

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 8
Exodus 20-31

Key Concepts: The key concept in this section is that the Israelite people are called to live orderly lives governed by a set of laws and religious practices.

Stories: We move somewhat away from narrative stories and find ourselves enmeshed in the creation of a community which will have laws to govern itself and a set of religious practices by which it will orient its self to God. It is very easy to get bogged down in the minutia of the laws and religious practices. I encourage you to see these pieces as part of a larger whole which will assist the Israelite community in maintaining order in terms of both human interaction and its relationship with God. There is much in this section that will disturb (slavery, etc.) and confuse (who actually got to go up on Mt. Sinai), so just hang in there and get the flow of the section.

Brief Summary: We begin with a set of rules on human relationships. These include the Ten Commandments, rules for dealing with slaves, assault and murder. These rules then move to dealing with livestock, treatment of strangers, lending of money and dedication of animals and people to God. The laws continue and focus on honesty, Sabbath and a series of three annual feasts (Unleavened bread/Passover, First Fruits/Pentecost, Ingathering/Booths). A series of promises concerning the giving of the Land of Promise completes this initial section.

The next move sends us back to Sinai and the giving of more of the Law. There is some confusion as to exactly who gets to go up on the mountain. In one place it is only Moses and in another it is Moses and about seventy some-odd others. In addition the people twice agree to obey all of the laws that God has given to Moses. What Moses receives at this point is not more laws but instructions for creating religious objects.

The religious objects include the ark, along with the mercy seat which is where God will meet Moses. Next the people are instructed to build a table on which will sit the holy bread. This is followed by a lampstand with six lights. All of these objects will be housed in the tabernacle whose construction is intricately described. In addition to all of these objects there needs to be an altar upon which the sacrifices of the people will be made. The altar will also be housed in the Tabernacle. All of these religious items will be moveable in order that they travel with the people through the wilderness and into the Land of Promise.

Following the construction of these items we are told who will make use of them and be responsible for the religious ceremonies for which they were designed. The ones who will be responsible will be Aaron and his sons. They will be the priests who will insure that all things religious are done decently and in order. As we move through this section we are told what they will wear and how the garments will be constructed. We are also informed as to the cultic ceremony which needs to take place in order that Aaron and his sons become holy (set aside for a purpose) and are thus able to be the religious leaders running the tabernacle and its sacrifices. The final addition to the tabernacle is the altar itself. Again the altar will be housed on the tabernacle and will be the place upon which all sacrifices are made. Finally we are told who will build all of this and the people are reminded to keep the Sabbath.

1. What do you think about the issues of slavery and the place of women in these texts?
2. How do you see the rules dealing with strangers as being relevant today?
3. Why do you suppose the writer spends so much time dealing with the details of construction?
4. How do you keep the Sabbath?