

p 67 WEEK 9: INSTRUCTIONS FOR BUILDING THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 25:1–31:18

The Place of the Passage

After rescuing his people (Exodus 1–18) and communicating his covenant law to them (Exodus 19–24), in these chapters God instructs Israel how to receive his holy presence in their midst. The tabernacle and all of its furnishings (chs. 25–27, 30) provide the space for God’s special presence to dwell with his people, and the craftsmen and priests (chs. 28–29, 31) serve at the tabernacle by building it and ministering in it. The instructions provided in these chapters will soon see their realization in chapters 35–40, where God graciously comes to dwell in the midst of his people.

The Big Picture

God instructs Israel how to build the tabernacle and consecrate the priests, providing the structure and servants needed for him to dwell with his people.

p 68 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the whole passage for this study, Exodus 25:1–31:18. Then review the shorter passages below and write your answers to the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 183–196; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. The Items of the Tabernacle (chs. 25–27, 30)

The tabernacle is furnished by contributions from the people, from “every man whose heart moves him” (Ex. 25:2). In the previous narratives, what was the ultimate source of the people’s wealth from which these contributions are given (see 3:21; 12:35–36)? What might this teach us about our own wealth and how God builds his church today?

Repeatedly God commands that the tabernacle and its furnishings be made according to the pattern that he reveals (Ex. 25:9, 40; 27:8). How do Hebrews 8:1–5 and 9:11–12 help us understand the significance of these statements for the Christian?

The first item to be constructed for the tabernacle is the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10–16). According to Numbers 10:35; 1 Samuel 4:1–8; and Psalm 132:8, p 69 what is the significance of the ark? What does this reveal about the function of the tabernacle?

Two cherubim are built above the mercy seat that rests upon the ark (Ex. 25:17–21). The only other time cherubim have been mentioned in Scripture is in Genesis 3:24, when cherubim were stationed at the edge of the garden to keep banished humanity away from God’s presence and from accessing the tree of life. In light of this, how is the grace of God revealed in the reappearance of the cherubim here?

A veil separates the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (Ex. 26:33), partitioning God’s presence from the outside world. How does this shed light on the significance of what happens in Matthew 27:51 upon Jesus’ death?

2. The People of the Tabernacle (chs. 28–29, 31)

The shoulder piece of the priest’s ephod has two onyx stones with the names of six tribes inscribed on each (28:9–12), and the breastpiece has 12 stones, each **p 70** representing one of the 12 tribes (28:17–21). By wearing these garments, Aaron represents God’s people as he enters before the Lord (28:29). In what way does this foreshadow the work of Jesus? (For help, see Rom. 8:33–34; Heb. 7:23–25.)

In consecrating Aaron and his sons for their priestly service, the first sacrifice required is a bull for a sin offering (Ex. 29:10–14). Read Leviticus 4:3. What does the need of a sin offering imply about Aaron and his sons? What are some implications of this for their priestly ministry?

In the closing section (31:12–17), God commands Israel three times to keep the Sabbath. What are the reasons given for Israel to do this?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

p 71 Gospel Glimpses

PRIESTLY SACRIFICES. The consecration of the priests involves multiple sacrifices. Three times Aaron and his sons must lay their hands on a sacrifice, symbolically transferring their guilt to the animal (Ex. 29:10, 15, 19). The first two of these sacrifices are a sin offering (29:14) and a burnt offering (29:18), both of which are later described as atoning for sin (Lev. 4:20; 1:3–4, respectively). Only after these sacrifices are made are the priests considered holy (Ex. 29:21). The priests are later instructed to offer daily sacrifices on the altar, once in the morning and once in the evening (Ex. 29:38–39). This need for the priests to make atonement for themselves and then perpetually offer sacrifices for the people shows the inherent limitation of their ministry and points forward to Jesus’ sacrificial work on the cross. Unlike these Old Testament priests, Jesus needs neither to make atonement for himself nor to offer himself perpetually for his people—

his once-for-all sacrificial death brings full and final salvation for all those who trust him (see Heb. 7:26–28; 10:14).

GOD THE HEAVENLY KING. In these chapters the tabernacle is presented as a mobile palace, with God portrayed as the heavenly king. The ark serves as God’s footstool (1 Chron. 28:2), above which his heavenly throne symbolically sits (Isa. 66:1). The blue and purple yarns of the curtains (Ex. 26:1) and veil (Ex. 26:31) represent heaven and royalty, respectively, and the cherubim that are above the ark (Ex. 25:18) and worked into the tapestries (Ex. 26:1, 31) depict the tabernacle as a heavenly structure. This portrayal of God as the heavenly king forms the background to the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus, who both begin their ministries by saying, “Repent, for *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). That is, Jesus, whose “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), has come to save his people and bring them into his heavenly kingdom (Luke 23:42–43).

Whole-Bible Connections

TWELVE STONES/TRIBES. The 12 stones on Aaron’s breastpiece represent the 12 tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:17–21). Just as God’s people consist of 12 tribes in the Old Testament, stemming from the 12 sons of Israel (Ex. 1:1–7), so do God’s people in the New Testament era stem from the 12 apostles of Christ (Eph. 2:19–20). In John’s final vision of the New Jerusalem, the gates of the eternal city have the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed (Rev. 21:12), while the foundations of the city wall have the names of the 12 apostles (Rev. 21:14). These foundations are also adorned with 12 stones that correspond to the 12 stones of the priestly breastpiece (Rev. 21:19–20). Therefore, just as Aaron represented God’s people as he entered God’s presence in the tabernacle, so do the [p 72](#) gates and foundations of the New Jerusalem show that all of God’s people—both old covenant and new covenant—will dwell in his presence forever.

A NEW EDEN. In various ways the tabernacle is presented as a new Eden. Since the tabernacle faces east (Ex. 27:13–16; Num. 3:38), the cherubim woven into the veil of the Most Holy Place (Ex. 26:31) recall the cherubim stationed on the east side of the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). The lampstand (Ex. 25:31–40) represents the tree of life (Gen. 2:9), and the terms used to describe Adam “working” and “keeping” the garden (Gen. 2:15) are used together elsewhere to describe the Levites’ service at the tabernacle (Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:7). Even the three-part structure of the tabernacle (Most Holy Place, Holy Place, outer court) corresponds to the three sections of creation (garden, land of Eden, remainder of creation). Creation imagery is later present in Ezekiel’s vision of a restored temple, which like Eden faces east (Ezek. 47:1), has water flowing out from it (Ezek. 47:1; Gen. 2:10), and is full of trees (Ezek. 47:7; Gen. 2:9). These themes are picked up finally in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, which similarly has water flowing out from it (Rev. 22:1) and is surrounded by the tree of life (Rev. 22:2).

Theological Soundings

WORSHIP. Virtually every aspect of these chapters relates to the theme of worship. The tabernacle is the central location of Israelite worship (Exodus 26); the various items within the

tabernacle are all used in worship (chs. 25, 27, 30); the priests are those who minister on behalf of the people during worship (chs. 28–29); and the Sabbath was a day when certain special worship-related activities occurred (Exodus 31; see Lev. 24:8; Num. 28:9–10; 1 Chron. 9:32; 2 Chron. 23:8). The detailed instructions throughout these chapters show that God desires his people to worship him according to his specifications. However, other passages reveal that God is not pleased with worship that is formally correct if one’s lifestyle does not reflect a heart of faith (Isa. 1:11–17; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8). Conversely, Scripture presents God as graciously willing to accept worship that is externally incorrect if one’s heart is set on seeking him (2 Chron. 30:18–20).

ATONEMENT. These chapters contain the first instructions in Scripture concerning atonement. The sin offering is first mentioned here (Ex. 29:14, 36; 30:10), which according to Leviticus is a means by which a person who sins can be atoned for (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35). Significantly, these verses in Leviticus all state that when atonement is made for someone, forgiveness follows. Since the New Testament describes Jesus’ death as a sin offering (Heb. 13:11–12), it follows that those for whom he died and made atonement receive God’s forgiveness (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

p 73 Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Exodus 25:1–31:18 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Exodus 25:1–31:18

p 74 As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Exodus. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.