

# Hints on the Tabernacle Exodus 25-34

by John Nelson Darby

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*The tabernacle represents God's relationship with man and the provision for redemption, foreshadowing the ultimate destination of the church in the heavens.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 25:9, Exodus 26:31-33, Exodus 28:29-30, Exodus 30:1-10, Exodus 32:9-10, Exodus 34:9, Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 8:5, Hebrews 9:24, Hebrews 10:19-22

**Topics:** "Access to God", "The Tabernacle"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby explores the significance of the tabernacle as a divine pattern reflecting heavenly realities, emphasizing that the tabernacle serves as a shadow of good things to come, revealing God's relationship with humanity through the law and priesthood. He highlights the contrast between the Old Testament system, where access to God was limited, and the New Testament revelation of boldness to enter the holiest through Christ's sacrifice. Darby underscores the importance of understanding the tabernacle's elements, such as the ark, altar, and priesthood, as they relate to God's holiness and man's need for redemption. He also discusses the implications of the rending of the veil, which signifies the opening of direct access to God for believers. Ultimately, he emphasizes the grace of God in allowing a relationship with Him despite human sinfulness.

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## Transcript

Exodus 25 begins the instructions for the tabernacle. First, they were to bring all the different materials, and then "according to all that I shew thee after the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it." And again, "after the pattern of all that was shewed thee in the mount." These were the "patterns of things in the heavens," or anti-types of things in the heavens. We must not bring in the highest relationships here; that is, connected with what has been said about priesthood; as "Father" is the highest name for us, so here you find all judicial questions settled. Such matters as cleansing, and all that was responsible down here, are dealt with, and so on; but no relationships save Jewish ones. It is this that makes the Psalms, beautiful as they are, mischievous in the use men make of them, because souls get into a false relationship with them. You never see the Father's relationship to the child in the entire body of Psalms. It is referred to as an analogy, but not the relationship itself. There are instructions how to walk in faith in this world, but they never put a person in heaven; the Christian class of relationships could not be, for it was not revealed; but many beautiful expressions of faith, confidence, and piety which apply to us all.

To me it is a remarkable thing that we have here the shadow of good things to come, not the very image of them. There is a most wonderful exhibition of what is divine, and yet it contains in it provision for a connection or relationship with what is fallen. Thus what is an altar for? In heaven you get an altar, and on earth pictured out the heavenly things themselves where Christ is gone; still it secretly kept in redemption, and, by sacrifice upon it, all was provided for, and a certain connection with heaven by means of what is earthly.

The existence of an altar and a laver supposed impurity, yet the third heavens are figured there and the throne of God, but along with that an unrent veil. There was a holiest, but no way into it; so that it all has a certain character of revelation of God, and yet of a hidden God after all. Thus we see in it mere connection with heaven before anybody could enter there, and this comes from foreshewing Christ - the perfect - by what is imperfect.

185 The first thing described (in chapter 25) is the ark, made of shittim wood, and covered all over with pure gold inside and out; and it is said, "thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee," that is the law. Now you could not put law in the Father's house; but you could put it where God was in a relationship with man which regarded him in a judicial manner, as I said. Take the Hebrews, where you have the highest christian expression of all this; and there we have boldness to enter into the holiest, but we are not sitting in heavenly places. No person ever thought of dwelling in the tabernacle; that is another set of ideas. God dwelt there, but nobody else. The moment man dwells there, I must get the Father, and also complete freedom of relationship to Him as such. The moment God revealed Himself as Father, you get the ground on which the relationship was founded, and then comes priesthood, and also adoption, and heirship of the glory. This is what frightened the disciples on the mount of transfiguration (I mean the "excellent glory," that is, the cloud, or the Shechinah); "and they feared as they entered into the cloud," that is, as Moses and Elias entered; it was a new thing altogether to the disciples, a new idea, and a fact before them that produced the fear.

Was not Moses in the cloud before? The cloud came down, and God talked with Moses, but Moses did not enter the cloud; the cloud was more than the holiest. Moses went up, but he never went into the cloud to talk with God, though the cloud covered God from the people. It was the sign of God's presence as when Miriam talked against Moses (Num. 12). But when you have the cloud on the mount, it was pure law, until Moses interceded with God for mercy; so in itself it was accompanied with thunderings and lightnings - not grace at all. Until Moses got the mercy (the second time he went up), he did not go in with God. If Moses went into the tabernacle, that was approaching God; but still it was not like being children in a house, it was approaching a God who will estimate whether you have a right to approach Him or not.

God was here in a certain character, and if man was not fit, he could not go there, for there was moral estimate of what man was. Now the Father has sent the Son; but then it was nothing of the kind, it was purely a question of whether man could approach God. The contrast is brought out in Hebrews, taking Hebrews in the highest way. We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus: this is what makes us competent; but still for us God is a consuming fire, estimating everything. The temple was the Lord's house, Jehovah's, and Jehovah was His Father. We were noticing in Corinthians the three names of God in the passage, "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord (Jehovah) Almighty."

186 Christ revealed the Father's name, for He was Son. It was not that man could go to God, but God was revealed to man; it was not sitting in righteousness to see if man could go near, but God was coming out in

grace to take man in to Himself. Thus you can see what is so terrible in confounding the Old Testament condition with ours; that was only the shadow of good things to come. Evidently it is a solemn truth, whether we can go to God or not; it is a difference in the starting-point of the whole being. And more still, it is the Father's eternal love that is thinking of me, though I am a sinner, and that means to give me such a blessing.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is more contrast than comparison; you have a veil, but it is rent; priests dying because they could not continue, and One who cannot die; sacrifices that were memorials of sins, and a sacrifice which is such as to be proof that sins are no more remembered. The Epistle is not the old system christianized, so to speak, but another bearing of things altogether.

You have the blood put upon the ark or mercy-seat. The mercy-seat itself is of pure gold. There you see what is absolutely divine. You see something as to man when the law is put in the ark, because that applies to man, and shittim wood too is in the ark; but the covering is divine righteousness absolutely.

Shittim wood, they say, was a kind of acacia, and figurative, in general, of the human side of things, as gold was of the divine. For when you have a covenant in the law, man is brought in; but the covering was of gold only, and this was divine alone.

There is a physical reason in it too, for they could not have carried it else. There was no appearance of wood, all was gold that was seen, but the covering is pure gold altogether. Then you have the cherubim, and the whole a throne: "he sitteth between the cherubim." The cherubim seem to be symbols always of judicial power. The seraphim are only in fact named in Isaiah, and there they say, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts., the whole earth is full of his glory." It was judgment looked at in connection with holiness more than with authority and government. In the Revelation the four living ones are both cherubs and seraphs. They have six wings and cry, "holy, holy, holy," having the likeness of a man, calf, lion, and flying eagle. Here the cherubim are connected with the judicial throne.

187 The four faces are the attributes of God in a way. The ox was called a cherub sometimes, though I do not know why. In it is the permanence and stability of judgment; the power of it in a lion; the rapidity of it in the eagle; and the intelligence in a man.

There was another thing in this divine throne - the covenant was there; the terms of the covenant were the law. You have no seraphim here, but it is the throne of judgment just as much. And there is this fact: the cherubim were of gold beaten out of one piece with the mercy-seat. They were divine. And they were together, with their wings stretched out, looking at the covenant, all the attributes of God securing the covenant and judging righteously.

Remarkably enough our rationalists in their researches have found in Nineveh winged things, bulls and lions, and images of cherubim, and so on. It just shews the utter folly of their system, for when Ezekiel has the cherubim, he has these animals sure enough; but they are merely to support the throne. For God is above; they are mere attributes, and God over them.

Here in the tabernacle they were not fully manifested in that way. It is the throne of God, and the cherubim are of one piece with it, look towards one another but downwards fixedly at the covenant, with their wings stretched out to cover the mercy-seat. When Solomon puts his cherubim in the temple, they stood up with the tip of one wing touching one wall then two tips met in the middle of the house, and the other tip of the fourth wing touched the wall on the opposite side, and they looked outwards, because all the attributes of

God were going out to man.

The reason the ark is mentioned as carried then into the temple is because the tabernacle was in ruin. Once men carried it into Dagon's house (this being an idol, part man and part fish), and when the ark went in, the man fell down, and the fish only was left in place. This had its meaning. Now Shiloh was all pulled to pieces when Solomon took the ark and set it in the temple. The Philistines had taken it, but God maintained His own glory (all else must go for nothing); and He watched over it step by step wherever they led it about, and finally took it from them.

188 It was a cherub at each end and all gold, simply divine, a sign of God Himself, as it were. "And thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark, and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee." This is first of all, and chief; but no Father sending the Son here. There is the meeting God in righteousness in a certain way, but it is God dealing with man, responsible man, and setting up His own throne in righteousness.

Then you find the table of shittim wood, overlaid with gold, and upon it the shewbread always. Then the candlestick of pure gold with beaten work and seven lamps for burning oil. These were on the two sides, and in the same place outside the veil.

But the altar of incense is not described yet, because this is for approach and not for display. The description of the vessels is broken in the middle here by the appointing of the priesthood. First the things that are from God coming out, and then, after the priests are appointed, the things which are wanted for man to go in. So, in the holy place, there is a table and a candlestick. The table is "before Jehovah," the number twelve in the loaves on the table, and seven in the lamps (the one being the sign of government in the creature, and the other, of what is divine light in the Spirit); and this is simply divine in its nature. Twelve is government on earth, as constantly one gets it so. Seven is what is spiritual, bad or good, but commonly good. Hence, as to these two numbers, they are both perfection; but one is perfection in a spiritual way, and the other is perfection in a human way. Seven is the highest prime number, absolutely indivisible, nine may be divided though not by two. Whereas twelve is the most divisible of the numbers, divisible by all below its half, except five. Their use (seven or twelve) is a matter of fact, and there is a kind of moral reason why they should be used; twelve apostles, twelve foundations to the city, twelve thrones, twelve patriarchs, twelve tribes, and so on. Thus there is the divine fight on the one side, and the human order according to God, or God's order in man, if you please, on the other side, in the holy place; not in the holiest of all.

189 The church ought to give out the light now that is true in the power of the Spirit.

The golden altar follows, because we are not yet going in; the altar is for going to God, and so the priesthood comes first before you can have the golden altar.

Afterwards come the glory itself and the court of the tabernacle. There are three unities in the tabernacle. It is Christ Himself; then the church, "whose house are we"; and then it is the heavens. He was the tabernacle, and the veil was His flesh; and we are His house and then He went "through the heavens" (Heb. 4:14). God dwelt in Christ, "the Father dwelleth in me; in the house the church, God's habitation; and in the heavens. All we have had was inside the tabernacle.

The loaves have nothing to do with the church; they are the perfection of administrative order in man. Of course these are all mere images, just like the city, which is a cube. Now a cube is perfection, but finite

perfection measurable every way and equal; but you can find no end to a circle, or come anywhere, to measure from, and which is not finite but infinite rather. Of a cube I come regularly to the end each way. Perhaps Christ answers more to the most holy place, because you get "the veil, that is to say, his flesh." Then we read, "he that built all things is God," and Christ went through all - the court - the holy place, and the most holy place. It is from this earth, up; this earth is the point of departure, for Christ went up from the earth through all the heavens.

Inside was where nobody could go in; there was neither display nor approach. Outside, the incense altar was approach, and the table and the candlestick were display. So until the rent veil nobody went in, "the Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while as the first tabernacle was standing."

In the ark I have God Himself sitting on the throne of judgment; and in it, as Christ, all that God could require from man was absolutely there, and God was there too. There is divine judgment, but it is there put into connection with man's responsibility; that is, God's measure of man's righteousness, if you please, not what it is of course, but what it ought to be. You notice in the Hebrews it is not the temple but the tabernacle that is always referred to. Scripture says we have "boldness to enter into the holiest"; and so we do in spirit. The veil is rent; so that, when we go to worship, we go into God's own presence, we go beyond the veil - inside the veil. Our position is, that the veil was rent from top to bottom, and we go inside where God is. What God is shewing under the law, was that man could not go in; "the Holy Ghost this signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." Whereas now the Holy Ghost shews that it is, all Hebrews being contrast in that way between what was and what is. The rending of the veil in Christ's death has let us into God's own presence. It did two things, the rending of the veil - it put away all sins for us totally; and also it opened up the way for us to God; so that now, through the work of Christ, we have all opened up for us into God's own presence, and we are without sin when we get there. There are other and higher things, even than this, in the Father and common truth; but all this is necessary for us to go to God.

190 "Moses was faithful in all his house," God's house, for the tabernacle was not Moses', but God's house. The house is all one now in that sense, though Hebrews omits notice of the rending of the veil. Perhaps the omission is on purpose. It supposes a rent veil, though it is not stated in so many words. It would have to be rent for the Jews in the millennium; but it is not rent to them, as I believe. The Jews get all the good of the veil being rent, looked at as Christ's death; but, Christ being then on earth, they have not to look through into heaven to see Him.

The court has its place, it was only where the tabernacle was; and it is not the earth exactly nor is it the heaven; if you take it merely as a figure, it is the created heavens.

The "heavenly places" of Daniel do not correspond, "heavenly places" being taken as a general term both in Daniel and in Ephesians.

When Christ was cast out of the world, He was put upon the brazen altar, so that the court is like the heaven as being out of the earth where man was; but scarcely heaven either, for man could not put Him there.

Then you get the court of the tabernacle made, but not the laver here. The camp is earthly or fleshly religion, and, when Christ's death proves that man cannot be in relationship with God, at least in that way, and therefore the blood goes into heaven so as to take my title there, I must have done with human

religiousness; and then having an inside place with God, I must have an outside place from the world. Morally, Christianity is turned into a camp again, and, to carry it fairly out, there must be a sacrifice and priest too; this is just what popery has done, and they have given that old character to what Christianity is; sacrifices on earth, and priests on earth going to God for you because you cannot.

191 But when I get sacrifice carried outside, it is revealed that there cannot be such a thing; and the law is but a shadow in itself, though in it you find certain elements which are very instructive in going to God. But the moment you apply these things to Christianity, every element is in contrast. Christ has gone through the heavens, the veil is rent, and there is positive access to the holiest. All now is just the opposite to what then was. When we have heaven, we have done with a worldly religion and are outside the camp. And this is the very thing that now characterizes an intelligent Christian; he cannot be adapting the world to God, or God to man. Taking the system as such is to set aside the truth of Christianity. We have the altar, but not that of incense, and no laver.

The highest point that Judaism reached was that the priest could go to the veil, but not the people. The priest could have the external display of God amongst men in a priestly way; but there was no going to God Himself. As a rule the veil was on them, but this varies with their spiritual apprehension. Moses might have understood some things. God says of him, "thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name." But he stood all alone, he took the veil off his face when he went in to God; but what characterized Israel was the veil on.

The veil is the Word made flesh - Christ - fine twined linen, the positive purity of the nature; and then all the graces embroidered upon it. You get the same here in the first covering of the tabernacle; it is made of the same thing as the veil; it is Christ's human nature. God had no interest in putting colours there without a meaning. If you compare one scripture with another, you may learn what they mean. It is the same with the heavenly Jerusalem, certain things are clear, but you must be careful; there is no temple in it, for if a temple is glorious about God, it hides God; but there it is God's own glory seen.

192 Then you get the dress of the high priest (more for Israel than for us, and therefore I do not go into it minutely); but there is the beautiful expression of Christ's care for His people, only the immediate reference is to Israel. A coat, a blue robe, an ephod (and in the ephod gold or divine righteousness), and with that, a stone on each shoulder that clasped together the back and front parts of the ephod; and then the breastplate (the breastplate and ephod being essentially the priestly robe). Then we have all the names of the children of Israel, six on one onyx stone and six on the other, on the two shoulders of the priest, and so he carries, as it were, the weight of the people: then in the breastplate again, the twelve names on his heart and the Urim and Thummim were there too, lights and perfections, the judgment of the children of Israel. The Jews' idea of it was that the divine glory lit up the particular letters that gave the answer to an inquiry. In all is a complete picture of the way that Christ cares for His people. He bore the judgment of His people, not here atonement, but the iniquity of their holy things.

This only takes up their lowest condition. It does not testify of Christianity. In a priest, I get one from whom I am separated, for he has to act for me; but when I look at my proper condition as a Christian, I am member of Christ's body, and of His flesh and of His bones. I am also walking on the earth and have failures and difficulties; and these all have their needs, and to them priesthood refers. In Hebrews you never get sins referred to as the subject of priesthood, save on the great day of atonement. The priesthood of Christ is continual help in whatever we need as we walk on here. In Hebrews it is first a question of access to God as such. How can this be? The answer is, I am perfected for ever by the one

offering, and have no more conscience of sins, and so we can go in even boldly. I do not know what place priesthood can have now as to that; it is done already; and then, inasmuch as we are perfected in that respect, we have priesthood provided. The frequent common use of priesthood now - the ordinary idea - is a mistake altogether. But when I look at my other character in communion with the Father and Son, it is not that my righteousness is altered; but if I have let in an evil thought, my communion is blasted and then the priesthood is to restore my soul; for I cannot think of God having communion with evil in any way. I remember this question being raised twenty-five years ago.

193 These then are the priestly garments; but Aaron never went into the most holy place in them; he should have gone in whenever he liked, or at least it was the Lord's will. Nadab and Abihu faded at once with their strange fire, and then the high priest was prohibited going in. But having got the priest with a mitre also - holiness to Jehovah - he bore the iniquity of their most holy things. I think he wore that mitre even on the great day of atonement when he put off the other garments of glory and beauty. It says he was to bear their names continually before Jehovah.

The words "crowned with glory and honour," in Hebrews 2, are the same as in the Septuagint. (Cf. Exodus 28:2 of the LXX with Hebrews 2:7, 9.) There is another thing which is interesting, and which I believe has its truth in Christ; there was a golden bell and a pomegranate alternately on the hem of the robe of blue; it is testimony and fruit; it was that his sound might be "heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not." There was fruit-bearing and testimony, like the early and the latter rain, I should think. It is the two characters of the Holy Ghost's action, testimony and fruit-bearing, the sounding bell and the pomegranate.

Their consecration is seen in chapter 29, and all the sacrifices are together there. Then, the moment we have Aaron consecrated, in chapter 30 you have an altar to burn incense upon.

You may notice too that Aaron is anointed with oil by himself all alone, because he represented Christ. I mean without blood at all; and this is a point of importance. He and his sons were to come together, and they were all washed. I have no washing of this character save the partaking of the divine nature - "which thing is true in Him and in you." But the distinctive point is, when you come to the consecrating: Aaron is first anointed with oil without blood; and then, when the sons are taken, he is brought in with them to identify us with Christ. And blood is put on the tip of the right ear and thumb and toe, giving complete consecration to God in thought, act, and walk: the same as in the case of the leper, only in the leper there is a question of cleansing a sinner. It makes a great difference that Christ was consecrated without blood-shedding; of course He did not want any, whereas we do.

194 The priest being there, we have the altar of incense. The things we have had were the manifestation of God coming out; now we have approach to Him. The burning of the incense is at the golden altar; it is intercession. Incense was to go up regularly, continuously, as the lamps were to be kept burning, constantly in use. This was the time of service to God, and it was renewed. The lamps were dressed for day and for night.

Then the ransom money comes in, and remarkably there is all the people for whom Moses intercedes: they must be identified with this service. If you number them, you seem to make something of God's people. It is not by blood here, but rather the fact of their giving atonement - money; and He did make them of some importance, even by the fact that they had to be ransomed, though man is a poor sinner if he is ransomed. It comes here because the priest is coming to God, and he cannot go to God except for a

ransomed people. Christ is Priest or Advocate, not for the world, and not for the elect either, but for other believers, who must get their place those who are given to Him out of the world, and believe in His name.

Then comes another thing, the laver; this is not washing the body to be made a priest, but here the priest washes his hands and feet; it was not the washing of consecration; but, when consecrated, he must be perfectly pure for God, and he must wash his hands and feet. Only in our case it is walk, not work, and so it is feet only for us. He was to wash every time he did any service whatever.

The washing of regeneration is not priestly washing; but after that I come inside as a priest, and get the full place of a priest, then follows priestly washing of hands and feet, a washing for those who are within.

The water is the word in its own purity from God; but the place in which I get it is the point. The sinner must have the new nature in order to come in; but then when he says, I must be with God every day, this wants a washing of hands and feet. Until the priest was consecrated, he could not go to the altar or laver at all. Then what is the water of the first washing in chapter 29? That washing is the washing of water by the word - born of water and of the Spirit - and this is never repeated; whereas every time they served, they washed their hands and feet.

195 Then, as regards the anointing oil, it was not to be poured on man's flesh; a man must be a priest to have it. You cannot give a nature; and the anointing can only be of a nature that is of God. "Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ and hath anointed us is God, who also sealed us," 2 Cor. 1:22. No human flesh could have that. And no one was to imitate the anointing oil either. On mere human nature you cannot put anointing; you cannot anoint man, looked at as man, nor put the Holy Ghost upon him. As to mere power, He can make a dumb ass speak, but this is not anointing.

So with the perfume, it was that which was to go up to God. If I do a gracious thing, it is acceptable, and these sweet spices give us the graces in Christ, etc., at the altar, His intercession, a sweet savour used in that way.

As you look at all this, of course, it is quite imperfect as regards our condition; but the provision is clear; and it is most interesting to see God coming out, by table and candlestick and brazen altar, and then man going in to God, with laver and altar of incense.

From verse 34 to the end of the chapter is the incense. The incense-altar was the ordinary place. Frankincense was put upon the meat-offering, but it is not this point here.

In the millennium the Jews will have the true sabbath again, and all the sacrifices will be repeated too, and the feasts, save Pentecost - which belongs to us. The sin-offering, peace-offering, burnt-offering, meat-offering, and the trespass-offering too, are all named in Ezekiel for that day.

Next they made a golden calf. Moses was getting all these things for them, and they in his absence make the calf. It is afflicting, but withal exceedingly beautiful, the intercourse of God with Moses, consequent upon the people making the golden calf - how, in the midst of all the ruin, faith, under grace, can have closer intercourse than when there was no ruin. Moses never had so close intercourse with God, as now when the people had made the calf; and it was while the calf was in the camp. And the way in which God meets Moses is beautiful, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." And then Moses grows bolder still, and says, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."

There is another thought: the ground that God gives for destroying the people is precisely what Moses takes for God's going with them, when once grace has come in. In chapter 32:9, 10, the Lord says "it is a stiff-necked people, now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." And then, in chapter 34:9, Moses says "Let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people." So God's reason for consuming me would be my sin; and my reason for asking God to be with me, now that grace has come in, is that sin is in me. What infinite mercy!

196 Another thing note, beside the way that God answers God will not call them His people any more. The people had said, "As for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what has become of him," chap. 32:1. And God says, "This people" (v. 7), "which though broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves." So in verse 11 Moses says, "which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt," and in chapter 33:1 the Lord says, "The people which thou [Moses] hast brought up out of the land of Egypt," and in chapter 34:10, God again calls them "thy [Moses'] people."

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