

Know the God of Scripture

Volume 1

Week 5: The Tabernacle - Answer Guide

Below is the answer guide for this week's lesson. By no means are the answers complete or the only possible responses to each question. They are a guide to fully understanding the intent of the questions posed.

1. Tabernacle in Hebrew is *mishkan* which means dwelling place or tent. It denotes the dwelling or settling of the Divine Presence of God. The Tabernacle was the model from which all three future temples were built. In the New Testament, especially in Hebrews 8, the Greek word for tabernacle is *skini* which is translated tent. In John 1:14 a unique version of *skini*, *episkinou* (“dwelt” or *tabernacled*), is used and is translated “to take up residence, to come to reside or to come to dwell” which is exactly what Jesus did. It is an eye-opening and interesting play on words.

2. The Ark of the Covenant constructed back in Exodus 25 is meticulously placed in the Holy of Holies along with its unique covering called the mercy seat or seat of atonement. It has two winged cherubim of gold facing opposite directions as if to protect what is inside the Ark. Inside the Ark of the Covenant Moses placed three items:

Ten commandments → God's Law
Aaron's Staff → God's Authority
Jar of Manna → God's Provisions

3. The Tabernacle, when completely erected according to God's instructions, always faced east (Numbers 3:38). It is very likely it faced east because that was where the gate of the Garden of Eden faced (Genesis 3:24). The cherubim sewn into the curtain at the entrance to the Tabernacle could have mimicked the cherubim God placed at the Garden of Eden. Later the prophet Ezekiel had a vision from the Temple where God's glory comes from the east (Ezekiel 43:1). Ezekiel 43 alludes to the glory of the coming Lord from the east which may be why the original Tabernacle entrance gate faced east. Many cultures during this time built their temples towards the east mainly because they worshipped the Sun as a god.

4. Table of Shewbread – Placed on the north side table were 12 loaves of unleavened bread representing the 12 tribes of Israel, called the Bread of Presence (1 Samuel 21:6; 1 Kings 7:48). Presence was used for “face” as in “my face will go before you” (Exodus 33:14-15) usually as an Old Testament designation of the Messiah. It was a symbol to remind the Israelites of God's provisions.

The Menorah was placed on the south side table and continuously kept lit by priests. It had one main stem with six supporting branches, three on each side. Seven, in Hebrew, symbolizes completion. It could point to Jesus as He is the light of the world (John 8:12) and the vine from which branches (John 15:1-4) are fed. It was also the only source of Light in the Holy Place.

The altar of incense was placed on the east side before the entrance to the Holy of Holies. There it burned with continuous incense by priests. Incense symbolizes prayers and communion with God. It may be a symbol of Jesus interceding for His saints like Moses did for Israel.

5. The High Priest and his subordinates were responsible for the assembly, disassembly and functioning of the Tabernacle. They were instructed to wear holy garments or attire. The ephod, or apron garment worn by the High Priest, was made with blue, purple, scarlet and white linen. This represented heaven, royalty, redemption and purity respectively. On each shoulder piece was a precious stone. Six names were written on each stone naming

the 12 tribes. The breastplate was square and embroidered in gold containing the urim and thummim, stones used for divine guidance. The breastplate contained 12 stones for the 12 tribes. The blue robe had a hem of pomegranate motifs. The turban had a golden crown engraved with HOLY TO THE LORD.

6. *Shekinah*, in Hebrew, means divine presence. It actually is not in the Bible but was fabricated by Christians to explain the glory of God that was present with the Israelites when they left Egypt in the form of a cloud in the day and fiery pillar by night (Exodus 13:21-22). It is also referenced to be the glory of God that shone above the mercy seat atop the Ark of the Covenant (Leviticus 16:2) and later in the Temple built by Solomon (Ezekiel 10:4, 18).

7. The tabernacle is a beautiful visual of the path to approach a holy, just and righteous God. To enter into the presence of God, who resided in the Holy of Holies, one must first enter the only gate accessible. This points to Jesus as the only way to come to the Father (John 14:6). Entering the tabernacle, they had to bring an acceptable sacrifice for their sin. Next, they gave their sacrifice to the priest for slaughter and draining of blood symbolizing the atonement of sin (Matthew 26:28). After the sacrifice they were washed at the laver, which symbolizes believer's baptism and filling of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Next, they enter the Holy Place (reference above question about what's in the Holy Place) where, before the Holy of Holies, they offer up prayers. Finally, they enter the Holy of Holies, the presence of God, clothed in the Robe of Righteousness.

8. There is only one opening to the Tabernacle which represents the fact that there is only one way to God and that is through the blood of Jesus (John 14:6). Reference above steps to move into the Holy of Holies. Every aspect of the Tabernacle's construction in some way points to the holiness of God and the coming atonement of the Messiah.

9. When the author of Hebrews, and other New Testament books, uses the word "shadow" he is inferring a reference to Platonic thought. According to Plato what we perceive as reality is merely a shadow of the real substance (or form) in a higher utopia (heaven to Christians). The Tabernacle is not only a picture of Christ's atoning sacrifice and our way to salvation, but a glimpse into the heavens and God's presence. It is interesting that God instructed Moses how to build the tabernacle (dimensions, materials used and placement), but not the Temple(s). They were constructed to replicate the tabernacle's form.

Additional Questions:

1. The Tabernacle points to communion or fellowship with God. God is unapproachable Light (1 John 1:5; 1 Timothy 6:16). Man must be forgiven, cleansed and clothed in order to approach Him. The Tabernacle displays the process of communing with God.

2. The "copy" the Hebrew writer alludes to is just that. It's a copy of the "real" form of the Tabernacle that is in heaven. It is a picture of the real throne of God believers will one day be able to approach in praise and worship of the Father.

3. The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (or Sukkot in Hebrew) is one of the feasts the Israelites were instructed to observe on an annual basis (Leviticus 23). It is one of the three pilgrimage festivals the Israelites were commanded to observe in Jerusalem (Exodus 23:17). It takes place on Tishri 15 (in the Fall) according to the Hebrew calendar. It was instituted to remind the Jews of their desert wandering when God called them out of Egypt. It is still celebrated today, except the use of tents to dwell in during the feast has diminished somewhat.

