



IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Exodus 24:12–26:37

The tabernacle was constructed according to a very detailed plan the Lord gave Moses. The whole system of worship that centered on the tabernacle seems very foreign to us, yet upon closer inspection it helps us grasp important truths about our own relationship to God.

After the 1986 space shuttle disaster that took the lives of seven American astronauts, the president of the United States quoted words from an old poem from a World War II pilot as he attempted to bring comfort to the nation. “The crew of the space shuttle,” the president said, “slipped the surly bonds of earth” to “touch the face of God.”¹

That longing, to touch the face of God, is a God-created desire in all our hearts. In fact, that desire to connect with the presence of God becomes a very real possibility for the Israelites as we open to Exodus chapters 24–26.

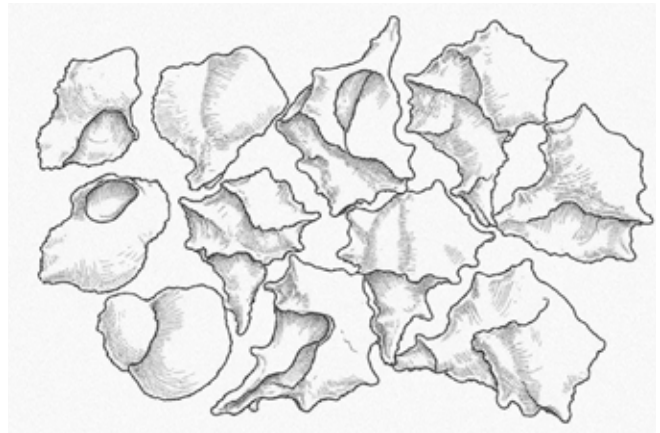
In Exodus 24, the Lord calls Moses up on the mountain again. And we read here in verse 12 that the Lord says He’s going to give Moses tablets of stone on which God Himself has written out the law for Israel’s instruction. The tablets will be engraved with the Ten Commandments God spoke to Israel, the same commandments they had agreed to live by just a short time earlier.

Verse 18 tells us that Moses is with the Lord on the mountain forty days and nights. We will revisit these same forty days when we study the golden calf fiasco recorded in chapter 32. But for now, the Lord speaks to Moses in Exodus chapter 25 and verse 2:

“Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.”

The Lord is asking, not demanding, that every head of household with a willing heart give financially. We’re told here in verse 8 the reason why: “Let them make me a sanctuary [literally, a holy place], that I may dwell in their midst.”

The Lord goes on to tell Moses in verse 9, “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle,



Mollusks from which purple dye was extracted



and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”

Then verse 10 explains that the very heart of this tabernacle is the ark and the mercy seat that covers it. God says:

“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.”

A cubit in Moses’ time was around eighteen inches, so this ark is going to be a wooden chest about three and a half feet long, almost two and a half feet wide and two and a half feet tall. And in verse 11 Moses is told to cover it with gold.

The Lord gives Moses the purpose of the ark in verse 16: “You shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.” This “testimony” is the stone tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments. Moses is told to put a cover, or a “mercy seat” as verse 17 calls it, on top of this golden box. This mercy seat is to be made of pure gold with two gold cherubim, one on each end of the mercy seat, facing each other and looking down toward the cover. Cherubim is the plural form of *cherub*. These are angels known in Scripture to “stand closest to God in heaven.”² This makes sense because in verse 22, God informs us that this will be the place where God’s presence will effectively hover.

Here in the tabernacle, on the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest will sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animal on this mercy seat. God in essence looks down on the tablets of the law inside the golden box—the law that His people have broken during the past year. But He’s looking down, as it were, through the blood of this sacrifice. And with that, the people have their sins *temporarily* covered by the blood of this animal, which points to the coming, final, and permanent sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who will finally and completely pay for the sins of the whole world.

Now in verses 23-30 we’re introduced to the table for

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the bread of the Presence. The Lord instructs Moses to build a table using acacia wood overlaid with gold. This is a low, small table, around three feet long and one and a half feet wide and about two and a half feet tall.

In verse 30, the Lord tells Moses, “You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.”

The priests are going to place twelve loaves of bread on this table, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. These loaves represent fellowship between Israel and the Lord, and they will be changed out with fresh loaves of bread every Sabbath day.

Now beginning in verse 31, Moses is told about a piece of furniture inside the Holy Place called the lampstand. The Lord tells Moses:

“You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it.”



We are told that the seven branches of the lampstand will hold seven oil lamps. Verse 37 gives us the function of the lampstand: “The lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.” Keep in mind that the tabernacle is basically a large tent, and it doesn’t have any windows. It’s going to be pitch dark in there and impossible to approach the presence of God. So, this will light up the Holy Place.

Next, Moses turns our attention to the structure of the tabernacle itself in chapter 26. We will study this more later when we arrive at the book of Leviticus. But for now, when you read the description of the tabernacle, you need to picture it as a rectangular structure supported by gold-plated wooden beams. Over these beams are several layers of coverings.

When this tent is set up, it’s about forty-five feet long by fifteen feet wide and fifteen feet high; and let me tell you, to someone looking on it from the outside, the tabernacle would appear to be a rather drab, unimpressive tent. What makes it impressive is the same thing that makes you impressive—God dwells there, just as He indwells you today, as a believer. Your body is the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In verses 31 to 37, Moses is instructed to make a curtain, embroidered with cherubim—these warrior angels. This veil serves as a divider, separating the tabernacle into two rooms. The outer room, called the Holy Place, is where the table and the bread and the lampstand will be placed. The inner room, the Most Holy Place, will house that golden box, the ark, with the mercy seat on top, effectively acting as God’s throne on earth.

So, we see described in these chapters a tent where God dwells in a special way on earth. Therein is bread, which represents life and the fellowship God

desires with His people. And there’s a large lampstand illuminating the darkness.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Beloved, all of it illustrates and points to Jesus, who came to earth and dwelt with us—literally tabernacled among us, John 1:14 says. He announced that He is the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, and the final atoning sacrifice for sin.

We might not be able to touch the face of God today, but we can do this, as the old chorus sings:

*Turn [our] eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow
strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.³*

If the tabernacle was required by God for Israel’s worship, why were contributions toward its construction voluntary? How does 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 help you understand this?

God went to great lengths to point His people to the Savior they needed. What does this reveal about God’s heart to relieve you of the burden of sin? How does this add to your confidence in explaining to your yet to be saved neighbors who God really wants to be towards them?

¹ NASA, “President Reagan’s Remarks Following the Loss of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* and Her Crew,” January 26, 1986, nasa.gov. archive.

² Stephen Davey, *Angels, Demons, and Other Flying Creatures* (Wisdom for the Heart, 2012), 55.

³ Helen Howarth Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus.”

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