

## SESSION 12

# GOD TOLD THE ISRAELITES HOW TO WORSHIP HIM

The Israelites said they were happy to make an agreement with God. When Moses came back down the mountain with God's laws, the Israelites said again that they would do everything God said.



EXODUS 24:3

<sup>3</sup> Then Moses went down to the people and repeated all the instructions and regulations the Lord had given him. All the people answered with one voice, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded."

Then God told Moses to go up on the mountain again.



EXODUS 24:12

<sup>12</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain. Stay there, and I will give you the tablets of stone on which I have inscribed the instructions and commands so you can teach the people."

This time, God gave Moses a copy of his laws written on large flat stones. God wanted his perfect laws to be carved<sup>134</sup> into stone. He did not want them to be lost or changed. He wanted the Israelites to remember what they had agreed to do.

God also told Moses something amazing. God said he was going to come and live with the Israelites. They had agreed to God's contract and he said he was going to be part of their community.<sup>135</sup> The Israelites were nomadic – this means that they moved around from place to place and lived in tents.

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134. **carved** - to cut into something with something sharp to leave a deep mark

135. **community** - a group of people living together in the same area

## HIS STORY: THE RESCUE

The place God would live among them had to be made so that it could be moved from place to place. God told Moses that they must make a large meeting tent where he could stay. In English, the word for this tent is ‘tabernacle.’

This tabernacle would be a special place. God told Moses every single small thing that should be done in order to make it. He told Moses very clearly what furniture<sup>136</sup> and what other things should be inside it. He also told Moses how it should be decorated.<sup>137</sup> God wanted the Israelites to see clearly how holy and perfect he is. He wanted to show them that sinful human beings cannot just come to God in their own way. He wanted them to understand that they had to come to him in the way that he said. So he told them very, very clearly how to make this special place where he would live with his people.

God knew that the Israelites would not be able to follow his laws. He knew that they could not do what they had agreed to do. Yes, they were God’s chosen people, but like all people born outside of the garden, they were sinners. They could not change that or fix that themselves. They were born into a world of sin, and sin was part of who they were. Like all people, they could not live perfectly and follow all of God’s laws. God is the only one who is perfect. The Israelites could not do what God’s laws said. They needed God to rescue them. But they did not understand that then.

Now God had made an agreement, a covenant, with the Israelites. He would live among them. The tabernacle would be a place where they could come to him. It would be one place where all the people – around two million people – could come to God precisely how he wanted. It was a very important and special place. God told them exactly<sup>138</sup> how they should make it. You can read later in your Bible in Exodus Chapters 25 to 27 all the things God said about how to build the tabernacle. We will look now at just some of the things that God said about it.

God told them to use animal skins and materials made of animal hair for the outside walls and the roof of the tabernacle. These are the same things that the Israelites used to make their own tents that they lived in.

God said there should be a large area with tent walls around it to mark the edge of the tabernacle, about 46 m x 23 m.<sup>139</sup> Inside those tent walls, there should be one tent that was about 14 m x 4.5 m<sup>140</sup> with two rooms inside it. The first room, the bigger one, should be called the Holy Place. The Holy Place would be next to another room called the Most Holy Place. This room would be half as big as the Holy Place.

The Most Holy Place would be God’s place, set apart for him. God is spirit – he does not have a body like us – and so he does not need a house or a tent to live in. But God wanted his people to know that he was with them. That is why he wanted them to build the tabernacle.

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136. **furniture** - things for people to use in a room, like tables, chairs and lamps

137. **decorate** - to make something look better by adding curtains or paint or designs to it

138. **exactly** - he told them every small detail

139. **43 m x 23 m** - 141 ft. x 75 ft.

140. **14 m x 4.5 m** - 46 ft. x 15 ft.

## SESSION 12 : GOD TOLD THE ISRAELITES HOW TO WORSHIP HIM

God said that they should hang a very thick curtain<sup>141</sup> between the two rooms. The curtain was there to remind the people that they could not just come to God in their own way. He is holy and they were not holy. The curtain should remind them of their sin that kept them separated from God. Their sin was like the curtain that was between them and the Most Holy Place where God was.

God said that a special wooden box covered in gold should be put inside the Most Holy Place. This would be the only thing inside the Most Holy Place. In English, this box is called an ‘ark.’ An ark is a strong box and anything that is put inside it will be safe. God’s laws that were written on the flat stones would be kept inside this golden box. These laws were the agreement that the Israelites had made with God. This golden box was called the Ark of the Covenant. God said that the box should have a special lid on it. This lid would cover the flat stones with the laws written on them that were inside. God said that just above the box would be the place where he would stay. That would be his place over the golden box with the laws inside. He said that place would be a place of mercy, where wrong things would be made right.

God knew that the people could never obey his laws. He knew that they could not pay for their sins. But he wanted to make a way for them to come to him. He did not want them to die because of their sins. He loves people and he wanted to rescue the Israelites and be with them. He wanted them to have a relationship with him that was real and true. The golden box with the laws inside showed how perfect God’s laws were. It showed that God’s perfect laws would never change. But because God loves people, he would make a way to “cover” his laws – just like the lid on the golden box covered the laws written in stone. He did not want the people to have to pay for their sins with their own deaths. God had promised to send the Rescuer to deal with sin forever. But until that time, God was making a temporary<sup>142</sup> way for his people to come to him in the tabernacle.

God said they should make a large altar – a place for burning offerings. This altar should be made of brass.<sup>143</sup> It should be placed inside the area with the tent walls around it. God said that people should bring animals there to be killed. He said that the person who brought the animal should put their hand on the head of the animal. Then, they should ask God to accept the animal’s death in place of their own. God wanted them to always remember that they deserved death for their sins, but that he had made a way for them to come to him and to live.

There were many other decorations, furniture and objects that God told them to put in the tabernacle. God told them how to make everything and what materials everything should be made out of. All of the things in the tabernacle were there to remind the people of the important things about God.

God told Moses that a group of men called priests<sup>144</sup> would take care of the tabernacle. The priests would make sure that the offerings were done correctly. They would help the people to do everything the way that God said it should be done. God said that Moses’ brother, Aaron, would be the first high priest. The high priest would be the leader of the priests. Aaron’s sons would work with him. Later, new priests would come from Aaron’s family too. You can read all the things God said about

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141. **curtain** - a piece of material held at the top to make a screen

142. **temporary** - something that is only for a short amount of time

143. **brass** - a yellow metal made up of copper and zinc

144. **priest** - someone who helps other people to worship God

## HIS STORY: THE RESCUE

the priests in Exodus Chapters 28 and 29. God told the Israelites very, very clearly many things about the priests. He told them how to make special, beautiful clothing for the priests. He told them exactly how these men should do the work he wanted them to do. He gave them many instructions<sup>145</sup> about how they should make their offerings.

God said that the high priest had a special job to do. On one day each year, the high priest should go into the Most Holy Place. This day was called the *Day of Atonement*. Atonement means to pay for something that you have done wrong. God said that on that day, the high priest should take the blood of an animal into God's special place. The priest should sprinkle<sup>146</sup> the blood on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. God said that they should do this each year, just like he told them to. Then God would not punish the Israelites for all the times that they broke his laws in that year.

God knows everything that has ever happened and that will ever happen. So he knew that the Children of Israel would not be able to obey the laws he had given them. He wanted them to understand that they needed him to save them. But even when Moses was still up on the mountain with God, the Israelites were already breaking God's laws.

You can read the whole story about what they did later in Exodus Chapter 32. Moses was up on the mountain for a long time. While the Israelites were waiting for him, they melted<sup>147</sup> down a large amount of gold. With the gold, they made the shape of a calf.<sup>148</sup> Then they worshiped the golden calf and thanked it for bringing them out of Egypt. They forgot that it was God who had brought them out of Egypt. They were worshiping an idol<sup>149</sup> instead of God.

God knew that they would break his laws, so he made another way for them to come to him. He said they could offer animals at the tabernacle. By doing that, they would show that they knew that they should die for their sins. But the animals would die in their place. They should do that and wait for the Rescuer to come. He would defeat Satan and pay for people's sins once and for all.

After the tabernacle was finished, the Israelites started to move again.



EXODUS 40:36-38

<sup>36</sup> Now whenever the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out on their journey, following it. <sup>37</sup> But if the cloud did not rise, they remained where they were until it lifted. <sup>38</sup> The cloud of the Lord hovered over the Tabernacle during the day, and at night fire glowed inside the cloud so the whole family of Israel could see it. This continued throughout all their journeys.

God came and lived with them. During the day, the people of Israel could see that God was with them. God put a cloud above the tabernacle. And at night, they could see that he was still there. God put a fire inside the cloud at night so they could all see that he was still with them. When this cloud moved up, the people knew that God was telling them to move on.

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145. **instructions** - directions or orders about how to do something

146. **sprinkle** - to cover something with small drops (of the blood)

147. **melted** - heated the gold so they could make another shape out of it

148. **calf** - a young cow

149. **idol** - something that people make out of metal or wood that they worship as a god

## SESSION 12 : GOD TOLD THE ISRAELITES HOW TO WORSHIP HIM

One day, ten or eleven months after they had first arrived at Mount Sinai, the cloud moved up.



NUMBERS 10:11

<sup>11</sup> In the second year after Israel's departure from Egypt—on the twentieth day of the second month—the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle of the Covenant.

With God leading them, they traveled through the wilderness. They reached the border<sup>150</sup> area of Canaan. This was the land that God had promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. They set up camp at a place called Kadesh Barnea.

The land of Canaan is the area that we now call Israel, the Palestinian territories,<sup>151</sup> Lebanon, and the western parts of Jordan and Syria. This was the land that God promised to the Israelite nation. But when they got to the border, there were many tribes already living there. These tribes were *Semitic* people. Semitic means that they were descendants of Noah's son, Shem. Some of these tribes were trying to get more land, money and power. They fought with the other tribes. These tribes did not listen to God or follow what he said. They worshiped idols as well. They did not believe he was the Creator. God had told Abraham many years before that these tribes would be punished for turning away from him. God knew what the land of Canaan would be like when the Israelites arrived there. He knew that there would already be tribes of people living there.

While the Israelites were camped at Kadesh Barnea, some interesting things happened. You can read about it later for yourself. But we will move ahead in the story a little bit now. God told Moses to choose twelve men – one man from each of the Israelite tribes. He told them to go into Canaan and come back to tell the people what they had found there.



NUMBERS 13:21-29

<sup>21</sup> So they went up and explored the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. <sup>22</sup> Going north, they passed through the Negev and arrived at Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi—all descendants of Anak—lived. (The ancient town of Hebron was founded seven years before the Egyptian city of Zoan.) <sup>23</sup> When they came to the valley of Eshcol, they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes so large that it took two of them to carry it on a pole between them! They also brought back samples of the pomegranates and figs. <sup>24</sup> That place was called the valley of Eshcol (which means “cluster”), because of the cluster of grapes the Israelite men cut there.

<sup>25</sup> After exploring the land for forty days, the men returned <sup>26</sup> to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land. <sup>27</sup> This was their report to Moses: “We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces. <sup>28</sup> But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! <sup>29</sup> The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley.”

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150. **border** - the outside edge of something

151. **territories** - areas of land that are ruled by a state or country

## HIS STORY: THE RESCUE

The twelve men went in to the land of Canaan for nearly six weeks. They went to different areas in the land. They saw that the land was very good for growing things. They brought back a huge bunch of grapes to show the people. But they also told the people that the tribes in the land were very strong. They said there were huge people in the land and that their towns had very strong walls. But two of the men who had entered Canaan told the people not to be afraid. Their names were Caleb and Joshua. They believed that God would help them to defeat the people who were living there.



NUMBERS 13:30

<sup>30</sup> But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. “Let’s go at once to take the land,” he said. “We can certainly conquer it!”

But the people did not listen to Caleb and Joshua. They were afraid. They listened to the other ten men who had gone into Canaan. They thought about Egypt and they wanted to go back there. They got angry and wanted to kill Caleb and Joshua. They did not want Moses and Aaron to be their leaders any more.

God had promised that the Israelites would live in the land of Canaan. But they did not believe what God said. Because the Children of Israel did not believe what God said, he told them that their generation would not go and live in the promised land. God said that they would move around in the wilderness for 40 years and then die in the wilderness. But he said that their children’s generation would go into the land that he had promised.

God’s story tells us more about the Israelites while they were in the wilderness. You can read in Numbers Chapter 20 about a time when they ran out of water. They did not ask God for help. Instead, they complained and blamed Moses and Aaron for leading them out to die in the wilderness.

Not very long after this, the Israelites again started to complain about God and Moses. They said that they did not have good food and drink in the wilderness. They said that the manna that God had given them for food was horrible.<sup>152</sup>



NUMBERS 21:4-9

<sup>4</sup> Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, <sup>5</sup> and they began to speak against God and Moses. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?” they complained. “There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!”

<sup>6</sup> So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. <sup>7</sup> Then the people came to Moses and cried out, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes.” So Moses prayed for the people.

<sup>8</sup> Then the Lord told him, “Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!” <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!

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152. **horrible** - very bad or unpleasant

## SESSION 12 : GOD TOLD THE ISRAELITES HOW TO WORSHIP HIM

God sent poisonous<sup>153</sup> snakes to the place where the Israelites were camped. When the snakes bit a person, that person would die. The people knew that God did this to them because they had spoken against God and against Moses. They asked Moses to talk to God and ask for his help. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. God said that any person who had been bitten by a poisonous snake could look at the bronze snake on the pole. If they looked at it, then God would heal<sup>154</sup> them.

God sent the snakes to show the Israelites that they needed him. They had no way to escape the bite of the snakes. But God made a way for them to live. If they did not do what he said, they would die.

God promised Adam and Eve that he would send the Rescuer to end the power of Satan. The Rescuer would save people from having to pay for their sins. The bronze snake was an example of what the Rescuer would do for all people later on. We will hear all about that later in God's story.

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1. God very clearly told the Children of Israel how to build the tabernacle. Why did he do that?
2. God knew that the Israelites would not obey his laws. But he still went to live with them and he gave them a way to come to him. Why do you think he did that?
3. How did he say the Israelites should come to him?
4. How did God show that he was with the Israelites?
5. What did the bronze snake on a pole show the people about God?

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153. **poisonous** - something with poison in it that can kill people

154. **heal** - to make someone well again



This lesson has been adapted from the book *His Story: The Rescue, The Bible message from Genesis to Christ in easy English* (ISBN: 978-0-9944270-4-5)

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