I couldn’t help but marvel at the announcement that Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost has just released a new book, which we are offering to our *Veritas* readers in this issue.

Here’s a 95-year-old scholar, beloved teacher, and dear saint of God who could easily rest on a lifetime’s worth of laurels. But this amazing man we affectionately call Dr. P. is still learning and writing and growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

All of us at Dallas Seminary deeply appreciate Dr. P.’s heart for God, his love for students, and his love of the ministry. He spoke at a chapel service on the subject of the tabernacle and what it teaches us today about how to worship our Redeemer, and I am thrilled to bring you his message in *Veritas*. It is a classic subject by a man of God whose heart beats with the things that matter most to his Lord.

When I think of Dr. P., three things come to mind: a Book, a Person, and an experience. The Book is God’s Word, which Dr. P. has spent a lifetime studying and living out. The Person is Jesus Christ, whom Dr. P. has also spent a lifetime teaching about. His Life of Christ course here at the Seminary is legendary. The experience is the Christian life, the life of the Spirit, which has been the dominant focus of his life.

One of the great joys for me in providing Dallas Seminary students with Bible-centered training is the privilege it affords them to sit under the teaching and influence of godly instructors and mentors like Dr. Pentecost.

I am also delighted for the opportunity to share his biblical wisdom with you by means of this publication and the book we are offering. Both come to you with my very heartfelt appreciation for your support of Dallas Seminary. It is our desire to help you grow in Christ as you share with us from your heart. We continue to thank God for you daily!

Dr. Mark L. Bailey, President
Dallas Theological Seminary
Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 1955.

“Dr. P.,” as he is affectionately known on campus, graduated magna cum laude from Hampden-Sydney College and from Dallas Seminary, where he holds both the Th.M. and Th.D. degrees. He is also the author of numerous books, including his groundbreaking work on the subject of eschatology (future things) titled Things to Come.

Dr. Pentecost also served as a pastor for many years, including pastorates at Saint John’s Presbyterian Church in Devon, Pennsylvania, from 1946–1951, and Grace Bible Church of Dallas from 1958–1976. He and his late wife, Dorothy, have two married daughters and two grandchildren.

This message is taken from a chapel address that Dr. Pentecost delivered to the Dallas Seminary faculty and student body.

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Many Christians who have read through the Book of Exodus have been amazed, and sometimes mystified, by the complexity of the details that God gave to Moses for the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness, Israel’s first place of worship. The purpose for the tabernacle is given in Exodus 25 as the place where God would dwell with His people, meet with them in worship and sacrifice, and speak to them. In a classic message, Dr. Pentecost takes us on a biblical “tour” of this worship structure—and challenges us to pause and learn a vital lesson from a key piece of furniture found in the tabernacle.
After recording the redemption of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, the Book of Exodus devotes itself to the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle, where God said His presence would dwell.

**God’s Dwelling Place**

In Exodus 40 we are told that once the tabernacle was complete, “Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (v. 35). God’s glory is always manifested by the dazzling brilliance that radiates from His person and presence. Thus the tabernacle became God’s dwelling place among His people.

Certainly that structure, made out of translucent materials, was transformed by God’s glory so that the tabernacle must have glowed by day and night. It reminded Israel that the tabernacle was designed to be a place where God said, “I will meet with you” (Exodus 25:22). Here the Redeemer is taking the initiative to provide a place where the redeemed may meet with Him.

Furthermore, God said it was from the tabernacle that, “I will . . . speak to you” (Exodus 29:42). Interestingly, the tabernacle itself was the message that God wanted to convey to His people. God was speaking to them visually because every detail of the tabernacle was designed to answer the question of how sinful people can approach a holy God who has come to make Himself available to meet with them.

If we were to join the high priest Aaron and walk with him through the tabernacle as God had commanded Moses to build it, we would see a number of pieces of sacred furniture and learn what purpose they had in Israel’s worship.

**Sacrifice for the Guilty**

The first piece of furniture we would come to is the bronze altar. This was a place of propitiation, which means satisfaction. Here an offering was made to God, and the blood would be put on the mercy seat to satisfy the demands of a holy God for redemption and forgiveness of sin through the shedding of blood. But instead of the guilty dying to meet the demands of a holy God, the blood of a substitute was offered on the altar in place of the blood of the guilty party. God was satisfied in view of a coming, better sacrifice.

**Instead of the guilty dying to meet the demands of a holy God, the blood of a substitute was offered on the altar in place of the guilty party.**

This was clearly a foreshadowing of the doctrine later expanded by the apostle Paul as he declared the truth of justification by faith. That was the first lesson that Aaron would have learned by observing the bronze altar.

**The Importance of Cleansing**

Next on our tour of the tabernacle, we would encounter a bronze laver, or basin filled with water for ceremonial washings. Here we would learn that, as a result of the propitiatory sacrifice that was made on the bronze altar, God provides for the sanctification of His people. It was not the water that would cleanse Aaron. He would have been cleansed by the blood. The water would signify that that which has been cleansed by blood can enter God’s presence. That is sanctification.

**Reminders of Provision and Witness**

As we proceeded on in our tour with Aaron, we would enter the holy place, outside the veil, and find two more articles
of furniture that were important (Exodus 26:35). To the north was the table for what the Bible calls “the bread of the Presence” (Exodus 25:30), or “showbread” (KJV). God had promised that when He brought Israel into the land, a land of milk and honey, there would be an abundant provision for their physical needs.

The bread on the altar was available for the priests to eat, so Aaron could go to the table and devour that evidence of God’s faithfulness. The bread on the altar provided for fellowship of the redeemed with the God who redeemed them.

To the south was the lampstand, which served as a reminder of the function of God’s redeemed people to the world. They who would receive the light were to let that light shine to others. The redeemed were to communicate truth about God.

A Change of Focus

There was one other article of furniture in the tabernacle that I want to mention and about which I want to think in more detail with you. This was the altar of incense. Among his other duties, Aaron was charged with the responsibility of preparing incense and then putting the incense on that altar. The coals to keep the fire burning on the altar of incense were to be brought from the bronze altar every morning and every night.

Incense played a very important role in Israel’s worship, and indeed incense appears elsewhere in the Scripture as representing the worship of God’s redeemed people. In Revelation 5:8, we read that incense represented the prayers of the saints—offerings of worship, praise, and thanksgiving.

Four times in the Book of Revelation do the 24 elders, who represent the redeemed of this age, join with the 4 angelic beings in offering worship to the Throne Sitter. They are offering, in effect, incense at the altar of incense. Their prayers are not petitions offered for the benefit of the one praying nor are they intercessory prayers offered to benefit one in need. They are all prayers of worship, praise, and thanksgiving for what the Throne Sitter has done. In Revelation 5:12–13, the elders worship because the Lamb lives and is enthroned. In Revelation 11:16–17 and 19:5–6, the elders worship because the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Notice how the focus of this scene of heavenly worship is not on the redeemed, but on the Redeemer. This same change of focus is what the altar of incense in the tabernacle accomplished, turning Israel’s attention to their Redeemer. The message contained here is one we need today as we learn how to truly worship the Redeemer.

Worshiping God in the Holy of Holies

It has been traditionally understood that the altar of incense in the tabernacle was on the outside of the curtain that separated the inner portion, the holy of holies, from the rest of the tabernacle. This placement would have put the altar of incense between the table with the bread of the Presence and the lampstand, outside of the holy of holies.

But when we read Exodus 40:22–24, which describes the layout of the furniture in the tabernacle, it specifically says that there were only two articles of furniture in the outer part of the tabernacle, not three; these were the lampstand and the table of bread.

Exodus 30:6 says the altar of incense was to be put before (in front of) the veil . . . that is before (in front of) the mercy seat. Thus the altar of incense was inside the holy of holies, not outside of it. Hebrews 9:4 confirms this arrangement, saying that the two articles of furniture inside the holy of holies were the altar of incense and the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant.

Spending Time in Worship

Why is this significant? Because it means that the high priest Aaron would have spent a great deal of time every day
inside the veil of the tabernacle, not outside of it. Offering incense on the altar was such a high privilege that later in Israel’s history, when they had established courses of priests to take their turn serving in the temple, the priest who was selected by lot to enter the temple and perform this act of worship considered it the greatest of honors.

We recall that the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was selected to offer incense (Luke 1:5–25). He received a visit from the angel Gabriel while he was inside as the people were outside. Zechariah was inside the veil of the temple, offering worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God on the altar of incense. Such was the honor that this privilege was given to a priest only once in his lifetime.

Set Aside for God
The message God was giving His people through the altar of incense was this: “I have provided for your justification, for your sanctification, and for your fellowship through the various articles of the tabernacle. But I have also set aside something in this tabernacle for Myself, the altar of incense, on which you are to offer praise and worship to Me. I will meet with you to receive that worship, that praise of which you deem Me worthy.”

Remember, the worship taking place on the altar of incense was inside the veil or curtain in the tabernacle; this veil divided the tabernacle into two parts and signified that the way into God’s presence was open only to the designated priest. When Jesus died on the cross, that veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). God was declaring that the way into the holiest is now available to us, a new kingdom of priests. We can function as priests at the altar of incense today.

In God’s Presence as Worshipers
We have completed our “tour” of the tabernacle, and there is much we can learn from it. We can reflect on the altar on which the blood was shed for our justification, the blood of the sacrifice taking the place of the blood of the guilty one to make atonement for sin.

We can consider the bronze basin for cleansing and thank the Lord for what it provides for us, as the apostle John develops in 1 John 1:9 where he reminds us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

We can view all of the provisions God made for the redeemed in the tabernacle so that His people might be sanctified, cleansed by His Word so they could walk by faith and please Him. We can rejoice in the way these “shadows” in the tabernacle speak of the better things to come, which were fulfilled in Christ.

Then, we can consider how God gives us the privilege of bearing witness to His marvelous, saving grace, even as the lampstand in the tabernacle was to give light and shine the light of the true God to others.

For the Redeemer’s Benefit
All of this is wonderful—but all of these were for the benefit of the redeemed. We have not yet fulfilled that for which the tabernacle was designed until we understand that it was designed to bring us into the presence of God as worshipers. The tabernacle is teaching us that in the end, the purpose of the whole arrangement is not what benefit it brings to the redeemed, but what glory it brings to the Redeemer.

What the tabernacle is doing is calling us to live inside the veil, in the holy of holies in God’s presence. Whatever God has called you to do in your life, whether in the marketplace, the shop, the office, the home, or wherever it might be, you can accomplish your calling and fulfill your responsibilities from within the veil as you give praise, honor, and glory to Him. Whatever God asks you to do is done better from within the veil.
In John 15, Jesus called us to abide in Him. That’s what worship within the veil is all about. Move away from those truths that are for your benefit alone. Move into His presence to live within the veil. There is an old hymn that our founder, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, loved to quote. I can still hear his voice saying, “So near, so very near to God, nearer I could not be. For in the person of His Son, I am as near as He. So dear, so very dear to God. Dearer I could not be. For the love of which He loved His Son, such is His love for me.”

Whatever God has called you to do, you can accomplish your calling from within the veil as you give praise, honor, and glory to Him.

Meditate on the altar with its propitiatory sacrifice, and give thanks for it. Look at the basin and give thanks for the cleansing that the sacrifice provides. Enjoy the benefits of meditation on God’s Word. Rejoice that you have been set aside to be a witness to His grace.

But please don’t stop there. Move on within the veil to offer worship, praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to the One who has provided so richly for you. May we not just occasionally go within the veil, but dwell there. Then every moment of our lives will be an act of worship, and every action will be worship to the One alone who is worthy.

Consider this: We will spend eternity in the glorious presence of the Throne Sitter serving as believer priests at the altar of incense to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to the One who is worthy. What better way to prepare for that privilege than to live within the veil today to offer our incense to Him for His glory.

Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost has spent more than seven decades studying and teaching God’s Word—and in many ways, his book New Wine is the culmination of a lifetime of biblical study.

This new release from a revered Bible teacher follows the birth of the Church in the Book of Acts through its “growing pains” and many transitions. Dr. Pentecost emphasizes the study of Acts as a transitional narrative—the kingdom has been inaugurated and the Church has been birthed. Now it must discover how to fulfill the commission of Jesus, a mission that will require new “wineskins” for the message of the gospel.

In this book, you will examine the Church as guided by the apostles, learning to survive amid persecution, and finally spreading across the Roman Empire through the impetus of a new apostle, Paul. New Wine will help both pastor and layperson grasp the significance of the changes and transitions God was orchestrating for His people and shows how those events can shape our own view of mission in today’s world.

Let a Revered Bible Teacher Show You How God Has Provided New “Wineskins” for His People

Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost

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