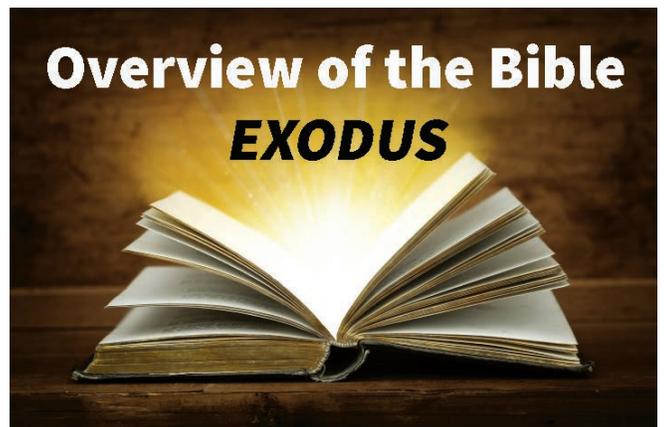


EXODUS:
Tabernacle, the Golden Calf,
and Covenant Renewal
Exodus 25-40 – Lesson 18
Wednesday, September 2, 2020



Quite possibly this is the last major unit of Exodus (dealing with the tabernacle), this section probably seems tedious, for many modern readers of the Old Testament. Nevertheless,

Scripture has given us an intricate description of the tabernacle, a description that ranges over sixteen chapters, from divine orders to build (25-31), to interruption and delay of implementation because of apostasy (32-34), to final execution of the divine mandate (35-40). The movement is from instruction (25-31) to interruption (32-34) to implementation (35-40). Sandwiched in between two sections (25-31 and 35-40) that deal with proper worship of God and building what God wants his people to build is a section (32-34) that deals with improper worship of God and building/making what God does not want his people to build/make. One may also discern that Exodus begins and ends with Israelites building something. At the beginning that are forced to build stores cities for Pharaoh (1:11); at the end they choose to build a portable place of worship where God may dwell in their midst.

Theological Analysis

In the tabernacle there were seven pieces of furniture. The article of clothing worn by those officiating in the tabernacle numbered eight, four of which are worn by the high priest alone (the ephod 28:6-12); (the breastpiece of judgment 28:15-30); (the ephod's robe (28:31-35); (a turban 28:36-38), and four more that are worn by all the priests (a coat, gridle, cap, and linen breeches 28:40-42). The only part of the human body not covered is the feet, perhaps indicating that the priests performed their tasks barefoot.

The materials necessary for the tabernacle and the priestly vestments are to come from the freewill offerings of the people. No one is taxed or assigned dues. The giving is voluntary (25:1-7, especially v. 2). The response to Moses' appeal was overwhelming.

The description of the furniture of the tabernacle starts with the pieces at the center and works outward, but not consistently so. And in the sections dealing with the actual construction, the order of completion is different from the order of instruction.

Instruction			Completion		
Holy of Holies	ark	25:10-16	ark	37:1-5	Holy of Holies
	mercy seat	25:17-22	mercy seat	37:6-9	
The Holy Place	table of shew-bread	25:23-30	table of shew-bread	37:10-16	The Holy Place
	lampstand	25:31-40	lampstand	37:17-24	
Outer Court	bronze altar	27:1-8	altar of incense	37:25-28	Outer Court
The Holy Place	altar of incense	30:1-10	bronze altar	38:1-7	The Holy Place
Outer Court	laver	30:17-21	laver	38:8	Outer Court

The text of Exodus itself should caution us against reading too much symbolic interpretation into the tabernacle. To detect in each piece of furniture, in each fabric, in each curtain ring, in each color some hidden meaning is more speculative than exegetical.

However, this does not negate the fact that symbolism is present in the tabernacle. The symmetrical dimensions bear this out. The length of the court is twice that of the width. The Holy Place is twice the size of the Holy of Holies. The latter is a cube of ten cubits.

The choice of metals is indicative of greater degrees of sanctity: the more crucial the object, the more precious the metal used to make it. The term *"pure gold"* is applied only to the furniture of the tabernacle proper: the ark (25:11), the mercy seat (25:17), the table of shewbread (25:24), the lampstand (25:31, 36, 38, 39), the altar of incense (30:3).

The same applies to fabrics. The most crucial piece of fabric is the veil, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Primarily it is made of blue, purple, and crimson wools, along with fine linen (26:31). The tabernacle curtains are just the opposite: primarily a fine linen product, along with the blue, purple, and crimson wool (26:1). Last are the curtain of goats' hair (26:7).

Parallels between the Passages about Creation and the Tabernacle

Scholars have suggested parallels between the beginning of Genesis and the end of Exodus, or more specifically, between creation and the tabernacle. Those who hold to the parallelism between the two relate the seven divine speeches in chs. 25-31 (25:1; 30:11; 30:17; 30:22; 30:34; 31:1; 31:12) to the seven days of creation, noting parallels between each day and each corresponding divine speech in Exodus about the tabernacle. Exodus 25-31 is creation. Exodus 32:33 is the fall. Exodus 34-40 is the restoration. Further binding the two together is the reference to 'the Spirit of God' in both the creation of the world and the creation of the tabernacle (Gen. 1:2; Exod. 31:3; 35:31).

Parallels between Mount Sinai and the Tabernacle

It appears that Israel's experience with God at Sinai in 19-24 is an archetype of the tabernacle. What the peak of Mount Sinai is in 19-24, the Holy of Holies is in 25-40. Only one may ascend to the former and only Aaron may enter the latter. The very sight of Sinai's summit is punishable by death (Ex. 19:21), and so is its tabernacle counterpart (Lev. 16:2). Joshua, Aaron, and seventy of the elders may go partway up Sinai's slope, but no farther. Only the priest may enter the Holy Place, but no farther.

At the conclusion of the revelation at Sinai we read, *"The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days"* (24:16); when the tabernacle was finished, *"The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle"* (40:34). God's presence, once on Sinai, is now over the tabernacle. Second, the tabernacle intensifies Mount Sinai. At the peak of Mount Sinai Moses *"entered the cloud"* (24:18). But when the same divine glory enshrouded the tabernacle, Moses *"was not able to enter the tent of meeting"* (40:35).

Third, the tabernacle completes Mount Sinai. Sinai is a marriage the start of a new relationship. Now the partners must start to live together. In Sinai God has said, *"I have chosen you"*; in the tabernacle God has said, *"I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God"* (29:43-46).

Fourth, the tabernacle extends Mount Sinai. The Israelites cannot take a mountain with them when it is time to break camp, but they can take along a portable tent. To leave Sinai behind is not to leave the God of Sinai behind.

The tabernacle is the place where God and people can be closest to each other. Here God meets with His people. The tabernacle is the principle bridgehead in the OT to the doctrine of the incarnation. God, who once dwelt among his people in an edifice, now dwells among us in Jesus Christ.

For the author of Hebrew, the tabernacle is a prefiguration of the heavenly tent. (Revelation 21:16 makes the same equation. The holy city, the new Jerusalem and the Holy of Holies are the only two things Scripture explicitly said to be cubic dimensions.) The latter is greater and more perfect. It is not made with hands (Heb. 9:11). Its officiating high priest is Jesus Christ. The point, then, of the NT use of the tabernacle is twofold: the dwelling of God in Jesus Christ in the incarnation, and the dwelling of God in heaven.

