

I AM THANKFUL...

God chooses to dwell with us, *Revelation 21:1-4*

November concludes with Thanksgiving, a holiday intended to offer us a time to remember the blessing we enjoy. For us, the holiday provides us more than a chance to remember the many good things within our lives; it allows us to intentionally practice the thankfulness the Bible describes as an essential Christian characteristic (cf. *Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:18*). To help us focus on that part of our identity, we will use this month's Sundays to remind ourselves of some of the blessings God has given to us. We begin in this lesson by considering why we should be thankful for the places God chooses to dwell:

I am thankful because God chooses to dwell with us.

“The dwelling place of God is with man”¹

- Exodus through Deuteronomy dedicate about forty chapters to describing the tabernacle and its furnishings (the book of Exodus, by comparison, contains forty chapters). Consider a few passages that offer insights into why God devotes so much space to the tabernacle:
 - God designed the tabernacle to be His dwelling place in Israel's midst (*Exodus 25:8*).
 - Because it was to be His dwelling place, God designed the tabernacle according to “the pattern” of heaven (*Exodus 24:9-11, 15-18; 25:8-9*).
 - That pattern featured extensive use of Eden imagery in the tabernacle to emphasize its significance (Eden was the place God previously dwelt with people). For example:
 - He included images of the cherubim, the divine beings He stationed at the entrance of Eden to guard it (*Exodus 25:10-12; 26:31-35; Genesis 3:24*).
 - God designed a golden lampstand to be used inside the tabernacle, but He designed it to represent a budding tree - a reference to the tree of life in Eden (*Exodus 25:31-40*).
- **As God's dwelling place in the midst of His people, the tabernacle embodied the intersection of heaven and earth.** However, God's return to dwell with humanity was limited; He restricted access to His presence in the tabernacle (cf. *Exodus 26:31-37; 27:9-18; Leviticus 8-9*).
- Even though God's tabernacle (and later the temple) symbolized Eden, heaven, and God's dwelling amid His people, God allowed it to be destroyed in response to Israel's persistent rebelliousness (*Jeremiah 7:1-15; 2 Kings 25:1-21*).
- The Hebrew Bible ends with God's promise to build a new temple and to return His presence into the midst of His people (*Ezekiel 40:1-48:35*).

¹ Revelation 21:3. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- **The New Testament begins by pointing to Jesus as God’s new temple and the one in whom God’s presence returns to dwell among His people** (*John 1:1, 14*).
- But Jesus does not merely represent the intersection of heaven and earth as did the Jewish tabernacle and temple. Instead, **God planned for Jesus to “unite all...things in heaven and things on earth”** (*Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20; Revelation 21-22; John 1:1, 14*).
- **A crucial part of God’s plan to reunite heaven and earth plays out through Christians**, in whom He dwells as His temple and through whom He works as His priests (*1 Peter 2:4-9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Ephesians 2:11-22*).

Applications

- God does not wait for us to come to Him; He comes to us (*Revelation 21:3*).
- His choice to dwell with us evidences His love for us – God believes all of us possess a valuable identity.
- God also chooses to work through us – He partners with us in accomplishing His purposes (*1 Peter 2:4-9; Ephesians 2:11-3:12*).
- His choice to partner with us in accomplishing His purposes reveals His belief in our ability.
- However, God’s choice to dwell with us and work through us requires us to be holy, to act and think in ways that reflect His identity and will (*1 Peter 1:14-16*).
- We honor God’s holiness by acting like Jesus; by changing our character to reflect the perfect expression of God’s identity in Jesus.

We should be thankful that God chooses to dwell with us. Let us demonstrate our thankfulness to God by committing to living in ways that honor His identity and will. Let us commit to glorifying God by living like Jesus so that people can encounter God through the ways we allow Jesus to transform our lives.

