

# THE LAW: A SHADOW OF THE GOOD THINGS TO COME

Exodus 40:1–16 • Brian Brodersen

## Introduction:

*At this lonely place in the midst of the chaos of the wilderness, a new creation comes into being. In the midst of disorder there is order. The tabernacle (pictures) the world order as God intended ...*

*The priests of the sanctuary going about their appointed courses is like everything in creation performing its liturgical service—the sun, the trees, human beings. The people of Israel carefully encamped around the tabernacle in their midst constitutes the beginnings of God's bringing creation back to what it was originally intended to be ...*

*In and through this people, God is on the move to a new creation for all. God's presence in the tabernacle is a statement about God's intended presence in the entire world. The glory manifest there is to stream out into the larger world ... As a kingdom of priests, they have a role of mediating this glory to the entire cosmos.*

Terrence Fretheim

As the presence of God among Israel was seen through the tabernacle in their midst, upon closer inspection, the Tabernacle was also a reminder of their inability to freely and directly access God. The Tabernacle consisted of the outer court, the sanctuary, and the most holy place. The people could come only to the outer court, only the priest could enter the sanctuary, and only the high priest could enter the most holy place once a year, not without the blood of a sacrificial lamb.

Listen to what Hebrews says,

*For a tabernacle was set up, and in the first room, which is called the holy place, were the lampstand, the table, and the consecrated bread. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the most holy place. It had the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant, covered with gold on all sides, in which was a gold jar containing the manna, Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. The cherubim of glory were above the ark overshadowing the mercy seat ... With these things prepared like this, the priests enter the first room repeatedly, performing their ministry. But the high priest alone enters the second room, and he does that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins the people have committed in ignorance.*

*The Holy Spirit was making it clear that the way into the most holy place had not yet been made accessible while the first tabernacle was still standing.*

Hebrews 9:2–8

God was among them, but still, to some degree, separated from them due to their sin. For fellowship with God to be experienced and maintained, sin had to be dealt with and only “blood can make atonement for the soul.” This necessitated a sacrificial system with a priesthood to mediate, through sacrifice between God and the people.

In our last study, we saw how God had covenanted with the people and given them the Law—the Ten Words—which began with, “I am Yahweh your God, you shall have no other gods before me.” The people agreed with the covenant, yet before Moses had returned with the tablets of the covenants, the people had

already broken the commands by making a golden calf and hailing it as the god who brought them out of Egypt.

**1. Atonement**—The reality of Israel’s sin required an atoning (covering) sacrifice for fellowship with Yahweh to be maintained.

- a. Burnt Offering, Grain Offering, Peace Offering, Sin Offering, Trespass Offering

*Peace and fellowship between a human being and God could not be achieved as long as sin created a barrier between them, so means had to be found to deal with that problem. Sin could be either unintentional or by choice. The rituals of Leviticus provided atonement only for unintentional sin. The person who sinned by choice (defiantly, HEB: high-handed) was forever cut off from God’s people.*

*The removal of unintentional sin required appropriate sacrifices. These included not only the bull and lamb but also the goat, dove, or even grain. The nature of the offering depended on the status of the offerer. Thus the sin of the priest required a bull, the blood of which was sprinkled within the holy place of the tabernacle. The purification of the whole congregation required the same as for the priest.*

*The unintentional sin of a ruler was atoned by the sacrifice of a male goat, the blood being applied to the great altar. An ordinary person presented a female goat or lamb or even, if poor, two doves or a mere handful of flour. When all of this was done with proper ritual and intent, the sin would be forgiven.*

- b. The sacrifices, like the entire covenant itself, was both a temporary and incomplete measure unable to truly and permanently purify the people.

Again, the author of Hebrews explains:

*“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”*

Hebrews 10:1–4

- c. Those sacrifices, the priesthood and the entire Levitical system was ultimately a sign pointing on to the greater and better tabernacle, priesthood and sacrifice—Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

**2. Shadow of Good Things to Come**

- a. Tabernacle: “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld his glory, as of the one and only Son of the Father.” John 1:14
- b. High Priesthood: “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come ... Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the most holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption.” Hebrews 9:11-12
- c. Sacrifice: “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Hebrews 9:14

### 3. A Spiritual House, a Holy Priesthood

- a. “God’s presence in the tabernacle is a statement about God’s intended presence in the entire world. The glory manifest there is to stream out into the larger world... As a kingdom of priests, they have a role of mediating this glory to the entire cosmos.” Fretheim

This privilege, which was originally given to Israel in the overarching redemptive plan of God, has been passed on to us through our great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God.

Peter picks up on these ideas when he writes:

*“You like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

- Living Stones (a spiritual house): God’s presence among the people.
- Holy Priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices—the fruit of the lips that give thanks and praise to his name ... Intercession

*“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

*“The church is both a ‘royal priesthood’ to offer spiritual sacrifices to God (which is worship) and a ‘holy nation’ to spread abroad God’s praises (which is witness). Every Christian congregation is called by God to be a worshiping, witnessing community. Indeed, each of these two duties necessarily involves the other. If we truly worship God... we find ourselves impelled to make him known to others, in order that they may worship him too. The church has a double identity. We are a people who have been called out of the world to worship God and sent back into the world to witness and serve. These are, in fact, two of the classical “marks” of the church. According to the first the church is “holy” called out to belong to God and to worship him. According to the second, the church is “apostolic,” sent out into the world on its mission.”*

John Stott

**Close:** The story of the people is the story of redemption through blood. Through the blood of the lamb in Egypt, and through the blood of the sacrifices in both the Tabernacle and the temple in the wilderness and in the land. But as we’ve seen, those sacrifices could never truly take away sin, they could only cover it until the One to whom they pointed came. The One who said, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.’”

#### Communion

A body you have prepared for me ...