

LESSON 25

God ordains the tabernacle

EXODUS 25:1-27:19; 30:1-10



The holy God dwells among His people.



“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst”
(Exod 25:8).

Supporting Truths

1. God dwells with His people.
2. God is holy.
3. Man is sinful.
4. God provides atonement so that people can live in His holy presence.
5. Jesus allows sinners to know God.

Objectives

1. Explain what the tabernacle is.
2. Describe aspects of the tabernacle that show God’s separateness and purity.
3. Describe aspects of the tabernacle that show the daily reality of sin.
4. Describe the bronze altar and the blood on the ark of the covenant.
5. Appreciate the access we have to God through Jesus.



Lesson Summary

God showed Moses the plan for the tabernacle, the holy place where God would meet with His people. The curtains, the gate, the altar for sacrifices, the bronze basin for washing, the lampstand, the table for the bread, the altar of incense, and the ark with its special cover—all these provided a way for God’s presence to dwell among His people. The tabernacle also reminds us of how amazing Christ is, who provides a way for all who believe to access the presence of the holy God.

Spotlight on the Gospel

The tabernacle and constant sacrifices Israel needed in order to have God live among them remind us of the greatness of Christ’s sacrifice that allows believers today to enter God’s presence.

LAST WEEK



God gives the Ten
Commandments

Exodus 20:1–21

THIS WEEK



God ordains the
tabernacle

*Exodus 25:1–27:19;
30:1–10*

NEXT WEEK



God punishes Israel’s
idolatry

Exodus 32:1–35

Lesson Commentary

The holy God dwells among His people.

The LORD had delivered Israel from Egypt in order to make them His people and to be their God. So at Mount Sinai He made a covenant with Israel, promising that if they obeyed Him and kept His covenant, they would be His treasured people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The people agreed, and the LORD gave them the Ten Commandments and other laws to teach them the standard for living as His holy people. But the laws could not make the people holy, so how could the LORD—who had just displayed His terrifying holiness with thunder, lighting, smoke, and

an earthquake—dwell among them as their God? He would do so by means of the ***tabernacle***, a special tent where the holy God dwelt with His people, separate from their sin but accessible to their worship.

When God delivered the plan of the tabernacle to Moses, He made it clear that it was to be built exactly according to the pattern He had given (Exod

25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8). This story demonstrates how serious Israel had to take approaching God, and reminds Christians about how great Christ's sacrifice is that allows us now to come into the presence of God in prayer and to have the Holy Spirit live within us.

The Court of the Tabernacle

Approaching the tabernacle, the first sight would have been a pure white, 7 ½ foot high linen curtain surrounding a courtyard about 150 feet long and 75 feet wide (27:9–19). The white curtain prevented the people from seeing inside, illustrating God's ***holiness***, His purity and separation from the world

(1 John 1:5–6). Even above the linen fence the top of the 15 foot high tabernacle would have been visible in the midst of the courtyard, as well as two columns of

smoke, a thin white ribbon of smoke from the altar of incense inside the tabernacle, and a dark plume of smoke from the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard. This constant smoke would have been a steady reminder to all Israel that the holy God could only dwell in their midst so long as innocent animals were sacrificed to atone for sin.

Bronze Altar

Entering the court of the tabernacle, the first thing that would have been seen was the large bronze altar, 7 ½ feet square and about 4 feet tall (Exod 27:1–8). It was made of acacia wood and covered with bronze, with a bronze grate halfway up on the inside. In addition to any sacrifices brought in by individuals or on special days, two lambs were to be offered every day upon the altar, one in the morning and one in the evening (29:38–42). The smell of blood, sweat, smoke, and burned flesh would have clung to the air, with blood smeared on the four horns of the altar. It is a sober reminder that in order to come to God we must have ***atonement***. We must have our sins paid for and guilt washed away by the death of an innocent victim (Lev 17:11).

These sacrifices had to be offered each day, because sin is a daily reality. In fact, the animal sacrifices could never take away sin (Heb 10:4). They were signs, pointing forward to the blood of the spotless Lamb, Jesus Christ, who offered Himself as the one great sacrifice to atone for sins once for all (1 Pet 3:18). When Israel sacrificed lambs, they did so by faith that God would atone for their sins so that they could come into the presence of the holy God. Christians no longer offer daily sacrificial lambs, because Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), completely satisfied God's wrath against sin through His



THINK ABOUT IT
How incredible it is that a perfect God would choose to dwell among a sinful people.



THINK ABOUT IT
God's passion to dwell with His people is seen clearly by the great lengths He went through to make that possible.

THINK ABOUT IT
God's unequaled holiness further highlights man's undeniable sinfulness.



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God ordains the tabernacle • Exodus 25:1–27:19; 30:1–10



THINK ABOUT IT

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin and no fellowship with God.

one sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin and no fellowship with God.

Bronze Basin

Moving past the altar towards the tabernacle itself would have been a large

bronze basin full of water (Exod 30:17–21). The priests used the basin for washing, and their purity in worship was so important that failure to wash would result in death (30:21). These constant washings revealed man's need for personal holiness and cleansing from sin. What water could never do—cleanse a sin stained heart—Jesus does, through the purifying work of His Spirit (Titus 3:5).

The Tabernacle: The Holy Place

Curtains of Tabernacle

Beyond the basin was the entrance to the tabernacle itself with its four coverings (Exod 26:1–30, 36–37). The tabernacle was 45 feet long, 15 feet wide and 15 feet high. On the outside was a covering of manitee or porpoise skin, a good protection from rain or snow and another sign of God's holiness as being separate from the world. Underneath this cover, was another cover of leathery rams' skin died red. Under the rams' skin was a cover of woven black goat's hair. The innermost of the four coverings, which could only be seen from the inside, was bright white linen, with cherubim woven into it with blue, purple, and scarlet thread. The white again reminds us of the pure splendor of God's holiness (Ps 96:9), and the **cherubim** are angelic beings whose job is to guard God's holiness (Gen 3:24; Ezek 10).

Holy Place

Entering through a veil of the same colorful linen was the Holy Place. The frame of the tabernacle, made out of acacia wood, could have been seen through a cloud

of incense smoke. But no wood would have been visible, because all was covered with gold. The result would have been stunning, as the colorful cherubim woven into the white linen were set in frames of gold

Table for Bread

Inside the Holy Place to the right was a table made of acacia wood and covered with gold, approximately 1½ feet wide, 3 feet long, and a little over 2 feet high (Exod 25:23–30). Twelve loaves of bread would have sat on the table. The bread was called the Bread of His Presence, or the showbread, and it represented the twelve tribes of Israel being continually in God's presence, a picture of God's fellowship with Israel. The priests ate and replaced the bread on the Sabbath (Lev 24:8–9).

Gold Lampstand

Opposite the table was the gold lampstand (Exod 25:31–40). The lampstand had seven lamps, one coming from the center and three on each side. The lampstand was pure gold and resembled a blossoming almond tree, with buds and blossoms decorating it all over. The seven lamps were never to be extinguished all at the same time, so that the lampstand would give light continually, supplied with pure olive oil morning and evening (Exod 27:20–21). There was no window in the tabernacle, so this lampstand was the only source of light.

Altar of Incense

Finally, the altar of incense would have been at the far end of the Holy Place, standing just in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (30:1–6).

It was a small altar, only 3 feet high and 1½ feet square. Like everything else inside the tabernacle, it was covered with gold (30:2–3). This was the source of the incense smoke that filled

THINK ABOUT IT

Because God is willing to dwell among His people they can have sweet communion and interaction with Him.



the tabernacle. The incense, which was replaced every morning and evening (30:7–8), was specially designed by God (30:34–38). It was forbidden to use the same kind of incense for any other purpose, illustrating again that holy God is distinct from the world. Throughout scripture incense represents the prayers of God’s people rising up to heaven (Ps 141:2; Luke 1:10; Rev 5:8).

The Tabernacle: The Holy of Holies Veil

Just past the altar of incense was the white veil embroidered with cherubim, which was the entrance into the Holy of Holies. “Holy of Holies” is a Hebrew way of saying “the Most Holy Place,” the place of God’s own presence. While other priests could enter the Holy Place to burn incense, replace the bread, or fill the lamps with oil, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and he could only do so once a year, on the Day of Atonement. On this special day, the high priest would represent all Israel, since he wore on his clothing twelve stones with the names of the twelve tribes engraved on them. When Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn (Mark 15:38), opening the way for any to enter God’s holy presence, if they enter by faith in the great High Priest, Jesus (Heb 10:19–22).

Ark of the Covenant

Entering the Holy of Holies, little would have been seen. There was just one piece of furniture, the ark of the testimony (Exod 25:10–16). The word for “ark” simply means “box” or “chest.” It was not large—just a little over 2 feet high, 2 feet wide, and almost 4 feet long. Like most of the other furniture, it was made of acacia wood and covered with gold, both inside and out. Inside the box were the tablets of stone given to Moses during the trip up Mount Sinai when he received these instructions (25:16).

Lid of the Ark of the Covenant

But the lid of the ark would have captured attention (25:17–22). The lid is often described as the “mercy seat,” but it was not a seat. The name for the lid actually means “place of **atonement**”, a place of ransom or

deliverance by offering a substitute. It was made of solid gold, with two gold cherubim rising up from each end of the lid, facing the center with their wings stretched

out over the lid. Like the cherubim woven into the linen curtains, these cherubim remind us of the sacred holiness of God. But there was something on the lid—blood, sprinkled on it by the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Inside the ark was the law, which reveals sin and condemns all people for failing to live by God’s perfect standard. But on the lid was the sacrificial blood, covering over the law which man had broken. And above the cherubim the LORD Himself promised to meet with His people (Exod 25:22), letting the sacrificial blood cover the judgment due to humans for breaking His law.

The tabernacle explains how the holy God can dwell with a sinful people, and how a sinful people can dwell with the holy God. This can happen in only one way, because God is supremely holy, as all the curtains, veils, cherubim, and blood show. It is through faith in Jesus’ work that we can dwell with God. For New Testament believers, the tabernacle is a vivid picture of the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin, and the amazing provision of salvation secured by Jesus, who, through His one sacrifice for sin, provides continued access to God.

THINK ABOUT IT
Believers enter
God’s presence
with confidence
because they are
in Christ.



Lesson Outline

The holy God dwells among His people.



AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. God is holy, but He chose to live with sinful people (29:45).
2. The tabernacle was the tent where God met with His people (25:22).
3. The curtains of the tabernacle protected the people from God's holiness (26:1–37; 27:9–19).
4. The sacrifices in the tabernacle allowed the people to come to God (27:1–8).



AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Court of the Tabernacle.

- The curtain around the court separated God's holiness from uncleanness (27:9–19).
- The gate in the curtain allowed just one way to enter (27:16).
- The bronze altar provided blood sacrifices to atone for sin (27:1–8).
- The bronze basin was for washing and purity (30:17–21).

2. The Tabernacle: The Holy Place.

- The curtains of the tabernacle guarded and glorified God's holiness (26:1–30, 36–37).
- The table for bread confirmed God's provision and presence (25:23–30).
- The gold lampstand gave light to come into God's presence (25:31–40).
- The altar of incense burned as a continual reminder of prayerful worship (30:1–10).

3. The Tabernacle: The Holy of Holies.

- The veil separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the tabernacle (26:31–35).
- The ark of the covenant contained the Ten Commandments (25:10–16).
- The ark's lid was the place of atonement, and above it the holy God met with His people (25:17–22).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What is the tabernacle?**
The tabernacle was a special tent where God chose to live among His people Israel.
- 2. In the tabernacle court there was a bronze altar. What did they do on the altar?**
They offered sacrifices to God, and they brought the blood into the Holy of Holies.
- 3. Why did they offer sacrifices to God?**
The sacrifices showed that the people were sinful and needed to have their sins paid for.
- 4. Do we still need to make animal sacrifices today?**
No. Jesus was the perfect and complete sacrifice for sin. We must trust in Him.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What is the tabernacle?**
The tabernacle was a special tent where the holy God dwelt with His people.
- 2. Why was the tabernacle needed?**
It kept sinful people separate from God so that they would not be destroyed, but it also gave the people a way to come to God and worship.
- 3. Was the tabernacle just designed for Israel's benefit?**
No. It was meant to be a picture for all believers of how to live with the holy God.
- 4. What was in the court of the tabernacle?**
There was a linen fence around it, a gate in the fence, and a bronze altar and a bronze basin inside.
- 5. What three things were in the Holy Place inside the tabernacle?**
The table of the bread of God's presence, the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense.
- 6. What one thing was in the Holy of Holies?**
The ark of the covenant, with its lid called the mercy seat.
- 7. What does _____ (pick an item of the tabernacle) show us about how to dwell with the Holy God?**
See the commentary for the chosen item.
- 8. How can we live with the Holy God today?**
Jesus is our tabernacle. He accomplishes in Himself everything that each part of the tabernacle represented.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

SIMON SAYS

This game can be used to demonstrate how God wanted Israel to follow (obey) His directions exactly. Compare not following Simon's directions to sin.

SET UP A TABERNACLE

As children arrive, tell them that today they will pretend that the classroom is a tabernacle. Explain that the tabernacle was the place where God met with the Israelites. Familiarize the children with the words tabernacle, Holy of Holies, ark, altar for sacrifice, altar for incense, and lampstand. Drape sheets (curtains) over coat racks or a table to make the Holy of Holies. No one but Aaron the priest could go into the Holy of Holies. Make an ark (a gold-painted box), put the two tablets in it, and place it reverently in the Holy of Holies. Outside the Holy Place, designate a table for the gold bowls, dishes, and 12 rolls (loaves of bread). You may cover plates with gold foil or simply ask the children to pretend that the dishes are gold. Place incense on another table and light a candelabra. Of course, this must be carefully supervised.



ILLUSTRATE

PRIEST DRESS-UP

During the teaching time, dress up a couple of the boys like Aaron's sons and one like Aaron, the high priest. Talk about how different they look from everyone else and indicate that God wanted Aaron and his sons to be different. For Aaron's sons: large man's T-shirt for tunic; colorful scarves for sashes and turbans. To make Aaron's clothes: ephod—two pieces of colorful (blue, purple, and scarlet) cloth for front and back, joined at the shoulders by gold chains (wide gold ribbon with six black stones glued on as onyx), and a sash of same material. Add a breastplate of the same material with gold cord at each corner (to attach to shoulder and belt/sash). On the breastplate, glue four rows of three precious stones.

TABERNACLE TOUR

Utilize the tabernacle set up when the children arrived (see "Set up a Tabernacle")



APPLY

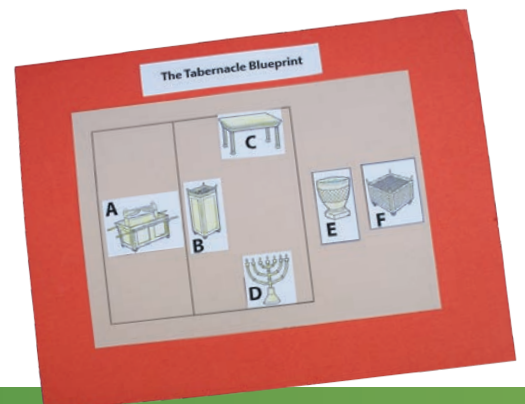
THE TABERNACLE BLUEPRINT

See *Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1*.

Materials: Craft sheets, orange construction paper, tan paper, crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Prior to class, print the tabernacle template onto tan paper and cut it out. Pre-cut the pictures on the craft sheet. In class, have children color the pictures and glue them to the corresponding locations on the template. Glue the template and the title of the craft to orange construction paper.

The Tabernacle Blueprint
See *Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1*.



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

God ordains the tabernacle • Exodus 25:1–27:19; 30:1–10



AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

GOD THE ARCHITECT

Materials: a variety of tools or a tool belt and hard hat.

Directions: While wearing the tool belt, hard hat, etc., tell the children that today they are going to enter a construction zone. Ask the children whether they ever have built anything. Explain that it takes a lot of work and planning to build something properly and that in today's lesson, they will learn about God's plan for His tabernacle.

BY DESIGN

Select a variety of clean, empty containers (perhaps from yogurt or oatmeal) to bring to class. Draw a blueprint of a simple project that can be built with the containers. Help the children build the project according to the blueprint. Tell them that God had a master plan that gave specific directions for building the tabernacle. For older children, instead of making a blueprint, write out various directions on single pieces of paper. Be specific. For example, "Place the yogurt containers two inches apart, then..." At the beginning of class, have the children select a piece of paper and build the project according to the directions. Be sure to have enough containers to build all the projects.



ILLUSTRATE

MATERIALS OF THE TABERNACLE

Bring in samples of materials discussed in the building of the tabernacle to show the class. Some examples may include gold; silver; bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread; fine linen; goats' hair; rams' skins dyed red; badger skins; acacia wood; oil; spices; incense; and onyx stones. Some of these materials may be hard to come by; if so, bring in pictures or similar objects to represent what you cannot find.

TABERNACLE BLUEPRINT

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: copies of "The Tabernacle Blueprint" work sheet in craft book, scissors and glue.

Pass out a work sheet to each child, and direct him to cut out the six pieces of furniture for the tabernacle and place them in a pile on top of his work sheet until later. As you teach on each section of the tabernacle, direct the children to paste the furniture in the correct locations on the tabernacle floor plan.

The Tabernacle Floor Plan
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.



APPLY

THE TABERNACLE FLOOR PLAN

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft sheets, brown and tan construction paper, white cardstock, crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Print tabernacle template on tan paper and pictures on white cardstock. Have children cut out tabernacle template and pictures from craft sheet. Color the pictures and glue them to the correct locations on the template. Glue template onto brown construction paper. Have children design the tabernacle and the tabernacle walls from tan construction paper, as shown below. Cut into the roof of the tabernacle to see inside and cut a door in the front wall of the tabernacle. Glue on the title of the craft.



AGES 9–11



BUILT WITH CARE

Materials: pictures of various types of houses from different cultures (an igloo, a mud hut, a house, etc.) and of the tabernacle.

Directions: Discuss how each of the buildings is built and what materials are used. Ask the children what type of houses they live in. Once you arrive at the picture of the tabernacle, talk about the materials and procedures by which God commanded the tabernacle to be built.

BLUEPRINTS

Bring in blueprints of various common structures such as a house, an office building, or a car. Have the children guess what each blueprint is for. Invite an architect or contractor to talk to the children about how to read and follow a blueprint and what happens when the plan is not followed.



SHOEBOX TABERNACLE

Construct a mini tabernacle using a shoebox. Use this as a visual aid during your lesson. Make sure to include the court of the tabernacle, holy place, most holy place, altar of burnt offering, bronze laver, gold lampstand, table of showbread, altar of incense, curtain separating holy place from most holy place, and ark of the covenant.

WASHING AWAY SIN

Start with two buckets containing water and soap. Take a dirty cloth and explain that it represents our sinful nature. As you attempt to clean the garment, dip it in and out of the first bucket, struggle, scrub, and add more soap. Give examples of how we might try to clean up our lives. Now take the same dirty cloth, which obviously has not become clean in the first bucket, and dip it into the “Jesus” bucket. Only Christ can truly wash away our sins, cleansing us of all unrighteousness in the eyes of the Father. He can do this because He became the required sacrifice for the atonement of sin. Now, bring out a sparkling clean white cloth (placed into the bucket before class) as a representation of a person whose sin has been washed away.



TABERNACLE REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you feel if you were the high priest who had to enter the Holy of Holies to offer the sacrifice before the Lord? (Note: When the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, the only day of the year in which he would enter that place, he would tie a rope around him in case he died in the presence of the Lord. The priest’s clothing also had little bells tied to it so that the people could hear him moving around.)
2. What elements of the tabernacle do you see in the death of Jesus Christ?
3. Read Hebrews 9:11–15. What do these verses tell us about the difference between Jesus’ death on the cross and the sacrifices made in the tabernacle? Can you note all the differences? Discuss all the differences.