

MAIN POINT

As we consider the construction of and various elements of the Tabernacle, we are reminded that God dwells with us and we can pray to Him in specific ways.

INTRODUCTION

How does it make you feel to know that God desires to dwell among His people?

How might a fresh remembrance of this truth lead us to pray differently?

Beginning in Exodus 25, we see God's instructions for His people to construct a movable sanctuary so that He could reside in their midst. It would be a place for worship and for God to reveal His will for His people. This week we are walking through the various aspects of the tabernacle and considering how each of these might lead us to pray in a specific way to God.

DISCUSSION

> READ EXODUS 25:8-9 AND SUMMARIZE EXODUS 25-30.

Review the seven elements included in the tabernacle prayer. Which of these stands out you the most: The outer court, brazen altar, laver, candlestick, table of shewbread, altar of incense, and the Ark of the Covenant?

Why is it important to begin prayer in "the outer court" with thanksgiving to God?

Why is it crucial to continually remember the sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf (the brazen altar) as you enter a posture of prayer?

Why do we need for God to search us and make us clean (the laver) rather than doing this ourself? How have you tried to make yourself clean, and failed?

How have you experienced God's faithfulness when seeking His guidance in your life (the candlestick)?

What is the value of including God's Word in our times of prayer (the shewbread)? How does prayer flow from God's Word?

Why is it important in prayer to give a focus to who God is (the altar of incense) and not just who we are or what we see in front of us?

How might walking through the first six elements of this prayer lead you to greater intercession for others (the Ark of the Covenant)?

APPLICATION

How might this pattern of prayer begin to change your relationship with God this week? How will you practice daily?

COMMENTARY

TABERNACLE, TENT OF MEETING

Sacred tent, portable and provisional sanctuary, where God met His people (Exod. 33:7-10). A tent was the dwelling place of a nomadic person. When the sacred tent was meant, it was usually used with some distinguishing epithet. Two compound phrases (ohel mo'ed and ohel ha'eduth) are used to designate this tent: "the tabernacle of the congregation" (Exod. 29:42,44), literally the "tent of meeting" (NRSV, NIV, NASB, REB) and "the tabernacle of witness" (Num. 17:7) or "tent of witness." In both cases it was the place where the God of Israel revealed Himself to and dwelled among His people. The basic Hebrew term (mishkan) translated as "tabernacle" (Exod. 25:9) comes from a verb which means "to dwell." In this sense it is correctly translated in some instances as "dwelling," "dwelling place," "habitation," and "abode."

The OT mentions three tents or tabernacles. First, after the sin of the golden calf at Mount Sinai, the "provisional" tabernacle was established outside the camp and called the "tent of meeting" (Exod. 33:7). Second, the "Sinaitic" tabernacle was built in accordance with directions given to Moses by God (Exod. 25-40). Unlike the tent of meeting, it stood at the center of the camp (Num. 2). Third, the "Davidic" tabernacle was erected in Jerusalem for the reception of the ark (2 Sam. 6:17).

Reconstruction of the Israelite tabernacle and its court. The court was formed by curtains attached to erect poles. In front of the tent was placed the altar of burnt offerings and the laver. The tabernacle was always erected to face the east, so this view is from the northeast.

The original "tent of meeting" was a provisional edifice where God met with His people (Exod. 33:7-11; 34:34-35). Apparently, only Moses actually entered the tent to meet God. Joshua, Moses' "servant" (Exod. 33:11), protected and cared for the tent. After the golden calf was made, God refused any longer to acknowledge Israel as His people and to dwell in their midst. Estrangement brought distance between God and the people because of their sin. Because of this situation and to symbolize it, Moses pitched this "tent of meeting" outside the camp (Exod. 33:7). Ultimately, God promised again to go into the midst of Israel (Exod. 34:9).

The exact nature of this tent is uncertain. It apparently formed the headquarters of the camp until the building of the Sinaitic tabernacle. Joshua guarded the tent in Moses' absence (Exod. 33:11). Since the earliest Greek translation, some would equate Moses' tent in Exod. 18:7 with the tent of meeting, but Scripture does not explicitly make this connection. The people could all go to the tent of meeting to seek the Lord (Exod. 33:7) either in looking for God's answer to a judicial case, in petition, in worship, or for a prophetic word. Apparently, Moses acted as the prophet who took the people's questions to God and received an answer, since "to seek Yahweh" usually appears in prophetic contexts. Prophetic content appears with the tent also in Num. 11:16-29. Moses installed Joshua as his successor at the tent (Deut. 31:14-15).

Moses called it the tent of meeting because it was the place of revelation. There God met His people when the pillar of cloud descended to the door of the tent (Exod. 33:9). It may have borne its appropriate name from the first, or perhaps Moses used the name from the instructions which he received regarding the permanent tabernacle (Exod. 27:21).

Apparently, the tent did not become a national sanctuary. It did not contain an ark or those items necessary for worship nor did it possess a priesthood. This tent was cared for by Joshua (Exod. 33:11), while Aaron was responsible for the tabernacle (Lev. 10:7). The cloud descended on this tent when Moses came to inquire of God, but the cloud stayed on the permanent tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filled it so Moses could not enter it (Exod. 40:34-35,38).

The center of attention in the wilderness narratives is the tabernacle with rich decorations, curtains, bread of the presence, ark, lights, and altar. This is the portable sanctuary Israel carefully delegates to the priests and Levites for transportation (Num. 3). The camp of Israel has this tabernacle as its center (Num. 2). This, too, is the tent of meeting (Exod. 27:21), where holy God comes to sinful people. Here the sacrifices and atonement procedures of the book of Leviticus were carried out. "I will also meet with the Israelites there, and that place will be consecrated by My glory. I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God" (Exod. 29:43,45 HCSB).