

Exodus 26-27
Psalm 27
Hebrews 10

“The Tabernacle and the New Creation”

July 2, 2017

Over the summer we are looking at the heavenly pattern of the tabernacle and the worship that God establishes at Sinai.

Last time we saw the emphasis in chapter 25 as God says
“see that you make them after the pattern for them,
which is being shown you on the mountain” (25:40)

Or in 25:9 – “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”

And we hear echoes of the same language today in 26:30 and 27:8.

But scholars of the ancient near east often point out the parallels between Israel’s worship and the cultures that surrounded them.

You may recall that when we talked about the crossing of the Red Sea, we saw that the Song of Moses has some interesting parallels to the victory song of Ramesses. You could describe the Song of the Sea as Moses’ “rap battle” with Pharaoh – as Moses takes various themes of Ramesses’ great victory at the Battle of Kadesh, and shows how the LORD is the great King who defeats Pharaoh and saves his people from their enemies.

In the same way, it is at least interesting to note that the layout of the Tabernacle has a lot of parallels to Ramesses’ throne tent, which is depicted on the monuments where Ramesses Victory Song was also inscribed.

Let me briefly describe Ramesses’ throne tent:
the courtyard was twice as long as it was wide;
the entrance was in the east;
in the middle of the courtyard was a tent that had two compartments –
the first was where those who came to pay homage to Pharaoh would kneel;
the second – a square inner compartment –
was where Pharaoh himself would sit enthroned before his people.
Oh, and these depictions show Pharaoh surrounded by falcons,
symbolizing the god Horus, with their wings protecting him.

Just a few weeks before, Pharaoh’s army had been pursuing them.
They may well have seen Pharaoh’s throne tent (from a distance) at the Red Sea.
As slaves they may even have been involved in making the throne tent –
or at least building the monuments where the depictions were carved.

So when God tells Moses to make a “throne tent” for Yahweh –
with the same layout –
twice as long as it is wide;

an entrance in the east;
in the middle of the courtyard is a tent with two compartments –
the first for the priests to do their regular work,
the second – a square inner compartment –
where the ark of the covenant has two cherubim,
with their outspread wings “protecting” the center –
the place where the LORD meets with his servant –

you can see why a skeptic might say that this is just an imitation of Pharaoh’s throne tent!

What is God doing here?

Remember the constant refrain?

“do everything shown you on the mountain”?

On the mountain, Moses sees the heavenly pattern.

And God tells him how to build the tabernacle as an imitation of that heavenly pattern.

But where else do you see an imitation of the heavenly pattern?

In Genesis 1-2.

The earth itself was modeled after the heavenly pattern.

God had planted a garden in the east – in Eden –

a holy of holies in the midst of his holy land,

where God might dwell with his people.

And when Adam and Eve sinned,

and God had cast his people *out* of the Holy of Holies – out of the garden –

he placed the cherubim there with a fiery sword.

So there are all sorts of things *in the creation itself* that point to the heavenly pattern.

We shouldn’t be surprised when unbelievers get things right.

As Paul says, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law,

by nature do what the law requires,

they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law” (Romans 2:14)

Human beings cannot *help* but live in God’s world.

Therefore, all peoples everywhere will get some things right.

(The problem is that we all get things *wrong* as well –

which means that we *all* need the gospel –

which is kind of Paul’s whole point in Romans 1-3!)

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 27 –

a song that speaks of offering sacrifices at God’s tent –

a song that also speaks of the LORD as the one who protects me in battle.

After all, when you face your enemies –

when temptation and trial come your way –

you are called to come into the holy place and gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.

Sing Psalm 27

Read Hebrews 10:1-25

Hebrews says that the curtain of the heavenly temple is nothing less than the flesh of Jesus.

Why does Hebrews say this?

Well, remember what we saw from Hebrews last time:

the first section of the tabernacle (the holy place) represents *this present age* (9:9);
the second section (the most holy place) represents the age to come –
the new creation.

How can you get from this age into the age to come?

It is only if God himself comes in our flesh.

So what we are looking at today is how the tabernacle points us to the new creation –
the age to come.

Why is this important?

Well, Hebrews says that this is how *we* enter the holy places.

We enter into the heavenly holy of holies –

that's what we do here every Sunday!

That's why our worship is structured the way it is!

1. “Make the Tabernacle” – The Coming of the New Creation (26:1-37)

a. The Cherubim and the Curtains of the Tabernacle (v1-14)

26 “Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. ² The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits,^[1] and the breadth of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be the same size. ³ Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. ⁴ And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. ⁵ Fifty loops you shall make on the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. ⁶ And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole.

⁷ “You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make. ⁸ The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains shall be the same size. ⁹ You shall couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and the sixth curtain you shall double over at the front of the tent. ¹⁰ You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set.

¹¹ “You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together that it may be a single whole. ¹² And the part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. ¹³ And the extra that remains in the length of the curtains, the cubit on the one side, and the cubit on the other side, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and that side, to cover it. ¹⁴ And you shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins^[2] and a covering of goatskins on top.

Verses 1-14 describe the three layers of fabric that covered the tabernacle – God's dwelling place.

The inner layer was made of curtains of fine-twined linen,

with blue and purple and scarlet yarns which were woven with patterns of cherubim.
The middle layer is made of goats' hair,
which was designed to protect the inner layer from the rougher skins on the outside.
The outer layer is made of rams skins and goat skins
which was designed to protect the tabernacle from rain or sandstorms.

Verse 6 talks about 50 clasps of gold for the inner curtain.
Verse 11 talks about 50 clasps of bronze for the outer curtain.

You use gold for everything that is *inside* the tabernacle –
and bronze for everything that is *outside* the tabernacle.

Inside the tabernacle, everything is gold, blue, purple, and scarlet –
the most valuable and expensive colors in the ancient world.

(Remember that in the ancient world, you have to find “natural” colors –
using snails, insects, or plants as your basis –
so certain colors are more expensive – as the dyes are harder to find!)

The exterior of the tabernacle would have been fairly plain:
It is only when you went inside that you would see the glory of the LORD.

b. Acacia and Gold – The Frames and Bars of the Tabernacle (v15-30)

¹⁵ “You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. ¹⁶ Ten cubits shall be the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. ¹⁷ There shall be two tenons in each frame, for fitting together. So shall you do for all the frames of the tabernacle. ¹⁸ You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; ¹⁹ and forty bases of silver you shall make under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons; ²⁰ and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side twenty frames, ²¹ and their forty bases of silver; two bases under one frame, and two bases under the next frame. ²² And for the rear of the tabernacle westward you shall make six frames. ²³ And you shall make two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear; ²⁴ they shall be separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring. Thus shall it be with both of them; they shall form the two corners. ²⁵ And there shall be eight frames, with their bases of silver; sixteen bases; two bases under one frame, and two bases under another frame.

²⁶ “You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, ²⁷ and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the side of the tabernacle at the rear westward. ²⁸ The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall run from end to end. ²⁹ You shall overlay the frames with gold and shall make their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and you shall overlay the bars with gold. ³⁰ Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.

And that is what we see in verses 15-30 –
the acacia wood frames with the gold overlaid acacia crossbars.
The gold would reflect the light of the lampstand –
so that there would always be a golden glow in the sanctuary.

And each frame would have a base of silver –

you do not want to put *gold* in the dirt!

Sometimes the description gets rather confusing to us –

but Moses had an advantage that we do not:

he had seen the plan – he had seen the model for all this –
when he was on the mountain.

He had seen the real thing – the heavenly archetype –
and so he could talk things through with his craftsmen
(perhaps better than he could express it in writing!).

[You know how this works:

“put this thing in that over there” – somehow communicates effectively to some people!]

But think about the results of this construction:

Israel is dwelling in tents in the wilderness.

And now the LORD God says that he will dwell in a tent with his people.

God’s purpose is to send his Holy Spirit to dwell *in* his people
(that’s what happens at Pentecost).

But so long as sin has corrupted humanity,
God cannot yet dwell in humanity!

And so, for now, God begins to show forth his purposes –

by leaving his holy *mountain* (Mt Sinai)

and dwelling in tents in the midst of his pilgrim people –

as if to say, “I am not only a God who is high and holy,

but I am also a God who draws near to my people – so that I may live with them.”

Yes, in many ways, this tent looks a lot like Pharaoh’s throne tent,

but the parallel itself communicates something clearly:

Israel had been serving Pharaoh.

But Yahweh has delivered Israel from Pharaoh, so that his people might serve *him*.

“Israel is my son, my firstborn. Let my son go, so that he may serve *me*.”

And the *differences* from Pharaoh’s throne tent are also important:

where Pharaoh’s throne would be,

there is *no image*.

The cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant are protecting an empty space!

In the Garden in Eden, there *was* an image in the Holy of Holies.

His name was Adam.

The fact that there is no image in the Most Holy Place
signals that there is something missing.

There *needs* to be an image of God in the Most Holy Place.

But no graven image – no picture of deity – can possibly suffice!

We need for the Word to become flesh and dwell among us!

And until that day came,

there was a screen – a veil – to bar the way into the Most Holy Place.

c. The Veil and the Screen of Blue and Purple and Scarlet – The Cherubim (v31-37)

³¹ “And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. ³² And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. ³³ And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. ³⁴ You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place. ³⁵ And you shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table, and you shall put the table on the north side.

Verses 31-35 tell us about the veil that would separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

The ark of the covenant is in the Most Holy Place.

Only the high priest would ever see the ark of the covenant.

(We hear in Numbers 4 that the ark was wrapped in three layers of protective cloth before it would be transported anywhere).

If you think about it, the most beautiful – the most holy – object ever made in Israel was never put on display!

The golden mercy seat – with its two cherubim – was only seen by one man in each generation.

We often think that great works of art are for *people* to see.

But the greatest artistic work of the OT was crafted for *God* to see.

I want you to think about that when you are doing the little things that no one ever sees.

In the great cathedrals of Europe,

you will find painstaking attention to detail

in the craftsmanship found in obscure corners

too high up for anyone to ever see.

Because they were not building for human eyes.

They were building for God.

In the same way,

we should delight in those little things – those things that will never be seen by others –

but will give honor and glory to our God.

³⁶ “You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. ³⁷ And you shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia, and overlay them with gold. Their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.

In verses 31-37 we then hear about the veil and the screen –

both of which are made of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.

(In other words, the same material as the inner curtain of the tabernacle).

The screen is for the entrance of the tent.

It has bases of bronze – rather than bases of silver.

Why?

Because the screen is the furthest point from the Most Holy Place –
and the further away you get from the Holy of Holies,
the more common the metals.

The veil is to separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place –

and the chief thing that distinguishes them is that the veil has cherubim
“skillfully worked into it.”

What are cherubim?

We have already heard that the cherubim were the guardians of God’s holy place.

Ezekiel 1 and 10 will give us detailed descriptions of what the cherubim looked like.

Ezekiel says that they have four faces –
human, lion, ox, and eagle.

They also have four wings, human hands, and the feet of a calf.

In other words, the guardians of God’s holiness

blend together characteristics of wild animals, tame beasts, winged birds,
and man.

You may recall that Ramesses throne tent had “falcon” guards.

Likewise, Assyrian temples from the same era had winged bulls – or winged lions –
with human heads.

It was common in ancient temples to portray the guardians of the holy places
in the forms of fantastic beasts.

And what God says here in Exodus 26-27 is that this impulse is *correct*.

In Revelation 4-5 we will again see the four living creatures –
the cherubim – at the throne of God.

But there, the four living creatures are joined by the 24 elders –
human representatives who are there because of the incarnation.

So in order to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies

you have to get past the cherubim –
the guardians of God’s throne.

And as we saw from Hebrews 9 last time,

the Holy Place represents the present age –
and the Most Holy Place represents the age to come.

How can we enter the age to come?

How can we enter the new creation?

This is why we need an altar:

2. “Make the Altar” – The Way into the New Creation (27:1-8)

27 “You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits^[h] long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. ² And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. ³ You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. ⁴ You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. ⁵ And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. ⁶ And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. ⁷ And the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. ⁸ You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.

The bronze altar is really a large portable grill.

The altar is around seven feet wide and seven feet long.

The fire would be lit under the altar –

so that the meat could cook on the grill.

The altar communicates two things:

first, the only way for us to come into God’s presence is through a sacrifice;

but second, having entered God’s presence through the sacrifice,

God wants to have a meal with us.

The altar is the place where most Israelites would come closest to God.

Only the priests could go into the tabernacle,

but all the worshipers could come into the courtyard.

And here, at the bronze altar, the blood was shed that made atonement for sin.

Here, at the bronze altar, the burnt offering was consumed by fire –

as God’s people drew near to God by offering.

And here, at the bronze altar, the meat of the peace offering was cooked –

so that the people of God might partake of a meal with the LORD –

and thus have *peace* with God.

The way into the new creation leads past the altar.

This is why Revelation 5 shows us Jesus – the lamb, standing as though slain.

This is why Hebrews 13:10 says that

“we have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.”

Jesus has offered himself as the once-for-all sacrifice at the altar of God.

As Hebrews 10:12 points out –

“when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins,
he sat down at the right hand of God.”

And we gather at that altar every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

We come to the heavenly altar – where Jesus himself feeds us with himself.

We’ll be looking tonight at how the sacraments are means of salvation –

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 that “those who eat the sacrifices [are] participants in the altar.”

Our shorter catechism says this really well:

“The sacraments become effectual means of salvation,
not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them,

but only by the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit
in them that by faith receive them.”

In other words, God uses the sacraments to save us *by faith*.

Do you want peace with God?

Then come to the table – sit down and have a meal with God.

And again we are reminded in v8 that all of this is to be made according to the heavenly pattern.

God is showing his people how they may draw near –

through the sacrifice –

and at the table –

as his people partake of the sacrifice.

3. “Make the Court of the Tabernacle” – The Court of the King (27:9-19)

⁹ “You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twined linen a hundred cubits long for one side. ¹⁰ Its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. ¹¹ And likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long, its pillars twenty and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. ¹² And for the breadth of the court on the west side there shall be hangings for fifty cubits, with ten pillars and ten bases. ¹³ The breadth of the court on the front to the east shall be fifty cubits. ¹⁴ The hangings for the one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. ¹⁵ On the other side the hangings shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. ¹⁶ For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. It shall have four pillars and with them four bases. ¹⁷ All the pillars around the court shall be filleted with silver. Their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze. ¹⁸ The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits, the breadth fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of fine twined linen and bases of bronze. ¹⁹ All the utensils of the tabernacle for every use, and all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

The dimensions of the tabernacle are not accidental.

The most holy place is a perfect cube:

10 cubits wide, 10 cubits long, and 10 cubits high.

The holy place is only slightly less perfect:

10 cubits wide, 20 cubits long, and 10 cubits high.

The courtyard is five times larger than the holy place, but only half as high:

50 cubits wide, 100 cubits long, and 5 cubits high.

As we saw earlier, these are the approximate proportions of Pharaoh’s war tent.

The LORD has delivered his people from Egypt.

They will no longer serve Pharaoh – they will serve the LORD.

4. “Bring Oil for the Lamp” – The Eternal Light (27:20-21)

²⁰ “You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn. ²¹ In the tent of meeting, outside the veil that is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a statute forever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel.

In verses 20-21 the language changes suddenly.
Rather than “you shall make”
it shifts to “You shall command...”

Because this is something that will need to continue long after the tabernacle is built.

Bring oil.

This is another reason why we sang Psalm 27 earlier.
The LORD’s my savior and my light.

Last time we heard about the lampstand –
the seven-fold lampstand that reflects the seven lights of heaven;
the lampstand that blends together the image of a tree of life –
and a tree of light.

God’s light shines in our darkness.

And we are told that Aaron and his sons shall tend the lamp
“from evening to morning before the LORD.”

The language of evening and morning reminds us again of the creation days.

And just like in the case of the creation days,
the language of “evening to morning”
focuses on the period of darkness.

Evening is when the sun is going down.

Morning is when the sun is rising.

During the day the priests will be in and out of the tabernacle regularly –
so during the day there will always be someone around to keep the lamps lit.

But at night it could be easy to overlook this.

And so God commands them to tend the lamps ‘from evening to morning.’

The lamp in the Holy Place is the light of the world.

You do not want the light of the world to go out!

Conclusion

“Therefore, brothers and sisters,

since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,
by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain,
that is, through his flesh,
and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

[there are three things that we should do:]

1) let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,
with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed with pure water.

[in other words, we now can draw near to the living God –
we have been consecrated as priests – washed and sprinkled –
so let us believe God’s promises – and draw near to him!]

2) Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,

for he who promised is faithful.

[our hope does not rest on our own performance;

our hope rests on our faithful savior –

my hope is nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness!]

3) And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...

We need each other – we belong to Jesus – so we need to encourage each other.

We need to meet together – and encourage one another –

and all the more as we see the Day drawing near.