

V. Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

July 2, 2017

Chapter 5

Purpose: To recognize that the furniture in the Tabernacle is ideally suited in both form and function to teach us about Christ and our response in obedience to Him.

Key Verses: ²⁴Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵**whom God set forth as a propitiation [mercy seat] by His blood**, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness (Romans 3:24-25).

A. Review

Last week we looked at the tabernacle and how it pointed to Christ. The tabernacle is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. We saw that the tabernacle teaches us about the Glory of Heaven, the Holiness of God, the Sinfulness of Man, the Separation between God and Man, and finally the Way of Salvation.

The images of the cherubim woven into the linens of the Most Holy Place are a representation of the Glory of Heaven. God is surrounded by his hosts of angels, both in heaven and in His tabernacle. The perfection of the dimensions of the Most Holy Place also suggests the Holiness of God. As one approaches the throne room of God, the dimensions and materials of construction become more and more glorious.

The entire purpose and service of the tabernacle suggests the Sinfulness of Man. The tabernacle was established to deal with the sin of God's people, because otherwise sinful men cannot approach a holy God. Because man is alienated from God, we need a way to be reconciled to our Creator. The very way in which the tabernacle was given by God to Moses demonstrates the path from law to grace through redemption.

The Separation between God and Man due to man's sinfulness is highlighted by the restricted access to the tabernacle. The closer one approaches, the more restricted the access becomes. The layout of the tabernacle teaches us that sinful man cannot come into the presence of a holy God.

Finally, the tabernacle points to the Way of Salvation. The sacrifices of the tabernacle are a picture of the way in which we are made acceptable to God – through the vicarious atonement of shed blood in our place. Jesus Christ is the door, the entryway into the presence of God. He bridges the gap for us, sprinkling us with His own blood, making us pure and holy and acceptable in God's sight. Christ is the only way that sinful men can be reconciled to a holy God. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all these various aspects of the tabernacle.

B. Introduction

Today, we're going to continue our study in the tabernacle by talking about its furniture. But first, let's think about furniture in general. What is the purpose of furniture? Furniture is used for providing comfort or storage or to facilitate work. For example, beds and reclining chairs provide comfort. China cabinets and bookcases provide storage. Tables and desks provide places to work. But furniture is more than just function. It also has form. Thus, we can have all

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

different kinds of chairs, from very simple metal folding chairs, to Lazy-Boy recliners, to elaborate wooden carved chairs or even thrones. While the purpose or function of these chairs is the same – to provide a place to sit – the form can be very different.

I used to give this example (it is no longer valid because my brother and sister-in-law have changed the furniture in the formal living room). In my mother's house she has both a family room (or den) and a formal living room. In the den are the everyday couch, chairs, and end tables. This is the room where she most often sits and relaxes. The room appears well lived in. The couch upholstery is worn; one of the chairs should be replaced. On the other hand, the formal living room is just that – formal. The sofa, chairs, and tables in that room are all furniture that my grandmother used to own. It is a style called "Italian Provincial." The furniture is very beautiful, with carved wood arms and expensive upholstery. The furniture is very beautiful, and at 50-60 years old, it is in excellent condition. Why? Two reasons. First, it is in a room that isn't used much, and so the furniture doesn't get much wear and tear. The second reason is: the furniture just isn't very comfortable to sit in! Form and function: the furniture in my mom's living room has better form, but the furniture in her den has much better function. Maybe you have furniture like this in your home.

Ideally, form and function should fit together, and that's just what we see in the furniture of the Tabernacle. Each piece of furniture is beautiful, made to the pattern of heaven with excellent materials and workmanship, teaching us about the holiness of God and the glory of heaven. But in addition to their excellent form, each piece of furniture is ideally fit to perform its function, not only the function of everyday use in the Tabernacle, but also the typical function of teaching us about Christ.

In fact, the furniture in each area of the Tabernacle complex teaches us something different. The furniture of the courtyard teaches us about justification and sanctification, showing us what Christ has done for us. The furniture of the Holy Place is a symbol of the mediation between God and humans, and teaches us about the way we should conduct ourselves in the world. And finally, the furniture of the Most Holy Place teaches us about the awfulness of sin and the wonders of God's grace.

If we consider that the Mercy Seat (lid) is a separate piece of furniture from the Ark of the Covenant, then we see that altogether there are seven pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle: two in the Courtyard (the Burnt Altar and the Laver of Cleansing); three in the Holy Place (the Table of Showbread, the Golden Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense); and finally the two pieces in the Most Holy Place, which together comprise God's throne.

The seven pieces of tabernacle furniture, their location, and their lessons are summarized as follows:

Courtyard: Burnt Altar – Christ justifies us; Laver – Christ cleanses us for service

Holy Place: Table of Showbread – Provision; Lampstand – Power; Altar of Incense – Prayer

Most Holy Place: Ark of the Covenant/Mercy Seat – intermingling of God's justice and mercy

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

C. Lesson

1. The Furniture of the Courtyard

a) The Altar of Burnt Offering – Justification

The first piece of furniture one would encounter upon entering the Courtyard of the Tabernacle from the eastern gate would be the Altar of Burnt Offering.

¹Build an altar of acacia wood, three cubits high; it is to be square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. ²Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze. ³Make all its utensils of bronze—its pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and firepans. ⁴Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. ⁵Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is halfway up the altar. ⁶Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. ⁷The poles are to be inserted into the rings so they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried. ⁸Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain (Exodus 27:1-8).

The altar was a simple erection of earth lined with stones, surrounded by a wooden frame and platform of acacia wood, all overlaid with brass. Its dimensions were 5 cubits x 5 cubits x 3 cubits tall. It had a bronze network or latticework around it.

Longman: The altar was made of bronze, rather than gold, because it was located outside the tent. The principle we have seen is that though everything in the entire tabernacle precinct was holy and important, the closer an object was to the Holy of Holies, the more sacred it was, a fact highlighted by the expense of the material out of which it was made (p. 59).

Four horns projected from the four corners of the altar.

Longman: The “horns” are rounded projections on each of the corners of the top of the altar. They were built of one piece with the body of the altar; they were not added separately. The function of the horns is best thought of as allowing the priest to tie the sacrifice down on top.... Symbolically, the horns may well have represented God’s strength. It is well known that horns used in non-cultic contexts referred to one’s strength (p. 60).

The horn is a symbol of strength:

¹Then Hannah prayed and said: ‘My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD **my horn is lifted high**’ (1 Samuel 2:1).

³My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, **my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold**, my refuge and my savior—from violent men you save me (2 Samuel 22:3).

¹⁰I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but **the horns of the righteous will be lifted up** (Psalm 75:10).

The altar was the place where all the sacrifices were made and consumed by fire. The altar was the meeting-place between God and men - the one as infinitely holy and good, the other as sinful

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

– that they might transact together respecting sin and salvation, that the fallen might again be restored, or if already restored, might be enabled to grow in the fellowship and blessing of Heaven.

Longman: Since the Fall, no human being could approach the intimate presence of God without offering a sacrifice of an animal, whose death would substitute for the death of the worshiper. Accordingly, as we have seen, altars were a part of the worship of the people of God since the Fall. The placement of the altar outside of the tabernacle proper signified that sinners had to offer sacrifice before getting closer to the awesome presence of their Lord (p. 60).

True reconciliation between God and man could not occur with animal sacrifice. It took the perfect sacrifice of Jesus to secure redemption completely:

¹The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason **it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.** ²If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷Then I said, ‘**Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God**’” (Hebrews 10:1-7).

So, coming into God’s Courtyard, before you could come any closer to God, you had to come to the place of sacrifice, the place of atonement, the place of reconciliation, the place of restoration.

Poythress: The altar itself replicates the whole tabernacle, since it is the special place rising up from the earth [represented by the outside courtyard] where sacrifices may be offered. Thus the altar is suggestive of a little replica of Mount Zion, the later resting place of the temple, or Mount Sinai where God meets with Moses. The three-cubit height of the altar might perhaps even suggested the three tiers or stories of the world, the highest invisible heavens, visible heaven, and earth (p. 23).

The altar thus was the place of substitutionary sacrifice. As such it represented both a way to God and a barrier to God. There was no other way into God’s presence except by the sacrificial blood of a substitute. The altar speaks to us of justification, the justification that we receive through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Savior on the cross. Like the altar, the cross stands between the sinner and God.

We need a substitute to die in our place for our sins, if we want to be reconciled to God, if we want to approach His holy temple, if we want to go to heaven. Christ is that sacrifice for us. He is our justification. That’s what the altar of burn offering teaches us.

b) The Bronze Laver – Sanctification

Heading toward the Tabernacle, one would next encounter the bronze laver of cleansing.

¹⁷Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹⁸“Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. ¹⁹Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. ²⁰Whenever they enter

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, ²¹they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come' (Exodus 30:17-21).

The laver was a brazen wash pot or basin that was located outside of the door into the tabernacle. The laver held water that was used to wash the hands and feet of the priests ministering in the tabernacle area.

Poythress: The laver represented the waters of the earth, while the space around the laver represents the dry land. ... The washing basin supplies the priests with water for their ceremonial washings. It is a basin for cleansing. Water descending from heaven through the seasonal pattern of rains represented in the Holy Place comes to the earth, with its life-giving power, and renews it. It is the cleansing, life-giving water of life (p. 23).

The action of washing symbolized inward purity – cleansing from the guilt and pollution of sin. The laver speaks of sanctification or cleansing.

²⁵... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, **cleansing her by the washing with water through the word** (Ephesians 5:25b-26).

³**You are already clean because of the word** I have spoken to you (John 15:3).

¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth (John 17:17).

Jesus, the Word of God, is the source of living water that can cleanse us and give us eternal life, the end result of justification and sanctification:

¹³Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, **the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life**' (John 4:13-14).

³⁷On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, **streams of living water will flow from within him.**' ³⁹**By this he meant the Spirit**, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:37-39).

Poythress: The priests "thirst" again and again, that is, they need to be washed again and again, but Christ's cleansing cleanses forever. Later Jesus identifies the water with the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39). The coming of the Spirit is now signified by baptism, a cleansing ceremony with water (cp. Acts 1:5; 2:38; 10:47). Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus about being born of water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:5) builds on the picture of cleansing in Ezekiel 36:25-27 and points to these same truths.

Christ, the second person of the Trinity is the Word of God (Jn. 1:1). The Word is the cleansing power in our lives, attended by the Holy Spirit. We are kept clean by a constant reading of God's word. The cleansing of the hands speaks to service, and that of feet speaks to our walk/conduct.

⁵He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy He saved us through **the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit** (Titus 3:5).

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

We need to be cleansed to serve our Lord. The cleansing comes from Christ and not from us. It is a picture of our ongoing sanctification. That’s what the bronze laver teaches us.

2. The Furniture in the Holy Place

Now we will look at the three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place, starting first with the table of showbread. “In the Holy Place are symbols easily associated with mediation between God and human beings” (Poythress, p. 18).

a) The Table of Showbread – Provision

²³Make a table of acacia wood—two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high.

²⁴Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it. ²⁵Also make around it a rim a handbreadth wide and put a gold molding on the rim. ²⁶Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners, where the four legs are. ²⁷The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. ²⁸Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them. ²⁹And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. ³⁰Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times (Exodus 25:23-30).

⁵Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. ⁶Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD.

⁷Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. ⁸This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant.

⁹It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire (Leviticus 24:5-9).

The table was located on the north side of the Sanctuary, accompanied by dishes, spoons, covers, and bowls. Twelve cakes were placed in two rows on the table. The bread was replaced with fresh cakes every Sabbath. Along with the bread, vessels of frankincense and wine were placed on the table.

Longman: The very name of the bread, “presence,” indicates that it represented the presence of God with His people. The twelve loaves certainly represented the twelve tribes. The covenant designated the relationship that bound Israel and God together.... Thus, the loaves were a reminder of the intimate relationship the people of God enjoyed with their covenant Lord (p. 59).

Since the Table is in the Holy Place, a representation of heaven, it represents the heavenly origin of food. The bread was always in the presence of the Lord, presented as a kind of sacrifice. The provision of bread before the Lord reminds us that God is our provider (cp. Ex. 16 where God provides the manna). The Bread of Presence continually before the Lord is a constant reminder of God’s daily provision (“Give us this day our daily bread”). In fact, a pot of the manna was permanently kept in the Most Holy Place as another reminder. When we eat heavenly bread, we are transformed into heavenly people.

Poythress: The bread of the Presence was a continual pointer to the fact that God provides food to human beings every day through the processes of reproduction, growth, and harvesting. But in addition, God provided to His people, Israel, the manna, a special

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

supernatural food, redemptive food, food from heaven, when He brought the people from bondage into the Promised Land (Ex. 16:32). A portion of manna was permanently kept in the Most Holy Place to signify its holy character and to encourage the Israelites to remember its lessons (Ex. 16:32-35). When Jesus came, he fulfilled this symbolism (cp. Jn. 6:1-13) (p. 20).

The Bread of Presence was always before the Lord on the Table of Showbread. This points us to Christ, the true Bread of Life:

³²Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ³⁴‘Sir,’ they said, ‘from now on give us this bread.’ ³⁵Then Jesus declared, ‘**I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty**’ (John 6:32-35).

⁴⁸**I am the bread of life.** ⁴⁹Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. **If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world** (John 6:48-51).

The 12 loaves represent the 12 tribes of Israel, the people of God. They are constantly in God’s presence. They are offered as a sacrifice, as a reminder of God’s daily provision. We are to rely daily and completely upon the Lord for our sustenance. And when we partake of God’s daily provision, when we feed spiritually on Christ, we are gradually transformed into heavenly people. That’s what the Table of Showbread teaches us.

b) The Golden Lampstand – Power

The Golden Lampstand illuminated the interior of the Holy Place.

³¹Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it. ³²Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand—three on one side and three on the other. ³³Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand. ³⁴And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. ³⁵One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair—six branches in all. ³⁶The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold. ³⁷Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. ³⁸Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. ³⁹A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. ⁴⁰See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain (Exodus 25:31-40).

¹The LORD said to Moses, ²‘Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. ³Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

generations to come. ⁴The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD must be tended continually’ (Leviticus 24:1-4).

¹The LORD said to Moses, ²‘Speak to Aaron and say to him, “When you set up the seven lamps, they are to light the area in front of the lampstand.”’ ³Aaron did so; he set up the lamps so that they faced forward on the lampstand, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

⁴This is how the lampstand was made: It was made of hammered gold—from its base to its blossoms. The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern the LORD had shown Moses (Numbers 8:1-4).

The golden lampstand was a stand for 7 lamps – 1 in the center, with 3 branches on either side – with all of the lamps on the same level. It was positioned on the south side of the Sanctuary. The lamps burned olive oil throughout the night.

Longman: We recognize the menorah as a tree. The tree-like qualities of the menorah were much more than decoration. In chapter 2 we noted the association of trees with places of worship. A tree-like menorah reminds us of the Garden of Eden and so represents the presence of God on earth. Heavenly and Edenic imagery thus permeated the tabernacle. Furthermore, this tree was on fire. We are perhaps to associate this with another episode where God made His presence known on earth, namely the burning bush (Ex. 3)... According to Leviticus 24:1-4, the menorah was to be kept lit all the time. This would serve as a reminder that God made His presence known in the tabernacle precincts just as He did throughout Eden, which represented heaven (p. 57).

Poythress: The lampstand is also in the shape of a tree, with branches, buds, blossoms, and almond flowers. What message is conveyed by this shape? Once more it is a message about time, the familiar cycle of growth of plants, springtime, summer, and harvest. Indeed, elsewhere in Scripture the almond is a symbol of a time of watching or waiting (Jer. 1:11-12), because of a play on the Hebrew word for almond. “Almond”, *shāqēd*, is related to the Hebrew word for “watch,” *shāqad*. If we follow this symbolism through, we see that the lamps themselves symbolize the fruit of the tree. This strange tree has buds, blossoms, almond flowers, and fruit all at once, because it must be a static picture of the whole cycle of time that God has created and sustains. The tree symbolizes the growth of life. It issues new light in the form of fruit that in turn will give birth to new trees. The tree is truly both a tree of light and a tree of life, which shines on the earth and sustains its growth ... (cp. Jn. 1:3-4). In addition, the tree reminds us of the Garden of Eden with its original tree of life. But now the true life of creation has been lost through sin. It is restored through God coming to be “God with us.” The tabernacle is a renewed vision of the Garden of Eden. But curtains with cherubim on them still bar the way into God’s presence, just as cherubim barred the way into the original Garden of Eden after the Fall (Gen. 3:24) (p. 19).

The lampstand is in the shape of a tree. It has branches, buds, blossoms, and almond flowers. This image reminds us of the Garden of Eden and the original Tree of Life. Thus, we have a renewed vision of the Garden of Eden, which makes sense, since the Garden, Tabernacle, and Temple are all just pictures or patterns of heaven. But the curtains with the cherubim also remind us that the way into God’s presence is still barred:

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

²⁴After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden **cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth** to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24).

We can see that the Golden Lampstand points to Jesus, because Christ is the original uncreated light of the world:

³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴**In him was life, and that life was the light of men.** ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹**The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world** (John 1:3-9).

¹²When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, **‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’** (John 8:12).

⁵While I am in the world, **I am the light of the world** (John 9:5).

The lampstand pictures Christ receiving power through the oil of the Holy Spirit:

¹**The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor** (Isaiah 61:1).

³⁷You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. ³⁸How **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power**, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:37-38).

The golden lampstand also reminds us of the seven golden lampstands in Revelation 1 and the two olive trees pouring oil into the golden candlestick in Zechariah 4.

¹²I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw **seven golden lampstands**.... ²⁰The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and **the seven lampstands are the seven churches** (Revelation 1:12, 20).

²He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see **a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights.** ³Also there are **two olive trees** by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.’ ⁴I asked the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ ⁵He answered, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ ‘No, my lord,’ I replied. ⁶So he said to me, ‘This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: **“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,”** says the LORD Almighty’ (Zechariah 4:2-6).

In Revelation 1, the golden lampstands are clearly identified as churches. In Zechariah 4, we have the image of olive trees continually supplying oil to the lampstand. In Scripture, oil is often used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, so on one level, the golden lampstand in the Tabernacle teaches us about the perpetual grace of God to His Church. The golden candlestick represents the Church – bearing the light of God's Holy Spirit. The symbol tells the church to bear the image of God, by walking in the light of His truth. The lampstand is a call to Testimony, a call

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

to us to let our light shine before men. The church, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, is to shine with the light of Christ:

¹⁴**You are the light of the world.** A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. ¹⁵Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, **let your light shine before men**, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which **you shine like stars in the universe** (Philippians 2:14-15).

The Golden Lampstand pictures for us the light that is in Christ. Christ is light, and in Him is life. Likewise, we are called to be image bearers of Christ, and to let His light shine through us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring the good news of salvation to our world. That's what the golden lampstand teaches us.

c) The Altar of Incense – Prayer

The Altar of Incense was used to burn sweet smelling incense inside the tabernacle, to cover over the odor of blood.

¹Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. ²It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high—its horns of one piece with it. ³Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. ⁴Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding—two on opposite sides—to hold the poles used to carry it. ⁵Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ⁶Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you. ⁷Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. ⁸He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come. ⁹Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it. ¹⁰Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on its horns. This annual atonement must be made with the blood of the atoning sin offering for the generations to come. It is most holy to the LORD. ... ³⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Take fragrant spices—gum resin, onycha and galbanum—and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, ³⁵and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. ³⁶Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. ³⁷Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the LORD. ³⁸Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people' (Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38).

This altar was a square-like box that served as a stand for the pot of incense that was placed on it. It was located inside the Holy Place nearest to the veil and immediately in front of it. Thus it was the piece of furniture in this first room closest to the Most Holy Place. Incense was burned continuously on this altar, kindled morning and evening by burning coals from the burnt altar.

Longman: The altar of incense was on an axis with the bronze altar in the courtyard at the entrance to the Holy Place. The incense altar stood at the entrance between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The third and climactic part of this axis was the ark of the

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

covenant itself.... The altar itself would have been associated with the presence of God by means of its close association with the ark and the tabernacle (p. 58).

The altar of incense was called “most holy” and logically is placed in the Most Holy Place, as the writer of Hebrews does:

¹Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. ²A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. ³**Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place,** ⁴**which had the golden altar of incense** and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. ⁵Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now (Hebrews 9:1-5).

The sweet smell of incense was a sign of hospitality, by covering up the ancient world smells of animals and human labor. The smoke of the burnt altar goes figuratively up into heaven. The altar of incense signifies what happens to the smoke when, figuratively speaking, it rises to the very top of the visible heavens. It becomes a sweet smelling fragrance that enters even into the Most Holy Place. God smells and is pleased. He accepts the offering.

Poythress: The outstanding function of the altar was to burn sweet smelling incense. The smoke and fragrance from the incense would have filled the entire tabernacle, both the inner and outer rooms. What picture does this process represent to the Israelites? For one thing, it would have suggested the lavish and thoughtful hospitality of a host. The life of the average Israelite was accompanied by the strong and not-always-pleasant smells associated with animals and physical labor. The fragrance of burning incense was used by hosts to add to the pleasant atmosphere or a special social occasion. God as the Supreme Host made sure that such items of pleasant hospitality were associated with His house (pp. 21-22).

Once we take into account the theme of replication, involving the inner and outer spaces replicating heaven, the incense also suggests another set of associations. The smoke from the animal sacrifices offered on the bronze altar outside would have gone up into heaven. The altar of incense signifies what happens to the smoke when, figuratively speaking, it rises to the very top of the visible heavens. It becomes a sweet smelling fragrance that enters even into the Most Holy Place, God’s throne room. God smells and is pleased. He receives the offering. The offerings themselves are a sort of non-verbal prayer—prayer for forgiveness of sin, prayer of adoration, prayer of thanksgiving, prayer of intercession by the priest for those whom he represents. Appropriately the New Testament clearly identifies the rising incense with the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8; 8:3) (p. 22).

The burning incense is identified with prayer:

²**May my prayer be set before you like incense;** may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2).

⁸And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints** (Revelation 5:8).

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

³Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. **He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints**, on the golden altar before the throne. ⁴**The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God** from the angel's hand (Revelation 8:3-4).

The cloud of incense reminds us of God's glory cloud, which is an environment of ceaseless angelic prayer:

¹⁸Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. **The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace**, the whole mountain trembled violently (Exodus 19:18).

³And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' ⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and **the temple was filled with smoke** (Isaiah 6:3-4).

We can see how the Altar of Incense points to Christ when we remember how Christ prayed for us on earth and now intercedes for us in Heaven:

⁷**During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions** with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission (Hebrews 5:7).

²⁴Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because **he always lives to intercede for them** (Hebrews 7:24-25).

The relation of the altar of incense with the coals of the burnt altar and its proximity (across the veil) to the mercy-seat, tells us that all acceptable prayer must have its foundation in the manifested grace of a redeeming God. The continual burning of the incense calls us to pray without ceasing (1 Th. 5:17) like our Savior who lives to intercede for us. That's what the altar of incense teaches us.

3. The Furniture of the Most Holy Place

a) The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat – Justice and Mercy Intermingled

Poythress: In the Most Holy Place are the symbols of God's immediate presence: the law setting forth God's standards, the ark symbolizing God's throne or footstool, and the two cherubim guarding the throne (p. 18).

Finally, the Ark of the Covenant was God's throne in the Most Holy Place. It consisted of the ark itself, plus the top cover or "mercy seat."

¹⁰Have them make a chest of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. ¹²Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. ¹³Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it. ¹⁵The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed. ¹⁶Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. ¹⁷Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. ¹⁸And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. ¹⁹Make one

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. ²⁰The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. ²¹Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. ²²There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites (Exodus 25:10-22).

The ark was a chest of wood covered with gold that was the repository of the 2 tablets of the law. In addition, a pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded were stored in the ark. The mercy seat that covered the ark was made of pure gold. The Hebrew word for the mercy seat is *kapporeth*, which literally means "covering," and it was an atonement covering – a covering of blood. Two cherubim made from gold were on opposite ends of mercy seat, facing each other with wings outstretched. The ark and mercy seat had the appearance of a glorious throne – God sits between the cherubim and is surrounded by a curtain of cherubim.

Longman: The cherubim were especially powerful spiritual beings who served as protectors of God's holiness. They were at the sides of the ark with their heads bowed and their wings outstretched and touching each other. The reason for their posture was that the ark was the most potent symbol of God's presence in the tabernacle. Indeed, it was seen as the footstool of His throne (1 Chr. 28:2), perhaps even occasionally as the throne itself (Jer. 3:16-17). God the King sat in His earthly house on His throne, and the cherubim, whose wings supported Him, looked to the ground to shield their gaze from the radiance of His glory (p. 50).

The Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat is the most holy object in the Tabernacle. It contained the Law, broken by man, but over the Law was the mercy seat, stained with the blood of atonement. The ark becomes the symbol of security and redemption in Christ.

Longman: The lid of the ark...is given the provocative title of "mercy seat." This was the place where God said He would meet with Moses. Furthermore, as the name itself suggests, and as Leviticus 16:2, 13-15 states, it conveys notions of forgiveness and of protection from the power of sin (p. 55).

The mercy seat is a perfect picture of the Lord Jesus Christ in his mediatorial, redemptive work. The words in Rom. 3:25 translated "sacrifice of atonement" or "propitiation" can also be translated literally as "mercy seat." Christ is our mercy seat.

²⁴Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵**God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement [mercy seat], through faith in his blood.** He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, **so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus** (Romans 3:24-26).

The ark without the covering of blood and with God's holy law revealed was a throne of awful judgment for Israel. By the interposition of the mercy seat sprinkled with the blood of a sacrifice, it becomes a throne of grace instead. The ark contained the law, symbolizing God's righteousness. The mercy seat was the place where propitiation occurred through blood atonement, displaying God's mercy. Thus, God's throne displays both His justice and His mercy.

Lesson V – Sacred Spaces: Worship Furniture

The ultimate expression of the mingled justice and mercy of God was found on Calvary. That's what the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat teach us.

D. Conclusion

We haven't really looked very much at the form of the tabernacle furniture, instead focusing mostly on its function – the function of pointing ahead to Christ. Looking at the furniture in the courtyard – the altar and the laver – we can see how Christ justifies us and cleanses us through sanctification for his service. The furniture in the Holy Place – the Table of Showbread, the Golden Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense – teach us about God's provision, power, and prayer. Finally, in the Most Holy Place, we can see God's justice and mercy mingled together in the sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus Christ, through the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. In our response to God's mercy, we should rely on Him for our daily bread, live holy and blameless lives as examples to the world around us, and continually be in prayer, even as Christ intercedes for us. Thus, the furniture of the tabernacle teaches us about Christ and our response in obedience to Him.

E. Selected Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Jeremiah 7. At the time of Jeremiah people had taken the view that God lived in Jerusalem and would allow nothing to happen to Jerusalem under any circumstance. Criticize their view from what we know about temple theology.
2. Some modern churches burn incense, as they did in the Old Testament temple. Should this practice be allowed? Why or why not?
3. We have seen that the menorah is a tree symbol. Where else in the Bible is the tree used as a symbol of divine presence?

Next Week: Read Longman chapter 6