

Exodus 25:1-9

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn in your Bibles back to Exodus chapter 25, and we're going to look at verses 1 to 9 and some other chapters later on in Exodus as well. I should pass on my greetings from Jackie! and the children to you. They had very specific people they wanted me to pass on their warmest regards and IPC Ealing was one of them. So, send you greetings from Jackie and the children.

So, let's look at Exodus chapter 25 and verses 1 to 9, and as we come to God's Word, let me pray for us again. Father, in your light we see light, and so we pray that you would come now and by your Holy Spirit illuminate the preaching of your Word so that we would see Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly. And we ask this in his name, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever praised. Amen.

A home says something about the person who lives in it or the people who live in it. A home says something about the person who lives in it or the people who live in it. My sister-in-law's home is decorated with bright and colorful colors, cheerful colors. For example, her kitchen is bright blue walls with yellow and pink bunting hanging from the ceiling, and that's because Angela is a bright and cheerful person. My parents' home has a sign on the front door that says Karibu, which is Swahili for welcome. Inside the house are souvenirs and ornaments from various parts of the world, Tanzania and Kenya, where they have lived, China and India and Canada, where they visited. My parents are well-traveled, well-cultured people who love to welcome people into their home. A home says something about the person who lives in it or the people who live in it. And it's the same when it comes to God's home in Exodus. Here in Exodus chapter 25, God gives Moses instructions about a home that He wants Moses to build for him. And the layout and materials, the fabrics and the furniture, the oils and the incense, all of it says something about the God who lives in it. Now, if we're honest, when we get to this part of Exodus, we tend to skip over it in our yearly Bible readings or our eyes glaze over it because it is quite hard going, all these details about the tabernacle. But I remember years ago hearing one of my favorite Old Testament commentators, Alec Mateer, say, if a certain part of the Bible is boring you, then God is trying to tell you something. If a certain part of the Bible is boring you, then God is trying to tell you something. And let's be honest, these tabernacle instructions can be a wee bit boring. But that's the point. God's trying to tell us something.

The details about the tabernacle are not meant to bore us. They're meant to awe us. They're meant to awe us with who God is because His tabernacle home says something about who He is and what He's like.

And I think from this chapter and this section on the tabernacle in Exodus 25 to 40, we can see four things about God. Four things. Here's the first. God is King. God is King. Just look again at the materials that God wants Moses to use in building a home for Him. Verse 3, gold, silver, and bronze, blue, and purple, and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen, goat's hair, and tanned ram skins, goat skins, acacia wood. These materials and fabrics listed here were materials and fabrics fit for a king.

[4 : 23] Now, you may be asking, well, how do they have it when they're in the middle of the wilderness? Well, they acquired them the night they left Egypt. The Egyptians were actually giving them gold and silver and some of these materials. So, that's why they're in possession of them in the middle of the wilderness. And God wants Moses to use these materials to make a tent for him that is fit for a king. A tent fit for a king. But it's not just the materials that reflect his royalty.

It's also the layout and the furniture. The layout of this tabernacle complex was quite simple. There were three main areas. There was the courtyard, a big, large, rectangular space. And then there was the tabernacle, which was divided into two rooms. The first room you walked into was called

the holy place.

And then you walked into a second room through a big veil, and that was called the most holy place, or the holy of holies. And that room was like God's throne room. As we'll see in a moment, this is where the Ark of the Covenant was situated. Now, boys and girls, if you've ever seen Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Ark, okay, that's the Ark of the Covenant that that movie's based on. It's this Ark of the Covenant. It was placed in the holy of holies. And it was symbolizing God's throne. In fact, one of the passages in 1 Chronicles calls the Ark of the Covenant God's footstool on earth.

The inner lining of the room was made of blue and purple and scarlet yarns with cherubim embroidered into it. So if you picture it, here was this Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies. It was like God enthroned in the midst of the cherubim in the heavens with his footstool touching the earth.

So the layout and materials, the fabrics and the furniture, convey that this was no ordinary tent. It was a royal tent. The king would be in residence here. You can hopefully see that the details are not meant to bore us, right? They're meant to awe us. This is the king's residence. God was setting up his royal residence in the midst of Israel. That's the first thing God's tabernacle tells us about himself. God is king. Number two, God is present. God is present. Look at verse 8.

[6 : 58] And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst. That's actually what the word tabernacle in verse 9 literally means, a dwelling place.

God's tabernacle is his dwelling place. Now, I know that's quite obvious. God's tent is his dwelling place, which means God is present. But we need to see the significance of that statement in the story line of the Bible, because this is a historic moment in redemptive history for Israel. This is an epoch defining moment in the history of Israel. Just think back to the Garden of Eden, where God would walk with Adam in the garden. Do you remember? Eden was where God lived with Adam and Eve in a bounded, holy space. But after the fall, God has only ever said to speak to people or to appear to them. But here in Exodus, he comes to dwell with his people, with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, even with Moses. God has never said to dwell with them. Some of them are said, like Noah and Enoch, to walk with God.

But it never says that God came down to dwell with them like he did with Adam. After the fall, God only ever appears, speaks, and then disappears. But now look what he's promising. He's promising to come and dwell permanently with his people. This is a significant moment in redemptive history. No more intermittent appearance. Now only permanent presence. And this is, in fact, the whole purpose of the Exodus. If you jump forward to chapter 29 and verse 45, chapter 29 and verse 45 and 46, here we see the purpose of the tabernacle. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God, and they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them. Do you see that? Do you see the whole point of the Exodus is so that God would dwell with his people. God redeems his people out of slavery, rescuing them from the judgment of death and the oppression of the oppression of the enemy, so that he might live with them, so that he might dwell with them. This is why Exodus chapter 25 to 40 is not the appendix to the book of Exodus. It is the climax, as one scholar has put. It's not the appendix. It's the climax of the book. The tabernacle is the climax of God's redemptive purpose in the Exodus. He rescues his people in order to dwell with his people. And this is underscored by each of the pieces of furniture mentioned in chapter 25 from verse 10 onwards. We have first the Ark of the Covenant, verses 10 to 22. The Ark of the Covenant. This was a rectangular box, wooden box made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold. And the lid was made of pure gold. There was no wood in the lid, unlike the box. And there were cherubim molded into the lid with their wings coming forward, touching each other as they looked down upon this lid. It was called the mercy seat.

It was where the blood of the sacrifice would be later sprinkled. As I mentioned earlier, the Ark of the Covenant symbolized God's footstool on earth. It was like his throne, where his feet would touch the earth from the Ark of the Covenant. It was the meeting place between God and man. It was the access point between heaven and earth. It was where God would speak with Moses in the tabernacle. It symbolized his presence with his people. There was a second piece of furniture that did that, and that's in verses 23 to 30. That's the table of the bread of presence. This was a wooden table, again, made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold. And on it were 12 loaves of bread, symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel.

And the loaves was a reminder that God had been present with his people in the wilderness, providing them with manna from heaven, the bread from heaven. It was called the bread of presence, and it would sit on the table. It also symbolized God's presence with his people. [11:54] And then third, in verses 31 to 40, we have the lampstand. This was a seven-branched lampstand made of pure gold. It had three branches on either side with a central stem. It had almond blossom cups on the end of each branch to hold the oil, and therefore it looked like a tree, reminded Israel of the tree of life. And it was lit. The oil was lit with fire all day, every day. For 24 hours a day, it was lit. It symbolized the life and light of God's presence with his people. The table and the lampstand were placed in the holy place, in the first room of the tabernacle, on the other side of the veil from the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was. The table was placed on the north, and the lampstand on the south. And these three pieces of furniture, the Ark of the Covenant, the table of the bread of presence, and the lampstand, they all symbolized what was at the heart of this home for God, and that was his presence with his people. And it was not just an intermittent presence, remember. It was permanent. And even so, when they traveled through the wilderness, these pieces of furniture were taken with them. The priests carried them. And so again, we're meant to see that these details are not meant to bore us, but to awe us. God the King was coming to dwell with his people and to travel with his people as they made their way through the wilderness. Since the fall with Adam, God had not dwelt with his people like this. He had only ever appeared and disappeared, but now he was moving into the neighborhood, into the vicinity, moving into the street, so to speak, and permanently so. This is the second thing we see from God's tent. God is King. Second, God is present.

Number three, God is holy. God is holy. Look again at chapter 25, verse 8. And let them make me a sanctuary. Literally, let them make me a holy place. The tabernacle meant a dwelling place. Sanctuary meant a holy place. This word sanctuary, it's only used twice in Exodus here, chapter 25, verse 8, and also back in the Song of Moses in chapter 15, verse 17. But the root word holy occurs 75 times in Exodus, and nearly always in relation to the tabernacle. The rooms in the tabernacle, do you remember their names? The holy place, the holy of holies, the most holy place. The garments for the priests, they were called holy garments. Aaron was to wear a turban with a golden plate on it, with the words engraved, holy to the Lord. It would be a holy crown on his head. Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated, which is the verb from which we get the noun or adjective holy. God promised to sanctify the whole tabernacle complex by his glory. The altar of incense was said to be most holy to the Lord. And Moses was to make a holy anointing oil with which he was to sanctify everything in the tabernacle. You can't read these chapters and not get the point that this home of God's was holy. This was a holy place. And the reason why it was a holy place is because it was based on a design from another world, from heaven. Look at verse 9. [16:08] Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and all of its furniture, so you shall make it. Why did Moses have to follow the pattern exactly? Why was there no human ingenuity or creativity in the design of this tabernacle? Because it was not an earthly tabernacle.

It was a heavenly tabernacle. It was supposed to replicate, be a copy of the archetypal home of God in heaven. That's why Moses had to follow it exactly as God had revealed it. It was a tent from another world. It was a tabernacle from heaven. Because God doesn't live here. He lives in heaven. And so his home should represent what heaven looked like. His home should be holy. But herein lies the tension.

God is king. God is present. The king is in residence here. So good, so far. But now God's holiness creates a problem. We might say that his holiness hinders rather than helps at this point. Because God, the king may dwell with his people, but his people can't get to meet him. God is holy, but they are unholy, as the golden calf incident in chapters 32 to 34 makes abundantly clear. So what's the point then of God, the holy king, coming to dwell with his people if his people never get to meet him?

The tension is reflected in the terminology that's used for talking about God's tent. In chapter 25, verse 8 to chapter 27, verse 19, Moses mainly uses the word tabernacle. Remember? Dwelling place. But from chapter 27, verse 20, through to chapter 30, verse 38, he switches the terminology and only ever uses the word tent of meeting. So for the first few chapters on this section, tabernacle. And then at the end of chapter 27, tent of meeting. The shift in terminology brings us to the heart of this tabernacle complex. It was meant to be a place not just for God to dwell with his people, but for his people, but for his people to meet with him. It was not just a

dwelling place. It was to be a meeting place between God and his people. That was the climax of the book of Exodus. And yet, if you think about it, it's an anti-climax, right? Because they don't get to meet with him. Because the place is holy, because it's God's royal dwelling place that is set apart, sanctified. Israel can't go in. God has come close, and then he shut the front door. Do not enter. So what's the point in this whole tabernacle sanctuary complex if God's people can never get in? If they can never meet with him? Reminds me of the time I was catching up with an old school friend back in Belfast, Clarkie. He was the sort of guy at school who could sell snow to an Eskimo.

[19 : 41] And he was brilliant with words, could sell you anything. And after university, doing an engineering degree, he decided to go into construction. And he made it big very quickly. He became a multi-millionaire within a few years. And I caught up with him about 10 years after his business had been going. And he told me that he had just bought a huge country estate in Scotland. True story. He'd bought it, this old heritage country estate, and he was going to build houses on it. And he said to me, he says, you'll never guess who my next door neighbor is. And I said, well, who is it? He said, Prince Charles. I said, you're joking me. He says, honestly, Prince Charles is my next door neighbor. And when I heard that, I only had one question for him.

Have you ever met him? Have you ever met him? He said, no, never met him. And I thought to myself, well, what's the point in living right beside Prince Charles if you never meet him? You might as well live beside Prince Joe blogs. It makes no difference. And what's the point in God, the King of Heaven, coming to dwell with his people, Israel in the wilderness, if they never get to meet him? What's the point? And that is the tension in this whole tabernacle story in Exodus. God, the great King of Heaven, the Holy King of Heaven, has come to dwell with his people, but they can't get in. Well, there's a fourth thing we see about this tabernacle, which shows us that they do eventually get in. God is King. God is present. God is holy. And number four, God is gracious. God is gracious. Exodus chapter 27 to 30. We see this through three more pieces of furniture.

The altar connected to the tabernacle, connected to the tabernacle priests. The ark, the table, the lampstand, do you remember what they symbolized? God's permanent presence with his people. But here, in chapters 27 and 30, we're introduced to three more pieces of furniture, each connected to making God's holy royal dwelling place, a meeting place. The bronze altar, chapter 27, verses 1 to 8. This was the altar used for sacrifices, which was placed inside the courtyard at the entrance. It was on the path to the entrance to the tent of meeting. The sacrifices on the bronze altar were linked to meeting with God at the tent of meeting. If you glance forward to chapter 29 and verse 38. Chapter 29 and verse 38. Here's some of the instructions about offering sacrifices on a daily basis on the bronze altar in the courtyard.

29 verse 38. Now, this is what you shall offer on the altar. Two lambs, a year old, by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. And then skip down to verse 42. It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you to speak to you there.

These were the morning and evening sacrifices. They were offered on the bronze altar, and it was there when the sacrifice would be offered in the morning at nine o'clock and at three o'clock in the afternoon.

[23 : 37] That is when God would meet with his people. So what's the lesson? It is that any meeting with this holy king of heaven is predicated on sacrifice. Do you want to meet with him? You can, but you got to bring a sacrifice. The second piece of furniture is mentioned in chapter 30 verses 1 to 10. Chapter 30 verses 1 to 10.

This is the golden altar of incense. This was placed inside the tabernacle in the first room, the holy place, just in front of the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. And Aaron was to burn fragrant incense on this golden altar in the morning at nine o'clock at the same time that the sacrifice was being made on the bronze altar out in the courtyard, and in the evening, three o'clock at the same time that the burnt sacrifice was being made on the bronze altar out in the courtyard. The idea was that the incense in the tabernacle was to be a sweet, pleasing aroma to God as it rose up into his presence on the other side of the veil in the holy of holies. Again, notice the placement of the altar of incense, chapter 30 verse 6. And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you.

Do you see how the altar of incense is connected to meeting with God? This was the closest the priest would come to the presence of God as they ministered in the holy place on a daily basis.

So we have the bronze altar. We have the golden altar of incense. And then in between, there is a third piece of furniture out in the courtyard again, the bronze basin, chapter 30 verse 17 to 21. This was placed out in the courtyard between the bronze altar and the entrance to the tent of meeting. It was where the priest would wash themselves before they went into the most holy place for their daily duties. So we have three pieces of furniture, the bronze altar, the bronze basin, the golden altar of incense. And if you can picture it, they are all on the same axis. They're all on the same line from the entrance of the courtyard through the entrance to the holy place right to right in front of the entrance to the holy of holies. They were actually all on the same line as the ark of the covenant behind the veil.

[26 : 28] In other words, if you wanted to meet with God in the holy of holies at the ark of the covenant, you had to go through these three pieces of furniture. You had to offer a sacrifice at the altar. Your priest had to cleanse himself, and then he had to go in and offer incense on the golden altar. This was part of the process of meeting with God. Now look back at chapters 28 and 29. We've looked at chapter 27 on the bronze altar. Chapter 30 about the golden altar of incense and the bronze basin. But look what's in between those two chapters. Just in your Bibles, look at the headings. The priest's garments, the priest's clothing, and then chapter 29, the consecration of the priests. The clothing and the consecration of the priests. So putting chapters 27, 28, 29, 30 together, here's what we see. If you want to meet the holy king of heaven, you need two things. You need a sacrifice, and you need a priest. You need a sacrifice, and you need a priest. Because if you think about it, there are really two hindrances to meeting with this holy king. There is the hindrance of our sin, and there is the hindrance of separation, the veils, the curtains. The people are sinful, and therefore they're separated from God by curtains and screens and a veil. Sin and separation, those are the two problems that stop the tent of dwelling becoming a tent of meeting. But both are overcome by sacrifice and a priest. The sacrifice overcomes the problem of sin. The priest overcomes the problem of separation. And all of this comes about by the gracious provision of God, the king who dwells in his tabernacle. People don't deserve it. The golden calf incident in chapters 32 and 34 will show us that. They are a sinful people who rebel against God, and yet God creates a way for sinful, rebellious people to come and meet with him through a sacrifice and a priest. Why? Because that's the kind of God he is. He's a gracious God. A home says something about the person who lives in it. And this home has shown us that God is king, God is present,

God is holy, and God is gracious. Now you may be thinking, okay, Johnny, thanks very much for the Old Testament history lesson. Very interesting. But what on earth is the relevance for us this evening here in 2023? We know the tabernacle at Sinai eventually became the temple on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, and that temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. And even though it was rebuilt in 515 BC by Ezra with the exiles who returned, and then it was expanded by great King Herod just before Jesus was born. We know it was destroyed again by the Romans in AD 70. The only thing that remains of that temple is the Western Wall in Jerusalem, which you might see on the news where the devout Jews go and they pray in front of the wall. They put their little prayers on pieces of paper and push them through the mortar between the bricks on that wall. So what's the relevance of this part of the Bible for us today if that's all that's left of God's dwelling place on earth? Well, look back again at chapter 25 verse 9.

Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and all of its furniture, so you shall make it. Do you remember what we saw? The relevance of that verse was that Moses had to make this tabernacle exactly as God directed him because it was a copy of God's tabernacle in heaven, of God's original home. Hebrews chapter 8 verse 5 tells us that the earthly tabernacle was just a copy of God's home in heaven. So while the tabernacle on earth is no more, while the temple in Jerusalem is no more, God's heavenly tabernacle still remains. God is still in heaven in his original home.

And we are still here on earth. And God has not changed. He's still calling sinners, people like you and me, to come and meet with him because that's the kind of God he is. There's none that seek after God, no, not one.

But there is one God who seeks after sinners. All the way through the Bible, God seeks after sinners. When Adam falls in the garden, God comes walking in the garden, calling to Adam, where are you?

[31 : 54] When Abraham is worshipping his idols in Ur of the Chaldeans, God comes to him and calls him to leave his idols and go to a promised land. When Moses is in Midian hiding because he

has murdered an Egyptian, God calls to him from the burning bush. When Israel commits the sin of idolatry with a golden calf, God doesn't quit on them. He renews covenant with them through Moses, and then he calls them to come and meet with him at the tabernacle. It's how the book of Leviticus begins. Do you remember the beginning of the book? And God called to Moses from the entrance of the tabernacle. And then what does he give him? All the rules and regulations about priests and sacrifices so that God's people can come and meet with him. That's the great good news. God is still calling sinners like you and me to come and meet with him in his heavenly home. The question is, where can we meet with him? Because here we are on earth, there he is in heaven. So where do we meet with God? At the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem? Do you have to make a pilgrimage to Israel? Mecca? The Vatican? IPC Ealing? Online? Where can we meet with God?

Well, the answer is actually not at a place anymore, but in a person. We can meet with God in Jesus Christ. You see, the Romans were not really the ones who destroyed the temple in AD 70. I mean, they did, right? They came in, they ransacked it, they kicked over the stones, and all that's left is the Wailing Wall today. But they were not really the ones who destroyed the temple, the second temple.

It was Jesus in AD 33 when he died on a cross. Do you remember what happened at the temple? The curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. Jesus destroyed the temple on earth, the meeting place of God, because he himself became the new temple. His flesh, which was offered in our place as a sacrifice, through that flesh, Hebrews says, it was like a curtain opening the way for us into the presence of God. Then he ascended into heaven, and as our high priest, he sits there now mediating between us and God. You see, Jesus fulfills the tabernacle in Exodus. He fulfills everything about it. He is the mercy seat, the place where God's wrath is turned away because of his sacrifice.

He is the bread from heaven in whom eternal life consists. He is the light of the world. He is the tabernacle, John 1:14. The word became flesh and literally tabernacled among us. He is the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He is the high priest who enters God's holy place to offer the once for all sacrifice for his people's sins. Jesus is everything we need to meet with this holy king who dwells in his holy heaven. And he invites us to do so. So let me ask you in closing, have you ever met with him? Do you remember the question I asked my friend Clarkie when he told me that he lived beside Prince Charles, now King Charles III? Have you ever met him?

So let me ask you, have you ever met with this God? Boys and girls, have you met him? Do you know you can meet him tonight through Jesus by putting your trust in Jesus? That's how you can meet him.

[36 : 02] Because Jesus, by faith, will take you into God's presence in those heavenly realms above, into his holy royal residence. And you will meet with the living God through Jesus by faith. And for those of us who have met with him, then let's rejoice that we have continual access into God's holy royal residence in heaven. This is how the writer of Hebrews puts it, therefore brothers, 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, there's the sacrifice. And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, there's the priest, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. What a beautiful, wonderful access we have into God's presence. Let us praise him. Let us pray. Father, we bless you that you're the God who longs to dwell with humanity, a sinful humanity that has turned its back on you, and yet you call on us to come and meet with you. We thank you that you did that with Adam, with Abraham, with Moses, with Israel, and that you continue to do it now with sinners like us. We pray, Father, that you would give us the faith to be responsive to that call to meet with you through your Son, the Lord Jesus, in your high and holy residence above. And we ask this in Jesus's strong name. Amen. We're going to conclude our worship this evening by meditating and praising God for some of the things we've spoken.