

EXODUS

CHAPTERS 14-40

Grumbling and grace

Despite God's continuing presence and provision God's people grumble and complain as they travel on. Journeying across the Sinai Peninsula they ran out of provisions and harangue old Moses with "at least we had food in Egypt". God brought them quails (Exodus 16:12-13) drew water from the rock (Exodus 17:5-6) and dropped bread from heaven for them each morning (Exodus 17:4, 14-15). When they first saw the bread they said "what is it" (translated into English "manna"). The name stuck as did the menu for the next forty years.

A wedding

The people don't head straight for the Promised Land, they go through the wilderness to Mount Sinai to meet with God (Exodus 19:4). After a few weeks journey from when they crossed the Red Sea they are camp at the base of the mountain. God is going to bring His people into covenant relationship with Himself and this was to be like a marriage. God became their husband (See for example Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 31:32).

At its heart the Bible is a love story. There are three elements to a wedding

1. The ceremony. God makes a solemn covenant with His people, just as a man and a woman make vows to each other at a wedding
2. The reception. God and the representatives of His people eat and drink together
3. Their new home. God makes arrangements to live with His bride Israel. He shows Moses the beautiful blueprint of the home where He will live among His people. This will be a tent called The Tabernacle

The ceremony exchanging vows

God promises that if His people remain obedient to Him they will be His treasured possession **"And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ⁴'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore**

you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. ⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and ^[b]laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. ⁸ Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD (Exodus 19:3-8).

Mankind had disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden now Gods new mankind promises to obey Him. The marriage vows themselves are set out in Exodus 20:1-23.33 and these are expanded and supplemented by other scriptures in Exodus Leviticus and Deuteronomy which together are called "The Law". God vows to love and care for His people, defeat their enemies, lead them into the Promised Land and bless them abundantly. In return Israel is to love, serve and obey God and Gods law show them how they can do this.

There follows a solemn ceremony, "**So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has said we will do."** ⁴ And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶ And Moses took half the blood and put *it* in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." ⁸ And Moses took the blood, sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words." (Exodus 24:3-8).

This is the moment when the marriage between God and His people is sealed. Israel vows to obey Gods law, then animals are sacrificed and Moses throws the blood from

these sacrifices against the altar representing God's presence. Moses splashes blood over the book and the people (Hebrews 9:19-20).

A covenant sealed with blood

This covenant between God and Israel is sealed with blood. Blood is really important in the Bible. It carries life giving oxygen and nutrients to every part of the body and as the Bible puts it **"the life of a creature is in the blood"** (Leviticus 17:11) Blood represents life and when it is shed life is poured out and brought to an end in death. Breaking the covenant would be an act of betrayal. If either party should break the covenant, they like the animal sacrificed would have to die. We know of course that Israel and each person in the nation did break the covenant and should have suffered the death penalty but God accepted the death of animals instead as we shall see when we get on to the book of Leviticus. Of course all this pointed forward to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

The reception

After the wedding Moses climbs Mount Sinai with Aeron and two of his sons and 70 elders who represent the whole nation. **"Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel. And *there was* under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in *its* clarity. ¹¹ But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.** (Exodus 24:9-11). They see God and under His feet a pavement like a sapphire clear as the sky. Years later Ezekiel and the apostle John were treated to this sublime spectacle (see Ezekiel 1:26-28 and Revelation 4:1-6). In those days a covenant was typically concluded by eating a fellowship meal"

God's new home

Now God is making plans to live among His people wanting to live as close to them as He possibly can. God tells Moses to make a home where He can live among His people (Exodus 25:8) and gives him the blueprint (Exodus 25 to 40) God is going to live in a tent just like His people did. His tent could be dismantled and re-erected just like theirs. God was going to travel with them to the Promised Land

God calls Bezalel and fills him with His Spirit giving him **“ability and intelligence with knowledge and all craftsmanship”** (Exodus 31:1-11). He and other helpers whom God had given ability were to make the Tabernacle and all its furniture, the priests clothes, the anointing oil and incense (Exodus 31:1-11, 35:10-19, 35:30-36:1). The people supply the materials doubtless plundered from the Egyptians when they left Egypt.

The Tabernacle is made and finally all is ready for God to move into His new home **“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle”** (Exodus 40:34-35). This is the same cloud as the one which guided them from before they even crossed the Red Sea. They had the benefit of this cloud by day and God's fire by night. Each day and each night they could see and experience God's presence with them

NB After Adam and Eve disobeyed God they had to be expelled from the Garden of Eden. What now takes place here at Sinai is a step towards reversing that tragedy. God is bringing people back to His home, at least as far as He could before Jesus opens the way into His presence fully. We shall go on to see strong links between the Tabernacle and the Garden of Eden.

The Tabernacle



The outer Court

It was surrounded by a large rectangular courtyard measuring approximately 150 by 75 feet and bounded by a linen screen about 7 or 8 feet high to shield the court from view. The entrance on the east side was hung with a screen of blue purple and scarlet yarns and fine linen which were embroidered with needlework. In the courtyard was a **bronze altar of burnt offering** where sacrifices were offered and a basin where the priests washed.

The Tent

This was about 45 feet long and 15 feet, both wide and high. The inner covering was fine linen and blue purple and scarlet yarn with Cherubim worked into them. This covering was overlaid with a protective covering of goat's hair and in turn overlaid by two coverings of skins, the inner of ram's skins and the outermost of another kind of leather. The Tent or Tabernacle was supported on a lightweight framework of wooden boards overlaid with gold. It had to be sturdy but at the same time easily taken down and re-erected

Inside the Tent

The inside of the tent was split into two by a screen or a “veil” of the same materials colour and design as the innermost coverings of the Tabernacle. The larger compartment at the front was about 30 feet long and called the Holy Place, whilst the smaller innermost chamber (about 15 feet long wide and high) was the Most Holy Place. The entrance to this place from the courtyard was protected by a similar screen to the one at the entrance itself.

The Holy Place

In the Holy place was a **Candlestick a table and an altar**”. On the left hand side was a golden seven branched candlestick (Menorah in Hebrew) with seven lamps which were to be keep alight throughout each night (Exodus 27:20-21)



On the right hand side was a **table**, which always had to have on it 12 loaves of bread. (Exodus 25:23-30). It was called **“the showbread”** or **“bread of the presence”**

because it was laid out in God's presence. The loaves were accompanied by vessels which included "**the bowels and the flagons for the drink offering**". Every Sabbath these loaves were exchanged for new ones, and the old ones were given to the priests to eat.

You will recall how the chosen representatives of Israel enjoyed a meal in God's presence on Mount Sinai (see earlier). This demonstrated that they had been adopted into God's family. Now these chosen priests regularly enter God's home and are in His presence. There is fellowship between the priests and God in His home. This points us forward to the Lord's Supper or Communion.

The **altar** was positioned in front of the veil which shielded the Most Holy Place. Incense was offered on it day by day each morning and evening

The Most Holy Place

The only piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place was **the Ark of the Covenant**". This was an acacia wood box overlaid with gold. On this box was a slab of pure gold called **The Mercy Seat**.



This was Gods royal palace; His throne room and the mercy seat was His footstool (See 1 Chronicles 28:2). On either side of the mercy seat was a golden cherub; these stretched their wings over the mercy seat as if to watch over the place of His presence. God was enthroned on these cherubim (see for example Psalm 99:1) **“The Lord reigns let the people tremble He dwells between the cherubim let the earth be moved”** From here God reigned over His people and over the whole earth. The cherubim protected the tree of life in the Garden of Eden after Adam sinned and now we meet them again. Who and what are they. Ezekiel and John give us a clue. They saw **“living creatures”** (Ezekiel 1. 5-14 and Revelation 4:6-8). They were great winged beasts with the face of a lion (The greatest of wild animals) an Ox (the greatest of domestic animals) an eagle (the greatest of birds) and human (the greatest of all creatures on the earth). These seem to be powerful angels in God’s presence but perhaps symbolise something too. One commentator suggests, for example, that they represent all creation in its perfection in the presence of God the creator

The Most Holy Place was a cube about 15 feet high wide and long. The Most Holy Place in Solomon’s Temple was also a cube (1 Kings 6:20). The New Jerusalem is also a cube (Revelation 21:16). The Most Holy Place foreshadowed the New Jerusalem Gods home the place of His immediate presence.

Only one man the High Priest could enter The Most Holy Place and then only on one day each year, but in the new creation all Gods people will live in Gods most Holy place in His immediate presence for all eternity. There will be no need for a special sanctuary for there will be no sin. Neither will there be a Temple because **“its Temple is The Lord God the Almighty and the lamb”** (Revelation 21:22). When Jesus came to earth He became the new temple on earth (John 2:19-21). He **tabernacled or lived in a tent** (John 1:14 literal translation). When at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came Gods people became **“a holy temple in the Lord** (Ephesians 2:19-22)

NB

1. Adam and Eve were appointed by God to take care of Gods first sanctuary The Garden of Eden
2. The Old Testament priests were appointed at Sinai to look after His sanctuary in the wilderness

3. The Church in the New Testament, our bodies and Gods people together, are Gods sanctuaries for God lives in them. We must act as guardians keeping ourselves holy and fit for God to dwell in us

There is a link here between us humans and the cherubim. The cherubim are doing what God has appointed mankind to do, keeping watch over Gods sanctuary on earth. What a wonderful calling is ours, may we discharge it faithfully.

Our way to God

To go to The Most Holy place where God lived you would first pass the bronze “**altar of burnt offering**”. Then you would pass the basin where the priests washed. Pushing past a curtain you would enter The Holy Place .Passing **The Lampstand** on your left and the **table of showbread**. On the right you would pass the **altar of incense and** push through the veil into the Most Holy Place (which you could not have done then) where the **Ark of the Covenant** was. Only the High Priest was allowed there, and just once a year under strict conditions. But Jesus perfect sacrifice has opened up the way into the heavenly Most Holy Place for us (Hebrews 6:19-20)

So then here is the picture vividly portrayed for us. We enter the courtyard that is we demonstrate our repentance toward God for sin and pass the altar where sacrifices were made. We accept the sacrifice made by Jesus for us. We then get to the basin and are washed, picturing new birth “**The washing of regeneration**” (Titus 3:5)

Now we are cleansed and born from above we enter the Holy Place and experience all the blessings of our new life with God. The tree like lampstand reminds us of The Tree of Life. Just as sunlight brings us natural light so this Tree of life brings spiritual light and that source is Jesus. We walk in that light (compare John 1:4, 8:12, 1 John 1:5-7).

We enjoy a meal on the table of showbread a picture that we are now part of Gods family and enjoying this fellowship with Him in His home. The golden altar in front of the veil seem to picture our worship of God, our adoration and praise and prayer being symbolised by incense rising from the altar (compare Psalm 141:2 Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4)

And finally we enter through the veil to enter The Most Holy Place the very presence chamber of God and may go boldly for the curtain has been torn from top to bottom (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Gods Guardians and servants

Whenever God makes a home in His creation he appoints beings to care for it and to worship and serve Him there. That seems to have been Satan's original role in the heavenly places. That was the task of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Now God appoints people to do this in His new home. These were the priests assisted by the Levites.

He chose Aeron the High Priests and his sons to keep the tabernacle pure and holy. They were to worship and serve Him there and offer sacrifices for the people. They were also to teach the law, they acted as judges, and dealt with case of leprous diseases. In this way the priests mediated between God and His people and brought Gods rule and blessing to the nation. God commissioned the other men of the tribe of Levi to help them. But the whole nation was called to be priests too. They were a **"kingdom of priests"** (Exodus 19:6)

There were two key ceremonies which had to be performed by Aeron and his sons

1. Every morning and evening they were to burn incense on the golden altar in the Holy Place (Exodus 30:7-8) The Bible associates incense with prayer and the sweet smelling incense seems to represent prayers of adoration rising to God with praise and intercession
2. They sacrificed daily burnt offerings with their cereal and drink offerings on the bronze altar in the courtyard (Exodus 29:38-42). These symbolised the perpetual consecration of the nation

These two offerings formed a ceaseless background to everything else that the priests did (Deuteronomy 33:10)

Robed in beauty and Glory



The High priest

God gave Aeron and his sons special clothes to wear (Exodus 28:2-43, 39:10-31).

Working from the inner to the outer garments, Aeron wore a linen undergarment, a linen tunic and a blue robe. Over these he wore an ephod (a kind of apron) of gold blue purple and scarlet yarns and linen. The ephod matched the linings of the inner Tabernacle tent. The ephod had a breast piece with the same colour scheme attached to the front. On the breast piece were 12 gems engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel. Inside the breast piece were the mysterious Urim and Thummin “**The means of making decisions**” (Exodus 28.30 NIV). Aeron wore a sash around his waist and a turban on his head which bore on its front “**Holy to The Lord**” (Exodus 28:36).

Whatever the High Priest did he did as the people’s representative and his actions would have the same essential effect they would have if all of the people one by one had done the same thing. Aeron and his sons were washed, robed, anointed with

special anointing oil, appointed and sprinkled with blood to consecrate them. Exodus 29:1-35 explains what was done.

Aaron pictures and prefigures Jesus our great High Priest our representative (Hebrews 8:1-2, 9:11-12). He also foreshadows God living in human hearts. The High priests outermost robe was the same as that of the inner Tabernacle tent and veils (Exodus 26:1 31, 36) The High Priest is a kind of mini tabernacle. The tabernacle was Gods home and the clothing of the High Priests pictures this man as Gods home too. Perhaps this is a foreshadowing of how one day God would take up occupation of those of His own (John 14:23, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16).

The Law

We have referred earlier about the bringing of the law (Exodus 19-31). These were telling the people of Israel how to live with Him and with each other. He wanted them to be aware constantly of His Holiness and their need of grace. The fatal flaw of the law was the weakness of the human heart to keep it (Deuteronomy 5:29). The purpose of the law was to make it clear that we could not match Gods standard of holiness (Romans 3:19). Paul say it was “**our tutor or schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith** (Galatians 3:24).

The law made it clear that God expects two things from his people, devotion to Him and sincere affection for others. God begins with 10 commandments which are a summary and supplemented by many more. The first four are about devotion to God and the last six focus on our affection and care for others. These are found in chapter 20

1. No other Gods before God (vs 3)
2. No carved images of any created thing (vvs4-6)
3. No taking God's name in vain (vs 7)
4. Keep the Sabbath (vs 8-11)
5. Honour your parents (vs 12)
6. No murder (vs 13)
7. No adultery (vs 14)
8. No stealing (vs 15)
9. No bearing false witness (vs 16)
- 10.No coveting (vs 17)

There were serious consequences for breaking these laws, for example capital punishment for murder (Exodus 21:12).

God also ordained laws to regulate three feasts which the Jews were to observe each year (Exodus 23:14). **Passover also called the feast of unleavened bread** celebrating their redemption, **Pentecost also known as the feast of harvest** celebrating God's provision and **Tabernacles also called the feast of the ingathering and Sukkot the Feast of Booths** celebrating God's protection in the wilderness

Moses up on the mountain

We can hardly leave this study without reference to the golden calf. Moses was up on the mountain receiving instructions from God while the people below worship an idol they had formed from melted down jewellery. Moses' anger "**became hot**" (Exodus 32:19). He threw down the fleshy hewn stone tablets. He took the golden calf they had been worshipping, burned it and ground it to powder. He scattered it on the water and made all the people drink of the wrath of God (Exodus 32: 19-20). Moses made the people choose sides "**whoever is on the Lord's side –come to me**". Three thousand men were killed on that day. What a wonderful turn around when on the day of Pentecost we read this "**Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.**" (Acts 2:41)

