

Building a Mishkan in Your Heart

By Rabbi Nathan Joiner

Shabbat Shuvah

9/27/14





INSIDE THE HOLY PLACE

(cutaway view)

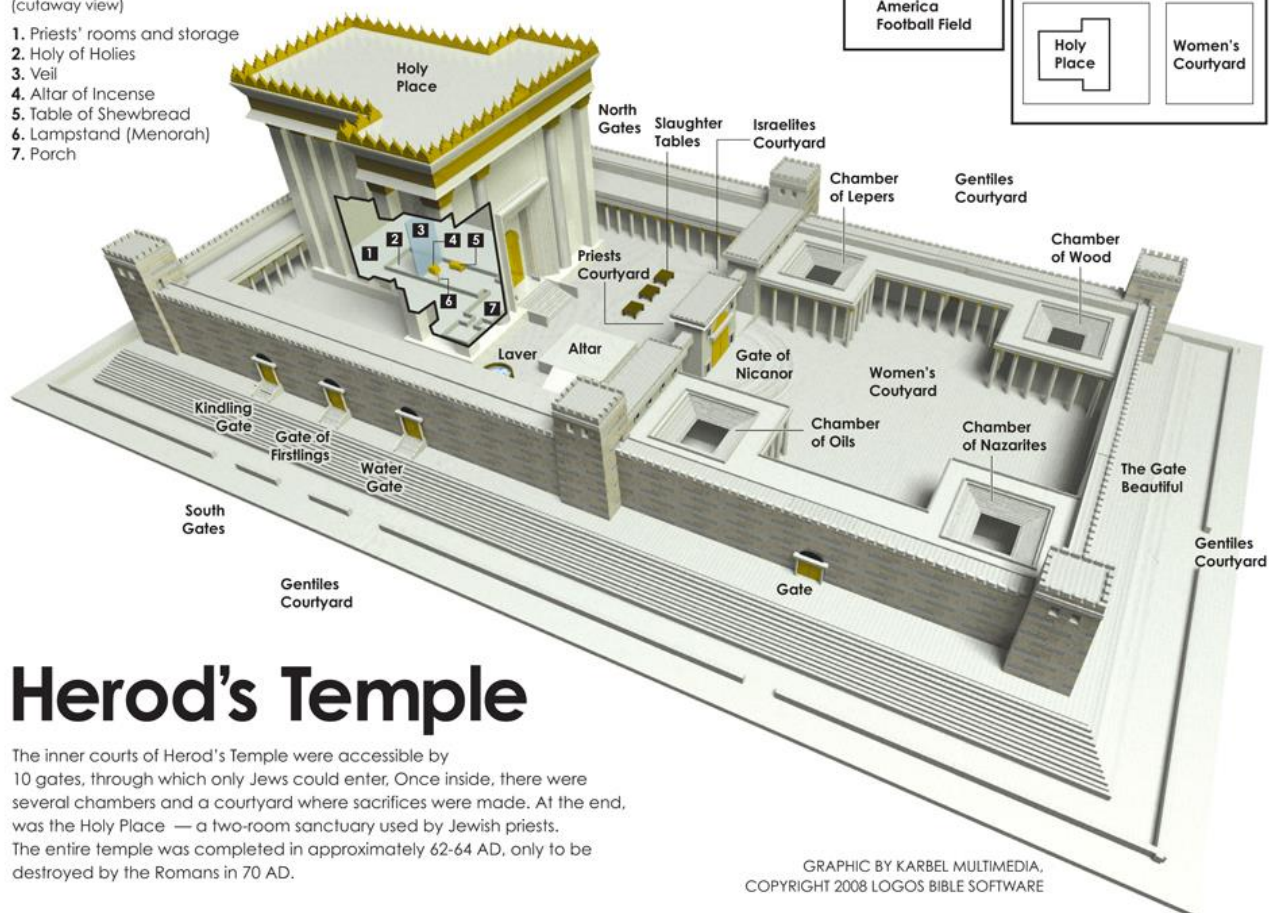
1. Priests' rooms and storage
2. Holy of Holies
3. Veil
4. Altar of Incense
5. Table of Shewbread
6. Lampstand (Menorah)
7. Porch

Size comparison (approximate):

America
Football Field

Holy
Place

Women's
Courtyard



Herod's Temple

The inner courts of Herod's Temple were accessible by 10 gates, through which only Jews could enter. Once inside, there were several chambers and a courtyard where sacrifices were made. At the end, was the Holy Place — a two-room sanctuary used by Jewish priests. The entire temple was completed in approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

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Today is a very unique Shabbat called Shabbat Shuvah. That means the Shabbat of Return. Shabbat Shuvah falls in the 10 days of Awe between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The image begins on Rosh Hashanah when the book of our lives is opened. We then take the next 10 days to make things right with G-d and other people before Yom Kippur, when we go through a symbolic death and the books are closed. So imagine that you are going to die and stand before G-d seven days from today.

What would you do?

No, don't go skydiving and binge on last hurrahs. But what's really important? How can you clean up your heart and soul, your relationships with other people and with G-d?

On Shabbat Shuvah it is customary to speak about an area where we might need to grow. This year, I want to talk with you about *Kedushim* (Holiness). Holiness means literally, to be set apart for G-d's purposes.

Ask yourself right now, do you feel like you are living your life for G-d's holy purposes? Does G-d's call on your life drive your passion, your zeal, your emotions, your conversations and the choices you make? Or do you feel spiritually passive, unaware and desensitized from G-d's call on your life to be a holy person — set apart for Him.

In order to talk about holiness, we are going to use the image of the Mishkan (The Temple) which is intended to be the Holiest place on earth. I gave a message a few weeks ago called "The Mystery of the Torn Temple Veil" where we talked about Yeshua and the sacrificial system (Please see pamphlet). In that message we talked about how the Temple was as an earthly replica of G-d's heavenly house. A Mishkan (a dwelling place) is a place where heaven is on earth, where G-d's presence could come and *dwell* with His people.

Now, of course the Temple is still destroyed, and we are still in exile. But our sages teach that the mitzvah (the commandment) to build the Mishkan still applies, because we need to build it inside ourselves. There are Midrashim that compare each part of the Temple to the organs of the body. In 1 Cr 3:16 Paul says: "*Don't you know that you yourselves are G-d's temple and that G-d's Spirit dwells in your midst?*"

We must build a Mishkan, a replica of heaven, a place for the Holy Presence of the Lord to dwell in our own hearts. We are going to use the actual Temple to learn how we can more fully live out G-d's call on our lives, to be a Holy and set apart for His Presence.

The Outer Walls

Your Body is a Holy

Let's take a look at our handout with the Temple layout (inside front cover).

If you think of your entire body, mind and soul as a Temple, we might think of the outer walls as our physical bodies, flesh that gives our soul a physical existence in the world.

In order to build an inner Temple we must first understand that our bodies should be Holy and set apart for G-d's purposes. Paul Writes:

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from G-d? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honor G-d with your bodies." 1Cor 6:19-20

Much of Jewish life acknowledges that our bodies are set apart. We are asked to demonstrate that we belong to G-d and not to ourselves. Keeping Kosher, fasting on Yom Kippur, resting on the Sabbath, Niddah, Tztiz, the prayers we say before and after we eat and even just after we use the bathroom — all remind us that we are Holy people.

We are told not to cut or put inscriptions or tattoo markings on our bodies. We shouldn't use recreational or self-medicating drugs that alter our personalities. We are given these restrictions not only because these kind of things might injure the bodies G-d has given us, but even deeper, they give us the illusion of control.

They suggest that we can change what G-d has given us, that we can somehow escape the world or personhood G-d has called us to live in. They suggest that we can take our lives into our own hands. But the truth is that our bodies are not our own to do with as we please. We are like stewards of our bodies to use in the ways that G-d has laid out for us.

The real way to have strong outer walls in your inner Temple is to internalize that your body, your brain and your emotions are all things that G-d has made for Holy purposes. We could go on and on with examples, but ultimately it isn't about a list of dos or don'ts:

It's about building a Mishkan in your heart.

G-d made you to be beautiful

Think of all the intense care and labor that went into crafting the Mishkan. Everything was described with great detail and exact measurements. But more than that it was beautiful. Everything was of the finest materials and colors.

I try to take regular, one on one, dates with my kids. Last week I took Aviva out on the kayak on the Charles River. We were able to get about 5 feet away from a blue Jay that was fanning it's wings and it was full of colors. I took it as an opportunity to share with her Yeshua's teaching; "if G-d clothes even the birds with this much splendor, how much more so will he take care of you?"

But this time we took it a step further. *If G-d made that bird so beautiful, and if you are so much more valuable to G-d than the blue jay, then how much more beautiful are you?*

She got it in a 3 year old way. But, we all need to get this too. Because of the lies we've all heard, the hurts and abuses we've been through and the brokenness of our world some people believe they are ugly and unlovable, they are shamed. We may feel like failures. We may feel like we have nothing left to give, that we are unworthy, unworthy of real love and unworthy to bear G-d's beauty to the world.

Far from feeling more valuable than the blue jay we might feel more like garbage, worthless with no impact. And then we live life through those eyes and it becomes harder to build a Holy Mishkan inside. The root of the problem is that we just don't know who we really are.

We don't know whose we are.

Think of the story we read today about the Prodigal Son. He took his life into his own hands. But then he got so low that he was actually eating garbage out of the pig trough. What got him out of it? *He remembered who His father was.*

Real healing can come when we remember who our Heavenly Abba is — and we allow Him to speak to us about who we really are and how he really sees us. "Knit together in your mother's womb. Fearfully and wonderfully made from the beginning."

Even more beautiful than a blue jay on a clear fall day on the river.

So the next time you look in the mirror, remember that your body is a Temple, a reflection of G-d's very image created to share His glory with the rest of creation.

Remember that you are His precious one.

The Outer Courts

The outer courts was a place for the people to gather. It was a busy market place where they would sell foods, souvenirs and animals for sacrifices.

This is probably where Yeshua overturned the tables shouting, “It is written that my house shall be called a house of prayer but you are turning it into a den of robbers!” Rather than being set aside for G-d’s purposes they were using it for their own, to extort and cheat vulnerable people.

So as we build our own mini-Mishkan, our outer courts can be the actions and things that we do to honor G-d and the other people He has put into our lives.

Are you letting G-d bring Holiness into your outer courts?

Ultimately Jewish life is all about allowing G-d to bring Holiness into our lives. The blessings we say all begin, “Blessed are you Lord our G-d, Ruler of the universe who has ‘sanctified us’ (or ‘set us apart’) by His commandments.”

For example on Friday night, we gather with our families over Shabbat prayers to bring the Holiness of the Temple into our home. The Torah tell us Jews not to engage in buying and selling on Shabbat to bring holiness into our lives and be set apart on this important day — for His purposes.

So on the drive home from Synagogue Shabbat afternoon is that Starbucks coffee worth it? Or is your life set apart?

Kashrut (Kosher eating) is all about bringing Holiness into our lives. It says, “G-d you are ultimately in charge of what I put inside my body. Because you are in charge of everything in my life, even what I eat”. Is your tummy’s desire for a Cheeseburger stronger than your desire to be set apart for G-d’s purposes?

I’m really not here to judge anyone, but just to share what’s behind these things. G-d want’s you to be a Mishkan. He wants your outer courts to be Holy.

Are we Holy in how we relate to others?

Another aspect of holiness in our outer courts is how we relate to others. Are we constantly working on mussar, on developing a Holy Character, to better love, serve and draw others nearer to the Lord?

Or have we allowed our inadequacies and need for self-preservation turn our outer courts into a den of Robbers? Ephesians 5:3 gives us a high standard to live by:

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for G-d's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Messiah and of G-d.”

This is tough stuff. Paul tells us there should not even be a hint of impurity. Dirty jokes, double entendres, hurtful sarcasm, envy, criticism, swearing (which is basically evoking curses on whatever you're condemning) and lashon hara (speaking poorly about other people.) And yes, this includes what you post on blogs, facebook, twitter, instagram, or whatever...

Ask yourself, does what you say, either in words, body language, gestures, or tone model and build others up? Does it help them to become the kinds of people they were created to be? Will it encourage other people toward the greater good, toward greater holiness?

Our Inner Courts:

Let's keep going and talk about the inside of our Temple. We walk up the stairs into the inner courts, through the woman's courtyard, up the 15 stairs and into the priests courtyard. Here we have the Great Alter.

You are a Living Sacrifice

Previously I talked about the sacrifices that were performed out front. The sacrifices were not only about atonement for sins but also about a symbolic way of giving our entire lives to G-d. The sacrifice would be like you saying, “I give you my whole heart”. In Roman's 12 we read “Make your lives a living sacrifice”.

Not just part of your life. Your whole life.

Everytime we say the Shema, we commit our whole heart, soul and all of our energies and resources toward serving G-d. That includes how we spend our time.

I know grown men who spend 4 or 5 hours a day watching TV or playing video games. Why? They don't realize the call on their lives to have an impact in our world.

Wake up! G-d has way too much for us to do in such a short time. So much to build and so many lives to touch and transform for the Kingdom of Heaven! You have an impact. Every moment of your lives has a purpose.

Are you living it out?

Don't let Blemished Things Inside

Now, sacrifices are a kind of worship. In order for a priest to worship he needed to be ritually pure. In addition, they could not bring any animal onto the alter if it was blemished in any way. Why? Remember we are working our way toward the Holy of Holies where G-d's presence dwells.

In your inner Mishkan, your inner courts should be a place for worship. Don't bring impure and blemished things inside. What will you read? What will you watch? What you listen to? With whom will you spend your time? How do you relax and wind down? These small daily choices will shape the kind of person you will become. They will also shape your spiritual life.

We never like to talk about this kind of thing, so forgive me in advance, but let's get real. Do you realize how prevalent Pornography is in our culture? Let me share with you some statistics:

- Pornography in the US alone is \$3-billion-a-year industry. It's only a google search away on smartphones, tablets and computers.
- "Porn doesn't have a demographic, it goes across all demographics and ages."
- Out of 400 million web searches, 1 in 8 of all searches online are for erotic content.
- Out of 1 million searches on mobile devices, more than 1 in 5 are for pornography.
- More than 7 out of 10 teens hide their online behavior from their parents.
- More than half of boys and nearly a third of girls see their first pornographic images *before they turn 13*.
- 93% of boys and 62% of girls said they were exposed to pornography before they turned 18.
- 35% say they have viewed pornographic videos "too many times to count." 68% use porn at least once every week.
- It's all bad, but 88% of all porn scenes include violent sexual aggression. Many of the girls don't really want to be there — they are there because they've been so broken and abused that they feel totally worthless.

I want to suggest that people are not just abusing these woman by producing the stuff. They are abusing them by watching it. These are G-d's beloved children. 93% of US young adult men are using, objectifying and trivializing His beloved.

- The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers reports that 56% of divorce cases involve one party having "an obsessive interest in pornographic websites".

Now, I'm not shaming or condemning anyone here.

The neurotransmitters and endorphins that are released when people see pornography are as influential and addictive as Heroin. Good people are stuck in this and can't get out!

Pornography destroys marriages and families. It destroys people's ability for real intimacy. It creates spiritual numbness. It destroys souls.

And listen, if this is something you struggle with, please come talk to me. You can break free. But the first step is to ask for help.

As I work with young people these stats seem accurate, even in faith based homes. But it doesn't stop with phones and computers. It's acted out in our schools, even in classy schools like the ones here in Needham.

One study showed that in the United States, by age 19, 71% of all youths in the US are sexually active and the pressure youth feel from their peers, social media circles and smartphones is often unbearable.

Is this the sex education we want for our kids?

Parents, are we protecting our kids from these kinds of things and training them to know how to process it? I suggest to us parents with small kids, now is the time to start.

But I want to suggest that our call to purity goes beyond explicit pornography. Let's talk about all the media that we regularly take in. Television, movies, and netflix shows are a major part of most of our lives. What about R rated movies?

Here's a real life example: you're watching a movie or show and it starts to get racy. Are you okay with filling your mind, heart and home with suggestive images of other people having sex on camera?

Raina and I have decided that we're still too young for R rated movies.

Does it matter to you? Are you even aware of it? Do you find that you start to actually like watching these scenes? How will those images and stored up files in your memory banks affect your purity, your relationship with G-d and your marriage (or future marriage)?

Or, if you are reading a romance novel and it gets steamy. Are you sure that in a season of frustration and hurt in your marriage it won't lead you to compare your spouse to the literary romantic?

Are we being careful about what we allow into our inner courts of our Temple?

The verses we just read in Ephesians emphasizes "not even a hint of sexual immorality or impurity".

Did you know that there was an episode of one of Google's top 5 most popular youth TV shows, "The Secret Life of The American Teenager" where the word sex was said 70 times? And of course, they were not referring to healthy marital intimacy, but to High school, no strings attached, sex.

I remember an episode of "The Office" that featured a comical yet salacious scene where a woman who was engaged to be married sneaks off to the back storage closet to rendezvous with another co-worker.

I love watching movies and shows, and I understand that we live in a broken world where marriage is trivialized and real people commit adultery, ***but what makes it OK for a follower of Yeshua to let that be entertainment?***

When Paul said that there "not be even a hint of sexual immorality, impurity or coarse jokes among you" *He didn't add a clause that said, "unless the humor is clever or the videography is excellent"*. And when G-d called us to be Holy, to make our hearts, bodies, and homes a Mishkan, He didn't say "unless it seems too extreme for our culture".

G-d called us to be set apart. We should be different.

Now, I'm not becoming a fundamentalist. In life we'll see and hear things we might rather not. I'm not saying we should isolate ourselves, or heaven forbid get so uptight that shame gets in the way of love. But my point is that we are so desensitized to this kind of entertainment, not just risqué content, but also extreme violence, that we simply aren't aware.

Think about how to boil a frog. If you try to drop a live frog into a pot of boiling water it will jump right out unharmed. But if you put the frog in a pot of cold water and slowly bring it to a boil, the frog will just sit at the bottom until he is cooked.

We are flooding our minds with sub-par moral values, and calling it relaxing "down-time." I suggest that right now we are like those frogs sitting in water slowly being boiled. In 1 Corinthians 6: 18 we read:

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from G-d? You are not your own.... Therefore honor G-d with your bodies."

See we need to wake up! This is important! G-d made you to be a Mishkan.

I'm not judging anyone or telling you what to watch, what not to watch or where to draw the lines. You'll have to make those choices for yourselves and your families. But we need to ask the hard questions.

Is this something you want to bring inside your Temple? Are you of more valuable than that?

30 Day Challenge

Here's a challenge for you: Take a 30 day media input fast. No TV shows, movies, netflix videos, whatever. Instead use that time to focus on building a Holy place in your inner courts. Then when you go back to your media, see if you experience those shows and movies the same way.

We don't need more rules, but we need to catch a vision for holiness. You're worth it.

Our Inner Ulam

Now as we move past the alter and up the stairs we enter the Ulam, the foyer of the Holy Place. It was a beautiful and joyful room with gold vines and hanging vessels and decorations.

We have talked a lot about protecting our Temples and Holy living but there is an opposite temptation to get so caught up "trying to be Holy" that that we lose a sense of what holiness is. It isn't about being fearful, reactionary or feeling a heavy sense of over importance. The purpose is to build a beautiful, sacred place of praise and Joy inside. I think there is whole lot of giggling going on in the Kingdom of heaven. And it is Holy and Good.

We need to *build an Ulam in our hearts — with golden vines and decorations — a place of praise and Joy.*

Our Holy Place

Now we finally enter into the Holy Place. The walls were 9 feet thick. Inside the room was the Incense alter, the Menorah and the Show bread table. Then beyond the Huge Curtain veil we find the Holy of Holies.

We could have a whole message on each of these rooms — but for sake of time let's focus on the the Temple Menorah. The Menorah was 80 pounds and 5 feet tall. It was re-lit every night to begin the new day so that it would be continuously burning. The ever burning light of the Temple Menorah symbolized G-d's eternal presence.

As we build our inner Mishkan, what do you think happens to us if we don't re-light our inner Menorah each day?

That's why we pray, we study Torah and learn, we keep the Sabbath and come for services, we live Jewish lives, we prioritize time with one another in community. To re-light our inner menorah and invite G-d's presence.

Don't let the business and worries of daily life break into your Holy Place blow out your Temple light.

HOLY OF HOLIES

And our final room which is the holiest part of the Temple, is the Holy of Holies. Your heart. Inside, the walls and floor is lined with gold. Sitting in the middle of the room is the Arch of the Covenant — The Torah — G-d's Words.

As we apply this to our own Mishkan — I'll leave you with these questions:

Is your heart lined with Gold and filled with G-d's Words?

Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies once per year. It was the place where G-d's presence would come and dwell. And we know that the manifest presence of G-d is Yeshua himself.

Is your heart a place where you encounter Yeshua?

That's what all this is about.

We will all have brokenness in our lives. We will all have pain. We'll all mess up. But know that Yeshua wants to make your heart a sacred place — a place that is lined with Gold and filled with Torah. He wants to make your heart a place where you can really know Him. Not just *know about* Him - but *know Him*.

And even more, He wants to make your heart a place where He can encounter *you*.

No matter what hurts you've been through — it's never too late.

Just like the prodigal son if we'd only look up and remember who our heavenly Abba is, He is there ready to pick you up. He's ready to restore your holiness. Because you are worth it, because you're of even more value than the blue jay.

This Yom Kippur — let Him in. Let Him rebuild the walls, clean up the inner courts, pick up the temple furniture and re-light your menorah.

Let Him pave your heart with gold and let him bring you into His Holy presence.