

Exodus 24:12-25:9

Introduction

Remember that Exodus naturally divides into four parts. In **Part I** we saw that Yahweh is the God who *delivers* His people from *Egypt* (1:1-15:21) That's what the first fifteen chapters were all about (the calling of Moses; the Ten Plagues; Cover-over, Unleavened Bread, and consecration of the firstborn; the crossing of the Red Sea).

In **Part II**, we saw that Yahweh is the God who *provides* for and *protects* His people in the *Wilderness* (15:22-18:27) This is what the next three and a half chapters were mainly been about (the bitter water made sweet; the bread from heaven; the water from the rock, the defeat of Amalek). We saw how each one of these accounts was truly full of Christ and the Gospel. In chapter eighteen the Midianite Jethro comes on the scene not only as a sign of God's plan for the nations (Jethro's conversion), but also as another means of God's provision for his people (Jethro's advice to Moses).

In **Part III**, we've learned that Yahweh is the God who makes a *covenant* with His people at *Mount Sinai* – chapters 19-24. Chapter 19 was prelude to the Covenant as Moses went up to the Lord on the mountain, the people prepared for the third day, and then the Lord came down on the mountain in thunder, and cloud, and smoke, and with the loud blast of the trumpet. In chapters 20-23 we have the Covenant itself. The Book of the Covenant contains the “words” (the Ten Commandments; cf. 20:1) and the “rules” (the Righteous Judgments; cf. 21:1) which the people are to *keep* if they would enjoy long life in the land. Then, in chapter 24, the covenant is officially ratified and sealed with blood, followed by a covenant meal eaten in the very presence of Yahweh Himself. And so the covenant, and the covenant relationship has come into being. The blood of the covenant means that the two parties to the covenant are now family. God has taken Israel to be, as it were, His wife—they are **His people**, and He is **their God**.

Of course, family live together. And yet this is no ordinary “family.” This is the holy God and Creator of the universe redeeming a people from Egypt, shepherding that people through the wilderness, and then taking that people to be His own—his “wife,” His son, His children—at Mount Sinai. And so we're ready to begin the last part of Exodus:

Part IV: Yahweh is the God who desires to *dwell* among His people – to live with them as “family” (25-40) This part of Exodus is divided into three sections. The tabernacle is commanded and described. (24:12-31) Interlude (“filling”): The covenant is broken and renewed. (32-34) The tabernacle is constructed. (35-40)

Where we begin this morning is very much a continuation of last week. The scene at Mount Sinai is still exactly the same, and yet it's clear now that we're moving on. The covenant is official; the family relationship has been established; now what?

I. Exodus 24:12–14 — The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and remain there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into

the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them.”

Remember, last week God said to Moses:

- Exodus 24:1–2 — Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.

So what we have this morning is Moses alone coming near to the Lord. Moses, alone, will go further up the mountain into the very cloud of God’s presence in order to receive the tablets of stone with the law and the commandment which God has written for the people’s instruction.

Before Moses goes up (with his assistant, Joshua, accompanying him part of the way), Moses instructs the elders to “wait here for us until we return to you.” When Moses says, “wait here,” does he mean “here,” in a broad and general sense (“at the bottom of the mountain”) so that when Moses goes up further into the mountain, Aaron and Hur, and the seventy elders can actually return to the people? Or are we to assume that sometime between verses 11 and 12, Moses and “company” had already descended again to the bottom of the mountain? (cf. Stuart) Either way, we know that Aaron and Hur are back among the people while Moses is away on the mountain. Indeed, Aaron and Hur are to be the ones left in charge.

Moses instructs the seventy elders: “Whoever has a dispute [among the people], let him go to them.” It may seem surprising that so soon after such a fearful and awesome display of Yahweh’s holy presence, there can already be fighting and arguments among the people. But Moses knows the hearts of the people, and here we, too, are given a window into the natural heart of man. No amount of external influence—not even the awesome display of God’s holy presence—can truly change our hearts, or conform us to God’s ways. The precaution that Moses takes, here, is not only a sobering reminder, but a sign and a shadow of things to come. For right now, we go on to read:

II. Exodus 24:15–18 — Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Here in these verses we have the Exodus “debut” of a very special Hebrew word. For the first time in Exodus, we have the word “*shakan*”: “The glory of the Lord **dwelt/settled** on Mount Sinai.” Aside from three other appearances of this word (one time in our text this morning [25:8], and two times in chapter 29 [29:45-46]), we won’t meet this word again until the very last verses of Exodus. In keeping with this first appearance of “dwelt,” or “settled” (*shakan*) we also have the first time that the “cloud” is ever said to be “**covering**” something. And here, as well, we won’t meet this word, or idea again until the very last verses of Exodus.

So the glory of the Lord has **settled**, and is now **dwelling**, on Mount Sinai – the “cloud” now **covering** the top of the mountain. And this appearance of the glory of the Lord as a cloud settling upon, and covering, Mount Sinai was like a devouring fire in the sight of the people of Israel. There was a very real sense in which someone could ask, “Where is Yahweh?” and the people could answer, “He’s **there**, in the cloud and the fire, **at the top of the mountain.**” You see, the difference between this and the pillar of cloud and fire everywhere else in Exodus (up to this point) is that this is the first time the pillar of cloud has ever **located in** or **settled upon** [**shakan**] any specific **place**. “Where is Yahweh? He’s *there*, not just in the cloud and the fire, but *there*, **dwelling at the top of Mount Sinai.**” But what does it mean?

The dwelling of God is there, visible to us, but still **far off** and **high up**, and looking to us like nothing more than a deadly, devouring fire. There He is(!)—having pitched His tent at the pinnacle of the mountain; and here we are in our tents at the bottom (hopefully a safe enough distance away). You see, the mountain provides a *kind* of **access** to God that we didn’t have before, because while we stay at the bottom, a chosen few may actually go part way up the mountain, and Moses himself may be called all the way to the top—into the cloud itself. The geography of the mountain actually provides a new kind of access to God. God’s “settling” on Mount Sinai *connects* His holy, awesome, transcendent **presence** with an actual *place on earth*. We didn’t build a ladder or a tower to reach up to God—we didn’t raise the mountain; rather, Yahweh has chosen to come down and settle/dwell on the mountain – at the very top.

Now, after the terrifying events of chapter nineteen, would we want God to be dwelling any closer? Would we want Him to be settling in any place nearer to where we are? Then again, after the events of chapter twenty-four, and the blood of the covenant, and the covenant meal, shouldn’t we want God to settle in some place nearer to us – to dwell in some place closer to us? So, there’s the tension. The devouring fire says that the place where Yahweh settles must be **high** up and **far** off (that He should settle [*shakan*] anywhere on earth, even in the distant vicinity of human beings, is already miracle enough). Nevertheless, the blood of the covenant and the covenant meal looks for the place where God settles and dwells to be **closer**—to be **closer and nearer** to His people.

And then there’s this: The first time God settles in any place, that place just happens to be at the top of a *mountain*. But aren’t we planning to move on from here? And when we do, is the mountain itself to follow us? Are we to take Mount Sinai with us as we journey on to Canaan?

After six days had passed, “on the seventh day [God] called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud... Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” Where is Moses? *There*, with God, high up and far off at the top of the mountain. And what, exactly, is happening there? What is God saying to Moses?

III. Exodus 25:1–7 — The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.”

Honestly, is this really what we would have *expected* to hear God saying to Moses?—There, on the top of the mountain? God commands Moses to take up a freewill offering — not for just *any* items, but only for these *specific* items: First, there are metals – gold, and silver, and bronze. Second, there are threads and fabrics – blue, purple, and scarlet yarns, fine twined linen, and spun goats’ hair. Third, there are skins and leathers – tanned rams’ skins and goatskins (or, maybe, sealskins). Then, there’s wood. And the final items to be contributed are oil, and spices, and precious stones.

What would God want with any of these things? There are lots of *obvious* clues already, here in these verses. In fact, the whole list put together would have been obvious to any ancient Israelite. Nevertheless, God doesn’t leave anyone to hazard even the obvious guess. Truly, given the awesome scene at Mount Sinai, would we really have dared—would we really have been so “bold”?

“The LORD said to Moses [from where He had settled at the top of Mount Sinai], ‘Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.’”

IV. Exodus 25:8 — And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell/settle [*shakan*] in their midst.

This is one of those verses that has always been most beautiful to me – and all the more beautiful, for how unlikely and astonishing it would seem to be. Let them make me, literally, a “holy place”—a “**sacred space**”—so that I may remove from the top of Mount Sinai, and come all the way down to **settle** and **dwel** [**shakan**] **in their midst**. The point of this sanctuary—this sacred space that the people are to make for God—is so they might be able to take “Mount Sinai” with them, wherever they go. But *more* than this, the point of this sanctuary is so all the full realities of Mount Sinai might somehow be reproduced not high up and far off, but **near** and **close** to the people – in their very midst. That such a thing *could* be is a wonderful mystery. But that God would *desire* such a thing is even more wonderful. God doesn’t need Israel. Israel needs Him. God will not “benefit” or be “enriched” by Israel. Israel is the only party to the covenant that stands to benefit or be enriched. And *yet* God doesn’t order the construction of this sacred space out of any sense of “duty,” or merely for “our good.” This is the wonderful mystery – that God *desires*, and even takes **delight** in being near and close to the people that He chooses; in living with them and among them as family. “**Let them** make me a sanctuary, **that I may** dwell/settle [*shakan*] in their midst.”

Do we understand that God is not simply seeking from us our obedience? He also pursues with us **fellowship** – the real and close communion between members of a family. But how often are we the ones pursuing obedience without any true comprehension of what fellowship with God is? Apart from *fellowship* with God, can there be any true obedience? How often are we the ones confessing all the right doctrine and faith in God without any true experience of communion with Him – of His nearness and closeness to us? Apart from communion with God, can there be any true *understanding* of doctrine or of faith in God? God reveals Himself to us—His being, His

character, His ways and commands—in order that we might experience fellowship with Him, **and in order that He might have fellowship with us(!)**.

And yet, there's still this caution. This is, still, fellowship with **God**. The very thing that makes this so thrilling, and so wonderful is also the thing that warns us and humbles us. Listen to what Yahweh says to Moses: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell/settle [*shakan*] in their midst...”

V. Exodus 25:9 — Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle [*mishkan*], and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

For God to live with us and among us requires the creation of “**sacred space**.” The pagan nations were very familiar with this idea. They all built temples, and every time they did this, they were attempting to create sacred space. Only, the message of the Bible is that as sinful and fallen people, we aren't capable of doing any such thing. No matter how fancy our blueprints, or how beautiful our buildings, we can't invent or create any space that's truly any different from any other space. In fact, even our “so-called” best efforts at creating sacred space only results in the opposite – space that is unholy, and profane, and an abomination to the one true God. When the pagan nations built their temples, their goal wasn't fellowship with the gods, but rather to coexist with the gods in a mutually beneficial relationship. That's ultimately the goal of any and every **human invention** of “sacred space” – not fellowship, but self-advancement; not communion, but self-empowerment; not the humble, awe-filled enjoyment of a meal at God's table, but ultimately a kind of self-deification. That's what a lot of today's so-called “fellowship” and “communion” with God is; but it's a fraud – just man's attempt at creating his own sacred spaces for the advancement and empowerment of self. What is it that we **TRULY** desire? – The advancing and empowering of self (“coexisting” with God), or actually and really **humble fellowship with God**? What is it that *you* desire?

If sacred space is *required* in order for God to live with us and among us, and yet any space of our own invention can only be unholy and profane, then what is the only option or hope that we have? God Himself must give us the blueprint – a blueprint not arbitrary or random, but rather a **true copy** and **symbolic representation** of the realities of God's dwelling place **in heaven**. (cf. Stuart) The point here isn't a physical replica, but rather a “spiritual” or “theological” representation. So, think about it. How could *we ever* know the **truths** and **realities** of God's heavenly dwelling place – much less know what a true and faithful copy on earth should look like? The very thought is preposterous and impossible. So, if we are ever to enjoy true fellowship and communion with God in truly sacred space, then the blueprint **must** come to us directly from God. It's obvious, now, isn't it? Are we seeing, as perhaps we've not seen it before, the miracle and the blessing of the tabernacle (the *mishkan*/“settling place”) in Israel?

But it's still not enough for the blueprint to come to us directly from God; Israel must then follow that blueprint **exactly** – to the very letter. To improvise would be to profane. To invent would be to turn the true representation into a twisted perversion. To alter the plan in any way would turn the holy copy into an unholy counterfeit.

The key to the closeness and the nearness of God—the key to true fellowship and communion with God as members of His family—is sacred space; in this case, a symbolic representation—a copy—of God’s own dwelling place in heaven. Can you *see*, then—can we *understand*, now—the full meaning and significance of God’s words here in Exodus twenty-five verses 8-9? “Let them make me a sanctuary [sacred space], that I may dwell/settle [*shakan*] in their midst. **Exactly** as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”

Conclusion

Oh, brothers and sisters! See to what **lengths** God is willing to go so that His chosen people might always enjoy intimate table fellowship with Him, and *He* with *them*(!), as treasured members of His family! Does it make more sense to us, now, that a full thirteen chapters in Exodus should be devoted to a description of this sacred space where God would settle and dwell among His people? — Not high up and far off like at the top of Mount Sinai, but now near and close, in their very midst. Shouldn’t we read these chapters, every word of them, with reverence, and awe, and joy? What, exactly, will the copy look like? What exactly will it take to bring us to the goal and the grand finale of Exodus, where we’ll finally be able to read **these** words:

- Exodus 40:34–38 — Then the **cloud covered** the tent of meeting, and the **glory of the LORD** filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud **settled/dwelt** [*shakan*] on it, and the **glory of the LORD** filled the tabernacle.

We’re about to see, in the coming weeks, to what lengths God will go so that His chosen people can enjoy intimate communion with Him, and *He* with *them*(!), as treasured members of His family! The table fellowship enjoyed by the elders on Mount Sinai is to be enjoyed by all the people as they bring their offerings to the tabernacle and actually “eat there *before* the Lord [their] God [with *rejoicing*].” (Deut. 14:26; cf. Deut. 12:7, 12, 18)

And yet the tabernacle is **only**(!?!) the shadow of the ultimate step that God will take to ensure our eternal enjoyment of sweet fellowship and intimate communion together – we with Him, and He with us. The Apostle John has these very verses in mind when he writes at the beginning of his Gospel:

- John 1:1, 14 — In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and **settled/dwelt among us**, and we have seen **his glory**, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

On the one hand, Jesus *is* the final **sacred space**, so that in Him, and through Him we draw near to God in sweet fellowship and communion — because in Him and through Him God has first of all drawn near to us. He even dwells now *within* each one of us through His Spirit, and the Spirit of His Son, Jesus Christ. (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19; Rom. 8:9)

On the one hand, Jesus *is* the final sacred space; on the other hand, Jesus has entered the heavenly “original” of all sacred space—the heavenly dwelling place of God, opening the way for us to enjoy intimate fellowship and communion with God, no longer with the mediation of

shadows and types, but directly and immediately through Christ alone. Speaking of the priests under the Old Covenant, the writer of Hebrews says:

- Hebrews 8:1–2, 5; 9:11–12 — They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” ... But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places.

When it comes to fellowship with God, we aren’t free to improvise. We must come to Him, and approach Him on His terms, in His sacred space, or all we’ll be experiencing, if we experience anything, is a satanic counterfeit. And *yet*, God does invite us and call us to approach and draw near to Him, because He has first of all gone to such awesome lengths to draw near to us. Some, in their fear of the world’s counterfeits, won’t even talk about an intimate, sweet communion and fellowship with God, and so they end up in danger of an entirely different, and equally deadly counterfeit. God is not simply seeking from us our obedience. He also pursues with us fellowship – the real and close communion between members of a family. Apart from *fellowship* with God, can there really be any true obedience? Apart from *communion* with God, can there really be any true *understanding* of doctrine or of faith in God?

What will it look like to **respond** wholeheartedly to this wonderful mystery – that God *desires*, and even *delights* to be near and close to the people that He chooses, living with us and among us in intimate fellowship and joyful communion together? How will this impact our practice of true, biblical prayer? How will this impact our practice of Bible reading? How will this impact our efforts at obedience, and our understanding of doctrine and faith – in short, our living of the whole Christian life?

In closing, listen to these words of Jesus:

- Revelation 3:19–20 — Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

As we move through the coming chapters, may God show us the grounds, and the means, and the nature, and the wonder and joy of true fellowship and communion with Him.

* Revelation 7:15 — “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence [lit. settle/dwell upon them].

Revelation 21:3 — And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place [tabernacle] of God is with man. He will settle/dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.