

The unfolding of your words gives light.

## Immanent and Transcendent

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### Exodus 40

#### Introduction

Have you ever been forced to live under rules that seemed too confining? Most of us grew up with rules like, "wash your hands," "shut the light off when you leave the room," "pick up your toys" and "no, you may not play with him or her." As we got older, the rules seemed more restrictive. We heard, "you need to be home by 10," "I will not have that kind of music in my house" and (at least for the younger generation) "no headphones at the table."

It is easy to think that living in the land of the free means that you don't have to obey a bunch of rules. That's the American way, right? And the Bible says that Christ set us free from the law. That is why it may seem inconsistent that God stooped to rescue a nation of people from the clutches of slavery in Egypt only to send them into a wilderness where he gave them 613 commands to keep.

I do not pretend to have all the intimate details of grace and law figured out. I do know this: the Law of God is in no way inconsistent with salvation by grace through faith. People have always been saved the same way. We believe in progressive sanctification, that God bought his people and is in the process of changing them into his image. It was no different for the nation of Israel. He rescued them, he revealed himself as the Holy One of Israel, then he gave them the law. These very detailed rules revealed the only safe way to interact with a holy God in a sinful world.

Approaching God is like approaching the sun. You cannot live without it, but you cannot go there as you are now. You will not survive in the darkness of a cave, but you had better not come too close to the sun without a veil of sunblock over your skin.

We have come to the end of the book of Moses called Exodus, a book whose extremes swing from the Majesty of the God who cannot be approached to things as earthly as the animal skins enclosing the place he met with men. The paradox of the book of Exodus is that this God has chosen to reveal himself in extremes that are completely consistent with his character.

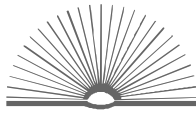
On one hand, he is over all. He rules. He is completely distinct from his creation. The word that best describes this attribute is *transcendent*. God is above us.

On the other hand, he cares for his people, shows his presence to his people, and works on behalf of his people. This is the meaning of the word *immanent*.

Consider the contrasts: this holy one would not allow shoes to be worn in his presence, but he was willing to manifest himself in a bush. This God would not allow his own people to touch the mountain when he descended upon it, yet he destroyed the nation that dared harm them. He descended to the mountain that could not be touched on penalty of death, yet while he was there established laws governing the ownership of oxen. He threatened to destroy an entire nation of sinners, but chose rather to manifest his glory to them, sustain them in the wilderness and provide a way for them to approach him forgiven. Consider this immanent, transcendent God:

Now in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. Moses erected the tabernacle and laid its sockets, and set up its boards, and inserted its bars and erected its pillars. He spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent on top of it, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Then he took the testimony and put it into the ark, and attached the poles to the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark. He brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up a veil for the screen, and screened off the ark of the testimony, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Then he put the table in the tent of meeting on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil. He set the arrangement of bread in

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order on it before the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Then he placed the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle. He lighted the lamps before the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Then he placed the gold altar in the tent of meeting in front of the veil; and he burned fragrant incense on it, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Then he set up the veil for the doorway of the tabernacle. He set the altar of burnt offering before the doorway of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the meal offering, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. He placed the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing. From it Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. When they entered the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. He erected the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the veil for the gateway of the court. Thus Moses finished the work.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel. (Exodus 40:17-38)

### **The Tabernacle Is Erected**

It was New Year's Day. The nation of Israel was not sitting around watching football games. The main attraction was the construction of a tent, patterned by God after one that exists in his very presence in heaven. The text almost appears to say that the people stood around and watched while Moses busily put the sockets and boards and bars and skins together to construct the tabernacle. Moses did not build the tabernacle by himself anymore than Solomon built the temple by himself. While Moses likely did more than just stand around and give orders, he was not the only member of the work crew. He, as a mediator, was the one responsible for overseeing the erection of the tabernacle. You see in this text how God separated the priesthood from the rest of the people.

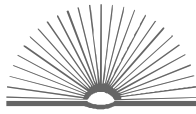
### **The Glory of the Lord Descends**

The word "glory" is the Hebrew word *kabod*, which means "weight." This heavy cloud followed, or, better, *led* Israel through the wilderness. The text says that Moses could not enter the tabernacle because the glory of the Lord filled it. This picture takes us back to chapter 33, where the Lord would not allow Moses to see his full glory. Maybe the intensity of the glory lessened to make the tent compatible with human life.

### **Where Is Jesus in All This?**

What do you do with a God like this, a God who is both immanent and transcendent, who invites his people to draw near, but only on his terms?

1. You fear his wrath. I am not suggesting that the wrath of God is the first attribute we should use to introduce him to the world. I am suggesting that this is the legitimate human response to seeing God as he is. Praise him for drawing near. Respect what it takes to draw near him.
2. You hate your sin. It is easy, even natural, to hate sin in others. It is not so easy to see and hate sin in yourself. When you come to know that life itself is found in approaching this Holy One and that the only thing that keeps you from approaching him is your own sin, you will begin to hate your sin.
3. You run to him. This is where the freedom is. Our access to God is not through a high priest who has his own sinful baggage to deal with. The veil has been rent in twain. The doors of mercy have been thrown wide open. The Savior has endured your wrath and conquered your death. The way to God is paved, but



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freedom is only found within his boundaries. It is only found as you approach his Son in repentance and faith.

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