

Understanding God in the Old Testament Exodus 25-31

A God of Promise

Have you ever made a promise to someone? Have you ever had a promise made to you? These are words of commitment, sometimes at varying degrees. Sometimes we simply say, “I promise I will...” or at other times we say, “I swear on my mothers grave” or whatever term we use to put weight on it.

We have all experienced the failure of a promise haven't we? It's not a great feeling. In fact, it cuts right to the heart and makes us hesitant to trust again. We feel violated, foolish, or even outright deceived when a promise doesn't come through because we need people to come through on their promises. Thank God, this morning we may be let down by people, we may be disappointed in people's choices, but we serve a God who makes promises and keeps them.

As we now come to Exodus 25 we begin to see the development of a building (or should I say, a series of tents) known as the Tabernacle. What was so special about this place was that it was the fulfillment of a promise made by God that he would come and dwell with his people and be with them and live with them. In fact, look with me at a verse we read just last week that refers to this where the presence of the Lord comes and it tells us in **Exodus 24:10-11**:

10 There they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there seemed to be a surface of brilliant blue lapis lazuli, as clear as the sky itself. 11 And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, he did not destroy them. In fact, they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in his presence!

God wanted to be with his people and the purpose of the Tabernacle was to create an earthly dwelling place where God could be ministered to, and where the people could have access to him. **We serve a God who wants to be with us – for us to minister to him and for him to speak to us.**

The first purpose of the Tabernacle was for it to be a place where people could worship God. Look at what it says in **Exodus 25:1-2**:

1 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Tell the people of Israel to bring me their sacred offerings. Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them.

Even though the people of Israel had the promise of God dwelling among them, they were still given the choice to give to him or not. It says here that anyone who wanted or who were moved to bring an offering to God were welcome to do so at the Tabernacle. Again, a great example of: **God gives us a choice to freely express our hearts to him.** Then look at **Exodus 25:8-9**:

8 *“Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them.”*

The second purpose of the Tabernacle was that it would be a place where God will live with us. All through scripture we find that God always wanted to be with his people. In the New Testament, when Jesus came to earth he was called Emanuel, God with us. And when he left this earth to be with the father, his heart was to continue to be with us. In fact look at **2 Corinthians 6:16**:

For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: “I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

I think it is safe to say that as we look at the Tabernacle it can show us something about ourselves and God. It's about our relationship with him as our God and we as his people. So as we begin to look at the things that were placed in the Tabernacle and the symbolisms of the clothing and artifacts, remember it always points to a God who fulfills his promise to be with us. However, we need to remember that our relationship with God is based on his terms.

When it came to the construction of the Tabernacle, and the craftsmanship of the artifacts that went inside God made it very clear, over and over again that it be according to his terms. Look at **Exodus 25:9**:

9 You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you.

After each piece it is made clear that these things were to be constructed according to God's specification. **When it comes to our relationship with God it is based on his terms.** How absurd it would be for man to think that he can create his own way to God. How absurd it is that man would think that he would know better than God. And the reality is this morning that God made a way through Jesus Christ, as the sacrifice for you and I so that we could once again be close to him.

The Ark of the Covenant

First, we come to the Ark of the Covenant, an artifact that has been made popular in recent years by Indiana Jones. It is known to contain the presence of God however, as we look at this artifact in Exodus we find that it is the place where the stone tablets which are inscribed with the terms of God's covenant with Israel are placed. Remember the Israelites told God, “We will do whatever you tell us.” There fore we find that the ark of the covenant was a place where two things happened.

First, it was the place where God would communicate with the nation of Israel, and second, it was a place where God would give his commands. Look at **Exodus 25:22**:

22 I will meet with you there and talk to you from above the atonement cover between the gold cherubim that hover over the Ark of the Covenant. From there I will give you my commands for the people of Israel.*

This box was placed in a special place called “The Most Holy Place” which was a compartment where only the High Priest was allowed to enter. It was a place where the priest would take the blood from the atonement sacrifice, offered on behalf of the people of Israel and it was spilled there for the sins of the people. It was the most intimate place with God.

But today, we don’t have to go to a place like this, going through religious exercise. But **today, the most holy of places for us is our hearts. It is in our hearts where God communicates with us, it is in our hearts that God gives his commands to us.** Look at what Paul wrote about the Gentiles in **Romans 2:15**:

15 They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

Today, we have God speaking to us with full access to us. You and I have a most holy place within us where we can speak and listen to God. This most intimate of relationships was founded on the foundation of an agreement or covenant, and today, because of the new covenant we have with God through Jesus Christ we can according to **Hebrews 4:16**:

16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

The Ark of the Covenant speaks of God’s promise to speak to us, lead us, and be our God.

The Table

We then see the instructions for building a table that is to be placed in what was called “the holy place” which was the room that led to the “the most holy place” and it was there that this table was placed that held the tools for incense and 12 loaves of bread. We read about it in **Hebrews 9:2**:

2 There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lamp stand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place.*

There were 12 loaves to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. It was a means of offering themselves to God. This was done in response to God’s provision of Manna when they needed food and it was done as a means of breaking bread and communing with God. **Today, you and I have a table that we feast from everyday within our hearts – it is the bread of life. John 6:33-35:**

33 Jesus said, "The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 "Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day." 35 Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

The Table speaks of God's promise to provide for us not only physically, but eternally as well. Today, just as there was bread that was offered up to God, Jesus continues to offer himself in our place so that our sacrifice is sufficient and pleasing and perfect enough to let us be close to God.

The Lamp Stand

Then we find the lamp stand which was made of solid gold and that held 7 lamps. It not only served a practical means of giving light in a tent where there were no windows, but it also speaks of the light of God: His word, his salvation, and his guidance. In **2 Corinthians 4:6-7** it tells us:

6 For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.*

The lamp-stand speaks of God's promise to show us his glory and strength available through Jesus Christ.

The Tabernacle

We then read about the construction of the Tabernacle and how it was a series of cloth and skin. We need to remember that the Tabernacle was to be mobile as God lead the Israelites to the Promise land. We have already seen that it contained "The most holy place" the place where the ark of the covenant was stored. It then had the "The holy place" where the lamp-stand, the table holding the bread, and the incense altar were located. It then had an outer court where the Altar of Burnt Offering was placed right when someone would walk it.

It think there are a couple of things we can learn about the Tabernacle. First, due to the fact that the Tabernacle was mobile I believe that it is representative that we should be people who simply passing through this life into an eternal life. I believe **the Tabernacle speaks of God's promise of a better life than this one here on earth.** Although this life may have heavenly moments, it is nothing compared to the life to come. **1 Peter 2:11** tells us:

11 Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.

We put so much emphasis on time here on earth when the promise of God stretches past its boundary and reaches into a time and place when true life begins.

Second, the Tabernacle and the Temple built by David and Solomon were both representative of Heaven. Look at **Hebrews 9:23**:

23 That is why the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals.

Second, **the Tabernacle speaks of God's promise to allow us to taste a bit of heaven right here, right now.** Do you realize that when we worship God, when we speak to him, when spend time in prayer, when we study his word, when we pray for others, when we minister to others, do you realize that it is a time "when heaven touches earth." People wonder what will happen in heaven, and yet we can find times when we will get only an appetizer of its full impact, its full majesty and glory, and the full presence and power of God.

The Altar of Burnt Offering

When you walked into the Tabernacle the first thing you saw was this altar. It was the place where people would bring their sacrifices to God. It was a vivid reminder to the people that the only way they could come to God was by means of a sacrifice. It was the only way their sins could be forgiven and taken away. **The altar speaks of God's promise to forgive and to remove any obstacle that stood in the way between man and himself.** In **Hebrews 10:11-18** we read:

11 Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. 12 But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. 13 There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. 14 For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy. 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says, 16 "This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."* 17 Then he says, "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds."* 18 And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.*

Jesus took himself and offered on the altar in heaven. Just as Isaac was facing death, and how God provide a ram to take his place, so you and I lay on the altar facing the penalty of our sin, only to find that Jesus makes himself available to take our place.

Clothing for the Priests

The Priest held the most important position. In **Exodus 28:1-2** we read:

1 "Call for your brother, Aaron, and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Set them apart from the rest of the people of Israel so they may minister to me and be my priests. 2 Make special clothing for Aaron, to show his

separation to God (to be holy) – beautiful garments that will lend dignity to his work.

The priest was a minister to God. It was the most important position held in Israel. He was to represent the people to God. There were some interesting pieces to his clothing – an Ephod, a chestpiece, bells on the hem, a gold medallion placed on the front of Aaron’s turban.

First, the ephod was a cloak and on this cloak was to be sown on two stone, one on each shoulder, each inscribed with 6 of the names of the tribes of Israel. Why? Look at what God says in **Exodus 28:12**:

Fasten the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod as a reminder that Aaron represents the people of Israel. Aaron will carry these names on his shoulders as a constant reminder whenever he goes before the Lord.

Second, we have the chest-piece which had 12 stones, each representing a tribe. Now we could go into a whole message on each type of stone but we will do that later. This piece was placed over the heart. What did it represent? Look at **Exodus 28:29**:

29 “In this way, Aaron will carry the names of the tribes of Israel on the sacred chestpiece over his heart when he goes into the Holy Place. This will be a continual reminder that he represents the people when he comes before the Lord.*

The clothing of the priests speaks of the promise of a representative before God.

You and I cannot come to God based on our own merit. No matter how hard we try, we can never earn God’s approval. Look at **Hebrews 9:24-26**:

24 For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf. 25 And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. 26 If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.*

*34 Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us. **Romans 8:34***

Right now we have a representative before God, who has walked in our shoes, who knows what it is life to be a human being, who knows the pain and suffering and the disappointments of life, and who knowingly understands us and ministers to God for us.

When we look at the Tabernacle and the clothing of the priests it is a reminder to us that we serve a God of promise: One who has promised to be our God and to dwell among us, one who has promised to speak to us and lead us, one who has promised to provide, one who has promised to show his glory and strength, one who has promised to grant us a better life and the hope of heaven, one who has promised to forgive and remove anything that stand in the way between us and him, one who has promised to give us a representative who would minister to God on our behalf.

You may have been disappointed by the promises of men, but the tabernacle is a reminder that the God we serve all comes through. Don't put your confidence in men, put it in God. **Exodus 29:45-46** tells us God's heart towards Israel. It tells us:

I will live among the people of Israel and be their God, 46 and they will know that I am the Lord their God. I am the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt so that I could live among them. I am the Lord their God.

God wants to live with us, to be our God, and he wants us to know that he saved us so that he could live with us. God's heart has always been to be with his people and to be their God. Today, you and I get to experience this part of God so that our confidence is in him. Let's pray!