

Our Life in the tabernacle (Part 3 of 3)

In this last part of our journey (to culminate in life with God here on earth) we enter the tabernacle. We have left the nations of the world that surround the courtyard. We then entered the courtyard and prepared to enter the tabernacle. We understood the atoning work of Christ's sacrifice and we were washed in the waters of baptism – as the priests washed in the laver.

Only now can we enter the tabernacle (Hebrew, 'dwelling place'). The tabernacle is symbolic of an ecclesia. It is interesting that modern versions call the tabernacle "the tent of meeting". On Sunday mornings many of us speak of, "going to the meeting". So once baptised we join an ecclesia. Before we consider what is inside the tabernacle it is worth considering what parts of it were made of.

The walls were made of long boards of shittim wood. The boards were held together by "tenons" (see Exodus 26:17). So what is a tenon? Well it was some sort of clasp that held the boards together. The Hebrew for "tenons" is almost always translated 'hands'. So imagine the walls of the tabernacle made strong by the holding of hands. In effect those in the meeting are holding hands. It is a symbol of unity. We often see in an ecclesia the shaking of hands – we are working together in fellowship and this is like a wall that defends the ecclesia from the winds of other doctrines that swirl around us.

And so we enter the tabernacle itself. It's a dazzling sight! Everything is gold! It is light in here with the huge seven-branch lampstand on our left burning with seven flames. It smells good too as the incense burns on an altar in front of us. To our right is a table – all gold. And on it are things we would recognise. Some plates with bread on and also some cups and a decanter with wine in.

Everything in here is found in an ecclesia and everything in here is symbolic of Christ and his work.

The lampstand or Menorah burnt brightly night and day. It would be pitch black in the tabernacle if it did not. It is clear that the light burning here is associated with the Word of God: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). Amazingly there are sixty-six different elements mentioned in relation to the lampstand – and there are sixty-six books in the Bible. There was a main trunk with six branches coming of it. The oil came through the central trunk and fed the branches. We are like branches grafted on to the Lord Jesus Christ. He enables us to shine brightly to the world around us. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5), and again, "I am the [true] vine, ye are the branches" (15:5).

The table of shewbread was opposite the lampstand. It may come as some surprise to discover that there was not only bread but also wine on this table:

"And thou shalt make the dishes thereof, and spoons thereof, and covers thereof, and bowls thereof, to cover withal: of pure gold shalt thou make them. And thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway." (Exodus 25:29,30)

This is somewhat confusing language in the Authorised Version as meanings have changed over the years. To understand what dishes and spoons and bowls really are: for 'dish' read 'plate'; for 'spoon' read 'cup', and for 'bowl' read 'decanter'. "To cover withal", means 'to pour out'.

So we have bread on a plate, some empty cups and a decanter to pour out wine. How do we know that wine was in the decanter?

"In the holy place shalt thou cause the *strong wine* to be poured unto the LORD for a drink offering." (Numbers 28:7)

We see the very emblems of Christ's sacrifice here on this table – the very emblems present in every ecclesia in the world. It is interesting that the priests could eat the bread but could *not* drink

the wine: “Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle” (Leviticus 10:9).

The bread is symbolic of corruptible flesh – of man. The wine is symbolic of a perfect life poured out. The priests could eat the bread and pour the wine but they *could not drink the wine* – for they were not able to drink of the cup – it was for the Lord Jesus to do this millennia later.

Finally we see the altar of incense. It is right in front of the veil and is the closest we come to God. The incense, burning and creating such a wonderful aroma is symbolic of our hymns and prayers: “golden vials full of odours [incense], which are the prayers of saints” (Revelation 5:8).

The altar of incense is burning continually. Coals from the sacrifice outside are brought in to keep the altar of incense burning and blood is sprinkled on this as well – again brought from the sacrifice outside in the courtyard.

The sacrifice outside is of a life – when we are in the ecclesial tabernacle and we offer our prayers to God we are offering him the sacrifice of our lives. Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life”.

So every element of the ecclesia of Christ is here in the tabernacle – the Word of God in the lampstand; the emblems of Christ’s sacrifice on the table; the hymns and prayers that we sing and say, in the incense. Here is unity and fellowship. Here is peace and holiness. All is light and fragrant.

But there is still one more step to go in order to actually live with God. God’s glory is behind the veil in the Most Holy Place: “O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth” (2 Kings 19:15). The cherubim were of course on the ark of the covenant which was in the Most Holy Place.

This final place is symbolic of the time when God is “all in all”; when His glory covers the whole earth; when God, in fact, comes to earth to dwell with man. But the veil that divided the room must be removed. In a sense it has already been removed by the sacrifice of Christ. Our place in the kingdom and the opportunity to live in the future with God is guaranteed (if we believe, are baptized, and obedient). God is willing even now to call us His sons and daughters. But in another sense God is still separated from us. We cannot look on Him in our current state and live. He cannot live here on earth while there is still sin and death.

But one day He will physically come and live here. The curtain of the heavens will be removed. It is this curtain that separates us from God currently. But it will be removed:

“Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he [God] that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.” (Isaiah 40:21,22)

When Christ returns he will establish a kingdom that will be handed to God after 1,000 years.

All those who have made the journey from the nations of the world, through the courtyard and into the tabernacle will, one day, tabernacle – dwell – with God; not in heaven, but here on earth:

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, 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)