

The Model of Heaven

(Exodus 25:1-22)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from the Previous Lessons

- a. After the Lord proclaimed the Ten Commandments to the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, He provided additional laws to Moses.
- b. Moses announced those laws to the people, who said “with one voice” that they would do *whatever the Lord said* through Moses. Then the covenant between the Lord and Israel was confirmed with blood.
- c. Moses ascends Mount Sinai for 40 days (the first time), during which time
 - i. He is fasting;
 - ii. He will receive the 10 Commandments on stone tablets (the first time); and
 - iii. The Lord provides Moses with clear instructions regarding the tabernacle that is to be built.

II. Studying about the Tabernacle?

- a. Many Christians trying to read through the Bible from cover-to-cover stumble (and sometimes even *give up in frustration*) when they reach this part, regarding details of the tabernacle (**Exodus 25-31**).
- b. Furthermore, many of these details *are repeated* when the Israelites actually build the tabernacle and set it up according to instructions, as recorded in **Exodus 35-40**.
- c. So you may be tempted to tune out or want to skip this part. After all, the Christian faith does not involve the Jewish sacrificial system. Furthermore, the temple (which replaced the tabernacle) was destroyed for the last time almost 2000 years ago, in AD 70, by the Romans under Titus.
- d. **Question:** Why is it important for us to read and try to understand this?
 - i. After quoting from **Psalms 69:9**, Paul made the point: “For *whatever things were written before were written for our learning*, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (**Romans 15:4**, NKJV)
 - ii. Paul believed that everything in the Old Testament Scriptures was there for the benefit of the Christians. If that is true, there must be

something (perhaps hidden) for us to learn from in the story of the construction of the tabernacle!

III. (Chuck's) Parable of the Toy Concrete Mixer Truck

- a. My oldest grandson, Elijah, *absolutely loves* trucks of all types.
 - i. He loves going down the street to construction sites, etc.; and he calls out whenever he sees a truck or tractor of any type.
 - ii. He also loves to have picture-books on trucks read to him.
 - iii. He also enjoys playing with toy trucks.
 - iv. My daughter Julia obtained (for free via a local Facebook group) unusually high quality (realistic) toy trucks, originally made in Germany.
 1. As a civil engineer, I have worked on construction sites with real cranes, concrete mixers, etc. So I know what the real-world trucks look like and how they operate. I was amazed at how realistic my grandson's scale-model trucks were, with moving parts that accurately represent the "real thing".
 2. To my surprise, I recently found this favorite truck of my grandson on a shelf in our unfinished basement (think: dark, spidery area). So I asked my son-in-law (Elijah's father), "*What happened?*"
 - a. (Note that my family and my daughter's family live in different apartments in a 2-family home with a shared basement.)
 - b. I appreciate that my son-in-law has convictions about disciplining his children and am fully supportive of that.
 - c. At the same time, I wondered what my grandson could have done to merit such a stern punishment: banishment of such a beloved toy to the spidery basement. *What had he done???*
 - d. My son-in-law explained the problem and the reason for this discipline:
 - i. This toy truck was *so realistic* that it had features and moving parts that my grandson Elijah (less than two years old) did not understand how to operate.

- ii. My grandson could not figure out what the special features were for. He became very frustrated trying to figure this out, to the point where he lost emotional self-control and *threw a fit*.
- b. Like the extremely realistic model of a concrete mixer truck, the tabernacle was a model of something much larger. The tabernacle is a “scale model” of very important things in the spiritual realm. The details are important, reflecting things that are indeed significant in the full-scale reality it imitates.
 - i. If we don’t understand the significance of the details and how the model is designed to reflect the full-scale reality, we (like my young grandson) *can get very frustrated* too!
- c. Since I (as a civil engineer) generally understand how a *real* concrete mixer truck works, I can appreciate (more than most) what a wonderful job the designers of this toy truck did.
 - i. Likewise, my hope in this lesson is to help us to understand how this *scale model* so accurately and amazingly reflects the *real thing*.
- d. If you are half as obsessed with *heaven* and *the kingdom of God* as my grandson is with *trucks*, perhaps you might really *enjoy* learning more about the tabernacle: this wonderful model that God has provided for our benefit!

IV. ***How Do We Know that the Tabernacle is a Scale Model of Something Else?***

- a. From Irenaeus, in *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, written perhaps c. 180 AD (Irenaeus was bishop of the Church in Lyons in Gaul, in modern-day France):
 - i. “And in the desert Moses received from God laws, ten sentences on tablets of stone, written with the finger of God; and ‘finger of God’ is that which is put forth by the Father in the Holy Spirit, and the commandments and laws which he committed to the children of Israel to be kept. *He also constructed at God’s command the tabernacle of the testimony, a visible construction on earth of what is spiritual and invisible in heaven, and a figure of the form of the Church, and a prophecy of things to be; and in it both vessels and altars and an ark, in which he put the tablets.*
 - ii. “And he also appointed as priests Aaron and his sons, giving the priesthood to them and to all their stock; and they were of the tribe of Levi; but he also summoned at God’s word the whole of that tribe, to work in the service of the temple of God, and also gave them the Levitical law, for the character and behavior of those whose

occupation it was to carry on constantly the work of the service of God's temple."

1. (Source: Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, chapter 26, translated by Joseph P. Smith, S.J.; in volume No. 16 in Ancient Christian Writers series by Catholic University of America; published by Paulist Press)
- iii. Irenaeus said the tabernacle was:
1. "A visible construction on earth of what is spiritual and invisible in heaven"
 2. "A figure and form of the church"
 3. "A prophecy of things (yet) to be"
- b. The tabernacle was a portable, tent-like structure that could be packed up and moved to the next location as the Jews were traveling in the Wilderness. At the time of King Solomon, it was replaced with a permanent structure, the temple.
- i. While the term "temple" usually refers to the permanent structure that superseded and replaced the tabernacle, the term "temple" is in some places used to refer to the tabernacle as well.
 1. See various translations of **1 Samuel 1** and **1 Samuel 3** (designated **1 Kingdoms** in the LXX), during the time of Hannah, Eli and Samuel.
 - a. "So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD." (**1 Samuel 1:9**, KJV 1900)
 - b. "Before the lamp of God went out, and while Samuel was asleep in the temple where the ark of God was..." (**1 Kingdoms 3:3**, LXX, OSB)
 - i. The Greek word in the LXX here and in the verse previously cited is naos (ναός), which is translated "temple" as opposed to the Greek word skene (σκηνή) which is generally translated "tabernacle/tent".
 - c. The tabernacle/temple is significant to Christians because Paul referred to the Church as "the *temple* of the living God".

- i. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” (**1 Corinthians 3:16–17**, NKJV)
 1. Paul’s point here: we must live holy lives because we are now *the temple of God*.
 - ii. “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (**1 Corinthians 6:18–20**, NKJV)
 1. Our bodies are temples in which God’s Holy Spirit dwells. Therefore, we must not defile God’s temple with sexual immorality.
 - iii. “O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.’” (**2 Corinthians 6:11–16**, NKJV)
 1. Since we are the temple of the living God, we must be separate from the pagans and their ways of life. The temple of God has nothing in common with the temples of idols.
 - iv. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (**Ephesians 2:19–22**, NKJV)
 1. Paul portrays the Church as a temple made up of individual stones fitted together to form one holy structure.
- d. The tabernacle/temple also reflects the reality of things *in heaven*.

i. Read **Revelation 7:9-17**.

1. They are before the throne of God and serve Him “in his *temple*”.
2. This is one of a few references to the *temple of God, in heaven*.

e. The significance of the tabernacle/temple, as foreshadowing things revealed in Christ, is explained in the Book of Hebrews.

i. Read **Hebrews 8:1-6**

1. Jesus as high priest over a better covenant;
2. Moses told to build the temple *according to the pattern he was shown on the mountain* (referring to the direction given in **Exodus 25:40**).
3. Moses was to make the tabernacle and its furnishings “according to the pattern shown to you”. Therefore, in addition to being given specific instructions (specifications) perhaps he also was shown some type of physical representation as well (for example, plan drawings or a model).
 - a. Consider also what Stephen said regarding this, before he was stoned: “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it *according to the pattern that he had seen...*” (**Acts 7:44**, NKJV)
4. Note that Moses was clearly instructed to make the tabernacle exactly according to what God had shown him, down to the details, with no deviation. God considered the details all to be important, for reasons that would be revealed later.

ii. Read **Hebrews 9:1-10**.

1. “It (the ministry of the tabernacle) was *symbolic for the present time*” (**Hebrews 9:9**).

iii. Description of the tabernacle sanctuary. (I encourage you to find a study Bible or other resource that depict this, to get a better idea).

1. The entire tabernacle court area was a curtained-off area about half the size of a soccer or football field.
 - a. Dimensions: 100 cubits x 50 cubits (where a cubit is equivalent to about 18 inches or half a meter).

- b. Therefore, the entire area was about 150 ft. x 75 ft, or roughly 50 meters x 25 meters.
2. Within the courtyard was the tabernacle itself, the tabernacle proper. The tabernacle consisted of two rooms: the Holy Place (through which the priests entered from a curtain on the east side) and the Most Holy Place (to the west of the Holy Place, separated from it by “the veil”).
 - a. The Most Holy Place, where the ark of the covenant resided, was a cube in shape, with dimensions 10 cubits (long) x 10 cubits (wide) x 10 cubits (high).
 - b. Since the Holy Place was 20 cubits long by 10 cubits high (and 10 cubits high), the tabernacle (including both rooms) had a 3:1 ratio of length to width (and height).
3. The Most Holy Place had only the ark of the covenant in it. It was dark, with no lights (keep in mind that the top of the tabernacle was covered by four layers of material). The High Priest (only) would enter it once each year, on the Day of Atonement, with blood.
4. The Holy Place was entered by the priests every day for their ministry. It had three things in it, all of which were made with fine gold:
 - a. The table of the showbread, on which 12 new loaves of bread would be placed each Sabbath, was located on the north side of the room.
 - b. The altar of incense, where the priests would burn incense each morning and night, was on the west side of the room, in front of the veil to the Most Holy Place.
 - c. The lampstand (or candlestick) was a standing lamp with seven lights (three on branches each side, and one light in the center), located on the south side of the room. The priests would supply oil and light it each night.
5. In the courtyard of the tabernacle, to the west of the tabernacle itself, were two items:
 - a. A laver or washing basin, where the priests would wash themselves when being appointed to their ministry, and when they went in to minister at the tabernacle.

b. A bronze altar for animal sacrifices.

iv. Read **Hebrews 9:11-24**

1. The Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, where the ark of the covenant represents “heaven itself”, where Jesus, our High Priest, has entered.
2. Understanding this point (that the Most Holy Place represents heaven itself) is the key to unlocking the significance of all the other parts of the tabernacle (what they represent).

v. Read **Hebrews 9:24-28** and **Hebrews 10:19-25**.

1. We now also have the ability to enter heaven (the Most Holy Place), by the blood of Jesus.
2. The “veil,” which separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place, represented the body (flesh) of Christ.
 - a. Note the significance of what happened at the moment Jesus died.
 - b. “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split...” (**Matthew 27:50-51**, NKJV)
 - c. The death of Christ opened up the veil that separated us from heaven and God. Jesus’ death opened up “a new and living way” for us to access the presence of God.
3. This wonderful mystery was foreshadowed in detail through the instructions Moses was given to build the tabernacle!

V. The Instructions

- a. As a civil engineer by training, much of my work in designing infrastructure involved preparing plans (drawings) and specifications (written instructions). So the format of this part of Exodus is familiar to me: construction specifications! Actual construction in conformance to those detailed specifications is to follow.
 - i. Specifications may seem boring to many (including to me, as a younger engineer). However, when you get into actual construction, you see how important they are.
 - ii. In the construction industry, since the lowest bid generally wins the project, the contractors strive to read the specifications to find holes

where they can use cheaper materials in order to come up with a lower price and win the project. A good engineer strives to write tight specifications that the creative contractor will not be able to evade, and then to monitor and enforce that during actual construction.

1. Writing specifications is considered a relatively boring project, so it is often relegated to younger engineers.
 2. However, they like to have very senior (experienced) engineers reviewing those specifications before the project is bid, since they have seen (and hopefully learned lessons from) mistakes made on other designs throughout their career.
- iii. An example where an appreciation of the importance of detailed specifications paid off for me: the “red cedar shingles” on my own house.
1. While all wood shingles for house siding may seem the same to most people, there are two main types: white (or yellow) cedar shingles, and red cedar shingles. Red cedar shingles are the highest quality ones; they last years longer. They are also more expensive than the other type.
 2. When developing a sketch for a contractor to use for estimating some major construction work on the front of my home several years ago, (as an engineer) I also included about 10 pages of handwritten specifications. In it, I specified what type of materials I wanted for all the major components. With a lump-sum bid, it is to the contractor’s advantage to use cheaper materials, so it is important to specify in advance what materials I want.
 - a. In the text that I included in the package I gave to the contractor when he bid the job, I clearly stated “*red cedar shingles*”.
 3. During construction, the contractor was about to put up yellow cedar shingles, as he did on all his other jobs, when I reminded him (by pointing to the exact reference in the specifications he had signed off on when he submitted his bid) that it said *red cedar shingles*. He had not read the specifications carefully and had to purchase and install the more expensive, higher quality shingles.
 4. Bottom Line: I have learned from experience that tight, well-written specifications, which dictate high-quality materials, can

make all the difference in the outcome of a construction project!

- a. We will notice that in the tabernacle, God is specifying the *very highest, best quality materials* (pure gold, wood that does not rot, etc.).
- b. Read **Exodus 25:1-22**
 - i. Starts with the details of the ark of the testimony (a hollow wooden box, covered inside and outside with gold).
 - ii. Rings and poles provided for carrying the ark, so that no one needs to touch the ark.
 1. Recall that later Uzzah would take hold of the ark to steady it, and was struck dead (**2 Samuel 6**).
 - iii. “Mercy seat” of pure gold is to be the cover of the box.
 1. Overshadowed by images of two cherubim (type of angel) in gold, facing each other with wings overshadowing the ark.
 - iv. The “mercy seat” above the ark is portrayed as the throne of God. It is from here that the Lord will speak to people.
 1. “The Lord reigns; Let the peoples tremble! *He dwells between the cherubim*; Let the earth be moved!” (**Psalms 99:1**, NKJV)
 2. From the time of Eli the priest: “So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, *who dwells between the cherubim...*” (**1 Samuel 4:4**, NKJV)
 3. From the time of David: “And David and all Israel went up to Baalah, to Kirjath Jearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God the Lord, *who dwells between the cherubim*, where His name is proclaimed.” (**1 Chronicles 13:6**, NKJV)
 4. From the prayer of Hezekiah when threatened by the Assyrians: “Then Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, saying: ‘O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.’” (**Isaiah 37:15-16**, NKJV)

5. Consider also **Ezekiel 1**, where the Lord is portrayed as being on a portable throne, among the “living creatures”, which are referred to as *cherubim* in **Ezekiel 10**.

- c. The temple of God, and the ark, in heaven.
 - i. “Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and *the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple*. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.” (**Revelation 11:19**, NKJV)
 - ii. **Questions:** How literal are we to take this? Is there a literal temple of God in heaven, even with an actual “ark of the covenant” in it? As unusual as that sounds to many of us, that is what it seems (to me) to be saying here.
- d. The tabernacle’s significance for us
 - i. Most Holy Place represents the throne room of God: *heaven itself*.
 - ii. The mercy seat, the gold cover with the figures of cherubim above the ark, represents the throne of God.
 - iii. That is why only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, once (per year), with blood. This foreshadowed how Jesus, our greater High Priest, would bring his own blood to offer on our behalf, opening up the way to heaven for us.
 - iv. That also is why when Jesus died, the veil that blocked the way to the Most Holy Place, representing the flesh of Jesus, was torn in two by God, from top to bottom, at the very time Jesus died.