

The Veil and the Craftsmen (Exodus 31:1-17)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review and Background

- a. We are coming up on the end of our study over the past several lessons of the instructions for building the tabernacle (found in **Exodus 25-31**).
- b. In *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (sometimes titled *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*), written by Irenaeus probably in the 180's or 190's, we have a significant statement regarding the importance of the tabernacle to Christians. Irenaeus, in his youth a disciple of Polycarp (who had been a disciple of the apostle John), therefore was only one human link removed from one of the apostles! Irenaeus, who had been a bishop of the church in Smyrna (Izmir, Turkey) and then a bishop in Lyons, in Gaul (modern-day France) wrote:
 - i. "...[Moses] also constructed at God's command the tabernacle of the testimony, a visible construction on earth of what is spiritual and invisible in heaven, and a figure of the form of the church, and a prophecy of things to be; and in it both vessels and altars and an ark, in which he put the tablets. He also appointed as priests Aaron and his sons, giving the priesthood to them and to all their stock; and they were of the tribe of Levi...".
 1. (Source: Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, chapter 26; translated by Joseph P. Smith, SJ; Ancient Christian Writers series, No. 16; Paulist Press, pp. 64-65).
 2. An online translation in the public domain is available at <https://eurekachurchofchrist.com/demonstration-of-the-apostolic-preaching/>
 - ii. Irenaeus tells us that the tabernacle was:
 1. A visible construction on earth of what is invisible in heaven;
 2. A figure and form of the church; and
 3. A prophecy of things (at the time it was written) that were yet to be.
- c. We also know from **Hebrews 8-10** that 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 prior lessons:
- i. The High Priest foreshadowed Christ, our High Priest.
 - ii. The Most Holy Place, which had the ark of the covenant in it (covered by the “mercy seat”), foreshadowed heaven.
 - iii. The veil that separated the sanctuary (Holy Place) from the Holy Place represented the body of Christ (**Hebrews 10:19-20**).
 - iv. The priests who ministered in the Holy Place represent Christians. In **Hebrews, 1 Peter** and some of the writings of Paul, we Christians are referred to as members of a priesthood who are offering spiritual sacrifices.
 1. Therefore the Holy Place, which had the three articles in it (lampstand, table of showbread and golden altar of incense), represents the church and our ministry.

II. Another Look at that Veil

- a. While we briefly discussed the veil (and what it represented) in a prior lesson, a comment shared with me by someone present in that lesson (David Adams, who helps in editing and posting these lesson notes) got me thinking that there might be more to this connection than I had realized.
- i. As a consequence, I would like to take a step backward at the start of the current lesson, before we finish our discussions about the tabernacle construction, to take another look at that veil.
- b. **Recap from a Prior Lesson:** The veil separating the Most Holy Place from the sanctuary where the priests ministered (the Holy Place), which was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross, represented *the body (physical flesh) of Jesus*.
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. “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom...” (**Matthew 27:50-51**, NKJV)
- c. Note that while the Hebrews writer states in **Hebrews 10:19-20** that the veil of the tabernacle foreshadowed the flesh of Jesus Christ, he does not explain in that statement *in what ways* the veil was like Jesus’ physical body.

- i. Similarly, when Paul states that “...Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (**1 Corinthians 5:7**, NKJV), he does not explain in what ways the Passover Lamb foreshadowed Christ.
 - 1. However, when we examine the Passover Lamb instructions (in **Exodus 12**, **Numbers 9** and **Deuteronomy 16**), we can discern several fascinating parallels between the Passover lamb that was sacrificed and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, including:
 - a. Both were males without blemish (sinless life of Jesus).
 - b. Both were sacrificed at twilight on the eve of the Passover.
 - c. The blood of the lamb that was sacrificed protected God’s people from death that came to all the others.
 - d. A meal commemorating the death of the lamb, consisting of the flesh of the lamb, was to be eaten by God’s people regularly, thereafter.
 - e. None of the lamb’s bones were to be broken.
 - f. After the lamb was slain, God’s people were to get rid of all the yeast (which represented Christians repenting of all kinds of sin, as Paul explained in **1 Corinthians 5**).
- d. **Question:** Is it possible that there are *details* in the description of the veil that parallel similar details regarding the flesh (physical body) of Jesus?
- e. One possible connection that David Adams pointed out to me after a prior lesson in which we discussed this veil:
 - i. This veil was *hung from the wood*, as the body of Jesus was suspended from the wood of the cross.
 - 1. That had never occurred to me, but seemed like an interesting aspect of this foreshadowing. So I went back to re-read the details this past week.
 - ii. The other potential parallel between the veil and the flesh of Christ, as we already noted, was that the veil was torn in two at the moment Jesus died on the cross.
- f. With that idea that in mind, *let’s take another look* at the details of construction for the tabernacle and the veil.

- i. The exterior walls of the tabernacle were vertical posts (planks) of incorruptible wood set in bases. Each post was 10 cubits tall x 1 cubit in width (15 feet tall x 1.5 feet; or about 5 meters tall x 0.5 meter wide). The posts were overlaid with gold, and there were also wooden bars to keep the vertical posts aligned and connected.
- ii. Recall that the tabernacle is 10 cubits wide (= 15 feet or about 5 meters wide). The Most Holy Place (which represents heaven, at one end of the tabernacle) is 10 cubits x 10 cubits x 10 cubits: a perfect cube in shape.
- iii. Read **Exodus 26:31-33**, which discusses the construction and installation of the veil that would separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.
 1. The veil was hung from four wood posts (incorruptible wood overlaid with gold).
 2. The veil is suspended from hooks on the vertical poles (or posts).
 3. The four posts would need to be set one at either end of the 10 cubit (15 foot) run, and two at the intermediate points (therefore 5 feet separating each post).
 4. It seems to me that the veil was to be hung *directly from the four posts*, via hooks, as opposed to it hanging from a rod above similar to a shower curtain rod (as I had envisioned it before re-reading this passage).
 - a. **Some Questions:** Why did the Lord specify *four* posts? Why not three, for example (representing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or perhaps the three men who would be crucified together)? Also, why suspend the veil from four points? Wouldn't it be a better design to have it hang *from a bar above* (like a shower curtain), so that it would not sag at the mid-points? Why did this veil have to be suspended from four posts, by a hook at each post?
 - b. **One Possible Reason for the Four Posts:** With the veil being hung from four points (one post at each end and two closer to the middle), someone ministering in the Holy Place looking at the veil would see three hanging sections of fabric (perhaps suggesting the three men on the cross at the crucifixion).

- c. **Another Possible Reason:** The body of Jesus was hung on the wooden cross *from four points on his body* (a nail penetrated each hand and each foot). He was suspended from the wooden cross by nails penetrating his hands (similar to the way the hooks held up the veil).
- g. Consider the following Scriptures, regarding the crucifixion:
- i. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (**John 3:14–15**, NKJV)
 - ii. ““And I, if I am *lifted up from the earth*, will draw all peoples to Myself.’ This He said, signifying by what death He would die.” (**John 12:32–33**, NKJV)
 - iii. “For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. *They pierced My hands and My feet*; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.” (**Psalm 22:16–17**, NKJV)
 1. Notice that it specifies in **Psalm 22** that both his hands (plural) and feet (plural) will be pierced. Therefore, the one this passage speaks about *will be pierced in four places*.
 2. This is confirmed by Jesus’ remark after his resurrection, “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself...” (**Luke 24:39**, NKJV)
 - iv. “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then *they will look on Me whom they pierced*. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” (**Zechariah 12:10**, NKJV)
 1. I will note that in **John 19:37** where this passage is quoted it follows the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text (as opposed to the text of the Septuagint).
- h. Another look at the crucifixion of the body of Jesus.
- i. If each hand is pierced (and the wrist were considered part of the ‘hand’ back then), for an average-sized man of that time with both arms extended, we would expect the nails to be located about 5 feet apart.
 - i. In His crucifixion, the body of Jesus was hung from the *wood of the cross*. Similarly, the veil was hung from *wood* posts. Early Christian writers noted that *God used wood to play a significant role in saving His people* throughout

their Scriptures, foreshadowing the wood of the cross on which Jesus would be crucified (see Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 86; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 242; also chapter 138, in ANF vol. 1, p. 268). Some examples:

- i. The wood of Noah's ark, through which the human race was saved, in **Genesis 6-7**.
- ii. The wood of Moses' staff that is raised up to part the Red Sea in **Exodus 14**, and is held up all day by Moses to win victory over the Amalekites in **Exodus 17**.
- iii. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 14:1-7**.
 1. Note that this book was in the original King James Version of the Bible and was removed from Protestant Bibles over a hundred years ago, but remains in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles.
 2. After discussing the significance of wood (used to save the human race), a reference to the story of Noah's ark.
 3. This passage discussing wood includes the enigmatic statement, "The wood was blessed *through which righteousness comes*", which calls to mind the cross of Christ.
- iv. Recall also that while wood (a tree) was used by Satan to introduce sin into the world (**Genesis 3**), the Lord would use wood to bring about salvation.
 1. Early Christian writer Irenaeus (bishop of the church in Smyrna and Lyons (in Gaul, in modern-day France) explained that the Lord used the principle of "recapitulation", bringing things full-circle, using the very elements used by evil to defeat evil in the end. (See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 19; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers volume 1, p. 547.)
- v. Also, consider also what Paul said regarding the cross:
 1. "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (**Galatians 6:14**, NKJV)
- j. Perhaps the most important parallel between the veil at the tabernacle and the body of Jesus (as seen hanging on the cross): *this is the only way into heaven*. As the veil was the only way to enter the Most Holy Place with the ark of the covenant (representing the throne room of God), the body of Jesus on the cross is the one and only means by which a person can enter heaven.

- i. The Most Holy Place was closed off by an interlocked system of wooden boards and bars on three sides. It could only be entered via the veil. There was no “fire exit”, and absolutely no other way to enter!
- ii. Read **John 14:1-6**.
 1. Jesus is the way to the Father; *the only way*!
 2. To many unbelievers, this is the most objectionable belief of Christians, but it is based on what Jesus Himself said. And it was revealed in the construction of the tabernacle, 1400 years before the birth of Jesus.
 3. There is *only one way* to the Father, to heaven. It is only *through Him*, as was foreshadowed that there was only one way into the presence of the throne room of the Lord in the tabernacle: literally by entering *through the veil* that was hung from the wood.
 - a. This was all revealed in the instructions for building the tabernacle, given to Moses 1400 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.
 - b. This is one more reason why it was important for Moses to make the tabernacle *exactly* as God told him on the mountain.

III. Expert Craftsmen to Build This Tabernacle

- a. Read **Exodus 31:1-11**.
- b. Also, read **Exodus 35:30-36:2**.
 - i. It then goes on to explain what each man did. Aholiab was “a master workman of woven and needlework in the scarlet and fine linen” (**Exodus 37:21**).
- c. Storyline:
 - i. Two men were chosen by God, who identifies them by name to Moses.
 1. Bezalel (of the tribe Judah) and Aholiab (of Dan) were in charge of the construction.
 - a. Note that many English translations of the Bible spell the name Qholiab, as opposed to Aholiab. In these notes I am using the spelling convention from the LXX for his name.

- ii. These men are “filled with the divine Spirit”.
 - iii. Also says the Lord has inspired the other gifted artisans and gave Bezalel and Aholiab men the ability to teach others.
- d. **Question:** What was this about being “filled with the divine Spirit”?
- i. It references “wisdom, understanding and knowledge”
 - ii. Read **Isaiah 11:1-3** (from the LXX, where it mentions *seven* characteristics as opposed to what we find in Bible translations based on the Masoretic Text where *six* are mentioned).
 1. Seven-fold Spirit (LXX) is referenced by several early Christian writers as the characteristics of the Holy Spirit.
 2. In **Revelation**, it speaks of the seven Spirits (or seven-fold Spirit) of God.
 3. Irenaeus, in *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* chapter 9, points to the Spirit as being foreshadowed by the seven-lamp lampstand that burned in the Holy Place. The lampstand gave light to the priests who ministered there.
 4. Note that others before Jesus were filled with the Spirit, at least to some degree.
 - a. In **Luke 1**, John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit even from his mother’s womb; and his father Zecharias was filled with the Spirit when he spoke out.
 - b. Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom (**Deuteronomy 34**) when Moses laid his hands on him.
 - c. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets who wrote Scripture and proclaimed the word of God.
 - iii. It certainly seems to me that this “divine Spirit” who inspired the craftsmen refers to the Holy Spirit.
- e. **Question:** Any lesson for us from this story (in view of the fact that the tabernacle foreshadows the church)?
- i. First, constructing the tabernacle was not just a matter of cook-book following the instructions.
 1. It required skill that was not specifically spelled out (gemstone cutting, weaving gold threads, weaving cherubim into cloth, etc.).

- a. Consider: How would they know what cherubim *look like*, anyway, without receiving further inspiration from God?
2. Some tend to view the Christian faith as *simply follow the rule-book* (Bible) and do what it says. However, there are a lot of details we run across regarding implementation and practical everyday decisions that are not explicitly covered in the text of Scripture.
 - a. Furthermore, an approach that reduces the faith to *no more than* following written instructions tends to lead to a brittle, divisive, fractured church.
 - b. Certainly, we must follow everything laid out in the Scriptures regarding how we live and what we teach. However, *we also need the Holy Spirit* to guide us every day.
- ii. Second, Moses did not just grab some talented men and give them the job. Some churches hire great speakers, good salesmen, people naturally gifted with leadership ability to move people (but who are unspiritual men). This will crash in the end. This is NOT how to build the church.
 1. *We also* need men who are full of, and who are led by, the Holy Spirit.
 2. Here we see the Holy Spirit working not only through Moses and Aaron, but also through the craftsmen.
 3. All who become Christians receive the Spirit initially when they are baptized (**Acts 2:38**). However, the Scriptures also seem to indicate that we should seek to receive *more of* the Spirit.
 - a. Jesus in **Luke 11:9-13** encourages His followers to *pray for* the Spirit.
 - b. The apostles were “filled with the Spirit” in **Acts 4:23-31**.
 - c. Stephen, selected as a deacon, was a man “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (**Acts 6:5**).

IV. Sabbath Requirements

- a. Read **Exodus 31:12-17**.

- i. There is a severe punishment for working on the Sabbath: the death penalty.
 - ii. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week (Saturday).
- b. **Question:** Do Christians need to keep the Sabbath observance?
- i. In **Acts 15**, the apostles meet to determine whether Gentiles who come to the faith need to follow circumcision or any other requirements in the Law of Moses. They conclude that only four requirements must be kept by the Gentiles, and keeping the Sabbath is *not* among those four!
 - ii. Also, in **Colossians** Paul says: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” (**Colossians 2:16–17**, NKJV)
 - 1. Therefore, we Christians do not have to observe the Sabbath requirements (contrary to what groups like the Seventh Day Adventists teach), any more than we have to be circumcised nor follow the dietary requirements of the Law (no pork, no shellfish, etc.).
 - 2. Those requirements of the Law were only *shadows* of what has been fulfilled (and replaced) by *the reality* now revealed through Jesus Christ.
- c. **Question:** What is the lesson contained in the Sabbath *for Christians*?
- i. For us, the emphasis is *reversed*: punished for goofing-off (resting) during the first “six days”, when it’s still the *time to work*!
 - ii. Read **Hebrews 3:12-4:13**.
 - 1. The *first* Jesus (a/k/a Joshua; same name in Greek as ‘Jesus’) did not lead them to the place of rest.
 - 2. However, *our Jesus* (the Christ) offers that hope of rest.
 - 3. We need to *be diligent* to enter that rest.
 - a. Let us learn from the example of Israel in the Wilderness. Most of them never made it to the Promised Land, because they *refused to continue* in the path of obedience.
 - b. Don’t fall into disobedience, as they did.

- c. God sees everything. Therefore, we must repent and persevere!
- d. We WILL enjoy a rest at the end, the true rest we are seeking (salvation/heaven), only *if we persevere and continue to do the work now.*