

# He Dwelt Among Us

Exodus: Revelation and Redemption

Exodus 25:1-27:19

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## *Save, Sanctify, Settle*

This morning we begin the third and final section of the book Exodus. It's on the tabernacle and will also serve as our Advent series. So, before we get to our primary passage this morning, I want to take time to set up this whole third section.

As we begin this section, it's worth repeating the main theme of the whole book. Exodus is all about God making himself known.<sup>1</sup> He has made himself known through *salvation*, bringing Israel out of Egypt. He has made himself known through their *sanctification*, establishing a covenant with them at Sinai.

But salvation and sanctification aren't sufficient. Israel also needs to learn something about their own separation from God. It's not enough for God to save and sanctify. He also has to settle among his people.

That's the only way Israel can truly and fully come to know him. And that's the only way we can truly and fully come to know God. It's not enough for God to rescue us from sins. God also has to reside with us. It's not enough for us to live our lives for God. God also has to live among us.<sup>2</sup>

Last week, we saw Moses ask God two things, two things that are intimately related. He asked God to go with Israel into the Promised Land. And he asked to see God's glory. God's answer to these requests are fulfilled in the tabernacle.

Sometimes God's glory is referred to as his *shekinah* glory. The word *shekinah* is the Hebrew word for dwelling. But *shekinah* is also translated as tabernacle.<sup>3</sup>

So, for God's shekinah glory to go with the people, for his glory to dwell with the them, they'll have to build a tabernacle for God. Look at chapter 25:8. "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst."<sup>4</sup> Now look at chapter 29:46. "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God."

So how do people come to know the LORD fully? As he dwells with his people. And how does he dwell with Israel? Through the tabernacle.

## *Remote or Relevant?*

This section on the tabernacle makes up nearly a third of the whole book. There are two large sections, separated by the golden calf episode. The first has to do with instruction for building the

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<sup>1</sup> W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology

<sup>2</sup> This language is adapted from Dave Helm and Ben Panner. Cf. Allen Ross and John N. Oswalt, *Genesis, Exodus: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*

<sup>3</sup> Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, The Bible Speaks Today

<sup>4</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

tabernacle (chapters 25-31). The second has to do with the construction of the tabernacle (chapters 35-40).

It's a massive section of Scripture. So, if it's so massive, why's it rarely covered? I think it's simply because it's so difficult. All of the details seem so remote and irrelevant to us. I know they've seemed that way to me for years. But because I believe all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for us, and because I believe this section of Scripture is really important, simply because it's so long, I've given myself to study it over the last couple of months. And I'm now so excited to share with you some of what I've learned.

Why is this passage so important for us? And how is it relevant and profitable for us? Ultimately, it's because this section of Scripture on the tabernacle points to Jesus. We saw this last week. In John 1:14, we read of Jesus, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Or literally, "The Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us and we have seen his glory." Jesus is God in the flesh. The *shekinah* glory of God came to dwell among us in Christ.

So, isn't it fitting that as we enter into this Advent season, as we celebrate Jesus coming in the flesh to tabernacle among us, that we would begin a study of the tabernacle. As we grow in our understanding of the tabernacle, we'll grow in our understanding of Christ's incarnation.

We're going to have six sermons on the tabernacle between now and the end of the year. I'd like to lay them out briefly.

1. This morning, we'll consider the instruction for building the tabernacle itself.
2. Next week, we'll look at instructions for priests who serve in the tabernacle.
3. The third week, we'll look at the contributions people made for the tabernacle.
4. Then we'll talk about Sabbath. God not only creates holy space, but holy time.
5. The Sunday before Christmas, we'll see the climax of the whole where God's glory actually comes down.
6. Then before New Year's, we'll consider the tabernacle's relevance for mission.

So, let's begin with the plans for the tabernacle and its furnishings. My text is 25:10-27:19. It's too large of a text to cover in its entirety. So, here's the plan. I'll give an overview of the whole passage. Then I'm going to zoom in on the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat.

Let's begin by reading the passage on the ark and the mercy seat.

### **Exodus 25:10-22**

<sup>10</sup>"They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. <sup>11</sup>You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. <sup>12</sup>You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. <sup>13</sup>You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. <sup>14</sup>And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. <sup>15</sup>The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. <sup>16</sup>And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.

<sup>17</sup>"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. <sup>18</sup>And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the

*mercy seat. <sup>19</sup>Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. <sup>20</sup>The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. <sup>21</sup>And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. <sup>22</sup>There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.”*

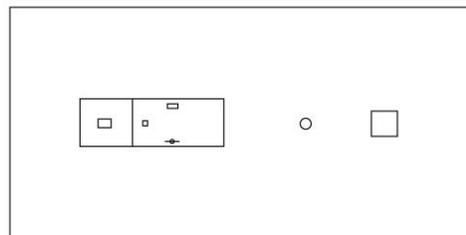
This is the Word of the Lord

There will be three parts to this sermon that give us three points about God’s plan to reside, God’s place to rule, and God’s provision for mercy.<sup>5</sup>

## **GOD’S PLAN TO RESIDE**

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Let’s begin with God’s plan to reside. This comes from the overview of chapters 25-27. As I thought about the way these chapters are organized, I kept thinking about the video many of you saw last week at our members meeting. That video laid out the design of our proposed remodel project, called Renew 20-21. It walked you through the building from the south entrance to the auditorium. Then from the auditorium to the gym. Well, that’s kind of what’s going on in chapters 25-27. Unfortunately, I don’t have a video of the tabernacle.



But I’m going to put a basic drawing of the tabernacle on the screen. As I walk you through it, pay attention to the headings in your Bible, so you can see how the text relates to this drawing.<sup>6</sup> Chapter 25, verse 10, begins at the heart of the tabernacle, on the west side, in the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant is. It moves in verse 23 to the Holy Place, where the table for bread and the golden lampstand are. Then in chapter 26, we’re told about the tabernacle itself which houses the ark, the table, and the lampstand. Then in chapter 27, we see the bronze altar, which is located in the courtyard of the tabernacle. In verse 9, we’re told about the walls around the courtyard.

Here’s the point of this movement. There’s a move from the most heavenly to the most earthly. And it’s all to demonstrate that the God of heaven came to dwell on earth. This architectural plan for the tabernacle shows us God’s plan to reside with his people.

Let me say it again. The God of heaven came to dwell on earth. Where do I get the ideas of heaven and earth? It’s through the various materials used in the tabernacle. I want to draw your attention to two categories of materials: the metals used in the various sections and the fabric used for the tabernacle.<sup>7</sup>

First, notice the metals used in the various sections. They move from the most heavenly to the most earthly. Verse 25:3 says, “And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze.” Gold is the most pure, the most heavenly, silver is still precious but less so, and bronze

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<sup>5</sup> From a sermon by Ben Panner.

<sup>6</sup> What follows is informed by Motyer.

<sup>7</sup> What follows is largely from Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*.

is the least so. And what we find in the Most Holy Place is full of the most precious metals. And the most common place is full of the least precious metals.

In the Most Holy Place, you have the ark and the mercy seat. And what are they made with? Look in verses 11 and 17. They are made with pure gold. Everything else in the Holy of Holies is made with normal gold. The rings in verse 12 are made with gold. The poles in verse 13 are overlaid with gold. The cherubim in verse 18 are made of gold. You get the point.

Then as we move to the Holy Place, its furnishings are still made with gold. The table in verse 24 is overlaid with gold. The lampstand in verse 31 is made of pure gold. But we also see elements of silver at play in chapter 26, verses 18-21. Silver is used for the bases of the frames for the tabernacle.

When we get into the court, in chapter 27, we see that there is still silver, but there is also bronze. There is no gold in the courtyard. And no bronze in the Holy Places.

There's movement from the most precious elements to the least precious elements. This all signifies a movement from the most heavenly to the most earthly. All illustrating that the God of heaven has come to dwell with his people on earth.

This is also seen in the fabric used for the tabernacle, in chapter 26. The inner and outer rooms are covered in blue and purple and interwoven with cherubim. These colors and the angels embroidered on them signify the heavens, the sky, and the angels in the heavens. As the priest entered the Holy Place he would've moved from a very earthly place into a room surrounded by imagery of the heavens. As a side note, there are also heavenly metaphors in the lampstand and the table. The seven lights on the lampstand spoke of the seven known heavenly bodies at that time: the sun, the moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn. The table would've reminded Israel of the bread from heaven.

I could say more, but hopefully this is enough to make my point. Everything in the tabernacle, and in the intentional sequence, in chapters 25-27 are making the same point. The God of heaven has come to dwell with his people on earth.

But there's more than that. Why did the God of heaven come to earth? What was the purpose of it all? The answer to that question is seen in the ark of the covenant.

## **GOD'S PLACE TO RULE**

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And that brings me to our second point. The tabernacle was God's place to rule.

One reason I say that God came to reside in order to rule is simply because of what the ark contained. We're told twice in chapter 25 (verses 16 and 21), that Moses was to place the testimony, or the Ten Commandments, in the ark. The covenant God made with Israel was to be in the ark, in the Most Holy Place where God dwelt. That's why it's called the ark of the covenant.

The covenant, as we've seen, was the way a sovereign king would establish a relationship with a vassal state. The sovereign king promised to protect his people. But the people also promised to obey him. The sovereign was in charge! So having the covenant in the ark shows that God resides in order to rule.

There's another point of connection between the sovereign king and his people. In the ancient world, whenever a king would go out to war, he would set up his tent in the middle of the camp. All the other tents would be placed around his tent and would face his tent. In Numbers, we see the same layout. The tabernacle is in the center of the camp. All the other tents surround it and face it. This shows not only that God is present among his people. It shows that he is the king in the midst of his people.<sup>8</sup>

But there's even more. Elsewhere in Scripture the ark of the covenant is called God's throne (Jer. 3:16-17) or the footstool of God's throne (1 Chron. 28:2). And we also know that the dimensions of the ark match the dimensions of an ancient king's footstool.<sup>9</sup> All of this shows us that God's tabernacle is not only the place where God *resides* with his people. It's also the place where he *rules* among his people.

There's a division in the Scripture between the earth, the heavens or the sky, and the highest heaven where God's throne room is. What this shows us is that the King of highest heaven has come to dwell among his people; he's come to establish his reign or his kingdom on earth.<sup>10</sup>

### *Application*

What's the application for us today? We are to live for God; we are to live under his rule. That defines a right relationship with God. But God also wants us to live under his blessing. And that blessing involves his presence among us. So, we not only live for God; God also lives among us.<sup>11</sup> His rule and his residence are related.

So many Christians get stuck in their spiritual development. They see the pinnacle of Christian maturity in service for God. The productive life for God is about as high as most people make it in their discipleship. But God wants us to do more than be productive for him. He also wants to be present with us.

God is ruler. But we can't limit our view or our experience of God to his rule. It's a residing rule. There's something more intimate to experience in our relationship with God. Are you seeking his presence in your life? Or are you simply trying to be productive?

But how can we seek God's presence? How can we approach a holy God? That leads me to our third point.

## **GOD'S PROVISION FOR MERCY**

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God's provision for mercy. You see we have a problem. God is holy. So much of the setup of the ark is driving this home. The three different areas of the tabernacle establish God's separateness from man. These areas are divided by curtains. And only certain people can pass through these curtains and only in a very particular way. If you want to approach God's holy presence, you have to do it in his way. We'll learn more about all that next week.

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<sup>8</sup> Tremper Longman, III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship*, The Gospel according to the Old Testament

<sup>9</sup> Poythress

<sup>10</sup> Poythress

<sup>11</sup> Panner

For now I simply want to talk about the mercy seat that covered the ark of the covenant. We read about it in verses 17-22. Between the ark of the covenant, which represents the rule of God, and the cherubim, where God's presence resides, we find this mercy seat.

The mercy seat was the place where the blood of sacrifice would be offered on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1-3). Actually, the word for mercy seat and atonement are very similar in Hebrew. The word for mercy seat is *kapporet*. And the word for atonement is *kipper*.<sup>12</sup> You've probably heard of Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement.

What's the point? We know that Israel constantly broke God's covenant that was placed in the ark. They were a sinful people. So how can God have a relationship with them? How can God reside among a rebellious people?

It's only through the blood of a substitutionary lamb. It's only through atonement. It's only through God's mercy. In verse 22 we see that God met with the people and spoke with the people above the mercy seat. The only way God can reside with his people is through blood!

### ***Connection with the Gospel***

We'll talk more about this next week. For now, I want to return to where we began. We said the main reason this passage is relevant for us is that it points us to Jesus. So how does all of this point to Christ?

It blows my mind! If you turn to the very first chapter of the very first book of the New Testament, you see all of these themes run together. Turn to Matthew 1. Matthew's genealogy is establishing the fact that Jesus is the promised Messianic King (Mt. 1:1-17). So, Jesus establishes God's rule on earth. In the very next section, beginning in Matthew 1:18, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph and announces to him in verse 21, "[Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." So Jesus will rescue his people. But that's not all. He'll also reside among his people. Look at verse 22. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."

And that's just chapter 1. When we turn to the end of chapter 4, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, what does he say? What are the first words out of his mouth? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (v. 17).

So, in Jesus, the God of heaven has come to *rescue*, but he's also come to *reside*. And he's come to reside so that he can establish his *rule*.

But this King of heaven rules in a very counter-intuitive way. Similar to the counter-intuitive way God rules and resides in Exodus. When you think of the throne of a great king what images come to mind? Maybe you think of a massive and menacing throne in a great hall. But God's throne in Exodus is on a mercy seat. Who could have come up with that?

The same is true of Jesus. We see this in Matthew 27, verses 27 and following. When Jesus is arrested and brought to trial, the soldiers strip him and put a scarlet robe on him (v. 28). Then they put a crown of thorns on his head and a reed in his right hand. Then they mock him as the King of

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<sup>12</sup> ESV Study Bible

the Jews (v. 29). Then they lead him away to crucify him (v. 31). On his cross they place a sign that again mocks him as king (v. 37). Then those who pass by him say if you are king why don't you come down from the cross (v. 42).

But there's irony here. They don't believe that a great king could suffer like this. But they fail to see that Jesus *is* the King of heaven. But his throne is like his Father's. Just as God was enthroned on the mercy seat, Jesus is now enthroned on the cross!<sup>13</sup>

He comes to reside as the ruler of his people. But he does that through the mercy of the cross! The people at the cross said they'd believe if he came down from the cross. But we're called to believe he's the King because he *didn't* come down.

It's only through his cross, through the mercy seat, that we can meet with God.

### ***Application***

So how does all of this apply to us today?

First of all, we have to believe that Jesus is God with us. It's only through Jesus that we can know God. It's only through Jesus that we can come into God's presence. He's shown us the glory of God. And that glory is full of grace and truth! By his grace he's made a way for us to come into relationship with God. We have to believe that the cross is the only way for rebels to receive mercy.

Then, as I said earlier, we have to pursue his abiding presence with us. You see, God's presence not only dwelt in the tabernacle. And it not only dwelt in Jesus. If we place our faith in Jesus, God's presence dwells in each of us through the Holy Spirit.

And God's presence dwells in the church. In Christ, we are the temple of God. In him, we are being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). We're told in Matthew 18 that wherever the church is gathered in his name, he is present among us (v. 20). When we come together as the church to worship God, we're coming to sit under his rule as we sit under his Word. But we're also coming into the presence of God. He not only wants us to live for him; he wants to live among us.

And this is true not only as we *gather* in our worship on Sunday mornings. It's also true as we *scatter* into the world to make disciples. In Matthew 28, what did Jesus say? "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, *I am with you* always, to the end of the age."

We need to surrender to the King of heaven. The one in whom all authority in heaven and on earth resides. We do that as we gather for worship. We do that as we scatter on mission.

But we have to remember that Christ's rule is a residing rule. We have to seek his presence if we want to rightly know him, worship him, and serve him.

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<sup>13</sup> Lecture by D.A. Carson