

Jun 3, 2017

Exodus 40:34-38

God's Exodus People: The Way of God's Presence

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Last week we talked about “The Gift of God’s Presence.” I spoke on why God’s presence matters for our lives and church, and how we can have God’s presence because of Jesus and grace. This week we’re looking at “The Way of God’s Presence”—the way God’s presence has come from Old to New Testament to today, and the way we long to know God’s presence now. Looking at the story of **God’s presence** from Genesis to Revelation helps us realize how valuable God’s presence is, and why we long for him.

Have you ever been on a **road trip**? How does that compare to a **business trip**? On a road trip, you want to get to your destination, but you also want to enjoy the journey, the highway, its sights, foods, and sounds. On a business trip, it’s all about getting to your project, getting the job done, and going home. Today, I want us to take a road trip through the Bible to taste the sights, foods, and sounds of God’s presence with his people. *We will get to the destination, but a little more slowly, and with a greater appreciation for it.*

The story of God's presence starts in **Genesis**. God creates a world where he lives with people. He speaks and walks with the first two people, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. But Adam and Eve choose to not trust God, and because of this, they and everyone after them are put out of God's presence.

But just a few chapters later, God introduces us to his **rescue plan** through the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God promises to bless Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:2-3). Through them he is going to bring a **rescuer** who will make it possible for God to dwell with people once more. *In the second book of the Bible, Exodus, something really special happens. God begins to dwell with his people once more.*

The presence of God comes.

God introduces himself to the descendants of Jacob, the **Israelites**, by delivering them from captivity in Egypt. When he leads them out of the land towards the Red Sea, he guides them as a **pillar of cloud** by day and as a **pillar of fire** by night (Ex 13:21). For the first time since Eden, people can once more hear and see God’s presence near them. But God is only a **travel guide** here. He hasn’t set up home yet, which is why he tells Moses to make a **tabernacle**, which literally means “dwelling-place.” In the tabernacle tent, God will be with his people. It’s at the tabernacle that we see the pillar of cloud, the presence, descend.

Tabernacle | 1444 B.C.¹

In 1444 B.C., between 1-2 years after they leave Egypt, the Israelites finish building the tabernacle. Moses inspects it, consecrates Aaron and his sons as priests, places the ten commandments—the covenant law the people have sworn to obey—in the most holy place in the tabernacle and finishes his work. As soon as Moses finishes (v. 33), the pillar of cloud that led them out of Egypt and spoke with Moses on Sinai descends.

Exodus 40:34-35 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. (NIV®)

¹ Date approximated from Accordance Bible Software Timeline.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

Notice how it says "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" two times (2x). This is really significant. God's presence in the cloud is descending on this tent. **Glory** means a **visible manifestation of God's presence**. God is showing himself to his people because he is their new neighbor. The Triune God, Yahweh, is somehow, mysteriously, calling this tent belonging to the poorest of peoples, ex-slaves, home.

God continues to call the tabernacle his home as the story continues. God goes with Israel to the promised lands, stays with them through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and continues to do so as they take over the promised land. After Moses dies, **Joshua** leads the Israelites, but after him the people begin to forget God and disobey again. So God sends foreign nations to punish the Israelites, who then cry out to God for mercy, and God sends Judges to rescue them. Eventually they ask for a king, and God says yes. They don't need a king, because God is with them, but they ask for one anyways.

Almost 500 years after the tabernacle is made, the second King of Israel, David, seeks to build Yahweh a more permanent home so God doesn't live in a tent when the king lives in a palace. God is honored, but tells him that his son must build it (2 Sam 7:12-13). David's son Solomon builds this new temple.

Temple | 953 B.C.²

It took Solomon **seven years** to build the temple, which he finished in 953 B.C. (1 Kings 6:38). When he finishes it, he brings the ark of the covenant into the temple, sets it down in the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, and when the priests leave this happens.

1 Kings 8:10-11 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. (NIV®)

Does this remind you of anything? It's almost exactly like what happened with the tabernacle. God's glory, his manifest presence, enters the temple to reside there. The temple wasn't an empty structure for housing empty religion. It was filled with the same life-giving presence of God that walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This is why both the tabernacle and the temple are filled with garden imagery (Ex 37:17-24, 1 Kings 6:29), with flowers, and blossoms, and cherubim, like the angel that cast Adam and Eve from Eden. At last, the presence of God seems to have a lasting home among his people. *The presence of God comes.*

Illustration: Although we don't do it anymore, for the first year of our ministry, Cornerstone sent out a **postcard** to anyone who moved into town, a new-mover's mailing list. We advertised to a five-mile radius around Westford, sending out approximately 139 postcards each month. That's a lot of people to move in and out of the area per month. Of those people, how many do you hear about? If they visit our church, sure, but otherwise we won't meet them unless they move into our neighborhood or our children become friends with them at school. Do you think you would hear about it if a retired governor, senator, or president moved into the area? What about a famous movie star? In the town I grew up in I heard a rumor that Sandra Bullock owned a house outside town in the mountains, but nobody ever saw her. Now what if God moved into our neighborhood, if he came in a cloud and everybody saw him move into a house on Graniteville Rd? That's a bit like what has happened for Israel with the tabernacle and temple. God has a new address in town. God is their new neighbor. The presence of God comes, and he stays... but not for long.

The presence of God goes.

At the end of the Pentateuch in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelite nation of the law once more. Moses says that if they obey, they'll receive **blessings**. But if they disobey, they'll receive **curses**. The

² Date from Eerdmans Dictionary by John M. Lundquist, "Temple," 1282.

worst curse of all is that **God's presence will leave** them (Deut 31:17-18). As Israel goes forward, they continually forget God, worship false idols, sin and do evil. God sends judges and prophets to tell them to repent and obey, but few do, so in the book of Ezekiel, a prophet gets a vision of God leaving.

Departure | 592 B.C.³

In Ezekiel's vision in 592 B.C., he sees the temple, and the glory of God. He watches as the cloud of glory (or presence) of God rises off the ark of the covenant and out into the courtyard of the temple. God's departure takes place in stages. He longs to be with his people. He doesn't want to leave them.

Ezekiel 10:4, 19 Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord... While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. (NIV®)

After the presence of God leaves the temple building and courtyard, he leaves the city and travels to the east.

Ezekiel 11:22-23 Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it. (NIV®)

This is massively devastating for the Israelites. God is gone. God has abandoned them, and it leads to **destruction**. Four years later, on **August 14th, 586 B.C.**, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon destroys the temple.⁴ God's presence and God's home are gone. All is lost. The Israelites go into exile without their God and without God's presence. God is missing. *The presence of God departs and doesn't return.*

Absence | 516 B.C.⁵

In 539 B.C., God sends the exiles home. They return from captivity, and begin to rebuild the temple. They finish rebuilding the **second temple** in 516 B.C., 70 years after it was initially destroyed. But notice what is missing when they finish rebuilding the temple.

Ezra 6:15-16 The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. (NIV®)

If you were to read the following couple verses, you would see the dedication of the temple, the priests, and Levites with lots of sacrifices (Ezra 6:17-18). But something is wrong. The presence of God doesn't return. The cloud doesn't come back. He stays away.

Illustration: When I was in seminary, I heard a chapel talk by a doctor. To illustrate one of his points he put up a slide of a chest x-ray, and asked us what was wrong. Now, we were seminary students not medical doctors, so we weren't very good at this game. But students studying to become doctors also struggled to find what was wrong. There was no mass, no cloudy region, no clear break. But there was something wrong. A bone was missing, gone. Absence, not presence, was the problem. What's wrong with the picture in Ezra?

³ Date from NIV Zondervan Study Bible, "Dates in Ezekiel," 1598.

⁴ Date from 2015 NIV Zondervan Study Bible, 2 Kings 25:8, 710.

⁵ Date from 2015 NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Ezra 6:15, 841.

The temple is rebuilt but God doesn't come back. God is absent, he doesn't come home. But there's a reason for this. *His absence is meant to make us long for his return.*

Long for the presence of God.

When we read Ezra, we're supposed to miss what Israel had with the tabernacle and first temple. Like little kids can't wait for **Christmas** or their **birthdays**, or an engaged couple longs for their **wedding day**, we're supposed to long for the presence of God in our story. Do you want him back? Do you want him in your life too? There's good news. Four years before Ezra finished the temple, God made a promise in 520 B.C. that he is going to build a final temple that is greater than the second one.

Promise | 520 B.C.⁶

In the book of Haggai, which is named after a prophet who told the people to get back to work building this second temple when they began focusing on other things, we read this prophecy.

Haggai 2:6-7 "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. (NIV®)

The prophet is telling us that God is going to fill his temple in a new and greater way. Do you want him to come? Remember the cold, long, **New England winter** we just had? Remember when it was February and people were asking how much longer till summer? Maybe you feel right now like it's winter, you can't sense God's presence, you wonder where he is. What if you had to wait over **500 years** for this promise to be fulfilled? That's one long winter. That's how long the world had to wait. But the wait was worth it, because this promise is fulfilled, not one, but **three (3) ways**:

Fulfillment 1: Christ | 6-4~ B.C.⁷

Somewhere between 6-4 B.C., we don't know the exact date for sure, Jesus was born. Jesus is the **manifest presence of God**. He is God's presence making a home with us. We actually see this in the gospel of John.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NIV®)

The word for dwelling means "to pitch a tent." The tabernacle is back and this time it's full of God's presence. In Jesus, God has tabernacled with us. In Jesus, God has sent up his tent on earth.

Application: It's at this point in the story that we all have to ask ourselves this question. *Do I want God to set up camp in my life?* The only way to know God's presence is by knowing Jesus. Putting your faith in Jesus isn't just a simple prayer of conversion, it's a **lifelong camping trip** with God. How about those of you who have been camping with Jesus for quite sometime, but you feel the **embers** beginning to die out? You feel nothing for him any more, no spark of God's presence. Last week we discussed cultivating a yearning for Christ through worship, prayer, fasting, and reading the Scriptures. This week I want to give you one more way, remember the **gospel**. In Jesus, God's presence died for our sins on the cross. In Jesus, God's presence took our punishment. In Jesus, God's presence rose again to new life so that we can live. Through faith in

⁶ Date from 2015 NIV Zondervan Study Bible, "Introduction to Haggai," 1851.

⁷ Date estimated from gotquestions.org "When was Jesus born?"

Jesus, I receive God's presence in my life. Through Jesus, my life is filled with God's presence. *Long for the presence of God by longing for Jesus.*

Fulfillment 2: Church | A.D. 30~8

The second fulfillment of God's presence coming to dwell among us is fulfilled at Pentecost. During his ministry, Jesus promised to send another helper, the Holy Spirit to all believers. In Acts chapter 2, right after Jesus' ascension into heaven, his disciples are worshiping together in an upper-room in Jerusalem when the presence of God comes just like he did in the tabernacle and temple.

Acts 2:2-4a Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit... (NIV®)

The same pillar of fire from Exodus comes to rest not on a building, but on each of the believers in the upper room. They are filled with the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God. This is a special event marking the arrival of God's glory, God's manifest presence now in the people of God. God's presence fills his church, his people. Jesus is the big tabernacle of God, but as we follow Jesus as the church, we too become little mini-tabernacles, mini-temples. This is why the Bible says we are God's temple (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19).

Application: Do we believe that the church is the temple of God? This also means that we on our own, without the church, are missing something. We still have God's presence through Christ, but we aren't a part of God's presence in the local church. There's something special that as we gather to worship God, as we're filled with the Holy Spirit, with God's special presence. Do you treat the church like it's full of God's presence? When you come here among these people, do you sense him? Do you long to be here among believers because we're encountering God? Is there nothing you wouldn't give or sacrifice to care for the church because we have the church house God's presence? *We long for God's special presence to fill our church.*

Fulfillment 3: Eternity | Unknown Hour

We've gone from Jesus to the church yesterday, and the church today, but where does this all end? One day at an hour none of us know, Christ will return, and God will fill the whole world with his special presence. The book of Revelation is a vision of this final day. In the second to the last chapter of Revelations, we see a vision of a New Heaven and New Earth and heaven and God coming down to dwell among us forever.

Revelation 21:3 "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (NIV®)

The word for dwelling, you guessed it, is "tent" or "tabernacle." One day, the fullness of the triune God will tabernacle in this whole world unrestrained by sin. A couple verses later it says there's no temple in this city because the "God almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev 21:22). And in the next chapter, the final chapter, it says the tree of life grows there. At the end of days, what awaits us all is a return to Eden where we will dwell once more live in God's presence (Rev 22:2).

Application: Do you want this day? Do you long for God's presence to fill this **world**? One day he will, he'll make everything new again. No matter what you're going through or where you're at, God promises that he will make it all right again. But until that day, you and I carry the presence of God with us into this world. We're little tabernacles setting up shop in our homes, neighborhood, offices, parks, and churches. As you go

⁸ Date adapted from gotquestions.org "When was Jesus born?"

through your week, be encouraged that one day God's presence will make everything right, and ask God how you can bring his presence with you wherever you're at. *Long for the presence of God for all of eternity.*

Long for the presence of Christ.

Maybe you still feel like it's winter in New England. You doubt. Will God ever come? Will I ever feel his presence? Why does he seem so far away? In the *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, a talking faun (half goat, half man) describes the land of Narnia as “Always winter and never Christmas.” It’s this way because a white witch has taken over the land, and Aslan, the king is gone.

But later in the story, another character talks about the coming of Aslan, and that one day he will return to the land of Narnia. The character, a talking beaver, shares this promise:

Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.⁹

Christ has come and defeated the wicked white witch, but sometimes it still feels like winter. Remember, that in Christ, winter will end and Christmas will come. On that day Jesus will come on the clouds of heaven and we will finally be with God face-to-face forevermore.

Long for the presence of Christ.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).

⁹ Lewis, C. S. (2013-11-05). *The Chronicles of Narnia Complete 7-Book Collection with Bonus Book: Boxen*. HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.