

Sabbath and Construction

Exodus 35:1-19

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

April 9, 2003

If you'll open your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 35. We are moving into the very last section of the book of Exodus and Moses' record of the building of the tabernacle. And the very fact that the culminating chapters of this book of epic adventures climaxes on the story of the construction of a tent tells you something very important. Let me just say that again, take that in: all the adventure stories of the miracles in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, the adventures in the wilderness and the miracles displayed there, and the visible and verbal manifestation of God at Mount Sinai climaxes with the story of the building of a tent in Exodus 35-39. This lets you know two things. First of all it lets you know that worship is really important to God. The last thing He wants you to remember in this book is the place where the people of God are going to gather corporately to worship Him. That's what it's all been about, remember? They are saved to worship; they are saved out of Egypt into the presence of God to worship Him. The second thing it tells you is that the presence of God is really important. I mean, that's what they had risked losing in the story of the golden calf. And the fact that the tabernacle is being built at all says that God, in His grace and mercy had determined, despite their own sin, to be present with them, to draw near to them, to be favorable to them, to fellowship with them, to commune with them.

And so the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 35-39, far from being an anti-climax, though it may read to you like an anti-climax when you're working through that section in your personal devotions. It may be a little hard to get through Oholiab and Uri's task list, you know, and figure out something that that's going to give you an "umph" during that particular day in your Bible reading. But look at the big picture when you're there. When you're reading through Exodus 35-39 by yourself one winter morning with a cup of coffee and trying to figure out what this is going to get you, here's what it's going to get you: that all of this was what God was looking for, that His people would worship Him, that He would draw near to them, that they would commune with Him, and that He would dwell in their midst. This is a climax; this is not an anti-climax.

You remember how J.R.R. Tolkien ends the *Lord of the Rings*? You know it doesn't end with a big battle, it ends in the Shire and everybody's back home in the little Shire. That's how the *Lord of the Rings* ends. I know they eventually go

across to the White Havens, and all, but it ends really in the Shire. And a lot of people, even Peter Jackson, the guy who's doing all the screenplay said, "You know, I never understood that part." You know he's going to leave that out of the third movie; no scouring of the Shire, he's going to kill Saruman off early in the third movie and no scouring ... this means nothing to 35 percent of you, I understand. This really means a lot to some of us Tolkien fanatics, however. But Jackson said, "I never did get it, I never did get the scouring of the Shire." But you know the Shire is the whole deal in the *Lord of the Rings* because it represents that idyllic life of repose that's worth living and fighting for in the hard things of this world. That's what the Hobbits want to get back to, they want to get back to the Shire. You know, the Cotswold, the heart of old England, that's what it's all about, you know. Well here, you know here it may look like this is an anti-climax in Exodus 35-39; it's not. This is what it's all been about, all those grand adventures from Exodus 1-25 and then in 32-34, all those adventures lead up to this: the people of God worshiping God and experiencing His presence.

Now let me just say a couple of things: Exodus 35-39 duplicates a lot of material that we had already heard about when we worked through Exodus 25-30, and a little bit in 31. That reduplication by Moses is deliberate. It's not identical, but that reduplication is deliberate. For one thing, the tenses of the verbs change. You know, in verses 25-31, God is telling Moses what the people of Israel "shall do." In verses 35-39, Moses is telling you what they "were doing" that God had commanded them to do. And so, the difference between verses 25-31 and 35-39 is first, that God is giving the command, and then the people of God are fulfilling it.

That's important for two reasons. One reason it's really important because what was the big thing that the people of God had messed up on in the golden calf? They had messed up by doing it their way, and so a gazillion times in Exodus 35-39 God just throws in this little phrase, "Just as the Lord commanded...Just as the Lord commanded...Just as the Lord commanded." What's being emphasized is that the people understood how they had messed up with the golden calf and now they were finished for then, with doing it their way, and they were going to do it the Lord's way.

So that's a really important part, but you know the fact that they're building that tabernacle at all also tells you that God in His mercy, was not only gracious to spare them from their sins, but He was willing to still come and dwell in their midst. The very fact that they're building that tabernacle which He had given the instructions to Moses for, is a sign of His grace. They deserved to be blasted and having not been blasted, not only does God spare them, but He goes right ahead and enters into fellowship and communion with them through this tabernacle. So the repetition of that material serves to remind us of those truths.

Now the context of the passage we're going to read is, of course, in the wake of the covenant renewal that occurred in Exodus 34. As God sent Moses back

down the mountain to the people of God with the rewritten tablets of stone, those stone tablets represented the fact that that covenant which the people had broken had been reconfirmed and reinstated and reinaugurated and fixed by God and that God was in covenant relationship with them. And we see God's grace in the second giving of the Law and in the recarved commands and in allowing the tabernacle to proceed. So with all of that as introduction, let's turn to God's Word in Exodus 35 beginning in verse 1 and we'll read 19 verses in this chapter:

Exodus 35:1-19

Amen. This is God's Word, may He add his blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and God, we bow before You. We thank you for Your word. Teach us from it now. Behold, enable us to embrace the truth of Your word and behold wonderful things from Your law. In Jesus' name, Amen.

There are several great lessons I want to draw to your attention in this passage and just let me outline four of them for you very quickly. One is this: the building of the tabernacle was to be a project of all the people because worship and God's presence is the business of all God's people. Two, the building of the tabernacle does not displace the creational ordinance and covenant sign of the Sabbath; that's going to be emphasized in this passage. Three, the people's giving is expected, commanded, and voluntary. How do those go together? Expected, commanded, and voluntary — you'll see in this passage. And four, the tabernacle construction is to proceed strictly by the Lord's command, unlike the worship of the golden calf. We're going to see each of those in this passage.

The passage outlines very easily; it's a three-part outline. In verses 1-3 we see the command of the Lord to keep the Sabbath. You remember that the section before the story of the golden calf ended with the commands about the Sabbath. Isn't it interesting, that's right where we start again. So verses 1-3 deal with the command for complete Sabbath rest. Then if you look at verses 4-9, here you see the command for a contribution. Here we see the command for Moses for the people to make a willing contribution to the Lord. And then in verses 10-19 you see the command for construction to build the tabernacle just as the Lord commanded. And each of those sections are opened with the phrase "Just as the Lord commanded." So they are to have complete rest on the Sabbath, "Just as the Lord commanded" (1-3), they are to give a willing contribution, "Just as the Lord commanded" (verses 4-9), and then they are to build the tabernacle, "Just as the Lord commanded" (verses 10-19). So Moses himself gives you his outline of the passage with that repeated phrase, "Just as the Lord commanded." Let's look through it then quickly together. If you are looking for one-word points for each of those parts, I would do it this way: rest (verses 1-3), give (verses 4-9), build (verses 10-19). Rest, give, and build.

I. God commands a Sabbath “rest.”

Let's look at the “rest” section. In verses 1-3, Moses calls on the people to keep the Sabbath just as the Lord commanded and that point is very significant for at least a couple of reasons. For one, he's telling them that they are now, in God's mercy, going to be able to engage in this task which they have been waiting for for some time now: the task of building the tabernacle. But he says even as you begin to go into that task of building the tabernacle, remember this: don't work on the Sabbath day. Don't you build that tabernacle on the Sabbath day. You work six days, and when the Sabbath comes, don't build the tabernacle. Everybody is called before Moses in verse 1 to hear God's word; the assembly is gathered together to hear God's word. And Moses in verse 1 stresses that what he's about to deliver comes from God, not him. It's the Lord's commandment; not his commandment, it's the Lord's commandment that they are going to hear. And just as the section before the golden calf incident had ended with the Sabbath command, so this section begins with the Sabbath command. There is something beautiful about that. God has just given Moses the Sabbath command as a covenant sign at the end of Exodus 31, and the very next scene you find Moses caught up in is what? The scene of seeing the children of Israel rebelling against God. And so you go through that depressing three-chapter cycle from Exodus 32, 33, and 34, and when God in His mercy pulls them out of it, where does He start? It's almost like He says, “Now where was I? Where was I?” You know, right back to the point where he left off before all the shenanigans began.

You all know the story of John Calvin in Geneva. He was there for about two years and people got so sick and tired of him they ran him off. And he was somewhere in the middle of the gospel of Matthew. Don't you think I wasn't nervous about that when I was preaching through Matthew here. He was somewhere in the middle of the gospel of Matthew and they ran him off. Three years later, things had gone to pot in Geneva, and he was having a great time over in Strassbourg, and they sent him a letter and they said, “Calvin, come back.” Long story short, he came back. And so he gets up into the pulpit to start preaching his first Sunday back in Geneva and where does he pick up? The next verse in Matthew where he left off. That's exactly what God does here — where was I? Sabbath. Boom. That's where He starts. Right where He left off before the golden calf began. You see, the point is, even tabernacle construction takes a back seat to the people's needed rest and for the honoring of God's holy Day. It's a beautiful thing; God is so committed to their need for rest and for their need for spiritual communion and resting in Him on His Day, that He says, “Even my tabernacle, the place which visibly represents My presence on earth, even it is second, it takes a second place to the importance of your observing the Sabbath.”

And notice in verse 2, the death penalty is given as the maximum penalty for those who are Sabbath-breakers. We saw that, by the way, in Exodus 31; same

thing is given — it's reiterated in Numbers. Apparently it wasn't applied often in Israel, but let me also remind you, Jesus Himself is going to be accused of being a Sabbath-breaker and there were some people in Jesus' time that wanted to stone Him to death because they considered him to be a Sabbath-breaker. So the idea of the Sabbath being a very, very important law in Israel is one that you can get evidence for throughout the Old Testament, but here's the thing that I want to draw from it for us. It's simply this: that our 24 hour a day, seven day a week life, our 24-7 approach to life, is wrong. Now I'm not saying that it's wrong for a store to be open, you know, it's wrong for a drugstore to be open 24-7 or something like that. I understand that there are things that have to be done around the clock. I understand that physicians have to do certain things, I understand that ambulance drivers must work; I'm not picking on those folks. I'm saying that when we get into the rat race of 24-7 we are violating this principle. But isn't it interesting that God was willing to say to the Israelites, "If you decide to work 24-7, I will give you rest - I'll kill you. You're going to get rest one way or another. You're either going to rest on My Day, or I'm going to kill you." It's amazing how serious God is about your rest. Now with all the transpositions that you have to do, moving into the Christian era of Revelation, the principle still holds, doesn't it? It's a creation ordinance; God built us to need rest, and he's serious about us taking that rest. We need this divinely-given cycle of the rhythm of six days work and one day rest, so bear that in mind.

II. God's command for a contribution.

Secondly, look at verses 4-9. Here we see this command from Moses, really it's the Lord's command that Moses delivers to the people, to make a willing contribution, just as the Lord had commanded: "Give," Moses says. The people are to manifest their real desire for God's presence by free contributions given toward the tabernacle. Again, in verse 4 it's reiterated that Moses speaks to everyone and that the command he speaks is the command of the Lord. And then, lo and behold, what does he do? In verse 5, we have hear a command to give freely. A command to give freely. We have a contribution that is both voluntary and obligatory. It's free and commanded. But you know, that's how all Old Testament and New Testament giving is: it's commanded and voluntary. God commands giving, but He doesn't want unwilling givers. There's an expectation, there's a command, but it is to be willingly given. Derek and I have quoted a couple of times over the last few weeks some of these amazing speeches delivered by Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. He's an Ulsterman, a Protestant from Northern Ireland, commanding one of those British units that is in the Basra region of Iraq. He's an amazing guy. Some of the speeches he has given have been very moving. One of the things that he said to his men before they went into Iraq initially is, "Anyone here that doesn't want to go, you stay. Don't come in unless you want to be in with us." Now presumably, a commission in Her Majesty's Army is not the most voluntary of things, and yet what was he saying? He was saying, "If you don't want to be doing what we are

called to do here, I don't want you there. It's your job, but I want you to do it willingly. I want you to choose right now to do your job or don't go in with us." And I think he was totally serious. Well, that's kind of what's going on here. The Lord is saying, "This is your obligation, but I don't want it done grudgingly. I want you to do it because you want to do it." The language is almost identical to the passage that we studied in Exodus 25:1-7; the emphasis there, again was "from every man whose heart moves him, you shall raise my contribution." You see, giving is both a responsibility and a privilege. It's a duty and a delight. It serves as one external index of the priorities of our heart. Because the people of God had said, "Lord, Lord, don't destroy us and please, Lord, don't leave us, dwell with us, be close to us, draw near to us, give us Your presence." And so God says, "Okay, I'll build a tabernacle." And then He turns around to them and says, "Now, I've spared you, I've forgiven you, I've shown you My grace, I've promised to dwell in your midst. Now, you show Me that you really meant it when you said you wanted that. Give to the building of my tabernacle. You wanted My presence? Okay, show Me that you wanted My presence and show Me by willingly giving." Let me spoil next week's story: the result of this is that Moses has to go back to them and say, "Please stop giving, we've already got enough." That's what happens. This is not what you hear in typical building campaigns around churches today: Please stop giving, we've already got enough. By the way, I think for us, the application of the building of the tabernacle isn't just about bricks and mortar for us today. I think it's about building the Lord's church. That's about a lot more than just bricks and mortar.

III. God commands them to build.

Well, let's think about that as we look at verses 10-19. Here's the command to build: "Let every skillful man among you come and make all that the Lord had commanded." So along with this command for complete Sabbath rest and along with this command for a contribution, there's this command for construction: build as the Lord has commanded. The tabernacle construction itself is to proceed strictly in accordance with the Lord's command. Now, it's interesting to me that God's grace is apparent even in verse 10. Let me get you to do this: turn back to Exodus chapter 31 and look at verse 2 and verse 6. "See, I have called by my name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit" for doing all these things, and then He lists them in verses 1-5. Then look at verse 6, "Behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given them skill to make all that I have commanded you." Now turn back to Exodus 35 verse 10, "Let every man with skill among you..." Now, by the way, I don't think that is a contradiction. I think these are the guys that God put in charge. But the emphasis, you see, of Moses here in Exodus 35:10, I mean it was obvious that more than Bezalel and Oholiab were going to have to be involved doing all the stuff that was going to have to be done for the building of the tabernacle. So it was obvious that more than just those men were going to be involved in the construction. Those men had been

chosen as God's chief engineers for the plan. But Moses' emphasis, you see, in Exodus 35:10 is that every skilled man is going to participate in this.

The point is that God in His mercy is emphasizing that He is allowing rebellious sinners to participate in the declaration of His glory and in the building of the place of His presence. You see, it's a privilege for us to be able to participate in the building of His kingdom. That's one of the greatest privileges God has given us in redemption. He didn't just redeem us and say, "Okay now sit on the sidelines where I can get some real people to work for Me." He redeems us and He says, "Now look, you're a holy mess. I'm going to put you to work in building up My kingdom." And that's what we see going on in the building of the tabernacle and the way we show gratitude for grace is in relishing that responsibility that the Lord has given to us. We love it that He has put us to work! You know the attitude that says, "Aw, do I have to?" totally misses the point. The believer who has tasted of grace loves it that God has not said, "Okay, sit on the sidelines where I can get somebody really competent to do this." We feel our weakness and our unworthiness and yet God says to us, "Right, now I'm going to put you to work glorifying My name, building up My kingdom." And the believer who has received God's grace and realizes what he's like on the inside says, "This is unbelievable. You mean I get to work? You mean I get to contribute something. I get to be involved after what I've done? I get to be involved in this?" Right. And so duty is a word of delight to that believer; he loves it! You see, God's tabernacle is His own work, but in His mercy He chooses to involve us in the building up of that tabernacle.

The New Testament application of that is not so much building church buildings. It's building the body, building the church, in our total involvement in the building up of the Church. I thought, "This is a great building sermon here." And it's true, I think you can make an application, but it's a broader application than that, isn't it? It's not just about bricks and mortar. It's talking about our total involvement in the building up of the people of God. And it's a mercy that God would involve us in that. Those three things strike me as very, very important as we look at this passage. May God bless His word in your heart tonight. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we are amazed at the way you called on the children of Israel who had rebelled against you to be instruments in the declaration of your glory in the building of your tabernacle. And we're even more amazed that we who are not a people have been made your people and then given the responsibility of being hewers of wood and drawers of water in the household and fellowship the church, the assembly, the gathering of the people of God. Help us to love that and to love your church and to love your people, and to long to serve your people and to build them up and to draw into the fellowship of your people those who are not your people that they might be your people who worship and love and serve and trust in you. We pray heavenly Father that you would cause your Word to dwell in us richly. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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