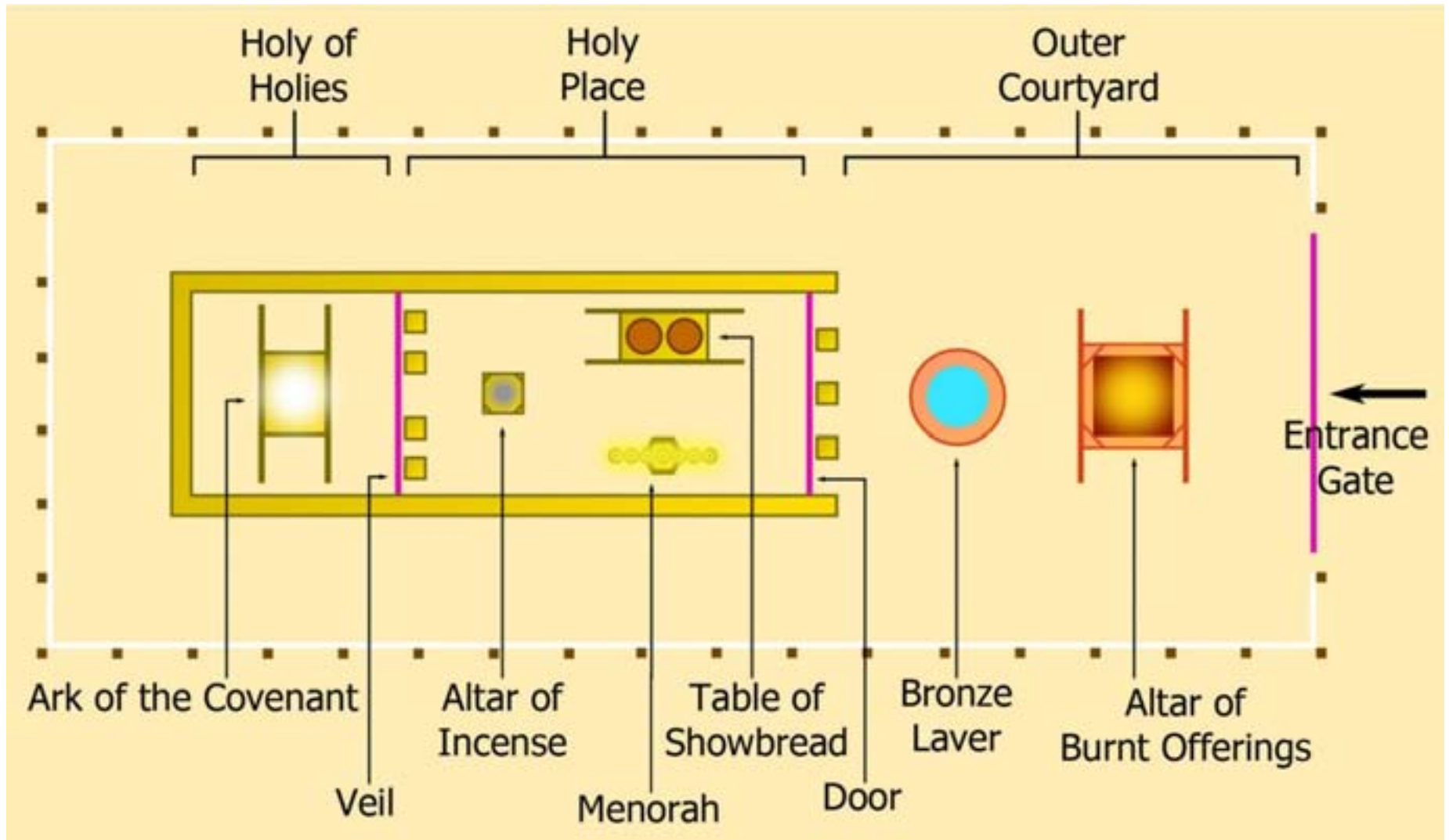




# The Tabernacle: God's Presence with His People

Images & Text from Exhibits that  
accompanied a Sermon Series based on  
Exodus 25-40 taught by Bernard Bell  
2016 - 2019

*"Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?' And the LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.'" Exodus 33:15-17*



The Layout of the Tabernacle and Courtyard

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## Introduction

In a series of three month-long sermon sets in 2016 – 2018 titled, *The Tabernacle: God's Presence with His People*, Bernard Bell taught from Exodus 25:1–34:9; from March 17 – April 14 of this year, 2019, he will complete this series as he focuses on Exodus 34:10-40:38. The chapters of Exodus preceding chapter 25 describe Israel's deliverance from harsh slavery in Egypt and their difficult two-month journey through the desert, arriving on the first day of the third month at the foot of Mount Sinai. They had witnessed God's power and supremacy over Egypt's gods and military in the miracles that He – through His intermediaries Moses and Aaron – performed on their behalf. They came to know of God's holiness and glory through the faith of their leader Moses and experienced His caring provision during their journey when He provided water and food.

While they were camped in the desolate terrain at the base of Mount Sinai, God descended onto the mountain and spoke aloud with Moses, so the people could hear and their trust in Moses be strengthened. Terrified by the earth-shaking signs accompanying God's arrival, they begged Moses to meet alone with God and then relay His words to them. Accordingly, Moses went up the mountain and stayed there for forty days as God gave him the law by which they were to live, and the instructions for building the tent in which His Presence would dwell among them.

## Part 1. *Exodus 25:1-31:18*: God's Blueprint for His Dwelling Place

The following photographs are of a life-size model of the tabernacle that dwells in the Negev Desert in Israel; its design and construction follow as accurately as possible the blueprint given by God.

## The Tabernacle and Courtyard



This photograph depicts the desolate terrain the Israelite people were camped in as they awaited Moses' return from his time with God on Mount Sinai, and in which the tabernacle would later be constructed. The tabernacle would sit inside a large compound (150" by 75") bounded by a fence approximately 7' in height. The fence was to be made of curtains of fine twisted linen, supported by posts having silver hooks and bands and secured in bronze bases. The one entrance to the compound would face east, and have a curtain of fine twisted linen, and blue purple, and scarlet yarn – the work of an embroiderer. Four curtains would stretch over and protect the roof and walls. The innermost layer would be woven with fine linen and embroidered with cherubim, the second layer of goat's hair, the third of rams' skins dyed red, and the last of a durable leather.

## The Tabernacle Courtyard

God's instructions describe one entrance through the white fence into the **courtyard**; the colored curtain of this entrance can be seen in the previous photograph. The altar of burnt offering and the bronze laver were to be placed between the entrance curtain and the curtain covering the entrance to the tabernacle tent, as seen in the next image.



The **altar of burnt offering** would be used for the sacrifice of rams, lambs, bulls and other animals. God required that the fire for these offerings never be allowed to go out. The altar was to be made from wood from the acacia tree overlaid with bronze, and all its utensils (pots to remove the ashes, shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks, and firepans) were also to be made of bronze.

The following image focuses on the **bronze laver**, a large bowl that would be filled with spring water, set on a bronze stand. Whenever the priests entered the tabernacle tent or approached the altar to present a food offering to the Lord, they were to wash their hands and feet. This was commanded by the Lord so that they would be pure and not die before the holy God.

This photo also shows the five posts at the entrance to the tent, to be made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and set on bronze bases. Behind them would hang "a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen." Extending out from the side of the tent would be the four layers of curtain covering the tent. The innermost layer, to be made from linen "and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into them", and the waterproof outermost layer are also visible here. Inconspicuous and dull in color, this outermost layer was to be made from a durable leather, alternatively translated as being from porpoise or badger skins. (Exodus 26)



## The Holy Place



The curtains at the entrance to the tabernacle tent would open into the **Holy Place**, accessible only to Priests. The walls of the tabernacle would be made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and anchored in silver bases. The curtain forming the visible ceiling, seen here in the model, would be the innermost layer of the four layers of curtain that were to cover the roof and sides of the tabernacle. A **curtain (or veil)**, seen in this photo at the far end of the Holy Place, would guard the entrance to the innermost room of the tabernacle - the Holy of Holies - and its contents. It was to be made of finely twisted linen, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into it.

Along the right wall would be placed the table holding the **Bread of The Presence**, also called showbread. The table was to be made from acacia wood overlaid with gold, and the showbread made of fine wheat flour.

God commanded that each Sabbath, the twelve loaves, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, were to be replaced with fresh ones.

Along the left wall would stand the **Menorah**, the seven-branched lampstand. Along with its tongs and trays, it was to be hammered out of one piece of pure gold. It would have a central branch from which three branches extend on each side; each of the seven branches fashioned to look like flowering branches of an almond tree. A lamp holding olive oil and a wick would rest on top of each of the seven branches. Every morning, the priests were to remove the lamps, trim the wicks and replenish the oil, so they could be lit in the evening to burn through the night; they would be the only source of light in the tabernacle tent.



Sitting directly in front of the curtain would be the **Altar of Incense**, to be made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, upon which the priests would burn incense every morning and every evening when they attended to the lamps of the menorah. The recipe for this sacred incense called for a mix of finely-ground spices – gum resin, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense. The aroma of sweet-smelling spices that would fill the tabernacle tent and the air around it would also contain the scent of the sacred anointing oil to be used to sanctify the tent and its contents, as well as the priests. Its recipe contained myrrh, sweet-smelling cinnamon, sweet-smelling cane, and cassia, blended in olive oil. Both perfumes were to be prepared by skillful perfumers, the recipes for them reserved solely for use in the tabernacle, and anyone who used the same recipe for other uses would be severely punished.

### The Holy of Holies



The innermost room of the tabernacle would be the Holy of Holies; only the High Priest would be permitted to enter the Holy of Holies – and only once a year on Atonement Day. Hidden from the Holy Place by the veil, this inner room would contain the **Ark of the Covenant**, a chest made of acacia wood overlaid inside and out with pure gold. Along the sides of the chest were to be two gold-covered acacia wood poles to be used to carry the ark when the Israelites moved their camp. God called the lid for the ark the Atonement Cover (or Mercy Seat) and directed that a cherub would sit at each of its two ends. The cherubim would face each other, with their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover. God told Moses, *“There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”* (Exodus 25:22)



The ark would hold the stone tablets of the covenant law given to Moses by God, a gold jar of manna, and Aaron’s staff that had budded. (Exodus 25:21; Hebrews 9:4)



## The Garments for the Priests

God also gave Moses instructions concerning the garments the priests should wear when serving Him in His Tabernacle (Exodus 28). The model of the garments shown in this photograph were created by Robin Haney.

The item of clothing that would lay closest to the priest's body was the white tunic, woven of fine linen, under which the priest was to wear linen undergarments that reached from the waist to the thigh. Directly over the tunic, would be the blue robe of the ephod, its hem decorated with alternating gold bells and fabric pomegranates. Exodus 28:35 says of the bells, *"The sound of the bells will be heard when (Aaron) enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die."* Over the blue robe would be the ephod itself, striped with gold, blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen, and tied with a sash. On each of the ephod's two shoulder pieces would be an onyx stone engraved with the names of six of the sons of Israel, and the breastplate for making decisions was to be attached to it with braided chains of pure gold. On the ephod were to be mounted four rows of precious stones: carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, turquoise, lapis lazuli, emerald, jacinth, agate, amethyst, topaz, onyx, and jasper, each engraved with one of the names of the sons of Israel. In this way, the priest would bear the names of the sons of Israel on both his shoulders and over his heart, as a memorial before the Lord. (Ex. 28:12, 29) Inside the breastplate would be a pouch holding the Urim and Thummim. The priest would wear a turban of fine linen upon which would be fastened a plate of gold bearing the words, HOLY TO THE LORD.

When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on Atonement Day, he was commanded to carry a censer. Before entering he was to put hot coals into it, and upon entering the Holy of Holies, throw ground incense on the coals so that the resulting smoke would hide the atonement cover where God dwelt. To see God would mean certain death.

## Part II. Exodus 32:1-34:9: Will God Go With Us?

Exodus 24:18 tells us that Moses was gone from the Israelite camp for forty days and forty nights while he received from God these instructions for building this tent in which His Presence would dwell among His people Israel and the Law by which they were to live. During these forty long days and nights, the people were camped in the desolate wilderness at the base of the fearsome cloud-covered mountain that had seemingly swallowed Moses. Exodus 32:1-6 relates that near the end of this time, *“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’”* Exodus 32:7-33:16 describe God’s angry responses to their turning from Him to idol-worship and the dark days during which they experienced God’s punishment of them and the likelihood that He Himself would not live and travel with them. They slowly came to realize their need for this Almighty God, and Chapters 33:12-34:9 relate God’s declaration of His pleasure with Moses and His decision to dwell among His people.

The photographs and artwork that follow explore the experiences and responses of Israel’s people during the events of this time.

### Exodus 32:1 – The People Turn Away from the LORD

Moses had been gone for forty days in his meeting with God on Mount Sinai. During this time, the people were camped in a barren desert landscape at the edge of a fearsome cloud-darkened mountain. They demanded of Aaron, *“Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”* What moved them to make this blasphemous request – just three months after experiencing God’s miraculous acts

freeing them from Egypt? Perhaps they were feeling abandoned and left to fend for themselves in a hostile environment, seeing only their immediate earthly needs and forgetting their heavenly Deliverer?



*This photograph of Feather Peak was taken by Tom Carr in the Bear Lakes area of the John Muir Wilderness. Tom says, “Bear Lakes rest atop the rocky plateau of Mono Divide in the Sierra Nevada and are approached only by cross-country routes; there are no trails that access the area. Our last visit to the Divide included daily thunderstorms that at dusk lifted to reveal the shrouded peaks. The color on the rocky faces add contrast to the barren appearance of the foreground giving a sense of more distance from the observer to the peak, much like the Israelites may have felt wondering what happened to Moses.”*



## Exodus 32:1-8, 15-19 - Moses Returns

After waiting many days for Moses to return from the mountain, the people of Israel demanded that Aaron make gods to lead them. Aaron made a golden calf from their gold jewelry and they held a festival to worship it, sacrificing offerings and partying. God saw what they were doing, told Moses, and sent him back, carrying the two tablets of the covenant law. *“They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets...When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.”*



*This photograph by Tom Carr shows the Isberg Pass, and the Merced and Triple Divide Peaks of Yosemite National Park. Tom: “This scene is perched between two mountain passes and looks out over the headwaters of the Merced River Canyon in Yosemite, some thirty miles by foot to the floor of Yosemite Valley. When I came across these broken, tilted stones I immediately thought of the tablets Moses cast aside to the ground in anger at the Israelites as he came down from meeting God on Mount Sinai.”*

## Exodus 32:7-14, 33:1-6 - Will God Go With Us?

When God saw that the people were worshipping an idol - the golden calf - He declared that He would destroy them. Moses pleaded with God and, *"Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened."* (32:9-14) Moses came down the mountain, and the people were punished for their idolatry. When he returned up the mountain, God informed him that He would keep His promises to Abraham to bring his descendants to Canaan, but an angel would accompany and lead them, not God Himself. Upon hearing that God would not go with them, the people *"...began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments."* Mount Sinai, where God had been meeting with Moses and from which He had spoken to them may have seemed more distant and darker as they felt God withdrawing from them.



*In this photograph, Tom Carr shows Dusty Basin, and the Isosceles & Palisade Peaks in King's Canyon National Park. Tom: "At the southern end of Dusty Basin looms the impressive Palisade Range with multiple peaks over 13,000' and some of the few glacial remnants in the Sierra. A late afternoon storm brought contrasting light and dark to the peaks, causing me to wonder how the prospect of losing God's presence may have felt to the wandering Israelites."*

Exodus 33:12-23 – Blaze of Glory



**Blaze of Glory**

Tom Carr:  
*Photograph of  
Bean Hollow State  
Beach, Pescadero,  
California*

After telling the people that God would not live with them, Moses met again with the LORD. Moses convinced God to change His mind with the question, “How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?” Moses then asked

to see His glory, to which the LORD answered, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence...but, you cannot see my face...” Tom Carr: “We cannot look directly at the sun without harming our eyes. Moses could not look directly at God on Mt Sinai without dying. (But) God provided a way for him to experience His glory.” He placed Moses in a cleft in a rock, covering

him with His hand until He passed by. When God lifted His hand, Moses looked and saw His back, blazing with glory. Kathy Woodward calls this, “...a remarkable story of God’s Holy Majesty, but also His Mercy!” Tom’s brilliant photograph gives a sense of that moment – a photograph captured after careful planning, “I sat behind this rock just outside the surf line for some time waiting for the sun to be at the right angle to catch the diffracting rays of the sun.”



**Cleft of the  
Rock**

Kathy  
Woodward:  
*Transparent  
watercolor,  
with highlights  
of white  
opaque water-  
based media to  
create texture,  
emphasis, and  
interest*

### Part III. *Exodus 34:10-40:38*: God's Presence Enters the Tabernacle

In the final chapters of Exodus, Israel created the tabernacle following God's instructions, and when they were done, *"Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the LORD had commanded. So Moses blessed them."* (Exodus 39:43) Then Moses, commanded by God, on the first day of the first month in the second year since leaving Egypt set up the tabernacle with its furnishings and courtyard, *"And so Moses finished the work."* (Exodus 40:33). And then God entered His dwelling to live among them. *"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle...In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until it lifted."* (Exodus 40:36-37)

Bernard Bell's sermons can be found at <https://pbcc.org/sermon-archive/>. In the "Preacher" box, choose "Bernard Bell"; in the "Series" box, choose "The Tabernacle: God's Presence with His People".

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Photographs shown in Part II: Tom Carr

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