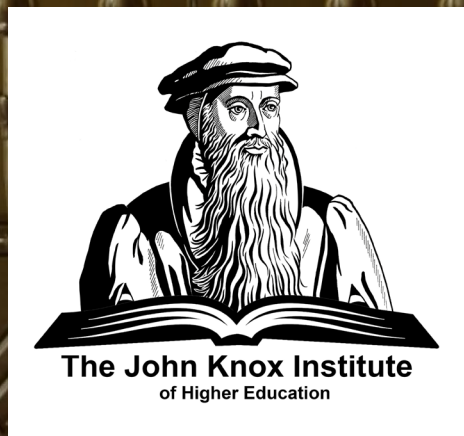


# The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series  
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

*Lecture 4 ~*  
**THE COURTYARD FENCE**



**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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## Video Lecture Series

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

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# The Tabernacle of Moses

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### Lecture 4 ~

## THE COURTYARD FENCE

Welcome again, in our fourth study on the Tabernacle, as God has given Moses the instructions to build it according to God's pattern. This took place in the forty-day stay, when he was with the Lord on Mount Sinai.

Now to make our study more personal, I'll try to do this study through the eyes of an inquiring Jewish boy in a conversation with the priest. We imagine this Jewish boy to be from the tribe of Benjamin, who was born during the wilderness journey. His father and his mother, and all his relatives camped on the west side of the Tabernacle, and he grew up looking at it from his baby days onward. But now that he's getting older, he began to wonder about this building with a pillar of cloud during the day, and this huge pillar of fire at night. And the only way that he could learn, is to ask questions. We'll call him Shema, as one of Benjamin's descendants carried that name, as mentioned in the genealogy of 1 Chronicles.

One day, Shema ventured closer to the fenced-off building on which the pillar of cloud rested. He had seen several times that his father and mother began to fold up their tent and gather their belongings when that pillar of cloud moved heavenward. He could see that the entire tent structure was broken down and loaded on a number of ox-drawn wagons. Recently, he caught a glimpse of white-clothed men carrying a number of cloth-covered items. Today the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle, so there would be no journeying today. It would be a good day to take a closer look at this building.

So Shema started to walk toward the white fence. The white cloth fence stood out as a bright contrast to all the surrounding tents, in which they lived. Their tents were brownish-black color. As a matter of fact, the Tabernacle courtyard was the only white thing in the entire camp, and in the bright sun, it was actually quite intense to look at for too long. Shema thought out loud as



he walked towards it, "I must ask why the builders made this fence so white. Oh my! This fence is also much taller than I thought." From a two-mile distance, the fence did not look as tall as close up. The curtain wall was almost two-and-a-half meters, or over eight feet tall. Far too tall for even his dad to look over. And as he came closer, Shema could see that although this fence was made out of curtains, it was actually a very secure fence.

Each of the sixty pillars were about two meters, or six-and-a-half feet apart, and each was set on a bronze socket, or a footing. And then they were secured with silver bars to the next post. And finally, they were tied down on both sides with cords and pegs to the ground.

The fence posts were even pretty, for the brass-covered wooden posts, they were crowned with a silver ornamental top. Shema walked along the wall towards the south corner, and then he turned left. And walking along the fence curtains, his curiosity was stirred even more. “How I would love to see across this fence. I wonder why we are not allowed to see inside. If there is a door, would I be able to go in? Straining himself to stand on his toes, he tried to see something of the inside building, but he could see just a glimpse of it above the fence line when farther away, but no matter how he strained, now standing near to the fence, that inside building was completely hidden from his view.

Walking along the fence toward the east corner, Shema saw something that he had not noticed before. The curtain fence was actually not one full length. Thinking of it, that would really be nearly impossible to carry or move around, for the entire south and north length was 50 meters or 150 feet long, and the east and the west side was half that length, at 25 meters or 75 feet. The curtain, as he noticed, was actually made of various sections, and looking back over the distance he covered, he counted how many sections he could see on the west and on the south side. And a quick calculation meant that there were exactly 10 curtains joined together to circulate this entire building.

So having reviewed together the material details of the courtyard fence now through the eyes of Shema, let’s ask ourselves— What is God’s message in this white wall Shema described above? Now there are four

Biblical truths that God pictures to us in the Courtyard Fence. First, this tall and sparkling white fence around the building reveals a solemn truth about God. It’s a truth, friends, we are never to forget in our personal, and also our congregational worship of God. God is saying with this fence, “I am the Holy One. I AM the unapproachable One. Each time this fence came into view throughout the day, or when they approached the Tabernacle to participate in the ceremonies, it was as if God’s word spoken in pictures. Think of Psalm 96 or 99, “Oh worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him all the earth” (Psalm 96:9) “Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy” (Psalm 99:5).

The Hebrew word “holy” has the meaning of “to cut,” or “to be separate,” or “to stand apart.” So apply that to God. That means that God stands apart from us. No, he’s not just bigger, he’s not just more than us, he is altogether in a different category. He is totally separate from us. There is none like him. Often the Biblical authors exclaim in their worship, “O who is like unto the Lord?” And the answer’s always the same. There is none, for none can be likened unto Jehovah. Friends, it is this truth of the holiness of God that is vividly pictured in this Courtyard Fence. And yet, as we shall see, not only in the Fence, no, no, every part of the sacred Tabernacle emphasizes the holiness of God. The first time that this truth was vividly emphasized to the Israelites was in Exodus 19. God gave Moses careful instructions how the people were to prepare themselves to meet with their sovereign Lord and King. Hear God’s words in Exodus 19, verses 10 to 19: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and [let them] be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the

trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.”

Now as words could not express adequately the glory of God’s holiness to us, God expressed it in the most awe-inspiring display of his power at Mount Sinai. You would think that what we read in Exodus 19, verses 18 and 19, was enough to keep the people in line, and behind the boundary. Before them stood a mountain smoking and quaking greatly, and the voice of the trumpet sounding long, and louder and louder. Did that stop them? No, still we read how the Israelites ignored the Lord God’s boundary, and they pushed on curiously and inappropriately. So God told Moses to hasten back, after he came up the mountain, and the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish” (verse 21). Now did the message of this awe-inspiring holiness of God hit home? Now we reviewed that earlier, after they heard the voice of God from the mountain in proclaiming the Ten Commandments, they shook, and they stood afar off. And then in Exodus 20, verse 18, we read: “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”



Now this unchanging truth about God is pictured in the Courtyard Fence. God drove home the truth of the needed separation and the appropriate distance. God has made clear in this Fence that he is not on our level, ...and therefore he cannot be approached as we approach our equals. He is the Holy One. No common Israelite, young or old, was ever free to stroll into the Tabernacle area. It was completely off limits for the ordinary use. As we shall see in our further studies, God prescribed, laid out only one way by which he could be approached. That way, Jesus proclaimed himself. Listen—he said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14, verse 6). Friends, how spiritually alive are we to the holiness of God. How much of the truth of 1 Timothy 6:16 live within us? Do you and I extol God as Paul did? The “blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.”

Or, consider the language of Isaiah 33, verse 14, so commonly misunderstood. How many of us think that Isaiah is describing hell in the worst. But my friends, that is not correct. He described God’s holiness in these words I will now quote. He says, “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” Earlier in his prophecy, Isaiah already described how he saw the Lord God of hosts in a vision. And as he saw, his response is amazing: “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Any man who has had a close encounter with the Holy One, will echo Isaiah’s woe about himself. Or he will sense what Moses felt when he stood before the burning bush, in Exodus 3. It says that Moses hid his face, as he feared to look upon God. Now not only sinful men sense the holiness of God. Even the highest ranking and sinless angels who stand before God sense it. If any of these creatures would join our fellowship, we would feel terrified, and yet Isaiah observed them standing in angelic modesty covering their feet and their faces, as they cried out “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3).

So friends, adding up all these passages, can't you see the appropriateness of the reminder and the exhortation in Hebrews, chapter 12:28–29: “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.” So in sum, the sparkling white, fine linen Courtyard Fence stood in total contrast to the black tents of the Israelites. Every Israelite looking toward the Tabernacle will be reminded, by this glaring white Fence, of two truths. First, the Lord our God is holy. And second, I am unholy.

And that brings us to the second main spiritual truth pictured in this Fence. We know this, that Shema observed the fence to be very secure—a strong fence. Each post was interconnected, set upon solid footing, and tied down with ropes. The Fence could withstand the fierce desert winds. Besides, Shema counted 10 individual pieces that made up this fence. All these facts set out the Biblical truth about God's holy law. God's law is the eternal, the unchangeable expression of his holy character.

From the onset of Jesus' redeeming ministry, the Lord Jesus made it clear that he did not come to take down the Courtyard Fence. Now the words in which he said it were a little different. In Matthew 5, verses 17 to 19, he says, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy [the law], but to fulfil [the law]. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass [on], one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and [whosoever] shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Now, if I paraphrase Jesus' words I said then earlier, in a different way, and use Tabernacle language, then Matthew 5 may have sounded like this: “Think not that I have come to make some cuts in the Courtyard Fence, or to take away one or more of the panels of the Tabernacle Fence, no, I will not even cut a few coupling loops or strips of fabric.” The Ten Commandments, the 10 curtains, joined together, visualize the abiding Ten Commandments God declared in this majestic display from Mount Sinai. And what was first spoken in audible thunder is reinforced in visible Fence in a visual brightness and sturdiness. And each time that the Israelite looked towards the Tabernacle, he was reminded of God's holy law, of the expression of his holy character, and of his holy will.

May I remind you, what is the original law of God. Matthew 22 tells us: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (verses 37–40) Do you and I love like that? All the time? Consistently and sincerely? Let's be reminded that God's demand doesn't change or is lowered simply because we can't keep his law anymore. The firmness and the permanency of this Courtyard Fence pictures that his law stands firm. God will hold us to the requirement to love him perfectly, and to love our neighbor in the degree Jesus loved even his enemies. He never changed his standards of his law, for that would mean a change in his character. And this truth is both confronting and convicting—it emphasizes a third main spiritual truth pictured in the Fence.

The white, tall, secure barrier stresses the spiritual truth that without holiness, no man shall see God. The Courtyard Fence declares the truth of the angels standing in the entry of the way to the tree of life in Genesis 3:24. We read, “So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” Reentry was forbidden, as well as impossible for us fallen sinners. The Cherubims were to enforce the no entry. The sword seen in Genesis 3 symbolized the justice of God. And God's message in all this is so crystal clear. Only when my justice, demanding the payment upon

sin is satisfied, will the way to life be open. The Courtyard Fence pictured what Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:26—“Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”



So finally, let's turn this for a moment to personal. Have you met with this Fence of God in your spiritual thoughts. God uses his law to bring us to the knowledge of our sin. Paul wrote, in Romans 3:20, “For by the law is the knowledge of sin.” God's first message in the Tabernacle, friends, is not, “I died for you and all is well.” No, instead, he proclaimed visibly, “I am holy. I am of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. I cannot meet or fellowship with you, for you are a guilty sinner.” Now

such a convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit is vital for the health of our spiritual life. Conviction of sin is like God's leading us out of our comfort zone to his comfort. And without sensing the holiness of God as revealed in his holy law—let's be honest—you feel comfortable, and you see yourself as acceptable. You may live a good life. You may be an obedient person. You may have never hurt anyone or cheat anyone. And you may think all is fine. And though you know you're not perfect, yet you think you are acceptable enough.

Well, friends, when God convicts you, it's as if he draws you to stand before his formidable and blinding, bright Fence. And with a growing understanding of his holiness, you will understand Peter when he saw the greatness of his Master in the mighty miracle, and he said, “Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” The knowledge and the conviction of sin is not saving. Seeing the white fence preventing you from access to God, that's no salvation in itself, and yet it is an essential step towards salvation. For without a conviction that you are lost as you face your holy Maker, you will never learn to seek or to cry out, “What must I do to be saved?”

So it is through this awareness that we begin to say earnestly, “Is there a way to God?” And this way is provided, and that we will study in our next session, as we take up the study of the Courtyard Gate. So may God bless these studies to use his law pictured in this Fence, as his means to bring us unto Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in him alone. Thank you.