

There is something about moving in to a house that is exciting. For most people, moving in to their home is an exciting time – setting up the furniture, decorating the house, and enjoying how each space can serve everyone who lives there.

Homes are not only a place to live but also a place to enjoy company. We set up our homes so that we have spaces for living and spaces for meeting and visiting. We design the spaces of our homes so we can have rest and enjoy time together.

When God told Moses to set up his house, God had designed every room with furniture placed in the appropriate spots. But God was not setting up his house as a Home and Garden TV designer, but as a God who is revealing and restoring.

God had given specifications about his dwelling place beginning in Exodus 25 and continued to provide the people with more details in Exodus 35. The skilled workers had set out to make a dwelling so that God would live among his people. When the work was finished, everything was brought together and we are told in 40:17 that the tabernacle was set up at the beginning of the second year. So from the time they had arrived at Sinai (19:1) and the forty days Moses had been up the mountain with God, they had spent approximately 7 months working on God's home.

Why does God give the people such detailed information about his dwelling? And why does this matter to us today?

Meet with God

The details that are given about the construction and set up of the tabernacle seem quite repetitive and boring to most of us. But when the original readers would have heard the level of detail, they would have noticed that there was a pattern to the construction and set up of this dwelling place.

First, there are seven speeches given from God about the construction of the tabernacle, and each one begins with "Then the Lord said..." (25:1, 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12). These seven speeches detail the furniture, the structure, the altar and court, the oil, the priestly garments, the priests themselves, and the completion of worship for Sabbath rest. And chapter 40 picks up on these ideas and repeats them. To us, these are details that seem strange and far removed from us.

But when we see what God is doing in these 7 speeches, what we discover is that God is speaking just like he did at creation ("And God said..." Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26). Much could be said here about the details of the tabernacle, but what is fascinating are the parallels to Eden. Just as the garden had gold and precious stones (Gen. 2:11-12), so does the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:7, 18). And finally, both Eden and the Tabernacle have cherubim at the entrance to the sacred place (Gen. 3:24; Exod. 25:18). , What God is doing in the creation of the tabernacle is like the creation of the world. And just as the creation culminated in the 7th day of God's rest, so the Tabernacle was designed to recreate the creation and called the people to rest (Exod. 31:12ff).

But there is more than a call to rest. The Tabernacle's entrance faced East. As you moved into the Tabernacle, as you came to the entrance place of the Most Holy Place, we are told that the veil had cherubim woven into it (Exod. 36:35). And the furniture included a lampstand that looked like a tree full of life – reminding the people of the first tree of life, and its lamps were to always shine bright. On the priest's clothes were golden pomegranates (Exod. 39:24-26). In other words, the symbolism points back to Eden – the cherubim guarding the way back to the fruitful garden and the tree of life.

What God was saying, in other words, is that his dwelling among Israel was his promise to re-create Eden where God and humanity would walk together. There would be a tree of life, the light of God's presence, and the way back would be through the east entrance where the cherubim guarded the way. Since humanity sinned, God has said, "I will make a way for you so that you can return back to me, and we will walk and talk together."

Remember Salvation

When Moses had come to Mount Sinai in Exodus 3, he came by the far side, moving East, when he saw a burning bush. There God revealed himself to him in the burning bush. The Lord had said that he was sending Moses back to the people of Israel to free them from the bondage of slavery, and that when they left Egypt, they would return to Mount Sinai and worship the Lord.

And true to his word, God rescued his people out of Egypt. They returned to the mountain, and God spoke his Words to Moses from the top of the mountain, where only Moses could go (Exod. 24:12-18). With thunder and lightning and smoke, Moses received the very words of God (Exod. 19-20). He would return part way up the mountain with the other priests (Exod. 24:1, 9-11) where they would have a meal with God while the people waited at the bottom of the mountain.

Just as the people could not touch the mountain (Exod. 19:12), so the people could not go into the tent. And just as the priests could go part way up the mountain with Moses (Exod. 24:1-2, 9-11), so the priests could go into the court. But only the one who was interceding for the people could go up to the top of the mountain to hear the voice of God from the smoke and lightning (Exod. 24:12ff), just as one priest could go into the Most Holy Place where God spoke as he filled the room with a censer of incense.

The tabernacle, in other words, was a recreation of the saving event of Sinai. God had brought his people out of Egypt, to the holy mountain, and there God revealed himself. God was saying to Israel, "I don't want you to ever forget that I dwell with you because I saved you out of bondage and slavery."

Deal with Sin (Exod. 40:34-35; Lev. 1:1-3)

But there is one major problem that we face at the end of Exodus. Yes, God comes down and fills the tabernacle with his presence. Yes, God dwells among his people. But Moses cannot enter because if he sees the glory of the Lord, he will not live (Exod. 40:34-5).

Who can go into the presence of God?

What is fascinating is how Exodus ends and Leviticus begins. Exodus ends with Moses not able to go into the tabernacle because of God's glory. The word "tabernacle" is the word that means "dwelling place." God has moved into his house. But people who have unclean lives cannot come in to his presence.

But what does God do at the beginning of Leviticus? "The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting" (Lev. 1:1). Yes, God has taken up his dwelling. But here God speaks to Moses not from his 'dwelling place' but invites his people into relationship in 'the tent of meeting.' And the shift in language is important. God not only comes to dwell among his people, but he comes to meet with them. And what follows are details about how they can come and meet with him.

Leviticus is about how we can draw near to God. This is the language of Lev. 1:2-3 – you shall draw near by bringing an offering. Even an offering is that which is brought near to the Lord. The way that you can come into God's presence, the way that you can draw near to God, the way that you can return to Eden is not by your great work, but by a great sacrifice. Leviticus 1-7 spells out how drawing near can only happen by the appropriate sacrifice to the Lord.

See the Glory of Christ

Hebrews 8:5 tells us that the tabernacle, all of its specifications and construction, was a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things. They were the blueprint of what was heavenly, and what is in heaven is better.

And what was in heaven? At the beginning of John's account of the good news, he tells us that the Voice of God that thundered at Sinai, the voice that gave the Word of God, that voice became flesh and tabernacled among us. God dwelt with humanity by becoming human. And John says that he was able to do something that Moses could not do – he saw the glory of God, and that glory is the glory that Moses heard about – grace and truth (John 1:14). Those words – grace and truth – correspond to what Moses heard about God: that the Lord is steadfast in love and faithful (Exod. 34:6).

When John saw Jesus, what he saw was glory manifested all the time – delivering people from the bondage of sin, healing the sick, and restoring rest for the soul. Throughout John's gospel, Jesus is healing on the Sabbath, and this causes controversy for so many of the religious leaders (see John 9). Yet they miss the very purpose of Sabbath – the day was one of restoring and renewing back to what God had originally purposed from the very beginning (see Mk. 2:27). This is the reason John begins his gospel with "In the beginning..." (Jn 1:1). The way back to Eden is by God coming near to us, coming in the



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flesh, coming and revealing his glory in forgiving sinners. And he does that not by the blood of bulls and goats, but by his own blood, to secure our eternal redemption (see Heb. 9:11-14).

Yes, God dwells with us. He comes by his Spirit and takes up residence in our lives so that by faith we are God's dwelling place (1 Cor. 3:16). But right now we only see and understand in part (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). But one day, faith will be made sight. Every tear that keeps us from enjoying life will be wiped away. Every sin that separated us from the presence of God will be gone. And the dwelling place of God will be with us forever (Rev. 21:3)!

Until that day he takes us to the renewed Eden, we enter into the holy places by the blood of Jesus, through the curtain where the cherubim guard the way, we draw near to God with no fear of his glory, but with hearts that are cleansed (Heb. 10:19-25), we come boldly before God, praying and asking and mediating not only for ourselves, but others (Heb. 4:14-16). And then, knowing that the presence of God is with us, we hear the words of Jesus: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). So we go! In the presence and power of Jesus with his thundering words, calling people to draw near to God who has drawn near to them by the blood of his Son.

And one day, we will move into our new home – a home that will never fade, spoil, or wear out. And we will not only live there, but we will have the best time anyone could ever imagine – not with a visitor in the living room, but with the God who invites us to live in his house. Forever.