

In preparation for the Tabernacle display at Scentsy Commons, the Meridian Idaho North Stake Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints requested that several members of the Stake write research papers on various subjects relating to the ancient Tabernacle revealed to Moses in the Old Testament. The authors of these nine papers are not Bible scholars, but spent significant time, effort, and prayer as they studied their subjects and honed their messages. Their hope was to provide meaningful information for readers of all faiths and backgrounds who want to gain a deeper understanding of the doctrine and symbolism of Jesus Christ surrounding the Tabernacle. The authors' intent was for the writings to be from a Christian perspective, yet free from bias towards any one Christian religion. Further, the facts and opinions represented in these papers are the work of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the doctrine and teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or its leaders.

We welcome your questions or feedback on how we can improve the content of these research papers:
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An Overview of the Children of Israel and their Covenant Relationship with God Executive Summary

By Jane Johnson

- After the fall of Adam, God wanted each of His children to return to His presence
 - He called a people to help Him, that through them, “all the families of the earth would be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3)
 - He called His people through a *covenant*
 - He established this covenant through Abraham
 - Jacob, Abraham’s grandson became known as Israel and his twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel
 - The twelve tribes of Israel fell into bondage in Egypt
- The Children of Israel were led out of bondage and wandered in the wilderness in an event called the Exodus
 - The Exodus came to define Israel as the Lord’s covenant people (Ex. 19:3-6)
 - While in the wilderness, the Lord invited Israel to sanctify themselves that they might enter His presence
 - The children of Israel feared thunder and lightning they saw at Mount Sinai before entering the Lord’s presence and asked Moses to speak on their behalf rather than enter God’s presence themselves (Ex. 20:18-19)
 - Moses received God’s law and the children of Israel covenanted to follow it (Ex. 24:7-8)
 - Moses returned to the mount for further instructions to prepare the children of Israel to enter God’s presence
 - These instructions included the allotment of sacred time and sacred space for the spiritual edification of Israel
- The Lord gave Moses instructions for building a sanctuary (a sacred space) to help them enter His presence (Ex. 25:8)
 - All aspects of the tabernacle were foreshadowing of Jesus Christ
 - When the tabernacle was complete the presence of the Lord descended on it in a cloudy pillar (Ex. 33:9-10)
 - Moses spoke face to face with the Lord when the pillar came (Ex. 33:11)
 - The pillar continued day and night while Israel was in the wilderness (Ex. 40:38)
 - Whenever the pillar disappeared, the Israelites moved camp (Num. 9:22)
 - Priests were called from the tribe of Levi to officiate in the tabernacle
 - The high priest was the intermediary for all of Israel (a type of Christ)
 - Other priests acted on behalf of individuals and families
- Israel was willing to follow God but weak in doing so
 - When Moses was in the mount the children of Israel built a golden calf
 - God forgave them and promised guidance despite weakness (Ex. 34:10)
 - Spies sent to the promised land feared the men of Canaan
 - God punished Israel by requiring them to stay in the wilderness 40 years
- When Israel was ready, they entered the promised land
 - The promised land was divided up among the twelve tribes

- The tabernacle remained the center of Israelite worship
 - The tabernacle moved from place to place, including: Shiloh, Nob, Gibeon, and Jerusalem
 - The tabernacle was eventually replaced by the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem in about 950 BC
- Israel was divided in half after the reign of King Solomon
 - The northern part of the kingdom was called Israel
 - Ten of the twelve tribes resided in the northern kingdom
 - The northern kingdom did not have a temple
 - The northern kingdom quickly fell into idol worship and broke their covenants with the Lord
 - Ten tribes of the north were scattered by Assyria in 721 BC
 - The southern part of the kingdom was called Judah
 - The tribes of Judah and Benjamin resided in the southern kingdom
 - Jerusalem (and therefore, the temple) was in Judah
 - The people of Judah fluctuated between righteousness and wickedness for many generations
 - The people of Judah were captured and taken into captivity by Babylon in 586 BC
 - The temple was destroyed by the Babylonians
- Seventy years after the Babylonian captivity, the tribe of Judah returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple
 - The new temple was called the Temple of Zerubbabel
 - Several hundred years after the rebuilding of the temple, the land of Israel fell under Roman authority
 - Herod, ruler of Jerusalem under Rome, remodeled the temple
 - Jesus was born at the time of Herod and was brought to Herod's temple
- Jesus was born to fulfill the Law of Moses which would end the "old covenant"
 - Jesus Christ was the Great High Priest (Heb. 9:11-16)
 - He was the intercessor for all of Israel
 - He carried the burdens of Israel on his shoulders and close to his heart
 - Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God
 - Sacrificial lambs were in similitude of His great sacrifice
 - Christ's atonement brought an end to animal sacrifice
 - The new covenant replaced the old covenant and required God's people to have the law "written in their hearts" (Heb. 8:7-10)
- When Christ completed his atonement the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom (Matt. 27:50-51), a sign that he had opened the way for all men to return to the presence of the Lord

An Overview of the Children of Israel and Their Covenant Relationship with God

By Jane Johnson

Introduction

More than anything else, God, in His great love for all mankind, wanted each of His children on earth to come unto Him and to return to His presence. In a fallen world this would be a difficult task, and He needed help. With infinite wisdom, He called a people to help Him through the Abrahamic covenant, that through them, “all families of the earth [would] be blessed” (*King James Bible*, Gen. 12:1-3). This people, which descended from Abraham’s line, came to be known as Israel. To secure Israel’s commitment to Him, God made covenants with them, promising to lead and guide them if they would be faithful to Him and follow in His ways.

How could one family come to bless all the families of the earth? Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, who was later known as Israel, had twelve sons who inherited the covenants of their fathers and became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Due to famine in their homeland of Canaan, Jacob’s twelve sons and their families relocated to Egypt where they eventually came into bondage to the Egyptians. After four hundred years of slavery, Israel did not fully understand freedom and demands that would be required of their agency in keeping their covenant relationship with God. They needed to be taught.

Guided by the hand of God, the children of Israel were delivered from bondage and led into the wilderness where they resided for forty years. This series of events came to be known as the Exodus and was transformational in giving Israel a sense of identity, defining them as God’s covenant people. During this time, God tutored Israel by showing them His will and power through numerous miraculous events, among which were the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and “bread from heaven” that was sent to feed Israel in the wilderness. God also used this time period to show Israel His great love and mercy, as he repeatedly forgave their sins and foolish behavior in the wilderness. During this time of tutelage, the children of Israel not only came to know of God’s great power and mercy, but they also received important instructions intended to prepare them to live in a way that would ultimately lead them, and help them be instrumental in leading others, back into the presence God.

An Invitation to Receive God’s Presence: From Sinai to Tabernacle

After leaving Egypt, Moses and the children of Israel, entered the wilderness of Sinai where the Lord was ready to manifest His will to His people. Leaving the hosts of Israel encamped at the base of Mount Sinai, Moses climbed the mount and talked with God, who spoke to Him saying:

Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation (Ex. 19:3-6).

The Lord’s reference to Israel as his ‘peculiar treasure,’ or in Hebrew, *segullah* “special treasure,” is suggestive of the great affection the Lord felt for his people (Strong). Eager for them to come into His presence, He invited the Israelites to wash and sanctify themselves to prepare to be visited by Him. Unfortunately, they were not ready to have such an experience. When they saw thick clouds, smoke, and lightning and heard thunder and an exceedingly loud voice near Mount Sinai, they were afraid and asked that God “not speak with us, lest we die.” Instead, they asked that Moses speak God’s words to them and “we will hear” (Ex. 20:18-19). Afraid of being directly in God’s presence, they preferred that Moses receive God’s law for them.

With willing hearts, the Israelites received God’s law as revealed to Moses, “The Law having a shadow of good things to come” (Heb. 10:1), and they covenanted to be obedient to that law.

And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, all the words which the Lord hath said will we do....And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, all that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words (Ex. 24:3, 7-8).

After the children of Israel accepted God’s law by covenant, the Lord invited Moses to return to the mount where he spent forty days receiving additional instructions for Israel. It was during this time that plans were given for the building of a tabernacle, “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). The tabernacle was so crucial to God for the edification and instruction of his people that he gave Moses great details on how to build and furnish it.



Figure 1. Mount Sinai from: Coleman, Michael

By giving Israel the tabernacle, the Lord’s previous invitation to enter His presence was extended, in a sense. Although only the high priest was permitted into the holiest section of the tabernacle where God’s presence was, the people understood that the high priest who entered into the Holy of Holies was acting on their behalf, just as Moses had communicated with God on their behalf on Mount Sinai. Thus, the people were blessed with an opportunity to feel the power and love of God, albeit through his intermediaries.

One of two Hebrew words for tabernacle, *ohel mo’ed*, meaning “tent of meeting,” denotes its portable tent structure. With a fence around the perimeter, the tabernacle was divided into three main areas. Though portable, the tabernacle was anything but common. Made and furnished of the finest materials, it represented the best workmanship Israel could offer and would have been an impressive sight to behold in ancient times. As the Israelites lived in tents and moved from place to place, it was fitting that the Lord also dwelt in a tent so as to accompany them on their journey through the wilderness to the promised land.

Another Hebrew word for tabernacle, ‘mishkan,’ meaning “residence or dwelling place,” denotes one of the great purposes of the structure—that the Lord, who wanted so much to dwell among his covenant people, would have a designated place to be near them. Here, Israel could learn to seek God, “And it came to pass, that every one which sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation” (Ex. 33:7). The tabernacle was patterned after the archetype of Sinai, the Lord’s holy mountain (Milgrom). Just as the Lord’s glory was manifest over Mount Sinai, so also the Lord’s glory

shown over the tabernacle in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar by night. Within the tabernacle, Moses saw and spoke with the Lord face to face.

And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend (Ex. 33:9-11).

This manifestation of the Lord's presence over the tabernacle was "in sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys" (Ex. 40:38), and became a guide to Israel. They camped in each location only as long as "the presence" remained. When the cloud was taken up, the children of Israel moved on, "whether it were two days, or a month, or a year" (Num. 9:22).



Figure 2. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night from: biblestudentsdaily.com

The temple was not only a dwelling place of the Lord, it was also a place of ritual worship in the form of individual and communal sacrifices. This worship occurred daily, connecting individuals, families, and the nation of Israel as a whole to the Lord. Members of the tribe of Levi were called to work in the tabernacle, officiating as priests. While priests were responsible for acting on behalf of individuals and families, only the high priest was considered a representative for all of Israel. The high priest wore six of the names of each tribe of Israel on each shoulder and a breastplate with twelve stones, representing each of the twelve tribes. This special clothing reflected the weight of the responsibilities of the high priest in acting on Israel's behalf—with Israel close to his heart, the high priest would carry the burdens of Israel on his shoulders. None but the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the temple, where the presence of God dwelt. Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would pass through the veil of the temple into this sacred space. Full of symbolism, all aspects of the tabernacle and the rituals performed therein were revealed by the Lord, intended to draw the hearts of Israel to Him.



Figure 3. High Priest Breastplate from: redeemerofisrael.org

A People Willing But Weak in their Relationship with God

Despite having willing hearts, the children of Israel were weak. When Moses returned from Mount Sinai, he found the people in a state of sin and weakness, worshipping a golden calf. Although God was angry, He heard Moses' plea on Israel's behalf and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 32:13). Instead of turning them away, in mercy, the Lord made another covenant with them:

And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord (Ex. 34:10).

The Lord, through Moses, continued to give instruction to Israel regarding all aspects of life in an effort to lead His people closer to Him. Still, the Israelites fluctuated in their faith, often showing vulnerability to fear and sin. When twelve Israelite spies were sent into the promised land, only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, were not overcome by fear of their enemies. Fearing men more than God, Israel was reprimanded and, consequently, their time in the wilderness was extended to forty years.

As Israel's years wandering in the wilderness came to a close and they prepared to begin a new life in the promised land, they were warned by Moses, "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 6:12). After being tutored by God in the wilderness away from the influences of the outside world, a new generation of Israelites was prepared to enter the promised land. Unlike the previous generation who had been slaves in Egypt, this new generation was confident in the Lord and His promises that He would help them succeed.

Tabernacle to Temple

As the Israelites settled in the land that God had promised them, each tribe was assigned a designated piece of ground. Regardless of where each tribe lived, the tabernacle continued to be the center of Israelite worship as it was set up first in Shiloh (Josh.18:11; 1 Sam. 1-3), then in Nob (1 Sam. 21), Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:39), and finally, Jerusalem, where it was eventually replaced with a permanent structure known as the temple of Solomon.



Figure 4. Artistic depiction of the first temple in Jerusalem from the public domain

King Solomon's death brought significant change to the Israelite people. Unhappy with the leadership of King Solomon's son and heir, Rehoboam, ten of the tribes of Israel separated themselves from his rule and set up a kingdom of their own in the northern part of the land. Without access to the temple in Jerusalem, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom soon fell away from the traditions and habits of worship they had learned and practiced in the wilderness. Sadly, they forgot the ways of the Lord, despite previous warnings not to forget all that the Lord had done for them. Consequently, the Lord allowed them to be conquered and scattered by the Assyrians in approximately 721 BC. The ten tribes were scattered in the lands roundabout, and eventually forgot their identity as Israelites.

Approximately one hundred thirty years later, Babylon conquered the southern kingdom, also known as the Kingdom of Judah. At this time, Solomon's temple, the center of Israelite life and faith, was destroyed. After seventy years of captivity in Babylon, the tribe of Judah was allowed to return to Jerusalem and a new temple, sometimes referred to as the temple of Zerubbabel, was built over the remains of the temple of Solomon.

The Offering of the Great High Priest

Several hundred years later, during the time of the Roman Empire, the second temple was remodeled and came to be known as the temple of Herod.



Figure 5. Brooklyn Museum - Reconstruction of the Temple of Herod Southeast Corner by James Tissot (1836-1902) from the public domain

To this temple, a young infant named Jesus was brought. This Jesus, the foreordained Messiah and Son of God, had finally been born into the world to make possible God's plan for bringing all of His children

back into his presence through a *new* covenant. With the establishment of this new covenant, the Law of Moses would no longer be necessary as the sacrifice of Jesus Christ would replace required sacrificial offerings. The new covenant would instead require a new offering--that of a heart willing to follow Jesus.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people* (Heb. 8:7-10, emphasis added).

This Jesus was none other than Jehovah of the Old Testament. It was He who had longed to bring Israel into His presence centuries earlier, and in an effort to do so, had revealed the original plan for the tabernacle with all of its symbolism pointing to Him. He was *the* High Priest, prepared to mediate on behalf of all of God's children. Unlike earlier high priests of the tabernacle and temple who had served as an "example and shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5), Christ was "a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Heb. 8:2), the "mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6). As the high priest of ancient times had symbolically worn Israel on a breastplate and on his shoulders, so also Jesus, the Great High Priest, held God's children close to His heart and carried their burdens on His shoulders.

Jesus was not only the high priest, he was the sacrificial lamb. For centuries, hands had been placed on the heads of countless lambs, transferring the sins of the children of Israel upon their heads before they were sacrificed. These were all in similitude of the Lamb of God, who had the sins of all mankind placed upon Him before He was sacrificed.

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, *that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance*. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (Heb. 9:11-16, emphasis added).

Unlike earlier ceremonial sacrifices performed by priests in the tabernacle and temples, Jesus' great sacrifice covered the sins of all mankind. This atonement ended the need for all sacrificial offerings, as the old covenant was replaced with a new covenant. And when his offering was complete, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matt. 27:51), symbolizing that He had at last opened the way for all of God's children to enter into His presence.

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