



Week 8 The Tabernacle

Day 1 - Exodus 25:1-9

The Lord said to Moses, ² "Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me. ³ This is the offering that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴ blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen, goats' hair, ⁵ tanned rams' skins, fine leather, acacia wood, ⁶ oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁷ onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece. ⁸ And they shall make me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them. ⁹ In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

Understanding the passage:

Of the forty chapters in Exodus, thirteen of them are dedicated to the tabernacle. Reading through those chapters can seem dry. The designs for the construction of the tabernacle are given in detail and begin to appear repetitive. But the fact that a significant part of the book is dedicated to the design and construction of the tabernacle should be a sign to us to pay attention. After all, the tabernacle will house the Almighty.

Right after the covenant is sealed with blood in Exodus 24, God tells Moses to instruct the people to make a tabernacle where God could dwell. It was not meant to be a house of worship that pointed them to God, but the actual home of God's presence on earth with them. The sealing of the covenant has joined God to the people in spirit and the tabernacle will join them physically.

This holy space where God will move and dwell among the people is a renewed Eden. The garden was the last place that God's presence was among the people. It was the last time that heaven and earth were joined as one.

The tabernacle is a forerunner to the temple that Solomon will build about 440 years later. God's presence will dwell in that temple in the ark of the covenant, and though that temple is destroyed

by the Babylonians when they attack Jerusalem in 586 BCE, it is rebuilt after the exile and God will dwell there again. And yet, these are still diminished occurrences of God's presence with the people.

In John 2:19-22, when Jesus throws the money changers out of the temple, he says, "destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up... he was speaking about the temple of his body." The temple was a building where God dwelled, but then God was present with people through Jesus. In Jesus, heaven and earth met.

Right as he breathed his last breath on the cross, the curtain of the temple that surrounded God's presence was torn. God's presence moved out of the holy space in the temple, and through Jesus, it was made available to all of us. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, the apostle Paul asks, "don't you know that you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you?" The good news is that God no longer dwells in a tabernacle or temple, but that God dwells with each of us. We are the tabernacle.

Questions for reflection:

1. What do you think it meant for Moses and the people to be promised that God's presence would dwell with them?
2. Do you see yourself as the temple of God? Why or why not?

Day 2 - Exodus 25:10-11, 17-18, 21-22; 26:1, 9-10

25:10 "They shall make an ark of acacia wood; it shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹ You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make a molding of gold upon it all around.

17 "Then you shall make a cover of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width.¹⁸ You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work at the two ends of the cover. ²¹ You shall put the cover on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I am giving you. ²² There I will meet with you, and from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will tell you all that I am commanding you for the Israelites.

26:1 The tabernacle itself you shall make with ten curtains of fine twisted linen and blue, purple, and crimson yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them.

9 "You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twisted linen one hundred cubits long for that side; ¹⁰ its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver.

Understanding the passage:

The tabernacle is described as having three main spaces: the courtyard, the Tent of Meeting, and the Holy of Holies. As yesterday's reading referenced, it is representative of Eden, which also had three spaces: the whole land was called delight. Within Eden, there was a garden. And then in the middle of the garden is the holiest place: the tree of life. It is also representative of Mt. Sinai, which was divided into three sections: the base where the people lived. The middle section where Moses and the elders went up. And finally, the summit where God dwelled and where Moses was permitted to meet God on occasion.

The myriad of details about the tabernacle's plans reveals something about God's holiness. The Israelites would be required to make a sacrifice to enter the courtyard in order to symbolize the

atonement of their sin. Sin costs something, and the Israelites would have to make that payment with an animal. As they moved toward the Tent of Meeting, they would have to wash themselves to symbolize cleansing and purity. That was as far as they could individually go. The priests were allowed in the Holy of Holies once a year to offer atonement for the people on Yom Kippur.

The materials used were the most valuable ones available, which symbolized the importance and sacredness of the space. God told Moses to return to the people and collect the materials of gold, silver, bronze, and precious stones from them. But they were escaped slaves - where would they have gotten those materials? These were the things that they'd asked the Egyptians to give them when they left after the plague of the firstborn (Exodus 12:35-36).

In addition to the construction of the courtyard and tent itself, God gave Moses' instructions for building components of worship. The Ark of the Covenant would be the physical place in which the covenant with God (the Ten Commandments) would be stored. This would be the place where God's presence rested. It is, like the other two arks in the Old Testament, representative of salvation. The first ark was Noah's ark, which saved his family and the animals during the flood. The second ark was the reed basket that Moses was placed in as a baby (the Hebrew word used for basket was the word used to describe Noah's ark). This ark is the place where atoning sacrifices will be made for the people's salvation.

Those atoning sacrifices would happen on the Mercy Seat, which was the cover of the ark. Remember that through the tabernacle, God is recreating Eden. When Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden, God placed cherubim at the entrance, blocking the way back in. Now, God is placing cherubim on the mercy seat, representing the place where the presence of God will be with the people again.

Questions for reflection:

1. What is the balance between beauty and function in the tabernacle?
2. Why do you think God wanted them to use valuable materials?
3. What was the symbolism of using the materials they plundered from the Egyptians?

Day 3 - Exodus 28:1-5, 9-12, 29-30; 29:1, 19-20

28:1 "Then bring near to you your brother Aaron and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons: Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ² You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron. ³ And you shall speak to all who are skillful, whom I have endowed with skill, so that they make Aaron's vestments to consecrate him for my priesthood. ⁴ These are the vestments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, and a sash. When they make these sacred vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests, ⁵ they shall use gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen.

⁹ You shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. ¹¹ As a gem cutter engraves signets, so you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel; you shall mount them in settings of gold filigree. ¹² You shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance.

29 So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before the Lord. 30 In the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord; thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the Israelites on his heart before the Lord continually.

28:1 "Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them to serve me as priests. Take one young bull and two rams without blemish.

19 "You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, 20 and you shall slaughter the ram and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of the right ears of his sons and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet and dash the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar.

Understanding the passage:

Moses and his brother Aaron were descended from the tribe of Levi, which became the tribe of priests for the Israelites. That moment of being named as the priests for their people begins here in Exodus 28 when God tells Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons.

The priestly garments are described in great detail, just as the tabernacle was. The role of the priest was a set-apart, holy calling and the garments that the priests wore were meant to point to God and to glorify God. Each piece of their garments had a specific purpose. The ephod and the breastpiece were adorned with stones engraved with the tribes of Israel. These were meant to be a "remembrance for the sons of Israel." The priests are representing Israel to God. This is the priestly function -- to speak to God on behalf of the people and to represent the people to God (as opposed to the prophetic function -- to represent God to the people).

The breastpiece of judgement is worn by Aaron when he goes in before the Lord and he "shall bear the judgment of the Israelites on his heart before the Lord continually." You may remember from a few weeks ago that the Hebrew word used for bear, which is *nāsā*, is the word used for "take" in the Ten Commandments ("You shall not *nāsā* the name of the Lord your God in vain."). In that case, do not wear the name of God lightly. Do not bear God's name in vain. And in this case, the priests must carry the weight of others' guilt before God in order for them to receive forgiveness.

In the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests, Moses is to take the blood of a sacrificed ram and put it on their ears, thumbs, and big toes. It symbolized their complete devotion. They would be focused, from this point out, on *hearing* the word of God with their ears, *servicing* God with their hands, and *walking* in the way of the Lord.

Questions for reflection:

1. The purpose of the priestly garments was to point to God. Is there anything in your life that is meant to point to God but gets used for another purpose? What is the end result?
2. After Jesus, all Christ-followers are meant to be a kingdom of priests. It is no longer left to specific mediators. How do you live out your calling to be a part of the priesthood of all believers?

Day 4 - Exodus 35:4-11, 20-23, 36:2-7

35:4 Moses said to all the congregation of the Israelites, "This is the thing that the Lord has commanded: ⁵ Take from among you an offering to the Lord; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the Lord's offering: gold, silver, and bronze; ⁶ blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen; goats' hair, ⁷ tanned rams' skins, and fine leather; acacia wood, ⁸ oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁹ and onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and the breastpiece.

10 "All who are skillful among you shall come and make all that the Lord has commanded: ¹¹ the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its clasps and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases.

20 Then all the congregation of the Israelites withdrew from the presence of Moses. ²¹ And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the Lord's offering to be used for the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the sacred vestments. ²² So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the Lord. ²³ And everyone who possessed blue or purple or crimson yarn or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or fine leather brought them.

36:2 Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given skill, everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work, ³ and they received from Moses all the offerings that the Israelites had brought for the work of constructing the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, ⁴ so that all the skilled workers who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task being performed, ⁵ and said to Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." ⁶ So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing, ⁷ for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work.

Understanding the passage:

Exodus opens with the Israelites building something for their king: they are building storage cities for Pharaoh. Exodus closes with the Israelites also building something for their king: they are building a tabernacle for God. These bookends of building represent the great movement of the people from slaves who were caught up in Egyptian worship to freed people who are a part of the covenant with God.

God calls the people to begin the building, but it must have been intimidating. Not only was this an intricate design, but it was for *God*. It had to be done right. God assures the people, "I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you." (Exodus 31:6) The onus of the project was not left to the people alone for God would equip them with what they needed.

God also calls, in Exodus 35, those of "generous hearts" and those "who are willing." God calls the people who *want* to have God's presence on earth. They should not be frustrated by building a tabernacle for God, but cheerful about what it means. There's nothing obligatory or forced about it.

This passage jumps ahead from the building plans to the beginning of the actual construction. Between Moses receiving the plans and the construction beginning, the people build the golden calf and experience both the wrath and grace of God (see last week's study).

When Moses calls for builders and supplies, he is overwhelmed by all that is offered and given. In chapter 36, Moses is told by the workers that the people had brought so much that they wouldn't be able to use it all. Moses is forced to restrain the people in their generosity.

How did they go from frustrated with Moses' disappearance and making a golden calf to bringing all of their worldly goods? Were they scared of God and responding out of fear? It seems that instead of operating out of fear of being punished, they were operating from transformed hearts. God could have punished them irreversibly after the golden calf, but God gave them mercy.

Questions for reflection:

1. How has God equipped you for the work to which God has called you?
2. Have you ever experienced an outpouring of generosity?
3. Are you a willing and cheerful builder of the kingdom of God?
4. Do you respond to God out of fear or a transformed heart?

Day 5 - Exodus 40:16-38

¹⁶ Moses did everything just as the Lord had commanded him. ¹⁷ In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was set up. ¹⁸ Moses set up the tabernacle; he laid its bases and set up its frames and put in its poles and raised up its pillars, ¹⁹ and he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁰ He took the covenant and put it into the ark and put the poles on the ark and set the cover above the ark, ²¹ and he brought the ark into the tabernacle and set up the curtain for screening and screened the ark of the covenant as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²² He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the curtain, ²³ and set the bread in order on it before the Lord as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁴ He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, ²⁵ and set up the lamps before the Lord as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁶ He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the curtain ²⁷ and offered fragrant incense on it as the Lord had commanded Moses. ²⁸ He also put in place the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. ²⁹ He set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering as the Lord had commanded Moses. ³⁰ He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing, ³¹ with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. ³² When they went into the tent of meeting and when they approached the altar, they washed as the Lord had commanded Moses. ³³ He set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey, ³⁷ but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

Understanding the passage:

Everything is finally in place for God to descend down and be present with the people. All of the preparations have been made. The tabernacle has been constructed exactly as God has commanded. In fact, over and over again, it is emphasized that the work was done in exact accordance with God's instructions (Exodus 38:22; 39:1; 39:5; 39:7; 39:26; 39:31, 39:32, 29:42-43). All of God's commands

have purpose. The details and instructions for the tabernacle are so that God can be present with the people and live in their midst.

But it's not just about the physical construction of the tabernacle. Nor is it about the Ark of the Covenant nor the priestly garments. The law is in place as well. God gave them the law so that they could continue their relationship. Instead of viewing the law like a set of stifling rules, it's helpful to view it as guidelines that keep a relationship healthy. In a marriage, this might look like not cheating on a spouse, not abusing a spouse, treating the other with love and respect. In the covenant relationship with God, the people have to follow rules as well.

All of this leads to the point when they are surely holding their collective breath. It's been a year since God has delivered them from slavery in Egypt. A year that contained complaining in the wilderness. A year of God's provision right when they needed it. A year with new laws. A year with rebellion and idolatry. A year of hoping for God's presence. The people had not always been faithful to God, but at the end of this year, God proves that God will always be faithful to them. God descends and fills the tabernacle and the glory of God is there with them.

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you view the law as a way of being in a relationship? Or a hindrance?
2. Is there a place in your life in which you're waiting to feel God's presence? What do you need to do to open yourself to God's presence?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. What's the purpose of the Tabernacle?
2. Why do you think God went to great lengths to detail the plans?
3. Are you an equipped disciple? Are you a willing disciple?
4. What kinds of preparation do you make for worship? For prayer?
5. What reminds you that everything you do is for God?
6. The tabernacle gave the Israelites a place to worship God. They had specific instructions for how they would conduct their prayer and worship. What rhythms and disciplines do you follow in your own spiritual life?
7. Is generosity and giving a spiritual discipline that you practice?
8. What gets in the way of you being a cheerful giver?
9. What is your biggest takeaway from this week?
10. How would you summarize the book of Exodus? What stands out to you the most?

Prayer requests and other notes: