

Exodus – Lesson 18

Constructing the Tabernacle – Part 1

Read Exodus 25:1-40

1. (a) From Exodus 25:1-9, how was the construction of the tabernacle to be *financed*? Where did the Israelites get the *resources* needed?

The construction of the tabernacle was to be financed by *freewill* offerings of the Hebrew people; they were to give to this project from their own personal resources, and according to their own personal *desire* to do so (see 1b below). Since the Hebrews were a slave people fleeing from Egypt, they would *normally* have had nothing personal to draw from. However, in his providence, God had allowed the Hebrew people to plunder the Egyptians before they left, taking all of the *voluntarily* given resources of the Egyptians in order that they might leave. This abundance, then, would be used to construct the tabernacle, and the irony of using plundered goods should not be overlooked.

- (b) What is the significance of the statement in 25:2 “*from every man whose heart moves him?*” How does this compare to 2 Corinthians 9:6-8?

The contribution of resources to the building of the tabernacle was to be *voluntary*. It was *not* going to be based on a tax or a census or a pledge drive, or some other means of *extraction*. It would be based on *willing* participants, people who would give what they felt like giving. This is precisely what Paul says Christians are to do when giving to the work of the ministry: they are to do so “*not under compulsion,*” but as cheerful givers. The issue of money, as it relates to the work of the ministry, is *always* based on the voluntary choices of the people of God. However, such giving is always *assumed* to be based on a response to the *generosity of God*, both in matters of finance *and* in all other matters, including the gracious gift of salvation itself. What the people of God give *always* comes out of the abundance that God has given *to them*; the response must be commiserate with what has been received. This is what it means to be a cheerful giver.

2. (a) What is the *purpose* of the tabernacle, according to 25:8? How does this verse fit with the statement of God in 1 Chronicles 17:1-6?

The tabernacle was designed as a sanctuary, a place set aside for the holy presence of God to “*dwell.*” This “*dwelling*” was to move with the people; the tabernacle was designed as a tent in order to be portable. God would “*dwell*” with his people in the sense that his holiness would be *symbolically* represented within the Most Holy Place of this tent. This is how to interpret 1 Chronicles 17, where God said that he never desired a place in which to dwell. Certainly this passage means that God does not require a *permanent* dwelling since he “*moves*” with his people. But it also can mean that God does not live in buildings constructed with human hands; he is the *transcendent* God whose presence fills the earth, not just a room in a tent. The tabernacle (and, later, the temple) are *symbolic* of the presence of God with his people, that he dwells with them and knows them personally.

- (b) According to John 1:14 and Colossians 1:19, where does the fullness of God *now* dwell? How does this apply to the *relationship* between God and believers (see Ephesians 2:19-22)?

The fullness of God now “*dwells*” in the person of Jesus Christ; the *presence* of God is now manifest in the incarnate Son of the Living God, who “*tabernacles*” amongst his people. This “*dwelling*” now relates the believer to God through Christ, who dwells in his people through the Holy Spirit. Believers have the *eternal* presence of God through Jesus Christ indwelling them, and they become a “*living*” temple that knows the measure of God’s love.

3. Compare Exodus 25:9 to 25:40 and 27:8. How much *latitude* was Moses allowed in constructing the tabernacle and its accoutrements? Why is this important?

All of these verses say the same thing: Moses was to construct the tabernacle to the specification of the “pattern” given to him on the mountain. He was not allowed to stray from this pattern and he was to follow God’s explicit directions without deviation. This is an important *principle* regarding the relationship of God to his people: as much as we might think that matters of the church are open to *our* interpretation, the reality is that we are to follow *God’s* designs for his church only. This is particularly important in two areas: 1) in matters of theology, specifically, soteriology. It is not up to us to “design” the church of God by customizing the message of the gospel in order to make it “relevant” or “appealing.” Instead, we are to proclaim what we have been given and allow God to use it as he pleases, 2) in matters of church life, specifically, worship. It is not up to us to reform worship into what pleases us, or to transform the life of the church from what God gave to us as a pattern. The “development” of the church along cultural lines in order for the church to be “useful” or “practical” is prohibited by the fact that it is *God* who has established its order.

4. (a) Briefly describe the *ark of the covenant* from Exodus 25:10-22. What was its purpose?

The ark was to be a box made of acacia wood which would carry the “*testimony*” (i.e. the tablets of the law). It was to be about 2½ cubits (45”) long, about 1½ cubits (27”) wide, and about 1½ cubits (27”) tall. It was to be overlaid with pure gold, and be carried by two long poles made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold placed through rings on its longer sides. The cover, also known as the “*mercy seat*,” was to have two golden cherubim with outstretched wings facing each other on its top.

- (b) What is the name of the *cover* that was to be fashioned over the ark? Why is it called this?

The cover of the ark was known as the “*mercy seat*,” the place where God would meet with his people. The “*mercy seat*” was where God would “sit.” The cherubim on the top pointed with their outstretched wings where God sat, symbolic of the “*throne*” of God that is also pictured in Isaiah 6.

- (c) Read Leviticus 16:1-16. Describe the *symbolism* of the mercy seat and its relationship to atonement?

The mercy seat, which sat on top of the ark of the covenant, would become the *focal point* of the sprinkling of blood for atonement. The high priest (in this case, Aaron) would enter the Most Holy Place with animal blood and sprinkle that blood on the top of the mercy seat. This would “obscure” the vision of the law from God; the blood would come between God and the law, and God’s wrath would be turned away since his view of the transgression of the people would be obscured. The blood would act as a *propitiation*, a turning back of God’s wrath, and the mercy of God would be revealed. This is why the top was called the “*mercy seat*”: it was where mercy was dispensed through the shedding of blood and the obscuring of the law and its demands.

5. Compare Exodus 25:30 to Leviticus 24:5-9. Why was the bread on the table known as the “*bread of the Presence*?”

The showbread placed on the table *represented* (like the mercy seat) the “*presence*” of God in the *provision* for his people. Just as God had miraculously provided manna for bread during their journey, the showbread represented this provision of God to the twelve tribes of Israel.

6. (a) Briefly describe the *lampstand* from Exodus 25:31-40. What was its purpose?

The lampstand was to provide light in the Most Holy Place, since that room in the tabernacle (and, later, in the temple) would have no windows. It was to be made out of hammered gold, with six branches for the lamps, three on each side of a central shaft. The lamp cups were to be shaped like almond blossoms each containing an oil lamp, the entire thing to be hammered out of a single talent of pure gold.

(b) What is the connection between this lampstand and the *words* of Jesus in John 8:12? How does this now relate to the *church* (see Revelation 1:20 and 2:2-5)?

Whereas the lampstand in the tabernacle (and temple) would be used to provide light in the Most Holy Place, Jesus calls himself the “*light of the world.*” The original lampstand provided an “artificial” light so that the “presence” of God could be revealed. However, with the advent of Jesus, the fullest presence of God is now visible, and the light that Jesus reveals is the fullest expression of God’s nature and person, all in a very *personal* sense. The lampstand, as used in Revelation 1 and 2, is symbolic of the nature of that revelation *through the church*. The mission of the church, as the body of Christ, is to reveal the person and nature of God as he has now manifested himself through Jesus. Failure to remain faithful to that cause will result in the church *losing her mandate* and, thus, losing her lampstand. If the church fails to reveal the “presence” of God to the world in Jesus Christ, then she forfeits her right to know God at all, and loses her mission and purpose altogether.