

THE TABERNACLE (9)

Exodus 25-31; 35-40

Key Verse: 25:8

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."

The Lord renewed his covenant with his people, even though they made a golden calf and had a wild animal party during the time of Moses' absence. On the mountain, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and instructions how to build the Tabernacle. God would dwell in their midst until they could become a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. But how could the Holy God dwell among these unholy people? The Holy God dwells in the Tabernacle with his people until they grow up to be a holy people who would proclaim the knowledge of God to the whole world. Today we learn about the Tabernacle and the priestly garments. Why is the Tabernacle so important? We will think about this in this passage.

I. The pattern on the mountain (25-31)

First, the people's freewill offering. Read 25:1,2. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.'" This offering was not only to gather materials for building the sanctuary; it was also to see if they would give their most precious material things, and their time and energy in order to welcome God into their midst.

Second, the tabernacle and its furnishings. God gave Moses the pattern for building the sanctuary. Read 25:8-9. "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you." Everything had to be exactly like the pattern God gave Moses. Sinful people cannot come to God in their own way; they must come in God's way.

God gave Moses detailed patterns for three objects which represent God's personal presence--The ark with the atonement cover, the golden table, and the gold lampstand (25). First and most important is the ark with its atonement cover. The ark was a small chest (3' x 2' x 2') overlaid with pure gold inside and outside. The tablets of the Ten Commandments were placed inside the ark. God wanted to teach them that his word must be at the heart of the sanctuary. The atonement cover on top of the ark was made of pure gold. Two gold cherubim were molded on the atonement cover. It was also called the "mercy seat." Once a year the high priest sprinkled it with the blood of atonement (Lev 16:15,16). It covers the justice and righteousness of God's law with the grace of his mercy and forgiveness. If a man is judged solely by

the law, he must receive a death sentence, for all men have sinned (Ro 3:23). But God's justice is covered with God's mercy. It was here that God's righteousness and God's mercy met. Read 25:21-22. "Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites." The ark of the covenant looks forward to the cross of Jesus, where sinners may meet the Holy God and find mercy and forgiveness (Ro 3:25).

The other two articles are the golden table and the gold lampstand. On the table was the Bread of the Presence which was baked fresh each week. Bread represents sustenance to man. God himself is the sustenance of life. Jesus once said, "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35). The lampstand had seven lamps. They reveal that "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1Jn 1:5). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12). In chapter 27 is a charge to keep the lamp in the tent of meeting burning continually from evening to morning (27:21). God never slumbers; he keeps watch over his people by day and by night.

God concluded his instructions about how to make these three articles, and the utensils that go with them, with the words, "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (25:40).

Third, the tabernacle or the Tent of Meeting (26). The tabernacle is the tent which houses the ark with its atonement cover, the table and the lampstand. The tabernacle had two rooms divided by a beautiful curtain. One room was the "Most Holy Place." The ark was placed there. The other room was the "Holy Place." The table and the lampstand were there (26:31-35).

The tabernacle was beautiful on the inside, and rough and unattractive on the outside. In many ways it is symbolic of Jesus, who became flesh and dwelt or tabernacled among us. His outer appearance was like a root out of dry ground; but his inner beauty is beyond description.

There is one other item that belongs with these three articles in the tabernacle. It is the golden altar of incense. This altar is described in chapter 30. It is placed in the "Holy Place," just before the beautiful curtain. Burning incense represents prayer. It is here that Aaron was to come before God every morning and every evening to burn incense as prayer for the people. Intercessory prayer is a priestly duty. The sanctuary was a place of prayer.

Fourth, the bronze altar (27). The bronze altar which was used for

burnt offerings was placed in the court of the tabernacle. There was also a basin nearby for the priests to wash their hands and feet. This altar was the place where blood was shed to atone for sin. Sin separates us from God. Sin makes us miserable. "The wages of sin is death." (Ro 6:23a) God cannot dwell in the midst of sinful people. We cannot go to God unless our sins are washed clean. Leviticus 17:11 says, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." Hebrews 9:22 says, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." God provided a way through the blood for sinful man to be forgiven and to come into his presence. The sacrificial system and the bronze altar teach us that sin is a matter of life and death. A blood sacrifice is required for cleansing. The altar and blood of sacrifice point to Jesus who died to take away our sins. Jesus' death for sins validates and gives meaning to the sacrificial system--and makes it obsolete. There is now no need for animal sacrifices. Jesus the Lamb of God died once for all to take away the sins of the world.

II. The priesthood (28-29; 39)

First, sacred garments for dignity and honor. Read 28:2. "Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor." Aaron was the man who made the golden calf. His two oldest sons would later be executed for their irreverence (Lev 10). Aaron was a man of mistakes, but God appointed him high priest to administer the sacrificial system, and he clothed him with beautiful garments to give him dignity and honor. Aaron wore a seamless robe of blue that was embroidered with blue and purple pomegranates. It was decorated with golden bells that rang every time he took a step. He wore a sign on his head that was engraved with the words, "Holy to the Lord." God still calls weak people to serve him, and he clothes us with his righteousness. When we put on Jesus Christ, we are clothed with his dignity, honor and righteousness (Ro 13:14).

Second, the work of a mediator. The ephod and the breastpiece visually illustrate the high priest's work as a mediator. Firstly, he must pray for all the people. The ephod and the breastpiece show this. The ephod was beautifully woven with gold and purple and scarlet. It had straps over the shoulders on which were fastened two onyx stones engraved with the names of the 12 sons of Israel. Every time Aaron went before the Lord, he bore the names of his people on his shoulders. Secondly, he must listen to God and seek God's will for himself and for the people. For this, he wore the breastpiece for making decisions. It was a 9" X 9" square, folded double and worn over the ephod. Inside the fold were two mysterious items called the Urim and the Thummim. These had something to do with decision-making. The names of the 12 tribes of

Israel were engraved on precious stones and mounted on the breastpiece. Every time Aaron offered sacrifices for sin on the altar, he was bearing on his shoulders and on his heart all the people. When he burned incense on the golden altar, he was praying for all the people (28:29,30).

The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ is our high priest. He does not need such clothes to give him dignity and honor, for he is the sinless Son of God. Hebrews 8:1,2 says, "We...have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the ...true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man." Paul said, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (1Ti 2:5,6a). We no longer need a human high priest, nor the blood of sheep or goats. Jesus offered his own blood to atone for our sins. He serves us in the sanctuary of heaven where he makes continual intercession for us (Heb 6-9). Each person may go directly to God through our high priest Jesus.

In Exodus 19:5, God told the Israelites, "You will be for me a kingdom of priests." And Peter tells all Christians, "You are a royal priesthood" (1Pe 2:9). In both the Old Testament and the New, God's people have a priestly duty. We must go to God not only for ourselves and our families, but also to pray for others. God did not save us to make us selfish. God wants his people to be a kingdom of priests. We are a kingdom of priests when God dwells in our midst. We are a kingdom of priests when we pray for the world. We are a kingdom of priests when we obey Jesus' world mission command to make disciples of all nations.

Third, the consecration and ordination of the priests (29) Aaron and his sons were weak and sinful men, but God called them to serve him as priests. How amazing it is that God has hope for such people. But God did not leave Aaron and his sons as sinful, weak people. He provided a way to cleanse them of sin. The animal sacrifices described in chapter 29 were sin offerings to consecrate and ordain them. Consecration means to make holy. They were consecrated by the sprinkling of the blood. Ordination means to be entrusted with a responsibility. This also required a blood sacrifice, for it represents life commitment. After the priests had been purified by blood, they could offer sacrifices on the altar each day for the sins of the people. These weak and sinful men were chosen, consecrated and ordained to God's service. This was God's amazing grace. God still calls weak sinners to his service. He consecrates us through the blood of Jesus and gives us his work to do.

Through the blood sacrifices in the Tent of Meeting, God would come and dwell with his people. 29:45,46 say, "Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their

God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God."

III. The construction of the tabernacle (35-40)

The construction of the tabernacle did not begin immediately. When Moses came down from the mountain, he had to deal with the incident of the golden calf. After receiving the law a second time, Moses assembled the people and made three announcements: the people must work hard for six days and keep the Sabbath day holy; the people should make a freewill offering to collect necessary materials; and every man to whom God had given skill and ability should come forward to help make the things the Lord had commanded Moses to make.

First, the people responded joyfully. Everyone whose heart moved him, both men and women brought their most precious possessions. They brought so much that Moses had to tell them to stop (36:2-7). God had given special ability to Bezalel and Oholiab, and to others as well. When God called them, they went to work with joy and enthusiasm and gave their hearts to God's work. Everyone did what he could, and they all worked hard. There was no complaining or grumbling during those days of working hard for the Lord (35:21-29). The atmosphere in the camp must have been like heaven. We also must prepare a place for God to come and dwell among us by repentance and prayer; we must give our material possessions and our time and effort joyfully and liberally.

Second, just as the Lord commanded Moses. The phrase, "just as the Lord commanded Moses," is found at least 20 times in chapters 35-40. The tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priestly garments were constructed exactly as the Lord commanded Moses (39:42,43). Moses himself was the most careful to do everything just as the Lord commanded him. It was a mark of his humility and of his greatness. Learning to obey the word of the Lord is the most important lesson which God's people have to learn. God's covenant promise to Israel has but one condition: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession..." (19:5)

Third, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (40). "Then the Lord said to Moses: 'Set up the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the first month...' (40:1,2) Moses erected the tabernacle just as the Lord commanded. He consecrated and ordained Aaron and his sons as priests, as the Lord had commanded.

Moses finished everything (40:33). Read 40:34-35. "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." The Lord God had come to dwell with his people.

The tabernacle was made to travel. It was a tent that could be taken down and folded up. Its furnishings were equipped with rings and poles. Everything was ready to travel. God was a pilgrim God, and God's people were a pilgrim people. Their life was a life of wandering in the wilderness. However, they were not restless wanderers. They had a sure destination--they were on their way to the promised land. God's people are always strangers and pilgrims in the world. We are also a pilgrim people, for we are traveling toward the celestial city, the kingdom of heaven. Some people feel secure only if they are traveling a well-marked superhighway. But our God leads us one step at a time and asks his pilgrim people to follow him by faith. Look at 40:36. "In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out...."

We have learned from studying the tabernacle that God wants a blood-bought sanctuary in every man's heart, so that he may come in and dwell. God wants to dwell among his people so that he can raise us as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Let's read 25:8. "God said to Moses, 'Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.'"