

Designed by God, Built by Man

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Parashah Tetzaveh

Torah: Shemot/Exodus 27:20-30:10

Haftarah: Yechezk'el/Ezekiel 43:10-27

*“...or don't you know that your body is a temple
for the Ruach HaKodesh who lives inside you...” (1Corinthians 6:19)*

As we have read about the design for the tabernacle and the priestly garments, these past two weeks, the thought may have crossed your mind that it would be nice if such a thing existed today. It does. In fact, it is closer than you think. You look at it every day when you look in the mirror. It is you.

“We know that when the tent (tabernacle) which houses us here on earth is torn down, we have a permanent building (temple) from God, a building not made by human hands, to house us in heaven. For in this tent, our earthly body, we groan with desire to have around us the home from heaven that will be ours...” (1Corinthians 5:1-10)

Some understand this to simply mean that God dwells in believers as He did in the tabernacle and the temple, and that is as far as the analogy goes. However, God said we are a temple, not just a Holy of Holies, which is where God actually dwelled. Just as there are many parts to the body, so there are many parts to the tabernacle and the temple, thus the analogy is much more extensive than what we may think. (For convenience, I will only refer to the tabernacle for the remainder of the lesson, but for the most part, whatever is true of the tabernacle also applies to the temple, unless otherwise noted) Notice that in God's design for the tabernacle, He starts with the Holy of Holies, and the design spreads out from there. This is because the Holy of Holies is the central, most important, and most sacred part of the tabernacle. This is where God dwelled, and even the High Priest could only enter once a year, and completely without sin, or he would die on the spot. Why was this place so sacred? It housed the Ark of the Covenant, which itself contained the Torah. This was what made Israel the Children of God. It was central to their lives as God's people and their relationship with Him. Without it, God was unable to dwell in their midst. (1Ki.6:12-13) The Hebrew word for covenant is, bereeth, which is a compact made by passing between two *cut* pieces of meat. The Hebrew word for circumcision, which is the sign of the covenant comes from the word muwl, which means, “to cut.” Now let's look at the New Covenant.

*“For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says
Adonai: ‘I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts...’”
(Yirmeyahu/Jer.31:32)*

The Hebrew word which is translated heart, is qereb, which means, “inner parts.” Rather than referring to the heart, inner parts actually refers to the bowels, which includes the loins and the womb. It makes sense, then, that the sign of the covenant would be placed on a man's “inner part”. Why? Just before giving the New Covenant, God declares himself to be the husband of Israel. In a marriage

covenant, a husband puts his “seed” in his wife’s “inner parts” where it grows within her womb into new life, a child. The word for seed in Hebrew, zera, also means child, and fruit. What is the “fruit” which grows in the “womb” of the believer?

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self control. Nothing in Torah stands against such things.” (Galations 5:22-23)

By the way, the Hebrew word for womb is racham, which is considered the center of love and compassion, not the heart. This imagery gives us a perfect analogy to describe the center of our life as the Bride of Messiah. Is it no wonder that Ha Satan has taken human sexuality and corrupted it so severely in our world? We should not avoid our sexuality as something dirty, nor should we exploit it as an idol for our own desires. It ought to be respected more than any other part of our body, for it is the Holy of Holies.

Next is the Table of Shewbread or the Presence. This is paneh, which refers to the face, countenance, and favor. Having God’s favor was of utmost importance to Israel. (Ex.33:13-16) It meant God was with them, and success was theirs. It did not matter where God led them, as long as they were always living in His presence.

“Let’s come into His presence with thanksgiving; let’s shout for joy to Him with songs of praise.” (Tehillim/Ps.95:2)

It is thought by the rabbis that the bread on the altar was just as fresh, warm and steaming even, when it was changed out at the end of the week, as when it was first put on the table. Our countenance ought to always be fresh and warm, reflecting the joy and peace that God has put in our inner parts. Then we come to the menorah. This Hebrew word comes from the word, menowr, which is a farming term, which means to yoke. The Hebrew word for yoke is tzav’varah which refers to the neck and back as the place where burdens are bound and carried. Think about when you are stressed out and what usually hurts the most, and this will make sense to you. It is no accident that the menorah is beaten into its shape. Life is difficult and there is much for us to endure under the yoke of godliness, but every trial is intended to shape us into the vessel God wants us to be.

“Do not let grace and truth leave you – bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and esteem in the sight of God and of people. (Mishlei/Pr.3:3-4)

The purpose of the menorah was to create light. Despite the affliction the menorah itself stood for, it also gave light, which is a symbol of joy and cheer. The menorah as a whole is a symbol of perseverance, joy in the midst of adversity. The sweet oil of the Ruach HaKodesh is what allows us to do this.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Likewise, when people light a lamp, they don’t cover it with a bowl, but put it on a lampstand, so that it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.” (Mattityahu/Mt.5:14-16)

Then there are the tabernacle coverings of white linen, leather, and ram skin. Blue, scarlet, and purple were the colors. Much artistry and skill went into these coverings. Many of the Hebrew words for the materials relate to strength and majesty. The colors relate to purity, wealth, glory, honor, and beauty. We see the same symbols and colors in the High Priest's garments. There is value in beauty as well as strength. One should not be without the other. It should be noted that though Israel had both a tabernacle and a temple, which was much more grand and pleasing to look at, God's original design was for the tabernacle. He never gave instructions for the temple. That was King Shlomo's design, and gift to God, which He accepted. God worked within the resources and practical abilities of Israel when they were in the wilderness. He did not give them the design for the temple and tell them to get as close to it as they could. Building the tabernacle took sacrifice and work, but was very attainable. Though beauty and strength have value to God, His expectations, unlike our culture's, is realistic.

*"Charm can lie, beauty can vanish but a woman who fears Adonai should be praised."
(Mishlei/Pr.31:30) (don't forget, we all are the Bride of Messiah)*

This brings us to the altar. Here is where the majority of the sacrifices were made. A sacrifice was a qurban, which means, "to draw close." The purpose of bringing an offering to the altar was to have your sins atoned for (covered over) by the blood of the sacrifice so that you could draw closer to God.

"I exhort you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for God. This will please Him; it is the logical 'temple worship' for you. In other words, do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the 'olam hazeh'. Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what God wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed." (Romans 12:1-2)

The Hebrew word for mind is nephesh, which refers to breath or breathing. It is used to describe the spirit, soul, mind, heart, intellect, emotions, and many other aspects of our being which make us tick. It is life. According to Scripture, life is in the blood. Blood is shed on the altar to give the offerer new life. The blood of Messiah was shed on a vertical altar so His bride could have life everlasting. We become living sacrifices to bring that life to the world around us.

Finally, the tabernacle was surrounded by a courtyard, which was separated from the rest of the encampment of Israel by a fence. The Hebrew word for fence is suwr, which means to shut in and protect.

"You clothed me with skin and flesh, you knit me together (fenced me in) with bones and sinews." (Iyov/Job 10:11)

Our skin encloses our internal organs and protects them. The fence for the courtyard protected the tabernacle, and also separated it from everything else in Israel. Within the fence, the ground was holy. Adam was made from such ground and set apart for service to God.

This concludes the design for the tabernacle itself. Now we will go to the next parashah to talk about the priest's garments. The tabernacle was the house of God, and where the priests performed their duties to God. Our body is also the dwelling place of God and what we use in our duties as priests of God. As we discuss the garments of the high priest, we are no longer talking about the body itself, but the character and duties of the believer as well as the Messiah Himself. As mentioned earlier, the garments were meant to bring dignity and splendor to the priest. He maintained a balance between beauty and strength, not only in his garments, but in the way he lived his life.

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you set in place – what are mortals, that you concern yourself with them; humans, that you watch over them with such care? You made him but a little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor, you had him rule what your hands made,..."

(Tehillim/Ps.8:3-6)

Sometimes, we forget who we are and our value to God. A person ought to always be approached with respect and dignity, because each person is a human being made in the image of God. To disrespect a person, especially a child of God, is to throw dirt in the face of the God who made him or her. The breastplate is choshen, which is a pocket meant to contain the Urim and Thummim, along with the gemstones that represented the tribes of Israel. The names of the tribes of Israel were also written on the onyx stones on the shoulder of the high priest. The high priest (cohen hagadol) was an intermediary between God and Man. He bore the burdens of Israel (thus the names on his shoulder) and worked to bring either a full pardon or at least a lesser sentence for God's people. The names were also close to his heart, his altar. The life of the priest was one of sacrifice for the people. He was both a servant of God and a servant of the people.

"...Have the belt of truth buckled around your waist, put on righteousness for a breastplate..." (Ephesians 6:14)

Righteousness involves blamelessness before both God and Man. The Urim (lights) and the Thummim (perfections) worked with the gems in the breastplate to enable the cohen hagadol to communicate with God and judge between right and wrong and the will of God. In rabbinic writings it is believed the gemstones actually lit up in different patterns which the cohen could decipher to receive messages from God.

"If we claim to have fellowship with him while we are walking in the darkness, we are lying and not living out the truth. But if we are walking in the light, as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of his Son Yeshua purifies us from all sin." (1Yochanan/Jn.1:6-7)

One way or another, following the light of God will lead to righteousness, truth, and holiness. So what is that light?

"Your word is a lamp for my foot and light on my path." (Tehillim/Ps.119:105)

In the front of the turban, and on the forehead of the cohen hagadol, was a sign which read, "Set apart for God". The sign was not meant to be a reminder to the cohen, but to everyone else of his authority over them. This also enabled God to accept the gifts the cohen provided on behalf of the people. This sign ought to remind us of another sign, "King of the Jews" which hung above Messiah and served the same purpose.

"Therefore, since we have a great cohen gadol who passed through to the highest heaven, Yeshua, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we acknowledge as true."
(Hebrews 4:14)

We are a priesthood, but Yeshua is the Cohen Hagadol. He sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for His people to this day. Our body is a tabernacle, we are priests, but our authority still comes from the Great High Priest, our Messiah.

There is one piece to the tabernacle which has not been discussed yet. I didn't forget it. It isn't described until the end of this week's parashah. It is the altar of incense. This was not an altar for making animal sacrifices, but for creating a pleasant aroma for God. A special combination of spices and herbs were combined with a plant which contains nitric acid. Today, among other things, we use nitric acid to make rocket fuel. This provided the column of smoke that rose up to God. Here is where God met with the Cohen Hagadol in the morning and the evening. This meeting was an appointment. It can be best thought of as a court trial. Intercession was made here for the people, but most importantly there was communion between God and Man. Also, the Hebrew word for aroma comes from nuwach which means, "to rest".

Why was this piece of the tabernacle saved for last? Why was it not included with the rest of the furnishings? I'm sure there are many answers to this, but here is one. After the covenant has been established, which includes the Torah, the bread has been placed on the table, the menorah has been lit, the sacrifices have been made on the altar, and the duties of the priest have been accomplished, what is the intended result? What else, but communion and rest with God.

"They are to make me a sanctuary, so that I may live among them." (Shemot/Ex.25:8)