

Session 26– Study Notes
Exodus 25:1 – 31:18
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1. A sanctuary is a place where we immerse ourselves in God.
2. Through the sacrificial system, God instructed Israel about the consequences of their sins and the need for a sacrifice to seal their repentance.
3. The sanctuary is a place of being,
 - Of sinking ourselves into the reality of a God-created world,
 - A Christ saved world, a Spirit blessed world.
4. The plans for the tabernacle are a pattern of the Lord’s heavenly home thus connecting heaven and earth. All communication with the Lord is channeled through cultic rituals in the tabernacle.
5. It was the first collective house of worship in the history of Israel.
6. The opening command, however, emphasizes an unusual dimension of the project. (25: 1-2, 8) *“Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give...”*
7. Why then was the Sanctuary specifically to be built through voluntary donations?
8. To understand this week’s text, we must move forwards almost five hundred years, to a time when King Solomon built the temple.
9. During Solomon’s reign, Israel reached its greatest heights, economic and politically.
10. The building of the Temple was itself seen by the Bible as the completion of the exodus from Egypt.
11. Ultimately, and significantly, Solomon failed as a king.
12. His plan made immense demands on the people and led, as we will see, to fateful consequences.
13. How then was Jeroboam able to mount a coup, with real expectations of success? The answer lies in the impact the building of the Temple has on the people.
14. The scriptures tell us that it was the burden of forced labor that made the people impatient and edgy, harder, and harder to control after Solomon’s death. Until the people finally had had enough.
15. On several occasions we hear words that appear in the Mosaic books either in the context of Egyptian slavery or in laws forbidding the Israelites to act harshly towards slaves.
16. Solomon built “store cities,” the same word used to describe the cities built by the Israelite slaves for Pharaoh.
17. The scriptures are hinting that the building of the Temple turned Israel into a second Egypt. And Solomon was altogether too close to being an Israelite Pharaoh.
18. The story of Solomon reminds us of the significance of God’s command in the making of the Tabernacle. *“Take my offering from everyone whose heart impels him to give.” (Exodus 25:2)*

19. Its temple should have been built out of voluntary contributions, just as the Tabernacle was. This was no minor detail. It lay at the very heart of the project itself.
20. A temple built by conscripted labor conflicts with the very nature of God to whom it is dedicated.
21. God lives not in houses of wood and stone, but in the minds and souls of free human beings. God is to be found not in monumental architecture, but in the willing heart.

REFLECTIONS

1. The building of the Temple was among other things a way to bring glory to God. How does Jesus teach us to bring glory to God?

2. According to scripture the Temple was the “dwelling” place of God when God was on earth. Where does God dwell today?

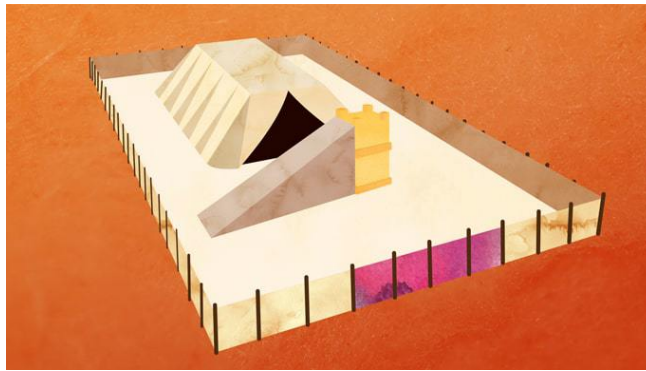
3. Why were the details of the plans for the tabernacle important?

4. How might you feel about a project if you voluntarily gave your resources towards it but others who didn’t give were able to enjoy and make use of it?

Sources

1. The Book of Exodus by Brevard Childs
2. Exodus (Interpretation) by Terence Fretheim
3. The Particulars of Rapture by Rabbi Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg
4. Covenant and Conversation by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
5. The New Interpreter’s Bible
6. Exodus – The New Cambridge Bible Commentary by Carol Meyers
7. Exodus – Application Commentary by Peter Enns

The Tabernacle (Mishkan in Hebrew)



Art by Sefira Lightstone

1. It Was a Portable Holy Temple. **Mishkan means “dwelling.”** and it refers to the portable complex in which G-d chose to dwell among the Israelites. Built shortly after the exodus from Egypt, it was the precursor to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem built by Solomon and then rebuilt by those returning from Babylonian captivity.

2. It's Known as the “Tabernacle” in English. In English it is commonly known as the Tabernacle, from the Latin *tabernaculum* (“tent”). This is probably more in line with its other Hebrew name, Ohel Mo'ed, “Tent of Meeting,”¹ thus named because it was where G-d would meet Moses and instruct him. At times the Torah also refers to it as Mikdash, “Holy [Place].”² Each name emphasizes another element of this temporary structure, where G-d chose to rest His holy presence and interface with His beloved nation.

3. It Came After the Sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah records the instruction to build the Mishkan,³ then tells us about the tragic sin of the Golden Calf,⁴ before finally recounting the actual construction of the Mishkan.⁵ According to Rashi, who takes the approach that Scripture is not necessarily arranged in chronological order, the mandate to build the Mishkan was actually given after the sin had occurred. The message is deeply inspiring: Even though the people had sinned, Moses prayed and they were forgiven. They were still worthy of building a home for G-d.

4. Construction Was Led by Betzalel and Aholiav The materials for the Mishkan were donated by the people, who gave so generously and so freely that Moses had to tell them to stop.⁶ The actual construction was performed by a team of inspired and skilled men and women. At G-d's command, they were led by two men named Betzalel and Aholiav. Betzalel was from a prominent family, a relative of Moses himself. Conversely, Aholiav was from the simplest of origins, from the humble tribe of Dan. But it made no difference; everyone contributed according to his or her abilities.

5. There Was a Central Building The Torah goes into great detail regarding the exact dimensions of the Mishkan and the materials from which it was made.⁷ The Mishkan itself was a boxlike structure that measured 30 cubits long and 10 cubits wide (a cubit is the length of the forearm and hand of an adult man). Its walls were made of thick gold-plated acacia wood beams standing side by side to form three sides of a rectangle. The beams were inserted into interlocking silver sockets and were held in place by long gold-plated wooden poles. A hanging curtain covered the fourth side.

6. It Was Covered With Fabric and Animal Skin The wooden structure was draped in a tapestry woven of linen and red-, blue- and purple-dyed wool. The tapestry had two sections which were attached to each other by a row of hooks. It was covered by a layer of goat skin, its panels similarly attached with hooks. These two layers covered the top of the structure and hung over the wooden walls of the Mishkan. Additionally, red-dyed ram skin and *tachash* skin covered the roof alone.⁸

7. There Were Two Altars There were two altars in the Mishkan complex. Outside, in the courtyard, there was a large copper altar, upon which many sacrifices were brought. Inside there was a small golden altar, upon which incense was burned on a daily basis.

8. A Courtyard Surrounded It The Tabernacle sat inside a large courtyard that was 100 cubits long and 50 cubits wide, known as the *chatzer*. In addition to the copper altar, this area was also home to the *kiyor* (laver), with which the priests would wash their hands and feet prior to performing the Divine service. The laver was made from mirrors donated by the women of Israel.

9. There Was an Outer Room...The interior of the Mishkan was divided in two by a hanging tapestry. Besides the golden altar, the anteroom, known as the Kodesh (“Holy”), contained a number of items. On the southern side stood the golden menorah, whose seven branches the priests kindled every day. Near the northern wall stood a golden table, upon which the priests placed showbread every week.

10. ... And an Inner Chamber The second, innermost room was known as the Kodesh HaKodashim (“Holy of Holies”). The Holy of Holies contained the ark, a golden box that housed the tablets (both the original, broken set and the second, complete set) and other sacred items. On the cover of the ark there were two golden cherubs facing each other with outstretched wings. No one was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies except for the high priest, and even he would enter only once a year as part of his Yom Kippur service.⁹

11. It Was Inaugurated Over 12 Days. For a week Moses practiced setting up and dismantling the Mishkan. Then, on the first of Nissan, just shy of one year after the exodus from Egypt, Moses officially inaugurated the Tabernacle. The entire tent was filled with G-d’s presence, evidenced by a thick cloud, which prevented everyone—even Moses—from entering.¹⁰ For 12 days, the first 12 days of the month of Nissan, the princes of the 12 tribes of Israel brought inaugural sacrifices and gifts.¹¹ The Tabernacle was not the exclusive domain of its stewards, the Levites (priests), but was the heritage of every Israelite.

12. It Was Transported in 6 Carts. The princes gave several donations to the Mishkan, including six covered ox carts, one from every two princes. Two wagons (and four oxen) were given to the Gershonites, who transported the Mishkan’s tent-coverings and tapestries. The remaining four wagons (and eight oxen) were given to the Levite families of Merari, who transported the Sanctuary’s wall panels, sockets, posts and other structural components. None were given to the clan of Kehat, who transported the most sacred items on their shoulders.¹²

13. It Was Placed in the Center of the Camp. For the duration of the Israelites’ 40-year sojourn in the desert, whenever they camped, the Mishkan would form the core of the camp. The Levites, who had been selected to be G-d’s ministers, would camp around the Mishkan, and the remaining 12 tribes camped around them, 3 on each side.

14. It Stood in Shiloh. When Joshua led the people into the promised land, the Mishkan came with them. For 14 years the Mishkan stood in Gilgal while the Israelites conquered and divided the land. Then they created a house of stone in Shiloh and spread the curtains of the Mishkan over it. The sanctuary of Shiloh stood for 369 years. At the end of that period, the sanctuary was moved to Nov, and then to Giv’on.¹³



Altar of Sacrifice

All burnt offerings performed within the tabernacle took place on this altar. It was hollow, five cubits square and three cubits high, or about 7½ x 7½ x 5 feet in dimension. It was made of shittim wood overlaid with brass plates.

It had four horns on its corners. Upon these horns the blood of the sacrifice was to be smeared. By laying hold of these horns, a person could find asylum and safety (see [1 Kings 1:50](#); [2:28](#)), although not if he was guilty of premeditated murder (see [Exodus 21:14](#)). Sometimes the horns were used to bind the animal or intended sacrifice.

Laver of Water

This, like the altar of sacrifice, was made of brass. It stood between the altar of sacrifice and the tabernacle. It was used by the priests for cleansing, preparatory to entering the tabernacle. In Solomon’s day, when a permanent temple was constructed, the laver was set on the backs of twelve oxen (see [1 Kings 7:23–26](#)).

The Table of Shewbread

Twelve loaves of unleavened bread were placed each Sabbath on the table of shewbread, a word meaning “bread of the presence” in Hebrew (see Exodus 25:30). The loaves were eaten in the holy place every Sabbath as “an everlasting covenant” (see Leviticus 24:5–9).

The Menorah

The candlestick provided light for the holy place and was kept constantly burning. It symbolizes the Holy Ghost and emphasizes the need to live by the light of the Spirit in this life.

The Altar of Incense

Each morning and evening, the high priest burned incense here. Incense is a symbol of prayer, just as the smoke from the altar rose before the veil every morning and evening. So Israel was expected to raise their prayers regularly before the Lord.

The altar's position before the Holy of Holies also shows the importance of prayer in preparing to enter the Lord's presence. The linen veil separates the holy place from the Holy of Holies. Embroidered on the veil in purple, blue, and scarlet are embroidered figures called cherubim, or angels of God.

The Holy of Holies and Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant: The Ark of the Covenant was the central focus of the Holy of Holies and the place where God met and talked with Moses. It was God's throne in Israel. The Ark contained a pot of manna, symbolizing God's mercy and constant provision; Aaron's rod that budded, representing priesthood authority; and the Testimony (or the Tablets of the Law, containing the Ten Commandments), reminding the people of God's holy nature and laws.