

The Tabernacle

Exodus 25-31; 35-40

Introduction

The first thing we need to do is to get some perspective on these chapters.

Getting Perspective On These Chapters

Exodus 24

In order to do this, let's remember what happened when we last looked at Exodus.

We saw how God had heard the cry of his people.

He had rescued them out of Egypt with great signs and wonders.

He had given them his law.

And finally, in Exodus 24, he had confirmed or ratified his covenant.

In other words, God and his people are tied together in formal covenant.

They are related to each other.

But relationship is all about meeting with each other appropriately.

And this is where Exodus 25-40 comes in.

For in these chapters we get the rules of engagement between God and his people.

Here is where and how God will be met by his people.

Here are the patterns by which they will engage with him.

Here is how they will worship.

And here is how he will physically demonstrate the spiritual reality of his presence with them.

An Overview of the Content

- A copy of the heavenly

Now let's see if we can get an overview of the content of these chapters.

There are a few things that we need to notice.

First, listen to Exodus 25:9 and Exodus 25:40 (cf. 27:8; cf. 39:31, 32, 42; 39:1, 5, 7, 21; 40).

These verses speak to us about the design of the tabernacle.

⁹*Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (ESV)*

⁴⁰*And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain. (ESV)*

I want you to notice the implications of these verses.

What Moses is being told is that what he is being given is a blueprint.

And this blueprint is a heavenly pattern.

In other words, what Moses is to build is a copy of something that already exists in heaven.

- Instructions and actual building

The second thing I want you to notice is that these chapters we are looking at today are divided into two sections.

You can see this in the diagrams I've supplied for you.

The first diagram shows a break up of the chapters.

You can see that chapters 25-31 deal with God's instructions to Moses as to how he is to build the tabernacle and deal with associated items and people.

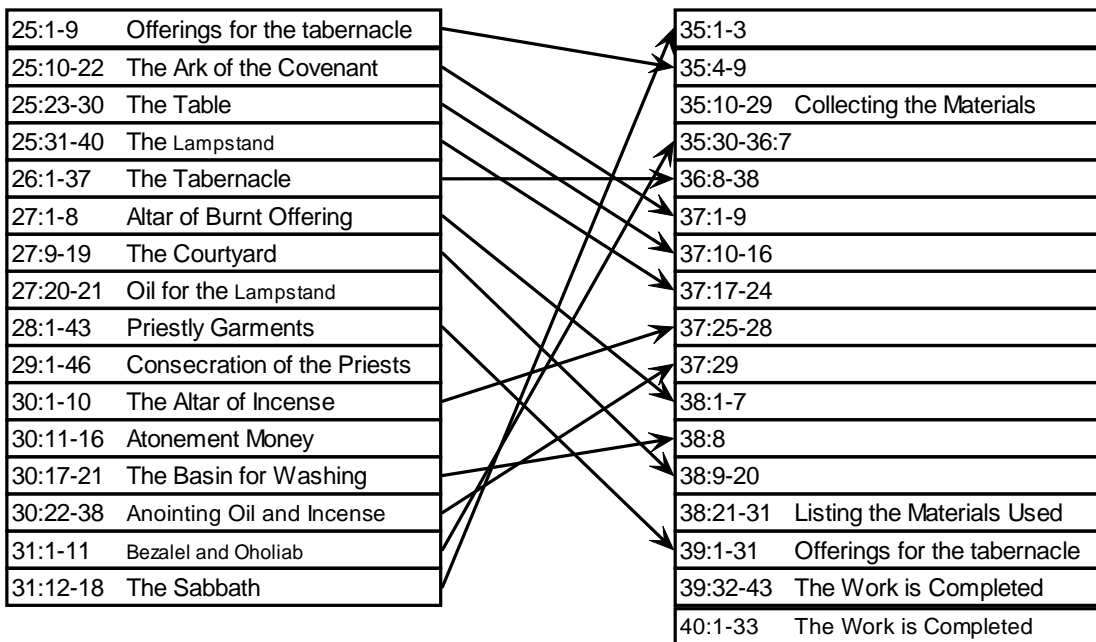
Chapters 35-40 deal with the actual building of these things.

Notice that there is a correlation between most items in the instructions and the description of the building.

The Tabernacle in Exodus

Instructions for Building

Actual Building



Sandwiched in-between chapters 25-31 and 35-40 are a story about idolatry, rebellion, punishment, and forgiveness.

The fundamental core of the story is that the people of God attempt to set up an alternative structure and system.

They seek to be free from God as he has revealed himself.

They seek to make a God after their own desires.

Exodus 25-31	Instructions on Building
Exodus 32-34	Idolatry/Rebellion/Punishment/Forgiveness (Israel attempts to set up an alternative to God and his ways)
Exodus 35-40	The Building Begun and Completed

- The design of the Tabernacle

Second, I want you to notice the design of the tabernacle (see diagram).

The Tabernacle is an oblong structure made up of three zones.

Each zone is in descending order of holiness – the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the Court.

Like most sacred buildings in the Ancient Near East, the building is oriented longitudinally, with the most sacred area being on the West.

There is an outer perimeter.

This perimeter is divided into two, forming two equal squares.

One square makes up the Court.

The other square makes up the other two areas.

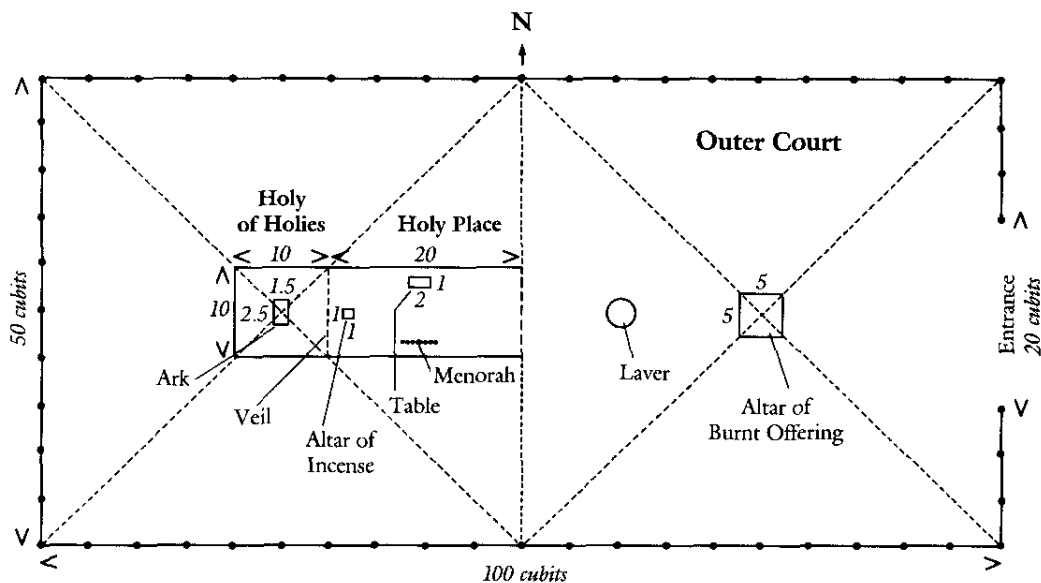
The Ark of the Covenant is located in the Holy of Holies.

It represents God reaching out to his people.

The Altar of Sacrifice represents the people reaching out to God.

Both the Ark of the Covenant and the Altar of Sacrifice seem to be located exactly at the point of intersection of the diagonals.

The Wilderness Tabernacle



THE WILDERNESS TABERNACLE. *All numbers within the rectangle refer to cubits. The Ark was 1.5 cubits high; the Altar of Incense was 2 cubits high; the Table was 1.5 cubits high; the Altar of Burnt Offering was 3 cubits high.*

Notes: Diagram taken from the JPS Torah Commentary on Exodus by Nahum Sarna.
1 Cubit is approximately equal to 45 cm.

- Seven words from God

The next thing to notice is the way chapters 25-31 are structured.

You will see that the words 'The Lord said to Moses' or 'The Lord spoke to Moses' are repeated seven times.

The LORD said to Moses... 25:1
30:11
30:17
30:22
30:34
31:1
31:12

Six of these references deal with creative acts.

The seventh features a reference to the Sabbath, which is specifically grounded in creation.

In other words, whatever else is going on in these chapters, we are to see them as specifically linked to Genesis 1-2.

The pattern of six creative words followed by a reference to rest is being followed here.

- Sabbath

But there is something else to notice about the reference to the Sabbath.

I want you to notice that God's instructions about building the Tabernacle ENDS with the Sabbath.

But I also want you to notice that the record of the construction of the Tabernacle BEGINS with the Sabbath.

The idea of the Sabbath is the link between these two accounts.

- Completion

Lastly, I want you to listen to Exodus 14:7.

¹⁷*In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected.*
(ESV)

This verse indicates that the completed Tabernacle is erected on New Year's day.

In other words, with the completion of the Tabernacle we are dealing with a new era in the life of the people of God.

God has redeemed them.

God has forged a covenant with them.

A new stage in the history of God's people has begun.

Things to Notice

The presence of God

We need to ask ourselves what is going on here.

You see, to our ears and eyes, these chapters are somewhat enigmatic.

We are not sure what Arks, tabernacles, priests, sacrifices, and the rest are all about.

However, the Israelites had no doubts what was going on.

They knew that what they had was a copy of a heavenly blueprint.

They therefore understood that the tabernacle, or the Temple that later replaced it, was the earthly dwelling place or palace of God.

In other words, once the tabernacle is built, God is imagined as being enthroned in the midst of his people.

God is present.

God is immanent with his people.

He dwells amongst his people.

Having said this, the tabernacle also demonstrated that while God was with his people, there was a proper way to approach him.

The importance of these chapters

Please understand what I'm saying here.

You see, these chapters are not just about building strange buildings and ways of carrying them around in the wilderness.

These chapters are fundamentally important.

These chapters are about God supplying a piece of heaven on earth.

They occupy a larger part of the book than the plague narratives.

They occupy a larger part of the book than the law sections.

These chapters are the heart of what has been going on in the book of Exodus.

They are about the God of all the earth setting up his dwelling among his people.

And if God is among his people, then his people know that all his covenant blessings are with them as well.

He is there to ensure their enjoyment of the covenant blessings.

He is there to ensure their entrance into the promised land and their rest in the promised land.

You see, God is not just a God who redeems them FROM slavery.

He is a God who redeems them FOR or TO something.

He redeems them FOR rest in his glorious presence.

He redeems them TO worship.

Creation and Sabbath

The next thing I want you to notice are the allusions to creation and Sabbath.

Please understand that the writer wants to tell us something by doing this.

So, let's see if we can see what he is getting at.

Let's think back to the garden of Eden.

What was the garden of Eden all about?

It was about living in God's presence.

It was about being God's people in God's place.

It was about resting in all the beauty of God's blessing.

The Garden of Eden was about undisturbed, peaceful rest with ready access to God and all his gifts.

This is what is going on here.

God is promising his people a return to Eden.

He is assuring them of access to his presence and rest in the land he has promised to give them.

He is assuring them of his goodness and his goodwill.

This is what he wanted for all the world in Eden.

And this is what he wants for his people.

A Bigger Bible Picture

Promise and Fulfilment

Okay, let's now see if we can put all of this today into a larger, Biblical framework.

We've already done a bit of this, haven't we?

We've looked back to Eden.

And we've seen God's intention for humanity – God's people, living in God's presence, in untainted relationship with him, with each other, and with the environment he has placed them in.

The part of the Bible we have looked at today has told us that God is still about this purpose.

He has not given up on it.

Human sinfulness has not blunted his enthusiasm for it.

He still wants this goal to be reached.

He still wants heaven to invade earth.

He still wants to dwell in peace with humans and he still wants to convey to them all the great blessings of his covenant.

This is one reason why the disappearance of the temple at the time of the exile was so devastating.

For many Jews it symbolised that God was with his people.

Without it, the plans and purposes of God seemed to have a question mark hanging above them.

That's why prophets such as Ezekiel looked forward to a future restoration of the temple.

They longed for Eden and the Tabernacle to be restored...

For God to be with his people.

Now, as Christians we know something about the fulfilment of these desires, don't we?

As Christians, we read the New Testament and hear the teaching of Jesus.

We hear him say in John 2:19:

¹⁹*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (ESV)*

We also read John 1:14:

¹⁴*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (ESV)*

Now our English translations hide what is going on in John 1:14.

The Greek word for 'dwelt' is related to the word that is used throughout the Greek Old Testament to refer to the tabernacle.

In other words, we could read John 1:14 along these lines...

And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us...

The New Testament is clear.

Jesus is the new and improved tabernacle or temple

He is the fulfilment of all that Eden represented and all that the tabernacle and temple represented.

The glory that was seen in the tabernacle in the wilderness is now seen in Jesus.

The glory that resided above the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies has walked the streets of Palestine and is available for all to encounter in the gospel.

Jesus Christ is the 'Yes' and the 'Amen' to the imagery that was present in the tabernacle.

Jesus Christ is God's heaven on earth.

Veils and boldness

Now, just to give you a snapshot of what Jesus has done, we should remember the Old Testament tabernacle.

Perhaps you might like to take another look at our diagram of the tabernacle.

Remember what we saw.

Remember that there were three zones – the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the Court.

Some could only enter into the Court, others could go a bit further into the Holy Place, and only very special people at limited times could go past the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies.

Their were veils and curtains therefore that illustrated that Eden has not yet returned.

Just as angels stood barring humans from entering back into Eden after Adam's sin, so curtains and veils indicated that human access to God was still restricted.

It is here that the book of Hebrews in the New Testament helps us.

For the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was our High Priest.

That he entered into the Holy of Holies in heaven itself.

That he went carrying his own blood.

And that he offered a sacrifice for our sins that atones for our sin forever.

As God, Jesus did what the Ark of the covenant represented – he was the point at which God reached out to humanity.

As a human being, Jesus did what the altar of sacrifice represented, he allowed humans to reach out to untainted relationship with God.

And because of what he has done, those who believe in him can go where no others have gone before.

And they can go with great boldness and confidence.

Listen to Hebrews 10:19-25:

*¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,
²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,
²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (ESV)*

We have what the people of God never had in the tabernacle.

We have what Moses did not have.

We have a High Priest and a Sacrifice that allows us to boldly enter the presence of God.

There are no curtains any more.

Privilege and Presence (no cult)

But there is more, isn't there?

You see, since we have the fulfilment of the tabernacle...

Since we have the perfect sacrifice and the perfect priest...

We no longer need all that ritual and all that cult.

We no longer need tabernacles and temples.

We no longer need sacrifices and blood and cult.

Please understand what I'm saying.

You see, all of that stuff in the Old Testament was an image of what was to come.

We have received their fulfilment.

We have access the presence of God.

And we have all the privileges that this offers.

Christians do not need the cultic and ritual things anymore.

We have the reality.

We don't need the shadow.

And it is this point that brings me to my concluding point in today's talk.

You see, the New Testament authors use the word 'temple' in one other way that I want to talk about.

[The following section of the sermon draws on material from Peter Enns commentary on Exodus]

They use the word 'temple' to refer to the people of God.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (ESV)

Or Ephesians 2:22

²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (ESV)

Can you see what is being said?

They are making the point that God has some new portable tabernacle's or temples.

God is no longer restricted to buildings in one part of the world.

Nor is God only embodied in his Son.

By the work of God's Spirit and the proclamation of God's word, God's sacred space has spread throughout all the world.

For wherever God's Christian people meet, there God is accessible.

Wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's name, there is Christ in their midst.

Please understand what I am saying.

When we meet tonight to talk about and remember and share Jesus Christ with each other, God is with us.

In other words, our meetings are where heaven and earth meet.

Church is about eternal realities.

It is not about programs.

It is not where you go because you have nowhere else to go.

It is not where you go because you feel guilty if you don't.

It is the place where God meets with his world.

This is why we come to church.

We come because we want to meet with God.

Church is God's ordained manner for entering into God's time and God's space.

It is the place where God rules.

Where God assures us of his goodness and goodwill.

Where he promises us that he is for us and that no one will take us out of his hand.

Church is where we participate in heaven itself.

When we are here, worshipping God together, we demonstrate that there is reality that is much more important than anything else.

And that reality is that there is a God.

That he is what makes life meaningful.

That he is what makes life tick.

And that as we find fellowship with him, we also find it with each other.

Church is where heaven and earth meet.

It is the meeting place of God with his people.

It is the meeting place of those who have been brought together by a common bond, a common reality.

Introduction

Getting Perspective On These Chapters

Exodus 24

An Overview of the Content

- A copy of the heavenly
- Instructions and actual building
- The design of the Tabernacle
- Seven words from God
- Sabbath
- Completion

Things to Notice

The importance of these chapters

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