

Where God Dwells

Life in the Wilderness: Part 10
June 21, 2026

Discussion questions

1. **The Only Gate:** There was only one entrance into the tabernacle courtyard, not multiple ways in. How does this design remind us of what Jesus said about being the only way to the Father?
2. **The Wash Basin:** The priests had to wash their hands and feet at the bronze basin before going any further into the tabernacle. Why is the reminder to be "cleansed and purified" still important for us today before we approach God?
3. **The Bread of the Presence:** Fresh bread was put out every single week to show that God faithfully feeds and takes care of His people. What are some specific ways God has provided for your basic needs recently?
4. **Smoke and Prayers:** The smoke from the Altar of Incense constantly drifted upward as a symbol of the people's prayers. Does it change your perspective on prayer to picture your requests rising up to God like sweet incense?
5. **The Broken Box:** Inside the Ark of the Covenant was the Law—the very rules we have all broken. Yet, Jesus covers us with His own grace at the Mercy Seat. What is the difference between feeling guilty for breaking God's rules and feeling secure in Jesus' grace?
6. **No More Shadows:** The sermon notes that the tabernacle was just a shadow or a symbol pointing forward to Jesus. Why is it easy for us to sometimes focus more on religious rituals (the symbols) rather than on a real relationship with Jesus?
7. **The Tearing of the Veil:** When Jesus died, the massive curtain was torn from top to bottom—not from the bottom up. Why is it significant that *God* was the one who ripped open the barrier, rather than man?
8. **An Imperfect Church Family:** The Israelites were far from perfect—they grumbled, failed, and even worshipped a golden calf—yet they still came together to build God's tent. How does this encourage you when you look at the flaws in the modern church today?
9. **Willing Generosity:** The people brought gold, silver, and supplies only if their hearts prompted them to give. When it comes to giving your time, money, or talents to God's work, do you usually give out of obligation or out of a willing heart?
10. **Following the Cloud:** The Israelites only moved their camp when the cloud of God's presence lifted and moved ahead of them. Is there an area in your life right now where you need to stop rushing ahead and instead wait for God to direct your next step?

Summary

We are concluding our series in the book of Exodus, and we're ending where you might not expect: talking about a tent. Throughout this series, we've referenced it a few times. This tent is called the tabernacle—a word that simply means “tent.” You might be thinking, after everything we've talked about—Moses' birth, the burning bush, the plagues, the Red Sea, manna in the wilderness, water from the rock, the Ten Commandments, and even Moses' radiant face—we're going to end by talking about a tent?

The answer is yes. One of the primary reasons is because you cannot escape how central the tabernacle is to the book of Exodus. What is striking is how much space the book of Exodus gives to it. Out of forty chapters in the book, thirteen are devoted entirely to the tabernacle: chapters 25 through 31, and then again chapters 35 through 40.

Consider the timeline of Exodus:

- **Moses' first eighty years of life** are contained in just a few chapters.
- **The actual Exodus itself**, including the plagues and the departure from Egypt, takes up about eight chapters.
- **The parting of the Red Sea** takes around two chapters.
- **The Ten Commandments** don't even fill a full chapter.
- **The tabernacle** is given thirteen full chapters.

Why does a tent receive this much attention? Part of the answer is practical. God is giving instructions for how this structure is to be built, and any building project requires plans and measurements. In our own church, our building is only about five years old. Down in our storage area, we still have a large set of architectural drawings showing the square footage, layout, and building details that were used throughout construction. In a similar way, the tabernacle required careful, detailed instruction because it was a significant, real structure with various meaningful furnishings. When reading sections of the Bible that feel less engaging—like laws, regulations, and tent measurements—we must remember these were instructions for a group of people being formed into a nation.

But there is more going on here than construction plans. The detailed instructions and extensive design are intentional because they reflect something far greater: **God's desire to dwell with His people**. The tabernacle is about a holy God choosing to dwell among His people. Because there is nothing more important than that, Exodus devotes

thirteen chapters to the subject. God wants His people to understand the significance of His presence and how they are to approach Him.

A Walk-Through of the Tabernacle and Courtyard

To understand this structure, let us look at Exodus 25:1–9, where the Lord instructs Moses to receive an offering from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. The people were to bring gold, silver, bronze, specific yarns, fine linen, skins, acacia wood, olive oil, spices, and gems to "make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" according to the exact pattern shown to them.

If we were to take a visual tour of the tabernacle, we would see a large rectangular courtyard enclosed by an outer fence. Toward the center stands the covered tent of the tabernacle itself, where God's presence uniquely dwelt. Notably, there is only **one gate**—the single entrance into the outer court. There are no multiple access points; there is only one way in.



As an Israelite stepped through that single gate, they would not find a welcome center or a coffee bar. Instead, they were immediately confronted by the **Bronze Altar**. This was the largest object in the outer court, where animal sacrifices were offered by the priests. Before you saw the lampstand, the bread, or came anywhere near the

presence of God, you were confronted with sacrifice. The sights, sounds, and smells made it clear: sin is serious, and reconciliation with a holy God requires a substitute. Just beyond the altar sat the **Bronze Basin**, filled with water for the priests to wash their hands and feet. It symbolized purification and cleansing, demonstrating that one does not casually walk into holiness.

Inside the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place

While the exterior of the tabernacle was made of support structures and various skin coverings—appearing relatively simple compared to the grand temple built centuries later—the interior was deeply sacred. Only the priests were permitted to enter the first interior space, known as the **Holy Place**.

Inside the Holy Place, a priest would see three specific furnishings:

- **The Table of the Bread of the Presence:** Located to the right, this table held twelve loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel. It served as a continual reminder that Israel lived by the faithful provision of God, who sustained them week after week.
- **The Golden Lampstand:** Located to the left, this 75-pound solid gold lampstand was the primary source of light. Because the tabernacle had no windows, the space would be entirely dark without it. It was to remain continually lit, showing that where God dwells, there is light.
- **The Altar of Incense:** Positioned directly in front, this altar was used daily to burn incense. The rising smoke served as a visible symbol of the prayers of God's people ascending before Him.

Directly behind the Altar of Incense hung a large, massive curtain known as the **veil**.

This veil blocked access to the final, most restricted room: the **Most Holy Place**.

Only the High Priest could pass through the veil into the Most Holy Place, and he could only do so once a year. Inside sat the **Ark of the Covenant**, a golden chest containing three powerful reminders of God's covenant history:

1. The tablets of the **Ten Commandments** (God's law).
2. A jar of **manna** (God's provision in the wilderness).
3. **Aaron's staff** that budded (a sign of life from death and confirmation of God's chosen leadership).

The lid covering the Ark was known as the **Mercy Seat** (or mercy covering). Atop it stood two golden cherubim (angelic beings) facing inward, bowed in reverence and awe before the holiness of God.

To bring this entire system together, Exodus details the garments of the High Priest. On his breast-piece, he wore twelve precious stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. This meant that whenever the High Priest entered the presence of God, he symbolically carried the names of the people with him, bearing them before the Lord.

When construction was finally complete, Exodus 40:34–38 records that the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the **glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle**. Throughout all their subsequent travels, the Israelites moved only when the cloud lifted; by day the cloud was over the tent, and by night fire was in the cloud, visible to all of Israel.

Three Major Takeaways for Us Today

What does a 3,400-year-old tent in the wilderness have to do with us today? There are three central themes we can draw from the completion of the tabernacle:

1. God Desires to Dwell with His People

To understand the Bible, you must understand its core storyline: God pursues His people so that He can dwell with them. The design of the tabernacle intentionally echoes the Garden of Eden. The curtains were embroidered with trees, the entrance faced east, and the language used to describe its completion mirrors the creation account in Genesis (complete with a concluding reminder about the Sabbath). The tabernacle was a mini re-creation of Eden. In the Garden, God walked openly with humanity. When sin entered the world, Adam and Eve hid in shame and were driven eastward out of the Garden, with an angel guarding the entrance. The tabernacle shows that God has not abandoned His desire to live among humanity—yet because sin remained, access was still limited, symbolized by the angels embroidered directly onto the heavy veil.

2. God's Holiness Cannot Be Ignored

The tabernacle teaches us that a sinful people cannot simply rush into the presence of a holy God. Every step of the structure reinforced this: the outer fence marked off sacred space, the single gate meant there was only one way in, the altar demanded a blood sacrifice for sin, the basin required cleansing, and the veil kept people separated from the Most Holy Place. The tabernacle was simultaneously encouraging (God is near) and frustrating (the way is not yet fully open). It showed that humanity ultimately needed something more than a tent.

3. Jesus Fulfills the Meaning of the Tabernacle

God was not content to dwell permanently in a tent, nor was He content to dwell only in the stone Temple later built in the Promised Land. Through His grace, God came to dwell with us in the person of Jesus Christ. John 1:14 states: *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."* The literal Greek word for "dwelling" used there means **tabernacled**.

Every detail of the old tabernacle anticipated Christ:

- Jesus is the **gate**—the only way to salvation.
- Jesus is the **altar of sacrifice**—shedding His blood to forgive sins once and for all.
- Jesus is the **cleansing water**—washing us clean.
- Jesus is the **bread**—the Bread of Life.
- Jesus is the **lampstand**—the Light of the World.
- Jesus is the **altar of incense**—interceding for His people before the Father.
- Jesus is our **Great High Priest**—the mediator between God and humankind.
- Jesus is the **mercy seat**—covering our lawbreaking with grace and righteousness.

When Jesus died on the cross and cried out, *"It is finished,"* the gospels record that the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The barrier was removed, changing the message from "Stay back" to "Come near". As Hebrews 10:19–23 states, we now have **confidence** to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, through the new and living way opened for us.

The Hope of Future Dwelling

We were created to dwell with God. We often try to satisfy that deep longing with created things—money, success, relationships, or possessions—but none of them can carry the weight of what we were made for. That longing can only be met in a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This biblical storyline culminates in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 21:1–4, John sees a new heaven and a new earth, and hears a voice from the throne saying: *"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes..."*

From the garden, to the tabernacle, to the temple, to Jesus Christ, and to the indwelling of His Spirit today, the consistent heart of God has always been to be with His people. If you are a follower of Jesus, let this truth give you confidence and comfort when you are weary. Take time to reflect on how the tabernacle points to all that Jesus has done for you. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, know that a holy God has made a way for you to find forgiveness and fellowship through His Son. Turn to Him, place your trust in Him, and find your rest in the God who desires to dwell with you.