Jesus & the Tabernacle in John’s Gospel

In the Old Testament God told the Jews to build a temple according to a set pattern. The NT book of Hebrews tells us that this pattern revealed heavenly truths about the Lord Jesus which were revealed 1500 years later.

Exodus 25:9 “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.” (about 1450 BC)

Hebrews 8:5 “They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.’” The tabernacle & temple pattern came from God as a shadow of heavenly things.

The tabernacle (and later, the temple) represented the presence of God among his people and how they were to approach him. This was the “way to God” in a concrete model, a sort of treasure map for a lost humanity to return to God’s presence.

Jesus, in his person and work, was the fulfillment of this pattern. This is made very clear especially in the NT gospel of John…

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt [or, “tabernacled, pitched his tent, dwelt, lived”, same root word as “tabernacle” in the Greek version of the OT] among us, and we have seen his glory, [cf. Ex. 40:34ff] glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 2:19-21 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. The living Temple was in the Temple!

What was this pattern and how did Jesus fulfill it? The statements of Jesus in the gospel of John seem to be outlined in the same order that one would approach and go through the tabernacle (or temple).
1. Altar of burnt offering... “behold, the lamb of God who takes away sin” (John 1:29, 36)(cf. Ex 27, 38)
   - The first thing we face in the tabernacle: our need for a sacrifice. God is just and moral. Our sin is serious to God & demands a just repayment. After Adam and Eve's fall in Eden, animals were killed to cover their nakedness. The death of even perfect and valuable animals could never remove sin. We needed a perfect substitute who could bear our punishment.
   - John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (cf 1:36) Jesus presented first as the sacrifice lamb, the Sin-bearer..
   - Is Christ sin-bearer to you? Do you see yourself as a guilty transgressor before God who can only be made right through the substitutionary death of his Son?

2. The water basin... “water for purification” (John 2:6ff)(cf. Ex 30, 38)
   - The need for cleansing. The bronze basin (also called laver) was for the priests to wash hands & feet & certain sacrifices. Ezekiel 36:25 “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.”
   - John 1:31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." The messiah would be revealed through water.
   - John 2:6 “Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.” The water of purification, which was to remove uncleanness, by Jesus’ word now becomes the beverage of celebration, which looks no longer at sin, but at the happy union of marriage.
   - John 5:7 The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus, better than the pool of Bethesda, brings the cleansing of healing to this man unable to help himself. What a picture of grace!
   - Our need for continued cleansing. John 13:5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. …John 13:8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."
   - Is Jesus the One who cleanses you? Are you being made holy? “Blessed are the pure [Gr., “cleansed”] in heart for they shall see God…

3. Table of bread... “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35ff)(Cf. Ex 25, 37)
   - Ex 25, 37, fresh bread was present on the table at all times. This symbolizes God’s support and provision for his people. The holy place appealed to three senses: sight, taste and smell.
   - John 6:33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” John 6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Jesus is the eternal provision & sustenance for God’s people. He miraculously fed the 5000, he was the “manna which came from heaven.” He supports us; gives us life and that daily and eternally.
   - John 21:9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. The picture of fellowship together, breaking bread.
   - Is Jesus the food of your soul? Is he your life, and your greatest satisfaction? Do you fellowship with him as with a friend at dinner? Do you attend communion at church?
4. Golden lampstand… “I am the Light of the world” (John 8:12ff)(Ex 25, 27, 37)
   - The lampstand provided light. Light & sight given to the interior. Supplied by pure oil.
   - John 1:4-5 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it
   - John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
   - John 9 Jesus heals the man blind from birth; contrasted with the “blindness” of many of the Jews. Jesus came to bring sight, understanding, truth, the right way of seeing.
   - Is Jesus the true light to you? (C S Lewis said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe in the sunrise, not only because I see it, but because by it I see all things.”) His Word is a lamp to our feet. Do we study it every day?

5. Altar of incense… “He lifted his eyes to heaven” (John 17:1ff)(Cf. Ex 30, 35, 37)
   - Special compound incense, provided fragrant covering. Lev 16:13; Num 16:46; Num 7:86, at dedication 12 golden dishes of incense offered by priest with 12 names on heart & on shoulders. Intercession for God’s people. Psalm 141:2 Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! (Cf. Rev 8:3, 4)
   - John 13 to 16, Jesus spends time with his disciples, his own. They, like the stones upon the breastplate of the high priest in the OT, are upon his heart.
   - John 17:1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you… Jesus intercedes for his own, and does so still, like a fragrant cloud of incense, covering the faults of the people of God so that they will not be destroyed.

6. Ark of the covenant… “two angels seated” (John 20:12)(Cf. Ex 25, 37)
   - There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. The mercy-seat (top of the ark) was covered with the sacrificial blood. Propitiation = turning aside God’s just wrath against an offense by an atoning sacrifice.
   - John 19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.
   - John 20:12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. Angels at either end of mercy seat. They are guardians of God’s holiness, and represent the place of propitiation, where lost humanity can return to communion with God. Fellowship with God is restored through the death and resurrection of Jesus! This is the gospel!
   - The story begins and ends with sacrifice. God is satisfied with Christ’s offering for our guilt and sin. Will we be reconciled to God now that the way is open?

Some final applications...
1) **The Scripture, Old and New Testaments both, are from one Divine Author.** This is God’s work and God’s book, over thousands of years. Same theme, same goal, same end: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:36; cf. Isaiah 41:4-6; Revelation 22:13)

2) **The centrality of Jesus Christ in all of Scripture.** Hundreds of prophecies, allusions, types and shadows in the OT pointing to Him. Four gospels, the epistles are Christ-centered (Paul in 1 Corinthians, chap 1 alone, 17x the name of Christ is mentioned. Do not be afraid to mention, own and proclaim the name of Jesus Christ… “there is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved”), and the last book, Revelation is Christ’s completion of history. Listen to Jesus on the day of his resurrection:

   And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ... Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47)

3) **The complete sufficiency of Christ for all we need.** Jesus… Sacrifice, the Water of Cleansing, the bread of life, the light of the world, the faithful intercessor, the One who makes a way for us to know God. He is all we need to be right with God, to walk with God, and to be complete before God:

   God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom. (1 Corinthians 1:30, NLT)

   ...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ... For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. (Colossians 2:2-3, 9-10 ESV)

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