

Lesson 13: Exodus 35-40 God Indwells the Tabernacle

Introduction

The burning of Notre Dame cathedral brought about mourning from around the world at the loss of a global treasure. The French grief is severely felt. Statements out of France focus on the cathedral not as a symbol of Christian faith but as a symbol of France.

Albert Mohler reflected on the cathedral's purpose the day after the fire on his April 16 podcast of *The Briefing*. I want to repeat some of his comments here. The construction of Notre Dame began in 1163 AD. The age of cathedrals sought to emphasize the magnificent transcendence of God in contrast to the smallness of man. These great cathedrals dominated city skylines across Europe. And for over 800 years Notre Dame's great spire pointed eyes upward to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The great cathedrals remind us that Western culture as we know it could not have come to be without the solid foundation, the worldview, of Christianity. The French Revolution attempted to remove Christian faith from the cultural equation. Notre Dame means "our lady" and the lady had always been Mary the mother of Jesus. But the enlightened French leaders replaced Mary with the Goddess of Reason and set up an altar of liberty inside Notre Dame. The state religion of reason lasted only a year. It removed Christianity without offering people answers to the deeper questions that people are always asking. So, Robespierre came up with another option, creating another new religion, declaring French belief in the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. That sterilized version of Christianity only lasted until Napoleon took over and re-established Christianity, seeing the need for a moral base in society, though that was out of a political motivation for a more stable France not out of true piety. Today, the majority of France does not mourn the loss of a symbol of the faith, but a loss of a symbol of France.

Something similar is going to happen to Israel. About 800 years from the construction of the tabernacle, the first mobile temple, the temple in Jerusalem will be burned down by Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army. By that time in Israel's history, the temple had lost its original purpose as an invitation to the Israelites to mold their personal lives and their culture around their covenant relationship with Yahweh. The temple stood to point Israel to God. Instead, the temple had become a point of ethnic pride and presumption. Without living for God or according to his precepts, the people of Judah presumed upon a special relationship with God. They acted as though Jerusalem gave God glory and identity rather than the other way around. They gave lip service to the Mosaic covenant while living according to the spirit of their modern age. They trusted in the fact of the temple, calling out, "the temple, the temple, the temple (Jeremiah 7:4)" as though the presence of God's house in the midst of the city would serve as a talisman guaranteeing safety from enemies despite their rejection of God in their everyday lives. Ezekiel tells them that they are sadly mistaken, describing in his prophecy a vision of God abandoning his own temple as his glory rises up, out of his house and out of Judah (Ezekiel 10:4, 18-19; 11:23). They forgot that God is so much greater than his temple. And so, the city fell, and the temple was burned to the ground.

The temple, like a great cathedral, fails at its purpose when people see it as a national symbol or as a symbol of their own great accomplishments and history instead of seeing it as a place to meet with God and be formed by God. The tabernacle is supposed to provide a constant reminder to Israel not to look outward for direction on how to form their religious, moral, and civil worldview. They are also not to look inside their own hearts. They are to look to God whose presence dwells in the center of the people. And they are not to look at the tabernacle and glory in their own achievement. It will be beautiful. It will be a great marvel accomplished by a slave people. Great amounts of treasure will be expended for its construction. The wood, fabric, precious metals, and gems will dazzle, evoking wonder and awe. But the tabernacle is still only a house. They are not to look to the tabernacle. They are to look to the God of the tabernacle to transform their society.

I. God Renews the Covenant (34:10-35:3)

Here is our great problem. God is a holy God, and Israel a combustible people. It is the burning bush. How does holy fire live among a sinful people without burning them up? The back and forth we had between God and Moses in Exodus 32 and 33 with Moses pleading for the people and imploring God to dwell among them, this back and forth underscored the seriousness and impossibility of the promise. God draws Moses into the debate so that Moses might experience this problem himself and recognize there is no solution in Israel. So, again, as with Abraham, God declares that the solution will fall on him, on his nature, his glory, his name, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7a)." This God, this God will make a way to dwell as holy among his sinful people because of who he is. How will God do this? That is not revealed, though the Passover lamb is a hint.

In this lesson we are addressing the last six chapters of Exodus, chapters 35-40. We'll start with the renewal of covenant after the golden calf incident, and then we will consider the symbolism of the tabernacle and the importance of God dwelling with his people.

Covenant Renewed: Moses' Last trip up the Mountain (34:10-35)

Moses has to make one more trip up the mountain. After God declares his name, the rest of Exodus 34 and 35 tell us about God renewing covenant. God recreates the stone tablets and warns Moses that Israel must take care going into the promise land. He will give them victory against the armies of the Canaanite peoples, but they themselves must fight against the Canaanite culture of idolatry and immorality. They must not enter into covenant with any of the people. God adds in 34:17, "You shall make for yourself no molten gods." That is a jab at Israel for their sin with the golden calf and a serious warning. Mankind wants to mold God. Yahweh insists that he is "I Am." His people do not mold him. He molds his people.

Chapter 34 continues with a representative selection of stipulations of dos and don'ts. These are not meant to be understood as a new covenant or as the whole of the covenant. These stipulations point to the laws already given on Mt. Sinai and also to the ones we are still going to get in Leviticus. It is a selection representing the reaffirmation of the whole. But this selection also makes a point, focusing as it does on the three main festivals and the Sabbath day. God is communicating to Israel that he is in charge of ordering society. The Israelites will be encouraged to rise up and dance and sing but not like they did around the golden calf. The singing and dancing was not the problem. The calf was the problem. Their joy and happiness should be a response to relationship with God and a remembering of his past and present goodness to them. God wants them to feast but according to how he orders society. As the people struggle with the radical social transition of leaving the old ways of Egypt and resisting the new ways of Canaan, they need help focusing on the reality that these words of the covenant are not being made by Moses. God is revealing to them truth for ordering of life and worship and civilization. So, God causes the residue of his glory to shine on the face of Moses to establish the authority of his words. These are not the words of Moses. These are the words of God communicated by Moses. And we constantly need that reminder. The truth of the Bible is not a list of human suggestions. It is not there to just give us inspiration. The Bible is God's Word for us. It is our pattern for life.

The Sabbath as Sign of the Mosaic Covenant (35:1-3 and 31:12-17).

The renewal the covenant is completed in 35:1-3 with a restatement of Sabbath. Why repeat the Sabbath regulations? We already read about the dos and don'ts of Sabbath when Moses received the temple pattern. Why repeat it here? Sabbath is repeated because Sabbath serves a special function as the sign of the Mosaic Covenant.

At the end of the tabernacle pattern section, God commanded Sabbath observance using language similar to the command for circumcision given to Abraham. Regarding circumcision, God used this language in Genesis 17:10-13.

“This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised...it shall be the **sign of the covenant between Me and you**...thus shall My covenant be in your flesh **for an everlasting covenant.**”

Concerning the Sabbath, God used this language in Exodus 31:13 and 16.

“You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a **sign** between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you...So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the **sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.**”

There are three similarities in the language between the instructions given Abraham about circumcision and the instructions given Moses about the sabbath. (1) First, both circumcision and the sabbath are called signs. (2) Second, both are to be an everlasting or perpetual covenant for the Israelites. (3) And third both texts use the sign of covenant as symbolic of the whole covenant. This is the language, “This is my covenant...every male among you shall be circumcised” and “they shall celebrate the sabbath...as a perpetual covenant.” Circumcision was not the covenant and the sabbath was not the covenant but for both God says, “This is my covenant with you.” He means according to this sign, the sign of circumcision and the sign of sabbath each one of them represent covenant. Circumcision represents the Abrahamic covenant. Sabbath represents the Mosaic covenant.

Both signs set the Israelites apart from the peoples around them. At the time of Exodus, the Egyptians used a 12-month calendar with 30 days per month. And they divided those 30 days into three 10-day periods. Some scholars believe there is evidence that the last two days of that period was free from labor, such that the Egyptians had a 10-day week with eight days of labor and two days off. In Abraham’s day, the third empire of Ur calculated a man’s labor as nine days of work with one day of off (Kriwaczek, *Babylon*, 146).

So, with the sabbath command, God established his own rhythm for Israel. They are to order their society around a seven-day work week with six days on and one day off. The sabbath rest applied to everybody, including slaves, even animals. Israel was not to do trade with foreigners who did not recognize the sabbath. And we can see how this would set their society off from those around them. They are not on the same rhythm. It is like Chick-fil-A on Sunday. You can’t get your chicken nuggets and lemonade. They shut the doors on Sunday. That makes them different. And being different was one of the purposes of sabbath, “that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you (31:13).” To be sanctified is to be set apart and to be made clean. And the sabbath set Israel apart as different while requiring the Israelites to stop whatever they were doing and focus on who Yahweh is and how they are doing in relationship with him. God said, “It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed (31:17).” The point of the seven-day rhythm is to remind us every week that we serve the God of Creation and that this God of Creation gives us rest.

The tabernacle, the festivals, the sabbath day, they all work to draw the focus of the Israelites to God as the central reality in their lives. After the golden calf, they need this point hammered home. God is at the center of all things. God himself is to be the ordering principle of Israelite society and culture. True, abundant, human life is accomplished by recognizing that fact. If God is not at the center of your life, if he is not at the center of your family culture, then you can’t experience life as life is meant to be experienced. And it changes, it should change how we think about everything. Even deeper, it is meant to change our hearts. I am not the center of my life. God is. My plans should not guide my life. God’s should. This is real life, to walk with God and yield everything to him.

II. Construction of the Tabernacle (35:4-40:38)

Contribution for the Tabernacle (35:4-36:7)

With the covenant renewed, Exodus 35:4 picks us up where we should have been at the end of Exodus 31 before the sin of the golden calf.

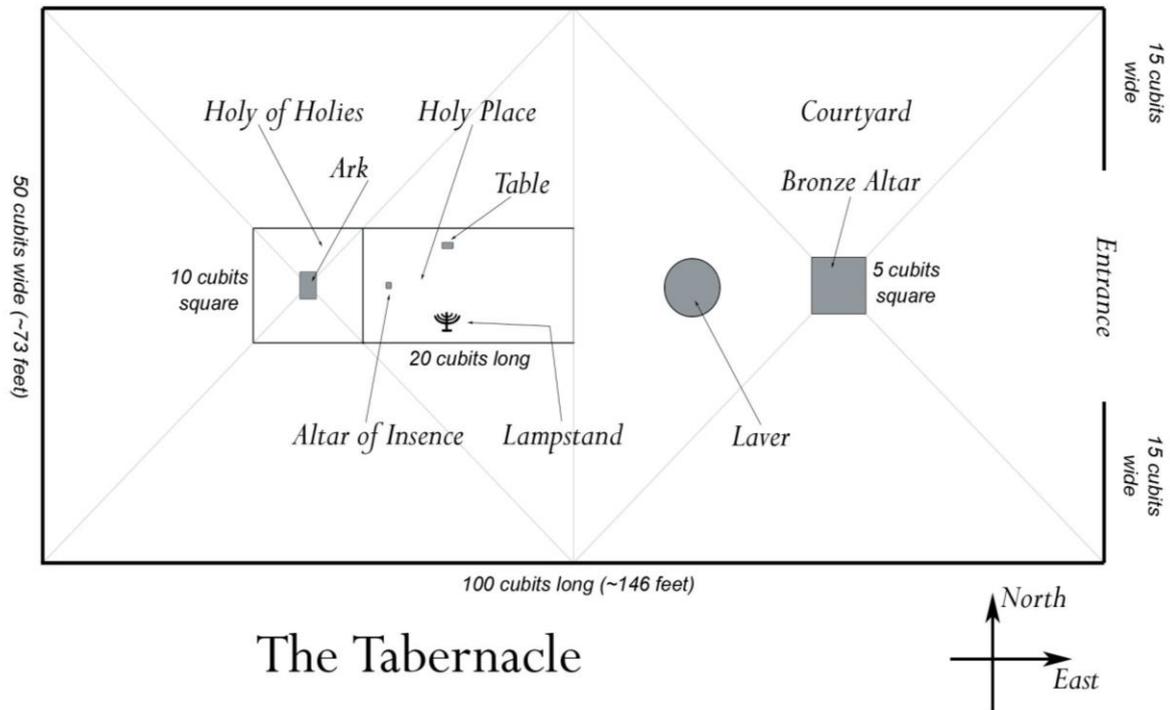
Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying, 'Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart... (Exodus 35:4-5a)'"

If we cut out the sin of worshipping a golden calf, then Moses would have come off the mountain full of joy, announcing to the Israelites his vision of a mobile temple and asking for an offering from the heart. The text reports that the Israelites respond with more than enough. And we can only imagine how wonderful it would have been if Israel would have not sinned with the golden idol and then Moses came off and we have this great response. We are getting late, but we are still getting it. Then God empowers skillful men and women to do the construction. And a couple of things should make us wonder about the contribution and the skilled men and women. We should wonder how the Israelites got all the expensive metals, wood, gems, and fabric required. They had been a nation of oppressed as slaves. And perhaps their wealth suggests there was some kind of social structure among the Israelites even in their oppressed state. We know that they had foremen and they had elders. We just don't know much else about their structure. But the best assumption is that the contributions came from the plunder of Egypt reported in chapter 12:35-36. The Egyptians paid the Israelites to leave their country after the last plague. And the text specifically mentions the Israelites asking for gold, silver, and articles of clothing and getting it. So, that is where they got the stuff to contribute. We might also wonder how bricklayers obtained the advanced artistic skills required for this kind of construction. Even though the majority of Israel was pressed into producing bricks for Egyptian construction projects, we should imagine some organization and variety in such a large community of people. Talented men and women may have been used as slaves in skilled labor and as their talents become known, they may have been given opportunity to develop skills useful to the Egyptians.

So, the giving for the tabernacle makes sense, and that they had people skilled to do it, we can believe that too, that makes sense. But then we come to a text that puzzles all western readers. We just can't figure out why it is here. The majority of western readers see little point in the detailed description of the tabernacle construction recorded in chapter 36:8 all the way to 40:33. That's five chapters. And these are the five chapters where you are most likely to give up reading Exodus. It is almost a verbatim repeat of the vision Moses received in chapters 25-30. So, if you did not give up there, good job if you made it all the way through chapter 40. The first list of detail was hard enough for most people to read through, much less reading it all again. Why not come to 36:8 and just state the first half of verse, "All the skillful men among those who were performing the work made the tabernacle," and then skip over the five chapters of detail to 40:34, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle"? I mean really, the tedium of the repetition is pointless. Isn't it? Well, no, it's not. Of course, it is not. It is in the Bible for a reason. There is a point to it all. I am going to let you wait a little longer before I explain the point of all the repetition. I am going to come back to it. But in this repetition, this is a good chance for us to consider the symbolism of the tabernacle.

The Symbolism of the Tabernacle (36-40; also in 25-30)

When we approach the tabernacle on the ground moving horizontally from the entrance to the holy of holies, there is a three-part division of holiness. The tabernacle is essentially an outer rectangle and an inner rectangle. The outer rectangle is not covered. So, just through the entrance there is an open courtyard. And after the courtyard there is a covered rectangle, or tent, divided into two parts. First, there is the holy place. And then, moving through the holy place there is an inner chamber called the Holy of Holies. Moving horizontally then there is the courtyard, a holy first chamber and a most holy second chamber.



The Tabernacle

The three-part division of holiness is also represented by the priesthood. All of Israel is to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Everybody is a priest in some sense. So, everybody is holy. And so, the Israelite worshipper brings his sacrifice to the courtyard but can't go further. The priests are set apart as symbolically more holy. Not really more holy but symbolically more holy. They serve a special function. They can enter inside the tent to the first holy place to perform their duties but can go no further. Then there is the high priest who is set apart symbolically as most holy. And he is allowed to enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies once a year.

The divisions of the tabernacle emphasize that God has made a way for his holiness to dwell with his people without burning them up. But there is still a barrier. For the people to stay safe they need regular atoning sacrifice, and experience God closely, yet, still at a distance.

So, that is the horizontal symbolism of moving horizontally deeper into the tabernacle. We can also think about the tabernacle vertically. As a person moves horizontally from courtyard to holy place to Holy of Holies, that person is symbolically moving from the earth to the sky to the spiritual heaven. It is a vertical movement. This is emphasized by the furniture that we find in the tabernacle. The outer courtyard has a large bronze laver, like a huge basin of water, also called a sea (s-e-a, like the Mediterranean Sea). And then there is a bronze altar that has four horns. And the word used for horns on the altar is also the word used for the top of a mountain, the horn of a mountain. So, there are four horns representing the four primary directions, north, south, east, and west. So, the courtyard represents the promise land. So, the whole courtyard is the land. The altar represents the mountains, and the laver represents the sea or the waters. And blood would be sprinkled on the tabernacle courtyard to symbolically atone for sin made in the whole land of Israel.

Moving then into the holy place there is a table of showbread, the lampstand, and the altar of incense. The bread would later represent manna that comes from the sky, and it would be a continual reminder that God provides for the Israelites sun and rain from the sky to provide food. The lampstand represents the light of sun, moon, and stars. While the altar of incense represents the prayers of the priests, and you can even see it physically, the incense smoke rises upward, skyward, heavenward.

Then inside the Holy of Holies, we have moved into a supernatural heaven, which is figuratively above the literal heavens. And there is no light required here apart from the glory of God. He is surrounded by angels woven into the tapestry, kneeling face down on the lid of the ark of the covenant. And the lid, which is also called the mercy seat, is God's footstool as we imagine him seated on his throne.

In this tabernacle pattern, there is not much here that would stand out as wrong or odd to the Israelites, only one thing. The mobile temple fits in with religious conceptions of the Ancient Near East; the altars for sacrifice and incense, the candles and bread, the sea for washings of purification, the ark in which is to be placed a covenant, the extravagance. It all fits with Ancient Near East culture. This is a home fit for a god. But that is the one big problem. God is a great communicator. And he has taken something understood in order to communicate something radically different. He has provided a palace, but there is no god in the palace. And that makes no sense to the Ancient Near Eastern mind. Why would you build an empty temple? The one thing you would expect to see if you were granted entrance would be an idol. Everybody knows that in the Holy of Holies there must be an idol. There must be a god. But that is the one thing that God has left out.

Isaiah will declare in Isaiah 66:1, "Thus says the LORD, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? Where is a place that I may rest?'" The tabernacle is a place where God will make his presence known. He is going to manifest himself. And he is going to draw the Israelites eyes and minds to himself in the tabernacle. But God is so much more than the tabernacle. God is not a god who can be contained. And he rejects the whole idea of idols.

Construction of the Tabernacle: Why the Repetition? (36:8-40:33)

Now back to the question, "Why the repetition in Exodus 36-40?" All of this symbolism we could have considered through the first giving of the tabernacle details back in Exodus 25-30. We don't need the repeat of it to get the symbolism. Why the repetition?

First, let me point out that there is really not that much detail here in the first place. I know you will say, "What are you talking about, not a lot of detail? It is way too much detail." And there is a lot of detail if you read it just to get through it. You are just trying to pick up some theological explanation, or you want the story to move on. If you do not really care about the temple pattern, your mind does not see significance to all this detail. And I admit myself often skimming through these chapters when reading Exodus. But there is a way to bring the detail more to life. I suggested this last in the last session. To bring it to life, we have to imagine building it. We need to use the creative side of our brain, not only the engineering side of our brain. My younger brother Bill graduated with a degree in Dramatic Arts with a focus in Costume Design and Construction from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In order for his family to eat, he works for a bank, converting retirement plans that they buy up. Apparently, that takes creativity, which he has a lot of. His primary way of using design talents is through the Light Theater Company that he and his wife Tiffany founded to give their daughter and her friends an opportunity to experience theater. And the costumes and sets they produce have been incredible. So, I asked Bill from a design perspective whether or not there is a lot of detail in the vision given Moses for the tabernacle and the priestly garments. And Bill's response immediately was, "Not at all. There is no way I could build this without using a lot of creative license. There is just not enough detail."

I had a sense of what he means earlier in this lesson when I said that in the Holy of Holies the angels knelt on the mercy seat. But I do not know if they were standing or kneeling. I can picture them kneeling. But the text does not say. It only says they are looking down and their wings are pointing towards one another. But even more important, we have no idea what a cherubim looks like. I am absolutely sure it was not a fat, chubby baby like you see in Renaissance paintings. But what did they look like? There is no explanation in the text. These skilled artisans are just told, "You need to fashion a cherubim." But how do they know what that looks like? What do you do if you are the sculpture or

if you are tasked with weaving them into the curtains? This is what Bill meant by not enough detail. There are hundreds of details not mentioned that a skilled artisan needs if he is going to figure this out.

Except that I think that is the beauty of it for the artisan. They get excited by having a general framework to work with and then they get to use some freedom to dream and envision. And that's how we want to come at this text. We want to come creatively, envisioning what the glory and beauty of the finished product will be like. We want to dream of making something worthy of God. Forget trying to fashion God into some golden animal. Let's build him a palace!

Okay, that does not really answer our repetition problem. We may have used up all our creative energy imagining the first time we got the detail. But what we need to do now is add in all the emotion, the anger, the sadness, the fear, the disappointment that comes with the destruction of that dream. We were with Moses, and we were excited. And now the people have destroyed it. The golden calf ended it all in a tragic way. God gave us this beautiful vision for the fulfillment of a beautiful promise. He would dwell with us. And we have ruined that. The people have ruined that. We are guilty. We fought with one another. People died. The dream of a holy nation living in a promised land with their God is ruined. There is no return to Eden.

But then, out of the tragedy, God declares his glorious name and he says, "I will make a way. I will re-covenant with you. And I will dwell with you." Now the excitement begins to come back as we start to repeat the detail. Wow. We thought it was not going to be but now it seems like it might be. In narrative terms chapters 34-40 cover the falling action of the story. We have passed through the near tragic climax. We are now ready to bring the story home to resolution. But the term "falling action" might throw us off of how we are supposed to read the remaining chapters. This remaining action is a rising kind of expectation. The grand vision of God dwelling among his people might yet come true. And repeating all the detail of the tabernacle construction draws out our anticipation as we slowly, step by step, detail by detail, move toward this final paragraph. And it may work better if we were listening to it read, then if we were just sitting on our own, trying to read through it, if we could hear the appropriate emphasis.

And as we are hearing it read and the detail is getting repeated, when we get into chapter 39, we would start to hear a refrain, a repeated phrase. This is in 39:1.

Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet *material*, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as well as the holy garments which were for Aaron, **just as the LORD had commanded Moses.**

Then in verse 5,

⁵ The skillfully woven band which was on it was like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold *and* of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, and fine twisted linen, **just as the LORD had commanded Moses.**

Verse 7, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses;" verse 21, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses;" verse 26, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses;" verse 29, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses;" 15 times as the priests' garments are finished and the tabernacle assembled the text says that the Israelites did "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." After the near fatal sin of fashioning God according to their own imagination, the skilled men and women of Israel commit themselves to bring to life the vision God has given them. They are not improvising religion here but seeking to faithfully produce something pleasing and honoring to the Lord. For Israel to be a kingdom of priests and holy nation full of the life and goodness and beauty of God, they are going to have to submit their culture to him, they are going to have to commit to doing "just as the LORD commanded Moses." God provides the pattern of life. These men and women do just as the LORD has commanded, using their own skill and imagination appropriately within the pattern provided.

God Indwells the Tabernacle (40:34-38)

And so, we come successfully to the resolution of the book of Exodus in the last paragraph. Exodus 40:34-38,

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. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; ³⁷ but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. ³⁸ For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

With God causing his presence to manifest, the tabernacle becomes the center of the new Israelite nation. After some time in the land, a temple will be built in Jerusalem as the center of the nation meant to be holy and to serve as priests bringing blessing to the peoples of the world. That was the promise to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed.

And yet, the history of Israel, through the whole of the Old Testament, is going to teach us that something is seriously lacking. Humanity needs more than God has given in the Old Testament. Humanity needs salvation both from the guilt of sin and from the power of sin. So, God is going to give a New Covenant. We live under that New Covenant.

III. Jesus fulfills the tabernacle symbolism (John 1:14-18)

The New Covenant has provided us with a new center. We no longer look to a temple to see the glory of God. John wrote in his gospel in 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." This one sentence brings us right back into the book of Exodus. John is going to use the idea of abiding or dwelling as a major theme in chapter 14 and 15 of the gospel when he exhorts Christians to abide in Christ. That word abide is a common Greek word. But here he uses a rare Greek word in 1:14 when he says the Word dwelt among us. The word literally means "to live in a tent," or as King James English would say, "to tabernacle." John 1:14 also tells us that in seeing Jesus we are seeing the glory of God. So, we have the word tabernacle and the word glory. That is the last paragraph of Exodus. The glory of God dwelt in the tabernacle. John 1:14 goes on to say that this glory is full of grace and truth, two Greek words which can translate the last two Hebrew words of God's name in Exodus 34:6, "abounding in loving kindness and truth," lovingkindness and truth, grace and truth. John goes on to refer directly to Moses in 1:17 saying, "the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." God declared his name to Moses. Jesus realizes that name in himself. Then John 1:18 alludes to Moses not being able to see the full glory of God saying, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him." Moses has not seen God, not the full glory of God. He has spoken with God, but God has to veil himself for Moses. Jesus has seen God fully. So, only Jesus can fully make God known.

In the Old Covenant God revealed his character through his name. In the New Covenant God reveals his character by becoming a man. In Jesus, we see his glory. The night of his arrest, Philip said, "Jesus, show us the Father." Jesus looks at Phillip. "Do you not know me?" He responds in 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." And then the glory and love and justice of the Father is spectacularly revealed in Jesus as he is lifted up on the cross, lifted up into glory. What a commitment to holiness! What incredible, unconditional love! Then Jesus is lifted up further. He is raised from the dead and lifted into heaven. His tabernacling on earth seems to have lasted only during his lifetime. But after returning to heaven, Jesus fulfilled a promise that he made to his disciples and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. So, removing the guilt of sin by his death, and he now gives us power to overcome sin by his life in us.

Temples and Cathedrals and churches still stand to point us to God, but as New Covenant believers we do not look to any geographical place as our center. Or to any building. We look to Jesus Christ. He has fulfilled the temple pattern. He died as the atoning sacrifice on the altar. His blood is spilled on the

mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. He is the bread of life set out on the table of presence and the light of the world shining from the holy menorah. He is the water of life in the laver by which we are all purified.

Jesus, not the tabernacle, reveals to us the glorious nature of God. As John tells us, Jesus reveals the name of God declared in Exodus 34:6, “full of grace and truth.” John also declares that Jesus is the “I Am” of Exodus 3:14, the very name of God. Jesus proclaims, “I Am the resurrection and the life. I Am the door. I Am the good shepherd. I Am the bread. I Am the light. I Am the true vine. I Am the way, the truth and the life. And before Abraham existed, I Am!”

This is our Jesus. And Jesus has finally removed the guilt of sin through payment on the cross. And in so doing, tore down the curtain barring us from the Holy of Holies. We are invited all the way in to the throne room of God. And Jesus has not left us alone. God still indwells his temple. What temple? You. You are the New Covenant temple, as crazy as that sounds and as unworthy as you are, God has made a way. Paul asks, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own (1 Corinthians 7:19)?” There is also a corporate reality to the temple. You are the temple of God as an individual believer, and we together are the temple as the body of Christ, the church, as Paul also says, “Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:20a-22).”

When a great cathedral like Notre Dame burns to the ground, we rightly mourn the loss of a symbol of Christian culture, a symbol that pointed heavenward for 800 years to the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, we are reminded that the temple of God is not a building. This is the incredible truth. You are the temple of God, you and your brothers and sisters in Christ; that you exist to point people to the God of heaven, to be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation tasked with the job of living a new kind of community in which we look to Jesus Christ as the center and as the pattern for everything we do. And we are tasked with living out his word, and we are commissioned to call everyone who will listen, “Come and eat and drink, for Jesus is the bread of life and from him flows everlasting water. We are the temple. He dwells in us. We dwell in him. And we are the sign to the world. Amazingly, we are not burnt up by our sin. Jesus us has made a way, so that the holy fire of his presence does not consume us. It purifies.

Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as you read Exodus 36:10-28? What do you notice as interesting or important or strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. The commands given again to Moses affirm the commands already given. Why do you think the Lord chose to focus on the festival days and the sabbath? How do these particular days help mold the culture of the Israelites? What truths are the different festivals and the sabbath day intended to point the Israelites to? Truths about God and/or truths about themselves?
3. As you survey 35:4-40:38, what aspects of the tabernacle or priests’ garments stand out to you as powerful, interesting, confusing or strange?
4. How can you apply the three-part holiness division of the people (people, priests, high priests) and the tabernacle (courtyard, holy place, Holy of Holies) to your present Christian experience in any way? What importance lies in understanding the holiness of God? Why was that so important for God to impress on his people?
5. How does the phrase “just as the LORD commanded Moses” help you to understand the repetition of the tabernacle details? Can you connect with the idea of a slow building of anticipation?
6. What do you think it meant to the Israelites to see God indwell the tabernacle?
7. What does it mean to you to think about yourself individually as the temple of the Holy Spirit and to think about your brothers and sisters in Christ corporately as the temple of the Holy Spirit?