

Lesson 1: Introduction to the Tabernacle

Read: Exodus 24:12 - 25:9

In Exodus, God performed many miracles and rescued the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (*circa* 1450 B.C.). In the passage, the Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness for a little less than a year. God summons Moses up to Mount Sinai to give him instructions regarding the building of a special structure called the tabernacle.

Upon completion, the tabernacle was a mobile tent with portable furniture that the people traveled with and set up wherever they pitched camp. The tabernacle would be in the center of the camp, and the 12 tribes of Israel would set up their tents around it according to tribe.

The tabernacle was a sign of God dwelling among His people. He appeared as a pillar of cloud over the tabernacle by day and a pillar of fire by night in the sight of all Israel. The people would not set out on their journey unless the cloud lifted. It was definitely a powerful visual statement indicating God's presence among them.

Discussion:

A visual dwelling

1. Where did God first meet with Moses? Were other people allowed to go and meet God there too? To the common Israelites, was God in the midst of them, or far away from them?
2. After Moses remained on Mount Sinai for 40 days receiving commandments from God regarding the tabernacle, the people did something completely out of line. Read about this event Exodus 32:1-10. What does this show about the people's nature and how they wanted to worship?
3. Tabernacle literally means "tent" or "dwelling." Read Exodus 29:45-46. Why do you think God chose to come close and live in the midst of Israel? What does this say about Israel as a nation?

A lesson of unquestionable authority

4. Read Exodus 25:9 again. God was about to give some very specific instructions about how each component of the tabernacle was to be built, and here He told Moses to follow everything exactly as He commanded it (we will learn more about the details in subsequent lessons). What does this say about God's relationship with His people? What would have happened if Moses strayed from God's pattern?

A projection of God's redemptive plan

5. Read John 1:14. The word "dwelling" in this verse is the same word for "tabernacle" in the Old Testament. How does this verse relate Jesus to the Old Testament tabernacle? What does this tell us about the purpose of the tabernacle?
6. Read Revelations 21:1-4. As we can see, the theme of the tabernacle begins in Exodus and continues through the Bible to its last pages. In this passage, where is the tabernacle? What does this tell us about God's plan regarding the tabernacle from the beginning?

Optional further reading: The tabernacle was a temporary structure and forerunner of the more permanent temple that Solomon built. For further information on Solomon's temple, read 2 Samuel 7:8-13 and 1 Kings 5 and 6.