

THE OUTER COURT: WASHING AND SACRIFICE

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Lesson: Exodus 27

The Tabernacle had a golden inner chamber cloaked in darkness, called the Holy of Holies. In that chamber was the Ark of the Testimony where the Ten Commandments were.

In the next room, called the Holy Place, was the table of shewbread, the lampstand, and the altar of incense. Imagine a beautiful table covered with gold; and on that table, golden dishes, most precious, filled with the very best bread and oil as a gift to the Lord. Then picture in your mind the high priest taking from the altar of incense, the censer—a bowl that hung from chains—and swinging it back and forth in the Tabernacle. Imagine the bells on the hem of the priest's garment jingling as he moved from place to place, and the sweet smell of the incense burning in the bowl, rising up and filling the whole Tabernacle with its gentle perfume. And, over everything in the Holy Place, imagine a soft light shed from the oil lamps on the golden lampstand. Was this not a beautiful way for the Children of Israel to show their love to the Lord?

Now the Tabernacle had a third part, not so beautiful or precious, but still very interesting and important. This third place was called the outer court. It had no roof, so we call it a court or courtyard instead of a room. It went all around the tent of the Tabernacle. Around it was a fence made of high curtains, higher than a person's head. When the Children of Israel came to the gate of the court with an offering, they could see in through the beautifully embroidered gate. But the rest of the time, everything that went on inside was closed off from their sight. The Tabernacle was holy, and the people did not just look in any time they wanted. In the same way, we don't handle the Word just any time; we use it only for study and worship. So, too, the Children of Israel saw into the court when they had come to worship, and only then.

Now, in that outer court was a very large basin made of shining brass, called the laver. It contained a large amount of water, so that the priests could wash themselves. They always washed before offering a sacrifice, or before they went into the rooms of the Tabernacle. We wash ourselves and put on special clothes for church for the same reason, because then we are coming before the Lord. And you know, we should try to wash our minds too, to make them clean. We must try to get rid of all our bad thoughts when we come to worship the Lord. And we must not let our minds wander when we hear a story from the Word,

but instead we should make worship a special time when we listen carefully and try to learn all we can, like the Children of Israel coming before the gate.

Besides the laver or the brass basin, right in front of the gate, was the altar of burnt offering. It was made of wood overlaid with brass. (It was not made of gold like the altar of incense, because that altar was very special and in the Holy Place.) The Children of Israel brought their offerings to this high brass altar, the very best things they had. These things, usually animals, were burnt upon the altar, as a sign of how much the people loved the Lord. Now we don't have such offerings anymore, but because everything about the Tabernacle had a special meaning, we can certainly learn something about how we should serve the Lord when we think of one of the Children of Israel bringing the best animal from his flock to give to the Lord.

So, then, there were three separate sections to the Tabernacle. Try to picture them: the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the outer court. The outer court is just like outer things in our own lives. If we are really going to wash ourselves, we must try to make everything we do clean and pure. And if we are really going to make an offering to the Lord, we must be willing to give up our selfish desires, give up some of the things we want to do, so that we can serve the Lord. And this is just why the Children of Israel had furniture for washing and making offerings in the outer court of the Tabernacle.

Because this outer court means our outer or external lives, everything there was made of brass, less important and precious than the gold of the inner two chambers. For brass means external good, the kind of thing we can do for each other every day.

After telling us all about the outer court, the Word said that there should be oil to cause the lamp to burn always. The light of the lampstand was never to be put out—night and day there was to be the fire of oil burning in the lamps. If we obey the Lord, we will bring the oil of love to Him and He will help us keep the light of truth burning in our minds. We must always remember what He says, keeping it inside our hearts so that, day or night, at any time in our lives, the Lord will always be there as a fire giving light to show us the way. And always, inmost, as in the Holy of Holies, the Lord will be present in His Word, just as He was present in the Ten Commandments inside the Ark.

So, let us keep washing our lives, and bringing the offerings of them to the Lord. If we do this, obeying Him whenever and wherever in this world we find ourselves, our lives will become a glorious Tabernacle dedicated to the Lord God.

The tent of meeting represented the three heavens, its court the lowest or first heaven; the tent itself as far as the veil, wherein were

the tables for the loaves, the altar of incense, and the lamp-stand, represented the middle or second heaven; and the ark which was within the veil, upon which was the mercy seat with the cherubim, represented the inmost or third heaven; and the law itself which was in the ark represented the Lord in relation to Divine truth or the Word; and because there is conjunction with the Lord by means of the Word, that ark was called 'the ark of the Covenant,' 'covenant' signifying conjunction (Apocalypse Explained 700).