



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



EXODUS 22 - 27

Exodus 22

PARENTAL ALERT — some of the following subject matter involves mature themes. Please review with discernment before sharing with your children.

22:2-3, 10-11 - "If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft... If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep for him, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept it, and he shall not make restitution."

The opening section of chapter 22 from verses one to fifteen are laws related to the eighth of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not steal". Remember, the Ten Words function as a kind of outline summary of all the rest of God's laws. I chose two of the laws from this section for comment. The first is a law regarding what we call burglary under our laws today. Two scenarios are addressed which are similar in the crime considered with one critical difference. The first is a burglary which takes place at night in the dark. The second is a burglary which is attempted in the daylight hours. In the course of the nighttime burglary, the law anticipates the homeowner waking up during the commission of the crime. In the ensuing confrontation with the burglar, the homeowner strikes the burglar and kills him. Has the homeowner committed any crime himself in this case? In our modern criminal system that has come to protect the criminals with extraordinary rights, the homeowner is likely to be sued by surviving members of the burglar's family and win. If the burglar is injured but survives he is likely to win a substantial settlement in court more valuable than anything he intended to steal. According to God's justice, the burglar is responsible for placing himself in harm's way. The death (or serious injury) of the criminal is the responsibility of the criminal not the homeowner. This presupposes the right of the homeowner to defend himself, his family and his property from harm in the uncertainty of the darkness of night.

However, if the crime occurs in the daylight then a different standard applies. If the burglar was stealing, and the homeowner strikes the burglar with deadly force, then the homeowner is responsible to make restitution to the burglar's family for his life. The homeowner makes restitution, rather than facing the death penalty because it is a killing rather than a murder. The key difference is between the darkness and the light in the environment during the crime. The daylight means that the homeowner is not startled awake, is able to see exactly what is

going on, and is able to conduct the defense of his home, family and property without unnecessary deadly force. This distinction in the law shows us that true justice weighs all pertinent factors before executing judgment. The punishment must always fit the crime. God's justice is never too heavy or too light. A theft must be treated as a theft, not as an assault or attempted murder. It is not that the criminal has the right to be protected to commit crime, but that even while committing a crime, they are protected under God's law from being given a harsher punishment than their crime actually deserves.

The second law from verses ten and eleven addresses the case of a man giving any of his animals to his neighbor for safe keeping. If the animals under the neighbor's care die, are injured, or stolen while no one is watching them, what should be done? The complication in the case is the lack of any witnesses to what occurred to the animals. The law allows for the possibility that the neighbor is secretly attempting to steal from his neighbor by either eating or selling the animals, and then telling his neighbor that the animals just died or were stolen. If there is no witness, there is no practical way to know for sure what really happened in such a circumstance. Rather than leave the circumstance unresolved the Lord provided in this law an unusual solution in the context of our laws today.

An "oath before the Lord" was to be taken. Such an oath was typically done in public before witnesses. The purpose of the oath was to declare one's innocence of any wrongdoing toward the neighbor. The oath was taken in the name of the Lord which was a request that the Lord would take notice and arbitrate between them. Such an oath recognized that true justice belongs to the Lord and that He sees what is hidden from men. His eyes are in every place, and the oath takers made themselves personally accountable to the Lord to handle any hidden or secret theft between them. The expected way the Lord would hold them accountable was by bringing judgment upon the person that was hiding their theft from their neighbor. It presupposes that God is willing to involve Himself in the daily interactions among His people and hold them directly accountable to walk in righteousness. Such a law could never be passed in our legal system today which has essentially divorced itself from the oversight of a holy God. We still maintain a little of the intent of this law in our courtroom tradition of swearing to tell the truth before testifying. In years past that oath was sworn with the words, "So help me God" with the right hand upon a Bible. Those words and the Bible have been recently removed, and the resulting diminishing of fear of the Lord in our justice system is a result.

22:16-17 - "If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins."

This law deals with the issue of what has become neutrally named "premarital sex" in our culture. The first thing to notice is the dramatic difference in

terminology. The label of premarital sex effectively reduces the activity in view to a physiological function prior to marriage. It does not reflect any moral perspective at all and allows for the possibility if not likelihood of repeat activity as long as a marriage has not yet occurred. Keep in mind, that in this verse it is the Lord still speaking to Moses and giving His standards for how such activity between people should be viewed and handled. A violation of an unspoken standard is implied here. The standard is established elsewhere in God's Word, but this law shows that God does not approve of sexual relationship between unmarried people. It is also very clear, that if the Lord's law was followed, the activity would not continue past a first violation. The simple reason that the activity will not continue and become habitual is that the Lord commands a marriage to take place in such cases. Now, this is so foreign to our current cultural perspective regarding sex, that it is difficult for many to even consider the possibility that our culture may be wrong on this issue, and God's Law may be right.

The first thing we should notice is the value this law places upon the virginity of the young women in God's holy nation. Sexual innocence and purity is something God wants His people to honor and protect. It is a telling comment on the decline of our culture when virginity is rare and commonly considered a condition to lose as quickly as possible as if it were a disease or social disability. The second thing to see is that the law does not even consider the "virginity" of the man involved, nor is it concerned with his situation. The reason is that in the Biblical perspective, only women were identified as virgins before marriage. Without a detailed explanation, this is connected to the role of the man to reflect the role of the Lord in the marriage relationship as the initiator. What is in view for the man is not his virginity, but his responsibility. In this scenario, both the man and the woman choose to participate in sexual relations, but only the man is considered accountable to the law. As the initiator, he is the one who "seduces" her. The term literally means to persuade. It does not take a behavior expert to recognize that the man is the driving force as the persuader in 99% of these situations.

Because the man is held responsible by the Lord, the judgment of the Lord attached to this violation of God's Law falls upon him. There are two forms this judgment takes, both of which are geared to insure there will be no repeat of his sin. The first judgment is that he must pay the young woman's bride price. This was a serious amount that was to be paid to her father. This price was due to be paid even if the relationship with the young woman ends right here. The bride price was more than an archaic, primitive custom. It served as a kind of insurance account for her future in case her husband died and left her without financial support. It also served the spiritual purpose of establishing the value the Lord placed on the young women who were the future wives and mothers of society. The second judgment is perhaps most surprising for us. The young man was required to marry the young woman. This required approaching the father of the woman, which would have a powerful accountability influence on the young man after this violation of that family's honor. The marriage would take place

unless the father refused. This allowed the father room to exercise wisdom and discernment regarding whether this man was a fitting husband for his daughter. However, if the father decided for them to marry the young man had no choice but to go through with marriage.

This powerfully demonstrates that, from God's perspective, marriage is covenant union that must be understood as a spiritual obligation, more than a romantic inclination. Romance itself is a gift from God that when present in a marriage relationship is a great enhancement of the experience of marriage. Romance is not as essential to marriage as spiritual responsibility is however. Marriage can survive an absence of romance, but it cannot survive spiritual irresponsibility. It is not even a factor to consider in this law how the young man feels about marrying the young woman, or even how she feels about marrying him. They both made their feelings the priority when they chose to engage in sexual relationship and this law's requirement of spiritual responsibility is the antidote for both of them. How different would our society be today if just this one law of the 613 laws of God was instituted and enforced? Recent statistics indicate 63% of young people between the ages 14-21 are "sexually active" and all of that activity is taking place before marriage. There was a time a generation or two ago where this was not the norm. Is our society healthier because of it? Many think so, but the Lord is not one of them.

22:18-20 - "You shall not allow a sorceress to live. Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death. He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed."

This section contains three short laws that do not have any direct connection to each other except that they all share the same judgment. All three of these laws require a death penalty response by the holy nation. In the study of the ten Commandments we considered that the Lord required a death penalty for the sin of murder. Here three other sins are in view, and as we continue our study through the Law of God we will find additional violations that require a death penalty. What is immediately obvious, is the longer list for death penalty offences in God's Law compared to ours today. In our legal system, only murder is punishable by death, and even among murder cases, the prosecution usually is required to demonstrate that there were "special circumstances" involved in the murder in order to be able to qualify for the death penalty. "Ordinary" murders are punished only by varying length of prison sentences. In God's value system, all murders require the death of the murderer, but there are other violations of His holiness that require death as well.

These three violations are all deserving of death according to the Lord. They are sorcery, bestiality, and idolatry. The first sin is the same kind of activity that Moses confronted in Pharaoh's court in Egypt (Exodus 7:11). Our translation refers only to a sorceress because the form of the word in Hebrew was feminine, but we will see in other passages that the Lord condemns this activity whether it

is practiced by males or females (Deuteronomy 18:10). This is the category of what is known today as occult practices. It involved various secret "magical" arts such as divination, necromancy, and incantations seeking spiritual knowledge and power. In ancient times, it was a common perspective that "magic" was the greatest power in the world and the goal of sorcery was to tap into that power. With the benefit of a New Covenant perspective, we can be clear that there is no such power as magic, but that sorcerers were empowered by demonic activity. This law reveals how serious the Lord considered such human-demon interaction to be.

The second of the three laws was aimed at bestiality, or the practice of sexual relationships between a human and an animal. While not yet as prevalent today as some other sexual deviations, the practice has continued in every generation of human history. In the ancient world it was not uncommon, especially in some particularly corrupt societies. The seven Canaanite inhabiting the Promised Land at this time allowed it and even promoted it as part of certain religious fertility rituals. Baal, the chief god of the Canaanites was depicted in this activity, and the people that worshipped Baal tended to follow his example. God's Law was aimed at eliminating this horrible moral contamination from the nation by an immediate death penalty without any right of appeal.

The third of these laws would be particularly offensive if it were to be instituted in our society today. It forbade offering sacrifices (the practical common expression of worship) to any god other than Yahweh. No worship of any other than the One True God was allowed within the boundaries of God's holy nation. Period. Israel was not established by the Lord as what we term a religiously pluralistic society. We currently take great pride as a nation today in allowing everyone to worship as they see fit whatever they see fit to worship, or to worship nothing at all if they prefer. If people want to erect a statue to themselves in their home and worship it they are free to do so. If they want to worship Allah, Buddha, Krishna, a dog, or tree, or the sun, or any other thing our law protects their right to do so. Not so in God's holy nation. Anyone found worshipping any god other than Yahweh was not just given a slap on the wrist. They were to be executed. What would the ACLU do with this law? Was this law extreme? Yes, of course, any law with a death penalty is an extreme law. The issue is not whether it was extreme, but whether the law was right and holy. See, the issue is whether there actually is any other god that exists in God's creation. God says no other god exists, and that all honor and worship our hearts are inclined to give to a god actually belongs to Him alone, and that it is spiritually a high crime to rob God of His glory in this way.

Questions from Exodus 21:

Question: What possible motive could a slave owner have, by giving his male slave a wife, other than keeping him a slave forever, or breaking up his family for financial gain. On the surface it seems unrighteous to take a man's wife and

children from him after his freedom. (And the two shall be one flesh) Is that just the price you pay for being a slave?

Answer: I can see four possible motives for why an Israelite master would have given a slave a wife. 1) It could be for economic reasons to increase the size of his own extended household through the children born. 2) It could be for economic reasons by keeping the male slave happy and motivated to work hard. 3) It could be for reasons of compassion by recognizing the real needs and desires of his slave. 4) It could be for strategic reasons knowing this law in the hope of retaining the service of his slave on a permanent basis.

Regarding your comment on it being unrighteous to "take" the released slave's wife and children from him after he gains his freedom; you are not catching the real heart of the slavery issue. His wife and children do not belong to him, but to the master. If the master chooses to keep the wife and children he is only keeping what belongs to him. The master is not taking anything from the former slave at all. The whole point of slavery is that the person enslaved does not belong to themselves, but to a master. That means that the master is not unrighteous to keep what belongs to him in the first place. The ball is then in the former slave's court entirely. He is free to choose to remain with his family. The separation is his choice, just like remaining united with them is.

The Lord used this real life circumstance to teach His people about the terrible consequences of sin. When we sin, we choose to enslave ourselves to that sin as a master over us. The world calls it addiction, but the Lord does not describe it first in terms of our craving, like the world does, but in terms of the spiritual and legal reality. From the Lord's perspective, people that misuse drugs are worse than addicted to the drugs, they are enslaved to them. The same principle applies to every category of sin.

Exodus 23

23:1-2 - "You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;"

These laws are an expansion on Commandment nine of the original ten. It certainly applies to a strict court room setting of a legal case and testimony given before a judge. It is a warning against joining with a wicked man and giving a false testimony against an innocent person. The minimal standard for conviction under the Law was two or three witnesses. If one wicked person could convince one other person to give a false testimony with him, that would meet the minimum standard. The entire justice system could be subverted by the

agreement of two such false witnesses in the case of a person they wished to harm. God does not name any specific judgment here for the two who would pervert justice in this way, because their wicked agreement to bear false witness would only be known to themselves. However, we can be confident that the Lord would take action on His own behalf in those cases because the justice system of Israel was intended by Him to represent His justice, righteousness and holiness. An attempt to abuse justice in Israel for selfish reasons would be an attempt to twist God's justice for personal gain.

The wording in our translation, "false report" correctly identifies that there is other behavior in view than only court testimony. There is common human behavior that would almost always precede a court appearance to give false testimony. It also points to what we call malicious gossip today. There are two basic forms of gossip, neither of which is beneficial, but one is more harmful than the other. Some gossip passes on true information about another person when it is not our business to do so, and will harm the reputation of the person in an unnecessary way. Then, there is gossip in which a false report about another person is accepted and passed on to others. Bearing a false report in this context involves listening to, accepting as worth sharing, and then speaking it to one or more others. The choice to do so is always tempting for various reasons, but is never profitable or wise. The person who is the subject of the gossip is always harmed to some degree when we participate in it. Even if the only harm done is to diminish their reputation in the eyes of others, we are attacking something the Lord tells us is of great value to every person. "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth..." (Proverbs 22:1).

There is one more important factor to consider in this section. The Lord warns His people to not "follow the masses in doing evil". This warning recognizes the nature of all people in a community setting. The Lord made us with a disposition for agreement and unity which inclines us to want to go the same direction that the majority of people go. The problem, of course, is that we live in a fallen world filled with fallen people under the influences of a wide range of sin and spiritual corruption. The majority in a fallen world are not always right, and most often are wrong in their shared opinions. If the majority of people choose to believe or follow an evil path, then the person who follows the Lord must be strong to go against the grain and hold to what is true and right. The impulse to shade testimony to make it more acceptable to the majority is a powerful temptation. To hold to the truth against the desires of the multitude in such situations is never easy and may even put the one testifying at risk to become the target of the crowd's displeasure. This is the peer pressure at its worst. Only those believers who have a solid commitment to the truth and justice of God before finding themselves in such a circumstance are likely to emerge without compromising.

23:4-5 - "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him."

Many people who are mostly unfamiliar with the Law of Moses have the impression that the laws found in the Old Testament are harsh, and oppressive. These two laws regarding a neighbor's donkey answer that false accusation and support what Jesus taught regarding all of the Law (Matthew 22:37-40). The primary focus of all of God's Law is love. The individual laws are aimed at teaching His people what it looks like in various life situations to truly love God and love our neighbor. These two laws are neighbor laws. At first glance, the neighbor focus might not be obvious because the Lord is giving directions for how we are to treat our enemy. The fact that he is our enemy does not change his identification as our neighbor in the broader Biblical definition of neighbor, but it does flavor our understanding. An enemy neighbor is in view here. This is someone with whom we are not on good and friendly terms. For the sake of our responsibility under these law, it does not matter whether we were the cause of becoming enemies, or they were. What matters under these laws, is how we will choose to treat them in certain kinds of circumstances knowing what God calls us to do in those situations.

The unspoken tension contained in both laws is the natural tendency of people toward enemies. I saw a clip on television last night of Donald Trump explaining his actions in his recent dispute with Rosie O'Donnell. In the clip, Trump declared, "If someone attacks me, I attack back." He is honestly stating the basic principle for human relationships that everyone in the world follows, "Treat me right and I'll treat you right as long as I feel like it, but if you treat me wrong, I'll treat you worse." That principle was never negotiated or agreed upon, it is simply the natural pattern of the fallen human nature. This portion of God's Law is aimed at exposing that sinful pattern and requires of us to go against every selfish, bitter, hateful tendency of our hearts when we are presented with an situation involving our enemy neighbor. Even though the specifics of this law are centered on what we do with our neighbor's donkey, the intent of the law is far broader than donkeys. If it were literally only for donkeys, we could easily dismiss any requirements for ourselves since few of us know any neighbors with donkeys anymore. The donkey is an example of something that is of value and matters to our enemy neighbor. The purpose of the law is also broader than only enemies. If we are to treat enemies in this way, we are also to treat every neighbor this well. The Lord uses the extreme example of an enemy neighbor to represent the entire category of neighbors.

So, how are we to treat even our enemy neighbor in his time of need? We are to love our neighbor as we would hope someone would do for us in the same circumstance. Using modern examples, if my enemy neighbor left his car lights on in the driveway, should I drive by with glee anticipating his trouble in the

morning when he finds his car battery dead? No, I am to stop, and risk going up to his front door and informing him that his lights are on. This is a law identifying what God requires of us. The word, "surely" emphasizes that my response is not optional. God will hold me accountable if I choose to disregard this law. On the other hand, the focus of the law is on my choice to do the right thing toward my enemy neighbor, not how I feel emotionally about them. I can do what is right without having tender feelings of affection toward them.

The second of these two laws is given to show that this same standard applies even when it may cost us something to obey it. The second law envisions a scenario where the neighbor's donkey has collapsed under a heavy load. It requires us to stop, unload the donkey and help their donkey back up. This would require the time to stop and do this as well as the hard work to accomplish it. There is no exception clause included which would allow us to back out if it would be too much trouble, or "not worth it". It is worth the trouble because God says it is. These laws are at the heart of the teaching the Lord Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:43-45).

23:14-19 - "Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning. You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother."

This is the first passage in God's Law that identifies the pattern to be established in the nation of the three great annual spiritual festivals celebrated by all of Israel. The three festivals would in the future be celebrated in Jerusalem once the Promised Land was conquered and the temple was built there. Each of the festivals will be described later in the Law in greater detail. The three feasts are Unleavened Bread, Harvest of Firstfruits, and Ingathering. They also became known by other names which may be more familiar. Unleavened Bread was also the annual Passover feast. The Harvest of Firstfruits is known now as Pentecost. The Feast of Ingathering is also known as the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles.

The feasts would become a continuing test of faith and obedience for Israel in the generations to come. It was not an easy thing for every household in all of Israel to stop, for the time required to honor the feast, all normal daily activity and travel to Jerusalem to celebrate it. It would require faith to trust the Lord to watch over all they left behind at home, and that He would honor their obedience by blessing their practical concerns while they were away. It was also a costly obedience. Each family was burdened with the cost of the trip three times a year to Jerusalem. In addition, each was to come to Jerusalem under a spiritual obligation greater than just showing up. It was commanded by the Lord that "none shall appear before Me empty-handed". To appear before the Lord empty handed meant to come with nothing to offer the Lord in sacrifice. The Lord commanded that every household present an offering to Him when they came to the feast. This was a direct reminder of the value of their relationship with the Lord. The offering did not teach that they earned their relationship with the Lord, rather that because He had blessed them so greatly, it was the appropriate expression of their gratitude toward Him.

When it came time to decide what to bring to the Lord for the offering, the Lord had a clear standard of what He expected from them. They were to offer "the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God". Simply put, the Lord wanted them to offer Him their best. This anticipates the natural devaluing of the Lord that occurs when we offer to God from the leftovers after we have set aside the best for ourselves. This portion has an application to our relationship with the Lord today. We have an ongoing call from the Lord to honor Him in tithes and offerings today. You might be surprised by what percentage of the people that attend church come empty-handed each week. Of those that are faithful to give, there are many that give to God only as a financial afterthought once money has been set aside for all other purposes. God calls us to honor Him first, not last.

These feasts were not the idea of Moses or any other Israelite to give everyone a vacation three times a year. These were established by the command of God. They all served a practical purpose benefiting Israel, an immediate spiritual purpose to cause them to stop and remember the Lord's role in their daily life, and a far distant symbolic and prophetic purpose. The feasts of the Lord were prophetic in that they portrayed in the festival a different aspect of the work of Christ as Messiah and Savior. These three great feasts each point to a great part of the work of Christ in salvation. The Passover points to the cross, the great center of God's work of redemption by His Son. Pentecost points to the beginning of the harvest of salvation in the New Covenant which was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to fill the newly formed church (Acts 2:1-4). The Feast of Ingathering points forward to the final culminating work of Christ in His Second Coming when all of His chosen ones will be gathered to Him in the great harvest of souls that concludes current history.

There is an interesting but mysterious law included in this section. "You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother." Without understanding the cultural context of this law, some have erroneously concluded that this was one of the food laws given for health reasons. In later rabbinical rules on food preparation and handling that became known as the Kosher rules there remains to this day a very strict prohibition of mixing meat and milk products. That rule was developed from an incorrect understanding of this law. There may be relative health disadvantages to boiling meat in milk, but not because God gave this law. The law had to do with insuring Israel as God's holy nation would not fall into the false worship patterns common in Canaan at this time. It was common practice for the Canaanites to boil a kid in its mother's milk as part of a religious fertility sacrifice. It was believed that doing so would cause their flocks to give birth at a greater rate. The law prohibits Israel from following their pagan influence and is placed here to show the clear contrast with where the assurance of their prosperity originated. Israel was to trust the Lord for the prosperity of their flocks and herds and that their obedience in these three annual feasts would be blessed by Him in practical ways affecting their flocks for good.

Questions from Exodus 22:

Question: Ex. 22:29-30 - "The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me...on the eighth day you shall give it to Me." - Was this referring to circumcision?

Answer: Yes, the eighth day requirement for the firstborn sons referred to the day of their circumcision. They were not to be given to the Lord before that day. The giving of the firstborn son however involved more than only circumcision. It required the father to redeem the son by paying a price in silver to the Lord because the son was symbolically "sacrificed" to the Lord.

Question: Should we still execute people for Witchcraft? If the answer is no doesn't that play into the hands of people who say the Law was only for the nation Israel, and if the answer is yes where is there confirmation of that principle in the New Testament?

Answer: I'm glad you asked this question, even though this is a tough one to answer. My answer will apply to all of the various death penalty laws in the Law of God, not just to the law regarding sorcery. In order to answer your specific question accurately I need to split my answer into yes and no sections. No, "we" should not execute people today for practicing sorcery. I am interpreting your "we" as we the church, not we the United States of America. The reason we should not, is that in the New Covenant, the Lord has not given to the church governmental authority to execute His judgments in society. In Old Covenant Israel, the Lord united the authority functions of the church (temple, prophets) and state (judges, kings) in such a way that a theocracy was created. God's Law was the law of the land. The government was responsible to carry out all the judgments required by the Law. In the New Covenant, the church is called to

speaking prophetically (representing the Lord's will) to the state, but has no way to hold the state accountable to follow God's laws. The church is not called to take up the sword to do the job of the state even if the state fails to do its job properly (Romans 13:1-4).

There is also, though, a yes aspect to your question. Let me rephrase your question for clarity. Do people that practice sorcery today still deserve a death penalty judgment for their sin? The answer is yes, they deserve it. The church must not presume to give them what they deserve, but a righteous society should. The question really boils down to this; to what degree is any modern society shaped and influenced by the holy standards of God's Law? We now follow Paul's example. He declared the truth of how God sees these kinds of sins and what the people that commit them deserve by way of His judgment, but Paul also left the judgment in the hands of the state where the Lord intends for it to be in the New Covenant. "and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." (Romans 1:32). So, as a Christian, I will never raise my hand against a person that practices such sins, but I will declare openly what God says they deserve to receive as judgment. In an ideal world, all societies should look to God's Law as the standard for making their own laws, but we live in a fallen, far from ideal world.

Exodus 24

24:3-8 - "Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

The Lord has concluded His declaration of the Ten Words and the ordinances of the covenant. Moses is instructed to return to the camp, deliver the ordinances of the Lord to the people, and prepare for a meeting between the Lord and the leadership representatives of the nation. When Moses descended from the mountain of the Lord, he recounted for the entire nation what the Lord had

spoken to him. There are two unspoken but implied details in this part of the story. One, in order for Moses to recount the ordinances revealed to him (chapters 21-23), he would have to remember them accurately. These are the covenant laws of God and any mistakes Moses might make in telling the law to the people could forever affect their own obedience to the Law. What is implied is the influence of God upon the mind of Moses to cause him to remember every single word of these ordinances perfectly. Moses only heard God speak them to him once, and yet the words of God were powerfully impressed upon his mind in a way that he would not forget or modify by mistake. Second, in order to effectively declare the ordinances to the nation Moses had to proclaim them in a way that the 600,000 men at minimum could all hear. It was critical that all the people hear the words because all the people would be held accountable by the Lord to obey them. This was no quiet conversation in which Moses shared what he had heard on the mountain from God. The voice of Moses had to powerfully project to be heard by so many. Moses was representing the Lord Who thunders, as the mediator of the covenant. By this point, long gone is the Moses who objected to the Lord at the burning bush that he was "slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

Once Moses declared the words of the covenant, all the people appropriately responded with a corporate declaration of their commitment to obey the Law. Their answer is a model for how our own hearts should respond each time we open God's Book and learn more of what His Word requires of us. "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" When we encounter a requirement in God's Word, is this our immediate and serious heart response to the Lord? Sadly, it is far too common among the people of God, especially in our generation, to pick and choose which requirements in the Bible to obey. Israel was far from perfect as we have already seen, but having just the thunder, lightning, earthquake, smoke and fire as the Lord spoke from Sinai, their hearts are at this moment clear that God's Word does not ask us to obey what parts we prefer, but imposes on us all the responsibility to obey all of it.

Following the response of the people, Moses then wrote down all that the Lord had spoken to him. This is a monumental moment in the history of Israel, and in history as a whole. This is the first moment when a human being wrote Scripture. Up until this moment, God had chosen to speak to special individuals from the beginning of history such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and now Moses. None of them ever wrote down the words that God had spoken to them. The messages of God were communicated from generation to generation by verbal transmission, or what became known as the oral tradition. Now, the Word of God are captured for the first time in writing. What Moses wrote were the Ten Words of chapter 20 and the first ordinances of the Law from chapters 21-23. We know that Moses wrote them under the same powerful influence mentioned above of God working in his mind to insure perfect remembrance so that every word was captured exactly as God had spoken them. Peter later describes the spiritual principle of how God inspired Moses and all the other writers of Scripture. "for no

prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (II Peter 1:21). Paul also describes this same principle which we call the Inspiration of Scripture. "All Scripture is inspired by God..." (II Timothy 3:16). The glorious result of Moses writing these words of God is that you and I can still read what God said to him over 3000 years ago, and our lives are shaped by them today just as their lives were then.

Once Moses finished writing the ordinances of the covenant, he got up early the next morning and built a special altar representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Upon the altar they offered sacrifices. Then Moses took the blood from the sacrifices and sprinkled half of it on the altar. Once he sprinkled the blood on the altar he read the book of the covenant which he had just written so that everyone could hear it for themselves. Remember that Moses had just orally rehearsed all the words God had spoken the day before. Yet now that the book was written the same words were read to all the people. This served a spiritual and a practical purpose. Spiritually, the reading was the second witness of what God had spoken. The standard under the Laws was by two or three witness every word would be established as truth. By having Moses read the same words to the people the Lord is confirming the absolute truth of His words to them. The practical purpose was by repeating the ordinances of God, the Lord was beginning to build a familiarity with His Law in the minds of His people. We will find throughout His Word, that the Lord will often repeat Himself when the subject requires special emphasis to make sure the people know it and remember it.

Then, the other half of the blood Moses sprinkled on the people. The significance of this simple act should not be overlooked. I'm not sure how the actions of Moses here would go over in a church setting today. Can you imagine the leader of a church taking a large basin filled with blood and going through the congregation and systematically sprinkling everyone with the fresh warm blood of animals that had just been sacrificed? I could see people hurry to exit before he hit them with a sprinkle of blood. It was an act that is so culturally distant from us that most people would recoil at the mere thought, let alone that actual experience of having their nice clothing permanently stained with the blood of a lamb. Keep in mind that there were no "miracle" spot removers in those days. In fact, this blood was not to be washed away or removed even if they could. This was the "blood of the covenant". The covenant was in one sense new and another old. It was old in that it was a continuation of the covenant God formed with Abraham. This covenant did not invalidate the covenant with Abraham. It was also new, because God had now, in the Law, added new substance to the covenant relationship with His people. This covenant modifies the original covenant with Abraham and gives it a new definition. In the same way, the New Covenant in Christ does not invalidate either the covenant with Abraham or the covenant with Moses, but adds new substance that redefines from that point forward the way God will relate to His people.

The reason Moses did this at this point was to display a vivid symbol of the people's true relationship with God and His Law. God required the people to obey all of His laws with perfect obedience. However, not one of them would obey as they should. Every single one of them would break the Law by disobeying God. The blood of the covenant was God's demonstration that only by the blood of the sacrifice, and the gracious mercy the sacrifice represented, could Israel maintain its relationship with God. Apart from the blood, Israel would have to bear the full judgment that their disobedience to the Law deserved. This is now the second great object lesson, along with the Passover in Egypt, that the Lord has given Israel to drive home the centrality of the blood. The blood points forward to the cross of Christ, and we understand that our own relationship to God depends entirely on the cross.

24:9-11 - "Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank."

Once the covenant with Israel through Moses is ratified by the sprinkling of blood, the leaders of Israel travel up the mountain of God with Moses and Aaron to meet with Him. Nadab and Abihu are the two eldest sons of Aaron, and will soon occupy special roles as priests in God's tabernacle. The leadership group travels up the mountain and when they do they encounter a special revelation of God Himself. They "see the God of Israel". We are not meant by this description to understand that they saw the full revelation of God. In other passages we discover that no human is able to see God in an unshielded revelation of His full glorious presence and survive the experience. Instead, what God showed them here was a form that could be identified as similar to a human body. The human form was recognizable because of the references to His feet and His hand. I believe that this appearance of God in a human similarity is another of what we have identified as a preincarnate appearance of Christ (Christophany).

When they saw him their attention was drawn to His feet. He was standing on what appeared to be like a pavement of sapphire, which was as clear as the sky. Pavement is probably not the best translation of the Hebrew word. It was something like tiles of sapphire. The sapphire meant that it seemed to be made of precious gem stone which was blue in shade, but clear enough to see through. There is a significance that we should catch of this surface that God was standing upon. Clearly, this was not a natural formation that was part of Mount Sinai. This was how God chose to reveal Himself to the leaders of Israel. The key to understand what it means is found in a passage from the book of Revelation. "and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal;" (Revelation 4:6). When John the apostle was caught up in his vision into heaven, he was allowed to see the throne of God, and God seated upon His throne. Just like the leaders of Israel, John's attention was drawn to the surface upon which

God's throne was established. Around the throne was something like a sea of glass which was clear like crystal. This is a similar description to what the leaders of Israel saw beneath the feet of the Lord on Sinai. In other passages also, where God appears in glory, we see this crystalline surface beneath Him. It is compared purposefully to the sky in our passage. It represents what is called in Genesis 1:8 the "expanse". "God called the expanse heaven..." It represents the sky as that which shows that God is above and we are below. It is a reminder that the natural heaven that is above us is below His feet. When the leaders saw God standing on "heaven" it was also a revelation that heaven has come down to earth in this covenant meeting.

Earlier, when the Lord first spoke to Israel from the mountain in fire and storm, He had warned them to not approach Him or they would surely die. Now, these leaders who represent the entire nation have approached very near to God, "Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel..." To stretch out the hand means to strike with judgment. They approached God, but He did not strike them in judgment even though He is awesomely holy. The only reason that He did not stretch out His hand against them was the testimony of the blood that had been sprinkled upon them. Then an amazing thing unfolded as they were in the presence of God. All of the leaders of Israel shared a meal together in the presence of the Lord. This followed a common practice whenever a covenant bond was formed between two parties. Both would sit down to share a celebratory meal together that symbolized their new fellowship. We still follow this covenant pattern in our culture today in one special venue. When a marriage takes place we hold a reception immediately following. The reception meal was originally an expression of this covenant confirmation of fellowship. In a church context the pattern continues in the New Covenant form of the Lord's Supper. When the church eats communion together it is a symbolic meal that signifies our confidence that we now have fellowship with God because of the sacrifice of His Son, the Lamb of God.

24:15-18 - "Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights."

Following the covenant meal, the leaders return down to the camp at the foot of the mountain. Moses and Joshua continue up the mountain together. Joshua will remain upon the mountain while Moses continues further to the summit where God has called Moses to meet Him. When Moses arrives on the summit of Sinai a cloud covers the mountain. This is not a meteorological weather report we are given here. This is not natural cloud such as often form around mountain tops. This is the same cloud that has so far led them through the Red Sea and through

the wilderness. It is the pillar of cloud during the daylight and the pillar of fire at night. In earlier descriptions we saw that the Angel of the Lord (Christophany) was in the pillar of cloud leading Israel throughout their journey in the wilderness. Now the Lord causes this same cloud to settle on and cover Sinai's summit. When the cloud covered the mountain, the glory of the Lord was visible through the cloud. In other words it was a bright or shining cloud. Moses is now in the near presence of the Lord on the mountain, but the Lord is inside the cloud and Moses is outside the cloud. For six days Moses waits there near the cloud, not daring to step into the cloud unless directed to do so by the Lord. The patience of Moses is evident in this six day wait. The Lord had told him to come up, but since he has arrived the Lord has said nothing further. Moses handles this well and simply waits on God, content to be quiet until the Lord shows him the next step.

Then on the seventh day the Lord spoke to Moses and called to him. The Lord called for Moses to come meet with Him inside of the cloud. We should recognize the intentional pattern of the six day wait and the seventh day call from God. This is the pattern as old as the original week of creation. The week before Moses entered the cloud was to signify that what was going to happen in the cloud was like a new creation in its implications for Israel and the world. What will unfold in the remaining chapters of Exodus is all that God showed and spoke to Moses. The main focus will be the plans and construction of the tabernacle of God. This new structure which will become, from that point forward, the center of Israel's relationship with God symbolizes a new creation that God will one day bring into existence through Christ.

Exodus 25

25:1-8 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them."

Moses has now entered the cloud covering the Lord's glory on the summit of Sinai. There is one subject on God's mind which He will communicate to Moses in great detail for the next seven chapters of Exodus. The subject is the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent structure that the Lord instructed Moses to have constructed by Israel. It was to be designed in such a way that it could be taken down and moved with them in all their travels. It will become, once it is finished, the center of Israel's culture and remain with them for the following 40 years in the wilderness, the conquest of the Promised Land, and until the Lord

instructs kings David and Solomon to replace it with a more permanent stone temple many generations from now. The Lord names it here a "sanctuary". The word means a place consecrated for a holy purpose. That holy purpose is also identified in this passage. The sanctuary is "for Me, that I may dwell among them." The tabernacle is for the Lord and will provide for the first time a way that He may dwell among His people Israel. The concepts emphasized in this short phrase are huge in their spiritual implications and identify for us key themes that continue to shape our own relationship with the Lord today, and will on into eternity.

The first detail in this phrase is that the tabernacle / sanctuary is for the Lord. The tabernacle is a symbolic structure. It was an actual physical structure in history, but it is symbolic in that the Lord was speaking through its construction as a whole and in its details to the generations to follow about His purpose in history. It is a multi-layered symbol representing in certain aspects Christ, heaven, and the church. The connection to the church as a symbol is established by the New Testament teaching that the church is called by God, His temple (Ephesians 2:20-22). The implications of this simple two word phrase from this passage, "for Me", are huge when we keep in mind that this is the Lord speaking, not just about His relationship to the physical tabernacle in the wilderness, but about His relationship with the church. The church is being built through New Covenant history for the Lord. In our present generation and culture in particular, the common perspective regarding the church is that the church is for us, not for the Lord. There may not be many that are bold enough to admit that they see the church as existing for them, but it is a shared perspective that shapes the decisions of many regarding church. The meaning is this; if I see the church as existing for me, then I will choose to attend a particular church as long as it meets my own perceived needs and desires for church. If it has the things I like in a church then I go there. If not, then I'll leave and shop for another one that better suits my tastes. Many churches have learned that this is how all too many see church, and have adjusted their way of doing church accordingly. Many churches now are geared to be the most attractive to the church shopper; from the content of the "worship", to the length of the service, to the substance of the message, to the programs aimed at perceived needs, to the decor chosen. The one core principle that is missed in all these decisions is that the tabernacle / temple / church is not for us, but for the Lord. Everything should be geared toward pleasing Him, not ourselves. If we do so, we will discover that our deepest real needs are fulfilled by Him.

The second detail in our key phrase identifies the overall purpose of the sanctuary. It was to be constructed so that Yahweh would be able to dwell among His people. Ever since the first day of the exodus from Egypt the Lord had been with them in an amazing display of His presence. The pillar of cloud and fire that led them through the wilderness and was now settled upon the mountain was the visible testimony of His presence with them. Yet, at the same time, the pillar of cloud and fire was also the testimony of the separation between the Lord

and His people. He was always with them, but at a distance. The pillar was not in the midst of the camp but always just ahead of them. Since arriving at Sinai, the cloud was now on the mountain summit, but the camp of Israel was below, and the people dared not approach Yahweh in the cloud as Moses had done. The reason for the separation was simple, but critical. Yahweh was holy and the people were defiled by sin. Yahweh could come relatively close, but would not come into the midst of the camp of His people. If He were to do so, the entire nation would die in the presence of His awesome holiness. But, it was God's purpose to be united with His people in a fellowship relationship of intimacy. The tabernacle sanctuary would provide for a way that God's holy presence could dwell in the middle of the camp. Once the tabernacle was constructed and consecrated as God instructed, then Yahweh would come to dwell there. The word dwell indicates a more lasting circumstance than visit. Yahweh would not visit His people in the tabernacle. He would dwell there. This is the beginning of a theme that will be developed further later in Scripture in which the tabernacle will be identified as the house of God.

The Lord instructs Moses regarding the materials to be used for this construction project. Moses was to raise a contribution for the Lord. This is what we would call today, taking an offering. The Lord specified what things He wanted the people to contribute to this offering for the sanctuary. They were to give gold and silver, not as cash, but as materials to be used for certain parts of the construction. There were a number of other materials from select metals, gems, wood, fabrics, skins, oil, incense, etc, that they were to gather. Most of these materials were the things that they had plundered from the Egyptians when they left Egypt. The way they were to raise the contribution includes a significant detail for them and for us, especially in light of the offering practices of so many churches today. The contribution was based upon "from every man whose heart moves him". The Lord did not set the amount each was to give. There was no manipulation by Moses to stir the emotions of the people to give. He was simply to announce what the Lord had told him to pass on to them regarding the plan for the sanctuary and the materials that were needed. The contribution would 100% depend on the hearts of the people being moved to give. The value the people placed upon the Lord and His desire to dwell among them would determine the amount of their offering.

25:16-22 - "You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you. You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. The cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."

Once the Lord describes the overall plan for a sanctuary to Moses, the next thing is to begin to describe it in detail, one part at a time. Each part will receive its own focus over the next seven chapters. What we should notice is where the Lord chooses to begin in addressing the details. We might have expected Him to begin with the outer structure, and then work His way into the details inside, much like we plan houses today. The Lord had the entire plan; both the exterior and interior in His mind as He is speaking with Moses, but there is spiritual significance in the order of what the Lord describes first to Moses for the construction. The Lord starts with the interior furnishings of the sanctuary, and with one piece of furniture in particular. Why does the Lord start with the inside rather than the outside of the sanctuary? It is because it is for Him, and everything is being built from His perspective and to foreshadow His future plans. God's construction always flows from heaven (interior) to earth (exterior). The tabernacle represents the church which is built from the inside out. The church is built in the New Covenant by the Lord as people with transformed hearts are added to His temple.

The first piece of furniture that God describes is the one that will occupy the innermost space in His house. The tabernacle will be divided into two interior rooms, the holy Place and the innermost Holy of Holies. This furnishing will be the only furniture allowed in the innermost room. In our houses, the furniture in the innermost room is a bed, where we sleep to rest. There will be no bed in God's room because He never slumbers or sleeps. Instead, the Lord has a special seat constructed for his inner room. The seat as a whole would become known as the ark of the covenant. It consisted of a rectangular box with a special golden cover on top. The box will contain the testimony once it is finished, which is the two tablets of the Law. The golden seat which will cover and close the box is translated mercy seat, but can also be translated seat of atonement. The cover was to have two winged cherubim at either end with their faces turned toward the seat with their wings extended over the seat. We have not encountered cherubim since all the way back in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:24. "So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of

life." Later, we learn from the book of Revelation that the cherubim are special angels which continuously around the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 4:6-8). This is the key to our understanding the symbolism of the ark within the tabernacle. The ark represents the throne of God in heaven.

The Lord declares the purpose of the ark in the tabernacle. "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark..." The Lord will meet with Moses from ark. His presence will manifest above the seat and between the cherubim. The image is of Yahweh sitting on His throne in heaven. The amazing thing is that this throne will be on earth and in the midst of the camp of the covenant people. Israel was meant to understand that God's throne is in heaven, but in the tabernacle, His throne is also fully represented on earth in the midst of His holy nation.

There is also tremendous symbolical meaning in the seat covering the box of the ark. Inside the box are the tablets of the Law. That Law holds the people of God strictly accountable to walk in perfect obedience before the Lord. Any violations of that Law are to be met with the judgment that God's justice requires. If this box containing the Law were to remain open to the people, it would symbolize the full judgment of God that their sin deserved. God had the seat of atonement placed over the box effectively closing it completely. Then, on the Day of Atonement, which we will read about in Leviticus, the blood of a lamb was to be sprinkled directly upon this seat. That blood was never to be wiped off. The blood forever stained the golden seat representing God's throne. When the blood was sprinkled on the seat it was transformed from a seat of judgment to a seat of mercy and atonement. The New Testament uses the identical word for this seat, translated propitiation, and Paul identifies it with Christ (Romans 3:25). Propitiation refers to a payment which satisfies judgment. Christ is the propitiation, now at the throne of God for us, Who by His blood, has transformed the throne of God into a mercy seat for us who believe.

25:23-30 - "You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a gold border around it. You shall make for it a rim of a handbreadth around it; and you shall make a gold border for the rim around it. You shall make four gold rings for it and put rings on the four corners which are on its four feet. The rings shall be close to the rim as holders for the poles to carry the table. You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, so that with them the table may be carried. You shall make its dishes and its pans and its jars and its bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times."

The second furnishing the God directs Moses to have made is a table for bread. The table will define a portion of God's house as a dining area. The food to be prepared and served on His table is bread. We will find in Leviticus the details of

the bread in which the Levitical priests will bake twelve loaves of bread once a week to arrange on the table. The bread is not for God to eat however in contrast to the pagan temples dedicated to false gods throughout the world. In those temples bread and other foods and drinks were offered as food offerings for the god who was hungry. God does not eat and has no need of food or anyone to serve it to Him. Instead, this table is the table of the Lord which holds bread which He serves to His people. Each week the priest were to eat the bread as guests in God's house. The bread is called in this passage "the bread of the Presence". The word presence translates a Hebrew word which literally means face. The table was set with the bread of face, which symbolized His presence as the One Who feeds and satisfies His people.

This bread has a very direct New Testament connection. Jesus declared about Himself, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger..." (John 6:35). It is in Christ that God has made His presence known to His people. He is the One Who satisfies our every need. He is the One Who feeds and sustains us. When we eat at God's table, He only ever serves one meal, the bread of life! God provides the answer to our need to be restored to table fellowship with Him in the provision of His Son.

25:9, 40 - "According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it. ... See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain."

As the Lord gave these instructions to Moses for the construction of His house, He gave a special instruction at the beginning and then repeated it at the end of this chapter. What I am calling a special instruction, the writer of Hebrews in the New Testament calls a warning. "just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN." (Hebrews 8:5). A warning notifies of great importance and alerts the hearer to the danger of consequences if the warning is ignored. The warning in this case was the insistence of the Lord that the tabernacle would be constructed in every detail following a certain pattern. The pattern was revealed by the Lord to Moses on the mountain. When any complex structure is constructed blueprints are necessary to insure that the building is finished as it was planned. The Lord showed Moses exactly what the tabernacle and all its furnishings were to look like once finished. The Lord gave him a visual blueprint. It was the responsibility of Moses to oversee the construction and make sure the pattern the Lord had shown him was followed exactly. The consequence of failing to follow the pattern is not given here, but we will see at the end of the book of Exodus that Moses was faithful to follow the pattern and when the tabernacle was finished there was a great blessing as God approved of his work.

In this interaction between the Lord and Moses, and his role as overseer we see two New Covenant roles modeled for us. The Lord Jesus has determined to build His church (Matthew 16:18) in the New Covenant and has commissioned His people to follow the patterns He has shown us in His Word. The Lord also appointed in the New Covenant a special overseer in Paul the apostle to see the details of God's church and to pass them on in writing to all future generations of the church. "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 3:9-11). The application point for us who are part of the church now in the 21st century is that we dare not veer or deviate from the heavenly blueprints God has laid out for the construction of His church. The plans are found in His Word. It is our responsibility to study them and follow them in every detail.

Exodus 26

26:30 - "Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan which you have been shown in the mountain."

This is now the third time that the Lord has spoken to Moses regarding the absolute necessity of building the tabernacle according to "its plan". Twice in chapter 25, in verse nine and verse 40, the Lord emphasized that the construction must follow a specific pattern. That pattern was not just spoken to Moses by the Lord, it was also shown to him. The Lord showed the entire structure to Moses as it should look before it was even built to ensure that Moses would be equipped as it was built to duplicate exactly what the Lord showed him. Now, in this passage the Lord changes the key word that He used before. In chapter 25 the key word was pattern. Here a different Hebrew word is used which is better translated plan. The idea is that the Lord showed him the pattern of what the tabernacle must look like, and now that pattern has become a clear and firm plan to be followed. There is a progression in the slight changes in the three times the Lord addresses Moses regarding the construction plans. The first time the Lord exhorts Moses that he is to build it according to the pattern he will be shown. The second time the Lord warns him to build it according to the pattern and not to deviate from that pattern. This third time is neither an exhortation nor a warning, but a strong command by the Lord. Having been so clear and specific about how He wants His tabernacle built, in this verse the Lord simply commands Moses to build it exactly as the Lord has instructed. "Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan..." This phrase could also be translated, "Then you must..."

The emphasis of the Lord is an imperative for Moses. There is one right way to build the tabernacle and many wrong ways. The right way is to build it exactly according to the pattern and plan of the Lord. The wrong way is to build it any other way. There was no room allowed for Moses or any of the craftsmen that would do the actual construction work to add their own personal touch or flourishes to the design. There was no room for changing any of the plan in any of the materials, dimensions, or designs. In this project, the Lord was like the ultimate custom home builder that intended His plans to be followed in exhausting detail.

One of the most important principles we can learn from the tabernacle and apply to the experience of the New Covenant church is established in this verse. Remember, that the tabernacle, in one of its symbolic purposes points forward to the church. The historic progression is tabernacle - temple - church. The issue is this; the Lord had a very very specific plan for the tabernacle. The tabernacle symbolizes the church, but spiritually the church is greater in significance than the tabernacle in that the church fulfills what the tabernacle could only symbolize. So, if the Lord was so careful to have the tabernacle built according to exact plan, does He have a similar, if not greater concern for the building of the church? The answer is yes! The church has suffered for two thousand years of church history from good intentions which took the church further away from God's pattern for it, rather than closer. The Lord has given us a clear pattern for the church in the New Testament writings. Yet, so many, ignore the Scriptures in building the church and substitute their own ideas, preferences and opinions. Why is it that there are so many different kinds of churches which all follow such different patterns in their organization and structure when we are all supposedly reading from the same book? Allowing for some differences due to variations in interpretation will account for some distinctions among churches, but many of our differences can be attributed to ignoring the pattern for church established in the Bible.

As just one example, take differences in church government among different churches. The Bible is very clear in the book of Acts as well as the letters of I Timothy and Titus that the pattern for church government established by the apostles in all the churches of that time was a group of spiritually qualified elders. It is a sad comment that many churches today do not even have elders as part of their church government pattern let alone give them the prominent position of leadership they held in the early churches. How can this be explained other than the tragic substitution of human "wisdom" for the patterns God intended His church to always follow. Moses was truly wise to not ignore the pattern that the Lord showed him in building the Lord's tabernacle. We would be truly wise to start our own church building where Moses did; by recognizing that the Lord has His own way of wanting the church built and by studying the patterns He has preserved for us in the Scriptures, while crying out to Him for understanding of how we are meant to implement those same New Testament patterns today.

26:31-34 - "You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also being of gold, on four sockets of silver. You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies. You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies."

This veil was the partition separating the Holy Place outer room, from the innermost Holy of Holies. There is an interesting detail that is established by not being mentioned in any of the descriptions of this veil. The veil had no opening in it. There was no part in the middle as most curtains would have that are used to separate two rooms. Usually, such a curtain has a division in the middle so that it can be parted and allow a person to pass through. This veil was one solid weaving of linen without such an opening in the middle. The reason there was no opening was that the Holy of Holies was not a public room, or even a room the priests ever entered. Only the high priest, and only one day a year would enter past this veil into that innermost room of the tabernacle. On that one day a year he would have to enter along the sides the veil support was loosened to allow the entrance of the high priest. The veil without an opening was a constant reminder for Israel that there was no way any of them could enter into the direct presence of God in the holiest place.

The book of Hebrews refers to this and tells us that it signified that throughout the Old Testament there was no way yet revealed into where the ark of the covenant rested. "but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing," (Hebrews 9:7-8). The symbolism was showing that the way into heaven was not yet open. The ark represents the throne of God in heaven. This veil without a doorway through it symbolically barred the way to God's throne in heaven from all but the high priest. The high priest pointed to Christ and the great work He had to accomplish in His sacrifice on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross an amazing thing happened to the veil in the temple in Jerusalem which was separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split." (Matthew 27:51). When Jesus actually died on the cross, the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The result was that the way into the Holy of Holies was now open. The spiritual symbolism is that Christ's death on the cross opened the doorway for us into heaven.

There is one additional important detail in the pattern for the veil. It was to be woven with a representation of cherubim on it. The cherubim were also represented in golden statues shaped into the mercy seat that covered the ark of

the covenant. They are the special category of angels that are closest to God's throne in heaven and proclaim His glory in worship continuously. As we saw in an earlier study, the cherubim make their first appearance in the Bible, not in heaven, but in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). There, they were stationed as guardians at the entrance into the Garden of Eden to bar Adam and Eve from coming back into the garden and gaining access to the tree of life. Here, the cherubim are depicted on the veil which has no opening. The symbolism is that they are standing guard over the way into the Holy of Holies and the ark of God's presence just like they were at the entrance into the Garden of Eden. The point is that the access Adam lost by his sin in the garden can only be restored by God's chosen High Priest and the blood of the lamb.

26:35-37 - "You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand opposite the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side. You shall make a screen for the doorway of the tent of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver. You shall make five pillars of acacia for the screen and overlay them with gold, their hooks also being of gold; and you shall cast five sockets of bronze for them."

The tabernacle as a whole structure was built as a rectangle. The two long sides faced north and south and the two short sides faced east and west. The front entrance into the tabernacle faced to the east. As the priests entered into the tabernacle they traveled west. The entire structure was divided into three sections. The outermost section was an external courtyard around the tent. The courtyard was divided from the world around it by a curtain which functioned as a fence to preserve the integrity of the courtyard. Within the outdoors courtyard were found the altar for sacrifice which is described in the next chapter, and the laver for washing which is described in chapter 30. The tabernacle proper was a large rectangular tent. The tent was divided into two sections called the Holy Place, which was the outer of the two rooms, and the Holy of Holies, which was the inner of the two rooms. In the outer room were three furnishings; the lampstand, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense which is described later. Inside the innermost room the only furnishing was the ark of the covenant. In the Holy Place the furniture was arranged in a specific pattern. The lampstand was placed along the south long wall. The table of bread was placed along the north long wall. The altar of incense was at the western end of the room just in front of the veil separating the Holy of Holies. Outside, in the courtyard the two items of furniture were placed so that the altar for sacrifice was in the eastern most side just inside the entrance to the courtyard. Then the laver was to the west of the altar as the priest traveled toward the entrance to the tabernacle.

The individual furnishings would then be encountered by the priests in a specific order each day as they entered the tabernacle. They visited first the altar, then the laver, then went inside the tabernacle and encountered first the lampstand, then the table, and finally the altar of incense. The final item of furniture, the ark

of the covenant was only ever seen by the high priest, and that was only once a year on the Day of Atonement after the pure lamb was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat covering the ark. All of the details we have encountered so far, and more in the chapters to come can be overwhelming to believers today unfamiliar with the subject, let alone the symbolic purpose of every part of this structure. Keep in mind as we continue through our tabernacle study that there is a big picture to keep in mind as we consider every part. The big picture is that the whole structure points to God's purpose in His Son, and His work of salvation and new creation.

The tabernacle effectively pictures all of this by pointing backwards and forwards in time simultaneously. The tabernacle points backwards in time by intentionally hinting at the following themes; original creation, the Garden of Eden, and the ark of Noah. It points forward in the progressive purpose of God in history and eternity by hinting at Solomon's temple to come, the New Covenant temple of the church, and the temple in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. Just taking one of these themes that has intentional connections to the tabernacle as an example, the ark of Noah bears interesting similarities to the tabernacle.

The ark that God instructed Noah to build was built according to a "blueprint" that was given to him directly from the Lord. The ark was built in a rectangular shape that was much larger than the tabernacle, but the dimensions of the ark correspond to the dimensions of the tabernacle on a larger scale. The ark was built in three sections as was the tabernacle. There was only one door built in the ark, just as there was only one door built in the tabernacle. That single door in both structures spiritually represents to all generations that there is only one entry point chosen by God to enter into His presence. Both structures provided the only way of salvation available to humanity. Each one of the themes mentioned above from both the past and future connections to the tabernacle teach us that the tabernacle was the centerpiece of God's revelation to humanity of Himself and His purpose.

Questions from Exodus 25:

Question: 25:33 - what is the significance of the almond blossoms, bulb and flower?

Answer: I plan on addressing the lampstand and its symbolic significance in detail when we reach chapter 37. To answer your specific question without spoiling the chapter 37 commentary too much, the primary intention was to show through the symbol of the lampstand that it represented a tree. Almonds, bulbs and flowers were all indicating a living fruit bearing tree was being portrayed in the image of the lampstand. I'll address why the Lord chose the almond out of all the varieties of trees in the study for chapter 37.

Exodus 27

27:1-2 - "And you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze."

The altar is the first furnishing of the house of the Lord. It was to be situated inside of the curtain separating the courtyard of the Lord from the world outside. That altar was portable with rings and poles for carrying as the Lord moved the camp of His people throughout their journeys. Even though it was movable, it was not small to accommodate the many sacrifices needed for all of the people of God. Its dimensions of five cubits long by five cubits wide provided a total surface area of approximately 56 square feet of cooking area. The altar was the end point for the sacrificial animals that God ordained for worship. The appropriate animals were brought by the people to the priests at the entrance into the courtyard. The priests then led the goat or lamb to the altar. There, the throat of the sacrifice was cut and the blood drained out into basins for that purpose. The sacrifice was then placed upon the altar which was a large bronze cooking surface with a fire built underneath it. Today, many believers struggle with the vivid imagery of the daily scene at the altar. It was not intended by the Lord to be scene of beauty. It was intended to have an unsettling impact on the heart as one began to approach the house of the Lord. It was a scene of bloodshed and death. Since there was no other way to reach the house of the Lord, the clear message was that no one could enter his house without first encountering blood and death. This is the necessary foundation in history for the fullness of the gospel to come.

All of the tabernacle and all of its furnishings speak in symbol about Christ, His work and His purpose. The altar is the first furnishing of the house of the Lord because it occupies a key role as a type or symbol of the work of Christ. The altar is the place where the sacrifices God ordained were offered. The sacrifices required the blood of the sacrifice to be shed and the death of the sacrifice. It was that sacrifice that opened the door to the rest of God's house. Without the sacrifice, no one could approach any closer to God, but with the sacrifice, the right relationship with God was established.

The entire life of Christ was aimed at one great purpose; His sacrifice of Himself on the cross. He was born for this one great reason. He lived a perfect life without sin in order to qualify to offer this great sacrifice. The altar is the single image in all of the symbolism of the tabernacle that points directly at Christ's death on the cross. The core message of the gospel of our salvation is that Christ died on the cross for our sins. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," (1 Corinthians 15:3). None of us are good enough or holy enough to be able to approach the perfectly holy God without a sacrifice first cleansing our sins. Don't

be put off by the uncomfortable reality of the blood and death at the altar of the tabernacle. It was all to show the depth and extent had to go in order to bring us to God. This is why Christians have always sung songs of worship praising Christ for the cross and His blood and death. We do not have a morbid fascination with blood and death, we have a spiritually realistic fixation on His blood and death. When a person has their perspective enlightened to realize the absolutely essential nature of the cross, it becomes, not an object of horror, but an object of wonder and praise to them.

27:9 - "You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side there shall be hangings for the court of fine twisted linen one hundred cubits long for one side;"

The court of the tabernacle was an outdoor area immediately surrounding the tabernacle on all sides that was established by hanging linen curtains all the way around the perimeter. Like the tabernacle itself, the curtains for the courtyard had only one entrance and exit on the east. This space held both the altar for sacrifice and the laver for washing. In order to enter the tabernacle, it was necessary to first enter and pass through the courtyard. This space around God's house was considered holy ground. Outside of the courtyard, everything was the normal space of the surrounding world, but inside the courtyard curtains the space was spiritually distinct. The concept of holy ground is not introduced here for the first time in the Bible, but it is repeated and re-emphasized. The first holy ground space in the Bible was the Garden of Eden. All of the space within the hedged in garden was holy, and all the space outside of the hedge of the garden was the normal space of the world. The ark of Noah was the next great representation of holy ground. Everything within the ark was on holy ground, while everything outside the ark was tainted by a fallen world and subject to the judgment of God in the Flood.

When the Lord appeared to Jacob at Bethel, it was a revelation of the holy ground principle. "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel," (Genesis 28:16-19). The Lord showed Jacob that wherever He causes His presence to be made known in this special way, it redefines normal space and causes that space to be set apart as holy ground. Even without the symbolic structure of the tabernacle, Jacob came to identify the location where Yahweh had revealed Himself as the house of God and the gate of heaven. The name he gave it, Bethel, literally means the house of God.

Then, when the Lord first appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He commanded Moses to recognize the place of His presence as holy ground (Exodus 3:5). We saw in our study of that passage that there was nothing

particularly special about the ground in that location or the bush in which the Lord revealed Himself. The only special factor was the presence of the Lord. This aspect of the design of the tabernacle now continues this theme which began in the Garden of Eden. It is one of the main themes of the entire Bible. We properly identify theologically that in one sense God is everywhere present at all times. The theological term is that He is omnipresent. However, in another sense, the Lord chooses to manifest His greater presence only in certain places at certain times. In that second sense we can properly identify the Lord as being there but not elsewhere. The Lord was present on Sinai in the 40 days with Moses in a greater way than anywhere else on earth. This principle of the special presence of the Lord continues throughout the Old Testament and is leading up to one great culmination point in history. That culmination point is Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15, Colossians 2:9). When Christ was born, the manifest presence of God was revealed in Jesus, and remains in Him from that point forward even to today. God no longer reveals His manifest presence in this world or history outside of Christ.

27:20-21 - "You shall charge the sons of Israel, that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel."

In this passage the Lord repeats His earlier instruction to Moses to raise a contribution from the people (25:2-6). This instruction is only concerned with the oil that is to be contributed by the people. It is not limited to a single offering, but is to be a "perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel." They were to supply this oil on an ongoing basis from this point forward throughout their history. The oil the Lord specified was "clear oil of beaten olives." Our modern equivalent is what we would call virgin olive oil. It was in that day the best quality oil available. It was appropriate for the Lord to instruct them to bring the best quality oil to His house because all that they offered to the Lord was to symbolize His value to them.

The oil was the exclusive fuel used to light the tabernacle. There was only one light source in the tabernacle, the lampstand. This corresponds to the New Testament revelation by Jesus. "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." (John 8:12). There are not two, three, fifty, or millions of true spiritual lights of the world. There is One and one only. The oil is the source of the light when it is burned. The seven lamps on the one lampstand were to be refilled daily by the high priest Aaron, assisted by his sons. The light of the lampstand was never to go out in the house of God. This is a symbol of the perpetual testimony of the Lord throughout the generations. The world around God's house is dark, but the light in His house is continually burning bright. This image was in contrast to the normal cultural practice. Each family would live in their own tent, or house. At night, once the sun

went down, lamps would be lit to fill the house with light. As the people of the house went to sleep each lamp would be extinguished for the night, with the lamp of the head of the household typically the last lamp to be extinguished. By contrast, the lamp in the Lord's house was never extinguished. The Lord as the head of His household never sleeps.