

Divine Dwelling

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[0:00] I'm going to read from Exodus 25 into chapter 26 this morning. If you want to turn, you can, and a few Bibles provided.

The words will also be on the screens here up front. So we're going to read the first part of what is a longer section related to the tabernacle.

There's a number of chapters giving instructions, and then there's some things in between, and then there's a number of chapters detailing how those instructions were carried out, and then the kind of climax at the end, and we'll be looking at some of that in future weeks.

But focusing on the instructions this week, starting at Exodus 25, verse 1, 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.

These are the offerings you are to receive from them. Gold, silver, and bronze, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen, goat hair, ram skins dyed red, and hides of sea cows, acacia wood, olive oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and the breastpiece.

[1:26] 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.

Have them make a chest of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it.

Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on the one side and two rings on the other. Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it.

The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark. They are not to be removed. Then put in the ark the testimony, which I will give you. Make an atonement cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide, and make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. Make one cherub on the one end and the second cherub on the other. Make the cherubim of one piece with the cover at the two ends. The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them.

[2:41] The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. 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.

Make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it.

Also make around it a rim, a hand breadth wide, and put a gold molding on the rim. Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners where the four legs are.

The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. Make the poles of acacia wood. Overlay them with gold and carry the table with them.

And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. Put the bread of the presence on this table to be before me at all times.

[3:48] Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft. Its flower-like cups, buds, and blossoms shall be of one piece with it.

Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand, three on one side and three on the other. Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on the one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand.

And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair, six branches in all. The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand hammered out of pure gold. Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. Its whip trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. A talon of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

[5:01] Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman.

All the curtains are to be the same size, 28 cubits long and four cubits wide. Join five of the curtains together and do the same with the other five. Make loops of blue material along the edge of the end curtain in one set and do the same with the end curtain in the other set.

Make 50 loops on one curtain and 50 loops on the end curtain of the other set with the loops opposite each other. Then make 50 gold clasps and use them to fasten the curtains together so that the tabernacle is a unit.

And I can keep going. And it does keep going. It keeps going. If you kind of flip through, you see there's quite a bit more about the tent, the tabernacle itself.

And then there's all the instructions for the altar of burnt offering in chapter 27. And then the instructions for the courtyard around all that given in detail in chapter 27.

[6:10] And you go on and the oil for the lampstand and all the priestly garments in 28. And the instructions for the consecration of the priests in 29.

And then you have the description of the altar of incense in chapter 30. And the basin for washing. And on and on it goes. It seems like a lot.

Sounds like a lot of trouble to me. A lot of work. Wow. It goes on and on. I mean, just our building project here with our replica tabernacle here with 1,330 pieces.

I had 13 kids helping me for three plus hours. And we're still not done. That felt like a pretty big project.

And now here we are. I can't imagine what it was like for those Israelites out there in the desert. Even just gathering all of those materials and then doing all that sewing and the carpentry and the metal work.

[7:14] It all needed to be done so carefully, too. Such exacting standards. And it's not like they had a nice shop to work in, either. It was a pile of work.

Why would God ask them to do all this? This doesn't seem very practical.

These people, they were, honestly, they were basically homeless nomads in the desert, right? Their concern was mainly for their health, for their survival.

They were camping. But like some people I know, camping wasn't really their idea of a good time.

This wasn't really their choice. They really wanted to settle down and get on to their destination.

They were antsy to get to the promised land. They were like, oh, that's what they wanted. But then God, he comes to them and says, hey, I need you to chill out for a while.

[8:07] Hold on. Settle down. I want you to build a tabernacle. Build me a sanctuary. Right here. Right now.

This is important. It seemed impractical. It seemed like a bit much. Maybe kind of excessive. All this ornate stuff.

Was it good stewardship? How is this not simply a burden on God's people out there, especially after all they've been through?

A lot went into this project. It was a massive project. And for what? Well, we're going to try and take a stab at answering that question this morning.

The for what question. The significance of the tabernacle. What was the significance of the tabernacle? Well, if the Bible itself is any indication, the significance was quite significant.

[9:08] There are 13 chapters here in Exodus devoted to the building of the tabernacle. And there are a few more beside that in the book of Numbers. It also comes up time and again in the New Testament.

And one key place is in Hebrews chapter 8. In verse 5, it's referring to the priests. And it says this. It says, They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.

This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle. See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. A copy and shadow of what's in heaven.

That's incredible. This tabernacle. It would be right there. A physical present right in front of their noses.

Object lesson for the people of Israel. They saw it there every day and it spoke to them every day about the sword of God that they serve. And what it is to have a relationship with this God.

[10 : 13] It spoke of heaven to them. And the Ark of the Covenant was the center of it all. This was the large golden chest at the center of it all.

And there were two things significant, especially about this chest. What was inside and what was on top. So inside was Aaron's rod and a jar of manna and the stone tablets from the mountain with the Ten Commandments.

And if you are wondering, our chest, our Ark has those things in it. We can attest to that. We put them in there. The rod stands for God's salvation, his saving power.

The manna stands for God's providence, his loving provision. And the tablets, they stand for the whole of the covenant.

This special bond that God established between him and his people. All of that was inside. And the people couldn't see it, but they knew very well it was there.

[11 : 20] They were very aware of its presence. These were powerful symbols. So that's what was inside. On top of the Ark, there were these two golden cherubim on each end.

And they were pretty special in and of themselves, solid gold and all that. But more special was what lied between them. There was space. An open space between these two heavenly beings. An opening. It was called the mercy seat. The space between the cherubim. It was God's throne. The Ark with that lid.

The atonement cover. The space in the middle flanked by those two angels. It looked like a seat. A throne. And that was the idea. The mercy seat. It represented God's very presence.

God's throne among his people. It's at the heart of what the whole tabernacle project was really all about. Exodus 25, verse 8. We actually read this verse before we started building this week.

[12 : 23] We opened the Bibles. Looked at Exodus 25, verse 8. This is what it's all about. Have them make a sanctuary for me. And I will dwell among them. That's what it's about.

That's what God's about. He wants to be near us. Among us. He's not content just ruling from afar. He wants to be enthroned among his people. Heaven is God's throne room. And we see God.

What we find here is God is finding a way. To bring something of heaven to earth. His throne room. Being enthroned among his people. That's the first thing.

The other big thing I want to point out this morning is how the tabernacle also provides a glimpse ahead. A preview of coming attractions. A look into what's to come at the end of time.

You see, God, he originally made the world as a whole to be his sanctuary. That was the big idea. The whole creation was to be his tabernacle. His sanctuary.

[13 : 25] His dwelling place. And dwelling with God was much easier. Much more natural. That relationship with God in the beginning. Before sin entered the scene.

Our first parents, though, they broke God's simple terms. And they began the snowball of sin. And the Bible chronicles that snowball of sin.

The effects of sin growing and touching everything. And every person and every relationship and institution and every corner of the earth. Sin defiling God's good creation. We see that.

We see the effects of that. As history unfolds. Because of sin, the earth could no longer serve in the same way as God's sanctuary. As God's dwelling place.

And this chasm formed between heaven and earth. This chasm formed between God and his creation. That's the bad news. The good news is that we have a God who won't let us go.

[14 : 22] Who doesn't turn his back on a world bent on destruction. The story of God's work is the story of God crossing that chasm. And bringing heaven back. And that's exactly what we have here in this text.

God's telling his people to build him a dwelling place. A sanctuary on earth. Like how it used to be. And like how it will be again one day. So yes.

You could look at all of this. And just see a whole bunch of impractical nonsense going on there in the wilderness. Or. If you know the larger story.

You might just see how huge this is. And what a big step this is. In the story. The unfolding story of God's redemption. It's a key move by our God. Really it's the king of kings reclaiming a portion of his creation.

His creation. The work of his hands. It was broken. And then he set out to. To remake the little corner of it. To make a corner of it new again.

[15 : 27] And whole again. And beautiful again. Beautiful again. That was the idea. And that's why it was worth the trouble. God is reclaiming his creation.

Moving back into town. It's his kingdom coming. On earth is in heaven. A preview of the new creation yet to come. And it's interesting.

It's interesting the way it echoes God's original creation work. In the beginning. Genesis 1 verse 2. It says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And then it highlights the role of spirit.

The spirit was hovering over the waters. There making things. Creating things. The spirit hovering over the waters. Now listen to Exodus 31. With the creation of the temple.

This creation project here in the wilderness. The Lord said to Moses. See I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri. The son of Hur of the tribe of Judah. And I've filled him with the spirit of God. The same spirit shows up.

[16 : 26] With skill, ability, knowledge. And all kinds of crafts. To make artistic designs for work. In gold, silver, and bronze. To cut and set stones. To work in wood. And age in all kinds of craftsmanship.

So just think about it. For that original. God's original creation. What did he do? He had his spirit hovering. And at work. God's spirit was there.

And he spoke. And it came to be. Now in this creation of the tabernacle. The same spirit was there. But he chooses to use people.

Like Bezalel. To do the work. God worked through people. It's similar though. The way God had it all planned out.

Right? All the order. And the beauty of it. It was all about order and beauty. Forming and filling. Both the original creation.

[17 : 25] And this creation of the tabernacle. No detail left to chance. So why go to such great lengths. To get just the right color dye. For the temple curtain.

Why? Why cover everything with gold? Why? Why spend so much time. Weaving cherubim. Into already nice looking curtains. Why?

Well the tabernacle. It was a reminder. Of the garden of Eden. That original goodness. And even more significant. It was meant to be a preview. Of the new creation.

When everything is going to be right. New. Holy. Whole. And beautiful. Once again. God's sanctuary.

Started out. As the whole earth. Sin messed it up. Defiled. Sanctuary. Then. Came the tabernacle. And after that.

[18 : 26] The temple. Right? Then. Jesus. Then. Jesus comes. At the center of history. God came. In the person. Of Jesus Christ. And we read. In John 1.

Verse 14. The word became flesh. And made his dwelling. Among us. Another translation. Says the word became flesh. And tabernacled.

Among us. That's what God did. In a special way. In Jesus. God tabernacled. Among us. And then he. Showed us his love.

And taught us his way. And he died for our sins. And he rose to new life. And he ascended. And then it happened again. Again. God came. To tabernacle.

Among us. At Pentecost. He poured out. His spirit. God came. And he. He made a church. And he filled it. With himself. With his own spirit.

[19 : 20] And the church. Becomes his. New creation. We're. We're like that. Tent in the wilderness. But now indwelt. By the. Spirit of God. And that's why the apostle Paul.

Says what he says. In 1 Corinthians. 3. Do you not know. You yourselves. Are God's temple. And God's spirit.

Lives in you. The tabernacling of God. Among his people. It. It continues on. The spirit.

Accompanies us. As we. Move.

Towards. His new creation. Heaven. On earth. The thing is.

Many Christians. They. They find it easier. To focus. To just focus. On going. From earth. To heaven. Rather than. On heaven. Coming. to earth. The thing is though, the whole thrust of scripture really, if you think about it, is toward God coming down. That's the direction we have in scripture. God coming down. You have the tabernacle, then the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and then there's the Pentecost with the Holy Spirit coming down. And the book of Revelation explicitly says that the new Jerusalem one day, the new Jerusalem will come down from heaven.

[20 : 36] The throne room will come down. That's the great announcement. Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will be with them. If we read scripture, we miss this.

And we're also, honestly, we're going to miss our purpose in the here and now. If all we think about is going up to heaven, then we're going to miss our purpose down here on earth.

Because the truth is, just as God filled Bezalel with his spirit for a purpose, so he fills us with his spirit for a purpose. He had a building project right here on earth for Bezalel, and he has a building project for us too.

He used Bezalel to build a little sanctuary there in the wilderness, a place of order and beauty. And he calls us to do the same, to be involved in that same sort of work.

He calls us and empowers us to create pockets of order, beauty, shalom, like that tabernacle way back when. Creating a bit more heaven on earth, ultimately it's the work of God.

[21 : 51] But he includes us in that work. He really does. It's what we've been redeemed to do. We often talk about what we've been saved from. We also need to talk about what we're saved for, right?

God's reclaimed us, and he uses us to reclaim his creation, renew his creation in different ways. Maybe you've noticed, though, that God's creation, God's world is kind of big, and the brokenness that's out there, it's not just a little bit of brokenness, it's a lot of brokenness, a lot of heartache, a lot of things not going right, and a lot of lost people.

And I know for me personally, a lot of the time I just kind of want to throw up my hands. It just feels overwhelming. But that's when I need to come back to Bezalel and back to the building of the tabernacle.

Because you see, God, he had promised that one day, he gives us the big vision, right? One day, the whole desert's going to bloom. The whole desert's going to be full of life.

That's what the prophets attest to. But Bezalel, he didn't set out to transform the whole desert. And God didn't ask him to transform the whole desert.

[23 : 14] He focused on one spot. And God used him to bring some order and some beauty and shalom to that one spot, that one place.

And maybe that's what he has in mind for us, too. Maybe God's inviting us to just pick a spot, to ask him what he has in mind for a small space somewhere, a pocket within his creation.

Maybe we pick a spot and ask God what his will for that place might be. It could be where you live or where you work or where you hang out.

It could be a certain field of study or a group of people or perhaps a community overseas. It could even be somewhere online, perhaps, or an institution or a political party or a playground.

How might God use you to make that thing, that place, that corner, a bit more of a sanctuary, just a little bit more like heaven? God equips us to bring something of him to the world around us.

[24 : 33] It's called seeking the kingdom. It's called being Christ's agents of renewal, building the tabernacle. It was the honor of a lifetime for Bezalel and his friends.

And we've got a project like that, too. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together. Our great creator, beautiful savior, we thank you for not abandoning the work of your hands.

We thank you for your promise to return and to make all things new. And we thank you for the good work you're doing in and around us even now and for involving us in your work.

Show us where to start. Show us what little corner of your world that you want us to bless and bring some beauty to and some goodness. You invite us to be a part of your kingdom-building work, to seek your kingdom wherever we are.

Help us with that, Lord. We want to join you in there. Lead us on, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.