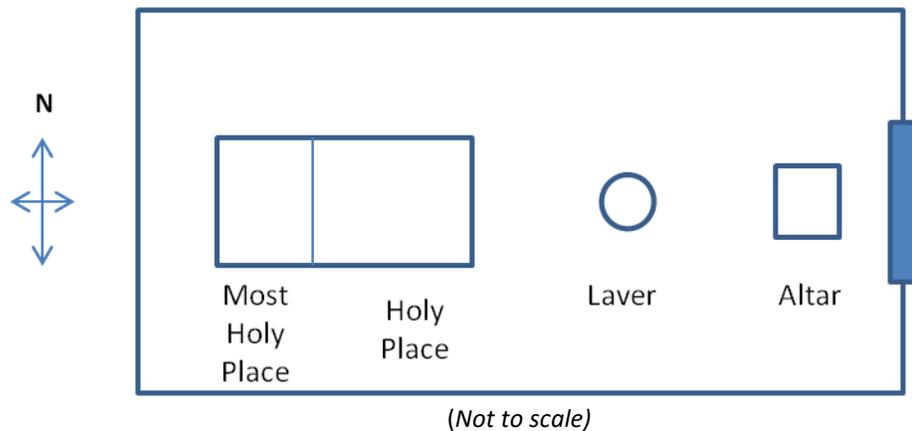


## The Tabernacle as the Body of Christ

One of the interesting aspects of Scripture is the simple and curious way in which it's written. Most have heard or read about how the Church makes up the Body of Christ, but few know where the concept originated. It wasn't just a convenient illustration devised by Paul... it was based on symbolism found in the Old Testament. Let's have a look.



The above provides a simple overhead view of the Tabernacle. The outer perimeter was a fine-twined white linen fence that was 150ft. long, 75ft. wide, and 7.5ft. high.

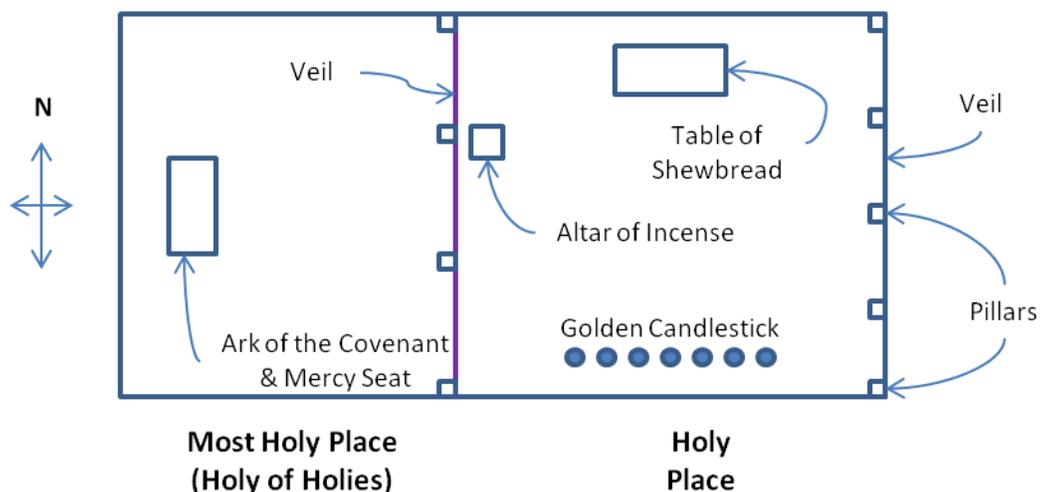
The only way into the Tabernacle was through a 30ft. Gate centered on its east side. This was the only way in because there's only one Saviour. Scripture speaks of it:

**Mt. 7:13** Enter ye in at the **strait gate**: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: <sup>14</sup>Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** there be that find it.

**Jn. 14:6** Jesus saith unto him, I am **the** way, **the** truth, and **the** life: no man cometh unto the Father, **but by me**.

Walking through the Gate, there were two pieces of furniture in the Outer Court. The first was the Altar of Burnt Offering where the sacrifices were offered and the second was the Laver, which was a large wash basin used to clean the sacrifices and to wash and consecrate the priests.

Next was the Tabernacle (proper). It was a wooden structure that was covered by multi-layered tent coverings. It was 45ft. long, 15ft. wide and 15ft. tall. It had two rooms separated by a veil. Through a veil, the first room entered was called The Holy Place. It was 30ft. long, 15ft. wide and 15ft. high. Walking inside, to the right was the Table of Shewbread, to the left the Golden Candlestick, and directly in front, the Altar of Incense.

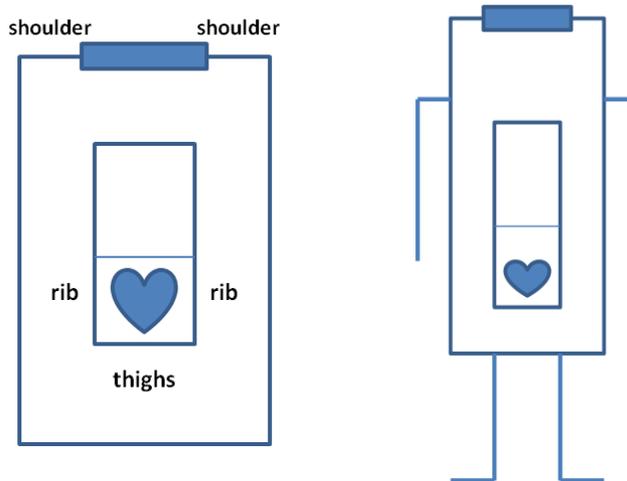


Behind this altar was the veil that separated the Holy Place from The Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies). This was the veil that rent when Jesus died upon the cross.<sup>1</sup> The Most Holy Place was 15ft. long, 15ft. wide and 15ft. high. Inside were the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat, and atop the Mercy Seat were two cherubim that looked down and toward one another with the glory of God dwelling in between.

But how does this represent the Church as the Body of Christ?

In explaining his design for the Tabernacle, God used several different Hebrew words that we in English simply render as “side;” and so what you see in the illustration are the more appropriate English equivalents.<sup>2,3</sup>

At what is now the top of the picture, the Hebrew word used to describe the sides to the left and right of the Gate mean *shoulder* (Ex. 27:14-15; Ex. 38:14-15). Along the right and left sides of the Tabernacle, the Hebrew word means *rib* (Ex. 26:20, 26-27, 35; Ex. 36:25, 31-32), and on the bottom side of the Tabernacle the word means *thighs* (Ex. 26:27; 36:32). Thus, a portrait of a man is beginning to



<sup>1</sup> Cp. Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 23:45

<sup>2</sup> For illustrative purposes, the Altar and Laver have been removed, but there’s also theological justification for this. The work of Christ is now personified in the person of Christ. There are no more sacrifices that need to be offered for sin because Jesus became our final sacrifice... so all that remains on this earth is his Body, his Bride: the Church.

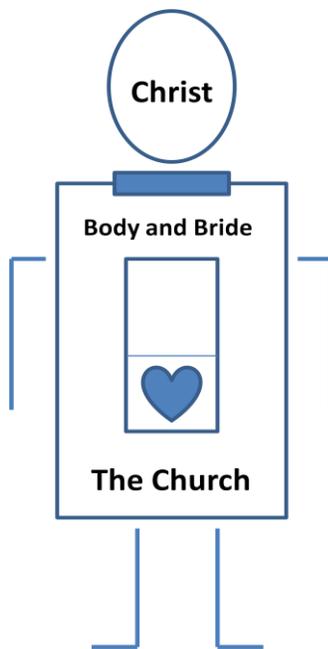
<sup>3</sup> The translators are not to be faulted. Had they used more appropriate English words for the Hebrew words – as found in the illustration – it would have caused more confusion; and so they used a word that conveyed the general meaning instead of the specific.

take shape. Add some stick arms and legs and what we have is a “stick man” that has been “clothed” with a white linen garment (the outer fence). And since the fine-twined white linen represents righteousness (Rev. 19:8), then what we have here is a man that’s been clothed in righteousness!

But between a man’s ribs lies his heart. And since the laws of God are said to be within the heart of God (Ps. 37:31; 40:8; Is. 51:7), and since the laws of God were kept in the Ark of the Covenant (Heb. 9:4), then the Ark, which also contained the Laws of God, represents the heart of God.<sup>4</sup>

But where’s the head?

The head of all things is Jesus Christ who’s now seated at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 1:3; 10:12). On the earth only his *body* remains – those that are believers in Jesus Christ: his Church, his Bride – clothed in a garment of righteousness.<sup>5</sup> But the Body is also comprised of individual parts (as represented by the pillars that held up the fence, but not elaborated upon here), each of which should be serving their purpose according to God’s design – as 1 Cor. 12:12-27 so beautifully describes.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>12</sup>For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ. <sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? <sup>16</sup>And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? <sup>17</sup>If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling? <sup>18</sup>But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. <sup>19</sup>And if they were all one member, where *were* the body? <sup>20</sup>But now *are they* many members, yet but one body. <sup>21</sup>And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. <sup>22</sup>Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: <sup>23</sup>And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness. <sup>24</sup>For our comely *parts* have no need:

but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked: <sup>25</sup>That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. <sup>26</sup>And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup>**Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.**

<sup>4</sup> Also note that on two sides of the Ark, the Hebrew word for “side” also means *rib*. And so there are the outer and inner ribs, if you will (Ex. 25:12; 37:3).

<sup>5</sup> See also 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 4:4, 15-16; 5:23; Col. 1:17-19; 2:9-10

<sup>6</sup> See also Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; Rev. 3:12

Thus, this simple overhead view of the Tabernacle demonstrates that Jesus is the Head of all things and that we are his Body. Often times the New Testament makes references to the Old Testament without citing specific Old Testament passages. So if we'd spend more time studying the Old Testament, then perhaps the New would become more alive for us, and vice versa. It is, after all, all about Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Selah.

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<sup>7</sup> Lu. 24:27, 44; Jn. 5:39; Acts 28:23 etc.