

Exodus 25-40

*What If God Lived Next Door?*

Have you ever had problems with your neighbors? Sometimes neighbors can be hard people to get along with.

According to police in New Orleans, Melvin Hitchens, who had been reading the Bible on his front porch, put it down, got his gun, and shot to death a neighbor woman because they'd been feuding about the cleanliness of their yards.

Steven R. Shenk, was arrested on drug possession charges in Tewksbury, N.J., after a neighbor complained of his odd behavior. Allegedly, Shenk crawled around his yard on all fours, and ate grass and leaves.

In Italy, a judge ordered Maria Bruna Bortolussi to keep her talking blackbird away from neighbor Norina Miorin, after Miorin testified that Bortolussi had taught the bird to say, in Italian, "Norina, I'm going to kill you." The two were arguing over a garden.

Neighbors can be tough people to deal with. But now let me ask you something. How would things go in your house if God moved in next door? Would you be a little tense? Maybe on edge?

That's exactly what happened to a bunch of people approximately 3400 years ago. God moved right into the neighborhood. For the past 5 months we've been in a study of the life of Moses from the Biblical book of Exodus.

Exodus begins with the people of God a long way from the promised land as slaves to the Egyptians. God, acting on the basis of His covenant promises to them through Abraham years before, graciously redeems them, rescues them, and takes them out of slavery in Egypt. They eat the Passover Lamb and then cross the Red Sea, and now that they've become His people through the act of deliverance, He gives them the law and says, 'This is how you're to live as my people.'

The rest of the book of Exodus deals with specifics of God's laws and "boat-loads" of details about something called the tabernacle.

What I'd like to do for the month of October is to close out the Book of Exodus by looking at some specific themes

What's really unique about the Bible is the emphasis it places on certain subjects. For instance, it only gives 2 chapters to the creation of the whole world but takes up 50 chapters, 288 verses giving meticulous details about a tent called the tabernacle.

What's going on? A lot of people get bogged down when they're reading the OT and end up just skipping over these details. We love to study Genesis 1 & 2 and go over all the nuances of creation but most of us don't know much about the thing that gets 25 times more scripture.

Well, we want to see if we can correct that this morning and find out what makes this tent and it's furnishings so important.

### **Open your Bible to Exodus 25 pg 72**

In chapter 25 God begins to give instructions for constructing the tabernacle. As He does we find out right off the bat what makes this project so important.

#### *I. The Tabernacle Was God's House* **Read vs 8**

God rescued the Jewish people from idolatrous Egypt and now He says I want to live right in the middle of them.

He says, *"let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."*

In theology we say that one of the attributes of God is that He's omnipresent, which means He's everywhere. You could say that God is everywhere and in every now. You can't contain God in one location, and yet God's omnipresence doesn't prevent Him from manifesting Himself in a localized place.

Allan Turner writes, "Although His self-existent, eternal, and infinite Being is present to all of space equally, He has, on occasion, entered space at specific points and become present in it for a specific purpose."

When God met Moses in the burning bush was one example. Living in the Tabernacle is another.

### **Flip over to 29:45-46**

As we've seen throughout the book of Exodus that God is a God that uses visuals.

The Hebrews had been in Egypt for hundreds of years. They had no written Scripture before Moses. They had the promises of God in oral form but that's it.

They couldn't see God at work. They had to take it by faith.

Now think about this. Think about how influenced we are by what we see and experience around us. Think about how many times we buy into bogus ideas about life because of constant influence of our culture.

Now take away our Bibles, churches, Christian radio, Christian book stores, all tangible Biblical influence and then think about how we'd do.

that's where these Hebrews had been. smack dab in the middle of the most powerful, culturally elite, educated society of their day.

You can believe that a lot of Hebrews struggled with their faith.

So really beginning with Moses, God gave them one concrete, tangible object lesson after another.

Moving into their neighborhood was about as powerful a lesson as you could get.

So God gives instructions on how to build this portable place of worship called the tabernacle.

The tabernacle looked something like this. There was a curtain around the whole outside enclosing a courtyard roughly 150 ft long and 75 ft wide. In that courtyard was a brass altar and a brass laver filled with water.

Any common Israelite could enter the court but only the Levites, who were from the priestly family could go inside the Tabernacle itself.

It was actually a large tent which was divided into two sections. The first was known as the Holy Place. Inside was a table with what was known as the Bread of the Presence on it. There were twelve loaves, freshly baked, and often replaced. Twelve loaves for twelve tribes of Israel.

There was also a golden lamp stand and an altar of incense.

Now imagine for a moment that you're allowed to go inside the next section, the holiest place. (You couldn't have gone in because that's reserved for the High Priest once a year and then only the after all sorts of elaborate preparations).

When you went inside you'd see the Ark. There was just one piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place according to God's original instructions.

**Look back to chapter 25 again. Read verse 10-11**

When God gives instructions, the Ark comes first.

The Ark is a box about 4 ft long, 2 ft wide and 2 ft high and inside are the two tablets of stone that God gave to Moses with the ten commandments on them.

On top of the ark there's a lid. **Read 25: 17-22**

The Tabernacle is right in the center of the camp and at the center of the Tabernacle is the Ark in the Most Holy Place where God lived right in the middle of His people.

Now, I don't know about you, but I'd feel a little unnerved if I knew God was like literally my next-door neighbor.

Listen to these verses and I think you'll see why:

*Ex 33:20 But God said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."*

*Leviticus 10:1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.*

*Lev 16:2 and the LORD said to Moses: "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.*

Now if you really think about it, this was almost a paradoxical situation. Here was God, holy, righteous, and full of glory. No one could get into His presence except one man, once a year.

And yet this same fearsome and holy God was living in their neighborhood in a badger skin tent just like theirs. God had a bigger yard than everybody else, but He still lived right there in a house like theirs.

This is so awesome. Even though He is high and holy and separate from sinful people, God came to live with people.

That's a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ. In the NT Gospel of John we read this: 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The word "dwelt" is a translation of the Greek word *skay-no'-o*. *Skay-no'-o* is the word the Jews used for tabernacle when they translated the OT for the Greek speaking world.

You could translate vs 14 *And the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us...*

Our Creator. The High and Lofty one who inhabits eternity got near to us in Jesus Christ.

- I. *The Tabernacle Was God's House*
- II. *The Tabernacle Showed The Character of God*

God was very specific about the materials the Hebrews were to use in the tabernacle.

### **Read 25:1-7**

When the Hebrew people were about to leave Egypt after 400 years of slavery God told them this:

Ex 3:22 God said, *But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters.*

Ex 12:35 *Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.*

The Egyptians loaded the Jews down with precious and valuable goods before they took off. It was like the whole had worked as slave labor for the Egyptians for centuries and finally they were getting all their back pay. Generations worth of back pay.

When it came time to build God said, "This is what I want you to use for the tabernacle. Only the best."

It was only the best because everything about this tabernacle, from the materials to the workmanship, said, right there, in the middle of the camp, "God is excellent."

In the Bible certain materials and colors take on significance. 'Gold' (Deity), 'Silver' (Redemption), 'Brass' (Judgment), 'Blue' (Heaven), 'Purple' (Royalty), and 'Scarlet thread' (Sacrifice).

The things that were in the tabernacle all had spiritual significance.

There was one entrance to the court yard. When an Israelite approached the tabernacle with his sacrifice and passed through that entrance gate he found that between him and the tabernacle was the bronze altar with a priest waiting beside it.

This was where the blood of an innocent sacrifice was shed and the sinner was pardoned. No matter how good a person was, without the shedding of blood there was no forgiveness.

Apart from the bronze altar there was no approach to God. The covenant God established was a blood covenant and therefore the innocent animal represented the sinner and took his place on the altar.

The Next thing you came to was the brass laver. The Laver was a big wash basin. This was where the priests would wash before they went into the holy place.

Again, this was all about God's holiness and how we need to be clean before we can meet Him.

Inside the tabernacle itself was the bread which was a reminder of God's care and the golden lamp to signify God the Protector, a God who was always with His people as a constant guide, always watching over them. Then there's an altar of

incense intended to give a sense of the nearness and the majesty and the wonder of God.

But nothing showed the character of God like the Ark of the Covenant. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement, (Just celebrated September 25) the high priest of Israel entered the holy of holies to sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice on the mercy seat. What he was doing was making an atonement for the sins of the people.

In the Ark was the tablets with the 10 commandments showing the Law of God which we've all broke. Over the broken commandments was the Mercy Seat.

The Mercy seat was completely covered gold representing the righteous character of God, and sprinkled on the Mercy seat was the blood of the sacrifice showing how sin could be covered.

Almost everything about God from the fact that He is there for us and with us, to his holiness and His willingness to forgive are there in the tabernacle.

- I. *The Tabernacle Was God's House*
- II. *The Tabernacle Showed The Character of God*
- III. *The Tabernacle Was Filled With Barriers*

The God who lived next door didn't come out. Here was the tension. Between God and people were some barriers.

First, around the whole court yard was a 450 ft wall of white linen. There was one entrance 30 feet long known as The Entrance Gate.

It wasn't formed of white linen but was multi-colored in woven white, blue, purple and red.

In a sense God was blocking off every way to his presence except one. No one could say "I want to get in from my end. I don't want to walk all the way around the other side."

Any where you looked, except from the end with the entrance you saw a barrier.

Then, once you got in to the court yard there was another curtain that blocked the entrance to the holy place. **Exodus 26:36-37**

Remember only the priests could go through that curtain.

Then there was one more barrier. **Exodus 26:31-33**

No one touched this veil except the high priest.

God was with His people, but God must have still seemed like a kind of reclusive neighbor to the Jews.

I. *The Tabernacle Was God's House*

II. *The Tabernacle Showed The Character of God*

III. *The Tabernacle Was Filled With Barriers*

IV. *The Tabernacle Was Actually A Picture Of The Real Thing*

**Go with me to the NT Book of Hebrews, Chapter 9 page 1067**

**Read verses 6-9a (Through "present time").**

The tabernacle was symbolic for Israel. The Holy Spirit was teaching that as long as the tabernacle stood there was no real way to God. He was there, but you couldn't get to Him. He lived next door but there wasn't any way to approach Him.

The whole tabernacle deal was to show that without a redeemer, without a messiah, without a savior, there's no access to God. God's behind a barrier that we can't get through.

**Verse 9 again... Read 9-10**

The old sanctuary and its services were meaningful and purposeful. Obviously God had real purpose for the tabernacle and then its permanent counterpart, the temple. But they were also limited, imperfect, and temporary.

If you were a godly Jew who offered sacrifices, you would offer those in faith. God would honor that faith. But at the same time, the very fact that you had to keep offering those sacrifices over and over again would be a constant reminder of your sin.

As verse 9 puts it, *it cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience.*



All the actions of the worshippers. Even the high priest on Yom Kippur, didn't really deal with sin. It covered sin, but it didn't pay for sin. They couldn't change the heart. They couldn't deal with the conscious.

There's only one thing that can change the heart and truly forgive sin. And it's not religious rules and actions, no matter how special those actions are. Ceremony doesn't pay for sin, even ceremony designed by God!

### **Read 11**

Here's the key to understanding the tabernacle. It was a picture of "the good things to come." The tabernacle was this one gigantic object lesson that said, "Don't stop here. Don't just see this physical setup. Look to what it signifies."

In the end it's all about Jesus Christ.

The Jewish tabernacle had a yearly, solemn ceremony on the Day of Atonement. Jesus came as High Priest and fulfilled that beautiful picture.

### **Read 12**

Everything is wrapped up in Jesus Christ.

The Redeemer is Christ. He is the high priest and He is the sacrifice. And the offering He made never needs to be repeated.

See, you can take the founders from the religions of the world and basically, you'll still have the religion. You can remove Buddha from Buddhism and you still have the 8 fold path.

You can removed the Prophet Mohammed from Islam and you still have the 5 pillars.

But you can't remove Christ from Christianity and still have Christianity. At it's heart Christianity isn't a set of ethical or religious teachings, it's Christ.

In Romans 3:25 we read that The Father set forth the Son to be propitiation by His blood. The word translated " propitiation" is the Greek word that's translated "mercy seat" here in Hebrews 9.

Jesus is High Priest, the sacrifice, and the mercy seat. In complete righteousness He purged our sins by His own blood.

### **Read 13-15**

Think about what God's telling us here. If the Old Covenant with its tabernacle and animal sacrifices could do its job, how much better will the New Covenant with the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross do its job?

The tabernacle dealt with externals and pictures. Jesus dealt with the ultimate issue.

How can sinful people like us as well as the OT worshippers be forgiven?

The tabernacle illustrated and the Bible plainly says, "The wages of sin is death." Only a perfect sacrifice would do. So God took on flesh.

Through the tabernacle God lived with His people. God was their neighbor but you couldn't ever stop in for a visit.

When God took on humanity in Jesus, He lived with His people again. But this time He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and a new and living way was opened.

By the time of Christ there was a temple in Jerusalem. The curtain that blocked off the holy of holies was 4in' thick and 66 feet high and 33 feet wide. It was a gigantic woven curtain.

Now look at what the Bible says happened at the death of Jesus. **Turn to Matt 27:50 page 880**

### **Read verse 50-51**

This massive curtain that had blocked the way into the place of the presence of God was ripped right and half starting at the top.

It was like God said, "All right. Now because of Jesus Christ you can walk right up into my living room and we can meet face to face."

in fact He goes one step further. This would have been an unthinkable concept for a Jew in the OT.

In I Corinthians 3:6 *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

There He uses a plural for “you” and I believe He’s talking about the whole church body, the Christians as a group. Then in I Cor 6 He explains why the church body is the temple of God. He says, speaking of individual Christians, *For you are the temple of the living God.*

- When we come to the place in our spiritual lives where we realize that we’ve sinned against a holy God and that nothing we can do can pay for that sin;
- and that Jesus Christ is the high priest, offering Himself as a sacrifice for us, to pay for our sin;
- and then we trust Him as our Savior we’re not only forgiven, but God, through His Holy Spirit, comes to live inside us.

We become the sanctuary. We become the holy place.

We ought to respect this building and take care of it. A lot of people gave very sacrificially so that this could be built. We have dedicated this building to God. But God doesn’t live here.

So parents when your little kids are running through the auditorium across the chairs or down the hall, as little kids will tend to do, don’t say to them, “Johnny, stop running in God’s house.”

Don’t let them run across the chairs!

You know what kids think when they hear that? God lives in a building, and we visit him once a week. And when we go home to our house God stays at His house and we’ll meet up with Him next Sunday.

How would things go in your house if God moved in next door? Would you keep the shades pulled down on your windows so He couldn’t see in? Would you put up a privacy fence? Would you worry that He could hear some of things you say or see some of the things you do?

How about this. God already knows all that stuff about you. He knows every thing you’ve ever said and done and everything you’ve even just thought about saying and doing.

He's God. That's part of what makes Him God.

But in spite of the fact that He knows it all He's still willing to forgive your sins, make you part of His family, and come to live in your life.

There's only one thing you can do. The Bible puts it this way.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Have you received Jesus Christ by faith? Have you recognized that He was the sacrifice for you?

God is not asking you this morning to give Him something. He's not asking you to promise Him something you might fail in. He's not looking for pledges.

What He demands is that you renounce trust in any thing that you yourself could ever accomplish or do. And that you place your faith and trust in Jesus who died and rose again.

One sacrifice, once for all.

A prayer can't bring forgiveness, only Jesus Christ can do that, but it's often helpful for us to express our faith in a prayer.

If right now, you recognize your need for a Savior, you might express that to go by praying something like this...