

EXODUS 35–40; LEVITICUS 1; 16; 19

Introduction

This “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers Exodus 35–40; Leviticus 1; 16; and 19.

The LDS resources for this week come in two sections:

[Thoughts to Keep In Mind: The Tabernacle and Sacrifice](#)

[Commentary on Exodus 35–40; Leviticus 1; 16; and 19](#)

LDS Study Focus

When we understand the symbolism of the tabernacle and animal sacrifice, we can gain spiritual insights that will also strengthen our faith in Christ. ([Thoughts to Keep In Mind: The Tabernacle and Sacrifice](#))

Leaving Egypt—as important and miraculous as that was—didn’t fully accomplish God’s purposes for the children of Israel. Even future prosperity in the promised land wasn’t God’s ultimate objective for them. These were only steps toward what God really wanted for His people: “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). How did God seek to make His people holy when they had known nothing but captivity for generations?

He commanded them to create a place of holiness to the Lord—a tabernacle in the wilderness. He gave them covenants and laws to guide their actions and, ultimately, to change their hearts. And when they fell short in their efforts to keep those laws, He commanded them to make animal sacrifices to symbolize atonement for their sins.

All of this was meant to point their minds, their hearts, and their lives toward the Savior and the redemption He offers. He is the true path to holiness, for the Israelites and for us. We have all spent some time in the captivity of sin, and we are all invited to repent—to leave sin behind and follow Jesus Christ, who has promised, “I am able to make you holy” (Doctrine & Covenants 60:7). ([Commentary on Exodus 35–40; Leviticus 1; 16; and 19](#))

Although the LDS commentary states, “He (Jesus) is the true path to holiness,” this does not mean the same thing in Mormonism as in Christianity. The commentary provides subtle yet significant insights into LDS theology and its holiness concepts.

The LDS commentary for this section of scripture points several times to [“The Beauty of Holiness,”](#) an LDS 2017 General Conference talk from Carol F. McConkie. The following quote gives insight into how Mormonism teaches about holiness and how one obtains it.

Holiness is in the striving and the struggle to keep the commandments and to honor the covenants we have made with God. Holiness is making the choices that will keep the Holy Ghost as our guide. Holiness is setting aside our natural tendencies and becoming “a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.” “Every moment of [our lives] must be holiness to the Lord.”

How does holiness occur in LDS theology? It begins with “striving” and “struggle to keep the commandments, followed by “making choices that will keep the Holy Spirit as our guide” and, finally, “becoming a saint through the atonement of Christ.” This backward order is just one of the many places in LDS theology where seeing Jesus first as an example rather than a substitute distorts and destroys true doctrine and faith. This improper order is emphasized and elaborated on in the Plan of Salvation and the LDS temple system, as one is encouraged to become worthy and progress in holiness.

How does holiness occur in Biblical theology? It begins with Jesus's atonement offered and received through the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit that grants one the status of a saint. Then, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a believer lives out their life as a sanctified and set-apart child of God. This status and being set-apart results in a desire to live a life that honors God's commandments as believers lovingly serve their fellow man. This proper order is emphasized and elaborated on in the biblical tabernacle/temple system, most significantly in its ultimate festival, The Great Day of Atonement, which we will cover in-depth later in this study.

Furthermore, the three-section headings and the order of McConkie's ["The Beauty of Holiness"](#) talk are also very telling. Notice how the order is again backward from how the Bible and even the chapters under consideration describe "being made holy" and "living lives of holiness."

- **Holiness Is Keeping Our Covenants**
 - "Most often it is the sacrifices we make to keep our covenants that sanctify us and make us holy."
 - "If we will keep the associated covenants, the sacred priesthood ordinances will change us, sanctify us, and prepare us to enter the presence of the Lord."
- **Holiness Is Taking the Holy Ghost as Our Guide**
 - "Holiness is a gift of the Spirit. We accept this gift when we choose to do those things that will increase the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost in our lives."
 - "Let us take time to be holy, that we may be filled with His sacred and sanctifying Spirit. With the Holy Ghost as our guide, we will be prepared to receive the Savior in the beauty of holiness."
- **Holiness Is Becoming a Saint through the Atonement of Jesus Christ**
 - "According to the inspired words of King Benjamin, those who become saints through the Atonement of Jesus Christ are those who are submissive, meek, humble, patient, and full of love, as the Savior is."
 - "May we do our best to keep our covenants and take the Holy Ghost as our guide. With faith in Jesus Christ, we become saints through His Atonement, that we may receive immortality and eternal life and give God our Father the glory due His name. May our lives ever be a sacred offering, that we may stand before the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

The improper order presented for holiness to the Lord is 1) make and keep covenants, 2) take the Holy Spirit as a guide to receive the Savior in the beauty of holiness, and 3) become a saint through the atonement of Christ. The backward order, which starts with humanity and its efforts and ends with Jesus and the atonement, is LDS theology at its very best worst.

The whole LDS temple system wrongly assumes that man can make and keep covenants and strive to keep the commandments to become worthy of continuing to progress through the ordinances required in the temple system. LDS theology bases this assumption on the faulty premise that all people are children of God; in fact, gods in embryo with divine potential and the ability to [choose the right](#) and become holy through their efforts. In contrast, the Bible says that all people are born as enemies of God with a nature that, apart from faith, is only evil.

Biblical Focus

Throughout this study, we will see that humanity cannot become holy through its work and movement toward God; instead, it is God who works and moves toward humans.

Unlike the LDS temple focus on holiness “to” the Lord, biblically, the tabernacle focuses on holiness “of” the Lord. Sometimes, the smallest of prepositions are the most telling difference between Mormonism and Christianity.

In Exodus and Leviticus, first, with rules, rituals, and restrictions, holy God demonstrated how humans are divided/separated from him because of their sinfulness.

Second, God bridged this divide and justified his people through bloody sacrifice fulfilled in Christ and sanctified them through cleansing and consumption. God DID all this so that he could reside and fellowship with the people he set apart from the pagan nations around them.

Third, as a people made holy, God directed them to live holy lives as his set-apart (sanctified) people, “You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own” (Leviticus 20:26).

The Tabernacle Teaches About the Problem of Sin and its Solution

With sights, sounds, and smells, God used justifying sacrifices and sanctifying rituals to teach his people about the problem of sin and death and the solution he would provide for them through the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The tabernacle’s furniture and each ceremony and festival ultimately pointed the people to Christ and the holiness he credited to them through faith.

The Tabernacle Was Part of God’s Plan to Save His People

In the chapters for study this week, God’s people constructed the tabernacle and its furniture in obedience to the Lord’s explicit direction. Moreover, God was the one who determined where and how they worshiped. This direction and determination distinguished this God and his people from the Pagan gods and people of the day, which designed their worship spaces and sacrifices “to gain the gods’ favor” and “presence.” Unsurprisingly, the modern LDS temple system functions similarly in its Plan of Salvation, with one working to gain God’s favor and presence. But, in contrast, God commanded his people to worship him according to his plan of salvation, as he provided and conferred them with his favor and presence.

The Tabernacle Provides An Incredible Opportunity for Witnessing to Christ

Mormons are more familiar with temples than Christians, who have never participated in temple rituals. However, with a little bit of study, Christians can use Mormons’ interest in and knowledge of modern LDS temples as an opportunity to discuss the Old Testament tabernacle and temple in a way that points to the atoning work of Christ.

In addition to the regular Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament study materials, we have put together a separate resource to use to witness to Christ from the tabernacle. This Tabernacle Tour Guide walks through the chapters of Exodus 24–40, highlighting how each piece of furniture and rite preached a message of sin and grace, death and life, distance and restoration. After reading through the following materials, check out the guide for witnessing opportunities and your own edification.

EXODUS 35–40

The Tabernacle

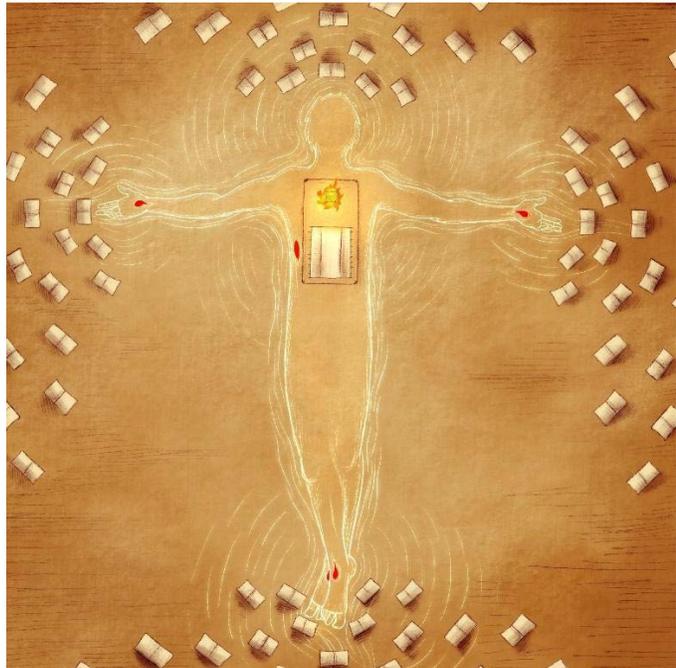
The tabernacle's construction took place on the heels of the golden calf offense. The Israelites had become acquainted with the reality of their sinfulness, and God had threatened them with deserved annihilation. But God, rich in mercy and abounding in love, forgave their sins and reclaimed them as his people. The Lord then told his people to build a tabernacle and bring some of their resources.

In response to God's grace, the people gave and gave, and Moses even had to force them to stop giving because they gave too much. This incredible response to God's love is a beautiful example of what prompts good works in the hearts of believers. The people responded *from* the love of God with love *for* God and gladly gave to build his tabernacle among them.

This home, however, wasn't a place God needed humanity to provide for him to live; instead, it was a place specifically designed for his guest, his family. **The tabernacle was a relational home built for God's ongoing interaction with his people.**

The temple was not about people working for God but rather about God working for them. It was all about showing what God would do for humanity in Jesus Christ.

The tabernacle pointed back to Eden and was a preview of the future incarnation of the Messiah. Exodus 40 reflects the language of the creation story in Genesis 1 and the Garden of Eden, where God dwelled with his people. Since the fall into sin, all creation suffered separation from God caused by sin. The tabernacle was a place where God again resided with his people.



Later, Jesus was the literal fulfillment of the tabernacle. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." The word "dwelt" literally is "tabernacle." Jesus is Immanuel, *God with us*. Jesus came to "*tabernacle*" among us.

This elaborate and intricate tabernacle was the physical representation of God's house on earth. Every aspect of God's house teaches us something about him and how he interacts with his people. God designed the tabernacle as his great wilderness classroom.

- Its structure stressed that sin separates humanity from God.
- Its sacrifices portrayed the principle of substitutionary sacrifice and pointed to Jesus.
- Its sights, sounds, and smells preached a consistent and continual sermon.

Each object in the tabernacle had its designed and essential purpose of providing and pointing to the justification and sanctification supplied in the atonement of Jesus.

Additional Resources: A Tabernacle Tour Guide

The LDS resources for this week encourage readers to speculate on what each temple object represents. Many Mormons will undoubtedly seek to connect the Old Testament tabernacle/temple and modern LDS temples. Building on this, fruitful witnessing conversations can occur as you **tour the tabernacle** with your Mormon friends and family.

An easy way to engage in fruitful conversation is to ask the Mormon you are interacting with to tell you about LDS temples and their significance. Ask them to give you a descriptive tour of the rooms and what happens in each. They will appreciate your curiosity. As you listen carefully, ask questions to gain clarity, **however**, resist the urge to debate the necessity of the temple and the basis for each temple ordinance. Instead, after letting them share fully, say, “Thanks for the temple tour, I better understand their function and purpose. Would you mind if we looked at the tabernacle in the Bible? I would love to examine and explore its function and purpose with you. I think you will find it fascinating.”

Then take out your Bible and turn to the book of Exodus. Begin with chapter 24 and work your way progressively through chapter 40. Don’t try to read or highlight everything. There is too much for one sitting. Instead, focus on the parts that point to Christ and what he would accomplish. If you aren’t sure where to start, we have your back. We put together **A Tabernacle Tour Guide** that you could research and use to walk through Exodus or print out and share it directly.

NOTE: The Mormon church is currently building dozens of new temples worldwide. There might be one under construction or planned in your area. If a Mormon friend, family member, or missionary invites you to attend an open house tour with them, accept their invitation based on your comfort level. Then use the tour as an opportunity to share Christ with them and other Mormons that you might encounter at the temple. You can use the same conversation format above. Take the tour with them, ask lots of questions, and then say, “Can we look at the tabernacle and temple in the Bible?”

[Take the tabernacle tour for yourself now](#) or continue reading for commentary and suggestions on witnessing from the remaining chapters in Leviticus.

Conversation Starters:

- **Imagine being an ancient Israelite participating in tabernacle worship in the wilderness.**
 - **What would the experience there teach you about God and his attitude toward sin?**
 - **What was the *structure* of the tabernacle designed to teach?**
 - **What were the *sacrifices* intended to teach?**

Sharing Personally

In Exodus 35–40, when I learn about the dwelling place of God, the tabernacle, I am struck by its relational design. The house of God wasn’t for his benefit and comfort, but it was the place where he met his people.

The tabernacle was God’s classroom in the wilderness. Its structure stressed that sin separated humanity from him. Its sacrifices demonstrated the wages of sin and the need for redemption.

Every animal that died in the tabernacle pointed forward to the rescue God would provide.

I am comforted knowing that the tabernacle was not about how people could work for God. Instead, it was all about showing us what God would do for humanity through Jesus Christ.

LEVITICUS 1

Sacrifice

Expanding on Exodus, the book of Leviticus contains God's instructions to his chosen nation, Israel, on how they were to worship him. For example, it has detailed instructions about the priests' duties and instructions on observing and obeying God's laws and the specifics of the sacrificial system.

In addition, Leviticus instructed God's people on how to interact with him and understand the need for any future fulfillment of redemption. God actively drew his people to him through deep meaning-filled rituals. These instructions were uniquely public and known to every Israelite. There were no secrets in the tabernacle, no hidden knowledge. God wanted his people to know and understand how to approach him. It was never a secret reserved for a select few.

Each sacrifice was a picture of the gospel. Every time the worshiper laid his hands upon the animal, his sins were conveyed to that animal connected to Christ's sacrifice. Then after that animal died, the worshiper was worthy of being before God. Sacrifice rituals were God's way of connecting to sinful people. The people became acceptable before him because of the animal's blood spilled and bodies sacrificed. All of this previewed the future sacrifice of the Messiah, Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the world's sins.

LEVITICUS 16

Day of Atonement and the Scapegoat

In addition to the daily and weekly sacrifices, God designated seven specific feasts that Israel was to celebrate each year. Each of these festivals is significant regarding the Lord's provision for his people. Each festival also foreshadows the coming Messiah and his work in redeeming people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. While Christians are no longer under any obligation to observe any of the Old Testament feasts (Colossians 2:16), we should understand their significance and importance nonetheless.

Discussions of the festivals provide witnessing potential as they are laden with law and gospel application. In addition, many Mormons are fascinated by Old Testaments rituals and stories like this that are never fully explained or examined in most of their circles.

To make "atonement" is to make restitution for wrongs committed.

As a day of humility and repentance to God, the great Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, was a time for God's chosen people to get their hearts, consciences, and lives right before him. Observances involved sacrificing animals as the high priest entered the Most Holy Place. What the high priest did there couldn't offer more than an annual payment for their sins. However, hiding in plain sight was the promise of one who could and would atone for their sins permanently (Hebrews 9:12).

By God's commandment, the high priest followed a specific protocol on Yom Kippur. First, he bathed and dressed in white linen raiments, an act of purification, before entering the Most Holy Place. Then the high priest made two sin offerings: a bull for his house and a goat for the people. Next, the priest would lay the sins of the people on the head of a second goat, chosen by lot as the "scapegoat." Finally, after the high priest spoke the sins and iniquities of the people and put them on the goat's head, the scapegoat was banished into the wilderness.

Where is Jesus in these sacrificed animals? The bull and one of the goats were offerings of thanks, but the *Azazel*, "scapegoat," took on their sins (Leviticus 16:10). The scapegoat was to be burdened with all the sins of Israel and sent into the wilderness. Chad Bird explains well:

This goat is not an innocent victim that bears the blame (as we colloquially say, “The boss is using Cindy as a scapegoat for his mistakes”). Rather, on Yom Kippur, the sins have already been atoned for by the first goat sacrificed (Leviticus 16:15–19). When the high priest lays his hands on the head of the Azazel goat, confesses, and sends him out into the wilderness, this goat bears witness not of guilt but of absolution. The goat goes to the devil, as it were, parading the atonement on the accuser’s own turf. When Jesus, after his death, descended into hell, he was parading before the enemy in a victory march that beat the drum of forgiveness. After the final Yom Kippur of Calvary, Satan had no claim on us. It is finished. (Chad Bird, *Unveiling Mercy*, 112)

Later, the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus, and they led him, burdened with the sins of all humanity, out of the city to crucify him. The Apostle John said, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Jesus’ death on the cross rendered the necessity of the Day of Atonement void, paying our debt in full!

In Leviticus 16:21, God commanded the priest, “He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task.” Our Lord and God fulfills this scapegoat type when he bears our sins in his body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).

Therefore, if we trust him, the hands in the picture are ours.

Finally, as a reminder that they could not atone for their sins, God’s chosen people were forbidden to do any work while atonement was being made **for them** on this holiest day (Leviticus 23:26–32; Numbers 29:7–11). What a powerful reminder of the need for substitution.



LEVITICUS 19

Be Holy

In addition to explaining and expanding on the Holy Days, Leviticus includes many commands designed to teach God’s people about living as holy and separate people from the nations around them.

At first glance it may be difficult to see any rhyme or reason to the arrangement. The structure becomes clear, however, the moment we realize the words “I am the Lord” mark the end of a thought. These words are in fact a key to understanding the entire book of Leviticus. Because God is the gracious Lord who would rescue and redeem his people, they were to evidence their gratitude by holy living. (Mark Lenz, *The People’s Bible: Leviticus*, 166)

Israel was to evidence its relationship with God by personal holiness, especially in matters of sexual behavior. Leviticus 19 further emphasizes the need for holiness in every other part of life.

Sharing Personally

Doesn't the sacrificial system God designed for Israel in Exodus sound terrible?

Kill an innocent animal, spill its blood, and sprinkle it on the people. Again and again, these terrible sacrifices were made.

All this reminds me of how terrible sin is. Because of sin, I deserve to have my blood poured out. I deserve to die. But God provided an innocent lamb, Jesus, to be sacrificed for me. The blame for my sin was placed upon him and removed from me. My deserved punishment was taken from him, and I was given life.

Praise the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

Conversation Starters:

- **How did the sacrificial system show the people their sins?**
- **How did the sacrificial system show the penalty for sin?**
- **How did the sacrificial system show what the coming Messiah would do?**
- **Why do we no longer need to follow the sacrificial system?**

Additional Resources:

Be sure to check out [A Tabernacle Tour Guide](#) for witnessing purposes and personal edification.

(Thanks to Christian artist Chris Powers for his words and beautiful images shared throughout this study.)