

Introduction: The Contributions for Building the Tabernacle (v1-7)

The LORD said to Moses, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. ³ And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴ blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, ⁵ tanned rams' skins, goatskins,^[a] acacia wood, ⁶ oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁷ onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

Verses 1-7 describe the various contributions that were to be made for the building of the tabernacle. Over the next few weeks we will hear the uses for all these things.

Of course, the Israelites had been slaves.

Where would *slaves* have obtained all these things?

Remember back to the Exodus:

before they left Egypt,

God had told them to ask the Egyptians for gold, silver, and clothing.

The Egyptians were so eager to let them go

that they willingly gave their former slaves all sorts of goods
in order to get rid of them!

Now the LORD calls Israel to take up a contribution.

And notice the way it is to be done: “From every man whose heart moves him...”

There is no specified percentage.

It is interesting to note that this same pattern is later used for the construction of the temple.

And this principle is the one that Paul appeals to when he talks in 2 Corinthians 8-9
about the “cheerful giver.”

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart...”

Yes, there are other principles and patterns in the scripture that are useful as well,

but it is important to note that Paul highlights *this one* in his discussion of giving.

Why?

Because Paul thinks of the church as a holy temple.

The contributions for the building of the tabernacle in Exodus

are a picture of how we are to give of ourselves to extend the kingdom of Jesus
(as Paul says of the Macedonians – “they gave themselves first to the Lord
and then by the will of God to us.” 8:5).

After all, we *are* the holy dwelling place of God by his Spirit.

In response, let us sing Psalm 122 – a song of ascents –

a song that Israel would sing as they were going up to Jerusalem for a feast.

Sing Psalm 122
Read Hebrews 9

Verse 5 says “Of these things we cannot now speak in detail” –
but when you think about how the rest of the chapter explains the most important things
(the meaning of the sanctuary – the sacrifices – and the priesthood),
you can see how the details of the sanctuary fit together.

Hebrews says that the structure of the Tabernacle reflects the structure of history.
The first section of the tabernacle – the holy place –
represents “the present age.”
The inner part of the sanctuary – the most holy place –
represents the age to come.

In the OT, the way was not yet open into the heavenly holy of holies – the age to come.
Moses went up the mountain and met with God.
But throughout the OT, only the high priest could imitate that –
going into the earthly Holy of Holies just once a year.

What Jesus does is offer his own blood as the perfect sacrifice that opens the way
into the heavenly Holy of Holies –
“he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

So what Hebrews is saying is that the structure of worship
is built around the structure of redemptive history.

If you think about it,
there is a liturgy – there is a worship practice –
for whatever story defines you – for whatever vision of the good life drives you.

James K. A. Smith gives an example of the liturgy of the shopping mall,
which is driven by the consumer gospel – the consumer version of the kingdom.

He gives several examples of the narrative that drives us:
“I’m broken, therefore I shop” –
when I am feeling depressed or sad, I go shopping, and then I feel better.
Or “I shop with others” – or at least, in comparison with others –
I evaluate myself and my value in comparison to others –
as the mall evangelizes me – telling me that I am in competition with others.
And I wind up objectifying myself – as well as others –
by thinking that I need to keep up with others.

As Smith puts it,
“The mall holds out consumption *as* redemption in two senses.
In one sense, the shopping itself is construed as a kind of therapy,
a healing activity, a way of dealing with the sadness and frustration of our broken world.
The mall offers a sanctuary and a respite that – at least for a time –
cover over the doldrums of our workaday existence...”

In another sense, the *goal* of shopping is the acquisition of goods and the enjoyment of services that try to address what's wrong with us...

To shop is to seek and to find:

we come with a sense of need...and the mall promises something to address that.” (50)

But here's the problem:

“When the shopping excursion is over...

we find that we've come back to the same old 'real world' we left.” (51)

The liturgy of the market – the liturgy of consumption –

trains us to invest “stuff” with a meaning and significance as objects of love and desire.

“I love my i-phone!”

But in Exodus 25, God is training us towards a different goal – a better vision of what really matters.

“Make Me a Sanctuary...Exactly as I Show You Concerning the Pattern of the Tabernacle” (v8-9)

⁸ *And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. ⁹ Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.*

Notice the point of all this:

“that I may dwell in their midst.”

God wants to live – to dwell – with his people.

He wants to be *near* us.

But as we have seen in Exodus 19-24,

the problem is that Israel is *not* holy.

They *say* that they will be holy – that they will do all that the LORD commands –

but in reality (as we will see again in a few chapters)

they do whatever they feel like.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray –

each one turns to his own way.

We prefer our own selfish little kingdom of ME –

rather than loving and serving the LORD.

And so God is beginning to teach us how we can draw near to him.

How can we draw near to a holy God?

Let me give you a brief overview:

The tabernacle was a tent,

around 45 feet long, 15 feet high, and 15 feet wide.

(So imagine a space about the same size as one of the sides of this building).

This tent had two compartments in it –

the holy place – where the priests would do their daily duties,

burning incense, partaking of the bread of the presence, and tending the lamps;

and then the most holy place – where only the high priest could enter once a year –
where the ark of the covenant was found.

These two compartments were separated by a veil – a curtain.

The tabernacle was surrounded by a courtyard of linen curtains
150 feet long and 75 feet wide (around the size of our parking lot).

The courtyard had two main items in it:
the bronze altar of burnt offering
and the bronze basin for ceremonial washings.

What is going on here?

Simplify the picture here:

you have a tent – you have a yard – and you have a stove.

In other words,

you have a place to live (a tent)
you have a place to meet (a yard)
and you have a place to cook (a stove).

Israel knew all about tents – they lived in tents!

They gathered in front of their tents to talk and cook and wash and eat.

What God is doing here is saying, “I have brought you to myself at Sinai.

I will now leave Sinai, my holy mountain,
and I will join you in a tent
and travel with you – and eat with you –
until I bring you to the Promised Land.”

In other words, the central point of Exodus 25-40 foreshadows John’s words,
“And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.”

Vern Poythress says this beautifully:

God’s tent “had rooms and a yard and a fireplace like their own.

Yet it was also unlike their own.

It was majestic, covered with gold and blue.

It was beautiful...

God was saying that He was majestic and beautiful.

But he would not simply remain in heaven and let Israel go its way.

He would come right down among them.” (p12)

Today we are looking at the furniture of the sanctuary:

first, the ark of the covenant;

second, the mercy seat – the cover – of the ark of the covenant;

third, the table for the bread of the presence;

and finally, the golden lampstand.

As we go through the tabernacle and its furnishings,

I want you to pay attention to the details.

Where is the *gold* in the tabernacle?

Where is the silver? The bronze?
When do you use wood?
When do you use pure gold?
God is teaching us in these things.
Because everything we talk about *today* in chapter 25 is made of gold –
or at least overlaid with gold –
because everything is in the holy place.

And even the *order* of things matters.
For instance, the *first* thing that is described is the ark.

1. “Make an Ark” – The Importance of the Written Word (v10-16)

¹⁰ “They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits^[b] and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹ You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. ¹² You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. ¹³ You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴ And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. ¹⁵ The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. ¹⁶ And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.

In pagan temples, the most important thing is the statue of the deity.
The statue of the deity becomes the representation of the deity’s presence and power.
Ancient peoples did not think that the statue *was* the deity!
Instead, they believed that the power and presence of the deity
was focused on that place –
and therefore, prayers offered to the deity in that place
(accompanied by the proper rituals)
could move the deity to act on their behalf.

It is remarkable, therefore, that there is no visible representation of deity in the tabernacle.

The ark of the covenant holds the “testimony that I shall give you” –
namely, the stone tablets of the ten commandments
(and in Ex 16 we heard that a jar of manna should also be placed in it,
and later in Numbers we will hear that Aaron’s rod will also go in the ark).
But the focus here in Exodus 25 is on the “testimony that I shall give you.”

The written word of God – the Ten Commandments –
is at the *heart* of worship.

And remember what we have seen repeatedly –
that that the Ten Commandments *begin* with the story of redemption:
“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Verse 15 highlights the *holiness* of the ark.
The ark is so holy that the poles of the ark should *never* be removed.

Why?

Because *no one* should *ever* touch the ark.
The ark of the covenant is God's footstool.

No one but God should ever touch the ark!

In the book of Samuel we learn how important the ark is.

In the days of Eli the high priest,

the Israelites were convinced that the ark was a magic talisman.

So when the Philistines attacked, they took the ark of the covenant out to battle.

At first the Philistines were afraid –

they believed that the God of Israel had come to battle against them!

(In 1 Samuel 4:8 we hear the cry of the Philistines:

“Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods?

These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.

Take courage, and be men, O Philistines,

lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you;
be men and fight.”)

But the LORD was *not* with Israel that day –

because Israel had rebelled against the LORD.

And so the Philistines defeated Israel – killed the two sons of Eli –

and *captured* the ark of the covenant.

That same day, when Eli heard the news about the ark, he fell over and died –

and when his pregnant daughter-in-law heard the news,

she went into labor – gave birth – and died,

naming her son, “Ichabod” – which means “no glory” –

for she said, “the glory has departed from Israel,

for the ark of God has been captured.” (1 Sam 4:22)

The Philistines then took the ark to Ashdod and placed the ark of the covenant in the temple of Dagon.

Then the weirdness really starts.

Because the next morning, the statue of Dagon is found lying on its face before the ark!

The Philistines thought that was a little odd,

but they simply set Dagon back up in his place.

The next morning, Dagon was again found on his face –

but this time his head and his hands were cut off!

Think about that for a moment.

What is God doing?

Israel thinks that the ark is a magic talisman that gives them victories.

So God makes clear – no, that's not the way I work.

But the Philistines think that their gods are more powerful than Yahweh.

So God makes clear – no, that's not the way I work!

How does God work?

God is captured by his enemies.
He descends into hell.
To put it another way, God goes *alone* into the jaws of death
in order to defeat his enemies – *alone* – single-handed.

He is about to call David as the king who will deliver his people from the Philistines.
But *before he does that* he himself goes alone into the jaws of hell
to go before his people to single-handedly defeat his enemies.

If you think about it, Jesus *is* the God who goes before his people –
and the Man – the King like David – who goes before his people.

But of course, David will also learn a hard lesson about the ark!

Because only the priests are allowed to carry the ark (by its poles).
David will learn this the hard way
when he has the ark brought to Jerusalem by ox cart!
One of the oxen stumbled –
and the ark was about to tumble off the cart,
and so Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark,
and God struck him dead – because he dared to touch the ark!

R. C. Sproul has said this well –
Uzzah’s problem was that he thought that the human hand was cleaner than dirt.
He was afraid that the ark would be dishonored by hitting the dirt.

But *God* had said that the ark was to be carried by the priests.
No one should ever touch the ark of the covenant.

(I suspect that this is why Jesus cautioned Mary not to touch him –
He *is* the ark of the covenant.
He had not yet ascended to the Father.
Only when he ascends to the Father and pours out the Holy Spirit
will his people be cleansed and sanctified.
Only then can we enter the Holy of Holies *through the curtain*
that is, through the body – the flesh – of Jesus.)

2. “Make a Mercy Seat” – God Speaks from Between the Cherubim (v17-22)

¹⁷ “You shall make a mercy seat^[c] of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ¹⁸ And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. ¹⁹ Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. ²⁰ The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. ²¹ And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you.

Many combine the mercy seat with the ark of the covenant –

but the text of Exodus 25 clearly identifies it as a distinct piece of work.

After all, the ark is made of acacia wood – overlaid with gold –
but the mercy seat is made of *pure gold*.

The mercy seat functions as a lid or cover for the ark.

But there are two things about it that are especially important:

First, in verse 18 we are told that there are two cherubim of gold – one on each end.
The cherubim are the guardians of the holy place.

Back in Genesis 3, when the LORD banished Adam and Eve from the Garden,
the LORD placed the cherubim – and a flaming sword –
to guard the way –
to prevent anyone from entering the Garden.

The Garden was the original Holy of Holies on earth.

It was the place where God walked and talked with his people.

Adam had been called to guard and protect the Garden.

But Adam failed.

Adam allowed the Serpent's voice to win the day –
and so humanity was banished from the Garden –
and the cherubim were placed at the gate
to prevent humanity from entering God's presence.

So now, when God commands Moses to build a tabernacle
according to the pattern shown on the mountain,
we see the cherubim again as the guardians of the holy place.

But the most important part of the mercy seat is verse 22:

²² There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

There I will meet with you.

There I will speak with you.

Why is this important?

Because for the last 400 years, God had been silent.

God had promised Abraham three things: the Land and the Seed and the Blessing to the Nations

And now God is beginning to reveal his purposes –
the plan of salvation.

God will be *present* with his people.

No longer will they travel in silence.

God has now spoken!

And he continues to speak and to lead – so that Israel can learn his ways.

And God speaks with Moses from above the mercy seat.

The term “mercy seat” could also be translated “atonement cover.”

The focus of the term is on reconciliation –

because this is the place where the high priest will make atonement once each year.

And this is where Hebrews says that Jesus has gotten past the guardian cherubim!

He has offered his own blood as the atoning sacrifice.

And by becoming that once-for-all sacrifice,

Jesus brings us with him into the heavenly Holy of Holies,

where we are welcomed to partake of his covenant meal.

3. “Make a Table” – The Bread of the Presence and the Covenant Meal (v23-30)

²³ “You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ²⁴ You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it.

²⁵ And you shall make a rim around it a handbreadth^[d] wide, and a molding of gold around the rim.

²⁶ And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs.

²⁷ Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table. ²⁸ You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. ²⁹ And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. ³⁰ And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.

In every home there is a table.

Tables are for food – they are places where people gather to eat.

And so God commands Moses to make a table for the Tabernacle.

Later, in Leviticus, the LORD will explain the details of the bread of the Presence.

There are to be twelve loaves – one for each tribe –

and only the priests were to eat the bread of the Presence.

And likewise there are to be flagons and bowls for drink offerings –

highlighting the importance of bread and wine at the Table of the LORD.

Why does God have bread in the sanctuary?

We saw a few weeks ago how God provided manna in the wilderness –
bread from heaven – to feed his people and provide for them.

Now Israel is to set the bread of the Presence on the table before God.

It is called the “bread of the Presence” because it is the bread that is set before God.

God wants to share a meal with his people.

And he is preparing his people for understanding what the “bread of the Presence” really is.

Because “When Jesus says that he is the bread of life,

he shows that he is the heavenly original of which these things are copies,
both in creation and in redemption.” (Poythress, 21)

And finally we turn to the lampstand:

4. “Make a Lampstand” – The Tree of Life and Light (v31-39)

³¹ “You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. ³² And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; ³³ three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. ³⁴ And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers, ³⁵ and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. ³⁶ Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. ³⁷ You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. ³⁸ Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. ³⁹ It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent^[e] of pure gold.

The lampstand – like the mercy seat – is made of pure gold.

There are six branches – three on each side – and one in the middle –
so there are seven lamps.

Each of the branches will look like an almond branch – with calyx and flower –
so that the lampstand will resemble a golden tree – shining – glowing.

And since there is so much gold in the holy place,
the whole room would glimmer with a golden light.

Why are there seven lamps?

In the ancient world, everyone knew about the seven lights –
the sun, the moon, and the five planets.

Again, this would fit with the creation account,
when God created the sun, moon, and stars for signs and for seasons.

The seven lamps would correspond also to the seven days of the week,
the seventh month is the month of atonement –
the seventh year is the sabbatical year of release from debts and slavery –
the seventh sabbatical year – the 50th year – is the year of Jubilee.

In Revelation 4:5 we see before the throne of God seven torches of fire,
“which are the seven spirits of God.”

(it might be better to translate this, the “sevenfold Spirit of God” –
since Isaiah 11 speaks of a sevenfold Spirit
being upon the shoot from the stump of Jesse).

And the branches are designed like almond branches – with flowers and fruit –
because the Hebrew word for “almond” sounds like the Hebrew word for “watching” –
(a point that God makes to Jeremiah)
and the lampstand reminds us that God is watching – God is waiting –
God is shining his light into the darkness in order to make his word come to pass.

Poythress again says this well:

“The tree is truly both a tree of light and a tree of life.

The reproductive living power of the tree is in its fruit, that is, the light,
which shines on the earth and sustains its growth.
As John says of Jesus,
“Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made that has been made.
In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:3-4).” [19]

In the Tabernacle, Eden is restored.
But also in the Tabernacles, the *problem* of Eden remains:
the cherubim guarding the access to the Holy of Holies.
God now dwells with his people –
living in a holy tent in the midst of his holy people.

But his people cannot draw near.
His people cannot eat a meal together with him.
(As we saw last time from Exodus 24 –
only 70 elders could eat – part way up the mountain...)

“See That You Make Them After the Pattern...Shown You on the Mountain” (v40)

⁴⁰ *And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.*

By now it should be clear that the pattern that Moses saw on the mountain was Jesus.
Moses does not seem to have understood that yet!
After all, the heavenly glory was too brilliant
to be seen clearly by those whose eyes were used to darkness.
In Colossians 2:17, Paul speaks of the “shadows” of the Old Testament –
and says that the substance – or the *body that casts the shadow* – is Christ.

What is the point of all these shadows?
And more to the point – why does it *matter* for us?

It matters because Jesus is risen from dead!
We now have access into the heavenly Holy of Holies.
The outpouring of the Holy Spirit means that God has done for Jesus
all that he promised and foreshadowed through Moses.
And so Paul goes on to say in Colossians 3:1-7
“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.
For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:
sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.
On account of these the wrath of God is coming.
In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.”

That was who you *once* were –
back in the days when you were out in the courtyard – far from God.

But in Christ, that's not who you are anymore!
You are no longer out in the courtyard, watching from a distance –
in Christ, you have been brought near.
Jesus became all that the Tabernacle symbolized –
so that he might bring you near to himself.

And so Paul goes on to say that you *have* put off the old self – you have *died* with Christ!
You *have* put on the new self – you have been *raised* with Christ!