

# Exodus 25: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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In Exodus chapter 25 we have the beginning of the preparation for the construction of the tabernacle. The people of Israel received gifts from the Egyptians, the

we see that creation has two stages. On the first three days the order of creation is formed by the division between light and darkness, waters above and waters beneath, land and sea. And on the second three days each of these realms is filled and distributed to ordained rulers. Day four corresponds to day one, day five to day two, day six to day three. And in Exodus chapter 25 to 30 we see two sets of phases dividing the construction of the tabernacle. There are pattern phases and there are ordinance or generation phases and these are marked out by phrases. So make everything according to the pattern that you've seen on the mount or this must be done throughout all your generations. So one concerned with the pattern, the other with the continuing practice and the delegation. The pattern phrases which occur in the first half in chapter 25 verses 9 and 40, chapter 26 verse 30, chapter 27 verse 8 refer to the forming stage of the new creation. And the ordinance or generation phrases occur in chapter 27 verse 21, chapter 28 verse 43, chapter 29 verse 9 and chapter 30 verse 10. These refer to the filling stage where the new formed order is filled and apportioned to rulers. The first day of the tabernacle building begins with the formless raw materials assembled for the construction of the tabernacle. This is what happens in verses 1 to 9 as they devote certain things to the Lord. And then the ark, the table and the lampstand are formed on that first day. They're covered with gold and they represent the radiance of God's glory presence. There will be other things that are formed of other materials, but these are formed of gold. They're specially representing God's presence. The ark and its cover represent God's throne and footstool. The table might be seen as the earth beneath, the heavens, and the lampstand is the light of the first day. We should also observe the way, particularly in the following chapters, that the spirit of God assists in the building of the tabernacle. This is also something that human beings are establishing as creators under God's direction and instruction. In the creation story of Genesis chapter 1, God creates the heavens and the earth. And in the formation of the Garden of

Eden in Genesis chapter 2, he plays out a similar pattern of creation with man as a witness. Now there is a further movement still, as God is teaching man to create under his direction. We'll also see as we get further on in the book that there are themes of assessment and blessing and Sabbath, just as we have at the end of the story of the creation. The Ark of the Covenant also reminds us of Noah's Ark.

[ 8 : 32 ] Even though the word for ark isn't the same, we've seen already some similarities between the ascent of Sinai and the ascent of the Ark upon the waters, leading it to Mount Ararat and the establishment of a new covenant there. There's a similarity between Moses' ascent into the cloud and the ascent of the Ark upon the waters. So two sets of seven days, followed by a 40 days and 40 nights period. Now the Ark of the Covenant reminds us again. Once again, there's a construction of a particular type of wood box that God gives the instructions for, that must be overlaid with something inside and out, with specific dimensions. But there are sharp contrasts of course. One is covered with pitch, the other is overlaid with gold. And the Hebrew letters used for the covering of Noah's Ark in Genesis chapter 6 verse 14 are taken up again to refer to the covering or the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Noah's Ark was lifted up by the waters and the people must provide liftings up or contributions for the building of the tabernacle. On the first day of a new year, the tabernacle is established later on in the book and the covering of the Ark is removed in Genesis chapter 8 verse 13.

Again, a new creation event. Perhaps the tabernacle should be seen as a sort of building of a new Ark, that God is going to lead his people through the wilderness and his presence among them within this vessel is perhaps a new form of Ark. To dwell in the hostile environment of a flooded world, Noah had to build a world in miniature, the Ark, and dwell in that realm for a period of time.

For God to dwell in our hostile environment, a world of sin, a world that rejects him, a world that is impure in his spotless and pure holiness requires a different sort of Ark, a glory Ark that contains God's glory presence in our midst without that presence breaking out and destroying us.

It allows for communion between God and man without God's holiness destroying the worshipper. The Ark of the Covenant then and its cover represent God's throne in the inner chamber of the tabernacle, or this sort of palace tent. It's a throne and a footstool. The footstool being the Ark and the throne being the cover. We should probably relate the furniture of chapter 25 to the details of the previous chapter. The Ark of the Covenant represents God's throne. God was seen enthroned in the previous chapter. The elders, the priests, and Moses representing Israel ate before the Lord, and the table of showbread is the continued representation of that communion between the people and God in God's tabernacle, or his tent. The golden lampstand represents the assembly of Israel, burning like the burning bush with the presence of God in its midst. There's a pattern shown to Moses as we see in Numbers chapter 8 verse 4 on the mountain, so perhaps we should think that there is a heavenly archetype for this. This is something that Hebrews suggested, that there is a heavenly tabernacle that corresponds to the details of the earthly tabernacle. This is a sort of heaven model on earth, a model of God's presence in our midst. God's heavenly throne is represented in an earthly model. When we get to it, we should also contrast the building of the tabernacle with the building of the golden calf, which is sharply contrasted with it. Israel's life will later be coordinated around the tabernacle.

It will be symbolically mapped onto the reality of the encounter with God at Sinai, and the continued presence of God in their midst thereafter. God isn't bound to a particular place, but his special presence will move with them, and his throne will be set up among them within this special tent.

[ 12 : 26 ] Understanding the nature of the tabernacle, first as a portable Sinai, a movable mountain, and then as a new creation, and then as something related to Noah's ark, will help us to see how the sacrificial system works in relation to it. The tabernacle is a continued representation of these things. It relates to heaven above, it relates to Sinai, it relates to the Garden of Eden, it relates to the original creation as a whole, and it relates to Noah's ark. And as Israel orders its life around this building, its symbolic practice will relate it to all of those past events. It's a way of continuing the reality of those events, and developing those events in their significance, in the continuing life and practice of the nation. This is not just a past event. When they leave Sinai behind, they will take Sinai with them in some sense, and that will be taken with them in the tabernacle. It will be a continued place of encounter with God, of meeting and fellowship with the heavenly bridegroom. It will be a way of entering into the realm of heaven itself, in a model. A question to consider. In Hebrews chapter 8 verses 1 following we read,

Now the point in what we are saying is this, We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. Thus it is necessary for this high priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old, as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. How can meditating upon the meaning of the tabernacle, its connection with Sinai, and its connection with heaven, and then thinking about the connection between the tabernacle and Christ, help us better to understand what the new covenant means in this regard?