

The Tabernacle



The Giving of the Law

In Lesson 6 we talked about God's giving of the Law to his people Israel. The Law included instructions concerning the tabernacle, priests and sacrificial system (*Exodus 25-31, 35-40; Leviticus 1-16*). What can learn from these instructions and how do they apply to us today?

The Tabernacle – Discussion Questions

1. Briefly look at the diagram of the tabernacle. Read Exodus 25:8-9, 29:43-46, & 40:34 (*below*). Based on these passages, what was the primary purpose of the tabernacle?¹
2. The tabernacle was a portable structure, designed for Israel's movements. The tabernacle was later superseded by the temple, which was a permanent structure following the general pattern of the tabernacle. However, neither the tabernacle nor temple exists today. So where does God "dwell" with his people today? Where can we meet Him?



- 📖 "The Word became flesh and 'made his dwelling' (*more literally* 'pitched his tabernacle') among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (*John 1:14, NIV; cf. John 2:19-21; Revelation 21:22*).²
- 📖 "Don't you know that you yourselves [as the church] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (*1 Corinthians 3:16, NIV*).
- 📖 "Do you not know that your [own] bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (*1 Corinthians 6:19, NIV*).³

The Tabernacle – Selected Verses

Exodus 25:8-9: *The LORD said, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."* (*NIV*)

Exodus 29:43-46: "...there [at the entrance] I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated⁴ by my glory. So I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar... Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God." (*NIV*)

¹ The word 'tabernacle' (*Hebrew miškān*) means 'dwelling place.' The Bible says that God is spirit and is omnipresent (everywhere present) but he chooses to make his presence known in a special way at particular times and places. Since the Garden of Eden was lost (due to the Fall), God established the tabernacle as a new meeting place.

² The 'Word' is Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate revelation of God. Colossians 1:19 says, 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.' So if we want to meet with God, we go to Jesus. If we go to Jesus, if we become united with him through faith, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and God dwells in us!

³ Of course, being God's 'temple' should greatly affect the believer's attitude in the church and use of his/her body!

⁴ 'consecrated' – set apart as holy; made sacred. In Exodus 25:8, 'sanctuary' means a place that is consecrated.

Exodus 40:34: *After the tabernacle was completed, "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." (NIV)*

The Sacrificial System

Vaughn Roberts notes, "God's presence with his people is wonderful, but it also creates a problem. How can a holy God live among a sinful people without destroying them? From the very start the Israelites could not keep God's law, and deserved to face his judgment as a result. The sacrificial system is designed to deal with this problem."⁵

God gave Moses and Israel instructions concerning the sacrificial system. The sacrifices on the Day of Atonement were especially significant. The detailed ritual is described in Leviticus 16. A condensed summary of the sacrifices is provided on page 3 ("Verses from Leviticus 16").

The Sacrificial System – Discussion Questions

3. Read Verses from Leviticus 16 (next page). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to make atonement. "Atonement" brings restored relationship between God and humans. Why was atonement needed? In general, what was necessary to make atonement?
4. Read Hebrews 10:1-4 and 9:11-12 (next page). Since *all* people are sinners (*Romans 3:10-18, 23*), atonement is necessary for all people. What was the ultimate purpose of the Old Testament sacrificial system?⁶
5. How can we "meet" God and experience His presence? Read Hebrews 10:19-22 (next page). How do we enter into the presence of God? What should our attitude be?⁷
6. What progress, if any, do you see in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham?⁸



⁵ Vaughn Roberts, 71-72.

⁶ The Old Testament sacrificial system points to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Animal sacrifices could never take away sins (*Hebrews 10:4*). Jesus is the ultimate 'high priest' who entered the heavenly Most Holy Place and offered Himself as the final, ultimate sacrifice (*Hebrews 9:11-12*). He is both 'high priest' and the 'lamb of God.'

⁷ The way into the 'Most Holy Place' (the presence of God) is through faith in Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate High Priest and sacrifice. This was symbolized when Christ died on the cross. At the moment of Christ's death, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (*Matthew 27:51*). If we have received Christ, we can draw near to God with full assurance of faith, because we approach God on the basis of Christ's righteousness. He paid for our sins, so we are forgiven and we are able to approach the holy God. As Christians, we need to approach God with a 'sincere heart' – humble, repentant, dedicated to God. The picture of the tabernacle is helpful. Of course, the believer's full realization of God's presence is future, when we see Him 'face to face' (*1 Corinthians 13:12*) and 'see him as he is' (*1 John 3:2*). This is God's promise for the believer, but it is future (*Revelation 21:3*).

⁸ Israel has lots of people, leadership, and law. God is with them. He dwells among them in the tabernacle, and he has instituted a system to address people's sins.

The Sacrificial System – Selected Verses

Verses from Leviticus 16: *The LORD spoke to Moses, "This is how [the high priest] Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering (v. 3) ... From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household (vv. 5-6) ... [After casting lots] Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering [for the people] (v. 9).⁹ [After Aaron has done these things and other rituals] ... he shall come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, to make atonement for himself and for the people (v. 24) ... This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites." (v. 34) (NIV)*

Hebrews 10:1-4: "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (NIV)

Hebrews 9:11-12: "But when [Jesus] Christ came as high priest ... he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands ... He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption." (NIV)



Hebrews 10:19-22: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (NIV)

Reflection & Application

- The sacrificial system may be difficult to understand and/or accept, but it is important! Why was it needed? Why did Jesus Christ have to die as a sacrifice? Review "Atonement" on page 4 and pursue answers to any questions you may have.
- Do you want to meet with God and be in his presence? God has provided the way through Jesus Christ. Do you need to trust in Jesus so you can enter into a relationship with God?
- Brothers and sisters, think about the picture of the tabernacle to better understand and appreciate what Jesus has done to provide the way into the "Most Holy Place" (God's presence). Think about that picture as you enter into times of prayer and worship. Are you regularly drawing near to God with a heart of humility, thankfulness and dedication to Him?

⁹ 'But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat' (*Leviticus 16:10, NIV*).

Atonement

What is "atonement?"



'Atonement'¹⁰ brings reconciliation (restored relationship) between God and sinful humans. Atonement generally requires the death of an acceptable substitute so that sinful people can have life and fellowship with God.¹¹

Why is atonement needed? Why must an acceptable substitute die?

- Because all people are sinners.
 - 📖 "there is no one who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46)
 - 📖 "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)
- God cannot tolerate sin; sin separates us from God.
 - 📖 "LORD...you cannot tolerate wrongdoing" (Habakkuk 1:12-13, NIV)
 - 📖 "your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2, NIV)
- Death is the necessary result of sin
 - 📖 "The one who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:20, NIV)
 - 📖 "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)
- God must punish sin; forgiveness requires the death of an acceptable substitute.
 - 📖 "God...does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Exodus 34:6-7)
 - 📖 "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22)

In the Old Covenant (Old Testament), particular animals could qualify as acceptable substitutes, but only partially and temporarily, for their purpose was to point toward the Ultimate Substitute.



- 📖 "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4, NIV)
- 📖 "The law [including the sacrifices] is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves" (Hebrews 10:1, NIV).

Jesus Christ is the ultimate and final acceptable substitute. Only the Ultimate Sacrifice could really take away sins.

- † "John saw Jesus... and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29, NIV)
- † "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- † "For you know that it was not with perishable things... that you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19, NIV)
- † "Jesus Christ...is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2, NIV)



¹⁰ The exact meaning of the Hebrew word for 'atonement' (*kippūr*) is disputed. However, it is reasonable to say that 'atonement' is 'at-one-ment' – 'a making of one'. Atonement brings reconciliation (restored relationship) between God and humans. This requires a 'ransom' (*kōper*) - in particular, the 'payment' of an acceptable substitute's life.

¹¹ While there are a few examples of atonement without the sacrifice of life (*Leviticus 5:11; Numbers 16:46; 31:50*), the general rule was that atonement had to be effected by the 'shedding of blood' (*Hebrews 9:22*).