

# Shadow of the Church

## (Exodus 25:23-40)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

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### I. Review from the Previous Lesson

- a. Moses and Joshua have ascended Mount Sinai. Moses is there 40 days and 40 nights, during which time he is fasting. He will receive the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments (for the first time).
- b. The Lord gives Moses detailed instructions regarding the tabernacle, a portable structure that the Israelites are to build, which will be at the center of their community as they travel through the Wilderness. During the time of Solomon, this portable tent-like structure will be replaced by a permanent structure: the temple in Jerusalem.
- c. **Hebrews 8-10** explains the significance of the tabernacle and its ministry. The tabernacle is a type or model of things in the heavenly realm. Its details are all very purposeful, reflecting things regarding heaven, the church, and the saving sacrifice of Jesus.
- d. We learned from **Hebrews**, as discussed in the prior lesson:
  - i. The High Priest foreshadowed Christ, our High Priest.
    1. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (**Hebrews 4:14-15**, NKJV)
  - ii. The Most Holy Place foreshadowed heaven.
    1. "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into *heaven itself*, now to appear in the presence of God for us;" (**Hebrews 9:24**, NKJV)
    2. As the Jewish High Priest was the only one allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, and only once a year (on the Day of Atonement), with blood, Jesus entered Heaven itself with His own blood, once for all time.
  - iii. The "mercy seat", the solid gold cover over the ark of the covenant, with the two cherubim overshadowing it, represented the throne of God.

1. In several places in the Old Testament, it speaks of the Lord Who is enthroned “above the cherubim”.
- iv. The veil of the temple, between the Holy Place (the sanctuary) and the Most Holy Place, represented the flesh (body) of Christ.
1. “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,” **(Hebrews 10:19–20, NKJV)**
  2. When Jesus was crucified, the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, as mentioned in the passion accounts of **Matthew, Mark** and **Luke**.
  3. Therefore, the death of Jesus opened up access to the Father to all of us, for the first time – the way to heaven.
- e. Review of the tabernacle layout
- i. The tabernacle was 30 cubits x 10 cubits (with a cubit equivalent to about 1.5 feet or ½ meter).
  - ii. The tabernacle had two rooms: the Most Holy Place (a perfect cube: 10 cubits x 10 cubits x 10 cubits high) and the Holy Place (10 cubits x 20 cubits x 10 cubits high). All the main items to be located within it were made of gold (and incorruptible wood).
  - iii. The Most Holy Place:
    1. Ark of the covenant kept there.
    2. Only the High Priest could enter, only once a year (on the Day of Atonement), and only with blood from animal sacrifice.
  - iv. The Holy Place:
    1. The priests would minister in this room.
    2. Three items in there:
      - a. Golden altar of incense; located in front of the veil leading to the Most Holy Place.
      - b. Table of showbread; located on the north side.
      - c. Lampstand with seven lights, located on the south side.
  - f. In the courtyard, outside and in front of the tabernacle were two things:

- i. Laver for priests to wash in (before being anointed as priests, and when they would minister in the tabernacle).
- ii. Bronze altar, for offering animal sacrifices.

## II. About the Priests

- a. **Question:** If the Most Holy Place represents heaven and the Holy Place represents the Church, whom do the priests represent?
  - i. If we consider this question, then we will glean significant insight as we study out the role of the priests in the tabernacle.
- b. The High Priest and all of the other priests were from the tribe of Levi and descended from Moses' brother Aaron (the first High Priest).
- c. They were males only and worked in the tabernacle/temple only from the ages of 25 and 50. (Read **Numbers 8:23-26**)
- d. The role of the priests included offering sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of the people.
- e. The priests (only) were allowed to eat from some of the grain and animal sacrifice offerings that were made at the tabernacle/temple. This is described in the first several chapters of **Leviticus**. Examples:
  - i. **Leviticus 6:7-9** (grain offering)
  - ii. **Leviticus 6:17-19** (sin offering/whole burnt offering)
  - iii. **Leviticus 7:28-34** (peace offering)
- f. As Jesus was the greater High Priest, we who follow Him are members of a greater priesthood. We eat from a greater altar from which they have no right to eat!
  - i. Read **Hebrews 13:9-16**.
  - ii. Those priests ate from an altar; we (Christians) eat *from a greater altar*. This is an altar that those priests have no right to eat from!
  - iii. Jesus sacrificed himself and bore reproach. We must be prepared to follow his example and offer the same sacrifice of ourselves.
    - 1. While Christians in the West generally have not faced significant persecution in recent years, that is not the case for our brothers and sisters in the East (especially in the Middle East and the Far East).

2. Also, even in the West things could change rapidly; we may soon see persecution of Christians in our part of the world. In any event, we must be prepared to “bear the reproach that Christ bore”, to walk in His steps and follow His example.
- iv. As Christians, we also are called to two other kinds of sacrifices:
    1. “Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (**Hebrews 13:15**, NKJV)
      - a. Just like the priests who served in the tabernacle/ temple, we Christians, as priests of God are also called to offer sacrifices.
      - b. We should always be offering the sacrifice to God of *thanking Him and praising His name.*
    2. “But do not forget to do good and to share, for *with such sacrifices* God is well pleased.” (**Hebrews 13:16**, NKJV)
      - a. Our lives should be filled with doing good to others, and sharing what we have with those in need.
  - g. Paul uses this tabernacle/priesthood imagery as well.
    - i. “Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the *things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.*” (**Philippians 4:18**, NKJV)
  - h. Peter also indicated that the priests of the temple foreshadowed us, the Christians.
    - i. Read **1 Peter 2:1-10**.
    - ii. “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (**1 Peter 2:5**, NKJV)
    - iii. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (**1 Peter 2:9**, NKJV)
  - i. Peter also calls us to see ourselves as God sees us: as His priests. We are set apart for serving the Lord. We also are offering spiritual sacrifices and bringing light. This is why we need to abstain from fleshly lusts, be willing to suffer while doing good (as slaves, submissive wives, understanding husbands, compassionate brothers who return good for evil)

- i. Read **1 Peter 3:7-17** and **1 Peter 4:1-2**.
- ii. Note the themes Peter touches on for us as priests
  - 1. Offering spiritual sacrifices
    - a. Willing to suffer unjustly
    - b. Submitting to those who have authority over us
    - c. Husbands showing consideration for their wives
    - d. Returning good for evil, forgiving others
    - e. Seeking peace and living righteously
    - f. Abstaining from lusts of the flesh
    - g. Follow the example of Christ who offered the sacrifice of His own suffering
  - 2. Coming out of the darkness and into the light
  - 3. Offering the prayers of the righteous, which God will answer
- j. With all of this in view, let us take a closer look at the ministry of the priests who served at the tabernacle, to get a clearer picture (from this model or type) of the kind of priests God wants us to be.

### III. The Sanctuary (Holy Place, Where the Priests Ministered)

- a. If the priests represent Christians, it logically follows that the Holy Place (where they alone ministered) represents the church and our ministry. So, let us pay attention to the details here and look for the significance of what this is foreshadowing for us.
- b. The three things found in the sanctuary, where the priests would minister: the table for the showbread, the lampstand and the altar of incense.
  - i. The Table for the Showbread (Read **Exodus 25:23-30**)
    - 1. All of the metal is *gold*.
    - 2. It is to be located on the north side of the room (the Holy Place).
    - 3. Portable, with rings, to be hand-carried with poles.
    - 4. New bread to be laid out (replaced) each Sabbath, with old bread to be eaten by the priests (**Leviticus 24:5-9**).

- a. Note that this was the bread David was allowed to eat. Read **1 Samuel 21:1-7** (designated **1 Kingdoms 21:1-7** in the LXX).
  - i. David's men had to be "clean" to eat it.
  - ii. Jesus pointed to this example when He and His disciples were criticized for allegedly violating the Sabbath. Read **Matthew 12:1-4**.
    1. Here Jesus remarked that according to the Law of Moses, *it was unlawful* for David (who was not a priest) to eat this bread.
    2. The bread was only meant for the priests (although we see Jesus using this story of David to defend the actions of His disciples).
- ii. The Lampstand (Read **Exodus 25:31-40** and **Exodus 27:20-21**.)
  1. Solid gold lampstand, consisting of "one talent of gold".
    - a. A talent is thought to be equivalent to about 75 pounds (34 kilograms), or about 1100 troy ounces
    - b. At the current price of \$1900/troy ounce for gold, this would equate to a cost of about \$2 million for the lampstand.
  2. Seven lamps on the lampstand: two sets of three lamps on the branches, plus one lamp in the middle.
  3. These lamps, fueled by olive oil, would be lit by the priests and maintained each night.
- iii. The Golden Altar of Incense (Read **Exodus 30:1-10** and **30:34-38**.)
  1. It was to be made of incorruptible wood and pure gold.
  2. Rings attached to the altar, for carrying it with poles.
  3. This was to be located directly in front of the veil that is before the ark.
  4. Special incense was to be burned there by the priests each morning and evening.
    - a. Very specific: no other type of incense was permitted, and this incense was not to be offered anywhere else.

- b. No other sacrifices to be made on this altar (no animal sacrifice nor drink offerings to be made there). This altar was only for incense.
    - c. Once per year, this altar would be cleansed by the High Priest with blood.
  - 5. Zechariah was burning the incense at this altar inside the temple when the angel Gabriel spoke with him, announcing that he would have a son, John the Baptist. (Read **Luke 1:8-22.**)
- c. Significance of these three items (the golden altar of incense, table of showbread and the lampstand) for us. Keep in mind that today we Christians serve as the *priests of God*.
  - i. **Question:** What do you think these three items represent? What do they say about *our* ministry?
  - ii. First, let us consider the easiest one to see a connection: the altar of incense.
    - 1. Read **Psalm 141:1-2** (designated **Psalm 140:1-2** in the LXX).
      - a. I have read elsewhere (but have not been able to confirm from primary sources) the claim that *this psalm* was sung at the time of the offering of evening incense.
        - i. That sounds reasonable to me, in light of what it says in this psalm.
      - b. According to David here, *prayer is like incense* to God.
    - 2. “Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.’” (**Revelation 5:7-10**, NKJV)
      - a. Also see **Revelation 8:1-4**.
    - 3. “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense

shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the LORD of hosts."  
**(Malachi 1:11, NKJV)**

- a. This is a prophecy about the Gentiles.
4. The link between incense and prayer is a strong one in Scripture. Our prayers waft up to the throne of God, just like the incense burned on the altar before the ark.
    - a. From this connection, we can reasonably conclude that one of the main features of *our ministry* should be prayer.
- iii. Second, let us consider the lampstand, which brings light into the Holy Place.
    1. Consider Jesus as the light of the world.
      - a. "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'" **(John 8:12, NKJV)**
      - b. Jesus also said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." **(John 9:5, NKJV)**
    2. Christians also are called to be the light of the world
      - a. Jesus said to His followers, "*You are* the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house." **(Matthew 5:14-15, NKJV)**
      - b. Paul called the Christians in Philippi to become, "... blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, *among whom you shine as lights in the world,*" **(Philippians 2:15, NKJV)**
      - c. Early Christian writer Irenaeus (bishop of the church in Gaul, modern-day France) writing c. 180 AD: "For the Church preaches the truth everywhere, and she is the seven-branched candlestick which bears the light of Christ."



- i. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 548)
- 3. The lampstand with its seven lamps may be representing the Holy Spirit.
  - a. Seven lamps were connected by some early Christian writers as referring to the Holy Spirit.
    - i. “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and *from the seven Spirits who are before His throne*,” (**Revelation 1:4**, NKJV)
      - 1. Some have translated “the seven Spirits” as “the seven-fold Spirit”.
    - ii. “And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are *the seven Spirits of God*.” (**Revelation 4:5**, NKJV)
      - 1. Consider also **Revelation 3:1** and **5:6**, in connection with **Zechariah 3:9** and **4:10** regarding the stone with seven “eyes” or facets (the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit).
    - iii. **Isaiah 11:1-3** speaks of the Spirit of God that will descend upon Christ, “the rod from the root of Jesse”. In the LXX it *mentions seven characteristics*.
    - iv. Several early Christian writers (including Irenaeus) connected this ‘seven’ to the Holy Spirit.
      - 1. Justin Martyr (philosopher from Samaria converted to the Christian faith, writing c. 160 AD) wrote, “I think, Plato having learned from the prophets regarding the Holy Ghost, he has manifestly transferred to what he calls virtue. For as the sacred prophets say that one and the same spirit is divided into seven spirits...”

- a. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, chapter 32; found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 1, p. 287)
2. Clement of Alexandria (teacher in the church in Alexandria, Egypt, writing c. 195 AD) wrote regarding the lampstand: “The golden lamp conveys another enigma as a symbol of Christ, not in respect of form alone, but in his casting light, ‘at sundry times and divers manners,’ on those who believe on Him and hope, and who see by means of the ministry of the First-born. And they say that the seven eyes of the Lord are the seven spirits resting on the rod that springs from the root of Jesse (referring to **Isaiah 11:1-3** in the LXX).”
  - a. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, or *Miscellanies*, book 5, chapter 6; found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 2, p. 452)
3. Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons, in Gaul (modern-day France) writing c. 180-200 AD about the Holy Spirit discusses the seven characteristics of the Spirit of **Isaiah 11:1-3**, “this Spirit who lights up the heavens”. He concludes, “For after the pattern Moses received the seven-branched candlestick always burning in the sanctuary...”
  - a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, chapter 9, p. 53; found in vol. 16 of *Ancient Christian Writers* series, published by Catholic University of America and Paulist Press)
4. Therefore, the lampstand in the tabernacle may refer to:
  - a. the Holy Spirit, who lights our way; OR
  - b. Christ, the light of the world; OR to

- c. the Church, since we are called to be bringing light to a dark world; OR
  - d. possibly even to *more than one* of the above three alternatives!
- iv. The table of showbread
- 1. Jesus is the bread that came down from heaven, which, if a man eats, he may live forever.
    - a. See **John 6:32-58**.
  - 2. From the earliest times, each week on the Lord's Day (Sunday) Christians (members of this priesthood) partake in the bread of God's presence, in *the Lord's Supper*. (See **Matthew 26:26-29** and **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**.)
  - 3. Also, Christians are called to meet the needs of others in feeding the hungry (**Matthew 3:10-11**, **Matthew 25:34-40**).

#### IV. Summary and Conclusion: Our Ministry

- a. In the three elements of the tabernacle ministry of the priests in the sanctuary, we see foreshadowed *our own ministry as the priests of God*. This includes:
  - i. To offer sacrifices – of denying the flesh, helping others, praising God;
  - ii. To live under the light of the Spirit and be the light to a dark and lost world;
  - iii. To partake in the bread of life each week, and to meet the needs of others; and
  - iv. To be always devoted to prayer (like priests offering incense day and night).
    - 1. Recall that the two highest priorities of the apostles after the resurrection of Jesus, in their own words, were “prayer and the ministry of the word” (**Acts 6:4**).
    - 2. Let us devote ourselves to be the kind of priests who are living righteous lives, whose prayers will be heard and answered by God, as Peter admonishes us in **1 Peter 2:7-12**.
      - a. James makes a similar point: “...The *effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man* avails much.” (**James 5:16**, NKJV)

- b. May we see ourselves as called to be *priests of God*, who embrace the wonderful multi-fold pattern that the Lord revealed to Moses in the tabernacle.