

# Old Testament Survey - Part 15

by Dick Woodward

---

*The tabernacle in the wilderness is a picture of Jesus Christ and the gospel of salvation, teaching us how to worship God and providing a means of forgiveness for our sins.*

**Duration:** 27:29

**Scripture:** John 14:6

**Topics:** "Worship And Salvation", "Holy Spirit Guidance"

---

## Description

This sermon delves into the significance of the tabernacle in the wilderness as a symbol of salvation and worship. It explores the allegorical representation of salvation in the Old Testament, emphasizing the importance of learning how to worship God after being delivered. The sermon highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in divine guidance and ministry, the centrality of God in our lives, the symbolism of Jesus in the tabernacle's articles of furniture, and the reconciliation of God and man through Jesus Christ.

---

## Transcript

When people decide they're going to read the Bible through beginning at the Book of Genesis and going all the way out to the Book of Revelation, they do pretty well reading through the Book of Genesis and about two-thirds of the Book of Exodus. When they come to the third third of the Book of Exodus, and then especially when they begin to read the Book of Leviticus, they bog down in their reading of the Scripture and become very discouraged. One reason for that is the third third of the Book of Exodus reads like a book of specifications.

In the Book of Exodus, God told Moses to build something, and he told him in great detail exactly how to build it. What God told Moses to build at the end of the Book of Exodus was, the Bible calls it, the tabernacle in the wilderness. The word tabernacle means tent, and that's really what this was.

It was actually a tent of worship. There was this compartment right here, which was a tent divided into two sections, and there was a canvas fence around everything, and there were articles of furniture leading up to this tabernacle proper. This is a very significant event in the development of the people of God.

As we consider the allegory of salvation that we find in these early books of the Old Testament, in Genesis we get the seeds and the sources, the beginnings of our salvation. In the Book of Exodus, when they're delivered from Egypt, when they come out from under the bondage and tyranny of the Egyptians, we said that we saw pictured there allegorically our salvation, because we see in their deliverance from Egypt our

deliverance from our enslavement to sin. If you follow that allegory through, one of the first things that God does after he delivers them from Egypt is to teach them how to worship.

By application, that should mean to you and me that when we are saved, when we're delivered from our spiritual Egypt, one of the first things God wants us to learn is how to worship the Holy God who has saved us. In other words, there is a purpose for our salvation. We know there are eternal purposes for our salvation.

We're saved from hell and we're saved for heaven, and that's glorious news according to the scripture. But the scripture will tell us in many ways and in many places about the present purposes of God in our salvation. In this present dimension, I was raised in a church where the emphasis was, you may be killed tonight on the way home, and so you better accept Jesus Christ and make him your Savior and your Lord, because you may die before you have a chance to make that decision.

After I had heard that for many years, one day as a young adult I heard a preacher say, I'm telling you this not because you're likely to die, but because the probability is you're going to live. That kind of brought me up short. I wasn't used to hearing that emphasis.

But that is an emphasis in the scripture. Having been delivered from our spiritual Egypt, what is the purpose of our salvation in this present life, between the time that we're saved and the time that God takes us home to be with him for all eternity? What are his purposes for our lifetime? One of the first ones is worship. Heaven begins when worship begins, and so God wants us to know what worship is.

Here you have the very beginning of God's instruction to his people about worship. How can a sinful man approach a holy God in worship? That's the message of this tabernacle in the wilderness. There are many applications we can make to this tent of worship.

Perhaps the first one we ought to make has to do with this cloud that came upon the tent of worship after it had been built according to God's specifications. We're told that this cloud filled the tabernacle in the wilderness, and it came upon the tabernacle in the wilderness. At night it changed to a pillar of fire, and this cloud actually led them.

They found their direction, their divine guidance, by way of this cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. But in addition to this representing divine guidance, which is a very beautiful truth, this cloud also represents two beautiful truths about the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, and we're told that the Holy Spirit has many dimensions in his ministry.

If you notice the prepositions used in connection with the Holy Spirit, you learn something about his ministry and his function in the body of Christ and in the church. The Holy Spirit, we're told, is in us. And when we're told to be filled with the Spirit, we're told that he should just permeate every fiber of our being.

But we're also told that the Holy Spirit comes upon us and he anoints us or he endows us, especially in connection with ministry. In the book of Acts, so often the preposition is on or upon, and you shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and then you shall be witnesses unto me. In Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the outermost parts of the earth.

So this cloud coming upon the tent of worship and filling the tent of worship is showing us something allegorically, perhaps, and symbolically about the ministry of the Holy Spirit today. And then another application to this tent of worship that we make that's a kind of a general application has to do with its

location. It was located at the center of the camp.

Now these people of Israel, when they left Egypt and moved out into the wilderness, they were not just an undisciplined multitude or mob of people. They moved in a very precise military formation. Every tribe had its location, and those tribes were located north, south, east, and west of the tabernacle in the wilderness, or the tent of worship.

The tent of worship was at the very center of the camp. And that symbolizes something for us. God is supposed to be at the center of our lives.

The commandments in Exodus told us this, God first. If God is anything, God is everything. And until God is everything, God isn't really anything.

God first. That's what the scripture says in so many ways in so many places. And here we have a picture of that.

If you have priorities, if you think of your priorities as if they were a target, like a target that you shoot at with a bullseye and circle one, circle two, circle three. If you think of your priorities in terms of a priority target, what would be the bullseye of your priority target? What is your most central priority? Well, the location of the tent of worship tells us God should be the bullseye of our priority target. God is to be at the center.

He is to be at the center of our lives, just as he was at the center of their camp. But now if we take a closer look at this tabernacle in the wilderness, if we look at it, for instance, in terms of the articles of furniture, we see so much spiritual truth. You see, if you were a sinner among those two to three million people, you were instructed by the law of Moses and the law of God to go down to the tent of worship.

Now, you were looking to the God who dwelt in this tent of worship, and you were looking to him not only for divine guidance and direction and the dynamic with which to live for him, as symbolized by that cloud, but you were also coming to this tent of worship for forgiveness. Perhaps this is one of the primary meanings of the tent of worship. If you were a sinner and you wanted to approach a holy God, you needed to be forgiven for your sin.

Your sin question had to be dealt with. So you were instructed to go down to the tent of worship, and when you went down there, you took some form of an animal sacrifice. If you were poor, it could be a turtle dove, and if you were wealthy, it could be something like a lamb or a larger animal.

The size and the value of the animal had to do with the economic status of the sinner and also the degree of their sin. But you would go to this tent of worship, which was surrounded by a little canvas fence, and you would be met right here at the gate by a priest. The priest would take your animal, and he would sacrifice this animal.

As this animal is sacrificed, the priest would instruct the sinner, and the sinner would make the sacrifice. After the sacrifice was made, the priest would then intercede for the sinner. The sinner stayed here.

He never went any further in his approach to God than here. But in his behalf, or in his stead, interceding for him, the priest would put the sinner's animal sacrifice on this brazen altar where it was consumed, and then the priest would go to the next article of furniture, which was a laver, where he would ceremoniously cleanse himself on behalf of the sinner, and then he would go into the tent proper. In the tent proper, there

were four articles of furniture.

First of all, in that first compartment, on the priest's left, there was the candlestick, and that candlestick spoke of the revelation God had given these people. The priest would stand before that candlestick and thank God that he had not let this sinner out here remain in the dark, but showed him how to approach the Holy God for salvation. He would thank God for the word of God and the revelation God had given them.

On the right of the priest was the table of showbread, which symbolized the truth that God will give us our daily bread. In Psalm 145, this is expressed so beautifully, it says in that psalm, "...he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season." That was symbolized by the table of showbread.

God will provide our needs, he will sustain us, and he is the source of our sustenance. The priest would stand before the table of showbread and thank God for that on behalf of the sinner, and then he would appear before the altar of incense, which was a prayer altar, and he would pray an intercessory prayer for the sinner. That's as far as the priest would go in his daily routine.

After he did that, he would go back and meet another sinner, and he would just do that all day. Once a year, all the people would gather around the Ten of Worship. This was all according to the instructions and the law of Moses.

They would all gather around the Ten of Worship, and the high priest would go through this process or this procedure in behalf of all the people. Once a year, he would go behind this thick veil that divided these two compartments here in the tabernacle proper. In this holy of holies, as it was called, this was called the holy place, this was called the holy of holies, the great high priest would go in, taking the blood of an animal that had been sacrificed, and offer that blood as an atonement for the sins of all the people.

That happened once a year. But in the normal course of things, the priest only went this far and kept meeting sinners and doing that all day, every day. Continuing with the applications, you can see that these articles of furniture are in the shape of a cross.

This says to us that this tabernacle in the wilderness was all about Jesus. Remember when Jesus opened up the scriptures to the apostles by saying to them, Moses wrote of me? All those things written by Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, they were all about me? Well, this is perhaps nowhere more true than it is in the Ten of Worship. This whole tabernacle in the wilderness symbolically pictured Jesus Christ.

The brazen altar spoke of his sacrificial death, his substitutionary atonement for our sins. All the animal sacrifices really were symbolic of that. At this labor we see Christ pictured, because he is the one who cleanses us from all sin through his death on the cross.

And then he was the light of the world, he said, and he was the bread of life, and he was the great high priest who interceded for us and prayed that great intercessory prayer in the garden when he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. The whole purpose of the ministry of Christ was to bring us to God. Jesus said, I am the way to God the Father, and there's no other way to God the Father but by me.

He said that in John 14, verse 6. And this is what's pictured here. You see, the most significant part of this whole tabernacle was the fact that in this Holy of Holies, and in this article of furniture called the Ark of the Covenant, the presence of God actually dwelt. That was where God actually dwelt.

Now, if we can continue, again, and get a little bit more of a close-up of these articles of furniture, looking at them one by one, this brazen altar had so much gospel represented in it. You know, we said in our introduction to the Bible that the Old Testament can be summed up with these words, Jesus is coming, and the New Testament can be summed up with these words, Jesus came. Now, this is the message of the Old Testament.

Jesus is coming, and when he comes, through his death on the cross, he's going to reconcile that divorce between God and man. That's the whole point of the Old Testament as it gives us all this Messianic prophecy. Now, when they were instructed to make these animal sacrifices, all these animal sacrifices were pointing to the day when the last of the Messianic prophets would point his finger at Jesus, the historical Jesus from Nazareth, and say, Behold the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world.

That's what the brazen altar pictured. All those animal sacrifices that were consumed on that altar pictured that, the Lamb of God whose sacrifice of himself would cleanse the world from all of its sin. This brazen altar really spoke to us of the righteousness of God.

This brazen altar told us that God is righteous, God demands that we be righteous, God condemns unrighteousness, God knows that we could never in a million years be righteous enough to save ourselves, and so God came into the world in the form of the Lamb of God, the Messiah, and through the sacrifice of himself, he paid the price, the only price that could be paid, to save us sinners. God did that because he knew we could never be good enough to save ourselves, and this brazen altar speaks of all of that. The brazen altar speaks to us of the gospel, that what God wants us to do is believe him when he tells us this, symbolically in the Old Testament and matter-of-factly in the New Testament.

The gospel of our salvation is all wrapped up in that brazen altar. When the sinner came into the tent of worship, when he came to that brazen altar, he would put his hand on the head of the animal, we'll see this when we get to Leviticus, and he would sacrifice the animal, but as he did, the priest would teach him the meaning of that sacrifice. The priest would teach him that that's what you deserve, sinner, because of your sin, but that's not going to happen to you, that's going to happen to God's Lamb when God's Lamb comes.

We call that substitutionary atonement. Substitutionary atonement is a very biblical concept. We find it especially here in the Old Testament and this tent of worship.

The next article of furniture was the laver. That brazen altar looked something like a sophisticated barbecue pit, because a fire was kept burning in it all the time, and animals were placed on it all the time. This laver, as it was called, looked like a sophisticated birdbath, and this was where the priest would go and ceremoniously cleanse himself before entering the tent proper.

What that's suggesting to us is this, who can ascend into the hill of the Lord? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. Remember when Jesus told Peter, Peter, if I wash you not, you have no part with me? Peter objected to the Lord washing his feet, and the Lord said, Peter, if I wash you not, you have no part with me. When Peter heard that, he said, well, then I want a bath, if that's the name of the game.

If you have to be cleansed to have fellowship with you, then cleanse me. The Lord said, Peter, when a man's been to the public bath, he goes home, and while he's going home, his feet are damp and they get dirty as he walks through the streets. When he gets home, Peter, he doesn't need another bath, he just

needs to have his feet washed.

The application is very beautiful. As we go through this world, we get our feet dirty. We don't have to be born again and again, we don't have to have the bath of regeneration a second time, but we do need that continuous cleansing, we do need that foot washing, as Jesus pictured it.

It's interesting in the book of the Revelation that as they approach God, there has to be cleansing, and that cleansing is always symbolized by water here in these worship forms. In the Revelation, this is a sea of glass like under crystal. Here it's liquid, this cleansing is continuous, and so the symbol of it is liquid.

But in the Revelation, it's solidified, it's like crystal, because the cleansing then will be permanent. But until then, the cleansing is continuous, and we need this continuous cleansing, and that was pictured there by the laborer. We said as the priest went into the tabernacle proper, on his left was this golden candlestick.

This is a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ. All of this picture is Christ, he was the light of the world, but also this is a picture of the revelation God gave the sinner. These sinners wouldn't have had any way of knowing how to approach the holy God for salvation or worship or anything else if it hadn't been for the word of God.

At the end of Genesis 3, it says that when God and man were divorced from each other, when they were separated from each other, the way back to God or to the tree of life was guarded by a flaming sword. Many feel that flaming sword there is a picture of the scripture, because in many ways it's the scripture that brings us back to God. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the word of God.

The word of God is the incorruptible seed that generates new life when we're born again. The word of God in many ways is the way back to God, and that's all symbolized by that candlestick. The priest would stand before that candlestick, and in worshiping God on behalf of the sinner, he would thank God for the revelation God had given the sinner.

Now on the right of the priest in that first compartment, the holy place, was the table of showbread, which looks something like this. As the priest stood before that table of showbread, he would thank God and worship God and recognize God as the source of the sustenance of the sinner. This is a great truth, and the truth, of course, that's pictured here is this.

Who is it really that meets your needs? Who is it that supplies your needs? These people are going out into a wilderness, and there isn't anything to eat out there. There isn't anything to drink out there. When Cecil B. DeMille described that in the movie, The Ten Commandments, he did a good job of showing the enormous responsibility that was placed upon Moses when the people were permitted to leave Egypt.

Moses is standing off to the side when the people are just ecstatically leaving Egypt, and Moses is praying to God, Oh God, what are they going to eat, and what are they going to drink? That's a great and terrible wilderness out there. Well, the great story of the book of Numbers is God supernaturally provided for their needs in that wilderness, and that's pictured here by the table of Shogrin, which again is a picture of Jesus, because Jesus was the bread of life, according to his own description of himself. At the altar of incense, the priest would stand and pray an intercessory prayer.

Here we see something very important. A priest was a man who went into the presence of God for the people. A prophet was a man who came from the presence of God to the people with the word of God for the people.

That was the difference between a priest and a prophet. As the priest stood before the altar of incense and prayed for that sinner who still remained outside there at the gate, we see a beautiful picture of what a priest was. Someone going into the presence of God on behalf of the sinner, on behalf of the people.

It's exciting when you get to the New Testament to read that we are a kingdom of priests. All of us have the challenge and the responsibility, according to the word of God, to intercede for others. But as that priest stood before the altar, he showed us what a priest was, and he also pictured Jesus Christ, who was the great high priest, and when he prayed his great intercessory prayer there in the garden, where he sweat as it were great drops of blood.

Read it in John 17. Read what he was praying about. Read the intercessory prayer of Jesus, and you'll come to appreciate what this altar of incense symbolized.

Of course, the altar of incense symbolized prayer, and prayer is one of the great spiritual blessings of the Christian life. Just beyond that altar of incense, there was a thick curtain called a veil. This veil separated the holy place from the holy of holies.

It was a very thick veil. Even in this little tent of worship, Josephus said that teams of horses pulling in opposite directions could not have torn that veil. It was a thick, heavy material.

Here's one of the great miracles of the tabernacle in the wilderness when we get to its New Testament applications. In our next session, I would like for us to consider how the New Testament applies the teaching about the tabernacle in the wilderness, because that's where we really get to understand much of its significance. The greatest commentary upon the Bible, remember, is the Bible itself.

When you get to the New Testament and read about this tent of worship, you understand the significance of this veil. This veil said symbolically, God and man are separated. There is a veil between God and man.

Genesis 3, we said, recorded the story of the divorce between God and man. We said in Genesis that that is the fundamental problem with which the scripture will deal. God and man are divorced.

God and man are separated. How can that divorce be reconciled? How can God and man come back together again? That's the message of the Bible, and that's the message of the tent of worship. Here you have it symbolized by this veil.

It is a serious thing, and it is not a simple thing for a sinful man to come into fellowship with a holy God. In order for God and man to be reconciled, something has to be done. Now, all these articles of furniture picture that.

All these articles of furniture will tell us what God had to do in order to open up that veil so that God and man could commune with one another again. It's fascinating that in the New Testament, one of the great miracles of the New Testament is when Jesus died on the cross, at the very minute that he died, at the moment that he gave up his life, this veil back in Solomon's temple, which was like a big theater curtain, supernaturally tore from top to bottom, symbolizing for us, now God and man need not be separated anymore. It is possible now to come right into the presence of God because of what Jesus did on his cross.

That's the message of this whole tent of worship, prophetically. I do believe that this is what Jesus meant when he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by me. Jesus

Christ is the way back into the presence of God the Father.

That's really the message of the tent of worship. In the Holy of Holies, which was that inner compartment, there was only one article of furniture, and that was the Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred article of furniture in this tent of worship. The Ark of the Covenant was an article of furniture in which the presence of God literally actually dwelt.

This is why later on in the historical books we'll see them carry this with them into battle. When they go around the walls of Jericho, they carry this Ark with them, and they're trusting this Ark to give them a dynamic that caused the walls of Jericho to fall down. This was not a rabbit's foot or some kind of a good luck charm.

This wasn't just a symbol of the fact that God was with them. This was literally true. This is one of the most dynamic things about this little tent of worship.

In the Holy of Holies, the innermost compartment of that tent proper, the presence of God literally actually dwelt. As they approached the Holy of Holies, and going through this procedure God described, they were actually literally approaching God. The tabernacle in the wilderness was giving them their approach to God, and that's the most dynamic truth about the tabernacle in the wilderness.

I think it's important when you realize that, to realize why during the times of the captivities, which we'll come to later when we get to the Book of Kings, in the captivities they prayed facing Jerusalem, because they believed God still dwelt in that article of furniture. In that article of furniture you had some precious items, Aaron's rod that budded, a pot of the manna with which God supernaturally sustained them, and the tablets upon which the law had been given. Those articles were in the Ark of the Covenant.

The priest who presided over this tent of worship is interesting. All of his garments were significant. We won't go into all the details because we're just surveying this, but this priest symbolizes something in the tent of worship scheme of things.

He symbolizes Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the great high priest. This man was the high priest.

He was the one who would go into the Holy of Holies once a year with blood for the sins of the people. That was very significant, but his primary significance by application was that he was a picture of Jesus Christ. He was a picture of the one who said to us, I am the way, and I am the truth, and I am the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by me.

It is not a simple thing for a sinful man to go into the presence of a holy God. There had to be a way made for him so that he could go into the presence of God and have his divorce with God reconciled. That was all accomplished through a priest.

It was the priest who interceded between God and man, and this high priest symbolized that. But more than that, he symbolized the fact that Jesus Christ was the mediator. He was the one that went into the presence of God for us and ultimately made it possible for us to come into the presence of God and be reconciled to him and no longer be separated from him.

The Apostle Paul says there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and that's what that priest represented. You can see how much truth there is in this little tent of worship. It's just filled with truth.

In our next session I would like for us to get into some of the New Testament applications to this spiritual truth we see in the tent of worship. Just remember the first application is, if you have been delivered from your spiritual If you've been saved, remember, in this present life, one of the first purposes of your salvation is that you might come to know and worship the holy God who has saved you. That's the message of the tent of worship.

---

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/1sY6IAAYN34.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dick-woodward/old-testament-survey-part-15/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**