

NOTE to Parents:

I realize there may be some differences of opinion as to some of the details of the construction of the Tabernacle. With this in mind, I have carefully researched this subject both in the Bible and elsewhere, and I have tried to give as accurate a picture as I could. When I was in doubt, I either said so or was somewhat vague.

The Tabernacle -- a Let's-Pretend Visit

(Exodus 25-27)

by

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Do you like to pretend? I do! So today let's do some pretending together, okay? All right then, let's pretend that we go way, way back in time, back to about 3,500 years ago, to the time just after the Lord had Moses take the children of Israel out of Egypt where they had been slaves, to the place where the Lord, with a pillar of cloud, is leading the children of Israel through the desert on their way to the promised land of Canaan. Would you like to do that with me? Good! This should be fun!

(Now remember, though, that though those things had really happened, we can't really go back in time, can we?! No, of course not! We're only going to be pretending that we can go back in time and see these things, aren't we?!)

So now let's start pretending, all right? Okay. First let's pretend that we are out in the desert where the children of Israel are after they left Egypt. Then let's pretend that we are up on a hill, and that we are looking down, and we see the camp of the children of Israel.

Wow! Just look at that! It's a great, big camp with thousands and thousands of tents, isn't it?! After all, there are 2-3 million people, as many as in a big city!

And you say to me, "What a big camp!"

I say to you, "Yes! And, oh, look! There is the Tabernacle with the pillar of cloud over it! And the Tabernacle is right in the middle of the camp! Why, this all sort of looks like a city with a church in the middle of it, doesn't it?"

You say to me, "Tabernacle? What is a Tabernacle?"

I say, "Tabernacle simply means tent."

You say, "But you said it was sort of like a church. Why would they have a tent for a church instead of a building?"

I say to you, "Why, because they're traveling through the desert."

Then you laugh and say, "Oh, yes, of course! They couldn't carry a building through the desert!"

We're still standing there looking down at the big camp, when suddenly you say, "Let's go down and look at the Tabernacle!"

I say, "Yes, let's!"

So, as we're pretending, we walk down the hill and go into the camp of the children of Israel itself. We walk past thousands of tents, and now we are coming toward the middle of the camp, toward where the Tabernacle, the tent of the Lord, is.

As we get closer, you say, "But look. There is a fence around the Tabernacle."

I say, "Yes, and we can only see the top of the Tabernacle beyond the fence."

You say, "Well, the Tabernacle must be taller than the fence if we can see its top, mustn't it?"

I say, "Yes, you must be right."

Then I say, "Oh, I read in the Bible that inside of the fence is a yard, a courtyard, then inside of this yard will be the tent, the Tabernacle itself. And the yard is big! It is about 75 feet wide by 150 feet deep, about half the size of an American football field! (That's about 23 by 46 meters.)"

You notice that I'm saying the measurements both in feet and in meters, and you ask me, "Why are you saying both feet and meters?"

I say, "Well, there will be many other children who will be listening to this, and they'll also be pretending to be here with us. And many of these children live in different countries all around the world. And while I'm used to using feet to measure things, many other people use a different kind of measurement called meters."

I stop and grin at you and ask, "But did you know that the children of Israel didn't use either feet or meters when they measured things?!"

You look surprised and ask me, "Well, how could they measure things then?"

I say, "They measured things by using the distance between the tips of a grown man's fingers and his elbow. They called this a cubit. Something would be so many cubits long or so many cubits high."

I stop while you look at the distance between your elbow and finger tip and mutter, "Hmm! A cubit!"

I smile and then go on and say, "But here I'm using both feet (which I'm used to) and also meters (which others may be used to). That way all of us around the world can pretend this together."

You say, "Oh, that's a good idea! But now let's pretend some more. This is fun!"

I say, "Okay. We were pretending we were by the fence that is around the Tabernacle."

Then we get to wondering and say, "But what kind of fence is this?"

So we walk up closer to look at it. Is it a chain link fence? Or a wooden fence? No, it couldn't be those. After all, this is a fence that has to be taken down and put back up each time they move from camp to camp on their way to the land of Canaan, isn't it? We look a little closer at the fence. Why, the fence is made of a very long piece of cloth that's about 7½ feet tall! (2 1/3 meters.)

We say, "Wow! A cloth fence!"

Then we notice that there seems to be one very long piece of this tall cloth along each of the two sides of the courtyard and another piece of cloth across the back.

You say, "I wonder what holds the cloth up?"

So we look even closer at the fence. And then we see that the long, tall piece of cloth is attached some way by hooks and fastenings to fence posts, and this makes a nice, cloth fence.

(By the way, I did a lot of reading in the Bible and other books about this cloth fence, and there are different ideas about the cloth part of the fence and how it was hung up. So I'm not really sure about it, but this was how it seemed to me from what I read. But let's go on pretending now, okay?)

We look at the fence posts, and then you say, "Why look! The fence posts aren't just plain wooden posts! They are made of metal. Why, the fence posts are made of bronze!"

I say, "Wow!"

Then I say, "But I remember now that some translations of the Bible say the fence posts are made of brass, but brass and bronze are sort of the same thing."

You say, "And, oh, look! The fence posts each have a silver cap on top of them! And the hooks and fastenings that hold the curtains up are silver, too! Wow!"

I say, "And there are lots of the fence posts! Let's count them, okay?"

So we start counting the fence posts. One, two, three, four... We keep counting. Now we can see that there are 20 posts on each long side and 10 posts across the back. The posts are about 7½ feet apart (2 1/3 meters).

You say, "But what makes the fence posts stand up straight? "

I say, "I wonder if they have dug holes to put the posts in or what?"

We look closer, and then I say, "Oh, no! There aren't holes in the ground for the posts! Look! There is a heavy block under each post."

We look again, and we see that each block is made of bronze and has a hole in it. Then each fence post has a pokey thing at the bottom of it that fits into this hole, and that will make the posts stand up.

You say, "What a great idea!"

I say, "Yes, but do you remember who made the plans for all this?"

You think a minute and then say, "Yes, I remember now. The Lord God made all of the plans for the whole Tabernacle and its yard and then told Moses just how to do it!"

Then you laugh and say, "So of course, since God made the plans, of course the ideas are great!"

Then we notice that there are ropes that are attached to each post, and these ropes have bronze pegs attached to them and the pegs are pounded into the ground. See how it works? The heavy bronze blocks make the posts stand up, and then these ropes keep the posts from wobbling around. And then the cloth curtains are attached to the bronze posts by the silver hooks and fastenings. So now that makes a cloth fence around the Tabernacle yard!

You say, "But I wonder how they get inside of this fence?"

I say, "Well, let's go find out!"

So (as we keep pretending) we now walk down one of the long sides of the fence and around the corner.

We stop, and you say, "Oh, look. There is a cloth gate in the middle of the eastern side of the fence."

We see that it's a wide gate, about 30 feet wide (about 9 meters), and there are 4 posts for the gate. But look at the gate! It isn't just plain cloth like the fence was, is it?! No. It is made of blue, purple, and scarlet cloth with some sort of needlework and is very beautiful, isn't it?

Now let's pretend that we are standing near the gate and can actually see inside of the Tabernacle yard. We won't go in ourselves, but we can look in. And we'll be very respectful, won't we? After all, the Tabernacle of the Lord is used in the worship of the Lord God. It is sort of like a

very special church, though in some ways it's very different from a church, too.

Well, as we look into the Tabernacle courtyard, we see a big altar for burning the sacrifices every day. This altar is about 7½ feet square (about 2 1/3 meters) and 3 feet tall (about 1 meter). It is made of wood covered with bronze metal.

You say, "Look. There is a bronze ring at each corner of this big altar."

I say, "I wonder why the altar has those rings? Maybe later we can find out."

Then you say, "And look. There is also something that sticks out on top of each corner of this altar."

I say, "I've heard that these are called 'horns'."

You are looking around the courtyard, and suddenly you say, "Oh, there's something else farther into the Tabernacle courtyard. And look! It's really shiny!"

I say, "Yes, it is! I wonder what that shiny thing is that the sun is reflecting off of so brightly!"

We stand near the gateway and look at it some more. Why, it is a very big sort of tub.

I say, "Oh, I remember now, I've heard that it's called a basin or laver." ("Laver" comes from a word that means to wash).

Then I say, "This laver must be where the priests will wash their hands and feet before going inside of the Tabernacle itself."

We notice that this laver is made of bronze.

You say, "I wonder why it is so shiny? Why, we can actually see things reflected in its sides!"

I say, "Maybe we can ask someone."

So we look around, and there is a Levite standing right near us. The Levites are the ones who take care of the Tabernacle. Let's see if he can tell us. So we go up to him and politely say to him, "Excuse me, sir, but we were wondering about something. Please, may we ask you about it?"

He smiles in a friendly way and says to us, "Yes, of course."

So we ask him, "Why is the laver so shiny?"

He says, "Why, the very shiny bronze that the laver is made of, used to be bronze mirrors that some of the women had."

We are surprised and say, "Bronze mirrors?!"

"Yes," he says, "you see, the bronze was polished so much that the women could actually see themselves in it."

We say, "Really?! Wow!"

Then we ask, "But did those women have to give up their mirrors?!"

The Levite seems shocked! He says, "Have to?? Oh, no! The Lord only wanted us to give things for His Tabernacle if we really wanted to. No, those women didn't have to give their mirrors. They wanted to. Yes, those women wanted very much to give something to help in the making of the Tabernacle, so they gave their mirrors to make the laver. They were very happy to do this."

We say, "Oh, we understand now. Thank you, sir, for telling us that. That was interesting."

He smiles at us and says, "You're very welcome." Then he walks on to go do his work.

We stand there looking through the gate and at the things in the Tabernacle yard. But now let's look beyond the big bronze altar and the bright, shiny laver. Because there we can see the Tabernacle/tent itself! Oh, my!! It's big! Why the Tabernacle is 15' high (4½ meters). Let's see, that makes it twice as high as the fence, doesn't it?! And it is 15' wide and 45' long. (That's about 4½ by 13½ meters.) So the Tabernacle is about as high as my medium sized, one-story house that I live in, and it's about as long as my house, but only about half as wide as my house.

Of course, we're not going to go into the courtyard and look at the Tabernacle, but even from the gateway we can see that the whole front of the Tabernacle is the doorway. It is made of beautiful scarlet, purple, and blue cloth all embroidered with cherubim. This curtain/doorway has 5 posts to hold this cloth up. Oh, but look at those posts! They're beautiful. But we can see even from here that they aren't bronze like the posts that hold up the cloth for the fence. No. The posts for the Tabernacle doorway are wood covered with gold!! And not just with gold paint either! No, they're covered with the real gold metal, pure gold! And these posts are set into bronze blocks that hold them up.

So that's the doorway for the Tabernacle. But what is the tent part of the Tabernacle itself made of?

We look and see that except for the beautiful curtain/doorway, that the rest of the outside of the Tabernacle is just a plain color. Why is that, I wonder? Again, maybe we can ask someone. Another Levite is walking by, so I respectfully stop him and ask, "Excuse me, sir. May I ask you a question?"

He says to me, "Of course. What is it?"

I say, "I'd always heard that the Tabernacle was very beautiful. So why is it just a plain colored, big tent?"

The Levite smiles and says, "Oh, but it is very beautiful -- on the inside! But the tent part of the Tabernacle of the Lord has 4 layers on it."

We are surprised and say, "Four layers?"

"Yes," he says. Then he goes on to explain some more and says, "These layers are called coverings. The outside covering, the one you see from here, is made from the skins from some sort of animal. Then the next covering right under this is made of rams' skins that have been dyed red. Then," he continues saying, "the covering under the red rams' skins is made of goats' hair."

I didn't want to ask too many questions, but to me it seems as if perhaps they had made yarn out of goats' hair and then had woven it into cloth. But I'm not sure.

The Levite continues explaining to us and says, "But the very innermost covering, the one that makes the ceiling, is made of fine linen -- scarlet, purple, and blue linen, and is embroidered with cherubim. It is very beautiful."

He stops talking, and I get to thinking about the cherubim. Cherubin! Now, I don't know exactly what a cherub looks like, but I remember now that the Bible says that cherubim have sort of a human form with 4 wings. There are real, live cherubim in heaven that serve God in some way. I guess that this embroidery is to be a sort of picture of that. (But that's enough about cherubim for now. Another time I'll tell you more about cherubim.)

Then I ask the Levite, "These coverings would have to be very large, wouldn't they?"

He says, "Oh, yes!"

So I ask him, "But how can there be such big pieces of leather and cloth?"

He says, "Well, the Lord God had actually talked to Moses, and the Lord had given directions to Moses for exactly how the Tabernacle and everything to do with it were to be built. So we knew just what to do."

Then he says, "The cloth for that beautiful inner covering was first woven into 10 separate, long panels of cloth. These panels were about 6 feet wide (about 2 meters); that is, the panels are as wide as the loom could make them. And each panel was 42 feet long (about 13 meters). Then 5 of these long panels were sewn together along their long sides to make 1 great big piece of cloth, and the other 5 long panels were also sewn together along their long sides to make a second great, big piece of cloth. So that made 2 big rectangular pieces of cloth about 42 by 30 feet, didn't it?"

We nod to show that we understand, and I'm thinking, "Let's see now. They would each be about 13 by 9 meters."

The Levite goes on talking and says, "Then these 2 great big pieces of cloth each have blue

loops put along just one of their longer sides. Then the looped sides are put next to each other, and using fasteners made of gold, the loops from one big piece are fastened to the loops from the other big piece."

I'm thinking, "Hmm. That sounds sort of like using big, strong safety pins to fasten the 2 big pieces together."

The Levite then says, "So you see that this would make it into one very large piece of cloth, wouldn't it?"

We nod our heads. Yes, we can understand that.

Then he says, "Then they used the same method for the other 3 layers. Only those fasteners are made of bronze instead of gold. First they made long panels, then they sewed the long panels together into 2 great big pieces. And then they connected the 2 great big pieces together with loops and the bronze fasteners."

We say, "Oh, and then they would drape these 4 layers of coverings over something, wouldn't they?"

"Yes," he says, "and they use tent pegs to hold the layers in place. Just like when you put up a regular tent."

Then we ask, "Yes, but what holds all these 4 layers of coverings up? All those layers would be quite heavy, wouldn't they?"

He says, "Oh, yes. Very heavy. So, of course, they'd need more than just posts such as the fence has, wouldn't they? They'd need actual walls. Well," he stops and laughs, "the Lord also told us how to make a wall for the Tabernacle."

And then the Levite describes the walls to us. (Isn't it nice of him to take so much of his time to answer our questions?) He says, "We made boards out of wood; then we covered these boards with gold. Not gold paint, mind you, but the real gold metal!"

We're thinking, "Wow!" But we don't say it out loud, as he is still talking.

He says, "There are 20 boards for each of the 2 long sides of the Tabernacle and 6 boards for the back. Each golden board is about 15 feet tall and 2 feet wide (that's about 4½ meters by over half a meter), and there are some sort of corner boards."

We ask him, "But wouldn't these boards wobble around?"

He laughs and says, "No, not after we finished following the directions the Lord gave to Moses for them!"

Then he explains it to us. He says, "You see, each board has a base to hold it up. Remember how you saw the bronze bases for the fence posts?"

We nod.

He says, "Well, the Tabernacle wall boards have bases like that, too. Of course, these bases are wider than the bases for the fence, since the wall boards are much wider than the fence posts. But these wall bases aren't made of bronze -- they're made of solid silver!"

We say, "Ooohh!"

The Levite smiles at our surprise then goes on talking and says, "Yes, silver! And each silver base has two holes in it, and each wall board has two pokey things at the bottom of it that fit into these holes. So that holds the boards up. See?"

"Yes," we say, then we ask, "But they still might wobble some, mightn't they?"

He says, "Oh, yes, if that were all there was. But the Lord had us put 3 golden rings into the back of each gold covered board and then make very long, gold covered poles that could slide into the rings. That way the 3 long poles connect the boards to each other and hold them into a nice, strong, steady wall. Then the 4 layers of coverings are draped over these strong walls, one layer at a time. First the beautiful cloth one, next the goats' hair one, third the red rams' skin one, and last of all the plain skin one that you can see from here."

So that's the way it was done?! We say, "Thank you very much, sir, for explaining this to us. That was interesting!"

He says, "You're very welcome." And with a smile and a wave, he goes off to do his work.

We stand there at the gateway looking in at the Tabernacle. We talk to each other and can't help but wonder about the inside of the Tabernacle.

Quietly we say to each other, "I wonder what the Tabernacle looks like inside? And I wonder what it has inside of it?"

Of course, we could never go inside of the Tabernacle and find out, could we? After all, only the priests can do that. So we just stand there at the gateway and talk about it. But while we're talking about this, why, a priest has come up to us.

And the priest says to us, "Excuse me, but I couldn't help but overhear what you were saying. You're wondering what it looks like inside of the Tabernacle, aren't you?"

We say, "Yes, sir, we are."

He says, "Well, would you like me to tell you?"

Oh, would we!! So very politely we say to the priest, "Oh, yes sir, please, if it isn't too much trouble and you have the time! We would really appreciate that!"

The priest smiles kindly at us and says, "Yes, I have the time. Well, first of all, you'd think that a big tent like this would be sort of dark inside, wouldn't you?"

We nod.

Then he says, "But, no, it isn't dark inside. You see, inside on the left hand side as I go into the Tabernacle is a lampstand."

The priest stops talking for a minute and smiles at us. Before he starts talking again, I'm going to quickly explain something to you. Some English translations of the Bible call the lampstand a candlestick, but it didn't have tall candles like we might think of. Instead, it had bowls with oil. There are wicks in the oil, and when the wicks are lighted, they burn. So that makes the bowls each actually to be an oil lamp, doesn't it? Oh, and we aren't told in the Bible how tall the lampstand is, but people now think that it may have been 4 or 5 feet tall (about 1½ meters).

But the priest is talking again now, so let's listen to what he's saying. He says, "Yes, there on the left as I go inside the Tabernacl is the lampstand. This lampstand is very beautiful. It is sort of like a tree with 7 branches. You see, there is the center part, sort of like a tree trunk, and this has a bowl for oil on top of it. And then `like-branches' come out of this center trunk, 3 branches on each side. Each of these 6 branches has a bowl for oil on top of it, too. So that makes 7 individual lamps in the lampstand, doesn't it?"

We nod to show that we understand what he's saying.

Then the priest asks us, "But what do you think the whole lampstand is all made out of?"

We look at him and say, "We don't know. What are the lampstand and its bowls made out of?"

The priest says, "Why, it is all made out of pure gold!"

He stops as we exclaim, "Ooohh!"

The priest laughs kindly at our surprise and then goes on talking. He says, "And that isn't all. There are pure gold decorations on the lampstand, too. The whole lampstand is sort of like a golden almond tree. You see, the 7 bowls for oil are all shaped like golden almond nuts, and they each have pure gold almond buds and flowers with them. So there are golden branches with golden almond buds, golden almond flowers, and golden almonds on them. And the light from the 7 lamps reflects off the golden walls. Doesn't that sound beautiful?!"

We say, "Oh, yes!"

He says, "So, as I go into the Tabernacle I see this beautiful golden lampstand on my left. Then on my right I see a table. The table is 3 feet wide, 1½ feet deep and 2 1/2 feet tall." (That would be about 1 meter wide, ½ meter deep, and about ¾ meter tall. It would be about the size of a coffee table, but a little taller.)

He goes on explaining about the table. He says, "The table is made out of wood, and the wood is all covered with gold. Of course, that's not just gold paint, but the gold metal itself. But the plates and things used with this table are made of pure gold. And there is a fancy gold edge around the top and bottom of the table. And it has 4 golden rings on each corner."

He stops and looks at us with a grin and then asks us a question, "Now, why do suppose the table has those golden rings?"

We don't know, so we shake our heads. So he goes on to explain, "Why, that is so that when the Lord has the pillar of cloud go up and start to move to another place, we can slip 2 gold covered wooden poles into the rings and carry the table that way. Isn't that a good idea?"

We nod; why we would never have thought of that!

Then he asks, "Did you see the big bronze altar outside?"

We say, "Yes, we did."

He says, "Did you see the bronze rings on its four corners?"

"Yes," we say, "and we were wondering what they were for". And then suddenly we have an idea, so we ask the priest, "Oh, are there bronze covered poles that can be put into those bronze rings, too?!"

He smiles and says to us, "Good thinking! Yes. That's exactly why the bronze rings are on the big bronze altar. That is the way we carry the big bronze altar when the Lord has us go to another place."

We think a moment and then ask him, "But you didn't say anything about gold rings on the lampstand. Doesn't the lampstand also have them?"

"No," says the priest. "You see, when the Lord has us travel to a new camp, we priests first cover all the furniture that is inside the Tabernacle with special coverings. The covered lampstand is then set upon a kind of carrying bar. Then some Levites pick up the carrying bar, and other Levites pick up all of the rest of the furniture by their poles, and they carry the furniture on their shoulders until we reach the next place where we're going to camp. Some Levites will already have set up the Tabernacle tent by then, so then the other Levites just carry the furniture inside. Then the Levites go out, and we priests uncover the furniture and set the pieces up again. No one but the priests can do this. Remember," he says, "all of these things are very special to the Lord, and we very carefully follow the directions the Lord gave to Moses about all of this."

That was interesting, wasn't it? How kind of the priest to tell us these things! But we still have more questions.

So we ask him, "Thank you, sir, for telling us that, but may we ask you some more questions?"

He says, "Of course; I have plenty of time."

So we say, "You were telling us about a golden table that is inside of the Tabernacle. We were wondering what is this table for? And does it have any special name?"

He nods and says, "Yes, it has a name. It's called the table of shewbread."

We ask him, "But what is shewbread?"

So then he says, "Shewbread is a special bread, You see, each week 12 loaves of bread are baked and put on this table. This bread is called shewbread, so that's where the table gets its name. At the end of the week we put fresh shewbread on the table, and then we priests eat the old shewbread. And the Lord said that only we priests may eat it, and we are only to eat it inside of the Tabernacle, because we're eating this holy (special) bread before the Lord."

We think about that for a minute. I don't think the Bible tells us why there were to be 12 loaves of bread, but it was probably because there are 12 tribes of Israel.

But we have more questions, so we ask him, "Okay, so there is the golden lampstand on your left when you go into the Tabernacle, and there is the golden table of shewbread on your right. Do you see any other furniture when you go inside of the Tabernacle?"

"Oh, yes," he answers. "When I go inside of the Tabernacle, if I look straight ahead of me, I can see the last piece of furniture in this room."

We ask, "What is it?"

"Well," he says, "this piece of furniture is 3 feet tall, 1½ feet wide and 1½ feet deep."

I'm thinking, "Hmmm. That's about 1 meter tall. ½ meter wide, and ½ meter deep. It sounds like about the size of my cedar chest if it were standing on end."

But he is still talking, so I'd better listen, hadn't I?! He says, "It is also made of wood, and this wood is also all covered over with gold metal. It also has a fancy gold edging at the top and has 4 golden rings on the corners so that its own 2 gold covered poles can be put into the rings and it can be carried the same way as the golden table of shewbread is carried. And on the four corners at the top of it are 4 things coming out called `horns'. You probably saw the big bronze altar outside and noticed that it has a `horn' on each corner, too, didn't you?"

We nod and say, "Yes, we did."

Then the priest asks us another question, "Now, this last piece of furniture inside of the Tabernacle that I just told you about. What does it sound like to you?"

We think a minute and then say, "Why, it sounds like some sort of altar."

He says, "You're right! It is an altar."

We're sort of puzzled now. So we ask him, "But what would be the purpose of another altar? After all, there is the great big bronze altar out in the yard."

He laughs and says, "Yes, there is the big bronze altar outside, and that altar is used for burning the sacrifices. But this smaller golden altar inside is used for burning a special incense before the Lord. In fact, the Lord gave us the directions for just how to make this incense, and it is only used in the Tabernacle."

He says, "As the incense burns, it smells very lovely. It is burned twice a day, and we priests take turns to burn this incense on this altar. We take the pieces of coal for it from the big bronze altar outside and use those coals to burn the special incense inside of the Tabernacle."

He stops and looks at us. His eyes are twinkling as he asks us, "Now, what do you think this second, smaller altar is called?"

We think a minute and then shake our heads and say, "We don't know."

He laughs kindly and says, "Think some more"

Finally we say, "Is it called the altar of incense?"

The priest pats our shoulders and says, "Yes, it is! Good thinking!"

Then we ask him, "Do you see anything else inside of the Tabernacle?"

"Oh, yes," he replies. And now he is serious. "Just behind the altar of incense is a beautiful, special curtain. This curtain is called the veil. The veil is also made of scarlet, purple, and blue cloth and also has cherubim embroidered on it in golden thread. And the veil is held up by 4 golden posts with silver bases, and it goes clear across the Tabernacle."

We ask, "Is this beautiful veil/curtain there for a special reason?"

He says, "Yes, the veil is what divides the Tabernacle into 2 separate rooms, one behind the other."

When we look a little puzzled, he says, "Oh, hadn't I mentioned that the Tabernacle has 2 rooms?"

We shake our heads.

He says, "Oh, then let me explain. Yes, the Tabernacle has 2 rooms. The first room, the room with the lampstand and the table of shewbread and the altar of incense is larger and is called the Holy Place. I'm sure that you remember that 'holy' means 'set apart for God' or 'very special for God', don't you?"

We nod, and he goes on, "The second room (which can't be seen because of the veil/curtain) is smaller and is in the shape of a cube. That is, it is about 15' tall, 15' wide, and 15' long." (In metric this is a cube of about 4½ meters each way.)

I say to the priest, "I'm wondering why this special curtain is called a veil. I know that sometimes a woman might wear a veil to hide her face. Is something hidden in that second, smaller room?"

"Yes," he says, and he is very serious now. He says, "Yes, there is something hidden there. And it is something very, very special. Remember that we said that the first room was called the Holy Place? Well, this second room is called the Holy of Holies, that is, the Very Most Set Apart Place, the Very Most Special Place. But even though I'm a priest, I can't go into that second room, that Holy of Holies. I can only go into the first room, the Holy Place."

We ask him, "But is there anyone who can go into this Holy of Holies?"

The priest answers and says, "Oh, yes, But the Lord told us that only Moses and the high priest are ever allowed to go into the Holy of Holies."

We look at each other in wonder. Then we whisper to the priest, "But do you know what's in the Holy of Holies?"

The priest smiles at us, nods his head and says, "Oh, yes. Everyone knows what's in the Holy of Holies."

We feel sort of embarrassed, because we don't know, do we? So we ask him, "Are you allowed to tell us?"

"Oh, yes," says the priest again. "The Holy of Holies is where the Lord said that He Himself would talk to Moses!! It is sort of like God's throne room here on earth!! And inside of the Holy of Holies, this second room, there is only one piece of furniture. But it is the very, very most important and special thing inside of the whole Tabernacle."

He stops a minute and looks at us with a look of great respect on his face for what he is telling us. Then he starts talking again. For a minute it's almost as if he were talking to himself. In a low voice

he says, "Inside of the Holy of Holies is the Ark of the Covenant."

He stops a minute, then he sort of shakes himself, looks at us and smiles, and then he explains, "It's sort of as if the Holy of Holies is the Lord's earthly throne room, and the Ark of the Covenant is His footstool."

We're puzzled, so we ask him, "But what is the Ark of the Covenant?"

So he goes on explaining, "Well, sometimes it's just called the Ark. And this word `ark' comes from one of our Hebrew words which simply means `box'. And, yes, the Ark of the Covenant is box shaped, and it is hollow. It is 2 1/4 feet tall, 3 feet wide and 1 1/2 feet deep."

I'm thinking, "Hmmm. That's a little over half a meter tall, about 1 meter wide, and about half a meter deep. It sounds to me sort of like a biggish cedar chest."

But I'd better be listening, as he is going on to describe the Ark of the Covenant, and I want to know what it is! He says, "The Ark is made of wood which is covered all over with pure gold. It has a fancy, raised golden edging around the top. It also has 4 golden rings and 2 poles (wood covered with gold) to carry it by. But these poles stay in the rings all the time. We don't take them out as we do the poles in the table of shewbread and the altar of incense."

We ask him, "Why don't you take the poles out of the Ark of the Covenant?"

He simply says, "Because that's what the Lord said."

Then he goes on talking about the Ark itself. He says, "Yes, the Ark is hollow, but it has a lid. And what a lid!! Why, this lid is pure gold and it even has its own name! The lid is called the Mercy Seat. And on top of the Mercy Seat lid are 2 statues of cherubim! Each cherub was hammered out of solid gold!! They have their faces toward the Mercy Seat and their wings are raised up over it." He stops talking for a minute with a look of great respect on his face.

Then he goes on talking again and says, "As I just said, the ark of the covenant is hollow with a lid, the Mercy Seat. But there are a few things inside of the ark, things that the Lord told Moses to put inside of it."

This is exciting, isn't it?! So we ask the priest, "Do you know what is inside of the ark of the covenant?"

He nods his head and says, "Yes, I know. First, the stone tablets that the Lord gave Moses with the Ten Commandments written on them are in the ark of the covenant. And then later Moses wrote down the Law, all the teachings and rules that the Lord told him, and this was put into the ark, too. You see, in part of this Law the Lord gives rules to us children of Israel, but He also made a covenant with us. `Covenant' means `agreement'. Those are the rules and the covenant (agreement) that Moses wrote down and put inside of the ark. And that is why the ark is called the ark of the covenant. The covenant of God is written and is inside of it."

Then he says, "Also, you remember, don't you, that the Lord miraculously feeds us every day with manna?"

We nod our heads.

So he goes on talking, "Well, the Lord had Moses take a golden pot and fill it with manna and put that inside of the ark of the covenant, too. This is a reminder to us that the Lord is feeding us and taking care of us all this time as we journey toward our promised land of Canaan. Also, Aaron's own rod that miraculously bloomed and got almond buds, flowers, and nuts on it overnight is inside of the ark to show that Aaron is the High Priest."

The priest stops talking and seems to be thinking, so we just stand there quietly. Oh, but now he's talking again. He says, "Now I said that the Lord would talk to Moses there inside of the Holy of Holies. In fact, the Lord told Moses that He would talk to him from between the wings of the cherubim that were on top of the Mercy Seat, the lid. And as far as we know, the Lord never talks to anyone else there inside the Holy of Holies, the second room of the Tabernacle."

We ask, "Can the High Priest go into the Holy of Holies any time he wants to?"

He says, "Oh, no. The High Priest can only go into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that special day, the Day of Atonement, the High Priest makes special sacrifices outside on the big bronze altar. Then a sacrifice is made for the sins (the spiritual uncleanness) of the children of Israel during the past year; this is a sacrifice for the sins of the whole nation. Then the High Priest takes blood from this sacrifice, and he takes it into the Tabernacle itself. He goes through the first room (the Holy Place), and he goes past the veil into the second room (the Holy of Holies) where the Ark of the Covenant is. And there the high priest makes atonement for us in front of the Ark of the Covenant, that is, before the Lord. And on that special day all of the children of Israel are to do no work, and we are to be sorry for our sins. Yes, the Ark of the Covenant is very important."

We ask him, "Is the ark magical? Do you worship the ark?"

The priest looks horrified! "Oh, no!" he says. "We don't worship the ark! Only God is to be worshipped! Nothing else!"

The priest takes a minute to calm down. Then he goes on kindly and explains, "You see, there is nothing magical about the ark. The ark can't do anything itself. No. It is just a piece of furniture that God had men make. But the ark reminds us of the Lord God, so that is why it is so important, and the Lord said it was to be treated with respect. No, no, the ark is not to be worshipped. Only the Lord God is to be worshipped."

We think about that for a minute. Then we say, "Oh, it's a little bit like how the flag of a country reminds a person of his country, isn't it? And that's why we are respectful in the way we treat our flag. Of course, a flag isn't a country. It couldn't be! But it just reminds us of our country."

The priest is pleased. He smiles and says to us, "Yes. Now you have the idea."

Then we say, "Please, sir. We don't want to keep you from your work, but we still have a few more questions. Would it be all right if we asked them?"

"Yes," he says kindly. "Go ahead. Ask me as many questions as you want to. I have plenty of time"

We say, "Oh, thank you, sir. Well, first we were wondering how long it took to build the Tabernacle and the things in it."

The priest says to us, "Why, it took about 6 or 7 months for us to build our beautiful Tabernacle for the worship of the Lord. Of course, we were very careful to build it exactly the way that the Lord had told Moses when they were up on Mt. Sinai together. And we built it while we were camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai during that first year after we left Egypt."

Then he asks us, "Do you have any more questions for me?"

We say, "Yes, sir. We wonder where you got all the gold and silver and the other things that were used in building the whole Tabernacle."

The priest of God smiles very happily, "Where did we get the things with which to build it? Why, the people were all so happy about the Tabernacle that they wanted to help, too. So they very happily gave the things that were needed to build it."

He says to us, "Yes, everything that was used in the building of the Tabernacle, the gold and silver and bronze and wood, everything, was from the children of Israel, both men and women. You see, everyone wanted to have a part in it. They had wanted to give for it. And women happily spun thread and wove cloth. White cloth and blue and purple and scarlet cloth, and they brought that for the Tabernacle. People had happily brought their golden bracelets and rings and their jewels to help. And some women brought their bronze mirrors for the laver, remember?"

We nod and say, "Yes, we saw the laver in the courtyard."

He says, "Yes, every day people brought things for the Tabernacle."

He stops and laughs and then says, "In fact, the people brought so many things for the making of the Tabernacle that Moses finally had to tell them to stop bringing things! There was more than enough!"

We say, "Wow!"

Then he says, "But nobody had to give anything. Oh, no! They wanted to give things for the making of the Tabernacle. And that was the way the Lord had wanted it to be."

"Yes," he says, "the people very happily gave the gold and other material needed to build the Lord's Tabernacle. And when the Tabernacle was all finished, Moses had a big ceremony where, just as the Lord had told him to do, Moses made Aaron to be the high priest and Aaron's 4 sons to be the other priests. And the Lord told Moses that ever afterwards only Aaron's sons, grandsons, great-grandsons and so on were ever to be the priests of the Lord God for us."

Then the priest says, "Now, after the ceremony where Aaron was made to be the high priest, there was another big ceremony where Aaron put a sacrifice on the big bronze altar out in the Tabernacle yard. And how do you think Aaron burned that sacrifice?"

We don't know, so we shake our heads.

So the priest answers his own question. He says, "Aaron didn't burn it!! The Lord did!!"

We are surprised! We ask, "The Lord did? How did the Lord burn the sacrifice?!"

He says, "Why, the Lord sent fire from heaven to burn the sacrifice! You see, this showed that the Lord was very pleased with the way that we had built the Tabernacle. And after that we priests have kept that special fire that the Lord had sent from heaven burning. And we use only the coals from this fire for something else, too. I mentioned it earlier. Do you remember what it is?"

We think a minute and finally we say, "No, we don't remember."

So the priest says, "Why, every morning and every evening one of us priests will take coals from this fire in the big bronze altar and put the coals onto a special golden plate-like thing called a censer. Then that priest will take the censer inside the Tabernacle itself and go up to the golden altar of incense, the altar that stands in front of the beautiful veil/curtain that separates the two rooms of the Tabernacle. And there the priest burns incense in front of the veil. It's sort of like we're burning incense in front of God's throne room."

We say, "Oh, yes. Now we remember; you told us that before."

The priest nods and then goes on talking, "And while the priest is burning the incense inside of the Tabernacle, the people are outside of the Tabernacle yard and are praying. The incense smells very sweet, and the Lord has said that the incense is like a picture of the prayers that the people are praying."

He nods his head again and says, "Yes, the Lord God likes our prayers. He likes for us to pray to Him. You see, our prayers are sweet to the Lord God, like incense. Isn't that a nice thought?"

We nod and say, "Yes."

He says, "Yes, when we pray to God, our prayers are like a sweet smell, like incense, to Him! I want you to remember that, all right?"

We eagerly nod our heads again and say, "Yes, we'll remember that. And the next time we pray we'll remember that our prayers are like sweet smelling incense to the Lord."

We thank the priest, and he smiles and waves to us as he leaves us to go back to work. He was really nice to take the time and tell us so many things, wasn't he?! And now we stand here and think about what we have just seen and heard. There is a lot for us to think about, isn't there?!

But then we shake ourselves. Why, we weren't really there, were we?! No, we were just pretending! And that's all the pretending we're going to do today. But I enjoyed pretending that you and I were there in the camp and seeing and hearing about all of those real things. Did you? (Oh, and another time I'll tell you about the Jewish camp itself, and we'll pretend together again! That will be fun then, too, won't it?!)

Yes, that is what the Tabernacle was like. And the pillar of cloud was over the Tabernacle during the day and the pillar of fire was there at night. And the Lord led the children of Israel by this pillar until finally He led them back to the land of Canaan, just as He had promised. Of course, the Lord always keeps His promises, doesn't He?

But you may be wonderig if the children of Israel always used the Tabernacle, or whether they ever had an actual building that was used in the worship of the Lord. Well, yes, after many years they did have a building. You see, many years later King Solomon built a great, big, beautiful temple in Jerusalem. It was built to be sort of like the Tabernacle and with lots of gold, but it was much larger and even more grand than the Tabernacle had been.

This beautiful temple also had 2 rooms separated by a veil (as the Tabernacle had had), and the ark of the covenant was carried into the second room, the Holy of Holies, in this wonderful temple. The ark now had a building and wouldn't have to move anymore, would it? So they didn't need to use the tent/Tabernacle anymore, did they? And now, finally, the carrying poles were taken out of the gold rings on the ark of the covenant, though the poles were still kept there in the temple. We might say that the ark was finally home! And every year the Jews (the children of Israel) were supposed to go to Jerusalem and to the temple area there at certain times of the year and have celebrations -- big feasts and special ceremonies in honor of the Lord God. These were very happy times!

But, sadly, a long time after Solomon had built the temple for the Lord, the Jews forgot how good the Lord had been to them, and they began worshipping idols instead of the Lord God. (Can you imagine that?! How foolish -- and wicked! Why, only the Lord God is to be worshipped, isn't He?!)

So then finally the Lord let Nebuchadnezzar come and destroy the beautiful temple that Solomon had built, and Nebuchadnezzar took the Jews away from Jerusalem and away from the land of Israel way over to Babylon. There in Babylon the Jews were very sorry that they had worshipped idols, so later the Lord had them be able to go back to Jerusalem, and they rebuilt the temple of the Lord. This new temple wasn't very big nor grand, but at least it was a temple of the Lord and they would go there to worship Him. And they never worshipped idols again.

Many more years after that, the Romans were ruling the land of Israel, and they had a man called Herod to be the ruler in Jerusalem. (Yes, this is the same Herod who tried to kill Jesus when he was a baby!) Well, Herod loved building things, and he made the temple of the Lord to be very beautiful again and very large. And what do you think? Why, this temple that Herod built was the temple where Jesus would go when He was here on earth!

Now, you remember, don't you, that the reason Jesus, the Son of God, had come to earth was to make a way for us to be able to go to heaven and be with God someday, wasn't it? (Oh, God loves us so very much!) But how did Jesus do this? That's right. Jesus, who never did any sins Himself, died on the cross for our sins, didn't He? Yes, His blood was shed for our sins, wasn't it? And this happened right outside of Jerusalem.

But do you know what happened inside the temple there inside of Jerusalem right when Jesus died? Why, God had the big, beautiful veil in the temple to tear! It tore clear down from the top to the bottom!! The Holy of Holies could be seen!

Now, of course, 3 days later Jesus was alive again, wasn't He? And He stayed alive. Hundreds of people saw Jesus alive, and then He went back to heaven. And the Bible tells us that now Jesus, the Son of God, is our High Priest to God the Father in heaven. And if we trust in Jesus to forgive our sins, our sins will be forgiven. And then someday we can be with the Lord forever!

Yes, and someday the Lord Jesus will come back again, won't He? And then He will be King of everyone and everything. And the earth and heavens will be made like new, and a beautiful city called the New Jerusalem will come down from heaven. It will be very, very big, an enormous cube, the same size on all sides -- the same shape as the Holy of Holies! This city will be built with gold and precious jewels, and there will be many, many rooms in it. But there won't be a temple in the New Jerusalem. Instead, God and God's throne will actually be in the New Jerusalem! It's sort of as if the New Jerusalem will be God's throne room on earth, just as the Holy of Holies was sort of like God's throne room in the Tabernacle, isn't it?

That reminds us that the ark of the covenant was in the Holy of Holies, doesn't it? Now, only the High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies, and only once a year. But if we have trusted the Lord Jesus to forgive our sins, then we will be able to go into the New Jerusalem -- and as often as we want to! And there won't be a veil in the New Jerusalem to keep us out! Instead, it's gates will always be open!

Yes, the Bible tells us that all of this about the Tabernacle is a sort of picture/prophecy for us, a picture of when Jesus would die for our sins. Remember the Day of Atonement when every year the high priest would make a sacrifice for the nation and then take the blood and go past the veil and into the Holy of Holies? And the people were to rest that day and be sorry for their sins, weren't they?

Well, Jesus died for the sins of the world and His blood was shed on the cross and the veil of the temple was torn. And after He rose from the dead, He went back to heaven and became the heavenly High Priest! And then in order for us to be saved and to have the Lord Jesus be our High Priest, we need to trust in Jesus, to rest in what He did for us. (And we should also be sorry for our

sins, shouldn't we?)

Yes, Jesus was the sacrifice for our sins, wasn't He? The Day of Atonement is a picture/prophesy of this. And all of the other sacrifices that were made on the big bronze altar were picture/prophesies of the sacrifice of Jesus for us on the cross. But Jesus, our sacrifice, only died once. And now Jesus, our High Priest, is alive and is always with God the Father.

I want to tell you just one more thing about the Tabernacle. The Bible tells us that the Tabernacle itself was a sort of little picture of what heaven is like now! Did you know that?! Yes, in the book of Revelation in the New Testament it tells us that in heaven the Lord God has a throne room (remember the Holy of Holies with the ark of the covenant in it?) and there is a rainbow around the throne (remember the scarlet, blue, and purple curtains in the Tabernacle?), and in the heavenly throne room of the Lord there are 7 lamps burning (remember the 7 lamps on the golden lampstand in the Tabernacle?), and another kind of special creature, seraphim, are around the heavenly throne of God. But do you remember the embroidered cherubim, a different special creature, on the inner curtain and also the 2 golden cherubim on top of the mercy seat, the lid of the ark of the covenant? Well, the prophet Ezekiel had 2 visions of the Lord on His throne, and in those 2 visions Ezekiel saw cherubim under the Lord's throne! And in one of the Psalms King David says that the Ark of the Covenant is God's footstool! Yes, the Tabernacle was a little picture of heaven! Just think how glorious it is! And if we have trusted in Jesus to forgive our sins, we will someday be in heaven where the real things are!! And we will be able to see them! And after the Lord Jesus comes back, we can go into the New Jerusalem, too.

When you get older, perhaps you will want to study more in the Bible about the Tabernacle and all of the things about it that are like pictures of the Lord Jesus and heaven; it's very interesting. But that's all I'm going to talk about now.

Well, I hope that you have enjoyed pretending with me that we went through the camp of the children of Israel and saw the beautiful Tabernacle of the Lord that He had them build after they left Egypt. I have certainly enjoyed sharing this time with you!