

The Progress of Construction

Exodus 36:8–38:20

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If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Exodus 36. When we get to this part of Exodus, much of this material is duplicated from earlier passages in Exodus. The difference is that the earlier passages, commanding the way the tabernacle was to be built, the way the various pieces of furnishing for the tabernacle was to be built, the way that the courtyard was to be built, was God's instruction to Moses for how it would be done.

This passage, however, from Exodus 35-39, is the actual construction of it, it's recording Moses and the faithful leaders of Israel carrying out the instructions that God had previously given to Moses and in His mercy was allowing the children of Israel to begin the construction of, despite their sin of the golden calf in Exodus 32-34. So, one of the major themes in this passage is, worship according to God's word. All of this material is repeated in such intricate detail and usually almost verbatim with only a few changes — one change is in verbal tenses — you shall do such and such to they did so and so. The other change is a change in the order. Whereas there was an order of description, you remember we saw in Exodus 25 and following, that brought you from the outside in and from the inside out, with the most holy things spoken of first, and the least holy things last, but in Exodus 35-39 the order is basically that of construction. So what we have here is a description of how things were put together and in the order they were put together. Those are the only two differences.

Outside of that, the constant repetition that “they did just as had been commanded” is obviously designed to impress upon us the importance of doing exactly what God has said in His worship. Let's hear the first section of God's word, concerning the construction of the tabernacle, the tent structure itself. Remember, when you hear tabernacle, don't hear elaborate, big, ornate, big, building in Salt Lake City. This is not a cathedral, it's not even an impressive Colonial style church in the Deep South. This is a tent, an expensive tent, but it's a tent. Hear God's word, beginning in Exodus 36 verse 8:

All the skillful men among those who were performing the work made the tabernacle with ten curtains; of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet material, with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman, Bezalel

made them. The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains had the same measurements. He joined five curtains to one another and the other five curtains he joined to one another. He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set; he did likewise on the edge of the curtain that was outermost in the second set. He made fifty loops in the one curtain and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set; the loops were opposite each other. He made fifty clasps of gold and joined the curtains to one another with the clasps, so the tabernacle was a unit. Then he made curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; he made eleven curtains in all. The length of each curtain was thirty cubits and four cubits the width of each curtain; the eleven curtains had the same measurements. ¹He joined five curtains by themselves and the other six curtains by themselves. Moreover, he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was outermost in the first set, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was outermost in the second set. He made fifty clasps of bronze to join the tent together so that it would be a unit. He made a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of porpoise skins above. Then he made the boards for the tabernacle of acacia wood, standing upright. Ten cubits was the length of each board and one and a half cubits the width of each board. There were two tenons for each board, fitted to one another; thus he did for all the boards of the tabernacle. He made the boards for the tabernacle: twenty boards for the south side; and he made forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards; two sockets under one board for its two tenons and two sockets under another board for its two tenons. Then for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty boards, and their forty sockets of silver; two sockets under one board and two sockets under another board. For the rear of the tabernacle, to the west, he made six boards. He made two boards for the corners of the tabernacle at the rear. They were double beneath, and together they were complete to its top to the first ring; thus he did with both of them for the two corners. There were eight boards with their sockets of silver, sixteen sockets, two under every board. Then he made bars of acacia wood, five for the boards of one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the tabernacle for the rear side to the west. He made the middle bar to pass through in the center of the boards from end to end. He overlaid the boards with gold and made their rings of gold as holders for the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold. Moreover, he made the veil of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen; he made it with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. He made four pillars of acacia for it, and overlaid them with gold, with their hooks of gold; and he cast four sockets of silver for them. He made a screen for the doorway of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver; and he made its five pillars with their hooks, and he overlaid their tops and their bands

with gold; but their five sockets were of bronze.

Amen. This is God's word. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this, Your word. As we read through a passage, not only much like one we looked at weeks ago, but one which is exhaustive in detail, we pray that by the grace of Your Holy Spirit we would see the forest and not be blinded to that forest by the trees, and that we would see truth from Your word, inspired by Your Spirit, intended to build up the saints, and to witness to those without Christ, and that we would see that truth and embrace it in Jesus' name, Amen.

As we work through this passage we could very easily get lost in the details, but there are three things that are important. First, the repetition points to the importance of obeying God's commands in worship. Two, the tent itself, and the building of the tent, is a sign of grace in the giving of the presence of God to His people. Three, the building of the furnishings and the accoutrements of the tent, the tabernacle, point to God's grace in providing atonement for sin. First, let's look at chapter 36, verses 8 through 38.

I. The importance of obeying God's commands.

The repetition of the words is Moses' way of saying to us that it's very important for God's people, if they want His presence, if they want to meet Him and approach Him and fellowship with Him in worship, it is very important for them to do that in accordance with God's command. Now that's not only apparent from the fact that the verbal explanation of the completion of the tabernacle work is so almost directly parallel to the commands that God had given to Moses, but it is also apparent because of what had happened in Exodus 32. In Exodus 32, Israel decided that they were going to worship in their own way. They decided they would get the presence of God in their own way, and what was the result? The result was almost the forever loss of the presence of God. So, it is as if Moses delights in writing that down here in contrast to Exodus 32, they did it just like God said. Wouldn't you just say, "See chapter 25," why else would you go to this detail, if it weren't extremely important that the people of God had done just as God had commanded them in His word. Moses is driving that point home because it had been such a crucial spiritual issue in the defection of the golden calf. They had decided they would worship God in their own way, and they had ended up being cursed and almost destroyed, almost losing the presence of God forever. Now, Moses is saying, look at what they are doing. They are obeying God's word. They are doing exactly what God said.

But there's another thing as well. Remember, what is it they are building? They are building this tent, and the very fact that God would live in a tent in the midst of His people was a tremendous sign of condescension. Surely, the God that

made this universe is worth more than a tent, no matter how elaborate, and the fact that He would dwell in their midst in a tent is a sign that points forward to the Lord Jesus Christ who came and tabernacled among us.

Don't miss this point. The very fact that they're building this tent is an act of God's grace, because they deserve to be dead in the wilderness, and this tent, you see, is the sign that God is going to draw near to them and fellowship with them and be their God and they His people. And the fact that after their rebellion God is still allowing them to build this tent and still going to come and inhabit that place and dwell with His people, is that not phenomenal? And they contributed nothing to their deserving of that glorious blessing. They deserved to be destroyed. And yet, God in His mercy comes and says, "Yes, you go right ahead and you build that tent and I am going to dwell in your midst." It shows us something, doesn't it, of the grace of God in His forgiveness of His people.

Now, look with me at Exodus 37, and we'll read from verse 1 to 9. This is the making of the ark of the covenant.

Now Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; its length was two and a half cubits, and its width one and a half cubits, and its height one and a half cubits; and he overlaid it with pure gold inside and out, and made a gold molding for it all around. He cast four rings of gold for it on its four feet; even two rings on one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. He made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. He put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry it. He made a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. He made two cherubim of gold; he made them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat; one cherub at the one end and one cherub at the other end; he made the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at the two ends. The cherubim had their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces toward each other; the faces of the cherubim were toward the mercy seat.

Now, this is the beginning of a section in which he will now detail the making of the equipment for the tabernacle. He's talked about the tabernacle in chapter 36. Beginning in chapter 37, he'll begin to talk about the equipment for the tabernacle, and that will continue through chapter 38.

Then he made the table of acacia wood, two cubits long and a cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. He overlaid it with pure gold, and made a gold molding for it all around. He made a rim for it of a handbreadth all around, and made a gold molding for its rim all around. He cast four gold rings for it and put the rings on the four corners that were on its four feet. Close by the rim were the rings, the holders for the poles to carry the table. He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold, to carry the table. He made the utensils which were on the table, its dishes

and its pans and its bowls and its jars, with which to pour out drink offerings, of pure gold.

Remember, the ark was the focal point of the holy of holies. The ark was the focal point of the presence of God with His people, but this table for the bread of presence was symbolic of God's provision for all of Israel's need. That's why the daily bread was put out, to symbolize the provision of God for the people of Israel. Now, verse 17, he moves to the lamp stand.

Then he made the lamp stand of pure gold. He made the lamp stand of hammered work, its base and its shaft; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers were of one piece with it. There were six branches going out of its sides; three branches of the lamp stand from the one side of it and three branches of the lamp stand from the other side of it; three cups shaped like almond blossoms, a bulb and a flower in one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, a bulb and a flower in the other branch--so for the six branches going out of the lamp stand. In the lamp stand there were four cups shaped like almond blossoms, its bulbs and its flowers; and a bulb was under the first pair of branches coming out of it, and a bulb under the second pair of branches coming out of it, and a bulb under the third pair of branches coming out of it, for the six branches coming out of the lamp stand. Their bulbs and their branches were of one piece with it; the whole of it was a single hammered work of pure gold. He made its seven lamps with its snuffers and its trays of pure gold. He made it and all its utensils from a talent of pure gold.

Next, he begins to describe the making of the altar of incense.

Then he made the altar of incense of acacia wood: a cubit long and a cubit wide, square, and two cubits high; its horns were of one piece with it. He overlaid it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns; and he made a gold molding for it all around. He made two golden rings for it under its molding, on its two sides--on opposite sides--as holders for poles with which to carry it. He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. And he made the holy anointing oil and the pure, fragrant incense of spices, the work of a perfumer.

You will recall that we studied previously that the altar of incense, whatever symbolic purpose it might have had, had definitely a helpful purpose to the priest in the context of all those slaughtered animals. You would have wanted all the incense you could have gotten in that area to overpower the smells they would have been working in the midst of the sacrificial system. Then, in chapter 38, he now moves from speaking of the altar of incense to the altar of burnt offering.

Then he made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood, five cubits long, and five cubits wide, square, and three cubits high. He made its horns on

its four corners, its horns being of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. He made all the utensils of the altar, the pails and the shovels and the basins, the flesh hooks and the fire pans; he made all its utensils of bronze. He made for the altar a grating of bronze network beneath, under its ledge, reaching halfway up. He cast four rings on the four ends of the bronze grating as holders for the poles. He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. He inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the altar, with which to carry it. He made it hollow with planks. Moreover, he made the laver of bronze with its base of bronze, from the mirrors of the serving women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Have you noticed how often he describes the poles that were attached to these pieces of equipment. Why? It had to be mobile. This was the mobile sanctuary, and God was going to go with His people, so the sanctuary had to go with them, and it was made to be portable. Thus, the rings and poles on all this equipment.

In the next section, he describes the outer courtyard.

Then he made the court: for the south side the hangings of the court were of fine twisted linen, one hundred cubits; their twenty pillars, and their twenty sockets, made of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands were of silver. For the north side there were one hundred cubits; their twenty pillars and their twenty sockets were of bronze, the hooks of the pillars and their bands were of silver. For the west side there were hangings of fifty cubits with their ten pillars and their ten sockets; the hooks of the pillars and their bands were of silver. For the east side fifty cubits. The hangings for the one side of the gate were fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets, and so for the other side. On both sides of the gate of the court were hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three sockets. All the hangings of the court all around were of fine twisted linen. The sockets for the pillars were of bronze, the hooks of the pillars and their bands, of silver; and the overlaying of their tops, of silver, and all the pillars of the court were furnished with silver bands. The screen of the gate of the court was the work of the weaver, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen. And the length was twenty cubits and the height was five cubits, corresponding to the hangings of the court. Their four pillars and their four sockets were of bronze; their hooks were of silver, and the overlaying of their tops and their bands were of silver. All the pegs of the tabernacle and of the court all around were of bronze.

II. The furnishings remind us of God's grace in providing forgiveness of sin.

Let me draw attention to several things in this section in chapters 37 and 38. In these chapters, the instructions for the making of the furnishings of the tabernacle follow the natural order of construction. The tabernacle has been made, we saw the description in chapter 36, and now the equipment to fill it is being made. In chapter 37, Bezalel makes the ark, then the mercy seat, the two cherubim, he builds the table of the bread of presence and its vessels, thereafter making the lamp stand. The chapter ends with the making of the altar of incense and the perfumer's production of the holy anointing oil and incense.

Each of these furnishings and instruments are designed to remind us of the gracious presence of the Lord, and at the same time of our need for mediation and propitiation. All of those instruments are going to be used as part of what? A sacrificial system. This is reminding Israel that the only way they enjoy the presence of God is through the penalty being symbolically meted out in that sacrificial system, over, and over, and over again. Every time the people of God draw near, they are reminded of their need for propitiation. In God's love He draws near to His people even though they are sinful, but His people are unholy so mediation, a divine work whereby reconciliation is accomplished, mediation is required. The mercy seat then, simultaneously speaks of God's nearness to His people, and the fact that they can have no communion with Him apart from the atoning blood of sacrifice. Those two things at the same time are spoken of in every instrument that's made in this passage. And doesn't it point to both the love and holiness of God?

You know, today there are a lot of people who want to have a God of love with no judgment and holiness. Even the famous neo-orthodox theologian H. Richard Niebuhr saw how wrong-headed liberalism was in that regard. Remember his famous statement about liberalism? He said, "In liberalism, a God without wrath, brought men without sin, into a kingdom without judgment, through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." That's a damning judgment, isn't it? Whenever you hear, "Well, I like to think of God as a God of love, but not of a God of judgment." You are just hearing another manifestation of that same liberalism. Yes, God is love, but God is *holy love*. And we see both His holiness and His love displayed in this tabernacle. The very provision of the instruments indicates, "Yes, I will draw near you. I love you, My people. I forgive you." The very making of the instruments remind you of: "My dear people, My drawing near to you is going to cost blood." Of course, in the end, it is not going to be the blood of animals that it is going to cost; it is going to be the blood of His own Son. Don't think that God doesn't take sin seriously. The whole sacrificial system is but a foreshadowing of just how serious God is about His judgment in order that He might enter into a love relationship with His people in justice-- justice which has been met in Jesus Christ. Let me point out to you just two other things in this passage.

One of the things that strike you in this passage is the provision of the bronze by the ladies who are ministering in the tabernacle. Does that strike you that these

ladies provide the brass mirrors? Look back at chapter 38 and verse 8. "Moreover, he made the laver of the bronze with its base of bronze from the mirrors of the serving women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting."

Now, I think I could spend the entire message just on that one, but let me say just a couple of things about that. Think of the cleaning ladies here. These are the ladies who are doing menial work around the tabernacle of God. And friends, they bring bronze mirrors. You know where they got those mirrors. These are former slaves; they didn't have mirrors. They got them from Egypt. These are part of the spoils of Egypt. These are among the poorest people of all this greatly poor people in Israel, and they bring their mirrors. These ladies bring their bronze mirrors to be used in the tabernacle of God. I can imagine that to a woman, of however mean circumstances, that a mirror which one would help adorn one's own countenance would be a fairly precious possession. And yet, these women, poor as they were, bring them. It's almost a picture of that widow with the widow's mite, isn't it? This is maybe their most precious possession and they give it to the tabernacle. And the very fact that they are ministering, doesn't it make you think of David's statement: "I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than dwell in the tents of iniquity." Where are these women *dwelling*? Next to the doors of the tabernacle. It's a glorious passage.

And there's one last thing. Does it strike you how much has been given from this slave people? Does it strike you how much these former slaves give—much less, where they get it all from? I understand they get so much of it from Egypt, but what about the wood? There are so many things to ask questions about, but does it strike you how much they give? Let me add it up. This is what the commentators say is something like the totals in weight of the amount of materials that would have been given in precious metals for the construction of this body. Roughly a ton of gold, four tons of silver, and three tons of bronze.

Now, one thing that does is that it tells you something about the costliness of sacrifice, doesn't it? Remember David's words? "I will not offer a sacrifice to the Lord that costs me nothing." Think of these slave people giving a ton of gold, four tons of silver, and three tons of bronze. And remember, my friends, none of this was demanded; this was a free will offering. "Let him who is moved in his heart give." A ton of gold, four tons of silver, three tons of bronze. Doesn't it also say something about the costliness of communion with God? If there's no forgiveness without atonement, so there is no worship without personal cost. David knew that and that's why he said, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord which cost me nothing." But that is a lesson often sadly lost on those who could most afford to give. May God make us generous in response to His great generosity to us, and may we remember that in the worship of God. Amen.

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