

## What Does the Tabernacle Symbolize?

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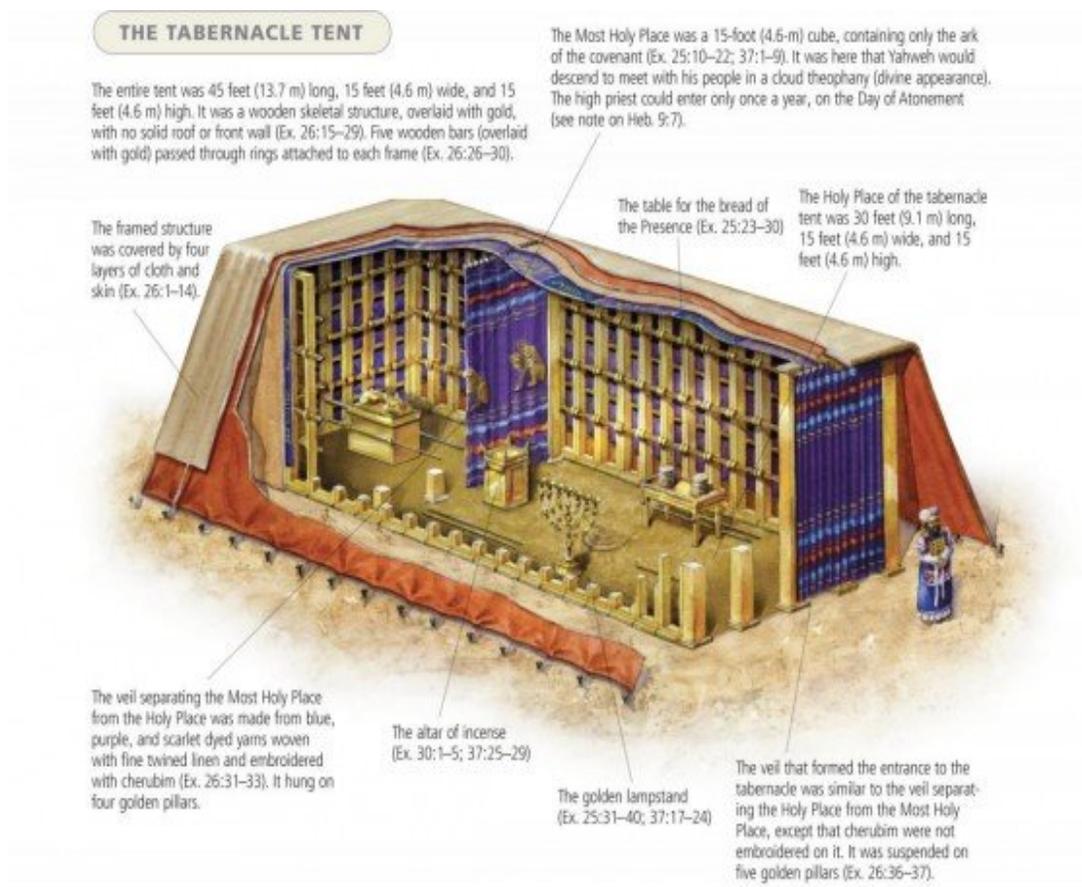


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The note on [Exodus 25:1-31:17](#) in the *ESV Study Bible* points out two important keys to understanding the symbolism of the tabernacle:

First, the tabernacle is seen as **a tented palace for Israel's divine king**. He is enthroned on the ark of the covenant in the innermost Holy of Holies (the Most Holy Place). His royalty is symbolized by the purple of the curtains and his divinity by the blue. The closer items are to the Holy of Holies, the more valuable are the metals (bronze → silver → gold) of which they are made.

The other symbolic dimension is Eden. The tabernacle, like the garden of Eden, is where God dwells, and various details of the tabernacle suggest it is **a mini-Eden**. These parallels include the east-facing entrance guarded by cherubim, the gold, the tree of life (lampstand), and the tree of knowledge (the law). Thus God's dwelling in the tabernacle was a step toward the restoration of paradise, which is to be completed in the new heaven and earth ([Revelation 21-22](#)).

Douglas Stuart, in his commentary on [Exodus](#) (NAC, 2006), p. 572, brings out another nuance:

The tabernacle represented **Yahweh's house** among the Israelites—he would soon encamp in his large house in their midst, and they would encamp around his house according to their tribes in concentric circles ([Num 2](#)).

He himself was symbolically represented as dwelling in the “back room” of his house by means of the ark.

In the tabernacle's “front room” were several pieces of furniture, the sorts of things that represented the furniture of a home, though on a grander scale. The first of these pieces of household-style furniture to be described is the table. It was primarily for food—a dining table

of sorts, symbolizing the fact that Yahweh really did live among his people and inhabit his house in much the same way that they inhabited theirs.

And as the storyline of redemptive history progresses, we see that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of these shadows:

### **Jesus is the true tabernacle.**

[John 1:14](#) tells us that “the Word became flesh and *dwelt* [Gk. σκηνώω] among us,” and the Greek translation of “tent of meeting” is σκηνή μαρτυρίου ([Ex. 33:7](#)). In other words, when Jesus became the God-man he “tabernacled” among us. (And of course Jesus spoke about “the temple of his body” [[John 2:19, 21](#)], and Paul taught that because we are united to the risen Messiah “we are the temple of the living God” [[2 Cor. 6:16](#)].)

### **Jesus’ body is the curtain ripped in two that brings us to the holy presence of God.**

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through *the curtain*, that is, through *his flesh*. . .” ([Heb. 10:19-20](#)). (See also [Matthew 27:51](#): “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”)

### **Jesus is the great high priest over the house of God.**

“. . . and since we have *a great priest over the house of God*, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with

pure water.” ([Heb. 10:21-22](#))

**Jesus is the full and final sacrifice.**

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ([John 1:29](#)).

“... We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . . Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins . . . By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” ([Heb. 10:10, 12, 14](#))