

Exodus 31:12-18 and 35:1-3

Introduction

It's helpful to think of the book of Exodus as having four major sections.

In **Part I** we saw that Yahweh is the God who *delivers* His people from *Egypt* (1:1-15:21)

In **Part II**, we saw that Yahweh is the God who *provides* for and *protects* His people in the *Wilderness* (15:22-18:27)

In **Part III**, we've learned that Yahweh is the God who makes a *covenant* with His people at *Mount Sinai* – chapters 19-24. Remember the Book of the Covenant (20-23) containing the “words” and the “rules”—the Ten Commandments (cf. 20:1) and the Righteous Judgments (cf. 21:1). Remember the Covenant Ceremony and the blood of the covenant which caused the two parties to the covenant (God and Israel) to become family. Now, of course, family live together. And so we were prepared for the last part of Exodus:

Part IV: Yahweh is the God who desires to *dwelt* among His people – to live with them as “family” (25-40) This is what the tabernacle—with its rooms, and its furniture, and its priesthood—is all about.

Now this last section of Exodus, which outlines Yahweh's plan to live among His people is actually divided into three main parts.

The plan of the tabernacle described in detail. (25-31)

The Golden Calf (Interlude/“filling”) (32-34)

The plan of the tabernacle followed exactly (35-40)

This morning, we come to the very last verses of this first section on “The Plans of the Tabernacle described in detail” – the very last verses of chapter 31. Only, when we come to these verses, they're not at all what we expect. Instead of a closing exhortation to *build*, or a closing reminder of God's desire to live with His people as family, we have God commanding His people to keep the **Sabbath**.

- Exodus 31:12–17 — And the LORD said to Moses, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’”

Now, hasn't God already commanded His people to keep the Sabbath? Wasn't that back in Part III where God gave His people the Ten Commandments? So, why are we ending this detailed blueprint of the Tabernacle with the Sabbath commandment **all over again**?

Now, we know that after "The Plan of the Tabernacle Described in Detail" we have the short interlude of the Golden Calf, and then we pick right back up again with the "The Plan of the Tabernacle Followed Exactly." But, do you know what the very first verses of this final section are? They're another command to keep the **Sabbath**.

- Exodus 35:1–3 — Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, "These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day."

So, you can see that if we took out the "Golden Calf Interlude," we'd have two Sabbath commandments back to back – one concluding "The Plan of the Tabernacle Described in Detail" and one introducing "The Plan of the Tabernacle Followed Exactly" — both of these commandments being a repetition of what we've already heard in the Ten Commandments. So the obvious question is, "Why?" My goal, this morning, is not so much to preach another sermon on the Sabbath, but rather to preach a sermon on **why** the Sabbath should show up again here in these two most unexpected places.¹

I. The Parting of the Red Sea and a New Creation²

One of the most sweeping, most overarching, most beautiful themes in the Bible is the theme of a New Creation. This is especially a major theme in the book of Exodus.

You might remember that the parting of the Red Sea back in Part I can only be fully and truly understood in connection with the creation of the world. What starts out looking like a reversal, or an undoing of creation itself as God tells His people to "go forward," *into the watery depths of the Sea* (cf. Gen. 1:2), ends up being instead a *second* mighty work of creation – a sort of "copy" of the first. The people of God are to go *through the waters of the Deep—on DRY GROUND* (cf. Day 3 of Creation). Throughout the Old Testament, we see numerous clues that in the parting and crossing of the Red Sea, God is beginning a new work of creation that will equal, and in the end, even surpass the first work of creation in Genesis chapter one. Why does God connect the parting of the Red Sea with the creation of the world? Because He wants us to be able to *see*—and not be blinded to—the full reality of what He is *really doing* – of what is *really happening* here in Exodus.

¹ Some commentators suggest that the reason the Sabbath commandment is repeated here is to make it clear that even work on the Tabernacle is not to be allowed on the Sabbath. In this regard, I couldn't agree more wholeheartedly with the comment of Durham: "The fact that the sabbath commandment is called a perpetual covenant between Yahweh and Israel, and 'a sign in perpetuity,' is an additional reason to extend the application of these verses to a frame far broader than the prohibition of work on the Tabernacle on the sabbath."

² See messages on Exodus 14:15-15:21 (Parts I, III, IV, and V)

We might also remember that in the pagan creation myths we have battles and wars between the gods of creation and order and the gods of chaos and disorder that live in the sea. The prophet Isaiah borrows this imagery, and pictures the Red Sea as the sea monster from these *pagan myths* just ready and waiting to devour the people of God. So when God parts the Red Sea, He is—as it were—slaying the monster, in order to bring into being a *New Creation*. The sea is just a picture of the real monster and enemy of God’s New Creation, which in Exodus 14 is the army of the Egyptians. But throughout the Bible, this sea monster takes on many different forms. And underneath all these different forms, the monster in the sea is always the same; it’s this present world system with all of its hatred for God’s people inspired by Satan himself. And so the monster in the sea not only represents Satan and this world, but it also represents sin, and death, and sorrow, and suffering, and everything that first came into the world when Eve believed the serpent’s lies. The monster in the sea is everything that’s ever caused God’s people to groan and to cry out for deliverance and salvation. In Exodus 14, when God drowned the Egyptians in the sea, He was slaying *this monster* – in order to bring into being a New Creation where there will be no more death, “neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.” (cf. Isa. 35:10; 65:19; Rev. 21:4)

So, in Part I of Exodus (“Yahweh is the God who delivers His people from Egypt”), we see a picture of what the New Creation will be (a rescue and deliverance from sin and death) and how it will be accomplished (God Himself will go forth to fight and to slay the dragon in the sea).

II. The Building of the Tabernacle and a New Creation

If the crossing of the Red Sea in Part I could only be fully understood in connection with the creation of the world, the very same thing can be said of the tabernacle here in Part IV. So let me say it: The building of the tabernacle can only be truly and fully understood in connection with the creation of the world.

We saw how the lampstand in the Holy Place is patterned after the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, and how it points us forward to unrestricted access to the tree of life in a new creation.³ The tree in the tabernacle is the sign of a new creation. The cherubim standing above the place for atonement in the Most Holy Place and skillfully worked into the veil and the curtains of the tabernacle point us back to the cherubim that God placed at the entrance of the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the Tree of Life. (cf. Gen. 3:24) Genesis 3 is the last place we heard about cherubim, and so the cherubim in the tabernacle are the sign of a new creation. The precious metals and precious stones associated with the tabernacle remind us of the gold and precious stones that were associated with the Garden of Eden. (cf. Gen. 2:10-12) The orientation of the tabernacle, facing east, is a clear reminder of the Garden of Eden which also faced east.⁴ (cf. Gen. 3:24) And, so, here are two more signs that the tabernacle is pointing us to a new creation. Finally, the dimensions of the tabernacle as a series of perfect squares and cubes point us forward to a day when sacred space will actually encompass the whole world in a whole new creation.⁵

³ See message on Exodus 25:31-40

⁴ See message on Exodus 27:9-19

⁵ See message on Exodus 27:9-19

If we're not yet convinced by these things, listen to what the Psalmist writes:

- Psalm 78:69 — [Yahweh] built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever.

Do you see the comparison between God's sanctuary and the creation – heaven and earth? Solomon's temple has even more connections with creation than the tabernacle. Just to mention two of these connections, in the temple, the bronze basin becomes a great "sea" holding 11,500 gallons of water. (1 Kings 7:23-26); and in addition to cherubim, covering all the walls and doors of the Temple are palm trees and flowers reminding us of the Garden of Eden. (1 Kings 6:29-35; 7:36; Ezek. 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37; 41:18, 20, 25, 26) In Isaiah 61, the Lord describes heaven and earth as His temple and the place of His "rest."

- Isaiah 66:1 (cf. Acts 7:48-50; Gen. 2:1-3) — Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?"

But then we read in Psalm 132 of the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem:

- Psalm 132:7-8, 13-14 (cf. 2 Chron. 6:40-41; Isa. 11:10) — Let us go to his **dwelling place**; let us worship at his footstool! Arise, O LORD, and go to your **resting place**, you and the ark of your might... For the LORD has chosen **Zion**; he has desired it for his **dwelling place**: "This is my **resting place** forever; here I will **dwell**, for I have desired it."

The tabernacle is patterned after creation so that in the tabernacle we might see the promise of a temple that will one day fill and encompass the entire creation.

III. The Sabbath Commandment and a New Creation⁶

If the crossing of the Red Sea in Part I and the building of the tabernacle in Part IV can only be fully understood in connection with the creation of the world—and, therefore, as the signs of a new creation—then what are we to say of the command to keep the Sabbath in Part III? Just this: The Sabbath Commandment, as the sign of the *entire* covenant, can only be fully understood in connection with the creation of the world.

- Exodus 20:8, 11 — Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... **For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.**

Remember that when *we* get to day seven (Saturday), our week starts all over again on day one. But for God, the week never started over. So when God rests on the seventh day, that day, **for God**, is a day that goes on **forever**, and ever, without ever ending. "Today," for God, is *still* Day 7. Now, the purpose of God's rest isn't His recovery and recuperation. If that were the case, He would have recovered and recuperated long ago. Instead, God's rest is His unceasing enjoyment and celebration of all His creative work. (cf. **Gen. 1:31**; Ps. 104:31; Prov. 8:31) God's rest is a festive and joyful thing – a blissful, unending celebration of His own infinite goodness. But what

⁶ See message on Exodus 20:1-17 (Part II)

does this have to do with us? The grand finale of the creation week is not so much the creation of man as it is the “creation” of an **everlasting day** of divine rest and celebration in which *we* were meant to *participate*. **Before the fall** God blessed the seventh day as a sign of His purposes for Adam and Eve – that they should one day share with Him in His rest. **After the fall**, God gave His people (Israel) the Sabbath as a *sign* that this **same** gracious purpose (revealed in creation) is now also His saving purpose for them – **only now, because of sin, it can only be fulfilled in a new creation.**

Just like the Red Sea in Part I and the tabernacle in Part IV, the Sabbath can only be fully understood in connection with the first creation, and therefore, also, as the sign of a new creation.

IV. The People of Israel and a New Creation

Can you see what God is doing in the book of Exodus? He’s showing us in pictures and shadows what the new creation will be. And so, in a sense, He *is* actually bringing into existence a new creation in picture and shadow form. So how are we to put all these pictures and shadows together?

One thing that the parting of the Red Sea, the tabernacle, and the Sabbath all have in common is that they all assume a **people**. In Part I, the Red Sea is parted so that a **people** can go *through* the waters of the Deep—*on* DRY GROUND. The dragon is slayed so that a **people** might be delivered and rescued from their slavery in Egypt. In Part IV, the Tabernacle is built in order to provide a place where a **people** can come to worship God, and enjoy the satisfying, lasting pleasures and delights of His presence. And, in Part III, God gives the Sabbath in order to provide a time when **people** can rest and rejoice in God’s desire that they should share in *His own* everlasting day of rest. And so, running throughout these pictures and shadows of the new creation, we have the picture and shadow of **Israel itself**. Even the people of Israel themselves can only be fully understood in connection with the first creation, and therefore, also, as the **sign** of a new creation.⁷ Let’s remember how Exodus started:

- Exodus 1:6–7 — Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were **fruitful** and **swarmed**; they **multiplied** and grew **exceedingly numerous**, so that the **land** was **filled** with them.

The words that are used here are very carefully chosen to point us back to God’s promises to Abraham, and then beyond that to creation itself where we read that God blessed Adam and Eve, and God said to them:

- Genesis 1:28 — Be **fruitful** and **multiply** and fill the **earth [land]** and subdue it.

So, even in Israel itself we see the beginnings—the picture and the shadow—of a new creation. And how does Israel come into existence? How was Israel created? Through the waters of the Red Sea and through the Covenant at Mount Sinai with its sign of the Sabbath. And how does Israel continue to live and exist as the people of God? Only through their weekly experience of **Sabbath rest** and their worship at the **tabernacle**.

⁷ See message on Exodus 1:1-22

V. Red Sea, Tabernacle, Sabbath, People – and the New Creation

So, now that we have this last, but most important ingredient, how are we to fit all the pictures and shadows together? Or maybe we could ask this: Why do we have a Sabbath commandment *concluding* “The Plan of the Tabernacle Described in Detail” and then another Sabbath commandment *introducing* “The Plan of the Tabernacle Followed Exactly”? What does Sabbath have to do with tabernacle? Well, both are signs of a new creation. But why are these signs of the new creation so intimately tied together?

The Sabbath is the sign of a new creation in actual, real **time**. Israel’s one-day-a-week Sabbath was the sign of a time when God’s people would enjoy **everlasting** Sabbath rest and celebration. Israel’s one-day-a-week Sabbath was the sign of a new creation – when **all days** alike would be most holy and **all time** would be sacred—set apart unto God.

The tabernacle, on the other hand, is the sign of a new creation in actual, real **space**. The tiny tabernacle real estate was always pointing to the real estate of a **whole new heaven and earth** – a place where God’s people could enjoy the delights of His presence without once ever needing to set food outside the Holy of Holies. Israel’s 100-cubit by 50-cubit tabernacle was the sign of a new creation – where **all places** alike would be most holy and **all space** would be sacred—set apart unto God.

In the Sabbath and the tabernacle put together we have a picture of God’s new creation encompassing all time and all space – all days and all places. (cf. Enns) And, of course, the only people who can enjoy this everlasting Sabbath and this world-wide holy of holies must be **themselves a new creation** – holy and set apart unto God. And do you know how this is pictured in Exodus? It’s pictured as a **people** who have **come out from Egypt and passed through the Sea on dry ground** so that they can now **keep** God’s **Sabbaths** and **revere** God’s **tabernacle**. Twice we read in the book of Leviticus:

- Leviticus 19:30 — You shall *keep* my Sabbaths and *revere* my sanctuary: I am the LORD.
- Leviticus 26:2 — You shall *keep* my Sabbaths and *revere* my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

We could summarize like this: God’s holy people enjoying God’s sacred time and God’s sacred space – here’s the ultimate sign and picture of the new creation. Remember, *keeping* the Sabbath means celebrating and rejoicing in the Sabbath. And, so, keeping the Sabbath was just the sign of one’s commitment to keeping *all* the commandments by faith. In the same way, reverencing God’s sanctuary means to delight in and to love the worship at His sanctuary. And, so, reverencing the sanctuary was just the sign of one’s trust in God’s provision for cleansing and forgiveness, and joyful fellowship with Him.

Conclusion

Why do we have a Sabbath commandment *concluding* “The Plan of the Tabernacle Described in Detail” and then another Sabbath commandment *introducing* “The Plan of the Tabernacle Followed Exactly”? Can you see it now? It’s because the Sabbath and the tabernacle **together**

are the sign of a new creation where all time is a sacred Sabbath rest and where all space is the holy of holies. But more than this, it's because a people who *both keep* God's Sabbaths *and reverence* God's sanctuary are themselves the sign of a new creation. Can you see what God is doing in the book of Exodus? He's showing us in pictures and shadows what the new creation will be. And so, in a sense, He *is* actually bringing into existence a new creation in picture and shadow form.

So what about *today*? What do we have *today*? We have the reality and the substance of the new creation **in Christ** – “already.” The Apostle Paul writes:

- 2 Corinthians 5:16–17 — From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

If we are **in Christ**, who is Himself our eternal Sabbath rest, and if we are **in Christ**, who is Himself the tabernacle in whom we have access to God, then the new creation is here. And as a **part** of this new creation ourselves, this is what we **love** to shout out loud (borrowing and paraphrasing the words of Abraham Kuyper): There is not a **square inch** in the whole **space** of my human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine!” And there is not a **fraction of a second** in all the **time** of my human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine!” Why do we love to shout these things from the rooftops? In the end, it's because this is what heaven itself will be – my delighted, wholehearted surrender to His cry of “**mine**” over all of **space**, and all of **time**, and all of **me**.

So let's ask ourselves, today, “Am *I* a **new creation in Christ**?” Is *this* vision of heaven—of the new creation that's still to come—truly what delights and motivates my heart today? And if so, then what about those “little” parts of my life—that fraction of time, that square inch of space—that I would still withhold from His Lordship? As the Apostle Paul says, let us always be putting off the old self, which belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and always be putting on the new self, **created** after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22-24; cf. Col. 3:8-11; Rom. 6:3-4)

- 2 Peter 3:13 (cf. Rev. 21:27) — According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
- 1 John 3:1–3 — The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know [the Father]. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.