

TUTORIAL
2.6

The Tabernacle reminds us of Jesus

This tutorial looks back at the Tabernacle, viewing it through the lens of what we now have in Christ.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: ***Exodus 20:1-17, Exodus Ch. 25 – 27***

Last time

We noted some parallels between the life of Moses and the life of Jesus. We also thought about how God gave His name as I AM to Moses and that Jesus also called Himself that to the Jewish leaders. Something else we highlighted were the parallels between God's instructions about the Passover lamb for the Israelites in Egypt, and Jesus, whose blood permanently protects us from God's judgement. And finally, we drew some encouragement and instruction for ourselves from the powerful picture of God intervening to rescue the Israelites at the Red Sea.

Only Jesus could fulfill the Law

After leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, God guided them eventually to camp at the foot of Mount Sinai. We'll remember the proposed Covenant that He put before the Israelites there. The basic terms were straightforward. He would provide a Law, a constitution, if you like, that would define His absolutely holy standards for them as individuals and a community (Exodus 20:1-17).

If they could live up to that - if every one of them could fulfill it completely in every dimension of thought, word and action - then He promised they'd enjoy a special relationship with Him as a people. Their special relationship with the Creator God would be unique on the earth. They would have direct access to Him. He would protect them and help them to thrive as a people. We know the Israelites readily agreed, and just as quickly failed completely at keeping their side of the agreement.

But what about us? Do we have to try to keep God's Law under the conditions of the New Covenant? Do we have to earn God's protection and favor? Well for one thing, we have just as little chance of doing that through our own efforts as

the Israelites did. It was realizing this reality that brought us to the point of finally giving up trying to please God ourselves and turning to Jesus.

Because the really amazing thing is that *He* did, and does, fulfill every aspect of God's Law...He lived, and lives, up to God's impossibly (for us) high standards. The New Covenant or Agreement or Testament - to use the old term - was made between God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Its conditions are upheld by Jesus' perfection and were sealed...or *signed*, in His blood. He paid the penalty already for all the times we have, and will continue to, fall short of His perfect standards.

As we've noted before, the mountain around which the Israelites were standing waiting for Moses to come down with God's Law, was shaking and smoking. God was graphically showing that He is holy and punishes sin. His anger against anything that falls short of His perfect standards is like a raging bush fire that vaporizes everything in its path. The very safest place when there is a bushfire around is where it has already been...where there's no fuel left for it to burn. And that's where we are. By faith we've walked right into the place where God's hatred against sin has already burned the hottest - against His Son Jesus when He was the sin bearer. So because in God's view we're forever identified now with Jesus, we will never face that inferno ourselves.

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God, of course, was fully aware that the Israelites - as individuals and as a community - had no hope at all of keeping their side of the bargain. Despite that - another one of those '*but God*' examples of His grace - He was determined to relate to them and live with them as a community.

So He gave very specific instructions about a large portable structure, a very elaborate tent, in fact, that would be His special, holy place among them. As well as describing the layout, dimensions and materials to use, God also gave specific instructions about objects they should make as furnishings for this enclosed space.

For the Israelite community, those things served as practical equipment for the never-ending rituals needed to deal with their numerous violations of the Covenant. The furnishings were also designed to create a sense of awe at God's holiness and to highlight His *distance* from sinful humans. If we as New Covenant people could take a visit to the Tabernacle, it would be a very different experience than for the Israelites living under the requirements of the Old Covenant.

We can take a virtual tour in our imaginations:

- The first thing we see as we enter the outer enclosure is a large **brass platform or altar**. A line of people is waiting nearby with animals to be

sacrificed and burned there. Priests in their special robes are busy around the altar. We're immediately grateful that we don't have to constantly be bringing animals to be killed and burned so we can ask for forgiveness or favor. Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf completely satisfied God. We are totally forgiven. We can come to ask God for help any time, wherever we are. While we're grateful for the encouragement, fellowship and even guidance from fellow believers, we don't need to rely on other humans to help us approach God.

- Moving on toward the large tent-like structure some meters away, we come to a **large basin** on a stand. This is kept full of water so the priests can wash their hands and feet before going into God's special place. Seeing this, we are reminded that God's Spirit uses His Word, His Narrative, rather like water to wash our hearts. In other words, as we learn more about Him and then ourselves in light of that, He helps us to align our perspectives, our values and our behaviour to His. It's a process of cleaning away the old habits associated with our past identity and learning to live in light of who we are now...of allowing Him to shape us into what we are actually meant to be as His image-bearing children.

- As we approach the Tabernacle, we're conscious that only the authorized priests from the line of Levi are entering...even into the outer room called the **Holy Place**. But for us New Covenant people, nothing is restricted and so we walk confidently on through the door. Inside we see a **table** that is completely covered in gold. On the table are **twelve loaves of bread** representing the twelve tribes of Israel. To us, the bread in this setting reminds us of Jesus who gives us life and strength. After all, He specifically said that He is the Bread of Life.

- Over on the left is an elaborate golden object that has a stand on the ground coming up to **seven branches**. Each holds a burning **oil lamp**. Immediately we remember that Jesus said that He is the Light of the World. Because we know Him, we can live with real clarity and direction... we don't have to stumble around in darkness like so many in this world.

- Since we came into the Holy Place we've been conscious of a really pleasant smell, and now we can see its source. Ahead is **another altar**, again made from wood but covered in gold; this one is smaller than the first one outside. On it we see **incense** burning as an offering to God. It makes us think about the fact that God is delighted by our worship, our prayers and our obedient actions as His children. Because we come *through His Son* - in fact, we regularly pray *in Jesus' name* - He finds them pleasing: a little like the way we appreciate something that smells really great.

- Hanging at the end of the Holy Place ahead is a thick, colorful **curtain**, woven with images of powerful angels. We know that behind this is the room reserved

for the shining glorious presence of the Almighty God. For those under the Old Covenant this formidable barrier was a symbol of fear and exclusion. Only the High Priest was allowed to go past this barrier, and only once a year after specific rituals and bringing blood. Anything else meant instantaneous death.

We, on the other hand, see nothing to fear there. To us it represents the body of the Lord Jesus which, while on earth, contained and hid the glory of God that is part of who He is. We are certainly sobered as we recall that His body was beaten and torn for us. But we're thrilled and thankful when we remember that moment just before He died when He said *It is finished!* and how the curtain hanging in the temple was torn from top to bottom.

And so, respectful and grateful, we walk in empty handed, without the need for any ritual, past the curtain into the **Holiest Place**. We can approach God's awesome Holy Presence with confidence...certainly not in ourselves, but because of Jesus' righteousness that protects us.

- At first we're almost overcome by the brilliance of **God's Divine glorious presence**, but we remember that we live every day in His presence. Normally we're aware of His presence by faith rather than through our senses, but that doesn't mean He is less real, or less majestic. What an amazing thing it is to live in the presence of God and to have His Spirit living in us.

- There's only one object in this room, a large wooden box or chest completely covered in gold. We know this is the **Ark of the Covenant** that contains the stone tablets engraved with the ten commandments. Thankfully we don't need to carry around something like that because God's Spirit is always with us, helping us to apply God's truth in everyday situations. The lid of the chest, the **mercy seat** is where the **High Priest** comes each year with lamb's blood to ask God to overlook the sin of the community.

As we stand there looking at these objects we're moved and overjoyed at the thought that Jesus is our High Priest. He is in Heaven, representing us to His Father on the basis of His blood that He offered as a sacrifice for our sins. We are completely forgiven. At any time of night or day, under any circumstance, we can come directly to God and be assured of His mercy and kindness to us. Our hearts are overwhelmed as we remember all the incredible privileges we have under the New Covenant that Jesus put into place for us.





DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. How would you answer someone who suggested that the God of the Old Testament seems much harsher and more vengeful than the loving, gracious God of the New Testament?
2. What do you think about the idea that as Christians we shouldn't really be worrying about the Old Testament? In your own words, describe how you think we should view this large part of God's Narrative? How should we interpret, or understand, what we find there?
3. If it's true that we do not need any particular rituals to worship God under the New Covenant, what importance do you feel we should place on church services? In terms of *worship* do you feel that church is:
 - a) irrelevant,
 - b) optional,
 - c) helpful on occasions,
 - d) very important,
 - e) absolutely essential,
 - f) something else.
 - g) Please explain.