SHAPED BY THE STORY SACRIFICES

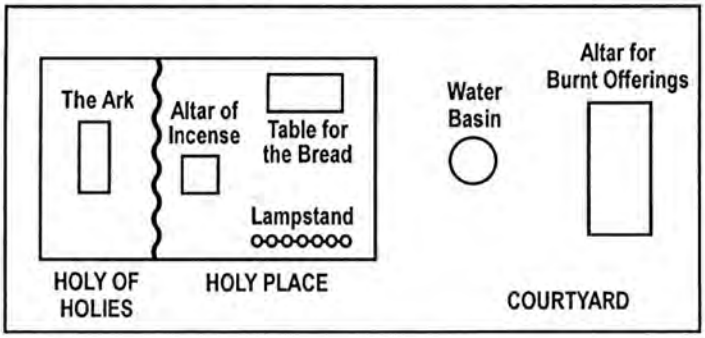
God had just given the people of Israel specific instructions about how to live in his ways and remain close to him in a covenant relationship.

During one of Moses' trips up the mountain, God also gave him specific instructions about how to build a holy tent called the *Tabernacle*.
God said, *"Build a special place for me to live among the people I love."*
So, Moses gathered the very best craftsmen and workers, and they began building the Tabernacle in the center of their camp.

(You may want to draw a simple diagram of the Tabernacle as you tell this part. See below.)

The tent was divided into two rooms. The large outer room was called the *Holy Place*. Inside this room, there was a stand that held seven oil lamps called a *Menorah*. These lamps burned day and night and symbolized God's constant protection and watch over his people. Next to this, was a table with 12 loaves of bread on it, reminding them that God would always provide for their needs. Also in the Holy Place, there was a gold altar where incense was burned. Incense reminded them of God's nearness and was also a symbol of their prayers rising to God.

The small inner room was called the *Holy of Holies*. A thick curtain hung from the ceiling of the tent all the way down to the floor, separating it from the Holy Place. This room contained a special wooden chest called the *Ark of the Covenant*. The Ark contained the stone tablets that God wrote on and gave to Moses. On top of the Ark, there was a gold cover called the *Mercy Seat* where the presence of God would come.



When the Israelites finished building the Tabernacle, God showed his presence was there by covering the top of it with a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Whenever the cloud or fire would move, they would pack up camp and follow it.

God told the people of Israel, *"When you realize you have sinned, you must confess it and bring an offering to me. Then, I will remove your sins and forgive you."*

Because of his love for the Israelites, God provided a way for them to substitute the life of an animal that was pure and without defects, in place of their own–a life for a life. So everyday, people would bring sacrifices to God in the courtyard of the Tabernacle. This system of sacrifice continued for hundreds of years, but these sacrifices were only a symbol of what was to come. God was preparing a final sacrifice that would pay for the world's sins ... once and for all.

▲ **RETELL THE STORY SO FAR** ***(story continued on next page)***

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SHAPED BY THE STORY SACRIFICES

(story continued from previous page)

At this time, the Israelites organized themselves into 12 groups–called tribes–according to which of the 12 sons of Israel (Jacob) they descended from.

Moses' brother Aaron was the oldest of the descendants of Levi, Israel's firstborn son. God chose Aaron and his sons to represent the people as priests. They had the special job of bringing the people's offerings to God.

The priests were the only ones allowed inside the Tabernacle. If anyone else tried to come near God's presence, they would die. But no one was allowed to go inside the Holy of Holies except the high priest, Aaron, on a special day called the *Day of Atonement*.

God said to Moses, *"In addition to the weekly Sabbath, you should set aside time for festivals where everyone comes together to worship, celebrate and rest."* So, the Israelites held several festivals each year–some lasted for weeks! This special *Day of Atonement* occured during one of their fall festivals.

God said, *"This will be a special day where you will all be made right with me. Today you will find forgiveness and cleansing from all your sins."*

Then God told the Aaron, the high priest, what he must do on the Day of Atonement. He said, *You must follow all of my instructions completely or you will die. Make sure you are completely clean, without sin on the inside and out. Then, wear the special clothes made for this occasion."*
(God went on to describe the special under clothing and elaborate robe that Aaron should wear).

God continued, *"Sacrifice a young bull as payment for your sins and the sins of your family. Then, dip your finger in the blood from this bull and sprinkle it on the cover of the Ark, and then sprinkle it seven times on the front of the Ark.*

Then find two spotless goats and sacrifice one of them as a substitute for the sins of all of the Israelites. Take its blood and sprinkle it on the cover and front of the ark as you did with the bull's blood. I will accept this and forgive all the sins and rebellion of the people. Remember, blood represents life; in this blood, you will find life and atonement for your sins."

After this, Aaron was to bring in the other goat that was still alive, called the *scapegoat* (also called the *Ahzazel,* which means to "take away").

And God told him, *"Lay both of your hands on its head and confess all of the people's sins, putting them on the head of the goat. Then, lead this goat far away into the wilderness. The people's sins will be taken away with it–never to be seen again."*

Aaron and the people of Israel followed God's instructions carefully. Because of this, the people were made right with God once again and given atonement for their sins.

This was a holy day that the people of Israel continued to celebrate year after year.

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SHAPED BY THE STORY QUESTIONS ON: SACRIFICES

▼ DIALOGUE

- **What was the purpose of the Tabernacle?**
- **Why do you think that no one was allowed to go in to the Holy of Holies?**

- **What was the purpose of the sacrifices that people brought to God?**
  Sacrifice is necessary for sinful / rebellious people to come into a Holy God's presence.
  NOTE: Animal sacrifice was a relatable practice at that time... they lived in a culture where this was common... it meant giving up their most valued possession as a sign of their dependence on God.

- **What do you think the word "atonement" means?**

- **What stands out to you as being most significant about the Day of Atonement?**
  The detail and order that things happened. This was necessary so that the high priest did not die in the presence of God.
  The importance of blood to pay for sin–life for life. We have now seen this on several occasions. Life must be substituted for another life in order to pay for sin.
  God is holy and separate, and no one can casually come into his presence. There is even a tradition that when the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, he tied a rope around his ankle in case he died before God. This provided a way for him to be pulled out of the Holy of Holies without someone else going in after him and dying.

- **Why were there two goats used on the Day of Atonement? Why was this important?**
  The first goat was a payment for sins; the second goat allowed for the removal of those sins.

- **Did you hear anything that reminded you of previous stories? What connections did you make?**

- **What does this story teach us about God?**
  God is Holy and will not allow sin to remain in his presence. Not just anyone could enter the Holy of Holies–only the high priest once a year, and only if he had first paid for his sin!
  God is the source of grace. He makes a way for man to come to him and to pay for his sin.
  God desires for us to listen to him and live in his ways–not our own.
  God is to be approached with great respect and awe.
  God loves his people and desires to be near them.

◆ APPLICATION *(Optional questions that also work well in smaller groups)*

- What did you notice from the story for the first time?
- What questions do you have about the story? What do you wonder about?
- How did the story challenge or encourage you?
- Have you ever thought that if you were good enough, God would let you into his presence or into heaven? Does this story challenge or reinforce that idea?
- How do you think we should approach (come to) God? How do you approach God?

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