enter the courtyard? And how would they do this?

Well someone would only enter the courtyard if he was to make a sacrifice for his sin. In other words, only people who realised they were sinful and were repentant could ever enter the courtyard. As Jesus said: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

This is the same for us. Our journey towards God begins by understanding this very thing. We are sinful and need forgiveness.

Now interestingly there is only one way into the courtyard. The high walls around the courtyard could not be scaled and their height blocked any sight of what was happening inside to even the tallest of men.

So how would someone enter the courtyard? There was only one way. Through the one door. Exodus 27:16 describes it as “the gate of the court”. This word “gate” is sometimes translated “door”. The point is, there was only *one way* to enter. It had to be approached in the right way.

The only way, of course, once we realise that we are sinful and repent of our sin, is to be saved by Jesus Christ. This is why he says in John 10:9, “I am the door”. In fact this word “door” is sometimes translated as “gate”.

So to get into the courtyard we have to find Jesus Christ. We must start our journey towards God by realising we can only come to God *through* His Son. No other route is possible.

There was and is only one way to enter – as Jesus said: “I am the way” (John 14:6).

We are going to see that Jesus is in *every* aspect of the tabernacle and courtyard. He is even there in the tribes that surrounded the tabernacle – though they did not realise it.

The twelve Tribes were positioned around the Tabernacle (see Numbers 2:17). Dan was in the centre of the north side and above his tribe flew a banner depicting an eagle. Judah was on the east side with a banner depicting a lion (see Genesis 49:9). Reuben was on the south side depicting a man (his name means, “see a son”) and Ephraim was on the west side depicting an ox (see Hosea 10:11).

Each of these “creatures” symbolise the four aspects of Christ’s nature and work (see Revelation 4:1-7). The eagle represents the Son of God. The man represents the son of man. The ox represents Jesus in his work as a servant. The lion represents Christ, the anointed King. Revelation 4:1-7 is depicting Christ on his throne in the kingdom.

The point is this – that even though the tribes (nations) do not recognise him, he is still there. We read that, “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men” (Daniel 4:17). We also read that all judgement has been given to God’s Son (John 5:22). Christ is there now as he was symbolically there in the twelve tribes.

So we begin our journey in amongst the tribes (nations). Then we must understand that we are sinful and need to repent. We must find our way to the door (gate) that is Christ. He is the only way in, the only means of approach to God.

In Part 2 we enter the courtyard and relate what happens next in our path to salvation.