

LESSON 27: God's Mobile Home: The Tabernacle

This lesson today is like eating vegetables. Remember when your mom said, "Eat 'em, they 're good for you. They'll help you grow strong and healthy." And you would turn up your nose at some of the vegetables you were being asked to eat. Well, that's today's lesson—it's like eating your least favorite vegetable. But, it's good for you and it will increase your spiritual understanding and you'll be better off for knowing what I'm about to teach you today.

Nearly one-third of Exodus is devoted to describing the form and function of the Tabernacle—a portable tent structure that becomes God's residence on earth. Although the Bible goes out of its way to say that God can't be limited to one geographical locale, the Tabernacle becomes a place where God's presence (also known as His "glory") is uniquely manifest on earth, and where the people can offer Him worship and sacrifices.

Also, the layout and content of the Tabernacle symbolize various facets of God's relationship with Israel.

Now, some of you watching this, may want to check out. Your eyes may start to glaze over, but let me encourage you to stick it out. Stay with me because the more we understand the Tabernacle, the better we understand God—who He is and how we are to approach Him, and what He has done for us. The Tabernacle reveals so much about God and our relationship to Him.

Before we look at the Tabernacle, let's review Lesson 26: God gives the Ten Commandments.

Review of Lesson 26

1. Does God care if people worship or serve anything or anyone else besides Him? *Yes, that is sin against God. God will not share His position as God and supreme ruler with anyone or anything else.*
2. Is it all right to make an image of something or worship anything else we have made or which God has created? *No, this, too, is sin against God. We do not know what God looks like, so we must not try to make anything which we think looks like Him or worship any creation of his or anything we have made.*
3. Does God care what we think about Him and what we say about Him? *Yes, God will punish all those who do not always honor Him in their thoughts and by their words. It is sin to use God's name in vain.*
4. Why did God command the Israelites to rest on the seventh day of the week?
 - a. *Because God created all things in six days and rested on the seventh day.*
 - b. *Because God wants us to always remember that He is the Creator and everything that we have comes from Him. We must not give Satan or anyone else the praise for all the things in the world.*
5. Does God care if children disobey or are disrespectful to their parents? *Yes, God will punish all those who do not obey and respect their parents.*
6. Why does God punish all murderers? *Because God gives life to all people, He is the only one who has the authority to take a person's life.*
7. What does God say about a person who hates someone else? *God says that person is a murderer.*
8. What is God's attitude toward adultery? *God condemns all sexual relationships except between a man and his wife.*
9. Why will God punish all who steal? *Because God gives people the right to own things.*

10. Are people guilty of stealing if they plan to steal but then become afraid and do not do it? *Yes, they are guilty because God saw that they had planned in their hearts to steal.*

11. What is God's command about telling lies? *God said that lying to anyone is sin against God because He always speaks the truth and hates lies.*

12. Does God care if we are envious of other people and want what they have? *Yes, that is also sin against God. That was Satan's sin. He was envious of God and wanted His position.*

13. Can anyone obey the Ten Commandments? *No*

A. Introduction

- What is mercy?
- Who needs it?
- Could the Israelites keep their promises to God?
- Can you keep your promises?
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Today's lesson is about God's holiness and His mercy.

B. Moses was once again called by God up into the mountain.

Theme: God communicates with man.

God spoke to the Israelites from Mount Sinai and told them His Ten Commandments. The Lord did not want the Israelites to forget His commandments, so He told Moses to come up into the mountain once again.

- The Lord Himself planned to write His commandments on two pieces of stone so Moses could teach them to the Israelites.
- They had heard His Law, but God intended to give them a permanent, written record of His holy standard.

Exodus 24:12 (ESV)

¹² The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction."

C. Joshua went with Moses up into the mountain.

- Moses obeyed the Lord and went up into the mountain.

Exodus 24:13-18 (NKJV)

¹³ So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God.

¹⁴ And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Indeed Aaron and Hur *are* with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them."

¹⁵ Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain.

¹⁶ Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

¹⁷ The sight of the glory of the LORD *was* like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.

¹⁸ So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

A young man named Joshua accompanied Moses.

Joshua was Moses' assistant.

POINT TO JOSHUA ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL CHART

D. God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle.

Theme: God communicates with man.

While Moses was on the mountain, the Lord gave him the Ten Commandments written on two tablets of stone. The Lord also explained to Moses other rules and customs that He commanded the Israelites to follow:

- God was their king.
- He told them everything that He wanted them to do.
- The Lord also wanted Moses and the people to do something very important.

Explain:

The Lord had given Israel His Ten Commandments. The Lord had agreed with Israel that, if they obeyed His laws, then He would be with them, protect them, and give them all that they needed. But, if they disobeyed His laws, then the punishment was death.

The Lord knew that the Israelites were sinners and would not be able to always obey His commands. God knew that they would disobey Him and that, unless they had some way of escape, He would have to punish all of them.

Theme: God is loving, merciful, and gracious.

However, because the Lord loved them, He did not want to destroy them. Therefore, He told them to build a special place where He would live with them. The people would learn how to approach their holy God without being destroyed

Exodus 25:1-8 (NKJV)

¹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

² "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering.

³ And this *is* the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze;

⁴ blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*, fine linen, and goats' *hair*;

⁵ ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood;

⁶ oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense;

⁷ onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.

⁸ And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

Note:

This didn't mean that God would no longer be everywhere. Even when He came to live in the tabernacle, God would continue to be everywhere. This special place was built so man could learn how God must be approached. But don't think for a second that God just confined Himself to the Tabernacle. He was everywhere then, even as He is everywhere now.

E. The tabernacle had to be built exactly as God commanded Moses.

Theme: Man can come to God only according to God's will and plan.

Exodus 25:9 (NKJV)

⁹ According to all that I show you, *that is*, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make *it*.

The Hebrew word used for tabernacle means tent, dwelling place, or home. Everything in this place had to be built exactly as the Lord told Moses when he was up in the mountain.

- It all had to be done God's way.
- Remember that Cain refused to come to God in the way God had said, and so God would not accept him.
- But Noah believed God and built the ark exactly as the Lord told him. God accepted and saved Noah and his family.
- We cannot tell God how we will come to Him.
- We must come to God in the way He teaches us through the Bible.

The **Tabernacle** was a **portable tent** with a **wooden framework** to give it stability. The entire sanctuary consisted of three parts:

- 1) An outer court enclosed by curtains supported on pillars. It was oblong in shape and the entrance was on the east side.
- 2) **The altar of sacrifice (bronze altar)** was within the court, facing **the entrance**.
- 3) The Tabernacle itself was located at the western part of the court. The Tabernacle was divided by a veil or hanging curtain into two chambers. The first chamber was called the Holy Place, it contained the Table, Lampstand, and Altar of Incense. Only priests were allowed into this section. The second chamber was called **the Holy of Holies**, it contained **the Ark of the Covenant**. **The High Priest** the Holy of Holies only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

The objects closest to the Holy of Holies were constructed of precious metals and cloths. Those farther off were made of **bronze** and ordinary woven materials. The Tabernacle was covered by a tent and additional cloth covers.

The Tabernacle area was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. There was a 7 1/2 foot curtain made of fine white linen which were fastened to 60 supporting pillars of bronze surrounding it with one entrance through the eastern gate. Within **the outer court** were two articles of furniture, **the bronze altar of sacrifice** where all of the sacrifices were made, and the bronze laver of cleansing where **the priests** washed their hands and their feet.

F. The Holy of holies

Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.

God told Moses that the tabernacle must have two rooms. The first room, which was entered from the outside, was called the holy place, or the separate place. God is holy, perfect, righteous—set apart from

sinner. It was a room set apart by God to be used only for Him. It was only to be used by God's chosen priests when they were serving God.

Within the Holy Place of the tabernacle, there was an inner room called the **Holy of Holies**, or the Most Holy Place. Judging from its name, we can see that it was a most sacred room, a place no ordinary person could enter. It was God's special dwelling place in the midst of His people. During the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, God appeared as a pillar of cloud or fire in and above the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was a perfect cube — its length, width and height were all equal to 15 feet.

A thick curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. This curtain, known as the "veil," was made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn. There were figures of cherubim (angels) embroidered onto it. Cherubim, spirits who serve God, were in the presence of God to demonstrate His almighty power and majesty. They also guarded the throne of God. These cherubim were also on the innermost layer of covering of the tent. If one looked upward, they would see the cherubim figures.

The picture of the veil was that of a barrier between man and God, showing man that the holiness of God could not be trifled with. God's eyes are too pure to look on evil and He can tolerate no sin (Habakkuk 1:13). The veil was a barrier to make sure that man could not carelessly and irreverently enter into God's awesome presence. Even as the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he had to make some meticulous preparations: He had to wash himself, put on special clothing, bring burning incense to let the smoke cover his eyes from a direct view of God, and bring blood with him to make atonement for sins.

"But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance." (Hebrews 9:7)

G. The ark and the mercy seat

Exodus 25:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ "They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high.

¹¹ "You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it.

The Lord also directed Moses to make a box which was to be placed inside the second room, the most holy place where God was to live.

-The Lord told Moses that this box, called the ark of the covenant, must be made from the wood of a particular tree which was chosen by God.

- After they made the Ark of the Covenant, they were to cover it with gold.
- The **Ark of the Covenant**, the chest containing the two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, was the most sacred object of the tabernacle and later in the temple in Jerusalem, where it was placed in an inner area called the Holy of Holies. Also within the ark were the golden pot of manna, such as was provided by God in the wilderness wanderings (Exodus 16:4) and Aaron's almond rod (Numbers 17:1-13). On top of the ark was a lid called the mercy seat on which rested the cloud or visible symbol of the divine presence.

Here God was supposed to be seated, and from this place He was supposed to dispense mercy to man when the blood of the atonement was sprinkled there.

Exodus 25:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.

Moses was told to make a lid of pure gold and place it on top of the ark in the inner room.

- The lid was called the mercy seat.
- The mercy seat was the most important part of the whole tabernacle.

This was the place where God promised to live with the sinful Israelites and show them mercy. Mercy is God's provision for sinners to escape the punishment they deserve for their sins.

In a manner of speaking, the mercy seat concealed the people of God from the ever-condemning judgment of the Law. Each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of animals sacrificed for the atonement of the sins of God's people. This blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The point conveyed by this imagery is that it is only through the offering of blood that the condemnation of the Law could be taken away and violations of God's laws covered.

MERCY

God's provision for sinners to escape the punishment they deserve for their sins

The Lord told Moses that he was to make two gold **cherubim** at either end of the mercy seat.

Exodus 25:18-21 (NASB)

¹⁸ "You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat.

¹⁹ "Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim *of one piece* with the mercy seat at its two ends.

²⁰ "The cherubim shall have *their* wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be *turned* toward the mercy seat.

²¹ "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.

²² "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

God promised that, when everything was finished just as He had commanded, He would come into the inner room. His presence would be evidenced by a very bright light between the cherubim. This bright light is referred to as the Shekinah glory—the radiance, glory, or presence of God, living with His people Israel.

H. The veil

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.

Exodus 26:31-33 (NASB)

³¹ "You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman.

³² "You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks *also being of gold*, on four sockets of silver.

³³ "You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies.

God told Moses that he was to hang a beautiful, thick **curtain** as a divider between the two rooms. This curtain was to remind the Israelites that they were separated from God because of sin.

The word "veil" in Hebrew means a screen, divider or separator that hides. What was this curtain hiding? Essentially, it was shielding a holy God from sinful man. Whoever entered into the Holy of Holies was entering the very presence of God. In fact, anyone except the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies would die. Even the high priest, God's chosen mediator with His people, could only pass through the veil and enter this sacred dwelling once a year, on a prescribed day called the Day of Atonement.

I. The tabernacle coverings and the brazen altar

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.

God also told Moses to make a fence of cloth curtains held upright between posts and to place it around the two-roomed structure.

When a person wanted to approach God, his first step was to bring a burnt offering to the Lord. He was to bring it to the **brazen altar**, just inside the gate.

- Note: "Brazen" means made of brass. He was to place his hand on the head of the animal and then kill it.

By doing this, he was admitting to God that he was a sinner and deserved to die. -By placing his hands on the animal, he was identifying himself with this animal that as to die in his place. -But he was asking God to accept the animal's death instead of his.

Leviticus 1:1-5 (NASB)

¹ Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,

² "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock.

³ 'If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.

⁴ 'He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.

⁵ 'He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Hebrews 9:19-22 (NASB)

¹⁹ For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,

²⁰ saying, "THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU."

²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.

²² And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Could the blood of animals pay for sin? No! The blood of animals was only a reminder, or illustration, or pattern, of the punishment demanded for sin. Separation of the sinner from God is the only just payment for sin. Obviously, God doesn't ask us to bring animal sacrifices to Him today, but that was the provision He made for the Israelites.

In the Old Testament, the sinner who came in God's way was fully forgiven and released from the judgment due to his sins, but God did this only because He intended to deal with that sin righteously and completely through the sacrificial blood and death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. When the Lord Jesus died, God laid on Him the sins of the Old Testament believers which, in the forbearance of God, He had left unpunished (Romans 3:25, Hebrews 9:15).

In other words, because these OT saints acted in faith and came in God's way through the blood sacrifice of a spotless lamb, and this act of faith looked forward to the coming Messiah, the coming Deliverer who would be the perfect sacrifice for all mankind once and for all. God showed us in His Son, the Messiah, a better way to take care of our sins, once and for all.

And as their faith looked forward to the Messiah, our faith here in the 21st century looks back to that act of sacrifice on the cross at Calvary where our sins were dealt with and forgiven by the shed blood of the Messiah, the Lamb of God.

J. Aaron and his sons were made priests.

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

The Lord appointed Aaron to be the high priest. His sons were also to be priests.

Exodus 28:1 (NASB)

¹ "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.

- Only Aaron, the high priest, was allowed to go into the inner room, the most holy place where God was.
- The High Priest's ceremonial robes were designed by God Himself. Each aspect of the robe has spiritual significance pointing to the relationship between God and man and the coming Messiah. The Ephod was a garment made of gold, blue, purple & scarlet. It was made of two parts which were clasped together by two onyx stones and each onyx stone was engraved with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. Six names in order of birth on one stone and six on the other. The instructions from God for doing this are found in Exodus 28:6-14.

- The High Priest also wore a breastplate and on the front of the breastplate were fastened twelve precious stones in [four](#) rows of three. On each of these stones were engraved the name of one of the tribes of Israel. The instructions for this breastplate was given in Exodus 28:15-29.
- I could go on but you get the idea. Every aspect of the High Priest's clothing was designed by God and is there for a reason; as a symbolic representation of God's righteousness, holiness, his relationship and love for His chosen people, Israel, as well as their need for the coming Deliverer.
- Continuing on with the duties of the High Priest. Only he was allowed to go into the inner room. If anyone else had gone behind the curtain and entered the inner room, he would have been killed.
 - If anyone else had gone behind the curtain and entered the inner room, he would have been killed.
 - Aaron could only go into the most holy place once each year, on the Day of Atonement, which means the "day of covering."
 - The only way he could enter was to come with the blood of an animal which had been sacrificed.

Leviticus 16:2-3 (NASB)

² The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

³ "Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.

Before Aaron entered the holy of holies, he had to kill an animal and catch its blood in a basin. Then, after he passed behind the heavy curtain which hung between the two rooms, Aaron was to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat, the pure gold cover of the ark of the covenant.

Theme: Man can come to God only according to God's will and plan. If everything was done the way the Lord had told Moses, then God promised to forgive the sins of Israel for the past year.

- **Could the blood of animals pay for their sins?** No! The blood of the animals could not pay for their sins.
- The punishment for sin is death, and that includes the separation of the sinner from God forever.
- Sin must be paid for in full. Nevertheless, God promised to hold off the judgment they deserved and forgive their sins for the past year, if they came to Him in the way He had told them.

They must come to him believing Him and bringing a blood sacrifice for their sins. God will only accept those who come to Him in the way He says in the Bible.

k. The tabernacle was finished and erected, and God came to live in it as His house.

Theme: Man can come to God only according to God's will and plan.

God had told Moses that the Israelites were to build the tabernacle so that He could live with them.

The Israelites built the tabernacle for the Lord and erected it exactly as He had instructed Moses.

If they had not made it exactly as God told them, God would not have come to live with them. But because Moses and the Israelites did everything the way God instructed them, God came to live in the center of the Israelites' camp in the most holy place of the tabernacle.

Exodus 40:34-35 (NASB)

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

³⁵ Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

The Israelites could now come to God in the way that He had taught them. Each year, Aaron, the high priest, could enter the most holy place and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat under the cherubim.

Why did the high priest have to repeat this every year? **Because the blood of animals cannot pay for sin.**

Hebrews 10:4 says, "...it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." In His mercy, God was simply holding off for another year the punishment the Israelites deserved.

L. Conclusion

The Israelites, like us, were sinners. They needed God's mercy. And God made a way for them to come to Him. We cannot decide how we will come to God. He is perfect, and He will only accept us if we come to Him in the way He tells us in His Word.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. On what did God write His Ten Commandments? *On two tablets of stone.*
2. What did God tell Moses that he and the Israelites must build? *The tabernacle, a place where God would live among them.*
3. Why did God tell the Israelites to build this place? *God knew that the Israelites would disobey the Ten Commandments which He had given them. Unless they had some place where they could go to God and receive His forgiveness and mercy, they would all be punished by death.*
4. How were they to make everything? *They were to make everything exactly as God instructed Moses up in the mountain.*
5. In which room was the bright light, or Shekinah glory, which showed that God was there? *In the inner room, called the most Holy place, or the Holy of holies.*
6. Who was the only one who could go once each year behind the large, heavy curtain into the inner room? *The high priest.*
7. What must he take with him? *The blood of an animal which had been killed.*
8. What was the high priest to do with the blood? *He was to sprinkle it on the mercy seat.*
9. What did God promise He would do if the high priest did this? *God promised that He would hold off His judgment on the Israelites for one more year.*
10. Did the blood of animals satisfy God as a payment for sin? *No, the blood of animals could never pay for sin.*
11. What is the only payment for sin? *Sinners must die. They are separated from God and destined to be punished by Him forever.*
12. Would God have come to live in the tabernacle if they had not done everything exactly as God had instructed Moses? *No.*

13. Can sinners come to God in whatever way they wish? **No, if we don't come to God in the way that He says, we will not be accepted.**

14. How can we know the way to God? **Only through the Bible, the Word of God.**

Next week: *Lesson 28: Israel's Unbelief and God's Judgments and Deliverances*