

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**November 24, 2013**

**Beginning of the Tabernacle**

Read Exodus 40:16-30, 34, 38.

**Key verse: “The Lord’s cloud stayed over the dwelling during the day, with lightning in it at night, clearly visible to the whole household of Israel at every stage of their journey” (Exodus 40:38).**

At first blush, the detailed descriptions of the tabernacle in Exodus might seem less than relevant to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But knowing about the tabernacle helps us understand more about Jesus, the Cross, salvation, and God’s presence with us today.

Consider, for example, the *ark of the covenant*. Its cover was called the *mercy seat*. This is where the sacrifice of atonement was offered for the sins of the people on the *Day of Atonement*. On the cross, Jesus made the ultimate and final atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The *veil*, or curtain, separated the two holy rooms in the tabernacle—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Every day, the priest went into the Holy Place, where he worshipped God and took care of the *altar of incense*, the *lampstand*, and the *table of bread*. God himself dwelt in the Most Holy Place. Only the high priest could enter here and he could only enter once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

The Bible tells us that, when on the cross Jesus breathed his last, at that moment the veil of the temple was torn in two (Mark 15:38). Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we now can come directly into God’s presence. No longer must we approach God through priests and sacrifices. Jesus has opened a new and living way by which we can have forgiveness and access into God’s presence!

The first thing the people saw when they entered the courtyard of the tabernacle was the *altar of burnt offering*. Here sacrifices were offered continually, reminding all that their sins could only be forgiven through the continual offering of these sacrifices.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Christ became the ultimate and final sacrifice for our sins: “Day after day every priest stands and performs his

religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.... And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin" (Hebrews 10:11-14, 18).

Exodus 40 tells how Moses set up the tabernacle. And after he had finished setting it up, God's presence filled it: "The cloud covered the meeting tent and the Lord's glorious presence filled the dwelling.... The Lord's cloud stayed over the dwelling during the day, with lightning in it at night, clearly visible to the whole household of Israel at every stage of their journey" (Exodus 40:34, 38).

Throughout the rest of Israel's journey into the Promised Land, God was present with them in the tabernacle. Later, the temple (which replaced the tabernacle) became the place where God lived among his people.

When John writes about the birth of Christ, John says: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). The Greek word for "made his dwelling" comes from the word for "tabernacle."

God has always wanted to make his home with us, God's people. Jesus, the Word made flesh, came and "tabernacled" among us. In his earthly life and ministry, Christ revealed the light and life of God. Through Jesus' sacrificial death, he became the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin. Through faith in Christ, we can have forgiveness and access into God's presence.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit. Now, when we receive Christ as our Savior, the Spirit of God takes up residence *in us*. No longer does God live in a tent or a temple. Now, we who receive Christ as Savior are the temple of God. Christ lives in us by his Spirit. His presence gives us love, joy, peace, and power for living. And we are called to carry the light of Christ and the presence of God to a lost and needy world.

Thanks be to God.

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