

p 83 WEEK 11: CONSTRUCTION OF THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 35:1–40:38

The Place of the Passage

The book of Exodus concludes with the construction of the tabernacle. In response to God's detailed instructions, outlined in chapters 25–31, the people obediently build the tabernacle. After the tabernacle is built and assembled, the section ends with God descending upon it through his glory cloud as he comes to dwell in the midst of his people. Whereas Exodus began with Israel enslaved in the midst of Egypt, it ends with God enthroned in the midst of Israel.

The Big Picture

Israel builds the tabernacle according to God's instructions, and God comes to live in their midst.

p 84 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the whole passage for this study, Exodus 35:1–40:38. Then review the shorter passages below and write your answers to the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 201–209; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Tabernacle Preparation (35:1–36:7)

The instructions for building the tabernacle end with a command to rest from work on the Sabbath (31:12–17), a theme that is reiterated here at the beginning of the tabernacle's construction (35:1–3). What do these Sabbath commands teach us about Israel's responsibility as they undertake this work of building the tabernacle? How does the account between the Sabbath commands (chs. 32–34) reinforce this?

In Exodus 35:20–29, the people respond to Moses' call for contributions for the construction of the tabernacle. How are the people repeatedly described throughout these verses? What does this teach us about the nature of true obedience?

According to Exodus 35:30–36:1, how did Bezalel and Oholiab acquire their skills and knowledge? What does this suggest about our own skills and p 85 knowledge? What attitude(s) should this instill in us concerning our personal abilities?

2. Tabernacle Construction (36:8–39:43)

These chapters describe in detail the fulfillment of the tabernacle instructions from chapters 25–30, as the following table summarizes:

	Instructions	Fulfillment
Tabernacle Proper	26:1–37	36:8–38
Ark	25:10–22	37:1–9
Table	25:23–30	37:10–16
Lampstand	25:31–40	37:17–24
Altar of Incense	30:1–10	37:25–28
Anointing Oil and Incense	30:22–38	37:29
Altar of Burnt Offering	27:1–8	38:1–7
Bronze Basin	30:17–21	38:8
Court	27:9–19	38:9–20
Priestly Garments	28:1–43	39:1–31

Why would Moses spend so much time describing the fulfillment of all these detailed instructions concerning the tabernacle? What does this emphasize about the people’s response to God’s word? (For help, review Ex. 25:9.)

p 86 How does Exodus 39:32–43 support the above observation? How might this challenge/encourage us today?

3. Tabernacle Assembly (40:1–33)

After the tabernacle is constructed, God commands Moses to anoint it “so that it may become holy” (40:9). Before this in Exodus, only one location has been described as holy: Mount Sinai (3:5; 19:23). Significantly, both of these verses describing God’s presence at Sinai emphasize the *distance* required between God and his people. However, through the tabernacle God brings his holy presence *right into the midst* of his people. In what ways does this foreshadow the gospel?

After God’s glory cloud fills the tabernacle (40:34–35), the final verses of the book describe how God leads Israel throughout all their journeys (vv. 36–38). What might be considered a New

Testament counterpart to this idea of God accompanying his people as they journey? (For help, see John 14:15–17.)

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 87 Gospel Glimpses

THE MERCY SEAT. One of the central features of the tabernacle is the mercy seat (Ex. 35:12; 37:6–9; 39:35; 40:20). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place. On this day he would take the blood of a sin offering and sprinkle it on the mercy seat to make atonement for the sins of the whole nation (Lev. 16:15). This great act at the mercy seat prefigures the saving work of Jesus on the cross. The New Testament not only describes Jesus as a high priest who enters the Most Holy Place and sprinkles his own blood (Heb. 9:11–14), but it may also describe him *as the mercy seat itself*. Paul says that redemption comes through Jesus, “whom God put forward as a propitiation” (Rom. 3:25). The word “propitiation” here translates the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for “mercy seat,” which may be what Paul had in mind. That is, while atonement under the old covenant was made at the mercy seat, atonement under the new covenant is made through Jesus.

GOD WITH US. A precious truth of the gospel is that not only does God save us by his grace, but he also comes to live with us. This truth is evident in the story of the exodus, as God saves his people from Egypt (Exodus 1–18) and then comes to live with them in the tabernacle (chs. 35–40). This connection between salvation and divine presence is summarized earlier in Exodus 29:46: “And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them.” These two gospel elements—salvation and presence—are also reflected in the names given to Christ at his birth. According to Matthew’s gospel, when Christ is born, he is called Jesus, “for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21), and also Immanuel, “which means, God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Whole-Bible Connections

HEART-FELT GENEROSITY. The Israelites are portrayed in these chapters as exceedingly generous in their giving toward the construction of the tabernacle. Moses calls for all those who have a “generous heart” (Ex. 35:5) to contribute toward the work, and the description of the people giving repeatedly focuses on the “heart” of those participating (35:21, 22, 26, 29). In the end, the people give so much that Moses tells them to stop because the craftsmen have more material than they need (36:3–7)! Such heartfelt generosity is extolled throughout the Old Testament in the law (Deut. 15:10–11; 24:19–22), the historical books (1 Chron. 29:6–9), and the poetic books (Ps. 37:21, 26; 112:5; Prov. 11:25; 22:9), as well as in the New Testament (Matt. 19:21; Acts 10:1–2; Rom. 12:8; 1 Tim. 6:17–18). Perhaps best representing this theme is Paul’s call for **p 88** the Corinthian believers to give freely toward a relief fund for the Jerusalem church.

He says, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

MOST HOLY PLACE. At the center of the tabernacle, behind the innermost veil, is the Most Holy Place (Ex. 40:3; see also 26:33–34). This inner sanctuary houses the ark of the covenant, which represents God’s kingly presence on earth (see e.g., 1 Sam. 4:4; Ps. 99:1; Isa. 37:16). When Solomon later constructs the temple, the Most Holy Place becomes established more permanently in Israel’s midst (1 Kings 8:6), thereby providing a longstanding place for God to reside with his people. However, after centuries of Israel living in unrepented sin, God departs the Most Holy Place in judgment (Ezek. 10:18–19; 11:22–23). When Jesus died on the cross, the veil to the Most Holy Place was torn in two (Matt. 27:51), showing that the barrier between God’s presence and his people had been removed. Finally, in Revelation, John pictures the New Jerusalem as cubic in shape (Rev. 21:16), which recalls the cubic shape of the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 6:20). This reveals that the eternal home of believers will be a worldwide Most Holy Place—God’s kingly presence will be everywhere.

Theological Soundings

SPIRITUAL GIFTS. God provides his people with various skills and abilities to enable them to serve him and others. These are known as “spiritual gifts” (see 1 Cor. 12:1–11). This is evident in this section as God calls Bezalel and Oholiab to build the tabernacle, fills them with his Spirit, and gives them the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out the task (Ex. 35:30–35; 36:1–2; 38:22–23). From other Scripture we see that God gives each of his people at least one spiritual gift (Eph. 4:7–8; 1 Pet. 4:10), that people are often gifted differently from each other (Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–11, 28; Eph. 4:11–12), that all of these different gifts are important (1 Cor. 12:12–27), and that all spiritual gifts should be used to build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Pet. 4:10).

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE. One of the precious truths of the gospel is that we are saved by grace through faith, which is “not a result of works” (Eph. 2:8–9). However, it is also true that through this gracious salvation we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10). That is, although our obedience to God’s word does not save us, it is evidence that we have been saved. Illustrating this, at the conclusion of the tabernacle construction the text repeatedly emphasizes that the people had responded obediently to God’s word through Moses (Ex. 39:32, 42–43). This obedient response was evidence that the people believed Moses (see 19:9), and therefore that they believed God (19:7–8). Having been graciously saved through the exodus, their faith was then demonstrated by their works (see James 2:18).

p 89 Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Exodus 35:1–40:38 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 35:1–40:38

p 90 **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.