

God's Dwelling Place

“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

THE WORD ‘TABERNACLE,’

which has been used by the revelator in this scripture, describes the tent that was used by the Israelites during the early time of their history. More importantly, however, it points to the symbolic dwelling place of God. The word tabernacle first appeared in the Old Testament Scriptures that were written by Moses, and identified the ancient Tabernacle which served as the center of Jewish religious life during the time of their sojourning in the wilderness.

A TYPICAL NATION

God gave very specific instructions to Moses concerning the construction of the Tabernacle when he was leading the Israelites in the wilderness while on their way to Canaan—the promised land. He was now revealing his ultimate purpose to them concerning

the destiny of his human creation. He called them his own people, even as the Prophet Amos wrote when speaking for God. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”—Amos 3:2

These were the same people that God had miraculously delivered from their long years of bondage in Egypt. By becoming God’s people, the Jewish nation would receive many favors and blessings. Their religious observances took on new meaning and would serve as types, or illustrations, that pointed forward to God’s ultimate plan of reconciliation for the human family. Mankind had inherited the penalty of death as a result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience to the Divine Law, and God would provide the means of reconciliation that would require centuries of time to fulfill.

GOD DWELLS WITH HIS PEOPLE

God promised that he would dwell with his people, as first recorded by Moses in the second book of his writings. God told him, “Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.” (Exod. 25:8) God would not be dwelling with the children of Israel physically, but would indicate his presence with them by a supernatural light called the Shekinah light which was in the Tabernacle. It would also lead them during their times of sojourning. The structure was carefully built according to a pattern that God had provided Moses. “According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.”—vs. 9

The Tabernacle of Israel became the most important feature of their religious life. It was a portable

structure 15 feet wide, 15 feet high and 45 feet long, and was built with acacia wood which was overlaid with gold. It was set on sockets of silver which were fastened together by bars of acacia wood, and were also plated with gold. The entire structure was overlaid with an elaborate set of inner and outer coverings that also have spiritual significance.—Exod. 26:1-14

The front entrance was closed off by a curtain that served as a door, and is often called the 'first veil.' There were two compartments inside the Tabernacle, the first being 15 feet wide, 15 feet high and 30 feet long and was called the Holy. The second room was 15 feet wide, 15 feet high and 15 feet long and was known as the Most Holy. A curtain of similar material as that used at the main entranceway also separated the two compartments and was known as the veil, or the 'second veil.'

THE HOLY AND MOST HOLY

The Holy and its furnishings represented the life of the Spirit-begotten child of God who is striving for the High Calling in Christ Jesus during the present Gospel Age. (Rom. 6:4,5) These are justified believers who have given their lives in full consecration to God and are walking in newness of life. The Most Holy compartment, which was beyond the second veil, represented the faithful Spirit-begotten class who will attain the Divine nature in heaven itself. (Rev. 2:10) To enter the Most Holy, the consecrated Christian must symbolically pass under the second veil, which represents death.

CLOUD BY DAY AND FIRE BY NIGHT

When Moses was given instructions concerning the Tabernacle he wrote, “Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”—Exod. 40:34-38

The Prophet Isaiah also spoke of God’s supernatural presence in the Tabernacle. “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.” (Isa. 37:16) The cherubims were an integral part of the mercy seat which was located in the Most Holy compartment of Israel’s Tabernacle. The Shekinah light gave them visible evidence of God’s presence with them.

The Tabernacle provided a very unique experience for Israel. Moses and Aaron communicated with God in this arrangement and the priests served as intermediaries between the Heavenly Father and the people. God accompanied Israel in this manner throughout the entire forty years of their wilderness journey. Upon reaching the promised land, the Tabernacle continued to be set up and used as a place of communication.

JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

The Tabernacle was a temporary structure that illustrates particular features pointing to the calling, testing and preparation of the church class, those faithful followers of our Lord Jesus who are being called by the Heavenly Father during the present Gospel Age. This is a time for laying down our lives in sacrifice to the most high God, and the Apostle Paul puts this in perspective. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

Paul proclaims, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."—Rom. 8:16-18

THE TEMPLE

The Tabernacle was portable and was a shadow of better things to come, but it was later replaced by the Temple which was a stationary structure. The Tabernacle represents the narrow way experiences of the Lord's people during the present age of trial and testing. The Temple illustrates the completed church which has been prepared and found worthy to share with Jesus in extending

blessings to all the families of the earth during Christ's future kingdom.

The Temple was built by Solomon. Although his father David desired to build it and had gathered materials for its building, God informed him that this was not to be. We read, "I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?" (II Sam. 7:6,7) Not only did Israel have the assurance of God's presence with them in the Tabernacle, but he would also be with them in the Temple when it was constructed.

Concerning David's place in these arrangements it is further recorded, "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou [David] shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He [Solomon] shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever." (vss. 12,13) Thus was shown the eternal purpose and will of God in connection with this feature of his Divine plan.

THE LORD'S HOUSE

In prophetic words, Isaiah speaks of the time when the majestic house of the LORD would be established. "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be

exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”—Isa. 2:2,3

The prophet continues to describe this wonderful scene. “The LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence [covering, *Marginal Translation*]. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”—chap. 4:5,6

FOR OUR ADMONITION

The Apostle Paul, when reflecting upon the experiences of the children of Israel, told them, “All these things happened unto them for ensamples [types, *Marginal Translation*]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (I Cor. 10:11) When speaking to the Hebrew brethren, the apostle said that these were a “shadow of good things to come.”—Heb. 10:1

God does not literally dwell in a tabernacle or temple that is made by human hands. Paul made this clear when he pointed to the great temples in Athens when he preached on Mars’ hill. In his dissertation, he explained, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” (Acts 17:24) The Apostle John put

this in perspective when he said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”—John 4:24

The thought of God dwelling with men and they with him is perhaps more clearly understood in light of the psalmist’s words. “LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” (Ps. 90:1,2) This reference speaks of those possessing humble hearts and who earnestly desire to dwell with the Heavenly Father.

The revelator also speaks of this special relationship. “I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Rev. 3:20) Our Lord knocks at the door of our heart and, when we permit him to enter in, it indicates our desire to commune with him in spirit and in truth. This is in harmony with God’s promise given to the typical people of Israel. “I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.”—Lev. 26:11,12

SUCH AN HIGH PRIEST

When the Apostle Paul was writing to the Hebrew brethren, he explained to them, “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” (Heb. 8:1,2) Israel’s Tabernacle in the wilderness *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) was intended to provide us with valuable illustrations which help us to better understand our Heavenly Father's ultimate plan and purpose for the blessing of his human creation.

The Tabernacle has been the object of a great deal of study by Jesus followers throughout the present Gospel Age. These alone have come to appreciate the deeper meaning intended in the Tabernacle, and consider the importance of its elaborate construction features, its measurements, furnishings, the priests' clothing and many other intricate details. The apostle pointed especially to the significance of these illustrations, "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount."—vs. 5

The typical sacrifices that were associated with Israel's Tabernacle arrangements portrayed the better sacrifices of Jesus and his faithful followers. The Tabernacle structure was a portable tent and was used to illustrate the temporary nature of the Levitical types. The sacrifices of the present time are also temporary when compared to the wonderful heavenly inheritance that is promised to those who are faithful unto death.

THE PEOPLE BLESSED

Israel's sacrifices took place on the Day of Atonement which pointed to those of the Gospel Age. During the kingdom age Jesus and his faithful body members will serve as priests to help the poor groaning creation in overcoming their inherited fleshly weaknesses, and to earn a standing before

the Heavenly Father. When the blessings of Christ's glorious kingdom begin to flow out to the earthly creation, the Mediator of the New Covenant will help them to attain the necessary heart condition for everlasting life here on a perfected earth. At the conclusion of the typical sacrifices, Israel's high priest dressed himself in the robes of glory and beauty and came out to bless the people. This illustrated our Lord blessing the world of mankind who will strive to obey the Divine law and walk in the ways of truth and righteousness.

ABIDING IN GOD'S TABERNACLE

The psalmist David asks, "LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" (Ps. 15:1) This is an important question, and it is directed toward those fully consecrated followers of Jesus who are abiding in the antitypical tabernacle of God, and will dwell in the 'holy hill' of his glorious kingdom. David's answer explains, "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." (vs. 2) This speaks of the faithful class who have entered into a covenant relationship with the Heavenly Father.

Concerning these brethren, David further proclaims, "He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." (vss. 3,4) These words well describe the child of God who has given himself as a living sacrifice to the Lord, and is striving to carry out his covenant faithfully even unto death.

(Rev. 2:10) The psalmist concludes, “He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.”—Ps. 15:5

A HOUSE NOT MADE WITH HANDS

The Apostle Paul put this in perspective in his letter to the brethren at Corinth. He said, “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”—II Cor. 5:1-4

Our human bodies are temporary dwelling places for the Spirit-begotten New Creature in Christ Jesus. In the meantime, a new and glorious spiritual body is promised to the faithful, and this body cannot be made with human hands nor by human power.

A PLACE PREPARED

When Jesus approached the end of his earthly ministry, he assured his followers that he was about to leave and prepare a special place for them. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye

may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”—John 14:1-4

The Heavenly Father’s ‘house’ encompasses all Creation, and there are numerous and varied kinds of beings. Provision has been made for each of these planes of life that is suited for their particular nature. Jesus was explaining to his disciples, however, that God’s New Creation required a new and special place on the plane of Divine nature, and Jesus was going to prepare this for them. When writing to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul explained, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”—Heb. 9:24

Our Lord Jesus had thus presented the merit of his sacrificed life on behalf of his faithful followers for their benefit and blessing during the present Gospel Age. The whole world of mankind will receive the benefits of his earthly ministry and death during the future administration of his kingdom. For this we continue to wait in joyful anticipation.

At that time, it will truly come to pass, “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. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev. 21:3-5 ■