

The Law, the Tabernacle, and God's Presence

Exodus 19:1–6; 20:1–17; 25:1–9; 40:34–38

The Big Idea: God redeemed Israel from slavery, established them as His covenant people, revealed His holiness through the Law, and instructed them to build a Tabernacle so that His presence would dwell among them. All of this points forward to Jesus Christ, through whom we can enter God's presence.

Introduction: From Redemption to Relationship

In our previous lesson, we studied how God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb and the crossing of the Red Sea. But God's purpose was much greater than simply freeing Israel from Pharaoh.

God did not merely bring Israel OUT of Egypt. He brought them TO Himself.

Read Exodus 19:4: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." (ESV)

The Exodus story now moves through three important developments:

1. The Covenant and the Law: God reveals who He is and how His redeemed people are to live.
2. The Tabernacle: God provides a place for His presence to dwell among His people.
3. The Glory of God: God fills the Tabernacle and leads His people through the wilderness.

I. God Establishes His Covenant People; Exodus 19:1–6

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel arrived at Mount Sinai. Here, God established His covenant relationship with the nation.

A. Grace came before the Law

- Notice the order of events:
 1. God heard Israel's cries in Egypt.
 2. God redeemed them through the Passover.
 3. God delivered them through the Red Sea.
 4. God brought them to Mount Sinai.
 5. Then God gave them His Law.
- Israel was not given the Law to earn redemption. The Law was given to a people God had already redeemed. This is an important biblical principle. Obedience is the proper response to God's grace, not the means by which we earn salvation. See Ephesians 2:8–10.

B. God's purpose for Israel

- In Exodus 19:5–6, God described Israel's calling in three ways:
 - His treasured possession: A people belonging especially to Him.
 - A kingdom of priests: A nation called to represent God before the world.
 - A holy nation: A people set apart to reflect God's character.
- God intended Israel to demonstrate His holiness, justice, goodness, and mercy to the surrounding nations. Read 1 Peter 2:9–10. Peter uses similar language to describe the identity and calling of believers in Jesus Christ.

II. The Ten Commandments: God's Holy Standard; Exodus 20:1–17

At Mount Sinai, God revealed the Ten Commandments. These commands were the foundational covenant obligations for Israel and revealed God's holy and righteous character. The commandments can be understood in two broad categories: our relationship with God and our relationship with others.

A. Our relationship with God; Exodus 20:1–11

Commandment God's instruction

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| 1 | Have no other gods before Me. |
| 2 | Do not make or worship idols. |
| 3 | Do not misuse the name of the Lord. |
| 4 | Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. |

These commands teach that God alone deserves our worship, loyalty, reverence, and devotion.

B. Our relationship with others; Exodus 20:12–17

Commandment God's instruction

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|----|-------------------------------|
| 5 | Honor your father and mother. |
| 6 | Do not murder. |
| 7 | Do not commit adultery. |
| 8 | Do not steal. |
| 9 | Do not bear false witness. |
| 10 | Do not covet. |

These commandments establish moral standards that protect relationships and promote justice, faithfulness, honesty, and love. Jesus summarized the Law through two great commandments: love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36–40).

C. What was the purpose of the Law?

The Law served several important purposes:

1. To reveal God's holiness. God's commands reflect His righteous character (Leviticus 19:2).
2. To reveal humanity's sinfulness. The Law exposes our failure to meet God's standard (Romans 3:20).
3. To instruct God's covenant people. The Law taught Israel how to live as a holy nation (Deuteronomy 6:1–9).
4. To point toward the need for a Savior. The Law could identify sin, but it could not provide the ultimate solution to sin (Galatians 3:23–25).

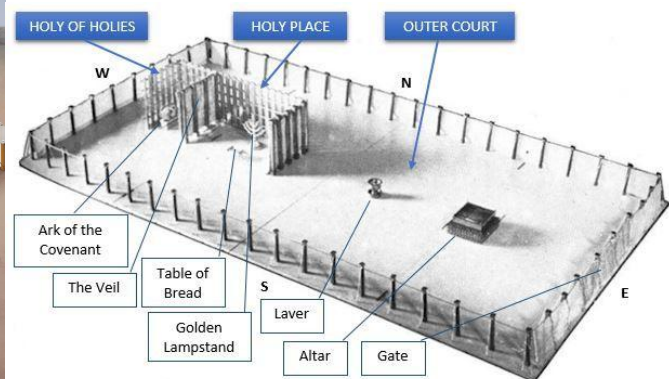
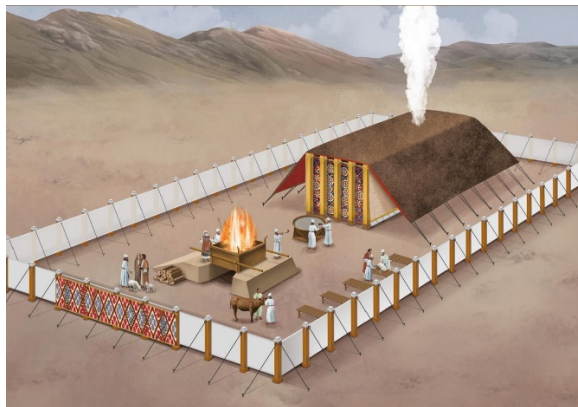
Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The Law reveals God's standard. Jesus provides the righteousness and redemption we cannot achieve ourselves.

D. Jesus and the Law; Read Matthew 5:17–20.

- Jesus did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them.
- He perfectly obeyed the Father, fulfilled the promises and patterns of the Old Testament, and established the New Covenant through His death and resurrection. Under the New Covenant, God's people are transformed by His Spirit and called to live in loving obedience (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Romans 8:1–4).

III. The Tabernacle: God Desires to Dwell With His People; Exodus 25:1–9

- After giving Israel His Law, God instructed Moses to build a sanctuary called the Tabernacle. Exodus 25:8 gives the reason: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst." (ESV)
- The Tabernacle was a portable sanctuary where God would manifest His presence among Israel during their wilderness journey.



A. The design of the Tabernacle

God provided detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle. Its design, furnishings, and priestly ministry all communicated important truths about God's holiness and humanity's need for atonement.

Location or furnishing	Significance
Courtyard and entrance	Access to God's sanctuary was through the appointed entrance.
Bronze altar	Sacrifices addressed sin and the need for atonement.
Bronze basin	Priestly washing emphasized cleansing and purity.
Lampstand	Provided light in the Holy Place.
Table of the Bread of the Presence	Represented the covenant fellowship of Israel before God.
Altar of incense	Incense was offered before the Lord.
Ark of the Covenant	Represented God's covenant and His holy throne-presence.
Mercy seat	The place where atoning blood was presented on the Day of Atonement.

B. The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place

- The Tabernacle contained two principal interior areas.
 1. The Holy Place: The priests ministered here regularly. It contained the lampstand, the table of bread, and the altar of incense.
 2. The Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies): This innermost sanctuary contained the Ark of the Covenant and was separated by a veil. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only once each year on the Day of Atonement, with sacrificial blood (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:6–7). The veil emphasized that sinful humanity could not casually approach the presence of a holy God.

C. The Tabernacle points forward to Jesus

- The Tabernacle was not simply an ancient religious building. Its priesthood, sacrifices, and sanctuary foreshadowed the greater work of Jesus Christ.

The Tabernacle	Fulfillment in Christ
Sacrificial offerings	Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10–14).
High priest	Jesus is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Veil separating the Most Holy Place	Through Jesus, believers have access to God (Hebrews 10:19–22).
God's dwelling among Israel	In Jesus, God came to dwell among humanity (John 1:14).
Repeated sacrifices	Jesus offered one sufficient sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:11–12).
• When Jesus died, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50–51), powerfully signifying the new access to God accomplished through His sacrifice. • Key Truth: The Tabernacle demonstrated that God desired to dwell among His people, but that sinful people needed an appointed way to approach Him. Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of that provision.	

IV. The Glory of God Fills the Tabernacle; Exodus 40:34–38

After the Tabernacle was completed according to God's instructions, something extraordinary happened. The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. God's presence was not merely an abstract theological idea. He visibly demonstrated that He was dwelling among His people.

A. God dwelled in the midst of Israel

The glory of God filled the Tabernacle so completely that Moses could not enter it. This revealed both God's willingness to dwell among His people and the overwhelming holiness of His presence.

B. God guided His people

Throughout their wilderness journey, the cloud of God's presence directed Israel.

- When the cloud lifted, Israel traveled.
- When the cloud remained, Israel stayed.
- The cloud appeared by day, and fire was visible by night.

God was not only the One who redeemed Israel. He was also the One who guided and sustained them.

C. God's presence is fulfilled in Christ and His people; John 1:14.

- John declares that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Greek verb translated dwelt carries the idea of pitching a tent or tabernacling. Jesus is the fullest revelation of God's presence among humanity. After His death, resurrection, and ascension, God poured out His Holy Spirit upon believers. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 and Ephesians 2:19–22.
- The New Testament teaches that God's people collectively form His temple, and that believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

- The story that began with God walking with humanity in Eden, and continued with His presence in the Tabernacle, reaches its final fulfillment in Revelation 21:3, when God will dwell with His redeemed people forever.

V. The Big Picture: God's Plan to Dwell With Humanity

- Throughout Scripture, we see a consistent theme: God desires to dwell with His people in holiness and fellowship.
 1. Eden — Genesis 2–3. Humanity enjoyed fellowship with God before sin brought separation.
 2. The Tabernacle — Exodus 25–40. God dwelled among Israel through a sanctuary and sacrificial system.
 3. The Temple — 1 Kings 8. God's glory filled the Temple built by Solomon.
 4. Jesus Christ — John 1:14. God came to dwell among humanity in the person of His Son.
 5. The Church — Ephesians 2:19–22. Believers are built together into a dwelling place for God by His Spirit.
 6. The New Creation — Revelation 21:1–4. God will dwell forever with His redeemed people.
- The Bible is not simply the story of humanity trying to find God. It is the story of God redeeming a people so that He may dwell with them forever.

Key Takeaways

1. Redemption comes before obedience. God redeemed Israel before giving them His Law. We obey God because of His grace, not to earn it.
2. The Law reveals God's holiness and our need for a Savior. It exposes sin and teaches us God's righteous standards.
3. The Tabernacle reveals God's desire to dwell with His people. Its sacrifices, priesthood, and furnishings anticipate the redemptive work of Christ.
4. Jesus is our perfect sacrifice and great High Priest. Through Him, we have access to the Father.
5. God's presence is now with and within His people through the Holy Spirit. One day, His redeemed people will dwell with Him forever.