

Jesus in the Tabernacle Bible Study

The Outer Court

By I Gordon

Introduction

We saw in the previous study that the tabernacle was split into three different areas – the outer court, the holy place and the holy of holies. The three areas, as we saw (and you hopefully remember!) speak of different aspects of salvation in Christ. They also point to three different dispensations within the plan of God.

This study will focus on the first of these three areas – the outer court. Specifically, we'll look at the gate to the tabernacle, the brazen altar and the bronze laver. Got it? Good. Let's start with the gate...

Only One Way

Exodus 27:9-19 *"Make a courtyard for the tabernacle. The south side shall be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains of finely twisted linen, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. The north side shall also be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts... For the entrance to the courtyard, provide a curtain twenty cubits long, of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen—the work of an embroiderer—with four posts and four bases. All the other articles used in the service of the tabernacle, whatever their function, including all the tent pegs for it and those for the courtyard, are to be of bronze."*

The first thing that we see was that the tabernacle's outer court was enclosed by a curtain fence. There was only one way into the court ^[1] and this was through an entrance on the east side. This entrance itself is a picture of the Lord Jesus. He is the door. He is the gate. He is the only entrance into salvation. As Jesus said -

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture." (**John 10:9**)

Now put yourself in the place of someone approaching this entrance... As you approached this gate you would have first noticed the colour on the curtain... Blue, purple and scarlet thread made up the fine linen curtain entrance. These colours, as we saw in the first study, would have reminded you that you were entering into something that was heavenly and involved royalty. The scarlet would have reminded you that this was also a place of sacrifice and blood. As you thought about the fine linen you would have been reminded that this was a place of complete righteousness. By about now you would be holding your breath somewhat and you have only

just approached the gate! ^[2] But as you go through that gate, a solemn site would confront you for directly in your way would be the brazen altar with its sacrifices and perpetual fire. Let's have a look at that now.

The fire that never goes out... or did it?

Exodus 27:1-8 *"Build an altar of acacia wood, three cubits high; it is to be square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze. Make all its utensils of bronze—its pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and firepans. Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is halfway up the altar. Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. The poles are to be inserted into the rings so they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried. Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain."*

Leviticus 6:12-13 *"The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it. The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out."*

The altar that lay directly in front of you was a solemn object. The altar had four horns in each of the corners where the sacrificial animal was bound and killed by the priests. These sacrifices went on daily and the command from God was that the fire for this altar was to never go out. Something else stood out as you looked around... everything was made from bronze. The altar itself was made from acacia wood but was completely covered in bronze. All of the utensils were bronze... even the wooden poles used to carry the altar were covered in bronze. All in all, you would have realised that this entire scene spoke of judgement. The fire that never went out... the

continual sacrifices and shedding of blood... the use of bronze on everything... it spoke volumes of God's hatred of sin. It spoke volumes of the continual judgement of God upon that sin.

This altar of course, had its fulfilment at the cross. This altar was a picture of the sacrifice for sin that Jesus would accomplish at Calvary. But unlike the continual sacrifices of unwilling animals that occurred at the brazen altar in the tabernacle, Jesus was a willing sacrifice that would end all sacrifices. At the brazen altar the animals had to be tied down to the four horns for they didn't want to die. Yet Jesus went willingly to the cross saying 'greater love has no man that he lays down his life for his friends.' And what's more, the fires of God's judgement burnt out in

[3] Christ! He was the final sacrifice taking all the judgement of God. Any who are now 'in Christ' are forever safe. That is not to say that the fire of God's judgement no longer exists at all. Surely it does and for those that reject God's offer of salvation in Christ then for them the text will be fulfilled that 'it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God'. 'Vengeance is mine says the Lord and I will repay.'

Run and cling to the horns!

But praise God that this altar was also a place of refuge. Many in Israel's history fled to the altar when they thought they may die and grabbed hold of the horns. An example is recorded for us in [1 Kings 1:50](#). Adonijah, David's son, had wrongfully tried to exalt himself as king. If successful, he would likely have killed any other claimants to the throne. But when David exalted his son Solomon to the throne Adonijah ran for his life to the brazen altar as we stated in [1 Kings 1:50-53](#)

But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. ⁵¹ Then Solomon was told, "Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and is clinging to the horns of the altar. He says, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.' " Solomon replied, "If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die." Then King Solomon sent men, and they brought him down from the altar. And Adonijah came and bowed down to King Solomon, and Solomon said, "Go to your home."

So while the altar is a place of judgement and sacrifice, it is also a place of refuge. By grabbing hold of the horns of the altar Adonijah was saying in affect "I deserve to die for my sin. I deserve to be judged. I associate myself with those that are sacrificed on this altar in the hope that I may find mercy and have my sins forgiven." And mercy was found for Adonijah. Likewise for mankind today God is asking them to come to this altar, the cross, and associate themselves with the sacrifice that was made on their behalf nearly 2000 years ago. We grab hold of the horns so to speak, as we see that Christ was our substitute that day. He took the place that we deserved so that we can now find mercy and eternal life through the payment with His life that he made for our sin. Wonderful truth!

The Bronze Laver - Don't forget to wash

[Exodus 30:17-21](#) "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come."

[Exodus 38:8](#) "They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting."

As you moved forward through the tabernacle you would come to the bronze laver. This laver was for the priests to wash from before ministering at the altar or in the holy place. As you approach the laver and peer in you are faced with a horrible sight. Some would even say a ghastly sight (especially in the mornings!) As you peer into the laver you are faced with... yourself! You see the laver was made from the polished bronze that the women used for their mirrors. ([Ex 38:8](#))

So what was God trying to say here? We've got water, washing, and a bronze mirror. So what is likened to water and washing in scripture? What is likened to a mirror in scripture? I think you'll find that the answer is one and the

[4] same! What God was illustrating here was the constant need that we have of being washed with the water of His word. Now, I don't like just talking in Christianese jargon so what exactly does that last sentence actually mean in practise? As we live in this world, the ways and thoughts of the world rub off onto us just as the earth dirties your feet when you go walking. There is no real way of escaping it. God calls us to be in the world, but not of it. It is inevitable that wrong thinking and some wrong practices will rub off onto you as you associate with those that are not Christians. So how do we clean ourselves of this dirt? That is where the word of God comes in. As

you read the Bible it has a perpetual washing effect.^[5] As you read the thoughts of God and meditate on His ways it is like pouring water over those dirty feet and hands of yours.

The constant need to see yourself

So reading the word of God is like washing in water and purifying yourself from the wrong ideas, attitudes and thoughts that exist in the world. But that is not all. The bronze laver was also made from mirrors so that those who washed could see themselves. This is critical. If we are to progress anywhere in the Christian life we must come to see ourselves. If we are to minister to God or to His people we must know all too well the frailty and weakness that dwells within our own soul. Actually, that is too soft a description. The Bible says it like this:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

I'll say it again – you need to learn to see yourself and have the God given ability to discern the flesh, your old nature, at work. When you do that, you will then be able to judge yourself so that you are not judged (1 Cor 11:31). You will be able to acknowledge your faults instead of blaming others and say 'Yeah, that is me. That is what I am like in my old nature. It is thoroughly wicked and in that old nature dwells no good thing. But thank you Lord that there is forgiveness and cleansing in you. Thank you Lord that you have given me yourself to be in me what I am not. Thank you Lord that you have given me a new nature as well that longs for you and your ways!' And then, as you wash yourself with the truth once again you will then be in a position to minister to God or to His people just as the priests were only allowed to minister after washing at the bronze laver.

Conclusion

There were two items in the outer court that we have looked at – the brazen altar and the laver. Both were made from bronze to symbolise the judgement upon sin. The brazen altar reminded us of our need of a blood sacrifice that would take our place and experience the judgement that should have been ours. This had its fulfilment in the cross of Christ who dies for all sin. The next item, the laver, reminds us of an ongoing need to see ourselves as we truly are and to wash ourselves in His word. While this is not a requirement of salvation, it is crucial if we are to go on in this Christian life. And we do want to go on do we not? We want to go on to see Christ as our bread, our light and our life. These things we shall encounter as we enter the holy place which is the subject of the next study.

Bible Studies in the Tabernacle Series

[Jesus in the Tabernacle - An Introduction and Overview](#)
[Jesus in the Tabernacle - The Outer Court](#)
[Jesus in the Tabernacle - The Holy Place](#)
[Jesus in the Tabernacle - The Holy of Holies](#)

^[1] Remember when you were little, it was the middle of summer and your Mum hadn't purchased the key to the school pool? And what did you do when you wanted to have a swim? Well, you looked left and right and when no one was looking you jumped the fence didn't you? Well, you did if you were like me! The worst that could happen was maybe some voice yelling 'Hey, what do you think you are doing... get off there!' Well, with the tabernacle there was no jumping the fence. God Himself was the one who watched and EVERYTHING had to proceed as He had prescribed. There was only one way into His presence and that was through the single gate. Jump the fence and you may end up dead! Many today think that they can come to God in any way that they want. Even some within the church (and especially within the 'emergent church' movement) are moving more and more to be more inclusive of all faiths as if Jesus was wrong when He said that 'no one can come to the Father except through me'. Be careful to come to God in the way He has told us in His word, the Bible. Jesus said that on the day of judgement many will say did we not do this, and did we not do that in your name... and he will say 'depart from me, I never knew you'. Solemn words. These are people that thought they could come to God without going through the gate and participating at the brazen altar and laver. How wrong they were... and how grave were the consequences of not following God's command.

^[2] Of course, the gate, as mentioned earlier is Christ. He is the one who came down from heaven (blue). He is the royal king (purple). He is the one who gave His life as a blood sacrifice (scarlet). He was the only man that has ever been completely righteous (fine linen). If salvation was to be found you had to come through Christ. That was the picture God gave then, that is the reality for all now.

[3]

I have mentioned this illustration before but it is worth repeating. It was one of the first illustrations that spoke to the heart of H.A Ironside as he would later recall:

"One of the first gospel illustrations that ever made a real impression upon my young heart was a simple story that I heard a preacher tell when I was less than nine years old. It was of pioneers who were making their way across one of the central states to a distant place that had been opened up for homesteading. They travelled in covered wagons drawn by oxen, and progress was necessarily slow. One day they were horrified to note a long line of smoke in the west, stretching for miles across the prairie, and soon it was evident that the dried grass was burning fiercely, and was coming toward them rapidly. They had crossed a river the day before but it would be impossible to go back to that before the flames would be upon them. One man only seemed to have an understanding as to what should be done. He gave the command to set fire to the grass behind them. Then when a space was burned over, the whole company moved back upon it. As the flames roared on toward them from the west, a little girl cried out in terror. "Are you sure we shall not all be burned up?" The leader replied, "My child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been!"

On Him Almighty vengeance fell,
Which would have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus becomes our Hiding Place.

The fires of God's judgment burned themselves out on Him, and all who are in Christ are safe forever, for they are now standing where the fire has been.

[4]

A couple of scriptures for you to ponder...

[Eph 5:25-26](#) "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word"

[James 1:23-25](#) "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."

[5]

I really like the following words of advice from an old Pastor. A young believer went to his pastor and said 'It is no use! No matter how much I read the Bible, I don't retain anything of it. I'm like a sieve!' The wise old pastor replied 'Well, if you hold a sieve under a running tap, it's probably not going to retain much of the water either. But at least you'll have a clean sieve!' And that is so true. If you don't remember much of what you read, the word of God will still be active and you will be washed with the water of the word!