

MAIN LESSON, ACTIVITY & DISCUSSION

Ages 5 to 11 | Read-Aloud Lesson | Scripture-Centered | Christ-Centered

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

Exodus 25 to 40

SECTION 1 LESSON OVERVIEW

Week / Date:	Week 19 May 10, 2026
Lesson Title:	God Dwells With His People: The Tabernacle
Scripture:	Exodus 25 to 40
Timeline:	Follows God giving the Ten Commandments at Sinai. Israel has sinned with the golden calf and been forgiven. Now God, in extraordinary grace, moves into the center of the camp.
Memory Verse:	"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." Exodus 25:8

BIG IDEA:

God designed a way to live with His people, and that way was always pointing to Jesus.

SECTION 2 OPENING BIBLE FOUNDATION

The Bible is not a collection of separate religious ideas. It is one unified account, written by more than forty different people across thousands of years, all telling the same story about the same God who loves His people and will stop at nothing to be near them. All sixty-six books of the Bible point to one person: Jesus. And today's account from the book of Exodus is one of the most powerful pictures of Jesus in the entire Old Testament. We are going to see why.

SECTION 3 MEMORY VERSE

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."

Exodus 25:8

God is saying: I want to live with you. Not above you. Not far away. Right in the middle of you.

HOW TO LEARN IT:

Say it in two parts: (1) 'Then have them make a sanctuary for me' / (2) 'and I will dwell among them. Exodus 25:8'

Repeat it together now. Then repeat it again at the end of the lesson. Say it one more time whenever you hear the word tabernacle today.

SECTION 4 SETTING THE SCENE

We have been walking through the Bible all year long. We watched God create the world. We saw sin enter through Adam and Eve. We followed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. We watched Moses lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea, and all the way to Mount Sinai. Last week the mountain shook with thunder and fire as God gave His people the Ten Commandments. The people trembled and stood far back because God is perfectly holy and they were sinful, and the distance between them was real. But today we are going to see what God did about that distance. And it will change the way you understand everything.

SECTION 5 MAIN LESSON NARRATIVE

Close your eyes for just a moment and imagine this. You are standing in the middle of a vast desert. The sun blazes overhead. In every direction, as far as you can see, there are tents. Hundreds of thousands of them. Over two million people are living in this wilderness together, carrying everything they own, following a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And right at the very center of all those tents, right in the heart of this enormous camp, something has appeared that was never there before. Something that changed everything about who these people were and whose they were.

Today we are going to find out what was at the center of that camp, why it mattered so much, and why it still matters to every single one of us today.

While Moses was on top of Mount Sinai, something incredible was happening. God was giving Moses the most detailed set of instructions anyone had ever received. Instructions for something called the tabernacle. Say that word with me: tab-er-na-cle. The tabernacle was a special tent, not an ordinary tent, but a sanctuary, a holy place, God's very own dwelling place that His people could carry with them through the wilderness.

Now, let us hear our memory verse right now, because it is the heart of everything we are going to learn. God says these words to Moses in Exodus 25, verse 8: 'Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.' Say it with me. 'Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.' Exodus 25, verse 8. Did you hear what God said? I will dwell among them. Not above them. Not watching from far away. Among them. Right in the middle of them. That is our God.

Someone might wonder: why would the God who made the entire universe want to live in a tent? And that is a fair question. God does not need anything. He does not need a building. He does not need furniture. He fills everything with His presence. But here is what you need to understand: the tabernacle was not for God. It was for the people. God was giving His people a visible, physical, real place where they could know without any doubt: He is truly here. He is truly with us. He has not left us.

He is among us.

The instructions God gave were extraordinary. He told Moses exactly how big to make every piece. Exactly what materials to use. Exactly what colors. Gold and silver and bronze. Blue and purple and scarlet yarn. Fine linen and goat hair and ram skins. Acacia wood and olive oil and precious stones. The instructions went on for chapter after chapter. Some people read all those details and wonder why God cares so much about the length of a curtain or the number of hooks on a frame. Here is why: because every single detail was telling a story. Every piece of furniture, every color, every curtain was a picture of something much bigger that God was going to do one day. When you understand the tabernacle, you begin to understand Jesus. And that is exactly where we are headed.

Now here is something worth thinking about. When the tabernacle was finished and the camp was organized, God gave Moses very specific instructions about how the twelve tribes of Israel were to arrange themselves. They were to camp in four groups, one group on each side of the tabernacle: to the east, to the south, to the west, and to the north. The tribe of Levi surrounded the tabernacle most closely, caring for it day and night. The tabernacle was at the very center, and the people stretched outward from it in every direction.

Here is something beautiful about that arrangement. When you look at it from above, from the sky, looking down at the camp with the tabernacle at the center and the people stretching outward to the east and west and north and south, you see the shape of a cross. The Bible does not tell us God planned it specifically that way, so we say it carefully. But the picture is worth seeing. The place where God dwelled was at the center, and His people reached outward in every direction like arms. And one day, the God who lived in the center of that camp would stretch out His own arms on a cross to bring every nation, every tribe, every person back to Himself.

Let us step inside the tabernacle and see what was there. There were three areas, three zones, each one representing a deeper nearness to God than the one before.

The first area was called the outer court. This was an open courtyard surrounded by curtains. Any Israelite could come here. This is where the large bronze altar stood, the place where animal sacrifices were offered. When an Israelite sinned and wanted to come to God, they would bring an animal. A priest would offer it on the altar. Something innocent died in the place of the guilty. It was a preview, a picture of a day when the perfect, innocent Lamb of God would do this once and for all. Also in the outer court was a large bronze basin where the priests had to wash before entering the holy tent. Before coming into God's presence, they had to be clean. It was a picture of what sin does to us and what we need from God: cleansing.

The second area was called the Holy Place. This was inside the tent itself, and only priests could enter here. Inside the Holy Place were three pieces of furniture, and each one was full of meaning.

On one side stood the golden lampstand, what many people call the menorah. It held seven lamps that were never, ever allowed to go out. Day or night, light always burned in God's presence. Do you know what Jesus said about Himself? He said, 'I am the light of the world.' That lampstand was a picture of Jesus, the light that never goes out, the light that no darkness can ever overcome.

Across from the lampstand stood a table holding twelve loaves of fresh bread, one for each tribe of Israel. They were always there, always present, always representing the people before God. Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life.' The person who comes to Me will never go hungry. That bread on the table was a picture of Him.

In front of the innermost curtain stood the altar of incense. Morning and evening, the priests burned special fragrant spices on this altar. The sweet-smelling smoke rose up before God. Psalm 141 says, 'May my prayer be set before you like incense.' Those rising prayers were a picture of God's people coming to Him and being heard. Jesus, even now, stands before the Father and intercedes for us, for everyone who belongs to Him.

Now here is where we come to something very serious and very beautiful at the same time. Behind the altar of incense hung a thick, heavy curtain. This was called the veil. And behind the veil was the third area: the Most Holy Place. This is where the presence of God was most fully known. And no one was allowed to go in there. No one at all, with one exception: the High Priest, the chief priest of Israel, and only once per year, on one special day called the Day of Atonement.

Children, that curtain was not simply a beautiful piece of fabric. That curtain was saying something true and serious about reality. It was saying: sin creates a real distance between people and a holy God. There is a gap we cannot close on our own. The curtain made that distance visible so no one could forget it was there.

Inside the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant. It was a beautiful gold-covered wooden chest. Inside the chest were the stone tablets with God's commandments, a jar of manna that God had given His people in the wilderness, and Aaron's rod that had budded as a sign of God's chosen leadership. And on top of the ark was what was called the mercy seat, a golden covering with two golden angels facing each other with their wings spread. This is the place where God told Moses He would meet with His people. Think about that. The law, God's commandments, was on the inside. Mercy was on top. The just demands of God's Word were covered by grace. Even in the design of this one piece of furniture, God was telling the story of what He was going to do through Jesus.

Let us say our memory verse together right now, because this is exactly the moment to remember it. 'Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.' Exodus 25, verse 8. God made a place where mercy could meet His people.

Before we talk about what happened when the tabernacle was finished, there is something important about who built it. God did not just hand Moses blueprints and say, figure it out. He appointed specific men by name to do the skilled work. A man named Bezalel from the tribe of Judah, and a man named Oholiab from the tribe of Dan. And God said something remarkable: He had filled them with His Spirit, with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill to build everything exactly as He had commanded. God did not just design the tabernacle. He equipped the people who built it. He filled them with His Spirit to do what He had asked them to do. And that same Spirit still works today, filling God's people to do what He has called them to do.

Now we come to the moment that takes everyone's breath away. The people worked and worked. They gave generously from what they had, their gold and silver, their fine fabric, their skills. In fact, they gave so generously that Moses had to tell them to stop. They had more than enough. When everything

was finally complete, built exactly as God had commanded, something happened that no one there would ever forget. God tells us in Exodus 40, verses 34 and 35: 'Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.'

God moved in.

The same God who had thundered from the mountain. The same God whose holiness was so overwhelming that Moses could not look at His face. He moved into a tent in the middle of a dusty wilderness camp and filled it with His glory from floor to ceiling. The cloud that had led them through the desert. The pillar of fire that had burned through the dark nights. It rested on the tabernacle. God was among His people.

Now, someone might wonder: did all of this really happen? It can seem like a lot to believe. But here is something to think about. Made-up religion tends to be vague and general. It deals in feelings and impressions. What we find in Exodus is specific, physical, and measurable. Exact dimensions. Real materials. Named craftsmen. Named tribes with numbered people. These are the details of something that actually happened. And hundreds of years after the tabernacle was built, the writers of the New Testament reference it as real history without a second thought. The book of Hebrews describes the furniture. The apostle John writes about Jesus using the language of the tabernacle. The whole Bible treats this account as something that truly happened. Because it did.

And now here is the most beautiful part of everything we have learned today. Hundreds of years after the tabernacle was carried through the wilderness, something happened that fulfilled everything it was ever pointing toward. The Gospel of John begins with these words: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And then, in John chapter 1, verse 14, we read: 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.'

Do you know what the word for made his dwelling means in the original language? It means tabernacled. Literally. The Word of God, Jesus Himself, God the Son, set up His tent among us. He moved into the camp. Not in a curtained sanctuary. Not in a tent of fabric and acacia wood. But in a body of flesh and blood. God came to dwell among His people in human skin.

And do you remember that thick curtain, the veil, the one that said sin keeps us from the full presence of a holy God? Do you remember what happened to it? When Jesus died on the cross, Matthew 27, verse 51 tells us that the curtain of the temple, the successor to that original tabernacle veil, was torn in two from top to bottom. Not from bottom to top, as a person might tear it. From top to bottom. God tore it. God Himself. He was announcing to the whole world in that moment: the barrier is gone. The way is open. Every person who trusts in Jesus can come close. Not once a year. Not through a priest. Any moment. Every day. Come close.

Jesus is the true tabernacle. He is the true High Priest who enters God's presence not with the blood of animals but with His own blood, obtaining eternal forgiveness for everyone who trusts in Him. He is the Lamb of God, the true sacrifice that takes away sin completely and permanently. He is the light of the world and the bread of life. He is the way to the Father. Every piece of furniture in that wilderness tent was a picture of Him, painted centuries before He was born.

Let us say our memory verse one more time together. Because now it means something even deeper than when we first said it. 'Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.' Exodus 25, verse 8. God has always wanted to be near His people. He made a way in the wilderness. He made the ultimate and final way in Jesus. And because of Jesus, you can come close to God right now, today, any time you need Him. The curtain is torn. The way is open. Nothing has to keep you away.

SECTION 6 WHY WE CAN TRUST GOD'S WORD

The tabernacle instructions in Exodus are extraordinarily specific: exact dimensions, named materials, numbered craftsmen, identified tribes. Invented religion tends to be vague. What God gives Moses is measurable and physical. The New Testament references the tabernacle as settled history, not legend. Hebrews 9:1-5 describes the furnishings without any sense of defending whether they existed. John 1:14 uses the language of tabernacling to describe the Incarnation. The whole Bible is one unified account, and every part of it points to Jesus.

Honest questions about the Bible are welcome. God does not ask us to stop thinking. He asks us to trust His Word, which has proven itself faithful across thousands of years of history.

SECTION 7 WHAT THIS SHOWS US ABOUT JESUS

The Tabernacle:	Jesus is the true tabernacle. In John 1:14, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. God in human form, dwelling with His people just as He had dwelled in the tent.
The High Priest:	Jesus is our great High Priest who entered the true Most Holy Place in heaven with His own blood, obtaining eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 4:14; 9:12).
The Sacrifice:	Every animal sacrifice in the tabernacle was a preview. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the one sacrifice that actually and permanently works (John 1:29; Hebrews 9:26).
The Veil:	When Jesus died, God tore the temple curtain from top to bottom. The way to God is now fully open to everyone who comes through Jesus. There is no more barrier (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19-20).
The Gospel:	Jesus lived without sin. He died on the cross for sinners. He rose again. Everyone who trusts in Him is forgiven, welcomed into God's presence, and will be with Him forever.

SECTION 8 GOD REVEALED AS TRINITY

God is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In this passage we see all three at work. God the Father gives the command and moves into the tabernacle with His glory. God the Son is previewed in every piece of furniture, the light, the bread, the sacrifice, the High Priest, and will one day become the true tabernacle in human flesh (John 1:14). God the Holy Spirit fills Bezalel and Oholiab for the skilled work of building (Exodus 31:3). The same Spirit who equipped those craftsmen lives in every believer today (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father. One God. Three Persons. Always together. Always distinct. Always fully God.

SECTION 9 LIFE APPLICATION

Prayer:	Because Jesus tore the curtain, children can talk to God any time. They are not interrupting. They are not too small. The way is open. Teach them to come boldly (Hebrews 4:16).
Guilt:	When children sin and feel far from God, remind them: Jesus opened the way back. Confession is not crawling through a locked door. It is walking through a door Jesus already opened wide.
Worship:	Understanding the tabernacle changes how children worship. They are not going through motions. They are drawing near to the God who designed this very nearness and paid for it with His Son.
Everyday life:	God wants to be in the middle of everything, just as the tabernacle was in the center of the camp. Help children see that God belongs at the center of their school day, their friendships, their family life, not just Sunday morning.

SECTION 10 DEFENDING THE TRUTH

Question:	Why does the Bible have so many details about a tent? It sounds boring.
Answer:	Those details are one of the reasons we can trust the Bible. Real events have real details. And every detail in the tabernacle was telling a story about Jesus. Once you see the connections, the tent is one of the most exciting things in the whole Old Testament.
Scripture:	Hebrews 9:1-5 lists the tabernacle furnishings as historical fact. John 1:14 uses the language of tabernacling to describe the Incarnation of Jesus.
Say it kindly:	'That is actually a great question. All those details are clues. Every single piece of furniture was pointing to Jesus. Want to find out how?'

SECTION 11 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CORE QUESTIONS FOR ALL AGES

Q1	What is a tabernacle?
	A special tent that God commanded His people to build so He could live in the center of their camp. It was His dwelling place in the wilderness.
Q2	What did God say He would do in Exodus 25:8? (Memory verse)
	He said He would dwell among His people. He wanted to live with them, right in the middle of their camp.
Q3	What were the three zones of the tabernacle, and who could go into each one?
	The outer court: all Israelites. The Holy Place: priests only. The Most Holy Place: only the High Priest, once a year.
Q4	What was the veil and what did it mean?
	The thick curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. It showed that sin creates a real distance between people and a holy God, a distance people could not cross on their own.
Q5	What happened to the curtain when Jesus died?
	It tore from top to bottom. God tore it Himself, showing that the barrier between us and God was gone because of Jesus.
Q6	How is Jesus like the tabernacle?
	Jesus tabernacled among us in human flesh (John 1:14). He is the true High Priest, the true sacrifice, and the one who makes the way to God fully open.
Q7	Why did God fill Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit?
	To give them the skill and wisdom to build the tabernacle exactly as God commanded. God equips the people He calls to do His work.
Q8	Because of Jesus, can we come close to God? When?
	Yes. Any time. Every day. The curtain is torn. The way is open. We come through Jesus.

OPTIONAL DEEPER QUESTIONS

D1	Why did God need so many details in the instructions?
	Every detail was telling a story about God's holiness, His grace, and what Jesus would one day do. Nothing was random. God was painting a picture of the Gospel in wood, gold, and fabric.
D2	If God is everywhere, why did the tabernacle matter?
	God chose that place to make His presence known in a visible, tangible way His people could see and respond to. It was a gift to them, not a need of His.

D3	What does the arrangement of the camp in the shape of a cross tell us?
	It is a beautiful picture, even if the Bible does not state it as God's explicit design. The dwelling place of God was at the center, and His people reached outward in every direction. That is the shape of the Gospel. Jesus at the center, arms stretched wide for everyone.

SECTION 12 HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

Activity Name:	Build the Tabernacle
Purpose:	Help children understand the three zones and what each piece of furniture points to in Jesus.
Supplies:	One sheet of paper per child, pencils or crayons. Optional: a simple printed diagram of the tabernacle layout to reference.
Time Needed:	10 to 12 minutes
Prep:	No advance preparation required.
Instructions:	Have children fold their paper into thirds. Label the three sections: Outer Court, Holy Place, Most Holy Place. In each section, draw the furniture that belongs there. Label each piece. Then beside each piece of furniture, write or say one way it points to Jesus: lampstand = light of the world, bread = bread of life, incense = our prayers are heard, mercy seat = Jesus covers our sin, sacrifice = Jesus died for us.
Scripture Link:	Exodus 25:8 and John 1:14. God designed every detail to point to Jesus.
Debrief:	Which piece of furniture surprised you the most? Which one helps you understand Jesus better?
Ages 5 to 7:	Focus only on the outer court and the ark. Have them draw the altar (the sacrifice) and the mercy seat. Tell them: Jesus is our sacrifice and our mercy.
Ages 8 to 11:	Challenge them to find one more New Testament verse that connects to one of the tabernacle pieces on their own.

SECTION 13 OPTIONAL REVIEW GAME

Game Name:	Tabernacle Zones
Purpose:	Reinforce the three zones and the furniture through a quick team review.
Supplies:	None required.
How to Play:	Divide children into two teams. Teacher calls out a piece of furniture or a zone. First team to correctly name which zone it belongs in AND what it points to in Jesus scores a point. End with the memory verse: say it together for a bonus point per team.

Review Questions

Q: What zone could any Israelite enter?	A: The outer court.
Q: What happened at the bronze altar?	A: Animal sacrifices were offered. Something innocent died for the guilty.
Q: What was in the Holy Place?	A: The golden lampstand, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense.
Q: Who could enter the Most Holy Place?	A: Only the High Priest, once a year.
Q: What was the veil?	A: The thick curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.
Q: What happened to the curtain when Jesus died?	A: God tore it from top to bottom. The way to God was opened.
Q: Say our memory verse.	A: Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Exodus 25:8.

SECTION 14 TEACHER CLOSING

TEACHER CLOSING

Children, today you have seen something remarkable. You have seen that God has always wanted to be near you. He designed a tent in the wilderness so He could live right in the middle of His people. He filled it with His glory. He was there.

And then, at exactly the right time, He came Himself. Jesus, God the Son, moved into the world in a human body. He lived a perfect life. He died on the cross to take away the guilt and the sin that kept us far from God. And when He died, God tore the curtain that had stood between us and His presence. The way was open.

If you have never trusted Jesus, you can do that today. It is not complicated. You simply tell God that you know you have sinned, that you believe Jesus died for you and rose again, and that you are trusting Him. That is faith. And faith is the door.

If you already know Jesus, remember this: the way to God is always open for you. You can come to Him any time. When you are scared. When you have done something wrong. When you just want to talk to Him. The curtain is torn. The invitation is real. Come close.

Let us say our memory verse one final time together. 'Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.' Exodus 25, verse 8. He still wants to dwell among His people. He still wants to dwell with you.

Let us pray.

Father, thank You that You are not a God who stays far away. Thank You for the tabernacle that showed us what You were going to do. Thank You for Jesus, who is everything the tabernacle was pointing to. Thank You that the way is open. Help each child here today to come close to You, through Jesus, who made the way. In His name. Amen.

SECTION 15 TAKEAWAY TRUTH

God designed a way to be near His people, and that way is Jesus.