



EXODUS

Chapters 24-31

The book of Exodus opens with Moses' conflict with Pharaoh that leads to God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, a well-known story that has achieved popular-level status in our culture. However, the presentation of those stories tends to give the impression that Exodus' material focuses on the liberation of enslaved people, which reached its crescendo when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. That unfortunate impression disregards the far more momentous second half of the book in which the liberated Israelites encounter God at Mt Sinai and enter a covenant relationship with Him. This class begins a study of the book of Exodus that seeks to help us better understand the book's story, the relationship between God's rescue of the Israelites from Egypt and His covenant with them in the wilderness, the book's connection to the larger biblical narrative, and the place it should have within our lives.

Moses on Mount Sinai

After a ceremony consecrating the people and formalizing God's covenant with Israel (*Exodus 24:1-8*), Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders approach God on Mount Sinai, going halfway up where "they saw the God of Israel"¹ and ate a meal in His presence (*Exodus 24:9*). However, they saw God from below His heavenly dwelling place, looking up through the transparent barrier separating their space from God's space (*Exodus 24:9-11*).

God called Moses to "come up to [Him] on the mountain" after Moses, Aaron, and the elders ate their meal (*Exodus 24:12-14*). After climbing to the mountaintop, Moses waited seven days before God called him to enter "the cloud" containing His presence (*Exodus 24:15-18*) – God called Moses into His heavenly dwelling place that Moses, Aaron, and the elders saw from below. Moses stayed with God for forty days, receiving a vision about the tabernacle, the mobile tent God designed to physically represent the heavenly dwelling Moses saw on top of Mount Sinai (*Exodus 25:8-9*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

Exodus through Deuteronomy dedicate about forty chapters to detailing the tabernacle and its role in Israel. The attention it receives indicates the crucial place God intended it to have in Israel. Consider – God designed the tabernacle as a portable Eden so that He could dwell amid Israel. **God made the radical choice to move His presence into the midst of His sinful, rebellious people.**

God's decision to move His presence into Israel's midst raised a dilemma – **how could a holy God dwell in the presence of unholy people?** The tabernacle addressed that issue by providing the Israelites instructions regarding the priests who would mediate on their behalf by offering sacrifices intended to remind the nation of their guilt and to cause God's judgment to 'pass over' them (*Exodus 28-29*).

A portable mini-Eden

Exodus designs its narrative of the tabernacle instructions to remind readers of the creation story and the garden in Eden. Consider:

- In a way that echoes God's speeches during the creation week, God speaks to Moses seven times in Exodus 24-31 (*Exodus 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12*). His speeches introduce blocks of instruction regarding the tabernacle, a tent designed as an Eden-like space.
- Additionally, Exodus groups the tabernacle instructions into three groups of seven. The significance of the grouping intensifies when one notices that the first two groups end with a description of **morning/evening** instructions (groups 1, 2), while the third group ends with a command about the **sabbath** (group 3).

Group 1 – the tabernacle and its furniture (*Exodus 25-28*)

1. Ark of the covenant (*Exodus 25:10-22*).
2. Table of bread (*Exodus 25:23-30*).
3. Golden lampstand (*Exodus 25:31-40*).
4. Tabernacle – its frame and curtains (*Exodus 26:1-37*)
5. Bronze altar (*Exodus 27:1-8*)
6. Tabernacle courtyard (*Exodus 27:9-19*)
7. Oil for the lamp (*Exodus 27:20-21*). Lamp is to be lit **evening and morning** – an echo of the morning/night pattern in the creation.



Group 2 – Seven paragraphs detailing the priests’ garments and consecration (Exodus 28-29).

1. The high priest’s ephod (*Exodus 28:6-14*)
2. The high priest’s breastplate (*Exodus 28:15-30*)
3. The high priest’s robe (*Exodus 28:31-35*)
4. The high priest’s turban (*Exodus 28:36-38*)
5. The high priest’s coat (*Exodus 28:29*)
6. Consecration of the priests and their garments took place in a seven-day event (*Exodus 29:35-37*).
7. The section about the priests includes a brief description of the sacrifices God instructed them to make every **morning and evening** (*Exodus 29:38-46*).

Group 3 – another seven paragraphs relating to the tabernacle’s funding, design, and activity (Exodus 30).

1. Altar of incense (*Exodus 30:1-10*)
2. Census tax (*Exodus 30:11-16*)
3. Bronze basin (*Exodus 30:17-21*)
4. Anointing oil (*Exodus 30:22-33*)
5. The incense (*Exodus 30:34-38*)
6. Oholiab and Bezalel (*Exodus 31:1-11*)
7. The **Sabbath** (*Exodus 31:12-18*) - command to rest every seventh day.

- God's tabernacle instructions included materials and designs previously connected to Eden. For example:
 - The materials God instructed Moses to gather to construct the tabernacle included "onyx" (*šōham*; the word appears 11x in the Hebrew Bible and, except for Job 28:16, all instances focus on the tabernacle/temple and the priest’s clothing), a material previously mentioned only in Eden (*Exodus 25:7; Genesis 2:12*).
 - God instructed Moses to craft cherubim on top of the Ark of the Covenant and to embroider them into the tabernacle's veil (*Exodus 25:17-22; 26:31*). Cherubim were the angelic beings God placed at the entrance of the garden in Eden – the place where God dwelt with humans (*cf. Genesis 3:8*) – to prevent humans from reentering it after their exile (*Genesis 3:22-24; cf. Ezekiel 1:4-14; 10:6-10; Isaiah 6:1-7; Revelation 4:6-8*).
 - God designed the lampstand to represent an almond tree with seven blossom-shaped branches that held its candles, an image reminiscent of the tree of life in the garden (*Exodus 25:31-40*).
- The tabernacle's creation-patterned instructions and its Edenic imagery signal its purpose – **the tabernacle was God's dwelling place in Israel's midst** (*Exodus 25:8; 40:19-33*). It was a place where God's space and human space overlapped and united.



Applications

What does God's choice to move His presence into Israel's midst reveal about His intentions?
How does that choice relate to passages like Habakkuk 1:13?

How might the tabernacle, a place where heaven and earth overlap and unite, help us understand Jesus and his mission (*John 14:8-9; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20*)?

The tabernacle was a 'holy space' ("sanctuary" in Exodus 25:8 is the Hebrew word *miqdash*, a word that means 'a holy space') because God dwelt in it. How might the holiness of the temple help us understand our identity as God's temple (*1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19*)?

What can we learn about our relationship with God from God's instructions regarding the tabernacle in Exodus 24-31?

Next class

Exodus 32-34, The Golden Calf incident

