

The Old Tabernacle Points Forward to the New

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[0 : 00] Lamech at the end of chapter 4, instead of protecting her from her. The first lonely wanderer. And so on and so forth. And the patterns set in Genesis 3 continue to play themselves out in the history of the world, in the history of our families, in the history of our lives.

Adam and Eve and all of their descendants not only lost their clear conscience, they lost their access to God's presence, and God's bountiful provision, and God's life-giving power. They were exiled from God's tabernacle and sent into the wilderness.

Genesis 3.24, God drove out the man. And at the east of the Garden of Eden, he placed the cherubim, mighty warrior angels. That's what cherubim were. And a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

So stage one in creation, we see unhindered access to God. And a clear conscience with no shame. Stage two, after the fall, driven out of God's presence with no way back in.

Guilty, ashamed, and avoidant. And this is the world into which we are born and in which we live.

It's what many biblical writers, including the author of Hebrews, refer to as the present age.

[1 : 24] But thankfully, the story of the Bible doesn't end here. Because God, in his mercy, continues to seek out a dwelling place with his people. And this leads us to stage three.

The tabernacle in the wilderness. We read from Exodus in our first scripture reading. Exodus 25, where God commanded Moses to build a tabernacle in the midst of the wilderness.

Exodus 25, 8, let them make me a sanctuary. In other words, a holy place set apart that I may dwell in their midst. Exodus 29, 45 and 46, I will dwell among the people of Israel and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them. And at the end of Exodus, as we read, the tabernacle was finally finished and the cloud of God's glory descended and came to dwell among his people and filled the tabernacle.

This is the conclusion of the book of Exodus. It's the climax. God has come to dwell among his people once again. That's what the tabernacle was about. What we had lost in the Garden of Eden was now being restored.

[2 : 39] But not quite. And that's what the author of Hebrews is pointing out. If you turn back to Hebrews, chapter 9, he begins by saying, Even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.

In other words, the tabernacle was limited by its earthly nature and by its regulations. So first, the tabernacle was limited because it was earthly.

In other words, it was made out of temporary materials donated by the people. Now, they were the best materials that we have.

But it wasn't made to last forever. In fact, the tabernacle in the wilderness had already been destroyed and replaced twice. First, it was replaced by Solomon's temple.

But then that was destroyed in the exile. And then that was rebuilt after they came back from exile. So the original tabernacle didn't even exist anymore. The point is, it was a temporary structure that would decay over time.

[3 : 46] And as it says in verse 9, that's a symbol for the world that we live in. The present age of decay and a fallen world. So the tabernacle was limited because it was earthly.

But second, it was limited by its regulations. You know, it wasn't like the cherubim, the mighty warrior angels, standing at the entrance to the Garden of Eden, had just been, and that flaming sword flashing back and forth.

It wasn't like that was just suddenly removed, and the gate was opened for any and everyone to come back into the Garden of Eden and enjoy all of its bounty once again.

No, there were detailed regulations about how you could approach the presence of God. So he says, and he talks about some of these here. If you want to read all of them, you can read the full text in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

But he summarizes some of the main ones here. In verse 6 and 7, he says there are two sections in the tabernacle. And he says the priest would enter regularly into the first section to offer gifts and sacrifices.

[4 : 56] Now, if you weren't a priest, you couldn't even go in there. If you weren't a priest, you were pretty much on the outside, period. But the priest could go regularly into the first section.

But then he says, but the second section, the most holy place represented the very presence of God. The most precious things were kept in the most holy place.

In particular, the Ark of the Covenant, representing God coming to dwell with his people. The promise that God had made to bind himself to his people and the covenant that he had made.

That was put in the most holy place. As well as the manna, a sign of God's provision for the people in the wilderness.

Aaron's staff that budded, a sign of God's life-giving power and authority. And the tablets of the covenant, as we said. And then he says, above it, verse 5, were the cherubim of glory.

[5 : 58] The glorious angels overshadowing the mercy seat. And if you read in Exodus, the description of that, in Exodus 25, God says, that's where I will meet with you.

He says, there I will meet with you, above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim. Exodus 25, 22. That was the place where the presence of God would come to dwell with his people in that innermost place.

But the problem was, only the high priest could go in there. And only once a year. And only with a sacrifice. And then he'd do his thing, and then he'd leave.

And he couldn't go in for another year. You see, the tabernacle in the wilderness was built to be the dwelling place of God among his people. But its very structure and its regulations communicated the distance and the barriers that still remained between people and God.

And all the sacrifices that had to be repeated over and over again could never restore us to the freedom that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the garden before the fall.

[7 : 19] Because as he says in verse 10, there were only regulations for the body. Dealing with food and drink and various washings. They could never definitively cleanse our conscience.

Otherwise, they wouldn't have had to be repeated all over again. They could never wash away our guilt and shame. Now, probably none of us here are planning to go to a tabernacle in Israel to be cleansed of our sins and our guilt.

It doesn't even exist anymore. Nobody's going there. It was destroyed in 70 AD. But think for a moment. Think for a moment about all the other bodily regulations that we come up with.

Seeking to cleanse our conscience. Seeking to bring us back into that life with God that Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden.

I mean, isn't that the promise of many diets? Rules about food and drink that promise cleansing and freedom and freedom and long life if you follow them strictly.

[8 : 32] These foods are good. These foods are bad. If you follow these rules, you can feel good about yourself because you're better than everybody else who doesn't. Of course, it's unstable because the rules are always changing.

If you read a dieting book from 20 or 30 years ago, it's completely outdated and been proved wrong by more recent research. But isn't it interesting?

It's striking how we can look to food as a means not only to physical well-being but even to spiritual well-being. My wife and I are members of the co-op down the street, the Elm City Market.

And a few months ago, I was walking by and they had an advertisement in the window that said something like, buy natural foods here at the co-op. Health for your body, mind, and spirit.

And I thought, really? You know, if eating raw foods could make me or keep me spiritually healthy, I'll eat them every day of the year.

[9 : 37] I mean, hey, I'm okay with kale. I'm okay with broccoli too. But neither one will cleanse our soul.

Now, of course, we can go to the other stream too. Overeating. Or compulsive eating. Not so much to cleanse our conscience as perhaps to dull our conscience.

When we're feeling lonely or sad or ashamed or overwhelmed, we turn to food or coffee or alcohol or sweets to comfort us.

But of course, the more we eat or the more we drink, the less pleasure we experience. And then sometimes we go back and forth between rigid legalistic dieting and unrestrained indulgence. And neither of them works. They only expose our shame and insecurity and our need for something more. Which brings us to stage four in God's plan to dwell among His people.

[10:51] verse 10 says, the tabernacle and its regulations were a temporary measure until the time of reformation. Reformation. You might ask, what does he mean by that phrase, the time of reformation?

Well, that word reformation could also be translated reconstruction. It referred to something being reformed or reshaped or rebuilt. Reformation was needed when a building was in disrepair, when an account was overdue or when a law became ineffective.

And the Old Testament prophets, including in particular Ezekiel and Zechariah, looked forward to a day when the tabernacle, God's dwelling place with His people, would be gloriously restored and all the world would see it.

And a river would flow out from it. Ezekiel described it. A river flowing out from the new temple giving life to all creation like the Garden of Eden once again.

Now the message of the New Testament is that in the coming of Jesus Christ, that day has arrived. That in Jesus Christ, God has established and anchored a permanent dwelling place among His people.

[12:04] As we heard earlier, Matt read this at the beginning of the service, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory. Jesus Christ is now the place where God and humanity meet together.

and are inseparably joined. He is the one through whom our conscience can be cleansed, not just temporarily, but forevermore. And because Jesus has come, the physical tabernacle and all its rules and regulations and all the other rules and regulations that we come up with to try to cleanse our own conscience and make us right with God have been superseded.

Jesus said in Matthew 12, 6, I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. Or John chapter 2, Jesus goes into the temple and He drives out the vendors and the money changers and the religious leaders confront Him and say, what are you doing?

You're acting like you own this place. And Jesus said, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. They didn't get what He was saying, but John explains He was speaking about the temple of His body.

Jesus' own body that would be demolished on the cross but gloriously rebuilt in His resurrection.

You see, through Jesus' death and resurrection He has established a permanent dwelling place of God with His people.

[13:40] Because through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross He's made provision for our conscience to be cleansed, for our guilt and shame to be removed, for our access to God's presence to be restored, for our lives to be rebuilt.

Once more, in Him. When Adam and Eve were sent away from the garden, God placed at the entrance the angels to guard the entrance with a flaming sword flashing back and forth, the sword of divine justice.

For Adam and Eve had sinned and the wages of sin is death. But when Jesus Christ who was without sin died on the cross, He went under that flaming sword of divine justice.

And because He died, the way is now open for us to enter into God's presence once more without hindrance. the price has been paid.

And because Jesus has offered that once-for-all sacrifice, we now have access to that life-giving river that flowed through the Garden of Eden and that Ezekiel foresaw would one day be restored, the life-giving river that never runs dry.

[14:57] And when Jesus was on earth, He talked about that. And He said, that's the Holy Spirit. John chapter 7, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast that celebrated God's dwelling among His people when they came out of Egypt in the wilderness.

And on the last and greatest day of the feast, He stood up, John 7, 37, and He cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

He said this about the Spirit whom those who believed in Him were to receive. You see, through Jesus we have access once more to the presence of God, to the life-giving power of God, to the provision of God.

It's the same promise that Jesus made when He met the Samaritan woman at the well. She had been married and divorced five times and was living with another man who wasn't her husband. For all kinds of reasons, she would have been excluded from the temple in Jerusalem, not even able to go in to the outer court. And yet, Jesus comes to her and she's sitting at the well and He says to her, everyone who drinks this water, He engages her in conversation.

[16:34] In the course of the conversation He says, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water that I give him will never be thirsty forever.

Because the water that I give will become in that person a river, a spring of living water, welling up to eternal life. Jesus, wow, no one else has ever promised that.

That's what Jesus promises. No matter what our past, no matter how qualified we might seem on the outside before others, Jesus offers a way into God's presence and living water that will never run dry.

When Jesus talked about the work of the Holy Spirit, He said, peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

And then He went on to talk about joy. He said, you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. You have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.

[17:57] Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. This is the promise that Jesus offers. Joy and peace from the Holy Spirit, the river of life-giving water flowing through us, cleansing from all of our guilt and shame.

Finally, stage five, the tabernacle yet to come. You see, what we have now, according to the Bible, it's only the beginning. Because at the end of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22 gives us a picture of the tabernacle yet to come, the eternal dwelling place of God with His people.

I want to close by simply reading some of the description that it gives. Revelation 21, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

[19:22] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said, behold, I am making all things new. Verse 22, he says, I saw no temple in the city. There's no need for a physical structure set apart, for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb.

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Chapter 22, then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, brightest crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

On either side of the river the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads and night will be no more.

[20:38] They will need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever. You see, in Jesus Christ, we can face our greatest problems because in Jesus Christ, we have a completely sufficient solution.

The price has been paid. The way has been opened. This is the promise that he offers. So he invites us, let us draw near to God through him.

That's how the Bible ends. The spirit and the bride say, come. And let the one who hears say, come. And let the one who is thirsty come.

Let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Let us pray. Almighty God, we thank you that in your mercy you have sought to establish a dwelling place with us, your people. We thank you, Lord, for the price you paid to cleanse us from guilt and shame, to open the way, a new and living way of access to your presence.

[22 : 14] Lord, we pray that we might come. And Lord, as we look forward to that day when what we just heard will be the complete reality, we pray that we would experience the life-giving river of your Holy Spirit flowing through us today.

We pray that we would experience the assurance of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed, of death defeated, and life without end.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, as the music team comes forward, we're going to sing our closing song, Beautiful Savior.

This speaks about the assurance and the confidence that we can have in Christ and how he's come to dwell among us. So let's stand as we sing in praise to him.

Amen. Amen.

[23 : 23] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. All my days I will sing this song of gladness Give my praise to the fountain of delight Lord of history You're the way that we are Lord of history For in my heart For in my heart You heard my cry And waves of mercy Pour down on my life Beautiful Savior Wonderful Counselor You're the way Father Cloth and majesty Lord of history You're the way The truth The light Star of the morning Glorious in holiness You're the risen one Heaven's champion And you reign You reign over all And I will trust In the cross Of my redeemer I will sing I will sing Of the blood That never fails Of sins forgiven Of conscience closed Of death defeated And life without end Beautiful Savior Wonderful Counselor Lord of the Lord You're the faithful Counselor Cloth and majesty Lord of history You're the way The truth The life Star of the morning Glorious in holiness You're the risen one Heaven's champion And you reign You reign over all And I long to be Where the praise is never ending Turn to dwell Where the glory never fades Where countless worshipers will shine Will share one's soul And Christ the Lord And I long to be Where the praise is never ending And I long to be Where the praise is never ending Turn to dwell Where the glory never fades Where countless worshipers will share one's soul And Christ the love worthy will honor the Lord Beautiful Savior Wonderful Counselor

Lord of majesty Lord of history You're the way The truth The life Star of the morning Glorious in holiness You're the risen one Heaven's champion And you reign You reign over all Thanks for joining us this morning We invite you to stay around either up here or downstairs Where there is coffee and refreshments To greet and encourage one another I receive God's word of blessing From the book of Revelation He who testifies