

# Items in God's Dwelling Place

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you have your Bibles with you, do turn back to Exodus chapter 25. As Victor was saying, we're going to be looking at the last part of Exodus to finish our three-year journey through it.

I'm pretty sure many of you here love to read. But let me ask you, hands up actually, who loves to read non-fiction? Yeah, a few, okay, alright, you want to keep your hands up.

Here's the next question. Of those non-fiction titles that you like to read, how many of you would like to read technical books? You know, like commentaries maybe? Daniel, please make sure your hands up.

Steph. Or manuals, you know, oven manuals, things like that. Okay, good, Daniel. Yes, okay, Nathan, good. Okay, and of those remaining people, how many of you, and particularly for those who like to read manuals, how many of you actually read every single page of the manual?

That is, you get to the back as well, you know the glossary and the appendices and the technical specifications. Yeah, anyone? I think Daniel Smith said he did. And Nathan, yeah, okay.

[ 1 : 14 ] Yep, not surprisingly. Not many people do, do they? Unless you want to go to sleep, maybe. Because many of these manuals, the purpose of those back sections are that they are references, aren't they?

You delve into them when you need them, when you've got a specific question you need answered, or something specific you want to look up. And I suppose as we get to this last part of Exodus, that's kind of how we do feel, don't we, when we read chapters 25 to 40.

I remember as a young man trying to read the Bible, read through the Bible from start to end, I would come to these chapters and sort of skip them. I may read chapter 32, because it's about the golden calf, and that's interesting.

But then I would glance over the headings of the others. I thought, no, no, no, I've got to get to the next book, which landed me in Leviticus, of course.

And then I decided, no, I actually need to go to Numbers before anything exciting was going to happen. But the thing is that if we do this, and if we do this as we're going through Exodus, then we've missed a large chunk of the book of Exodus, haven't we?

[ 2 : 26 ] In fact, more than a third of the book are these chapters. And you have to then wonder, why did God, why did the Israelites give so much content to these chapters, so much space to these chapters?

Now, you might think that perhaps it's because, you know, there was a tabernacle to be built or the temple afterwards, and they needed the instructions so that they could do it well.

But surely, once you've built the tabernacle once, once you've built the temple and the standing, you don't really need the instructions again, do you? I mean, you can see it there. Why do you need to have the measurements written out again?

You can just go and measure them. And so the question is, why do we have these chapters here? And I think in part, it's because Israel realized that these are still part of God's word to them.

These instructions, if you notice, are actually part and parcel of the law. And as we read, these are actually being given to Moses at the top of Mount Sinai, where God has given everything else so far regarding the law.

[ 3 : 39 ] And if you were watching over last year, you would remember that in chapter 24, God had just celebrated a covenant meal with Moses. Aaron and then his sons and the 70 elders were eating.

And then afterwards, God had summoned Moses to come further up to the mountain for him to give these very instructions. So it all takes on that very sort of sense in which this is really important, isn't it?

It's super important the way God has delivered it to the people. And so these instructions then are being preserved. But I want to say that as we look at them over the next coming weeks, I think you begin to realize just how important they are.

Not so much for the building of the tabernacle itself, but actually why the tabernacle was built the way it was built with the things that they had in them because they were pointing to something else. And so as we look through them slowly, rather than gloss over them, I would like us to then find treasures in God's word. Now you may not believe me just yet, but do keep coming along and hopefully by the end of it, you'll be convinced.

[ 4 : 56 ] So let's begin with the first nine verses of chapter 25. And we see just how significant this building of the tabernacle was going to be based solely on the quality of the materials that are being supplied.

So hopefully on the slide, I do have the verses. It says that the Lord asked the Israelites to bring him an offering based on what's been prompted from their heart. So they were to give without compulsion or coercion.

And all the materials you notice are of the finest quality. Gold, silver, and bronze, you understand. Blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen. Now the yarn itself was not so much the sort of thing that was valuable.

There was lots of wool that you could make yarn out of. But it was the coloring of it that made it precious. Because the dye, to get the blue, purple, and scarlet dye was very difficult to do. Then afterwards, there was to be durable leather. And then acacia, which is a very durable hardwood. And then afterwards, the oils, the fragrant incense, and then the precious stones for the priest's garments.

[ 6 : 05 ] Now, why such fuss about the quality of the materials? Well, we discover in verse 8 that it was because they were making a sanctuary for God to dwell with them.

In other words, they're building God's home on earth. And in the coming weeks, we'll see what the exact specs, the exact furnishings and furniture, what the purpose was, and the reason for the layout.

And we'll see that they're not merely functional or aesthetic, pleasing to look at, but rather deeply symbolic of God's relationship with His people. Now tonight, in today's chapter, we're just going to look at three items in particular.

The ark, the table, and the lampstand. So first, the ark, where we read, I think it's verse 10 on the slide. Have them make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.

So in metric terms, that's about 1.1 meters long, about 68 cm wide and high. So not very big, is it? Almost like if you had a chest at the end of your bed, it's the size of that.

[ 7 : 16 ] And so it's literally a chest, isn't it? But, it's to be overlaid with pure gold, inside and out, and then with the molding around it. Then they're to cast gold rings, four of them, fasten them to the feet, and then put two poles through them.

The poles are made of acacia again, but overlaid with gold, and then they're to be inserted. Why? Because the ark was to be carried by the poles. And as we shall see later on in the Bible, the poles are not to be removed because they had to be carried so that no human hand would then touch the ark, which was the most holy object.

And in it, God then asked for the tablets of the covenant law to be put in. That's the one where the Ten Commandments were inscribed. So that's the chest, and it had an opening on top, and now Moses is told to make a cover, an atonement cover, it's called.

And we'll look into a bit more of that as to why in future weeks. But, this atonement cover, unlike the chest, is to be of pure gold, not wood and then overlaid with gold, but two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide.

And then on top of that, two cherubim are to be hammered out of gold, at either ends of the cover, both looking at each other, both with their rings spread upwards and overshadowing the cover, facing each other and looking toward the cover.

[ 8 : 50 ] Then, the cover is to be placed on top of the ark after the ark, after the tablets of the covenant had been put into it. And here's the most insightful comment, I think, where it says, verse 22, there above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

Now, if you haven't watched Indiana Jones yet, or whatever, you can, I think there's a picture of it, yep, that's a picture of what it might look like. And it's in solid gold, it didn't have that thing at the bottom, by the way, it's probably a scale model or something.

It's in solid gold to indicate just how pure and holy it was. And you think about it, as we look at it, if you think that the tabernacle is the general place where God was going to dwell, then the atonement cover of the ark is almost like the precise location where God would meet his people. Symbolically, that was what God was saying in verse 22. We had just heard on Friday that Prince Philip had died, but if you imagine him living and the queen living in Buckingham Palace, the entire palace is the queen's residence, isn't it?

There are plenty of rooms, buildings, outbuildings, and the big gardens and everything. That's the queen's dwelling place, right? But, it's at the throne room and I've got a picture of that there.

[10:24] I actually went to visit that. Yep, didn't dare to take a seat on it, but it was at the throne room where you would meet the queen, right? Traditionally, that's where you would have an audience with the monarch.

And so, it's the same sense with this atonement cover. This is the place where they would have an audience with God. In fact, later Old Testament writers in the rest of the Bible would speak of the Ark of the Covenant as the footstool of God's throne.

So, if you want to reference 1 Chronicles 28, verse 2, or Psalm 132, verse 5. And so, what they were saying is that if God's throne is in the heavens, He's seated in the heavens, as often it says in the Psalms, and if you wanted an audience with the Lord, then you would approach Him humbly at His footstool, which is this tabernacle, this Ark of the Covenant, almost bowing in submission.

And that's what Israel had to do. And in fact, not anybody could just do it. It was only the priest and then the high priest Himself who could approach this Ark of the Covenant.

And so, we have a very, very stark contrast, don't we? That even though this is merely the footstool of God's throne, that's sort of the most lowly part of His entire throne, as it were, yet, for us on earth, that's the most holy place, isn't it?

[11:50] The most holy of locations in the tabernacle. Now, the other thing to note, of course, is that the Ark, the thing that was placed in it is the tablets of the covenant law.

Okay? And the reason for that is that it was a reminder of the basis of God's relationship with them. It's almost like the marriage certificate between God and His people. on it is written the fact that God had rescued them from slavery.

If you read the first commandment, that's what it starts up with. God brought them out of Egypt. And then, He calls them with the rest of the commandments to live as a holy people for Him, set apart for Him.

So, at the very heart of God's relationship with His people is this set of relationship, this covenant, as it were, the essence of God's relationship with them.

This is how He is their God and they are to be His people. Okay, as I said, many of you are probably familiar with the ark because of Indiana Jones, but the next two items in the tabernacle probably less so.

[13:01] And so, we'll look at them now. The second one is the table for the bread of presence. And so, we look back now at verse 23. God says, make a table again of acacia wood, two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high.

So, the same height actually as the ark. And overlaid it with pure gold, again, overlaid, and make a gold molding around it. Also, make around it a rim, a hand breadth width wide, and put a gold molding on the rim.

And then, we have the four rings and again poles through which they put the ring. So, again, the table was to be carried a bit like the ark. The poles were made of wood and overlaid with gold.

But then, we have the plates and the dishes made out of pure gold. As well, it's pitches and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. And here's the additional detail.

Put the bread of presence on this to be before me at all times. And so, again, I've got another visual image of that if you're wondering what it looks like.

[14:11] The pigeons and the bowls are solid gold. And what's not described here but in Leviticus 24 is the baking of the bread. And that's why you have pictures of it like that because they are to bake 12 loaves of bread, presumably one for each tribe, and then they were to put incense with it as a fragrant offering.

So, I think the stuff that's on top of the bread, that's for the fragrant offerings. And, what we find in Leviticus 24 is that the priests are to do it each Sabbath. That is, every Sunday they would swap the old bread with the new bread, bake a new set of loaves and put it on.

And then Aaron and his sons are allowed to then eat the bread that's been taken off. Now, we want to then think, why is this being called the bread of presence?

I don't think it's because God is present in the bread, because we already know, don't we, that the ark is his footstool. Rather, it's the bread of presence because it indicates God's presence with them, so that when the priests are eating it, they realize that they are eating it in the Lord's presence.

And here is a reminder of what just happened in the last chapter, chapter 24, because, again, Aaron and his sons and the elders, in chapter 24, ate in the presence of God, didn't they?

[15:36] And in verse 11, it actually says that even though they did, God did not raise his hand against them even though they saw God. And the fact that the eating and the changing over the bread happens on the Sabbath, I think, indicates that this is God's provision for his people.

You see, they are eating with God in the context of his Sabbath rest. It reminds them of how God will provide for them in the land, how God did provide for them in the wilderness through the manna, giving of the manna.

And the twelve loaves is symbolic of the fact that even though it was Aaron and his sons eating, they were eating on behalf of all Israel. And so, I think we're getting a picture, aren't we?

Starting to get a picture with this second piece of what it means for God to dwell in their presence. peace. It's a picture of rest and provision, that if God dwells with you, then there is peace and there is security.

And that's sort of added to now that we look at the final piece, the golden stand of seven lamps, which is in verse 31. Here, they are to make a lampstand of pure gold, hammer out its base and shaft, and make its flower-like cups, buds and blossoms of one piece with them.

[16:58] Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lamp, so three on one and three on the other, and then three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on the one branch, three on the next, three on and then so same for all six branches.

And on the lampstand itself, that is the middle stand, there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. So if you count that up, that's 22. One bud shall be under the first pair, that is as the branches meet one there, and then the second and the third.

So six branches in all. The buds and the branches shall be of one piece with the lampstand hammered out of pure gold. Then make the seven lamps and set them up so that they would light the space in front of it.

Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all its accessories. See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

So again, there's another picture of it if you're interested. And many of you will know that the Jews have something like that in the synagogue which they call the menorah. And again, this piece of furniture is both functional and symbolic.

[18:10] Because with this lamp, the function is that it lights up the entire room. But the symbolic meaning of it is that it signifies God's presence.

And additionally, that he's the one who brings light to the world. He's the true source of light to overcome the darkness. And we'll find in later chapters that actually this is the only source of light in the room.

The tabernacle itself doesn't have any windows for any light to come in. The seven lamps in total indicate completeness. And the way it is shaped, if you look at it, go back again if you can, remember, the buds and all that, strongly allude back to Genesis chapter 2, to the Garden of Eden. There's a strong allusions and references here back to creation. So we've had seven days of creation, seven lamps. God says on the first day, let there be light.

And this looks like the tree of life in the center of the garden. And remember what the garden represented. It represented God dwelling with humanity, with Adam and Eve.

[19:23] It said that God was walking in the garden with them. That was all before then. They had to be banished because of their sin. And so the whole picture of the garden of Eden is about God's presence sustaining and providing for his people.

people. And so we're beginning to see with these items, which will again be expanded on in coming chapters, God's vision for his people and by extension for all of humanity, for us.

We realize that God doesn't just want to create and then walk away. No, he created and he made creation so that ultimately his desire was to dwell with us.

That is God's purpose for creation and we're beginning to see it here in Exodus as well. And so in some ways we've come actually to the climax of Exodus. You know when you watch movies and fairy tales or read fairy tales, the happily ever after is just one scene isn't it?

It's 30 seconds at the end of the movie almost. And the movie is all about the drama and the tension that leads up to that. But that's not the case with God and Exodus.

[ 20 : 40 ] Yes, we've had drama in Exodus. We had the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea and the rescue of Israel from Egypt. We even had God descending in a big cloud and smoke and fire on Mount Sinai and giving the law.

But all this is merely working up to God's climax, the ultimate goal which he has of dwelling with his people. These final chapters here are about God, as it were, doing the happily ever after with Israel. Now we will see, of course, that it's not a perfect picture because of Israel's rebellion and sinfulness. But God's intent isn't changed by it. We realize that God is a God of relationship.

He created us to be in fellowship with him. Of course, even with sin, God works to overcome even those obstacles, and we will see that in the tabernacle itself.

And as we come to us now in this day and age in the New Testament, we see that same vision and ultimate goal which Brandon read to us in Revelation 21, didn't we? Where John saw a vision of the holy city of New Jerusalem coming down and we hear the loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them.

[ 22 : 03 ] They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

This is a vision of God's happily ever after for us, for all of creation, in the new creation. Now, we all have to make a choice, don't we, about where we want to live?

Some of us don't have the choice, probably, if you have children, but if you want to move out and get married or something, you're trying to decide where you want to live. Often, you base your decision on where the work is.

You want to be close to get to work. Later on, where the schools for the children are. You might also want to choose to live close to your family, your family members, your parents or your siblings or whatever.

I guess the same question is asked about our spiritual lives, isn't it? Where would you like to live spiritually? And I think that most of us, when we are Christians, we would say the answer is we want to live in close proximity to God, don't we?

[ 23 : 17 ] we want to live close to God because when we do, and when we live in his presence, we are assured of his care and his provision. We know that then all the blessings of being in relationship with him will flow to us.

But unlike the Israelites in the Old Testament, our access to God's dwelling is no longer via a physical thing like the tabernacle, but rather, as we read in the New Testament, it is accessed by being in Christ.

And we'll unpack more of this over the coming weeks, and I keep saying this like a broken record order, but that's true. But what we will see, the one thing that if you can just take away today, the one thing that you will see is that all these things that we're going to read about in Exodus 25 to 40 are really just pointers to Christ.

That is, they are shadows of what the reality will be in Christ Jesus. Everything is going to be fulfilled in Christ, but God is setting it up in these chapters so that the people of Israel can see when Jesus comes that he is the fulfillment of all these things that enables God to dwell with them.

Now, I'll just give you a few examples just by way of teaser, but if you look in John's gospel, when Jesus said, destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days, he wasn't talking about the physical temple, was he?

[ 24 : 52 ] He was talking about himself. Jesus was saying, he's the temple, he will die and be raised in three days. When he says, I'm the bread of life, or I'm the light of the world, if you're a Jew and you understand the temple, you would be thinking, is Jesus talking about those things, those items in the tabernacle, the light, the bread?

Yes, he is. He's referring to these very things in the tabernacle, and he's saying, now I'm the fulfillment of all these things that have been just sitting there pointing towards me. These items that we read about today signifies God's presence with his people, but when Jesus comes, he becomes the fulfillment of what it means to be living in God's presence.

presence. And so as Christians, we don't need to rely on a physical thing to dwell in God's presence. We don't need a church building. We don't need objects in our house.

We don't need any of these things. What we need is Christ. If you're in Christ, then God dwells with us. Now, of course, Jesus himself is no longer physically with us, but he prominence, didn't he? That as he was going up, that he would send his spirit. And so for us, before Jesus comes back again and is physically with us, for the time being, Christ is with us by his spirit.

[ 26 : 22 ] So God dwells with us when we are in Christ, and Christ is with us by his spirit. And the wonderful thing about this is that between the old and the new, God's goal of dwelling with us has not changed.

his end goal is still to dwell with his people, to have a people for himself, and then to dwell among them, to bless them. And so when Jesus actually, when he left and he promised his disciples at the end of Matthew, remember chapter 28, verse 20, I think I've got the verse in the slide, he says, and surely I am with you to the very end of the age.

That is a really, really significant promise to us, a great comfort in all times, that come what may, Jesus is with us by his spirit to the very end of the age.

And so for us as a church, if we are in Christ and his word, then that's true. That's always true. Christ is always with us.

We may be locked down, we may be YouTubing, but still, God is still dwelling among us. It's good to be able to gather physically, and we ought to when we can, but even if we can't, the promise is, God is still with us.

[ 27 : 50 ] All the Christians that we're praying for in China, in Myanmar, who are suffering, God's promise to them is that he is with them even through their trials.

No government, no threat is going to be able to take that promise away from them. So when we pray for them, we pray with that confidence. We know that God is going to be with them.

And what's true for us as a church is also true for us as members of Christ's body. So that if you are in Christ, then God is with you by his spirit.

You may not feel like God is with you. You might feel far away from God. You might be struggling with a lot of issues in your life, health or otherwise, a lot of pressures in your life.

But if you are in Christ, then God is with you. And when he's with you, his promise is to provide for you, to be your guide, to be your light.

[ 28 : 50 ] And he's already rescued you in Christ Jesus. But the corresponding side of the covenant is that because he's rescued us, he's also called us to be set apart, to live for him, to be holy as a people and as individuals as well.

So let's take heart, let's remember God's promise that if we're in Christ, then God dwells with us. Let's pray. Father, thank you that in Christ you dwell with us and we are secure to come into your presence.

Thank you that you feed us physically and spiritually and that you keep us safe physically and spiritually and you provide for all that we need physically and spiritually. Give us peace and comfort in the knowledge of this.

Help us to be strong and courageous to live for you in light of this. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.