

## Emmanuel: The Tabernacle of the LORD

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### Scripture 1: (Exod. 25:1-9 ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

### Scripture 2: (Exod. 33:1-17 ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring I will give it.' I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'" Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people."

And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

## Sermon:

Emmanuel and the Tabernacle.

The promise from the LORD that “God is with us” leads directly to the command for His people build Him a sanctuary, a holy place; specifically, a portable sanctuary so that He might always “ *dwell in their midst* ”, wherever they go.

Don't you think it would be nice to see and know that you have God dwelling in your midst?

Wouldn't you be comforted knowing that He was there with you; because you could just look over there and see His place and know that since the lights are on, the LORD surely must be home?

How nice it is to have God dwelling with us! How utterly terrifying it is to have God dwelling with us! It is both a joy and a terror; something for us to both celebrate and to dread.

Today, we are going to look at the implications of God commanding His people to build a sanctuary for His dwelling and also having His presence go with them.

To the Israelite people, the Tabernacle was the visible sign that the LORD God Almighty was with them. The cloud of the LORD's glory would ascend and descend onto the Tabernacle, governing their travels, and this was where the LORD would meet with Moses, face to face, as a friend (33:11).

Unfortunately, we are now at a point where our wonderful English language fails us. It fails to accurately portray and explain what is going on because we have certain “Bible words” which we think we know the meaning of, yet we often do not.

Like, what exactly is a Tabernacle? Is it a noun: a unique person, place, or thing; or is it a verb: to tabernacle? How is it used? There is a fancy box in which Roman Catholic priest's store the remaining “host” following a Mass, called a tabernacle. Usually, there is a compartment or “closet” in the front of a synagogue sanctuary where the Rabbi stores the their Torah scroll, also called a tabernacle. Then there is the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, which usually performs at their principle church building in Salt Lake City which they call, The Tabernacle. Then Christians will sometimes speak of Jesus as “tabernacling with us”, by paraphrasing John 1:14, {And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us....}.

What do these four different uses of the word tabernacle have in common? They each refer to something related to the “presence of God”.

Tabernacle is one of those “Bible Words” that we use, using it without actually understanding it. Tabernacle is now an English word coming to us through French, from the original Latin word *tabernaculum*, which plainly meant “tent”. This derives from the Latin word *taberna*, where we also get the word “tavern”. A *taberna* was a small, semi-permanent structure that people would come to visit for a specific purpose, such as a shop or an inn; thus, a *tabernaculum* was a smaller structure, similar in purpose and use but mobile, like a Carnival tent or a gypsy's wagon.

The Tabernacle built by the Israelites is clearly more than “just a tent”. Tabernacle translates from the Hebrew word *mishkan* and is best described as a “dwelling”; {*unlike the Hebrew word “ohel” which nearly always refers to an actual tent*}. Tabernacle refers to the whole complex, including the curtains, implements, and altar not merely the central tent, of the Holy Place and Most Holy Place, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. {*The central tent structure is specifically called the “Tent of Meeting” elsewhere in the Pentateuch because it was there that Moses, the priests, and later Joshua met with God.*}

The *mishkan*, the Tabernacle, was built as a dwelling place for the LORD in the midst of His chosen people. This is the place where God would meet with His people, where they could enter His presence for worship and fellowship. {*The book of Deuteronomy describes the Tabernacle as the place where “the LORD's name” would dwell, not meaning that the LORD Himself would dwell there, for the Creator LORD cannot be contained within any single creation or human construct, yet He certainly will make His presence known and felt in particular places, in particular times, according to His will and purpose.*}

The LORD commanded the Israelites to build the *mishkan*, more for their benefit than for His own. God does not need a tent to live in, but the people needed a visible sign, to comfort them and re-assure them, to remind to themselves, that God was with them. They required “proof” of Emmanuel.

Now the LORD gave to Moses a very specific set of instructions for the construction and operation of the Tabernacle: the how's, and where's, and who's. The reason for the necessity of following all these instructions was to protect the people from the LORD's wrath. These were instructions in holiness, so that the people might approach God without fear of destruction.

The layout of the Tabernacle established a series of layers, “degrees of holiness”, serving to constantly remind us of our separation from God, due our sinfulness.

At the very center of the Tabernacle was a tent containing two chambers. The “Most Holy Place”, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, or the “Holy of Holies”, which was the earthly throne room of God. This was a room into which the High Priest was only allowed once a year, on the Day of a Atonement, after many sacrifices had been made to cleanse the High Priest, the people of Israel, and all the many implements of the Tabernacle from their sin. Even then the High Priest was not sanctified enough to stand within the LORD's direct presence and look upon Him, he also needed to bring incense and smoke to block his view.

Further out was the “Holy Place”, separated from the “Most Holy Place” by a thick curtain. Here the golden lampstand, or Menorah, was kept burning twenty-four/seven, symbolizing the “light of the world” (Leviticus 24), as well as a table with the “showbread”, or the “bread of the Presence” (Exodus 25:30): twelve loaves given as an offering to the LORD, and a reminder of His constant provision for His people. The bread was kept there all week long as a extension of fellowship between God and man.

Outside of the tent was a basin used for washing the hands and feet of the priests before they entered the Holy Place, reminding us that everyone must be cleansed before we can approach God's presence.

Beyond the basin was the altar, where sinners would bring their sacrifices to the LORD for the priests to make atonement on their behalf, to pay the debt of their sin.

Now the altar, the basin, and the tent were set up within the courtyard of the Tabernacle. This courtyard was the whole place set apart as the sanctuary of God. It was enclosed by a fence on three sides, while the fourth side had a single gate allowing entrance into the sanctuary. The Tabernacle was always set up in the same orientation, according to the LORD's command, with the gate at the east end of the Tabernacle.

This divinely prescribed layout of the Tabernacle is a foreshadowing of God's plan to redeem His people, so that we might safely return to Him, to come before His throne of grace and receive mercy.

Approaching the LORD by entering into the sanctuary from the east, foreshadows our end of exile; as Adam and Eve were driven out into the east, away from the LORD's presence, so we respond to His call by moving back in His direction. Entering in through this single, solitary gate reminds us that there is only one way to be restored to God's presence and grace; God's prescribed way (John 14:6). A sacrifice of atonement and a

cleansing from our sin is also required before we can draw near to Him, entering into the Holy Place of God. While the Israelites never entered closer than the courtyard, a priest would carry their sacrifices and prayers into the LORD's presence, mediating before God on their behalf; but now all of us who call upon Christ are ordained into a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:4-5). We are now a "priesthood of all believers" and our Great High Priest, Jesus, has cleared the path for our entrance into the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 9+10).

The Tabernacle served as the model for how Man is redeemed and restored to fellowship with God. It was a physical sign of God's desire for us to be drawn into closer communion with Him; a sign of God's presence with His people; a sign of Emmanuel's relationship with us. God being with us, so that we may be with Him.

God commanded the Israelites to build a sanctuary for Him to dwell in among His people. He defined all these particular barriers and rituals to protect the people. The fences, the gate, and the tent of the Tabernacle were not a defense or protection for God, to keep the "wrong people" away from Him; instead they were protection for sinful people from the absolute, pure holiness of God; so that they would not be destroyed in their sinfulness.

God loves His people; He wants a relationship with us; He wants to dwell among us, in the midst of us, surrounded by us, living in fellowship and community with His Elect. God loves His people so much, that He commanded this sanctuary to be built, as a "safe space" for He and the people to meet.

*"And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst."*

Where ever His people would go, they knew that God was with them, because this sign of His Holy presence was always with them.

The LORD said in Exodus 29 concerning the Tabernacle, *"There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and 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. I am the LORD their God."* (Exodus 29:43-46 ESV)

Having the Tabernacle, the people would know that God is with them, that He alone is their God, and they would remember that He brought them out of Egypt, to be with them. The Tabernacle was where they heard what God commanded; the place where they glorified Him; where they worshiped the LORD God; where they met with Him, as He would meet with them. So, the Tabernacle was called also the "Tent of Meeting", because here God would meet them.

*{The expression, the "Tent of Meeting", is used to refer to three different things in Scripture: sometimes the whole Tabernacle; often the central tent in the courtyard; or another tent used by Moses before the Tabernacle's construction was completed. It is at this third Tent that Moses meets with the LORD in our second passage.}*

The portion of conversation recorded between God and Moses, in our first passage happened while Moses was first up on Mount Sinai: receiving the Law, the tablets of the testimony, and the instructions for building the Tabernacle. However, this next conversation happened shortly after the incident of the Golden Calf, before Moses had returned to the LORD and renewed the covenant.

Consider this temporary "tent of meeting", while the Tabernacle was still being constructed, Moses pitched this tent *"far off from the camp"*. It was removed and set far apart, away from the people, not with them.

Why? Because they were still guilty of sin for the altar of atonement had not yet been finished, their sin with the Golden Calf had not been atoned for yet. The people could not be in the LORD's holy presence. God would not go among, them lest they be destroyed (33:3). God was showing mercy to His people, by withholding the

fullness of His wrath. He also reaffirmed the promise of His continued faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, to give them the Promised Land, although He now adds a negative saying, “...*I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.*”

Why was God telling Moses that He would no longer go with His people?

God was telling Moses that since the people were so stubborn and loathe to give up their sinfulness, {*that since they were likely to sin greatly again;*} that if He went among them and they did not change, then He would destroy them for their wickedness. God still would bless Moses and the Israelites with physical, worldly good in the Promised Land, but not give them a spiritual blessing without their sincere, unwavering repentance. The LORD was still for His people, but the people who worshiped the Golden Calf had left the LORD. It was now their responsibility to return to Him, to turn back from the way of sin, and to repent.

All those gilded items which they had taken out of Egypt when they left, were intended by God for the eventual construction of the Tabernacle, but they had used some in their idolatrous profanity, so the remainder of this material wealth was given up and surrendered entirely to the LORD and His glory. Removing their jewelry was a sign of repentance for their idolatry. Discarding this jewelry removed a temptation to craft an idol again, for it was from their jewelry that Aaron had fashioned the Calf (Exodus 32:2-4). This also symbolized a rejection of a love for worldly goods, in preference of spiritual and Godly things.

Moses, after the people sincerely repented, now interceded with God on their behalf. He met with God, conversed with the LORD, prayed to God that He would still go with them and be their God, because the LORD had claimed them as His people.

Let's pause a moment, I need to make a side note here about intercessory prayer. We affirm it as Christians, even as Reformed Presbyterian types, as being an absolutely necessary act of our faith, while we also understand and affirm that God already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). We must not pray and expect our prayers to change the LORD's mind, because He does not change His mind (Numbers 23:19). Prayer is not about what we want, but is about aligning ourselves with God's will, recognizing His work, and giving Him the glory. Intercessory prayer glorifies Him more than ourselves. James wrote, “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*” (James 4:3 ESV) because often times we do not pray according to His will, instead we pray according to our fleshly and selfish desires; so, God often does not answer our prayers with a “Yes”. Yet whenever we pray, “*Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.*” and mean it, by praying with the Holy Spirit for what the LORD wills, then God smiles upon His children and says, “Yes”. Prayer is an important part of our conversation with God. Prayer humbles us. When we pray, we acknowledge His Power and Mercy, submitting to Him out of our own insufficiency. Sometimes it seems that the LORD will go to extreme lengths to get our attention, to return and refocus our attention of Who and What it should be on, by sending us to prayer.

Now God had said that He would not go with the Israelites because they would be destroyed in their sinfulness; yet after they repented, and Moses prayed on their behalf, the LORD said, “*My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*” Moses' prayer did not change God's mind, instead Moses' and the people's hearts were changed back towards the LORD, through their active prayer and their repentance. When they prayed and acted according to His will and desire, the LORD promised to continue being with His chosen people: to be their Emmanuel. The people's status was changed in their repentance, they moved relationally back to be “with God”. Now they were ready for Him to go with them.

Moses understood just how important the Emmanuel promise is. He was raised in the Egyptian court, exposed to all manner of idolatry; recognizing that Egyptian idols were either carvings of mute stone, or they were just

men (like Pharaoh), or unintelligent animals. The Egyptian “gods” could not help them. They were powerless to help because they were not true, because they were only the fantasies of sinful creatures. Regardless of whatever divinity he might have believed in beforehand, way back when in Egypt and in Midian, Moses could never again deny the truth of the LORD after God Almighty, the Living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob revealed Himself to Moses from the bush which burned, but was not consumed. Every nation on earth has their own “gods”, but only Israel is unique because they actually have the God of Truth with them; they have Emmanuel, and the Church today shares in that same blessing.

Knowing the LORD and the Truth of Him, allowed Moses to be comforted, encouraged, and confident when he spoke to Pharaoh because He had faith that God was with him, for the LORD told Moses during that first encounter “*Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.*” (Exod. 4:12 ESV; see also Exodus 3:12 for additional assurance of God being with Moses). Moses understood how important the Emmanuel promise is, and that is why he interceded with the LORD for the people, to ensure the LORD would be with them, that He would be present with them, that He would be their “God with us”: Emmanuel.

Moses understood the reality and truth of God: that He Is as well as Who He Is (“I AM” Exodus 3:14). He understood how special it was for the LORD of heaven and earth to come and be with His chosen people, and how unique this is. All those who are called into fellowship with the LORD are set apart, distinct, and separated from other peoples because of this unique, divine relationship that we are brought into, by His grace (33:16). Christians, we believers, are different from all other people because of Emmanuel: because the Truth is with us, the Truth is on our side, so we can and must always stand on the side of Truth; we must stand with God (John 14:6).

After God had told Moses that He would not go with the Israelites, {*even though the LORD would still drive the Canaanites out in order to give them the Promised Land,*} the people mourned. They mourned and cast off their jewelry, their fancies, and all their decorations of personal vanity, in grief and repentance, because they realized that God's presence was better and more important to them than any worldly wealth.

Moses approached the LORD personally in prayer, interceding for them, because He had a personal relationship with God. He wished that God's people would also have that same kind of relationship with the LORD; to have the confidence and be assured that the only Living God, the Lord of all Creation, was with them; to know and believe that He alone was their source of strength, their defense, and their only hope for life.

*“Moses said to the LORD, “...Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.”*

Moses represented all God's people before God, just as he represented God before all the people. He wanted to be sure that this blessing of communion with the LORD was shared with all God's chosen people. Moses leaned upon and depended upon the favor of God that he had received, but what was this favor? The word underlying favor is better understood by the familiar Greek term *xaris* {*used here in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible*}.

*Xaris* was one of the Apostle Paul's favorite words. It described the whole of his life, and his personal relationship with Christ. *Xaris* is how Paul and every other Christian is saved. *Xaris* is the Greek word for grace, God's grace, especially as shown to sinful humanity. *Xaris* is the total, unmerited favor, and love from our heavenly Father, for His children and people.

So, Moses asked God, *“Now therefore, if I have found GRACE in Your sight, please show me Your ways, that I may know You in order to find GRACE in Your sight.”* He asked this for the people. He asked in faith to share God's grace with the people. He asked to share grace with them, us, and all the Elect, throughout history.

Paul wrote that, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* (Eph. 2:8-9 ESV) Grace is a gift, the sovereign gift of God, plain and simple, and it is received by our faith in Christ, the LORD.

Jesus said *{in the Gospel of John}*, *“For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment-- what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”* (Jn. 12:49-50 ESV) and also, *“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* (Jn. 17:3 ESV)

This is why I spend so much time talking about God's Grace, and the Law of God. We have been given God's grace, so that we may follow His ways, and receive His grace *{we will explore the difference between “being given” and “receiving” at a later point}*. Knowing the LORD, knowing Christ, means we obey His commandments, which now we want to do, for God has given us a desire to obey. All our expanding capacity to obey, is given by the gift of the Holy Spirit inside every believer, by His sole sovereign grace, so that by our faith in Christ, we are justified and may rest in God's gracious presence, eternally.

God gives us His grace even now. He has given us the Scriptures, the Bible, to know His Ways, to know Him and His Son, Jesus, so that we may receive His grace, and His free gift of eternal life.

The LORD's presence at the Tabernacle supported the Israelites' faith. His presence dwelling with them, gave them the confidence and trust necessary to take possession of Canaan, to obey God, and to find their rest. Emmanuel, dwelling in the midst of Israel, blessed them. He showed them His favor: defended them against their enemies; provided manna and quail for them to eat; divided the Jordan river, shattered the walls of Jericho, and gave them cities which they did not build (Joshua 24:12) because our LORD is Emmanuel.

God's presence dwelling among His chosen people is a gift of grace. “God with us” means that then we can be with God.

The LORD does not keep His distance from His people. He wants His people to come to Him safely and remain in His presence. God is with us and He has shown us the way to be with Him: the way of faith and repentance. He has given us a great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who has atoned for sin on our behalf, a cleansing so that we may enter into His presence.

Moses and the Israelites understood that living in the presence of the LORD was the greatest blessing possible, greater than any worldly reward. That great reward, of dwelling with the LORD our God, our Emmanuel, is eternal life.

Christ, like Moses but far greater, interceded with the LORD on our behalf. We are now saved by grace, now our works, and are confident that His presence is with us, and that He will give us rest. So, approach Him by faith, believe that the LORD will always dwell with His people, where ever we go. His Glory fills the whole earth, but His presence dwells with those whom He has called, those who call upon His Name, and those who come to Him by faith. He is Emmanuel.

**AMEN**

## Appendix

- **mishkan 2387/skenes** – “tabernacle” or tent
- *shkan* – verb to dwell; “sheikanah glory” is also derived
- **ohel 32a/oikos** or *skenes* – tent – a dwelling of nomadic people, transitory and temporary; also used figuratively, after more permanent structures for homes were built; likely kept a cultural relevance from the figurative use, relating to the historical uses of the nomad's tent
- **heycal/naos** – temple or palace
- **bayt/oikos** – house or dwelling-place or temple
- **cheyn/xaris** – favor/grace
- **tavneyt/paradeigma** – pattern – Hebrew tavneyt also used elsewhere in reference to the crafting of idols, as a prohibition against using any creature as a tavneyt or pattern for idolatrous worship

**tabernacle (n.)** - mid-13c., "portable sanctuary carried by the Israelites in the wilderness," from Old French tabernacle "the Jewish Tabernacle; tent, canopy; tomb, monument" (12c.), from Latin tabernaculum "tent," especially "a tent of an augur" (for taking observations), diminutive of taberna "hut, cabin, booth" (see tavern).

Use of the word in English transferred late 14c. to the Temple in Jerusalem (which continued its function). Sense of "house of worship" first recorded 1690s. Also in Biblical language, "the body as the temporary abode of the soul" (late 14c.). The Old Testament Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (mid-October) was observed as a thanksgiving for harvest. This was rendered in English c. 1400 as Feste of Logges ("lodges"). Related: Tabernacular.

- <https://www.etymonline.com/word/tabernacle>

**Taberna** – noun, declension: 1<sup>st</sup> declension, gender: feminine, Definitions: small shop, stall/booth, tavern, inn, wood hut/cottage, shed/hovel

**Tabernaculum/Tabernaculi** – noun, declension: 2<sup>nd</sup> declension, gender: neuter, Definitions: Jewish Tabernacle, tent, [~ capere => (augur) set up tent to make observations]

- <http://www.latin-dictionary.net/search/latin/taberna>

- **σκηνης (skenes)**- noun genitive feminine singular common from σκηνή, [Friberg, Analytical Greek Lexicon]; [Fri] σκηνή, ης, ή tent, booth; (1) generally, of transitory, movable lodging places for nomads, pilgrims, herdsmen, soldiers, constructed of various materials tent, lodging, dwelling (HE 11.9); (2) as the portable divine sanctuary Tabernacle, Tent (HE 8.5); (3) as referring to the temple in Jerusalem (HE 13.10); (4) as referring to the outer and inner rooms of the Tabernacle, comprising the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (HE 9.2-8); (5) as a portable case for an idol shrine (AC 7.43); (6) figuratively, of the heavenly dwelling place of God, sanctuary (RV 13.6); (7) plural, as the eternal habitations of the righteous dwellings, homes (LU 16.9); (8) figuratively, as a ruling dynasty or lineage ruling family, kingdom (AC 15.16)