

# A Very Simple Survey of the Old Testament

*Sunday School Lessons — by Keith R. Blades*

## Lesson 30: Building God's House — Exodus 25–40

*Comprehension Questions & Answers*

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### PART ONE

#### **Q1. Who designed the tabernacle, and why was it so important that Moses follow the blueprint exactly?**

**Answer:** God Himself designed the tabernacle and gave the exact blueprint to Moses (Exodus 25:8-9) — even repeating the instruction to follow the pattern precisely in verse 40. This was critical because the tabernacle was not merely a house but a 'house with meaning.' Every detail of its design, structure, and furnishings was chosen by God to express something He wanted to communicate to Israel. Just as people design their own homes to express something about themselves, God designed His tabernacle to express something about Himself and to make Israel realize something true about themselves.

#### **Q2. What were the three main areas that made up the complete tabernacle complex, and what were their approximate sizes?**

**Answer:** The complete 'house' consisted of three areas: (1) the outer court — a large rectangular enclosure measuring approximately 150 feet by 75 feet; (2) the Holy Place — the larger of the two rooms inside the tabernacle proper, which opened out onto the court; and (3) the Most Holy Place, also called the Holiest of All — the smaller inner room. The tabernacle proper itself measured approximately 45 feet long by 15 feet wide.

#### **Q3. What separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, and why was the Most Holy Place the most important room?**

**Answer:** The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were separated by a veil — a special curtain. The Most Holy Place was the most important room in the entire tabernacle because it was the specific place where God said He would dwell. While the whole tabernacle was considered His house, the Holiest of All was the particular spot where He would actually be present — set apart from every other area of the tabernacle.

#### **Q4. What was the Ark of the Covenant, what was stored inside it, and what was unusual about it as a piece of furniture?**

**Answer:** The Ark of the Covenant was literally a coffin — a casket — making it a 'casket for the covenant.' Inside it were the two stone tablets on which the Law contract between God and Israel was written (Exodus 25:10-22). What was so unusual about it was that God had Israel build a coffin for His own Law contract. A casket speaks of death, and this testified that the Law contract could only condemn Israel and declare that what they deserved from God on the basis of their own performance was death.

**Q5. What was the 'mercy seat,' what did it look like, and what was significant about its name and placement?**

**Answer:** The mercy seat was the covering on top of the Ark of the Covenant, made of pure gold. On either end stood two golden cherubim angels with their wings stretched out over it and their faces turned toward one another, looking down toward the center (Exodus 25:17-21). God Himself gave this covering the special name 'mercy seat' — a name which stood in deliberate contrast to the coffin beneath it. It sat in the Most Holy Place, the very room where God dwelled, making it the most significant piece of furniture in all of the tabernacle.

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## PART TWO

### **Q1. What was the main message God designed the tabernacle to communicate to Israel, and how did it differ from the way we think of our own homes?**

**Answer:** Unlike our homes — which have 'welcome mats' and invite people in freely — the tabernacle was designed to communicate to Israel that they were NOT welcome in God's presence. Its entire structure, furnishings, and activities declared that a serious problem existed between Israel and God: the problem of sin. Israel thought of herself as pretty good and specially chosen for her own merit, but the tabernacle was God's constant teaching device in her midst to show her she was a sinner who desperately needed His mercy and grace.

### **Q2. What was the veil of separation, and how did the cherubim woven into it reinforce the tabernacle's message?**

**Answer:** The veil of separation was the curtain God commanded to close off the Most Holy Place from the rest of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31-37). God had cherubim angels woven into it — both as reminders of His holiness and as indicators that His presence was off limits to Israel. Just as God placed cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve sinned and were driven from Eden, so also the cherubim on the veil guarded God's presence in the tabernacle and forbid Israel from entering, declaring in effect: 'NOT WELCOME.'

### **Q3. What did the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat together testify to Israel about their standing before God?**

**Answer:** Together they told Israel a two-part story: the Ark (the coffin for the Law) testified that on the basis of their own works, Israel deserved only God's condemning judgment and death — the Law contract proved them sinners who merited nothing from God. But the mercy seat on top testified that God was full of mercy, and that through the death of another in their place (an animal sacrifice whose blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat), their sins could be covered over and God could receive them. The message: you deserve death, but God's mercy and grace provide the only way.

### **Q4. What did the priestly system reveal about Israel's standing before God, and what were the strict limits placed even on the priests themselves?**

**Answer:** God consecrated certain men as priests to function as mediators between Himself and Israel — a system which constantly made clear that something was fundamentally wrong with the people that prevented God from dwelling freely among them. But even the priests were not free to enter the Most Holy Place. Only the High Priest could enter that room, and only once a year, and only while carrying the blood of an animal sacrifice to place on the mercy seat. The more restrictive the access, the louder the testimony: Israel had a problem with God.

**Q5. What was the purpose of the altar of continual sacrifice in the court of the tabernacle, and how did it reinforce the overall testimony of God's house?**

**Answer:** The altar stood in the court of the tabernacle right by the door, and on it continuous sacrifices were offered every single day from morning to evening (Exodus 27:1-8; 29:38-46). This unceasing daily testimony declared to Israel that for God to receive them at all there was a constant, ongoing necessity for the death of another in their place because of their sins. Positioned at the very entrance to the tabernacle, it was an unavoidable, day-by-day witness to the truth of the problem between Israel and God — and to the truth that only through God's mercy and grace was there any hope for them at all.