

# EXTREME MAKEOVER - CHURCH EDITION

By Paul Vieira

Every Sunday night, millions tune in. “Put together one very run-down house, a deserving family, several opinionated designers, seven days and what do you get? The answer is *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.” Each episode of this highly successful reality program features a race against time on a project that would ordinarily take at least four months to achieve. It involves a team of designers, contractors and several hundred workers who have just seven days to totally rebuild an entire house – every single room, plus the exterior and landscaping. The lives of the lucky families are forever changed when they learn that they have been selected to have their home walls moved, their floors replaced and even their façades radically changed. Completely rebuilding a home in just seven days sounds quite familiar.

It took God the same amount of time to completely renew planet earth in Genesis, chapter one, from a chaotic formless mess to the beauty we see today. However, that project may not compare to the task of what Jesus is building these days.

Jesus told His disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:2) We know that His construction project is the church (Matthew 16:18), a cosmic “extreme makeover.” Taking the church from what it is now and making it God’s dream home, is no small ambition.

Speaking of “church,” we tried to go to church a few times, after resigning from my pastoral position. Surprisingly, it took everything in us to get our bodies out of bed on Sunday mornings. We had started making the shift. Church was changing for us. Our best times were when our gang of friends would come over and fellowship together. I didn’t know it then, but we were beginning to experience the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. God was making a house call, just in time.

More and more I felt God leading us to be part of a church that met in houses, or coffee shops, or anywhere outside the walls of the conventional church. The meeting place was really not the point. The point was that we wanted to be the church, out in the world. The building was fading behind us in the distance. There was no turning back.

One day as I was meditating on what the church should look like, I asked the Lord to give me a picture from the Scriptures of the kind of church that He wanted. Although we had entered a period of “detoxifying,” where we abstained from predicable church activity, I knew that we couldn’t stay there forever. God would lead us into a new expression of church. I was leery of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. What were we to keep from our past church experience? What should we throw out? And, what did God want to redefine for us? Therefore, I asked the Lord for something visual and simple. I asked God to give me a blueprint that we could follow and use as a standard to keep us in line with His heart. He showed me the tabernacle.

## A BLUEPRINT

Moses had a series of mountain top experiences with God, as the people waited at the foot of the mountain. We don’t know exactly how long he was up there. We do know that the people were afraid of God and they let Moses handle everything. They encouraged Moses to hear God and then bring down the news to them. So up and down the mountain Moses went.

Shortly after receiving the Ten Commandments we come to Exodus 25 where God instructed Moses to collect an extravagant, freewill offering from the people. The Lord specified the exact kinds of items and materials that He was looking for. In verse eight He revealed the purpose of this offering, “*Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.*” The word translated sanctuary is the Hebrew word *mishchan*, which is “a dwelling place, a place of habitation or residence.”

God wanted a place to live. He was not happy with being up on the mountain, with His people down below. He desired to get right down with His people and live among them. God was looking for a home, and He revealed to Moses the blueprints on how to build that home. He was making sure that Moses got it exactly right. This wasn’t just any house; it was a picture of God’s dream house.

Tamara and I have spent many nights talking and even drawing out what our dream home would look like. We would plan out the rooms we wanted, and what purpose they would serve. We would talk about how they would be laid out in proximity to each other. What materials would we use? How would the outside look and the yard be landscaped?

God has done this very same thing. Before the foundation of the world He had a plan. The Greek word in the New Testament for the English equivalent “predestination” is *proorizo*. This means to “limit in advance” or to “mark out beforehand.” It carries the idea of planning and drawing out sketches, measuring, marking, and even drawing a blueprint. The Scripture tells us that God dreamed up and made plans for His very own “extreme makeover” home project. However, the materials would be organic. The material would be alive! He would make His home in you and I. God thought about you before humanity even existed, and His thoughts of you gave Him pleasure. He purposed that you and I would be adopted by Him, conformed to the image of Jesus, holy and blameless, and be given a wonderful inheritance as His child (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-14). God’s dream house was much bigger than the plans given to Moses, but the tabernacle has given us a brilliant image.

The tabernacle of Moses itself was only a blueprint of a greater reality. The Old Testament is filled with pictures and models. When someone has a new idea for an invention, the first thing he must do is get the idea down in print. He will make schematics, write out the equations and measurement, and then build a model. The model is not the actual end product, but only the beginning. It creates a picture to look at and follow. The model represents the real thing, but is not the reality itself. A model points to the future. It casts a vision of what will be.

The tabernacle of Moses is a model for us to look at, but often the details are misapplied in the contemporary church. The structure, materials, furnishings, ceremonies, and function of the tabernacle are symbols and shadows of Christ, who was yet to come. (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1) It represented the dream house that God was going to build. We must look at what the elements symbolize for us using the light of the New Testament revelation. Perhaps unknowingly many adopt the literal structure of the tabernacle to support our modern views of church. Using the tabernacle in this way

may validate such ideas as the two class system of clergy and laity, or that church is defined by going to a building, or even that our church buildings are the house of God. However, as you will discover in this chapter, it is not God's plan to implement this ancient structure of worship on the New Testament church, but it was given as a metaphoric picture of the qualities Jesus and His church would possess.

Once the blueprints and model are made, it's time to build the prototype. A prototype is the first one made. The prototype phase is when you work out all the bugs. Building a prototype is costly, takes time, and requires an incredible amount of skill to complete. The prototype is tested to the max. It may be put under extreme conditions to see what it can handle. There can't be any surprises when this product is out on the market. What happens to the prototype when it's hot, cold, wet, or dry? They smash it, crash it, and pressure it looking for the weakness. The goal is to perfect it, making it ready for mass-production.

If the Old Testament provides the blueprints and models, Jesus is the prototype. He was tested beyond belief. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was perfected through suffering, in order to bring many people into perfection, glory and eternal salvation (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8, 9). We've already talked about the incarnation in the first chapter of John, where it says the "*word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" The word "dwelt" is literally "tabernacle." Jesus' name was Immanuel, which means "God with us." The tabernacle that God told Moses to build was actually a model of Jesus. Jesus is the prototype. God came down close to us and lived here in the person of Jesus Christ. God drew close, living and working among us in Christ. However, the purpose of a prototype is to get things ready for mass production.

We've already seen this in the apostolic dream. God loves His only begotten Son so much that He wants to have many more of Him to love. We who believe have been adopted into Sonship, and have become fellow heirs with Christ. If Jesus, the prototype, was the tabernacle of God, God's dwelling place on earth, then we were made for that very same purpose. This is what Paul writes about the church:

*"Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being*

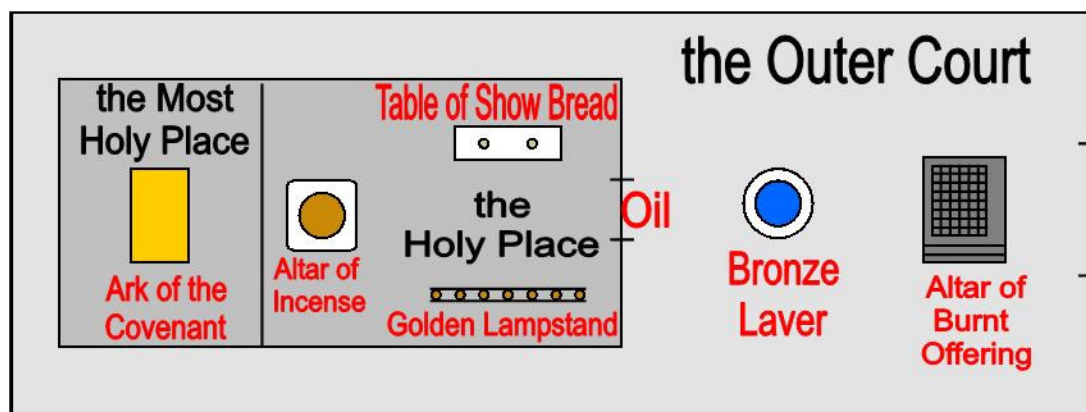
*fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22; emphasis mine)*

In fact this is the final destiny of our planet; that God would dwell with us. We are His dream house!

*“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, **the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.**” (Revelation 21:1-4; emphasis mine)*

## THE TABERNACLE LAYOUT

I hope I’ve adequately shown you that the tabernacle of Moses is actually a picture of not only Jesus, but of us, the church. It foreshadows the future reality that we live in now (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:1-6; 10:1). Looking at the layout and furnishings of this model found in Exodus can give us a pattern of things that God is interested in seeing in us, His house. This is the understanding God gave me when I asked Him for a picture of the church that He desires to live in. So let’s examine this model.



The tabernacle had three main areas: the Outer Court, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (also called “Holy of Holies”). The Holy Place and Most Holy Place were in one structure divided into two rooms. This structure was framed in wood, but

covered in badger skins. Remember, God chooses to live under skin, ultimately human skin. The building and the court were enclosed by a fence with an opening on the east side called the “gate.” The opening to the Holy Place was called the “door” and separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place was the “veil.” In the courtyard there were two main furnishings: the Altar of Burnt Offering (also called, Brazen Altar) and the Bronze Laver.

Anyone could enter through the gate into the Outer Court, but only priests on active duty would be allowed into the Holy Place. To do so, they would have to go through three processes. The first was shedding the blood of an animal on the Altar of Burnt Offerings. There were two types of animal offerings performed here: the burnt offering and the sin offering. In the burnt offering, the fragrance of the sacrifice symbolized the worship and devotion that was ascending before God. In the sin offering, the blood of the sacrifice would be for the forgiveness of the trespasses of the people. From there the priest would engage in ceremonial washings with water at the Laver. He would be anointed with oil at the door before entering the Holy Place.

The Holy Place had three pieces of furniture: the Golden Lampstand, the Table of Showbread, and the Altar of Incense. The entire room was kept lit by the lampstand, containing seven bowls, in which a wick lay with one end in the oil of the bowl and the lighted end hanging out. No outside light was permitted in the Holy Place. The door to the Holy Place had a double curtain system to ensure this.

The Table of Showbread was a stand on which the offerings were placed. There were always twelve loaves of bread on the table, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Altar of Incense was considered to be extremely holy to the people, second to the ark of the covenant. The fires on this altar burned incense day and night. It was lit in the morning to take it through the day and then again in the evening to make it through the night. The perfume was a sweet smelling aroma before the Lord.

Finally, behind the veil, in the Most Holy Place, was the ark. God’s manifest presence would sit between the Cherubim, on the Mercy Seat. Within the ark was the Ten Commandments, a golden bowl of manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded.

## WHAT DO THESE SPEAK OF?

There is a private area and a public area of the church. The Outer Court is where the priests and the people connected. Any Israelite was allowed to enter by the gate into this open courtyard. The priests represent all believers. (1 Peter 2:5, 9) So this is the arena where believers touch the world. This is where believers and unbelievers mix. In contrast, the Holy Place was only for the priests. No one else would be allowed to see this place. In the Outer Court there are three main things: blood, water, and oil.

I John 5:6-13 talks about how these three things testify to us that we belong to God. The blood of the Brazen Altar represents the cross and the sacrifice Jesus made for the forgiveness of sins. When a person puts their faith in Jesus they are washed by His blood. (Revelation 1:5; 7:14) The water of the Laver symbolizes water baptism, and the oil at the door of the Holy Place stands for the empowering, or baptism, of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 6:2 tells us that one of the elementary teachings of Christ is the doctrine of "baptisms." There is more than one. Here in the outer court there are three baptisms or washings: blood, water, and spirit (oil).

When we are in the world sharing Jesus with people looking for God, there are three processes we want to see them move through in order to be able to join us in the Holy Place. Their sins must be washed by the blood of Jesus through repentance and faith. They must be baptized in water and also intentionally receive the Holy Spirit. These three things agree and they confirm to a person that they are God's child. A normal New Testament conversion included blood, water, and Spirit. You can see this pattern all throughout the book of Acts. These experiences occurred fairly close in timing to each other.

When I have the opportunity to see someone come to faith in Jesus, I always encourage them to be baptized immediately. Baptism isn't something you work to attain, but it is a starting point. I also lead them to pray to receive the Holy Spirit. This is the pattern of the tabernacle, a blueprint of God's dream house.

The more private side of the church is beyond the door, and into the Holy Place. Only priests live here. This is our place as believers with each other. When we are together, there are three primary activities, represented by the furniture pieces in the Holy Place.

First, we have the Golden Lampstand. In the Scriptures “light” always represents truth and revelation (Ephesians 1:18; 2 Peter 1:19). The psalmist wrote, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*” (Psalm 119:105) The Holy Spirit is also represented as a lampstand before the throne in Revelation 4:5. The Lampstand speaks of truth and revelation as found in the Scriptures, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that the wicks on the Lampstand were soaked in oil. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, in revealing Christ through the word of God, is what the Lampstand points to. Interestingly enough, only the Lampstand could light this place. This must be why the “outside light” of false teachings was not tolerated by the early apostles.

The Table of Showbread represents the community of God’s people. It stands for fellowship and breaking bread together. This is developed beautifully by all the “one another” verses we find throughout the New Testament. It describes a people who love each other and share life together in mutual encouragement.

The last piece in the Holy Place is the Altar of Incense. Incense is a symbol of prayer and devotion of the Saints. (Revelation 4:8-10; 19:4) This is all that ascends before the Lord: thanksgiving, worship, praise, petition, supplication, prayer, fasting and the like. Notice that in the tabernacle the incense burned day and night.

The last room is where God rests. It’s His contribution to the house. I believe the Ten Commandments, within the ark, reveal to us His holiness and inspire a healthy fear of the Lord. It speaks of divine purity. The manna represents His divine provision. God fed the former Hebrew slaves, delivered out of Egypt, for forty years in the wilderness, by raining down unknown bread called “manna.” A sample of this was kept in the ark as a memorial. The budded rod of Aaron was likewise kept in the ark. God caused Aaron’s staff to bloom new life as a sign that God had authorized him to lead the people of Israel. It was a sign and wonder, designed to back up God’s chosen representative. I believe this speaks of God’s divine power to perform the miraculous.

Well, there you have it. It sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? I would love to be a part of a church that has all those elements to it. It would be a place where God would live and be active in the midst. However, so far we’ve only examined the model. Where can we see, in living color, a church that demonstrates this picture? The Holy Spirit led me to Acts 2:37-47.

This is what it says, (with my own inserts to show how it relates to the tabernacle):

“(Peter is in the “outer court” preaching) Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘**Repent** (*blood*) and let every one of you **be baptized** (*water*) in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall **receive the gift of the Holy Spirit** (*spirit*). For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as *the* Lord our God shall call.’ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them (*these all moved into the “Holy Place”*). And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles' doctrine** (*Lampstand*) and **fellowship, in the breaking of bread** (*Table of Showbread*), and in **prayers** (*Altar of Incense*). Then **fear came upon every soul** (*10 commandments*), and many **wonders and signs were done** through the apostles (*Aaron's budded rod*). Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and **divided them among all, as anyone had need** (*Golden Bowl of Manna*). So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

The tabernacle was the model. Jesus was the prototype, since every detail of the tabernacle speaks of Jesus. We, “the Church,” are the final image. We are God’s dream house. These are the things God has for us. This has become the picture I see when I think of church. We are out in the courtyard preaching the cross, baptizing in water, and ministering in the Holy Spirit. In the fellowship of believers, we are devoting ourselves to the truth of Scripture, fellowship and community, and prayer and worship. God’s presence among us causes a holy fear in our hearts, a release of signs and wonders, and supernatural generosity and provision.

This is the church that Jesus started.