

DEVOTIONAL 5



GOD IN OUR MIDST

EXODUS 25:1-9, 26:1-6, 37:1-9

^{25:1} 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, 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. 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.

^{26:1} “Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. ² The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be the same size. ³ Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. ⁴ And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. ⁵ Fifty loops you shall make on the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. ⁶ And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole.

^{37:1} Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ² And he overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. ³ And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. ⁴ And he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold ⁵ and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark. ⁶ And he made a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ⁷ And he made two cherubim of gold. He made them of hammered work on the two ends of the mercy seat, ⁸ one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. ⁹ The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim.

DAY 1

EXODUS 25:1-7

¹ 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, 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.

This time at Sinai was an intense period of learning for Israel. God had to grow a nation out of a people that had neither the skills, knowledge, or experience to live as the community he wanted them to be. Exodus 12 points to the fact that the Israelites had flocks and herds when they left Egypt. In addition, they asked the Egyptians for “silver and gold jewelry and for clothing” (v. 35). The text even says they “plundered the Egyptians” of their wealth (v. 36). They left Egypt with considerable resources, but they had to learn how to use those resources in the context of a new nation. So Sinai was their nation-building academy.

One of the first things they had to learn in that academy was how to handle these newly acquired resources. The building of the tabernacle was a hands-on community project that became an important learning experience. Through the planning and building process, they learned about money. They had their own Dave Ramsey seminar.

They had to realize and fully understand where their wealth came from. They needed to be good stewards of what God had given them. All the resources they got from the Egyptians were not to be held privately. A significant portion was to be used to build the tabernacle, which was for the whole community. God expected generosity. He expected their hearts to be “moved” to make offerings of the materials that were essential for the tabernacle. These offerings were to be gifts from the heart.

They were also learning that wealth should be used to glorify God; they were not supposed to just hang on to it for themselves. The tabernacle would be right in the middle of their camp every day. It was a structure that reminded them of God’s glory every time they looked at it or entered it. It was their primary place of worship, where all their attention was to be on this God who had saved them and brought them out of Egypt to be a new people and a new nation. They had a glorious God, and this glorious God needed a glorious place in which to live in their midst. They were to assemble the tabernacle with the finest materials they had and with the utmost care to be a beautiful dwelling place that glorified God just by being there.

PRAYER

Lord, we live in a world where personal wealth-building can be a preoccupation that distorts and corrupts our lives. Thank you for the biblical teaching that gives us a balanced perspective on our money. Thank you for all the reminders that everything in the world is really yours. Help us to live daily with this teaching in mind, and to give you glory by the way we manage the resources you have given us.

DAY 2

EXODUS 25: 8

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

The Bible begins with God creating a world and a people with whom he can dwell. He builds a sanctuary/garden on the top of the mountain of Eden (Ezekiel 28:13,14) where God can dwell and walk among his people.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.
(Genesis 3:8)

Adam and Eve corrupted the sanctuary in their rebellion against God and were kicked out of the sanctuary and God's presence. Even though there were consequences for their sin, God graciously provided them with clothing and reestablished his presence with them outside the garden. We see this when Cain murders Abel. He is cast out from God's presence and says, "From your face I shall be hidden" (Genesis 4:14).

Throughout the book of Genesis, God is continually establishing his presence among his people and providing sanctuary for them. Noah and his family take sanctuary in the ark. God calls Abraham and his family to follow him as they live in tents in the midst of the wilderness. God calls Isaac to follow him and he establishes his tents by the wells. God meets with Jacob at the "house of God" or "gates of heaven."

Now finally in Egypt, the Israelites have grown into a mighty people, but they have been enslaved by the Egyptians. God hears their voice and calls them out of Egypt, not merely to be rescued from slavery but so they can serve God. But God does rescue Israel and brings them to Mount Sinai so that he can meet with them. At Sinai, he gives Israel the plans for a new sanctuary, one that would allow Israel to carry God's presence with them through the wilderness as they journey to the promised land.

Eventually the tabernacle gives way to the building of the temple under King Solomon, a more permanent building in the promised land. Whether the tabernacle or the temple, neither is a guarantee of God's presence as God's presence can abandon the sanctuary. Israel continually corrupts the sanctuary through their sin, eventually leading to the temple's destruction by Babylon. Again, God redeems them from their captivity and Israel rebuilds the temple.

However, all these sanctuaries failed to achieve a lasting dwelling place for God in the midst of his people. Israel's history reveals that the chief cause for this failure was Israel's sin. It is only in Jesus, God's presence that tabernacled with us in the incarnation, that we can now draw near to God. Since Jesus has dealt with sin through his death, we can now draw near to God's presence in the heavenly tabernacle opened up for us through his blood. And it is through the Holy Spirit, sent by the ascended Jesus, that we ourselves become the dwelling place of God. Through Jesus, God has established a permanent dwelling by dealing with our sin. This will one day lead to the time when the Father will come and dwell with his people face to face. When heaven will come down to earth and the whole earth will be the temple filled with God's glory.

PRAYER

Dear Father, we long for the day when we can walk, feast, and see you face to face. Thank you for your grace and mercy in continuing to pursue us despite our rebellion. Thank you for sending your Son to deal with our sin. Thank you for sending your Spirit that your presence may dwell in us. Give us wisdom in how we may serve as your presence here on earth.

DAY 3

EXODUS 25:9

Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

Yesterday, we saw that God had commanded his newly redeemed people to construct a sanctuary so that he could dwell among them, his purpose and pattern since creation. Today, we see how he qualified his command by saying he expected them to follow exactly in every detail the pattern he would give for this sanctuary. Obviously, this dwelling place is critically important to God. “Exactly” and “everything” do not leave room for personal opinions or majority decisions. This place of worship is critical because it will picture who God is and what he has done to redeem lost and condemned sinners.

Let’s think about some things we can learn about God and his ways through this pattern:

God himself defines acceptable worship. The careful details he prescribes all carry meaning. Many years later, Jesus told a Samaritan woman that her people worshipped something they did not know, for salvation came only through the Jews. He was saying that ignorant worship, though it may be well-intentioned, is not acceptable. God defines worship and accepts nothing but the sacrifice of Jesus.

God is holy and cannot overlook or tolerate sin. All the patterns and prescriptions for tabernacle worship centered on sinners finding acceptance with a holy God through the blood/life of a substitute. All the blood and ritual cleansing required constantly reminded them that a holy God cannot accept sinful people.

God works through his people. He did not cause a tabernacle to magically appear in the camp. He accomplished his purpose through the talents, contributions, and hard work of ordinary people. Worship was experienced as human life is experienced—by seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. God values our humanity.

God loves beauty, for his perfect holiness is beautiful and he is the source of all beauty. Famous poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: “Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty back to God, beauty’s self and beauty’s giver.” The sanctuary of worship would be a place of beauty.

God uses costly materials lavishly! The most precious metal, gold, was on display everywhere in the tabernacle. In his encouraging letter to suffering believers centuries later, Peter reminded them that they had been redeemed by something more precious than gold. God lavished his grace on us through the costly gift of his only Son.

Our verse for today (Ex. 25:9) is quoted by the author of Hebrews as he describes the superior work and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:5). He reveals the meaning of this verse and why God was so uncompromising in his prescription for the tabernacle when he says it was a “copy and shadow” of the worship actually happening in heaven through the atoning sacrifice and continual intercession of our Savior. His comparison was not between what is false or true, unspiritual or spiritual, material or ethereal, but between what was temporal and eternal, provisional and permanent, copy and original. From eternity, God created patterns and rhythms that would shape our lives on earth toward the perfect worship we will experience when we gather with all the redeemed in our permanent home, the home of righteousness.

What a day that will be!

PRAYER

Loving Father, you have lavished your love on us! We see ourselves as unworthy sinners in the light of your holiness. Yet you have invited us to call you Abba. Beautiful Savior, you have embraced our humanity and invited us to be your friends. Open our spiritual eyes to see you at work in the ordinary people and places of our lives, even as we fix our eyes on what is yet unseen. We wait and work in hope. We love you, Lord! Amen.

DAY 4

EXODUS 26:1-6

¹“Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. ² The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be the same size. ³ Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. ⁴ And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. ⁵ Fifty loops you shall make on the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. ⁶ And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole.

God directed the Israelites to construct the tabernacle with only the best materials. Not only that, these materials and some of the symbols, like cherubim, point backwards and forwards at the same time. God wanted the Israelites to remember where they came from (Garden) and where they were headed (City). He was orchestrating His dwelling place with His people, just as he had done in the Garden with Adam and Eve. To the Israelites this would have been a great comfort, a reminder that God has not changed, His desires for His people to dwell with Him in a physical space still stands.

Are there places that remind you of God’s presence? Do you have a favorite place to sit, stand, kneel as you think, pray and contemplate your relationship with the Lord? If not, consider finding a place this week. Maybe it’s a chair in your house where you can see some of nature. Perhaps it’s outside in nature, or in a busy corridor of people. Wherever it is, it should remind you of God’s ever presence in your life.

Just think, God decided to dwell with His people in a tent. Of course this would change to the temple over time, but of all the places in the cosmos, God chose here. His intent is to dwell with His people, right here, right now. That is where King Jesus enters. Jesus, the High Priest and better covenant to God’s people, the better tent, was sent to dwell with His people.

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

Hebrews 9:11-14

When we encounter stories of God’s faithfulness to His people of old, it should remind us of His faithfulness to the people of now and forever more. From Garden to City, God is gracious to His people, desiring to dwell with them.

PRAYER

Father in Heaven. Thank you that you have made a way for us. That you chose to dwell with your people from Adam to Jesus to the end of time. Your desire is to be glorified by your people, and that we might enjoy a relationship with you. Give us the mindfulness to feel and sense your presence. To know that you are working through the Holy Spirit to lead us unto everlasting life, with you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAY 5

EXODUS 27:1-9

¹ Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ² And he overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. ³ And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. ⁴ And he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold ⁵ and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark. ⁶ And he made a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ⁷ And he made two cherubim of gold. He made them of hammered work on the two ends of the mercy seat, ⁸ one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. ⁹ The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim.

In the 1981 film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the Nazis were after the Ark of the Covenant because of their belief that it had power to level mountains and lay waste regions. It was their belief that any army that possessed the Ark would become invincible. In their mind, the Ark was the original weapon of mass destruction. As with most of Hollywood's interactions with the Bible, there is a mixture of truth and error. In Israel's subsequent history, we do see interactions with the Ark resulting in death (cf. 1 Sam. 5,6; 2 Sam. 6), but that is not its primary purpose nor what we see here in Exodus.

Here we come to the Holy of Holies in the very center, or heart, of the tabernacle. The Ark is the only piece of furniture within the Holy of Holies. The Ark is a wonderfully ornamented box, measuring about 45 inches by 27 inches, meant to symbolize the very place where God would meet his people. The centerpiece of the Ark was the gold inlaid "mercy seat" situated between the two cherubim. The High Priest would approach the mercy seat and sprinkle the blood of a spotless lamb upon it as a symbol of the atonement required to meet God. Rather than a weapon of mass destruction, the Ark was the symbol of mercy and meeting for God and his people.

In the New Testament, particularly in the book of John, we see what the Ark prefigured fulfilled in “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (Jn 1:29). Later in the book, we meet Mary Magdalene as she comes to the tomb of Christ. John 20:12 tells us that “*she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.*” As the two cherubim (angels) watched over the mercy seat of the Ark, so these two angels watched over THE ultimate sacrifice of atonement, Jesus. And now, no longer is any Ark needed. We come into the Holy of Holies each time we approach our God, trusting in the finished work of Christ.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for your willingness to become the Lamb who would shed your blood on the mercy seat. Help us today to live with the joy of knowing that you have prepared a place for us and that the way is open. We pray this in your strong, sweet name. Amen.