

Heaven on Earth: tabernacle (instructions)

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[0 : 00] Our reading this evening is taken from the book of Exodus chapter 25 which can be found on page 83 of the church bibles.

! Exodus chapter 25 beginning at verse 1. The Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. These are the offerings you are to receive from them. Gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, goat hair, ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather. Acacia wood, olive oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

Then let them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

[1 : 16] Let 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.

Overlay it with pure gold both inside and out and make a gold molding around it. Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it. The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark.

They are not to be removed. Then put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law, which I will give you. Make an atonement cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other. Make the cherubim of one piece with the cover at the two ends.

[2 : 31] The cherubim are to have their wings spread upwards, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking towards the cover.

Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law that I will give you. There, above the cover, between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

Make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it.

Also, make around it a rim a hand breath wide and put a gold molding on the rim. Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners where the four legs are.

The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them.

[3 : 45] And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. Put the bread of the presence on this table to be before me at all times.

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.

Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand, three on one side and three on the other. Three cups, shaped like almond flowers, with buds and blossoms, are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand.

And on the lampstand, there are to be four cups, shaped like almond flowers, with buds and blossoms. One bud shall be under the first pair of branches, extending from the lampstand.

A second bud, under the second pair. And a third bud, under the third pair. Six branches in all. The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold.

[5 : 06] Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it, so that they light the space in front of it. Its whip trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold.

A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, thanks so much, Tamara. And let me add my welcome. We are jumping back into the book of Exodus this evening.

We took a break just, and we got to the end of chapter 24 before Christmas. This evening we just read chapter 25. We're actually covering chapters 25 to 31.

Seven chapters of Exodus this evening. So let's pray and ask for God's help as we dig into it. All scripture, all scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

[6 : 16] Lord God, we thank you for that promise, that all scripture is profitable. And so we pray, Lord, that your spirit would apply it to our hearts this evening.

That you would profit from transformed hearts directed to the praise and worship of the Lord Jesus. We pray, Lord, that you would increase in us our understanding and appreciation of just the lengths that you have gone to, to restore a sinful people to yourself.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there was a season when our son was obsessed with Lego.

Absolutely obsessed. So obsessed with Lego that instead of his usual bedtime stories, he'd insist on being read the instruction manuals.

And at the time he was also insisting that Alice did the reading and not me. So there would be night after night and I'd be reading Anne of Green Gables to Mimi and poor Alice. Alice would be systematically working through Lego instruction manuals, construction manuals for Boaz.

[7 : 29] Now, to give credit where credit's due, Alice went about the task with suitable gusto. And admirably, like Tamara read for us this evening and attended to this unusual genre of bedtime reading with great enthusiasm.

Bag 8, step 301. Let's go. Well, I don't know about you, but when you get through the book of Exodus and it starts off with this exciting narrative.

And it's the epic story of the Lord leading his people out of Egyptian slavery, miraculously leading the people through the Red Sea. And there's a drama of that.

There's a drama of God appearing to Moses on Mount Sinai in clouds of smoke and fire. And it's all super exciting. But then you get to these chapters at the tail end of Exodus.

And I don't know about you, but with all the repetitive detail, with measurements in cubits. I mean, hello, we've got the metric system. Our eyes can tend to just glaze over a little bit, if we're honest.

[8 : 40] And for sure, we're not going to discard them entirely. This is the Word of God. But mentally, we shove them in that drawer reserved for instruction manuals and radiator bleeding keys.

But before you zone out entirely, you should consider these two things. Number one, why does the tabernacle get so much airtime in the Bible?

Seven chapters this evening. Altogether, about a fifth of the book of Exodus is devoted to the tabernacle. And if the Bible gives so much airtime to something, you should pay attention.

Number two, it's the instructions for the tabernacle come direct from God. So from chapter 25, verse 1, the Lord said to Moses all the way through chapter 31, verse 17.

It's one big speech. God does all the talking. Now back in Genesis chapter 1, God spoke creation into existence.

[9 : 52] Here in the end of Exodus, God speaks the tabernacle into existence. And in fact, it's not one long speech from the Lord, but seven speeches.

It's just like Genesis chapter 1. The Lord creates in seven days. He speaks at the beginning of each day seven speech acts that bring about the creation of the world.

The same here in Exodus chapter 25 to 31. Seven times it says, The Lord said to Moses, then gives him the instructions.

So 25, verse 1, 30, 11, 17, and 22. And then 31, verse 1 and 12. Just in case there's any doubt about it, any doubt that there's a parallel here.

What's interesting is that the seventh speech in both cases is about Sabbath rest. Now, for the original readers of Exodus, only the priests were allowed into the tabernacle.

[11 : 03] Only were allowed into the most holy place and the holy place. The ordinary Israelites wouldn't have had access. They never got inside the tabernacle.

So for the first readers, these are not IKEA flat pack instructions. They're more like MTV Cribs or Architectural Digest Open Doors, drawing back the curtain and granting special access to those places where you would normally never be allowed to go to spaces and interiors that you'd never otherwise have the chance to experience.

Now, for us, these chapters on the instructions for the tabernacle, I think, make us stop and think, do we realize just how good we've got it?

Do you appreciate, if you're a Christian, what a privilege you have? What a privilege you have in having the kind of access to God that we have through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So these chapters on the tabernacle, I think, highlight for us the very real privilege that we have, the very real privilege it is for us to have God to dwell among us.

[12:23] Highlight for us the reverence with which we should be approaching the throne of God.

Now, if you're here and you're just looking in on the Christian faith, you're exploring the Christian faith, then these chapters, I think, highlight for us the big problem that there is for sinful people to come into the presence of our Holy God and highlight for us the enormous lengths that the Lord has gone to to restore a sinful humanity to himself.

So we've got three headings this evening. They're in the service sheet if you find that helpful, if you'd like to take notes. So first up, it's a really big deal.

So first things first, what even is a tabernacle? Well, very simply, it is a tent. It's an ornate tent, but it is a tent nonetheless.

And so just to give us a quick overview, if you skip over the page to chapter 26, chapter 26, verse 33. End of verse 33.

A carton will separate the holy place from the most holy place. So it's a really simple piece of architecture in terms of its spatial organization.

[13:48] There's the most holy place, where only the high priest is allowed to go, and only once a year at that. And then there's the holy place, which is for priests only.

And what's in there is there's a lampstand and there's a table. Then you've got the outer court, and that's where the ordinary Israelites would go. And very important, the purpose of the tabernacle were given in chapter 25, verse 8.

So this is a key verse for us in understanding what's going on here. The Lord says, Have them make a sanctuary for me, that I will dwell among them.

So this is huge. No longer will the Lord be distant from his people. He's moving in.

This tent is God's tent among the tents of his people. So the tabernacle is really basically a glorified tent.

[14:56] Literally, a glorified tent. A glorified tent, as we're going to see. So just skip over a few pages to chapter 29, page 88 in the church Bibles.

And chapter 29, verse 42. There I will meet with you and speak to you.

And the place will be consecrated by my glory. In other words, it's made holy by the presence of the glorious God.

He's going to make this thing holy by his glorious presence. So you could call this glamping. Glamping with a difference.

It's not camping and glamour, but camping and glory. Glamping. So then verse 45. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.

[16:00] They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt. Why? Well, here's the purpose again. So that I might dwell among them.

I am the Lord their God. So this is the whole point. For God to be among them. And for them to worship him as their God.

And that's what God does. That's what God does when he rescues his people. He doesn't just rescue us and leave us at that. He doesn't just rescue us from sin.

But he restores us to relationship with him. That's the goal. To restore us to relationship with the living God. So you see these chapters at the end of Exodus.

They're not an appendix. They're the climax to the whole thing. And what's happening is that God is making a way for himself to dwell again with sinful people.

[17:05] And so it's a big move towards restoring Eden and reclaiming humanity. And what God is doing is he's reestablishing his presence with his people.

And he's doing it in a way that recalls what he originally did in the Garden of Eden. So we go back to chapter 25. And we're straight into the heart of the most holy place.

Right into the most innermost part of it in chapter 25. In Architectural Digest Open Doors, you get this incredible behind-the-scenes access into the most private parts of people's homes.

So there's this one episode with Kendall Jenner, who invites the camera into the inner sanctuary of her bathroom, complete with its golden bathtub.

With the tabernacle, we're right in there. Right into the innermost part of the sanctuary. The most holy place.

[18:14] And so we have this instruction in chapter 25, verse 10. Now, the ark is the only object in the most holy place.

It's like a sacred box containing the Ten Commandments. And in a way, it symbolizes God's presence. And it's overlaid with pure gold.

Now, if you scan through the chapters, what you'll find is you'll see there's a lot of gold. Gold is very prominent in the tabernacle. And keep your sunnies on because this thing is bling.

Even just chapter 25. Now, you won't see it on the slide. You won't be able to read it. But you can see the frequency of the references to gold. The ark's covered in gold. There's hammered gold.

There's gold moldings. And all this gold represents the glory of God. It speaks to something of his glorious presence. And the glorious nature of the tabernacle.

[19:24] And by the way, gold was also prominent in Eden. But then in chapter 25, verse 17, they're to make an atonement cover. It's the lid which covers the box.

And some translations call it a mercy seat. It is the throne of God. It is the place from which God rules.

And then on top of the lid, verse 18, there's these angelic figures. Two gold cherubim facing one another.

Now, what are cherubim? They're these angelic creatures. And the reason we've got these cherubim here is if we think about where these, we've seen these before in Scripture.

We've seen them in Genesis chapter 3 at the beginning of the Bible. Guarding access to the Garden of Eden and to the Tree of Life. And in Genesis, Eden is like the most holy place.

[20:29] It's the place of God's presence. It's the place of God's presence with his people. So in chapter 25, verse 22, we have this really significant statement.

And the Lord says, There, between the two cherubim, there I will meet with you and will give you my commands. So this will be the place.

This will be the locus that God will carry on the conversation that he started with Moses on Sinai. He will continue to speak here to his people.

He will continue to rule from this throne of grace. Now moving out from the most holy place to the holy place, we have the table and the lamps and this furniture.

And on the table with its golden plates and utensils and vessels, in verse 30, there's the bread of the presence. Now this indicates the abundance of provision that there is in the presence of God.

[21:38] And then there's the golden lampstand in verse 31. What on earth is the significance of it? Let's pay attention to the language used in verse 31.

Make a lampstand of pure gold. Hammer out its base and shaft and make its flower-like cups, buds and blossoms of one piece of them.

Six branches are to extend from its sides. Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. Would you see the imagery?

The branches and the buds and the blossom. The lampstand is a tree. And a couple of weeks ago, we were on holiday in Shropshire.

And we were walking past a churchyard. And there we spotted a magnolia tree in full blossom. Now for some reason, this captured the imagination of our kids.

[22:40] And since getting back to Glasgow, they won't stop asking. Every time we pass a tree in blossom, they ask, Is this a Mongolian tree? Nope, it's a cherry tree.

Is this a Mongolian tree? Nope, it's a cherry tree. And as it happens, we were around friends for lunch this afternoon. And as it happens, they had a magnolia tree in full bloom.

So we're put out of our misery today, thankfully. But with the golden lampstand, it's unmistakable. It's unmistakably made to resemble a tree, a light-emitting tree.

And it's another echo of Eden because it evokes the tree of life right in the middle of the garden. So again, this lampstand, this tree-like lampstand, represents a kind of restored garden of Eden. Represents the restoration of God's presence. So if you imagine the experience of going into this tabernacle covered in layers of woven fabric and animal skins.

[23 : 43] And it's dark and there's this tree-like lampstand giving some flickering light onto this gold surfaces. And the sheen and the shimmer. And what we have is everything pointing to God's glory.

Everything reminding you of the Garden of Eden. Everything reminding you of what was lost there. It reminds us of where God lived in perfect harmony with humanity.

And produces in us a yearning for that. So the big idea. The big idea is beginning in Genesis 3, man has been banished from God's presence.

Exiled from the Garden of Eden. But now through God's rescue of Israel from Egyptian slavery, God's made a way for people to re-enter His holy presence.

It won't be to the same degree as it was for Adam and Eve that they experienced at the tabernacle. And that's because the tabernacle conceals as much as it reveals of God.

[24 : 56] It puts barriers to separate the people even as God dwells in their midst. Now that's because secondly, it's a very dangerous thing to be in God's midst.

Now at St. Silas, as many of you know, we have a weekend for dads and their kids. We advertise it as dangerous camping. Of course it isn't actually dangerous. It's just a cunning marketing ruse to get the kids interested.

But the tabernacle is a different matter entirely. It really is dangerous camping. It's a dangerous thing for sinners like us to be in the midst of a holy God.

To be near to a holy God. God is dwelling among His people. But that doesn't mean you can just swan into His presence.

When the flag is flying over Balmoral, that tells you that the king is in residence. But it doesn't mean that you can just rock up for a cup of tea.

[26 : 06] When it comes to the tabernacle, we see this in a number of ways. For one thing, in chapter 25, verse 9, there's a command to make the tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly how I will show you.

And this is repeated again and again throughout the chapters. And there's some representative examples on the slide there. But I think we see it most clearly in chapter 28 and 29.

With the highly detailed instructions for the priest's uniforms and the duties they perform. The priests are set apart, serving there at the tabernacle, representing the people before God, constantly offering animal sacrifices for people's sins.

And in order to come even close into God's holy presence, they're to be dressed in robes of holiness, holy garments, verse 2 of chapter 28, designed for glory and for beauty.

So you can see it on the slide. That's some pretty fancy get-up, righteous robes. You're not going to walk into H&M; or Primark and find something like that on the clothes rails.

[27 : 24] But all these details and regulations exist. They exist so that they're not struck dead in encountering God's holiness.

So just look with me at verse 35. Chapter 28, verse 35. The high priest Aaron must wear the holy garments when he ministers so that he will not die.

And it's the same deal with his sons in verse 43. So that they will not incur guilt and die. It's a dangerous business that these priests have.

Now in chapter 29, we're given a sequence of sacrifices that install a priest. So in verse 10, there's a sacrifice of a bull. And then some rams.

And then in verse 21 of chapter 29, just read with me. Verse 21. So the idea is that holiness comes through sacrifice.

[28 : 37] Something's deeply wrong with them. So something has to die in its place. So you see, it's a dangerous business, this. And it's a bit like a nuclear reactor.

As you get closer and closer to the core, the more and more exposed you are to the radiation. With the tabernacle, the closer you get into God's holy presence, the more dangerous it is.

And at every level of the tabernacle, the closer you get into the most holy place, the more precious the metals, the more elaborate the furniture, the more precious the materials, the more costly they are.

And there's gradations of holiness moving from the courtyard into the holy place, into the most holy place. And so if you think about the curtains in chapter 26, each of these have to be entered from the east, just like Eden.

The curtains here act like barriers. So in verse 31, you have this curtain veil that separates the holy place from the most holy place.

[29 : 55] So verse 31. Make a curtain of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen with cherubim woven into it by a skilled worker.

And again, the only place we've seen cherubim up to this point in the Bible is back in Genesis 3 where these cherubim are guardians like angelic bouncers to guard the entrance to the garden and the tree of life.

Then in chapter 30, there's the altar of incense, billowing fragrant smoke of frankincense and resins filling up the holy place from the fire.

And if you think about what that represents in the book of Exodus, the fire and the smoke, we've had the presence of smoke and fire together at the burning bush where God first encountered Moses.

We've had the smoke and fire together at the pillar of cloud and fire leading the people out of slavery. And we've had that too on Mount Sinai where God meets with Moses and gives them the commandments.

[31 : 04] It represents the presence of God, the fire and the smoke. But by filling up the room with smoke, what you're doing is you're further concealing the most holy place and you're further enshrouding it from God's holy presence.

So these curtains, these barriers of separation, these clouds of incense, this is how the Lord can dwell with his people and yet remain separate from them by grace so that the people are protected from his holiness.

And this is how the people can offer sacrifices for their sins. But they have to do it regularly and constantly. Well, this is how the Lord reveals himself to his people and yet at the same time conceals himself from them.

So finally and very briefly, we're going to see how the tabernacle is also a preview of an even greater thing. The tabernacle points towards something that is greater by far, an even more amazing reality.

So just look with me again at verse 9 of chapter 25. 25 verse 9. Make this tabernacle and its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

[32 : 33] And then over the page to verse 40. See that you make them according to the patterns shown you on the mountain. So Moses is shown an architectural blueprint or an architectural model of what he's going to show the people to make.

And the author of Hebrews in the New Testament picks this up for us. And it's on the screen there. So Hebrews chapter 8 verse 5. The tabernacle is a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.

This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle to make everything according to the pattern. So the tabernacle and all its furniture that's so foreign to us in so many ways is a copy of the heavenly reality foreshadowing what would later be revealed.

Now to illustrate this we're going to play a quick game of whose shadow is this? Anyway. So shout out if you know the answer. Here's the first one.

What do you think that is? Shout it out. A sloth? Orangutan? It's a sloth.

[33 : 57] South American sloth. Alright next one. Shout it out if you know. I know it's a whale. Who said humpback whale?

Very good. I thought it was a blue whale. It is in fact a humpback whale. Well a shadow gives you a clue doesn't it? It doesn't tell you everything but it's enough to recognize the reality when you see it. Moses built a glorious tabernacle. God dwelt there among his people. The priest ministered there offering sacrifices. And so when we think about whose shadow is this in relation to the tabernacle when we look at the whole thing like that we discover that the whole structure the whole sacrificial system points to the Lord Jesus.

So in John's gospel we're told that when the word became flesh when Jesus clothed himself with humanity he tabernacled with us.

And then also in John's gospel Jesus later says destroy this temple referring to his body and in three days I will raise it.

[35 : 12] So in his own person Jesus fulfilled the tabernacle. Jesus is the fulfillment of the dwelling place of God. He is the place where God is present.

He is the place where sacrifice is made. He is a place where sin is finally once and for all dealt with. And with his death the curtain veil is torn in two and that barrier is removed.

And after Jesus died and was raised and ascended he sends his spirit to dwell among his people to dwell in the hearts of Christians.

So Jesus' death means that God now dwells among us. He dwells anywhere where Christians gather in his name.

So do you see what this means for us? If you are a follower of Jesus you have direct access to God through the Lord Jesus.

[36 : 20] You're not praying through Mary or the saints. you're not having to go and live in a monastery. It's not like Islam where you have to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

In Christ Jesus the high priest you have this incredible privileged access to the living God any time you like. A VIP pass right into the very throne room of God.

That's not something to be casual about. you can't read these chapters of Exodus and think that you can take that privilege lightly. But any time you like you have that access to the living God.

The tabernacle is the shadow that shows us that God has rescued us from slavery to sin yes but he saved us for a purpose.

He saved us to be in restored relationship with him. He's a God who desires us to be in relationship with him who demands our worship of him who desires to be among us.

[37 : 34] Sometimes it's good for us to be reminded of that just how good we've got it. So in closing let me ask you this how is your relationship with Jesus going?

How is your relationship with Jesus? How might you attend to your relationship with him? Do you yearn for his presence? Do you long to be in his courts?

What practical ways might you make changes that would help to foster that relationship with him? Changes in your life and schedule morning, your bedtime, throughout the day, to enjoy more of Jesus, to spend more quality time with him?

When was the last time you lingered in his throne room? What a privilege we have to carry everything to the Lord in prayer.

Let's pray. Lord God, we marvel at the grace you've shown us in the Lord Jesus.

[38 : 49] We marvel at the length you've gone to to bring about our restored relationship with you through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

We thank you for his once and for all sacrifice. That means we have access to you in prayer. That means that we have you dwelling in us by the Holy Spirit.

Would you draw us deeper into your presence? Would you consecrate our hearts for your purposes? would you meet with us?

That we might savor our every encounter with you. Would you help us to appropriate for ourselves the unbelievable privilege that we have in coming to you?

In Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to respond now to God's word and song. Andrew the band are going to lead us in praise.