

Lesson 59

God Dwells Among His People

God promised to stay with the Israelites. He gave them directions to build a place of worship.

Overview

Lesson Focus

God provided detailed instructions on how to construct a portable worship center—the tabernacle—and how to make and set up its furnishings. The Israelites built everything just as God commanded. The animal sacrifices in the tabernacle pointed to the final sacrifice God would send to take away sins—Jesus.

Key Passages

Exodus 25:8–9

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:1–3 And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

When God gives details, we should take notice. And in this account—the construction of the tabernacle—God is all about details. In fact, it is so specific that this is one of those sections of Scripture that people tend to skip over because of the “boring details.” But why did God include such thorough instructions? These rigid directions reveal that God dwells with men according to his plan and purpose. He is absolutely changeless and holy. God knew how he wanted to be worshipped, and he would not tolerate any other form. This dwelling place, with all its furnishings, was to be built according to God’s pattern (Exodus 25:9).

Some of the items included in the tabernacle are worth mentioning here. The bronze altar and bronze basin were placed in the courtyard of the tabernacle before the tent of meeting. The payment for sin through animal sacrifice and the priests’ cleansing at the water basin picture how we come to God today through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus and the cleansing of our sins through repentance. Inside the tent in the first room, the holy place, sat the table of showbread. On it were placed 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes of Israel. These were to be set before the Lord each Sabbath and eaten by Aaron and his sons in a holy place (Leviticus 24:8–9). We can easily see that this bread also pointed toward Jesus Christ, “the bread of life” (John 6:35).

The golden lampstand (made of pure gold) stood across from the table of showbread. The lamps were fueled with olive oil and burned continuously when the tabernacle was erected (Exodus 27:20). The priests certainly needed light within the tabernacle, but we see that this unextinguished light points to our Lord and Savior, “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

The most important piece of furniture God instructed Moses to build was the ark of the covenant—the gold-covered chest that would find its home within the most holy place, separated from the holy place by a veil. The ark would house the golden urn that held manna, Aaron’s staff that budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant (Hebrews 9:4). It was covered by the mercy seat, overshadowed by two cherubim at either end (Exodus 25:17–18). God would speak to the priest from above the mercy seat over the ark (Exodus 25:22). On the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sacrifice would be sprinkled on the mercy seat to make atonement for the sins of Israel (Leviticus 16:15–16).

The picture here should take our breath away, as God reveals his plan of redemption. Can you picture God above the mercy seat (Exodus 25:22) looking down at the ark which houses the law that could never be obeyed (Romans 3:19–20), knowing that because of his holiness he must demand perfect obedience? And then, once a year—on the Day of Atonement—the blood is sprinkled, according to the law, onto the mercy seat. God sees the sin offering presented, which provides a temporary covering but can never completely take away sins (Hebrews 10:11). What a wonderful foreshadowing of Christ’s perfect sacrifice, offered once for sins forever (Hebrews 10:12)!

The building of the tabernacle, far from being boring, offers us hope and the promise that by one offering—Jesus Christ—God has perfected those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:14).

Historical/Apologetics Background

God’s instructions for the objects used in the tabernacle included an interesting building material—acacia wood (Exodus 25:5, 25:10, 25:13, 25:23, 25:28, and others). Acacia wood was used for many of the tabernacle’s furnishings, but most significantly it was what the ark of the covenant itself was made of. Acacia was a durable and beautiful wood, but the acacia tree was covered with sharp thorns. Thorns are a constant reminder of the Curse that came after sin entered the world (Genesis 3:18). The Curse is real. As the workmen prepared the articles for the tabernacle, they would have had a constant physical reminder of the presence of sin. And the ark, made from the wood of this tree, was what God specifically wanted to house the law he had given to Moses on Mount Sinai—the law that could never be obeyed perfectly, the law that humbles man to the knowledge of his own sinfulness (Romans 3:20). Can you see the picture? The ark made from the sin-cursed, thorn-covered tree, housing the law that could never be kept, doused with the sacrificial blood every year, before the mercy seat, for atonement of the sins of the people. What an amazing foreshadowing of God’s plan of redemption through Jesus Christ—who would shed his blood once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous (1 Peter 3:18), as the propitiation for sinners (1 John 4:10).

We are surrounded by real reminders of the Curse and sin every day. But we can find joy and hope in the promise he has given us through the Lamb that was slain (Revelation 13:8).

The tabernacle was intended to be a temporary structure until Jerusalem was established as the capital of the Israelite nation. It was used during the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert and was replaced by Solomon's Temple 400 years later.

Houses of worship and temples were quite common at this time in history. Many cultures built temples dedicated to their pagan gods. These were often situated on mountains or high hills because the people believed that this would bring them nearer to their gods. This practice of pagan worship on the mountaintops explains the command God gave the Israelites as they entered the Promised Land to destroy the high places that were established to worship Baal and other false gods (Numbers 33:52; Deuteronomy 12:2).

God was very precise in giving directions for constructing both the tabernacle and the temple. Today, however, because of Jesus Christ our Savior, we do not look to a temple to worship in, but we worship God in spirit and truth wherever we are (John 4:23–24) and when we believers gather for worship each week. Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, which now grows together throughout the world into a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:21). In fact, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that we are the temple of the living God, and God has made his dwelling among us (2 Corinthians 6:16). Because of this, we should endeavor to live in humble worship and praise to our holy God—consistently reflecting his glory throughout our lives.

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