

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 303

Exodus 26-27, Part 1

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Episode Summary

Exodus 26-27 make for unexciting reading. Who really wants to read the blueprints for the Tabernacle? But we shouldn't assume that these chapters are uninteresting or devoid of theological messaging. Quite the contrary. There's a lot in these chapters that's easy to miss. This episode of the podcast continues our discussion of the Israelite Tabernacle, this time with an eye toward the theology embedded in its description found in these two chapters.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 303: Exodus 26 and 27, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What's going on?

MH: Hey, Merry Christmas, Trey. Coming up, real close. No "Happy Holidays" here. It's "Merry Christmas." [laughs]

TS: That's right. We're not ashamed. We're not...

MH: That's right. We'll use all the cliché's. "Jesus is the reason for the season." Can you think of any more? [laughs] I mean, I actually like them.

TS: Yeah, that is a good one. Hopefully people will listen to this episode and then go back and listen to the podcast we did about Jesus' birthday.

MH: Yeah, there you go. There you go. Google that.

TS: Yeah, google that one. "When was Jesus born?" That was the title of it, right? Do you know what episode number that was?

MH: Off the top of my head, I don't know what number it is. But something like, "When was Jesus born?" Or "Jesus' real birthday," or something like that.

TS: Yeah, that has to be a tradition, right? Every year, you listen to that show?

MH: Yeah, I get emails. I get little messages, when it turns to September (there's a clue) about that episode. Or "Happy Birthday to Jesus" or something like that. Yeah. We're looking forward... I always look forward to Christmas, too, because... Our kids are older, so they kind of know what they're getting, which takes the fun out of it. But I always get them something that they don't know what they're getting, and then I'll typically get them a gag gift. So this year is no exception. I have some... It's hard to outdo myself every year. But I get them something really epic that I know that they're just going to really be into, but that we don't talk about any other time during the year.

TS: I'm sure it's safe. They probably won't listen to this show. Just between me and you...

MH: No, no, no. I'll tell you after the fact. I *will* tell you what I got my... I'll just give you examples from previous years. So Calvin really likes Guardians of the Galaxy. So I got him an autographed Chris Pratt picture. And Simi was into Sherlock when it was actually running, several years ago. So I got her one of those big, life-sized, cardboard cut-outs of Benedict Cumberbatch as Sherlock for her room. [laughs] Which she did put in her room. But autographed stuff, memorabilia... I love getting stuff like that.

TS: Yeah, that's awesome. That's a good one. I like all those shows. Yeah. That's awesome. And that episode, Mike, was Episode 138: What Day Was Jesus Born? There you go. Hopefully that'll be a regular Christmas podcast rotation for our listeners.

MH: They'll snuggle around the radio [laughs] (or the iPhone)... [laughs]

TS: Light a fire, crack open the *Unseen Realm*, [MH laughs] play 138, and...

MH: Yep. No coffee. You have to drink tea. Okay? And of course, if you can rustle in a pug there, there you go. It's perfect.

TS: Even better. Alright, Mike, we're getting back into Exodus, after a brief break.

MH: Yep, brief hiatus. So Exodus 26 and 27. This is Part 1. We're going to split this up into two because I want to look at it in different ways (both of these chapters). So today, we're... It's more about the theological messaging of the instructions for the Tabernacle. You say, "What in the world? Where's the theology in that?" Well, that's the whole purpose of the episode. And then next time, Part 2, I want to devote an episode to the (I guess I could call it a controversy) disagreement, something I actually raised in *Unseen Realm*—the notion of what happened to the Tabernacle. If you recall, those of you who have read *Unseen Realm*... And if you haven't, shame on you. Get the book for

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Christmas. But there's a little bit in the book about how a scholar named Richard Elliot Freedman had hypothesized that the tabernacle/tent structure itself was actually moved inside the Temple complex. And actually, he based that on a few different verses and his understanding of how the Tabernacle was constructed—the dimensions. And there are other scholars (and I think it's fair to say, a majority of scholars) who either don't like that (there are just one or two who really hate Freedman's idea) and then there are others that are like, "Well, yeah, it's kind of workable, but we're not sure how well it's defensible." So I want to devote an episode to that issue, because we're here in Exodus in Tabernacle instructions. But for today, we want to hit the theological messaging.

Now to start off here, scholars have noticed plenty of times that Exodus 25:8 (so the prior chapter) is actually a key verse that frames the Tabernacle instructions and of course its later construction, when this is all put into action. And that verse says,

Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst.

Now the verb translated "dwell" in that translation (which is ESV) is *shakan*. It's the verb equivalent of the noun *mishkan* (tabernacle). And so God wants a place to tabernacle with his people. Each Israelite had his or her own tent, and now God's going to get one. It's this idea of God's presence returning to live among his people. Again, that should sound familiar, especially if you've read *Unseen Realm* and you're used to following biblical-theological trajectories from Genesis onward. That should sound familiar. The language there and, of course, lots of other items in these chapters (Exodus 26 and 27) inform us that Eden is being kickstarted. Eden is being restored, in some senses. We're starting over with that. God is going to dwell among his people. He has redeemed the new family he created from Abraham after divorcing humanity at Babel. Of course, Abraham's lineage goes back to Adam. Heaven is returning to earth.

These are the big picture ideas that go with the Tabernacle that we're going to drill down into. It even extends to the decorations of the Tabernacle—the Cosmic Garden motifs we've already talked about to this point. The cherubim, the menorah (all this stuff) give it this Edenic flavor. God will be with his family, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests. And from them, he will proceed to propel the plan to reclaim the nations and the world as was the case with the Edenic mission. This was the whole point. As with Eden, God will occupy sacred space. That is the purpose of the Tabernacle: to mark off his space as being distinct from every other space. Normal, mundane... This is actually what the word "profane" means—ordinary space. So he's going to share that space with the priesthood. When we get into the Tabernacle chapters, he will mark off turf. There'll be gradations of holiness. There's going to be a ritual system. Go back and listen to the Leviticus series and you'll hear all about that. That's going to be installed to protect sacred space from defilement and it's going to teach certain things about

God (his otherness, his mercy, and above all, his desire to dwell among his human family).

So in this episode, we're going to try to drill down on these two chapters (the instructions) to ferret out this kind of messaging. So I'm not going to read chapters 26 and 27. You can read them on your own. It's basically just the set of instructions about "Do this. Don't do that. Here's what you use to build. Here are the dimensions." That sort of thing. So it doesn't make for great reading. "Make the loops this way. Put them on the outer edge, not the inner edge." All that sort of thing. But if you actually read through the chapters, you get references to colors. You get references to material. Of course, we dealt with the furniture for the last couple of episodes that we spent on Exodus—the Ark, the Lampstand, the Bread of the Presence. We're going to hit some other pieces of furniture in chapter 27. There's the bronze altar, the outer court, oil for the lamp. So you get some of that in these two chapters, but I'm not going to rabbit-trail on the furniture. We'll go back and pick up the altar that's mentioned here in the first few verses of chapter 27. We'll hit that when we hit chapter 30. We'll come back to that because of stuff going on in chapter 30. So for today, it's just about the instructions and the look and the composition of the Tabernacle.

10:00

So I want to break it down into a few lead points—just ways that you can look at the instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle and think about them.

1. So the first one I'm going to call "zones" of the Tabernacle. We've mentioned this before, especially in the Leviticus series. But there are zones of holiness within the Tabernacle structure. There's an outer part and you proceed inside to the Holy of Holies finally. And that's the Most Holy Place. There are these zones where sacred space is thought of a bit differently than other parts of sacred space. So for lack of a better way to describe them, I'm just going to use the word "zones"—so zones of holiness, zones within the tabernacle. Now there's an interesting article here that I'm going to put in the podcast article folder by Angel Manuel Rodriguez. It's entitled "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus." The journal is called *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. This is a Seventh Day Adventist journal. As I've commented before, the Adventist tradition pays a lot of attention to sacrificial liturgy, Tabernacle stuff. Basically, that is important for some of their theological trajectories. We're not going to defend Adventism for what it is, as far as its teachings. But just to put the flag up here, that tradition spends a lot of time on Leviticus and liturgy and ritual and stuff like that. So this is actually a good source for thinking about the Tabernacle itself. And Rodriguez has some really interesting things to say. Let me just telegraph that by reading the early part of his article. He says:

Various investigators have noticed a parallel between God's appearance on the mountain [MH: Mount Sinai] and God's manifestation in the sanctuary subsequently.

So that sentence says, “Hey, there seems to be a relationship between the way the events at or on Sinai are talked about and the Tabernacle,” which is something that would probably never occur to you to think about. But this is why I’m dipping into Rodriguez’ work.

With respect to the experience at Sinai, as soon as the people arrived there, the Lord commanded them to get ready for the meeting with him. The Israelites were to consecrate themselves and to wash their garments (Exod 19:10). On the third day Moses was to bring them out of the camp to meet God (vs. 17). The people prepared themselves for the appointment, and "on the morning of the third day" Mt. Sinai was "wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire" (vss. 16-18). Although Yahweh and his people were to meet, the people themselves actually were not to have access to the mountain: "And you shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it'" (vs. 12). Sinai became holy because of God's presence, and it was fenced in so as to avoid any violation of its sanctity by the Israelites. An altar was also built at the foot of the mountain (Exod 24:4), to which only certain young men, selected by Moses from among the people, could go to offer sacrifices (vs. 5). Access to the mountain itself was limited to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel [MH: Exodus 24] (vs. 1), who could go up a certain distance on the mountain only after the covenant had been ratified [MH: Exodus 24] (vss. 6-9). There they would worship the Lord "afar off" (vs. 1), and participate in the covenant meal. While there, they saw God (vss. 10-11)-or perhaps more particularly, the place where the Lord was standing [MH: because his feet are mentioned] (vs. 10). Moses alone could ascend all the way up the mountain, near to Yahweh (vs. 2), where the glory of Yahweh was manifested in a special way. He went up there to get the tables of stone containing God's law (vs. 12).

So you have this... You could just read through that and you can kind of see that there are gradations here. There are certain people only allowed in certain places. There are different things going on in different places in Sinai. And yeah, you can see that. That’s kind of like the Tabernacle gets zoned off as well. Rodriguez adds this note. He says:

15:00

The similarity of arrangement here with that of the subsequent tabernacle is striking... The fence around the mountain, with an altar at the foot of the mountain, would correspond to the court of the sanctuary with its altar of burnt offering [MH: it’s the outer court]; the limited group of people who could go up to a certain point on the mountain would correspond to the priests of the sanctuary, who could enter into the first apartment or "holy place"; and the fact that only Moses could go up to the very presence of Yahweh would correspond to the

activity of the high priest, who alone could enter into the presence of Yahweh in the inner apartment of the sanctuary, or "most holy place." The theological implications of these structural parallels should not be missed. First of all, as indicated above, the ancient Israelite tabernacle was to be a perpetuation of the Sinai experience.

I'm just going to stop there. I hope you get the point. If you were looking at a picture of a mountain, you could say, "At the base of the mountain, that corresponds to the outer part of the Tabernacle. Then you go halfway up the mountain, that's the inner portion—the Holy Place. Then at the top of the mountain, where Moses was allowed, that's the Holy of Holies." You get these three zones—three structural distinctions or areas—on Sinai and in the Tabernacle. And Rodriguez' point is that's not an accident. This is intentional on the part of the writer. We're supposed to think of the Tabernacle because God's going to dwell there. He's going to "move" from the mountain, and his presence is going to abide with Israel via the Tabernacle, and more specifically, the Ark and the Most Holy Place—so God's domicile (mountain), and now it's going to be this portable sanctuary. This is important. These parallels are deliberate. Because we've already talked about, when it comes to the Ark and the Lampstand and the Bread of the Presence, how this is Cosmic Garden imagery. Well, it's actually also Cosmic Mountain imagery because of the way these zones parallel the experience at Sinai.

So Rodriguez' argument (and I think this has coherence to it) is that the Israelites would notice this sort of thing, at least the literate ones, at least the ones who had read this or knew about these gradations or remembered them in the early days before this was codified in Scripture. And they're going to be able to see (in transport at least) the decorative elements to the furniture inside the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies and whatnot. This is going to be garden imagery. So they're going to be thinking God's mountain when they think about the Tabernacle. And they're going to be thinking about God's garden (Eden) when they think about the Tabernacle. This is intentional, because of the whole cosmic garden/cosmic mountain thing (the motif) that begins in Eden, associated with the divine abode. This is ancient Near Eastern thinking. And if you've read *Unseen Realm*, this is all familiar to you. I'm not going to repeat *Unseen Realm* in the course of the podcast, as I've said many times. You need to go read the book to get the full impact of these things. But you can see how there's a conceptual continuity from Eden through Sinai through the Tabernacle and ultimately through the Temple. When you get to the New Testament, lo and behold there are really interesting things that happen in gardens or on mountains. And there's building imagery, especially temple imagery, that gets applied to believers who are inhabited by the glory of God, the same glory from the Old Testament and the Holy Spirit. All of these things are intentional. This is continuity of thought. And here we are in the book of Exodus with something as boring as the Tabernacle instructions and how it's constructed and how it's going to be used

and there you go. It's embedded in the layout of the thing. So it's just one thing to notice about these chapters.

2. Now number two, we can look at this a different way. There are parallels between the Tabernacle instructions and (believe it or not) Genesis 1 (really Genesis 1 and 2, to be fair here). Now this is also... I'll upload this article to the protected folder. It's Angel Manuel Rodriguez again (a different article): "Genesis 1 and the Building of the Israelite Sanctuary." This is from a book source (or I think it's a book source). *Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (in 2002). So he's a contributor to this volume. And it's about parallels between the Israelite sanctuary and Genesis 1. Again, you don't have to be an Adventist (and I'm not) to appreciate this work. It's actually very interesting. Rodriguez, in this particular essay, acknowledges that this paper is an attempt to utilize the work of other scholars who have also seen parallels between the Tabernacle and Genesis 1. So he's building on the work of others. For example, he draws attention to Frank Gorman's work, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*. This is in the series *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, volume 91, published in 1990 by Sheffield Academic Press. I have this book, so I'm going to read some excerpts from this instead of Rodriguez' article. Because Rodriguez alludes to this, but the meat of it is actually in Gorman's material. He writes this:

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In Exodus 25–31 Yahweh gives Moses instructions for constructing the tabernacle. Seven times the phrase 'and Yahweh said to Moses' occurs in these texts (Exod. 25:1; 30:11; 30:17, 22, 34; 31:1; 31:12). The recurrence of this phrase serves to emphasize the divine origin of the instructions for the tabernacle. Kearney [MH: this particular author Gorman is referring to] has argued that the seven speeches by Yahweh in Exodus 25–31 correspond to the seven speeches of creation in Gen. 1:1–2:4a, the seventh speech...

Now listen to this. This is literary analysis, comparing "Oh, we have seven speeches in Exodus 25-31, which is dealing with the Tabernacle, and lo and behold, we have seven utterances by Yahweh in Genesis 1 and 2." So this is literary comparison. So back to Gorman here. He writes, quoting Kearney:

...the seventh speech, in both cases emphasizing the holiness of the Sabbath. While not all of Kearney's arguments for correspondence are convincing, the attempt to relate cosmos and cult is important. Cosmos provides the necessary context for correct enactment of ritual; ritual only has meaning within a specific cosmos. Furthermore, these texts indicate that just as cosmos originated with Yahweh [MH: he's the Creator], so also the form of sacred space, of cult, originated with Yahweh... Again, the phrase 'and Yahweh said to Moses' plays an important structural role in these texts. Excluding the introductory statement of Lev. 1:1–2 and the concluding statement in Lev. 7:37–38, the phrase occurs seven

times in [MH: Leviticus, in the ritual text, in] these speeches (5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, 24; 7:22, 28).

About the meaning of a particular sacrifice. So the first one is introductory; the second one is summative. If you actually look about the instruction for the sacrifice, there are seven of those.

This series of seven speeches giving instructions for proper activity in sacred space parallel the seven speeches giving the instructions for constructing sacred space [MH: that's the Tabernacle], which in turn reflect the seven acts of speech in the construction of cosmos in Gen. 1:1–2:4a. That the priests understood sacrificial activity in the context of sacred space is clearly supported by the repeated emphasis that such activity is to take place 'before Yahweh' (Lev. 1:5; 3:6, 12; 4:4), at the 'door of the tent of meeting' (Lev. 1:3; 3:2; 4:4), or at the altar of the door of the tent of meeting (Lev. 1:5, 11; 4:7). Sacred activity is clearly oriented [MH: in Leviticus] by its being enacted in relation to sacred space. Thus, the tabernacle structure joins together the two ideas of Yahweh's presence in the midst of Israel and Israel's presence before Yahweh in the sacrificial cult.

Now the work of Kearney he's referencing is an article, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40". (The P is for JEDP. He's a JEDP guy.) That's in the German journal, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977). The whole idea... Let me summarize it this way. What these scholars are saying is there's a parallel (in terms of the verbal instruction) between the seven speeches in Exodus—talk about the construction of the Tabernacle—and the seven speeches of creation, and then if you go over and look at Leviticus as to how the Tabernacle being constructed here in Exodus was used and the meaning of the sacrifices... Which, if you go back to our series here on the podcast to Leviticus, the sacrifices were not about the forgiveness of moral sin. They were about the purgation (the protection) of sacred space from defilement and the curing—the wiping away—of defilement from the worshiper so that he would be fit for sacred space. It's all about sacred space. That's what the sacrificial system is about. We often misunderstand it. So he's saying that there are these sevens (seven speeches, seven sets of instructions, seven explanations for the meaning of the ritual that takes place on this sacred space). And these scholars are saying, "Look, that's not just coincidental. It's supposed to connect creation—the cosmos—with sacred space and the Tabernacle and with the rituals that happen in the Tabernacle. It connects these things."

25:00

So to summarize it more succinctly, I'm going to be selective. Because Rodriguez in his article, when he... Getting away from Gorman now, which is one of Rodriguez' sources, he actually has a listing of these things. And I'm going to be selective here. I'm not going to go through all of them for the episode here, to save a little time. But being selective, here are some examples that he notices. He says that you'll notice if you look at these parallel sevens (just the passages

themselves), you'll notice another pattern. There are six days plus a seventh day. So he writes:

Six days plus a seventh day. According to Exodus 24:15-17, Moses climbed Mount Sinai to receive instruction for the building of the sanctuary, waited for six days and on the seventh day the Lord spoke to him from the theophanic cloud. The sequence of six days and a seventh day is the same we find in Genesis. It is uncertain whether the seventh day in this case was a Sabbath, but the reference to six and seven days suggests a connection between the two narratives. In both cases the seventh day provided the time during which there is a special meeting between God and humans.

Another example...

Seven divine speeches. [MH: Which we've commented on before, just generally.] God gave Moses instructions concerning the building of the sanctuary through seven speeches introduced by the phrase "The Lord said to Moses" (25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12). The seventh speech brings the instructions for the building of the sanctuary to a close with a call to keep the Sabbath (31:13, 17)... In the Creation narrative in Genesis, God spoke during seven days and rested on the seventh day. It seems that it is that pattern that is being followed in the building of the Tabernacle.

Another example...

Linguistic parallels [MH: Rodriguez gives it this label]. There are some terminological parallels between Genesis 1-2:3 and the building of the sanctuary. (a) God saw everything He had made and behold it was very good (Gen. 1:31); Moses saw all the work [MH: (the construction of the Tabernacle)] and behold, they had done it.

And what he's drawing attention to is that in Genesis 2, the first couple of verses there, the same verb to say that everything was made, and then God's comment that it was very good, Moses approves of the construction of the Tabernacle and uses the same verb for the completion (they had done it, they had made it, in Exodus 39). So he's noticing that we've sort of got a book ending of this kind of verbiage.

(b) Genesis states that the heavens and the earth were finished (Gen. 2:1, 2); after the building of the sanctuary it is stated that "all the work on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting was finished".

Same verb as back in Genesis 2:1-2. So you get the idea, that there's the construction of the cosmos. God said that it was *asah*—they had made it. It's

very good. And then if you go over to the Tabernacle account, you have the same verbs show up once the Tabernacle is completed, and Moses approves of the project. He's satisfied. This is the way we were supposed to do it. Then another observation:

(c) God finished His creative work and blessed the seventh day (Gen. 2:3); Moses finished the Tabernacle and blessed the people (39:43).

There's a blessing pronounced. I'm being selective here, but Rodriguez' article is full of this kind of stuff, where one thing seems to mirror the other. Another one:

During Creation week God "separated" light "from" darkness, water from water, day from night (Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18). [MH: There's this verb of separation in Genesis 1, several times.] After Genesis 1 the phrase "between . . . to separate" is used again in the setting of the Tabernacle. [MH: So you have the same phrase (same verbiage) used in the setting of the Tabernacle.] A veil was to separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy (Exod. 26:33) and the priests were to separate or distinguish from or between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean (Lev. 10:10). The emphasis is on the fact "that the creator-God is a God of order."

30:00

So the cosmos is ordered; the Tabernacle is ordered. Procedurally, when God is ordering the cosmos, he separates things. Well, procedurally, what happens in Leviticus in how the Tabernacle is constructed results in separation of one thing from the other, distinguishing holy from the profane. And his argument is that the language here (the verbiage) is not coincidental. Here's the last one, for the sake of the episode:

Presence of the Spirit of God. The "Spirit of God" is mentioned in both the Creation narrative and in the construction of the Tabernacle. In Genesis 41:38 Pharaoh uses the phrase the "spirit of G/god(s)," but he most probably had in mind his own gods. [MH: Obviously he's referring to his own deities.] Therefore [MH: if we wipe that one off the table], the next biblical reference to the Spirit of God, after Genesis 1:1, is [MH: Guess where?] found in Exodus 31:3.

In the instructions for the Tabernacle. Right there in that section, Exodus 25-31, and of course we're looking at two of those chapters specifically today. So Rodriguez is like, "This isn't a coincidence. You go from Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters. And the next time you see a specific reference to The Spirit of God is in this section where they're building the Tabernacle." So he's like, "Okay. When we think of one thing, we're supposed to think of the other. And this is intentional on the part of the writer."

God enabled certain individuals to build the sanctuary by filling them with His Spirit (Exodus 31:3; 35:31). [MH: It ties the two things together by virtue of the language used.]

So you could go through a bunch of these (and Rodriguez does in his article. There's a lot more to it than this. But it raises an obvious question. What would the point be? What's the point of conceptually and psychologically linking the Tabernacle to the Genesis creation? Rodriguez would argue, just generally (I'm summarizing here) that by doing this, the reader would see the Tabernacle as the Creator's hand guiding the Israelites. In other words, just as God's hand was in creation, God's hand is in the construction of the Tabernacle, God is there with them. He's guiding them through his Spirit to being a new creation. That's a familiar way of thinking about the Exodus (the deliverance from Egypt), the covenant at Sinai. We have a new creation here. So he's saying that's really what the writer wants the people to think about. So in addition to being the visible abode of God's presence, the Tabernacle therefore also would also be a visual emblem of order being brought out of the chaos of Egypt's bondage and the battle against her gods. That's a new creation.

3. The third one... I'm going to add a third one here. This is a bit... It'll feel a little bit off the radar, but we're going to go into this because I think you're going to find it quite interesting. The third way of looking at the Tabernacle instructions is to think about the possible relationship between the Tabernacle and (believe it or not) the Divine Council.

Now you're probably thinking, "What in the world?" If you've read *Unseen Realm*, you probably already have an inkling of the trajectory here. But if you haven't, this is going to sound like, "What in the world? There's Mike. We've heard he has two heads, and this is proof." Again, go back and read *Unseen Realm* if you haven't. And for those of you who have, let's just jump in here a little bit. I think you already sense what's going to happen here. So Evangelicals typically think of the Tabernacle only in terms of it being the place God met with Israel's leader (Moses or the high priest). God never actually meets with the high priest, but that language is used of Moses and, in theory, his successors. That's typically how we think of the Tabernacle. This is where God meets with Israel's leader or (on occasion) the people in a bigger, more corporate sense when people are gathered and the glory cloud descends—so on and so forth. That's typically how we think of the Tabernacle. It's God and the people, or God and the leader.

Most, therefore, would be surprised that the Tabernacle would give us anything to think about in regard to the Divine Council. The point of connection, though, is the fact that the Tabernacle is a tent. Serious Old Testament scholars know that the high god of Ugaritic religion, El, lived in a tent. Consequently, they have taken note of this pretty obvious parallel as part of the wider discussion of how biblical writers in various places repurpose El language (the Canaanite or Ugaritic El)

and motifs for Yahweh (and of course, they do the same thing with Baal motifs—Baal phraseology), attributing that to Yahweh. If this is totally unfamiliar to you, this is standard Old Testament scholarship. The biblical writers don't want their people to worship El and Baal. They are the regent and the co-regent of the heavenly host in Canaanite religion. Instead, they want to make the point that Yahweh is God, not these two dudes. So they will use scenes from Canaanite literature and epithets (labels, titles) of these deities and say, "You know, Baal isn't the one who rides the clouds and gives us rain and keeps us alive. It's Yahweh. Yahweh is the one who rides upon the clouds." There are four references of that phraseology applied to Yahweh in the Old Testament. So this is what they're doing. And biblical writers do this a lot. They repurpose El and Baal (motifs, imagery, phraseology, epithets) and attribute it to Yahweh to teach theology—to teach who the real God is behind whatever thing that El or Baal is getting credit for. If you realize that this happens (and it happens a lot in the Old Testament), you have to also be struck by the fact that El lives in a tent. And Yahweh is in a tent, because we have the Tabernacle. So we can't really ignore that.

So back into the Ugaritic material here—more specifically, El lived in a tent on the cosmic mountain. The tent on the mountain was located at the source of the cosmic waters. Hence, El's abode was a well-watered garden-mountain and happened to be a tent. Again, the well-watered garden-mountain is Eden. It's very obvious from the description of Eden in Genesis 2. The fact that Eden is referred to as the mountain of God in Ezekiel 28—this is all familiar territory for *Unseen Realm* readers. But now we're adding the tent element.

Now I'm going to quote a few lines from an Ugaritic text here. This is from Nicolas Wyatt's translation in the book, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, specifically KTU 1.4.iv.20-26. It's part of a council scene. And it's dealing with Anat meeting with El, or going to see El. So it says this:

1.4 iv 20

Then indeed she [MH: Anat] set her face towards El
at the source of the rivers,
at the midst of the springs of the two deeps.

She rolled back the tent of El
and came to the pavilion of the King, the Father of the Bright One [MH: or the
Shining One].

1.4 iv 25

At the feet of El she bowed and fell down.
She paid him homage and honoured him.

So I'm quoting that to give you the source material for the double deep where El abides. He's in the source, the well-watered garden. It's in a garden in this scene.

It's on a mountain. And of course, the reference to the tent there—this is the stock description of Canaanite religion's high deity, El. Now as Richard Clifford points out in his article... Clifford should be a name that's familiar to this audience, if you've read *Unseen Realm* and if you've looked at the footnotes. Richard Clifford is the guy who wrote... This is part of the Harvard Semitic Monograph series, *The Cosmic Mountain in the Old Testament*. It has since been reprinted as a paperback, so it's affordable. But he's the guy who did his dissertation on the Cosmic Mountain at Harvard and then got it published. Well, he has an article as well. This was published in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* in 1971 and it's entitled "The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting". So he's zeroing in on this one aspect of how God is portrayed in the Old Testament. According to what Clifford notes in his article, the assembly of El (his council) also lived in tents and tabernacles. And he quotes KTU 1.15 iii 15, which says this:

...in the convocation of the assembly of Dita[n]. [MH: Or Ditanu. It's a reference to these other members of the spiritual world.]
 Their last one I shall treat as the firstborn.'
 The gods blessed him and went away,
 the gods went away to their tents,
 the family of El to their dwellings.

40:00

So it's a very clear reference to the sons of God in Canaanite/Ugaritic religion. They live in tents, so on and so forth. So the thing to note here: Ugaritic is not only a Semitic language, it is the closest linguistic relative to biblical Hebrew. And the terms here for "tents" and "tabernacles" (or "tents" and "dwellings" in the translation that Clifford offers us) are the same terms that are found in the Hebrew Bible that are translated tents and tabernacles. The biblical Hebrew word for tent is אהל [aleph-he-lamed, pronounced "o-hel"], the noun. And then you've got the reference to the tabernacle (משכן – *mishkan*). It's exactly the same in the Ugaritic text that I just read. Tents and tabernacles. The gods went away to their tents, the family of El to their tabernacles. So it's a very obvious parallel.

But the point to see here is... there's not just one. El's council also is described this way. And Clifford, in his article, says that though there is no explicit proof of this... There's no specific, explicit lines in Ugaritic literature. He goes on to presume, and I think with some coherence here, that when *El's* council meets on *his* mountain in *his* tent, that very obviously the sons of God are also in El's tent. Because that's where they're meeting. Where else would they be? He doesn't have a line from an Ugaritic text that actually spells out how many deities are in the room—how many council members are in the room. But he's like, "Look, this is logical. If this is where El lives, this is where his council meetings are held, and the other gods show up for the council meeting. Well, they're all there. They're all there in El's tent—in El's abode—so on and so forth.

Now one of the phrases... And for those who have read either my InterVarsity Press dictionary article on the Divine Council or maybe something in FaithLife Study Bible (one of the sidebars there), one of the Ugaritic terms for Divine Council meetings is read this way. It was called the *puḥru mō'idi* (*phr m'd*) You have two words there. The first of these two Ugaritic words (*phr*) is drawn from Akkadian. It means “assembly”. The second term (*m'd*) means “appointed gathering” or “appointed meeting.” Together the phrase means “meeting of the divine assembly.” The second word (*m'd*) has a direct biblical Hebrew equivalent (the first one does not). If you've read *Unseen Realm*, when I talk about the *har mo'ed*... *Har* is mountain, and then you have this *mem-ayan-dalet* word. It's the mount of assembly. So that's what we're talking about here. In biblical Hebrew, it's the *har mo'ed*—the mount of assembly—the mountain where the council meetings are held. And that matters in Isaiah 14 and a few other passages. It's really what lurks behind the term Armageddon (*har-mo-ged-on*)—the *har mo'ed*, the mount of assembly. It's not the plains of Megiddo. It's a mountain. It's the cosmic mountain. It's the place where the Divine Council meets, which in Israelite theology at the point of the temple and onward is Zion. So Armageddon is a battle that takes place *for* and *at* Zion. (Jerusalem, if you will.) And you can go back and read *Unseen Realm* for that.

45:00 What I'm talking about here is that you have this phrase that shows up in Ugaritic and we have this Hebrew equivalent for the Divine Council (for the mount of assembly). Now the implications of all this ought to be obvious. We have similar (and in some cases identical) terminology between these passages in the Hebrew Bible, specifically the tents and the tabernacles in the Exodus section that we're talking about. We know it's sacred space. We know it's connected to the cosmic garden/mountain, and we've got this overlap of ideas between the Hebrew Bible/Israelite belief (the belief of the biblical writers) and Ugarit. That's all well and good, but I want you to focus on a specific point here. Because we're talking about the Tabernacle and the Tent of *Meeting* (the *ohel mo'ed*). It's kind of interesting. This is the way I'm going to say it. I can't prove it, but I think you can build a coherent argument for it, at least one that makes sense linguistically, that I've just sketched out here. Scholars have wondered, since the Ugaritic council met at El's abode (his cosmic garden/mountain) and that abode was a tent, whether these phrases and their conceptual equivalent to the *ohel mo'ed* (the Tent of Meeting)... What that might mean. The idea would be that when the glory cloud descended to meet with Moses... And recall sometimes Moses entered the cloud, like Exodus 24:18—that somehow that was the gateway to an undefinable alternative reality (it was a gateway to the spiritual world) that included the divine council. In other words, they're all in the cloud. They're *all* in the cloud. Now we know biblically, it says that the Lord was in the cloud. So there's the obstacle. There's the thing that makes it somewhat uncertain. So it's hard to know whether we can read into some of these tent-of-meeting accounts, whether God's actually there with his council. You say, “Well that sounds flaky. There's nothing like that in the Bible.” Well, actually there is. And that's why this

is an item for discussion. It is hard to know for sure in the *ohel mo'ed* (the Tent of Meeting) passages, but there are passages that have the council with Yahweh on Sinai. There just are. You have Psalm 68:17. Let me just read that. The point is that Yahweh is on Sinai with others.

**¹⁷The chariots of God are twice ten thousand,
thousands upon thousands;
the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary.**

Isn't that an interesting phrase? "Sinai is in the sanctuary." And that's a quote from Psalm 68, which is about the mountain of God. It's actually about Hermon and Sinai (without rabbit-trailing back into *Unseen Realm* again). But you have God present, connected with Sinai, with his heavenly host. Deuteronomy 33:1-4. Specifically, you get more of this in the Septuagint. But this is the passage about,

**The Lord came from Sinai and dawned upon Seir. Among us he shone forth
from Mount Paran. He came [MH: the Septuagint has:] with the ten thousands
of holy ones.**

The entourage is with him. The heavenly host is there, somehow. It's cosmic realm language. We shouldn't look at this and think, "Well, if I was there at Sinai, man, I should be able to see all those guys." Like you're counting *elohim* noses or something. No, this is the language of spiritual presence. Now if you as a listener—if you as a Christian—believe that there really are spiritual forces around you right now, can you see them? No, that has nothing to do with the theology. We're talking about the theology of this right now, that the spiritual world by definition can't be seen unless providentially you're allowed to see it.

So could that idea that the Divine Council was present at the Tent of Meeting, at some of these (not all of them) passages—some of these situations—that you actually have everybody in the tent? It's a full tent, in a manner of speaking. Is it possible? I would say, given the fact that... Just think about what we've been talking about. If we consider that the writer is deliberately trying to parallel Sinai with the Tabernacle, there might be something to this. And consider, as well, God's instructions—that the earthly Tabernacle was to be modeled after a heavenly prototype. Hmm. I mean, after all, God does say, "Hey, I'm giving you the heavenly pattern." Exodus 25:9 and Exodus 25:40 say that specifically. "See that you make all this stuff after the pattern for them which is being shown you on the mountain." We know this is part of the idea. What's being constructed here is an earthly counterpart—an earthly equivalence, a mirror image (however you want to describe it) to something in the spiritual world—the heavens. Considering that, there is something to think about.

50:00

Now it's hard to press the idea. It's hard to know exactly how far to take this or how to exactly think about it. The patterning may simply speak of God giving directions as opposed to handing Moses blueprints. But you couldn't hand Moses blueprints for a spiritual reality, could you? Because it doesn't have physical form. So let's not get hung up on the physicality of the description about the template and the pattern and the blueprints. Human writers (and we) have to use this language because we live in a spatial world. We're embodied. We have to have physical language like this. So we can't dismiss the idea that the spiritual world in all its fullness (i.e., the heavenly host, the council) is actually present in some of these passages, like at the Tent of Meeting. We can't dismiss that based upon the language of, "Well, God gave Moses a template. He's building something you can see." Of course he's building something you can see, because he's a person. He's human. He's embodied. But that doesn't mean the thing on the other side (as it were) should be parsed and thought about the same way. As I've said many times, when it comes to the afterlife—when it comes to what the agents of the heavenly host do, when it comes to "what does God's house look like—his throne room, the entourage, the structure, the hierarchy, the order," we are forced to use the language of embodiment for a place that has no latitude and longitude. It is not spatial, by definition. That's just the way it is. We can't describe something that we cannot even conceive of with language we don't have. So the biblical writers use the language of spatiality and physicality. So we can't use that on one side to press literalism too far in one direction, and we also can't use the fact that we have to use that language in a way to deny spiritual connections as well. That would be an inconsistent hermeneutic. And we try to be consistent here. We try to be fair with the data and we try to be consistent here.

So I do think there is something to think about here, given the way that the Tabernacle instructions are designed in some way to make you think of Eden—to make you think of the creation, the presence of God. All of these things—the spiritual realities behind God's presence. What's being built here is supposed to make you think those thoughts, very evidently. And all I'm suggesting here is that one of those thoughts might be that the Divine Council is actually in some of these scenes, even though you can't "see" them and they aren't specifically and explicitly mentioned. Because the logic would be, where God is, his entourage is. Where he meets, they are. Where else would they be? In some other spiritual world? No. There's just something to think about here, because of this template understanding of one thing to the other.

So I wanted to throw that in because the obvious point of connection is the tent language. And that's very overt. So to think about the implications of that are well worth doing. And I think it's a good way to make the assertion—make the claim. And I think there's obviously merit to it. We just spent a whole episode on it. That even something as transparently or seemingly boring as, "Hey, build the Tabernacle. Do it this way. Here's what it's supposed to look like." And how the tabernacle is used, what it looks like when it's built, the different parts of it... The

furniture is easier to get excited about because of the Ark of the Covenant and all that. I get that. But just the Tabernacle as a concept and as an item itself actually messages theology. It really does.

So there's a lot to think about here and a lot to notice in terms of the way that the biblical writer wants you to be thinking. This is why, as I've said in *Unseen Realm* and on lots of other occasions, many times, I want the Israelite living in your head. Because what the biblical writers are doing is they're writing to people of their own day. They're not writing to you. They're not writing to me. They're writing to people of their own day. And they can make certain assumptions, that, "When my readers read this, they're going to think about this other thing over here. And I want them to think about those two things in tandem. Because they are related. There are things that one teaches about the other and vice versa. They are supposed to be mentally, intellectually, theologically connected. That's why I'm doing it this way." And all of this is under Providence, the inspiration of Scripture... all of these things have a purpose, even passages as ostensibly boring as this one. They have a purpose. They have a reason for being. And for me, I think it's kind of interesting.

TS: Mike, how did we get the word "tabernacle?"

55:00

MH: Well, we get it... It's actually sort of a literal understanding of a place to dwell. *Mishkan*. *Shakan* is to dwell-to inhabit. So the *shakan* language gets associated with the *shekinah* (the glory cloud) later in Israelite thinking. And "tabernacle" in English was one of those words that was used to describe a dwelling place that isn't people-occupied. It's a place of worship. It's a place of liturgy—this kind of thing. So I can't tell you the English etymology. I can tell you, conceptually, why that kind of terminology was deemed appropriate, just to distinguish this dwelling place from other dwelling places.

TS: Alright. So we'll be looking forward to Part 2 next time. And hopefully everybody's having a good Christmas this week.

MH: Absolutely.

TS: Merry Christmas, everybody. And with that, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.