

Exodus 27:9-19 and 38:9-20

Introduction

Exodus 25:8 — [The Lord said to Moses,] let [the people] make me a sanctuary [a sacred space], that I may dwell in their midst.

The fact that **so many** chapters in Exodus are devoted to describing this “sanctuary” should tell us a lot. It tells us **how important it is for us** that we should be able to live in relationship with our Creator. It tells us how **wholly committed God is** to bringing us to Himself because He loves us and has committed Himself to us. And it tells us that this goal of relationship between the holy Creator, and His sinful, fallen creation is **no small thing to achieve** – no small thing at all.

From the furniture inside the tabernacle, to the tabernacle itself, to the furniture outside the tabernacle (in the courtyard), and now to the courtyard itself, we’ve been on a journey “outward.” We’ve moved from the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place to, now, the very edge and perimeter of all “sacred space.” We read in Exodus twenty-seven verses 9-19:

II. Exodus 27:9–19 — You shall make the court of the tabernacle.

~ On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twined linen a hundred cubits [150 ft.] long for one side. There shall be twenty pillars and twenty bronze bases. The hooks of the pillars and their fillets [bands] shall be of silver.

~ And likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long [150 ft.], its twenty pillars and their twenty bases of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver.

~ And for the breadth of the court on the west side there shall be hangings for fifty cubits [75 ft.], with ten pillars and ten bases.

~ The breadth of the court on the front to the east toward the sunrise, shall be fifty cubits [75 ft.]. The hangings for the one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits [22½ ft.], with their three pillars and three bases. On the other side the hangings shall be fifteen cubits [22½ ft.], with their three pillars and three bases.

~ For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits [30 ft.] long, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. It shall have four pillars and with them four bases. All the pillars around the court shall be filleted with silver. Their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze.

~ The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits [150 ft.], the breadth fifty [75 ft.], and the height five cubits [7½ ft.], with hangings of fine twined linen and bases of bronze. All the utensils of the tabernacle for every use, and all its pegs [stakes?] and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

[See Illustration on page 8]

These hangings that mark off the outer court of the tabernacle are the last boundary between the sacred and the profane. They mark the very outer edge and perimeter of this sacred space, outside of which all is once again common and profane. There’s been an emphasis, so far, on an

outward movement – moving from the center outward to the perimeter. We’ve seen this in the simple fact of geography. So far, everything has been described in the order of how close it is (physically) to the center.

This movement outward has also been highlighted in the different kinds of **metals** that have been used in the various **parts** of the sanctuary. [See **Illustration on page 8**] Inside the tabernacle, everything is either made of pure gold or overlaid with pure gold* — everything except for the bases of the frames and the pillars that rest on the ground; these are all made of silver. When we come to the entrance of the tabernacle, however, the bases for the pillars that support the screen are all made of bronze. In fact, outside the curtained walls of the tabernacle there’s no gold anywhere, but now almost everything is made of bronze, with just a few things being made from silver.† Of course, once you actually moved outside the curtained walls of the court, all the gold, and the silver, and the bronze—as materials for a dwelling—disappear entirely. **Outside** the curtained walls of the court, all was once again common, and ordinary, and profane.

This movement outward from the center to the perimeter is also highlighted in the **geometry** of the tabernacle. (This is very, *very* important!)

➤ Exodus 27:18 — The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits [and] the breadth fifty.

So the outer court is to be a rectangle precisely twice as long as it is wide – or, two perfect squares put together side by side. [See **Illustration on page 9**] The holy place, or the guest room in the tabernacle, is also to be a rectangle – only smaller. Once again, this rectangle is to be precisely twice as long as it is wide (30 cubits x 15 cubits) – or, two perfect squares put together side by side. But what happens when we come to the Most Holy Place where God Himself sits enthroned above the cherubim? Based on the length of the curtains, we know that the width of the Most Holy Place, like the rest of the tabernacle, was ten cubits (15 ft.; Exod. 26:7-8; cf. 26:2, 13). We also know that the veil at the front of the Most Holy Place was hung from the gold clasps that connected the two sets of curtains; and based on the measurements of these curtains, we know that the clasps must have been ten cubits from the back of the Tabernacle. (Exod. 26:2-3, 6, 33) So what this means is that the *Most* Holy Place was *not* a rectangle—or two squares side by side, but just a single perfect **square**, ten cubits by ten cubits. But that’s not all. Based on the height of the frames, we know that the tabernacle was also ten cubits tall. (cf. Exod. 26:15-16) The outer court, then, was two perfect squares side by side; the Holy Place was two perfect cubes side by side; and the Most Holy Place was simply a single, perfect **cube** – ten cubits tall, ten cubits deep, and ten cubits wide. Of course, once you moved outside the curtained walls of the court, space was no longer divided into rectangles, and squares, and cubes. [See **Illustration on page 9**]

And so we’re reminded over and over again that there’s a world of difference between the space on one side of these curtains and the space on the other. Even *inside* this sacred space there’s still a “progression” of holiness from the two squares, to the two cubes, to the single cube; from the

* The furniture, poles, utensils, clasps, frames, rings, bars, pillars, and hooks

† The clasps that connect the curtains for the outer covering of the tabernacle, the outside furniture with its poles and utensils, and the pegs, bases, and probably the pillars of the outer court (cf. ESV) are all either made of bronze or overlaid with bronze. Only the fillets and hooks for the pillars of the court are made of silver.

bronze, to the silver, to the gold; from the places and things farthest away, to the places and things closer to the center, and then to the center itself at the ark of the covenant. And all these various “levels” are only emphasizing the fact that outside of this sacred space – outside the hangings of the court – there are no more “levels.” Outside, all is once again *common* and *ordinary*, and *profane*.

But perhaps nowhere is this progression of holiness—this idea of sacred space—more vividly represented than in the veil and the screens that mark the three entrances – first from the camp of Israel to the outer court, then from the outer court to the Holy Place, and then from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place. We read of the veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place in Exodus 26:

- Exodus 26:31 — And you shall make a **veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns** and *fine twined linen*. It shall be made with **cherubim skillfully worked into it**.

A few verses later, we read of the screen separating the inner rooms of the tabernacle from the outer court:

- Exodus 26:36 — You shall make a **screen** for the entrance of the tent, of **blue and purple and scarlet yarns** and *fine twined linen*, **embroidered with needlework**.

And now, this morning, we read of yet another screen separating this entire complex of sacred space from the world outside.

- Exodus 27:16 — For the gate of the court there shall be a **screen** twenty cubits long, of **blue and purple and scarlet yarns** and *fine twined linen*, **embroidered with needlework**.

[See **Illustration**] The rest of the hangings for the court are made “only” of fine twined linen; but the screen for the entrance is made in exactly the same way as the screen for the entrance of the tent – “of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework.” And these two screens differ from the veil only in the fact that the veil has the Cherubim “skillfully worked into it.” Once again, we see very vividly represented the different levels of sacred space, and ultimately the world of difference between the space on the **inside**, and all other space on the **outside**.

But the veils and the screens are telling an even bigger story. On the one hand, they’re marks of **separation**. They’re the warnings to all who are unauthorized to keep out. So only the High Priest can go beyond the veil into the Most Holy Place – and only once a year on the day of atonement with the blood of the sin offering. Only the priestly family can go past the screen of the tabernacle into the Holy Place. And only the covenant people of God can pass the screen at the entrance to the outer court. These warnings to “**keep out**” are all **gracious** warnings; they’re meant to **protect** sinful man from being consumed by the fire of God’s holiness. (cf. Num. 3:38) God doesn’t desire the death of His people – He desires their life and peace. And yet, ultimately, true life and peace can only be found **inside** – as the fruits of His immediate presence. And so, for all this emphasis on separation and all “unauthorized personnel” keeping out, the veil and the screens are, at the same time, a sign of God’s desire that we should ultimately all be **invited in**.

After all, the amazing reality is that the veil and the screens all mark *entrances* – entrances to sacred space, entrances **leading** one after the other, after the other to the very heart of Yahweh’s presence where He Himself sits enthroned above the Cherubim. And so we see this massive tension between “Keep out” and “Welcome!”; between “this far and no further” and “Come! Come all the way in!” Both the warning and the invitation are intended for our good—for our life and joy and peace. And yet it’s clear that our ultimate life, and joy, and peace depends in the end on an unhindered, unfettered, unrestricted, unlimited access to the immediate presence of God. The structure and layout of the tabernacle is so very, very vivid – and the tension so very, very palpable. On the one hand, we long to go *in*. We want to sit at the table in the guest room—in the light of the tree—and eat and drink. More than that, we want to enter within the veil to bow down at the foot of His throne and just bask in the light of His countenance shining upon us. On the other hand, we *dare not* go all the way in.

Can you see how it’s the various levels and stages of this sacred space that make it possible for us to enjoy any sacred space at all? If it weren’t for an outer court, there would be no place for sinners such as we are! And yet, here’s that tension again. Even while we do have the outer court, we still live *most* of our normal, everyday lives on the **outside** of even the outer court. We live most of our everyday lives in space that’s still common, and ordinary, and “profane.” On the other hand, while we do have the outer court, where we ultimately *long* to be and *need* to be is in that most sacred of all sacred space where God Himself *is*. *This* is where we *know* God has *called us to be* – not just occasionally, or even just regularly, but all the time, abiding there forever, and ever, and ever. So how is this tension to be resolved? How are we ever to make our *home* in the most sacred of all sacred space where God is?

It’s important for us to notice that even though this sacred space is entirely portable, it still has a south side, and a north side, and a west side, and an east side.

II. Exodus 27:9, 11–13 — On the **south side** the court shall have hangings of **fine twined linen** a hundred cubits long... And likewise for its length on the **north side**... And for the breadth of the court on the **west side** there shall be hangings for fifty cubits... The breadth of the court **on the front to the east toward the sunrise**, shall be fifty cubits.

God is careful and explicit: The **front** is to be on the **east** – the side facing the sun when it rises in the morning. (cf. Num. 3:38) We could say that the first sacred space was the Garden of Eden; and the Garden of Eden, too, in some way **faced east**. We read in Genesis chapter three:

- Genesis 3:24 (cf. 4:16) — [The Lord God] drove out the man, and **at the east** of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way **to guard the way** to the tree of life.

Here, in this sacred space of the tabernacle, we still have the guarding cherubim, and yet we also see the signs that the way to the tree of life—the way in to the most sacred of all sacred space—is to be **opened** up once again. About five hundred years later, when Solomon builds the temple it will once again face **east**. (cf. 1 Kings 7:21, 38-39; 2 Chron. 4:7-10) And once again, there will be all the different markers and levels of sacred space. We read especially about the veil at the entrance of the Most Holy Place:

- 2 Chronicles 3:14 — And [Solomon] made the **veil** of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and he worked cherubim on it.

And then there's this:

- 1 Kings 6:20 — The inner sanctuary [the Most Holy Place] was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, and he overlaid it with pure gold.

When the temple that Solomon built was destroyed, the prophet Ezekiel saw visions of something extraordinary – a temple, *a sacred space*, that looked like a **city**.

- Ezekiel 40:1–4 — In the twenty-fifth year of our exile... the hand of the LORD was upon me... In visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city... When he brought me there, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand.

Once again, this temple-city faces **east**.

- Ezekiel 47:1 (cf. 43:1-5, 17) — Then he brought me... to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the **east** (for the temple faced **east**).

While this sacred space still appears to be divided into different sections, the levels seem to be more blurred together and much less distinct. Once again, the most holy place is described as a perfect square.

- Ezekiel 41:4 — He measured the length of the room, twenty cubits, and its breadth, twenty cubits, across the nave. And he said to me, “This is the Most Holy Place.”

But then the big surprise is that the entire temple complex is no longer a rectangle, but is, itself, a single, perfect **square**.

- Ezekiel 42:20 (cf. 41:13-14) — It had a wall around it, 500 cubits long and 500 cubits broad, to make a separation between the holy and the common.

But then *again*(!), what's most astonishing of all is that even the actual city itself is also a single, perfect **square**!

- Ezekiel 48:30–35 — These shall be the exits of the city: On the **north side**, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates... the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. On the **east side**, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates... On the **south side**, which is to be 4,500 cubits... three gates... On the **west side**, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates... And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There.

So while there's still this wall of separation between the holy and the common, between the sacred and the profane, what we seem to see happening is the sacred expanding **outward** to include within itself more and more space. Now, the **whole temple complex** and *even the city itself* have the same "sacred" shape as the most sacred of all spaces – the Most Holy Place, where God *is*. On the one hand, it seems that the people are being invited in to live and dwell in God's sacred space. On the other hand, it seems that God's sacred space has expanded outward to include even the homes and dwellings of His people.

Conclusion

And so we see what heaven is. Heaven is the Most Holy Place—the back room of the tabernacle—now become a city – a city where all God's people have been **invited in to live**. A city where all of God's people will find their ultimate life, and joy, and peace in unhindered, unfettered, unrestricted, unlimited access to the immediate presence of God.

Of course, not even Ezekiel himself could have seen all this so clearly as we see it. It was only *after* the coming of Jesus that the temple and city in Ezekiel's vision could *finally* be clearly seen for what they really were. So the Apostle John writes in Revelation:

- Revelation 21:9–16, 22 — Then... [the angel] spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. **The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal... And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.**

In this city, there will be no more levels of sacred space surrounded by the common, and the ordinary, and the profane. And why is this? Because the Most Holy Place—the back room of the tabernacle—**is, now**, the city(!); a city filling and encompassing the entire earth (cf. Rev. 21:1-3); a city where all of God's people are welcomed and invited in to live forever, and ever, and ever.

In the coming weeks, we're going to see how all this is accomplished through the priestly work of our Lord Jesus Christ – both "already" and "not yet." But for now, I just want us all to see, and to revel in what heaven is. Are you longing for *this* place? And is this longing constantly sanctifying you, and making you always more and more holy? (cf. 1 Jn. 3:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:11-13) Listen to these words of Jesus:

- Revelation 3:12 — The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven.
- Revelation 22:14 — Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

So skipping ahead, now, to Exodus 38, maybe we can read now with growing delight and joy:

III. Exodus 38:9–20 — And he made the court. For the south side the hangings of the court were of fine twined linen, a hundred cubits; their twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. And for the north side there were hangings of a hundred cubits; their twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. And for the west side were hangings of fifty cubits, their ten pillars, and their ten bases; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. And for the front to the east, toward the sunrise, fifty cubits. The hangings for one side of the gate were fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. And so for the other side. On both sides of the gate of the court were hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three bases. All the hangings around the court were of fine twined linen. And the bases for the pillars were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. The overlaying of their capitals was also of silver, and all the pillars of the court were filleted with silver. And the screen for the gate of the court was embroidered with needlework in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It was twenty cubits long and five cubits high in its breadth, corresponding to the hangings of the court. And their pillars were four in number. Their four bases were of bronze, their hooks of silver, and the overlaying of their capitals and their fillets of silver. And all the pegs for the tabernacle and for the court all around were of bronze.



