

TEACHER BACKGROUND & PREPARATION SHEET

For Teacher Study Only | Not Read Aloud to Children

WEEK 19 | MAY 10, 2026 | GOD DWELLS WITH HIS PEOPLE: THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 25 to 40

SECTION 1 LESSON IDENTIFICATION

Week / Date:	Week 19 May 10, 2026
Lesson Title:	God Dwells With His People: The Tabernacle
Primary Scripture:	Exodus 25 to 40
Supporting:	John 1:14 Hebrews 4:14-16 Hebrews 9:1-15, 26 Hebrews 10:19-22 John 2:19-21 Revelation 21:1-4 Matthew 27:51
Timeline:	Comes after God gave the Ten Commandments at Sinai (Week 18). Israel has just made the golden calf and been forgiven. Now God, in stunning grace, moves in with His people. This passage flows directly into Leviticus and the sacrificial system, and every element points forward to Jesus.

SECTION 2 CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Every nation surrounding Israel built temples for their gods. Egyptians, Canaanites, and Babylonians all had them. But those temples housed idols, lifeless images of invented gods. Israel's tabernacle was radically different: it housed the presence of the living God, the Creator of everything, who had no image that could contain Him. The second commandment existed partly to protect Israel from confusing their God with the gods of their neighbors.

A Mobile God in a Portable Sanctuary

Pagan gods were thought to belong to specific regions or cities. Israel's God traveled. The tabernacle was a portable tent-sanctuary carried through the wilderness on poles. This communicated something unprecedented: the God who made everything was not tied to any mountain, city, or territory. He went where His people went.

The Camp Arrangement and the Shape of a Cross

Numbers 2 records precisely how Israel camped. The tabernacle sat at the center. The tribes arranged around it in four directions, with the Levites forming a ring closest to the tent. Judah, the largest group (186,400 men) and the tribe from which the Messiah would come (Genesis 49:10), anchored the east side. Reuben led the south, Ephraim the west, Dan the north. Observed from above, this arrangement forms the shape of a cross: four arms extending outward from the central dwelling place of God.

The Bible does not explicitly state this was God's design. But it is observable and worth sharing with children honestly: 'The Bible does not say God planned it this way, but when you look at it from above, the place where God lived sat at the very center, with His people reaching outward in every direction. That is not a bad picture of what Jesus would one day do on the cross.'

The Three Zones of Holiness

The tabernacle was not one open room. It was three distinct zones, each representing a greater degree of nearness to God:

Outer Court	Open to all Israelites. The bronze altar (animal sacrifices) and bronze basin (priests washed here) were located here.
Holy Place	Only priests could enter. Contained the golden lampstand (never extinguished), the table of showbread (12 loaves for the 12 tribes), and the altar of incense (burned morning and evening, representing the prayers of God's people).
Most Holy Place	Only the High Priest could enter, once per year, on the Day of Atonement. A thick curtain called the veil separated it from the Holy Place. The Ark of the Covenant was here.

The Veil

The veil was not decorative. It was a physical statement: sinful people cannot survive the direct, unfiltered presence of a perfectly holy God. It protected the people while also announcing: the full way is not yet open. When Jesus died on the cross, Matthew 27:51 records that this curtain tore from top to bottom. God tore it, not a person. The barrier was removed by God Himself.

The Ark of the Covenant

A gold-covered wooden chest holding the stone tablets of the law, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod. On top was the mercy seat: a gold covering with two cherubim facing each other. This is where God told Moses He would meet with him (Exodus 25:22). The High Priest sprinkled sacrificial blood on the mercy seat once per year. The law (stone tablets) was inside. Mercy covered it. Romans 3:25 uses the same Greek word for mercy seat (hilasterion) to describe Jesus as our sacrifice of atonement.

Bezalel, Oholiab, and the Holy Spirit

God specifically named and filled Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit for the skilled craftwork (Exodus 31:1-11). This is one of the earliest explicit references in Scripture to the Holy Spirit filling a person for a specific task. God did not merely command the work. He equipped the workers.

SECTION 3 WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS PASSAGE

While Moses was on the mountain with God for forty days, God gave him the complete design for the tabernacle and everything in it: the ark, the mercy seat, the lampstand, the table, the altar of incense, the courtyard, the priestly garments, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests. Every detail was specific: dimensions, materials, colors, hardware.

Meanwhile, the people grew impatient and pressured Aaron into making a golden calf, declaring it the god who rescued them from Egypt. This was a catastrophic act of idolatry committed almost immediately after the covenant. Moses interceded. God relented from destroying them. Moses' deepest plea was direct: 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here' (Exodus 33:15). God's response was grace: He renewed the covenant and promised His presence.

In chapters 35 through 40, the people built the tabernacle exactly as God commanded. The phrase 'just as the Lord commanded Moses' repeats ten times in chapter 40 alone. Obedience was precise. When everything was finished, Moses blessed the people. Then the cloud covered the tent and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34). Moses could not even enter. God had moved in.

SECTION 4 KEY THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS

What this reveals about God:	God is perfectly holy and genuinely desires nearness with His people at the same time. He did not stay on the mountain. He designed a way to move into the camp. Holiness and nearness are not opposites in God. He is both, fully, simultaneously (Exodus 25:8; Isaiah 6:3).
What this reveals about people:	People cannot enter God's holy presence on their own terms. The three zones, the veil, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system all exist because sinful people need mediation. We need someone to stand between us and a holy God. This is not cruelty. It is honesty (Hebrews 9:7; Romans 3:23).
How this points to Jesus:	Jesus is the fulfillment of everything the tabernacle pictured. He is the true tabernacle (John 1:14, the Word 'tabernacled' among us). He is the true High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). He is the true sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26). He is the torn curtain (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19-20). He is the way (John 14:6).

SECTION 5 GOSPEL CONNECTION

The tabernacle tells us three things about the human condition. God is holy. We are sinful. The gap between us is real and serious. The entire elaborate system of zones, priests, curtains, and sacrifices is God's answer to that gap. He designed it. He equipped the workers. He moved in. Every sacrifice said: something innocent dies for the guilty. Every priest entering God's presence said: you need a mediator. The curtain said: the full way is not yet open. Jesus answers all three. He is the sacrifice that actually, permanently takes away sin (Hebrews 9:26). He is the High Priest who lives forever to intercede (Hebrews 7:25). He is the curtain that was torn so the way is fully open (Hebrews 10:19-20). Because of Jesus, anyone can come close to God.

SIMPLE GOSPEL SENTENCE:

God wanted to live with His people, so He designed the tabernacle. Then He became the tabernacle Himself in Jesus, so we can be with Him forever.

SECTION 6 QUESTIONS CHILDREN WILL ASK

Why did God need a fancy tent?	God does not need anything. The tabernacle was not for God's benefit. It was for the people. God gave them a visible, physical sign that He was truly present with them. He came near in a way they could see and respond to.
What was inside the ark?	The stone tablets with God's commandments, a jar of manna from the wilderness, and Aaron's rod that had budded. Three reminders of God's Word, His provision, and His chosen leadership.
Why couldn't anyone go behind the curtain?	Because the full, unfiltered presence of a perfectly holy God is something sinful people cannot survive on their own. The curtain was protecting them. Only the High Priest, once a year, following God's exact instructions, could enter.
Where is the ark now?	We do not know. It disappears from history around the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. But the ark was always a picture pointing to Jesus. Now that the reality has come, the picture is no longer needed.
Does God still have a special place?	God is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10). But since Jesus came, God now lives in the hearts of His people through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Every believer is, in a sense, a tabernacle. And one day God will dwell with His people face to face forever (Revelation 21:3).

SECTION 7 TEACHER SUMMARY

Big Idea:	God designed a way to live with His people, and that way was always pointing to Jesus.
What God did:	Gave Moses precise instructions for the tabernacle, equipped the workers through His Spirit, and filled the completed tent with His glory.
Points to Jesus:	Jesus is the true tabernacle, true High Priest, true sacrifice, and the torn curtain. He is the full and permanent fulfillment of everything the tabernacle pictured.
Error to avoid:	Turning this into a lesson about following instructions carefully. The point is not the people's obedience. The point is what the tabernacle was pointing to: Jesus.
Hope to give:	Because of Jesus, you can come close to God right now. The curtain is torn. The way is open. Nothing has to keep you away.