
Exodus 25: Where, why, how do we worship?

Romans 12:1-2

1. The Old Testament situation

We quickly look at the contents of chapters 25–31: detailed instructions given to Moses on Mt Sinai regarding the worship of Israel. Much the same is repeated when they are carried out (chapters 36-40). The unusual words here are tabernacle = house; ark = chest or box.

It was always the plan that Israel would worship God (Ex 3:12; 4:23; 8:1).

The tabernacle and all else are built exactly according to God's plan. God is supposed to be central in the life of his people. Humans and their needs should not be central stage, but there is some room for creativity, e.g. in the making of psalms etc.

Israel has one national worship, contrary to the many gods and sanctuaries of the gentiles.

Priests mediated between God and the people, as Leviticus will make clear.

2. What is worship?

It is a very broad term. 'The way we relate to God, the way we pay respect to God.' Keeping the commandments is only part of it. Often worship is seen in a far too narrow perspective, esp. by modern singers and songs. It is much more than singing alone. It covers our entire life and lifestyle. At the end of today's service I will bless you with the words: 'Our service is over, our worship begins'.

In an Anglican church in London it says over the exit: 'You are now entering the mission field.'

3. Where?

Although God was with Israel, he had his separate, enclosed place: the tabernacle. The tabernacle, the temple and the people of God were meant to spread God's purity and renewal in the world. That is no longer so in New Testament times. When Jesus cleansed the temple, he basically abolished it; God now lives in the believers by the Holy Spirit. He no longer needs a separate space.

Unlike other denominations, we Baptists know that we have freedom regarding the place where we meet; we can e.g. celebrate home Communion. We do not have an altar, a sanctuary or priests. Our buildings can be simple and functional, as there is no need for incense, mystery or gold.

4. Why?

God wants it. He wants to be with his people. He wants to be glorified. And he deserves it.

He is worthy: 'Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.'

5. How? A few words only

- The tabernacle and all else were built from voluntary gifts (25:1; 2 Cor 9:7); the Israelites gave generously but it cost them. Paul is no less demanding but he does emphasise the voluntariness.
 - In holiness, for God is holy. We have to avoid sin at all cost.
 - We do not use any images, but creation shows us God's glory.
 - The expression 'in Spirit and truth' (Jn 4:24) is often abused and misunderstood. In Jesus' words it basically means: neither on Mt Gerizim nor in Jerusalem, but in a spiritual way.
 - So singing is fine, but worship is much more. Please reflect on what you do, how you worship the Lord.
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