

The Book of Exodus



The Tabernacle 1

Our Summer layover of Evening Services meant that we lost a key aspect of the journey that the people of Israel made from Egypt and into the desert of Sinai. It was the transformation of a rabble of Hebrews into a covenant society. The first covenant with this family of people was with Abraham, then Isaac and then Jacob and his family. By the time of the Exodus, the promises now applied to huge mass of people. In this second half of Exodus we see how the covenant with the people is affirmed by God and by the people and how they were transformed into a nation with God at the centre of it through the establishment of the Law – the Torah which was given to Moses on Sinai.

“The purpose of covenant is to create a new relationship. The purpose of law (Torah) is to regulate or perpetuate an existing relationship by orderly means.” Victor Hamilton

At the heart of the Torah are the Ten Words from Exodus 20. Notice I didn't say Commandments. Because of the way the Pharisees and others misused the Torah, we've come to think that the Jews were people who believed in salvation by keeping the Law. Many did, just as there are many people who believe that salvation is by Law today. But that isn't the way the Ten Words are constructed. Take a look at Exodus 20:

And God spoke all these words, saying,

- 1. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*
- 2. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*
- 3. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*
- 4. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*
- 5. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*
- 6. "You shall not murder.*
- 7. "You shall not commit adultery.*
- 8. "You shall not steal.*
- 9. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
- 10. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."*

Notice the difference to what you have been taught. The first word is not a command – it's a statement. The first two of the traditional commandments are merged – which actually makes more

sense if you look at it that way.

That first statement is the key to how we understand what Torah – the Law - is all about. Here it is again *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* It' s a statement of their salvation. They had been rescued, saved by a God who had chosen them. It' s about grace. God wasn' t saying "Here are 10 Commandments. If you keep them you will be my people." What this passage says is "You are my covenant people. I have chosen you. As a covenant people, you should live by the moral standards of a holy God. And here they are – the other nine words." All the laws of social organisation that follow in the rest of the Pentateuch derive from the moral order of the Ten Words – it is the basis of the society that Torah created. Torah brought order out of chaos. It changed them (in 40 years!) from a disorganised rabble into a disciplined society and an effective invasion force. It was a society where God would dwell in their midst, which is what the Tabernacle is all about.

I guess that' s no surprise to any of us really. So how do the Commandments apply to us? In some ways they don' t and in some ways they do. The Ten Words are the foundation of the earthly chosen people of God – the people of Israel. It is the moral foundation of their society from which all law derives. Is it for Christians? We aren' t the people who were brought out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. So in that sense it' s not our moral code because it doesn' t refer to our covenant.

But we are a people of grace – a chosen people who have been rescued from Hell, brought out of the land of slavery to sin, into the light of the glorious gospel. Now we are out of our Egypt, we live according to the law of Christ. You' ve heard this enough times because it' s a derivative of the Ten Words which Jesus used and is repeated elsewhere in various forms in the NT - *Matt 22:37-40 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* Why not a simple re-iteration of the Ten Words. The answer is that the Ten Words are a moral foundation to a society. What God demands of His heavenly people is much more exacting. As we know from what Jesus says elsewhere, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, You shall not do murder is much more morally exacting than just killing someone. Just holding a grudge or calling somebody a fool is a sin that awakens God' s wrath. The same applies to adultery- just lusting is enough to displease God. Our God is a holy God. We are His covenant people through the shed blood of Christ, therefore we are called to be holy as He is holy.

A second aspect is that we are a people of Word and Spirit. We have the commands of the Word but we are people who are called to walk in the Spirit. In other words, we obey God, not merely according to His written word, but according to how He leads and commands us by His Spirit day by day. The written word gives us the general, the Spirit the specific. And the one never contradicts the other.

There is a third aspect to this. The law is our schoolmaster and as Paul shows us in Romans 7, it shows us that we are sinners and therefore leads us to Christ for forgiveness and that only by His Spirit can we have the ability to live as God requires us to. We don' t get to be holy by trying to keep however many commandments we think we should, but living according to the Spirit who indwells us. That' s why teaching on the Holy Spirit is so critical. Asking God to fill us with His Spirit isn' t something that only Christians of a certain conviction or disposition should do. It' s a call on all of us. The characteristic of the Spirit of God is that He' s HOLY. If you' re desire is to be holy, then allow the Spirit to fill you and you will start to be like Him. This isn' t pie in the sky stuff, this is the foundation of our faith and I' ve dealt with this on a few occasions over the three years I have been here.

That was a long introduction to bring us to the Tabernacle. Here we have a holy God who desires to reside amongst His people and as they lived in tents, then Moses was commanded to make a tent - a Tabernacle - which would then be in the middle of the camp. Now you see the importance of order. The Torah, based on the foundations of the Ten Words was designed to place God at the centre of their daily lives, because God was going to be literally at their centre.

And for us in the New Covenant – we have been given God' s written Word – all of it, not just 10 commandments or whatever – as the order of our lives and the church because God resides at the centre physically by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "Don' t you know" Paul said "that your bodies

are temples of the Holy Spirit”. You and I are a holy place – we must live like we are.

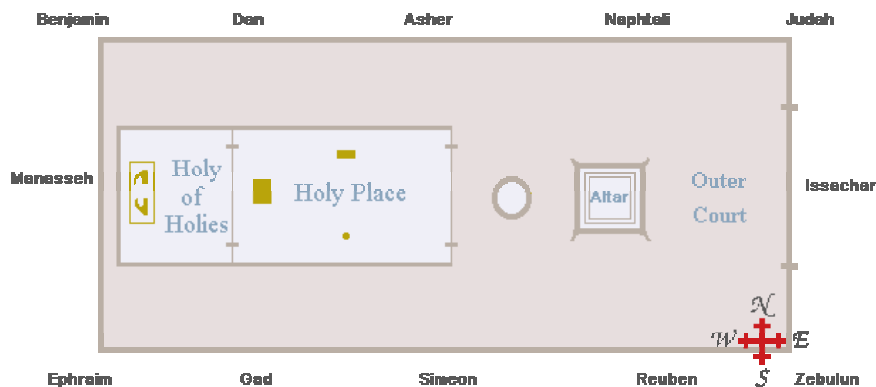
Exo 25:1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. 3 And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, 4 blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, 5 tanæd rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, 6 oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 7 onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece. 8 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

What an interesting mixture. There' s all the fine things you' d expeet the precious metal and stones, the fine linen, but also wood and skins. The Tabernacle was to be a tent just like theirs. Let' s have a look at what it was like and we' ll start to explore it.



As you can see, what they constructed was a tent. It was enclosed in a fabric stockade in which was a bronze altar and a bronze ceremonial laver. The tent looks nothing from the outside. It was very much like the tents of the people. It was covered in skins on the outside to protect it from the weather. But like the people' s tents, on the inside there were fine fabrics and items in gold. The whole court/stockade was 100 cubits by 50 (175 x 87.5 feet) and the linen wall of the stockade was 5 cubits high (about 8.5 feet). In other words, it wasn' t particularly enormous- about the ground area of our church site. Here' s a site plan:

The Tabernacle



What do we learn from this? Straightaway we understand as I have already said, that we have a God who desires to dwell amongst His people. It' s an irony really. We have thought today of a God who

is righteous and is angry at sin. We have already looked at the moral law tonight which defines what sin is. Yet we have a God who still desires to live amongst us. God accepts us and continues to dwell with us even though we fall so short of His righteousness.

As I said earlier, the Law is a schoolmaster that shows us that we can't actually live up to God's standards. In other words it condemns. On one hand we are chosen of God, but on the other hand, we sin by being unable to keep the law. That was the problem for the Israelites too. But God still dwelt amongst them and worked His purposes out through their weakness and failure. And God does that too in our lives. He still desires to use us and still does despite our fallenness. What a wonderful God we have!

But, the first feature of the tabernacle was that people could not enter into the outer court because there was this linen wall. It was a barrier that prevented ordinary people from casually approaching. If there's anything that we've learned today, it is that we should never take the things of God casually. God is holy and sin means that a barrier exists between us and God. God still desires us even in our fallenness, but sin limits how much we have fellowship with Him and how much He can use us. We need to go through that barrier and into His presence

Sin ruins our relationship with God and damages our relationships with one another – it brings decay and death. It needs to be dealt with so that we can enjoy His holy presence. Next time we will take that on further.

Prayer of confession and repentance

