

# Messiah's Mansion | THE GOSPEL IN SYMBOLS

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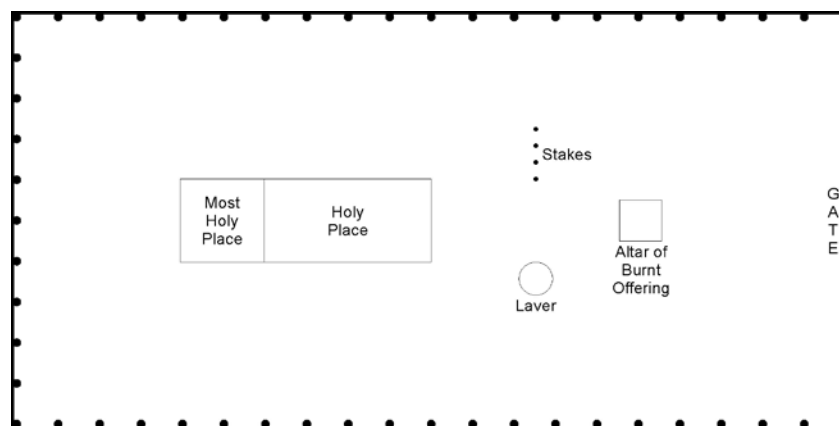
## LESSON 3: THE MEANING OF THE COURTYARD

### Review:

**Lesson One** - The purpose of the sanctuary is to remove the barriers of sin and guilt that keep us from face-to-face communion with God.

IN this lesson we will focus on the services and symbolism of the courtyard. The next two lessons will look at the holy place and the most holy place in a similar manner.

In the diagram below one can see the basic layout of the sanctuary. Surrounding the entire sanctuary area was a white linen curtain held up by bronze poles. One could enter this area by passing through a gate on the eastern side. Within the courtyard were the altar and laver. Towards the western end was a tent which contained the holy place and the most holy place. Within the most holy place was the Ark of the Covenant.



### 1. What was the court?

**Exodus 27:18** - *The length of the court shall be one hundred cubits, the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits, made of fine woven linen.*

The court marked out the boundaries of the sanctuary with a pure white linen curtain, broken only by the colorful section which marked the single gate. Inside were the altar of burnt offering, the laver, and the holy places. Into this area the individual worshipers would come to offer sacrifices and seek God's presence.

All the dimensions of the sanctuary are given in "cubits" (the length of a man's arm from elbow to fingertips). Since this varies from person to person, it is generally standardized to 1½ feet (18 inches). The curtains of the court were 100 cubits long, by 50 cubits wide, and 5 cubits tall. This works out to 150 feet, by 75 feet, by 7½ feet.

### 2. Does the white linen curtain mean anything special, or is it just a curtain?

**Revelation 3:5** - *He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

**Revelation 7:13-14** - Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

**Revelation 19:8** - The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

The linen represents righteousness, and specifically Christ's righteousness worked out in the believers' life experience. This is not a passive righteousness. No, these are the ones who have overcome, who have gone through the great tribulation and come out victorious, who have washed their robes, and have done righteous acts.

### 3. What does the white linen curtain surround?

**Exodus 38:16** - All the hangings of the court all around were of fine woven linen.

The white linen curtain surrounded the entire court. This represents the righteousness of believers -- not just individuals, but all God's people together. From the outside, the white linen formed an unmistakable boundary of righteousness. Everything inside was holy; everything outside was common. This is God's plan for His church.

**Ephesians 5:27** - That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

**Ephesians 3:10** - Now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

God doesn't want a spotless church just for the fun of it. He has a special need that can only be filled by the church. He needs His church to show the rest of His creation—the principalities and powers in the heavenly places—His wisdom in the plan of salvation.

### 4. So the curtain is God's church, but does the individual believer show up anywhere in this?

**Exodus 38:17** - The sockets for the pillars were bronze, the hooks of the pillars and their bands were silver, and the overlay of their capitals was silver; and all the pillars of the court had bands of silver.

These pillars were not solid bronze (imagine the weight!), but were made of acacia wood, and then bronze-plated. The "capitals" were the silver-plated upper portion of the pillars, and the "bands" wrapped around the pillars to hold on the "hooks" which held up the curtain.

Here we have an illustration of the true believer—just dead wood, but covered over with the character of Christ, crowned with glory, and holding "the confession of our hope" in Christ's righteousness. (Romans 4:7, 1 Peter 5:4, Hebrews 10:23)

### 5. How was the gate different from the rest of the curtain? Was there some special meaning to it?

**Exodus 38:18** - The screen for the gate of the court was woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and of fine woven linen. The length was twenty cubits.

**John 10:9** - I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

The single gate of the sanctuary represents Christ, the only means of access to God. He is "the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

The special screen or curtain which marked the gate was woven, with fine white linen as the warp (the threads running lengthwise), and blue, purple, and scarlet as the woof (threads running crosswise). We do not know the exact pattern.

The three colors each have symbolic significance. Blue represents loyalty, purple is associated with royalty, and scarlet is the color of blood and sacrifice.

Notice that loyalty and sacrifice (blue and scarlet), when combined, indicate royalty (purple). We are told that Jesus was “obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.” (Philippians 2:8–9) What name is that? “And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” (Revelation 19:16)

## 6. What all was actually inside the court?

The two objects the Bible mentions in the court were the altar of burnt offering and the laver. Let’s take them one at a time.

*Exodus 27:1-2 - You shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide—the altar shall be square—and its height shall be three cubits. You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze.*

The altar symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ coming in human flesh. Made of perishable wood (as in the pillars, a symbol of humanity), the altar was made invulnerable by its bronze sheeting (a symbol of invincibility).

At each corner of the altar was a bronze plated “horn” which curved up and out.

## 7. What was the primary symbolism of the horns?

*Psalms 18:2 - The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation.*

Horns represent strength and power. Horns connected to the altar of sacrifice illustrate the power associated with Christ's sacrifice. Certainly the well-known hymn, "Power in the Blood" comes to mind.

## 8. What is another meaning for a horn?

*1 Samuel 16:13 - Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed [David].*

The Bible speaks of anointing prophets, priests, and kings. Is it only coincidence that Jesus filled all three of these positions? (Matthew 21:11, Hebrews 4:14, John 18:37)

Nearby the altar were a number of stakes set in the ground to which the waiting sacrificial animals were tied. Perhaps this area became congested at times, and more space was needed to secure a lamb or a goat. Consider this scripture:

*Psalms 118:27 - Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.*

In the sanctuary, animals were always slain before being placed on the altar, so this is not talking about tying an animal down on top the altar. It must refer to an animal standing by, marked for sacrifice, but not yet slain.

It is fascinating that the verse just before this was sung by the children of Jerusalem as Jesus approached the city. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Psalms 118:26, Matthew 21:9) Did any of them realize what was coming to the One riding the donkey?

## 9. What happened with the first sacrifice?

*Leviticus 9:23-24 - The glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering.*

This was the “sacred fire.”

**Leviticus 6:13** - A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.

Without this element of divine purification, the sanctuary service would come to an immediate standstill.

#### 10. What does God intend to do with this fire?

**Isaiah 6:6-7** - Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."

The purpose of the fire is for the removal of sins. There is no replacement for the sacred fire, as we see in the case of Nadab and Abihu, who offered incense before the Lord using "profane fire," and were "devoured" by "fire which went out from the LORD." (Leviticus 10:1-2)

#### 11. But what is this fire? What does it symbolize?

**Hebrews 12:29** - For our God is a consuming fire.

**Acts 2:3-4** - Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

**Isaiah 4:3-5** - And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy.... When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night.

Whoa! The "spirit of judgment." The "spirit of burning." That sounds a little rough!

But look at the result—cloud and smoke by day and flaming fire by night. This is sanctuary language, through and through.

Let's look at one more:

**Zechariah 13:9** - I will bring [the people of the land] through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.... I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.'

There it is again. Fire, refining, cleansing. But look at the result—"This is My people," "The LORD is my God." This is what the sanctuary is all about, getting God and His people back together again.

#### 12. What about the laver? What was its purpose?

**Exodus 30:18-20** - You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die.

The purpose for the laver was for cleansing. The Bible gives very little information about the Laver—what we might call a large basin. It is generally believed to have been round, but that is because the "sea" which took its place in Solomon's temple was round.

#### 13. From where did the metal for the laver come?

**Exodus 38:8** - He made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the bronze mirrors of the serving women.

The brass for the laver came from probably thousands of mirrors donated by the women of Israel. Lacking silvered-glass, a polished brass surface was the best mirror they had.

This is an interesting side note, which might easily be overlooked were it not for the book of James. But like so much of the sanctuary, it has its own contribution to make to the overall picture.

**James 1:23-25** - *For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

Here a mirror is compared to “the Word” and the “perfect law of liberty.” But the mirror can’t, in and of itself, do anything to get you clean. Some other means must be sought.

So it is with the law. The law can show us where we have fallen short, but it has no means of “cleaning us up.” Hence, the whole idea of salvation-by-law-keeping is doomed right from the start. Always has been, always will be.

But God took the mirrors and did something special by extending their function and usefulness. Without doing away with the moral obligation of the law, He added water, flowing from the smitten Rock, (Exodus 17:6) and gave us the opportunity to purify our lives, “just as He is pure.” (1 John 3:3)

#### **14. I really want to live a better life, but how do I go about this “purifying”?**

**Titus 3:3-5** - *For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*

**Ephesians 5:25-26** - *Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word.*

The laver symbolizes the “washing of water by the Word.” And it is this washing—filling our minds with the Word of God, letting it reshape our thoughts and habits—that will bring us to Ephesians 5:27 and make it possible for us to fulfill Jesus’ longing desire for “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but... holy and without blemish.”

#### **15. Can that really happen?**

**John 3:9** - *Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”*

**John 3:5** - *Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of [the washing of] water [by the Word] and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*

Yes, it can happen. God says it will happen. The sanctuary shows us how it can be done. And we can have absolute confidence in God’s Word, because it is “the Word of His power” which upholds “all things,” including you and me. (Hebrews 1:3)

#### **16. The diagram has “stakes” on it. What’s that all about?**

The stakes were for tying the animals before they were sacrificed. They are not mentioned in the Bible, but are described in other Jewish writings about Zerubbabel’s temple. In Solomon’s temple it is said there were bronze rings fixed into the pavement for the same purpose.

### **Lesson Summary:**

- The white linen surrounding the courtyard represents the pure righteousness of Christ worked out in the lives of believers.
- The gate represents the only way to enter salvation...by Jesus Christ Himself.
- The altar represents the cross where Christ died in our place. The horns on the altar tells us of the power of Christ's sacrifice to save us.
- The bronze laver represents how God's law reveals our sinful state but the water it contains assures us that we can be washed clean.

### **My Response:**

*I accept Christ's sacrifice  
in my place and ask that  
He cleanse me of my  
sins.*

### **Next Lesson: The Meaning of the Holy Place**