

# THE TABERNACLE

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## CULTURAL INSIGHT

*Tabernacle* is the word in the King James Version for the ancient Israelite tent shrine. In Hebrew it is simply “the tent” (*ohel*). According to the book of Exodus, the tabernacle was the first formal Israelite shrine (the patriarchs had built various altars to Jehovah during their journeys). The tabernacle was built to be portable and to be carried by the Israelites from place to place during the Exodus. It consisted of a central tent, which was divided into two sections, surrounded by a courtyard. The tent shrine acted as the center place for the camp of Israel (Numbers 2:2).

The commands to create the tent shrine formed an important part of the Sinai Covenant as described in the biblical book of Exodus. Jehovah called Bezaleel, a Judahite to whom He had given skill with crafts, to build the various parts of the tent shrine (Exodus 31:1–5). Jehovah described to Moses in detail the various parts that made up the tent shrine. Exodus 31:7–11 lists the tabernacle proper, the ark of the covenant with its covering, the table of the bread of the presence, the lampstand, the altar of incense, the sacrificial altar, the washing basin, the clothing for the priests and the Levites, and the anointing oil and incense.

The ancient tent shrine was built out of precious materials. The Lord told Moses to gather acacia wood (*shittim* in the King James Version), gold, silver, bronze, and precious fabrics for the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:5–9). Many of the furnishings of the tent shrine were constructed from acacia wood covered in either bronze or gold. For example, the ark of the covenant was made of acacia and then covered in gold (Exodus 37:1–2). On the other hand, the sacrificial altar was made of acacia and then covered in bronze (Exodus 38:1–2).

The tabernacle, like the other ancient temples in Israel, was designed to teach Israel with symbols. One of these symbols was how space was divided. Surrounding the tent proper was a courtyard, where the ordinance of animal sacrifice took place. Sacrifice was the primary ordinance of the ancient temple (see the ritual system described in Leviticus 1–8). The tent itself was divided into a holy place and a most holy place (called the holy of holies in the King James Version). Each area was more holy than the previous one, and each one represented coming closer to the presence of God. The actual presence of Jehovah was symbolized by the ark of the covenant. The goal of the tabernacle, as of temples in any dispensation, was to teach God’s covenant people how to enter the divine presence (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:18–24).

After the Exodus, the tent shrine served as Israel’s primary altar until a permanent temple was built during the reign of Solomon. For a time the tabernacle rested at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1), apparently at Beth-el (Judges 20:27), and at Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1:3).

***Related verses***

Exodus 26:1–35

Exodus 27:9–21

Exodus 33:7–11

Exodus 36:8–37

Numbers 2:2

Numbers 3:7–8

Numbers 7:1–5

Numbers 8:9

Numbers 9:15

Numbers 10:3

Numbers 18:2–4

Leviticus 4:4–5

Joshua 18:1

Judges 20:27

2 Samuel 6:17

2 Samuel 7:4–7

1 Chronicles 6:32

2 Chronicles 1:3

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