

Exodus 25:1-22

Exodus 25 - 30 describe the plans given to Moses, as he met with God on Mount Sinai, for the construction of the Tabernacle. This special tent is described as '*a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them*' (7) The Lord plans to live among his people.

The instructions for its construction include receiving offerings '*from everyone whose heart prompts them to give*' (2)

The materials are costly, as befits the presence of a great king. (3) The Israelites are in a position to supply these materials because of the manner of their departure from Egypt. (Ex 11:2,3; 12:35,36)

At the centre of this construction is 'The Ark' a gold box containing the ten commandments. The tabernacle does not contain a visual image of God. Rather it expresses his reality by means of these commandments that disclose his character. This is what the Lord is like.

There is a lot of attention given to the lid of the ark. Its called the atonement and consists of 2 cherubim made out of hammered gold (18). This is Gods throne or his footstool. The older versions of the Bible refer to it as the mercy seat.

- The prospect of the Lord dwelling among his people is one that ought to encourage us. We are neither an afterthought or a chore. God desires fellowship with his people.
- The tabernacle is constructed from the giving of the people. The Church looks for a similar response. *But to each one grace has been given as Christ apportioned it* (Eph 4:7) *From him the whole body.. grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.* (Eph 4:16)

Exodus 31:1-18

God not only provides the plans and the raw materials for the creation of the Tabernacle but he also equips individuals with the skills necessary to bring it to fruition. Two men, Bezalel from Judah and Oholiab from Dan are supplied with the abilities to create this special tent. Specifically we learn, "*I have filled him with the Spirit of God with wisdom and understanding, with knowledge and with all kind of skills - to make artistic designs.... to cut and set stones.... to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of crafts.* (3,4) We tend to associate Gods Spirit with purely moral matters but the Spirit of God is intimately involved in the work of creation, producing beauty and design in all kinds of places. All beauty is Gods beauty and all skill in these matters begins with him.

Judah is the largest tribe and Dan one of the smallest. God has a habit of spreading his gifts around.

It is somewhat surprising to find this reference to the Sabbath inserted here. Sabbath means to stop and rest. It is given as a sign of their relationship with God. *This will be a sign between me and you.... that I am the Lord who makes you holy.* (13) So as the day is set apart from the rest of the week by virtue of its purpose so it serves to remind them that they are a people set apart from the nations for the Lords use.

"It was to be expected that the people would hurry forward the building of the Tabernacle seeing in it a possibility of regaining the Lord's favour. But God was saying by implication that the making of the Tabernacle should not take precedence over the Sabbath." (HL Ellison)

- Be alive to skill and beauty today. Give God thanks for the gifts he gives to people. Particularly thank him for the gifts he has given to his church.

- Recognise the wisdom of Gods order. He provides us with one day in seven where we can legitimately lay aside the demands of the rest of the week. Use the rest of the week so Sunday is not so busy.

Exodus 32:1-35

It is not unreasonable for the people to consider that Moses has gone for good. He has been on the mountain for around six weeks and from what Israel saw of God's presence it would not be surprising if he had not survived the ordeal.

Aaron appears weak rather than corrupt. He may have been trying to buy time with his response or else hoping handing over gold jewellery would prove too costly. His instruction in v5 (*Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord*) suggests he was attempting to keep the plan on track. Opposing the will of this people has proved a dangerous activity. (Exodus 17:4, Numbers 14:10) Moses response (21) would suggest as much.

The situation becomes a test for Moses. God offers Moses a deal. (9,10) It must have been an attractive idea to think of laying aside the burden of these people and becoming in effect a new Abraham. But Moses ambitions are not self centred. He intercedes for the people. He does not though offer excuses for sinners but rests his prayer on Gods honour. (12,13) According to Deut 9:20 it was Moses intercession that saved Aaron.

There is judgment as a result of this episode. But the chapter ends with Moses moving prayer offering to be blotted out of Gods book in place of his people. (30-32) Moses though will not be able to make atonement. For that we must wait for someone else. (Romans 3:21-26 nb v25 *in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished*)

Its not clear whether the threat of punishment (33) is fulfilled in the plague (35) or at the events that will take place at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 14:20-23)

- There are warnings here about compromise. Trying to keep everyone happy seldom works.
- Moses teaches us how to pray. He focuses on 'Gods glory'. Its how Jesus teaches us to pray. (Matt 6:9-15)
- Thank God for the gospel the one was able to make atonement.

Exodus 33:1-23

The first six verses describe the aftermath of the Golden Calf crisis. The people are to get the land but not the Lord. To their credit they appreciate that this is not a good state of affairs. To possess the land flowing with milk and honey but to be abandoned by their God was an unacceptable offer.

We are introduced to Moses 'tent of meeting' at this point. (7) In contrast to the Tabernacle (the special tent described in chapters 25-31, intended to be at the centre of things) the tent of meeting is located on the edge of the camp. There the pillar of cloud would come down and stand at the entrance whereas Gods presence was envisaged as being permanently present in the Tabernacle.

Moses intercedes on behalf of the people. (12-16). His priority is God's presence (14). He understands that salvation is not arriving in a particular location no matter how lavish but fellowship with God. (John 17:7, 1 John 1:3). The practical expression of God's Presence going with them will be the creation of the Tabernacle.

See 34:9 where Moses makes the need of the people for forgiveness an argument for God's presence among them.

The chapter concludes with Moses request to see God's glory. God's glory is his nature or essence. Moses will experience this in an audio version (19) *I will proclaim my name the Lord in your presence. We must wait for the arrival of Jesus Christ to see God's glory in human flesh. (John 1:14)*

Note too Moses has a back view of God. (22) Often it is only as we look back that we really appreciate what God was doing in our lives.

- The people owe everything to Moses and his intercession. We have a greater debt to the one who intercedes for us not by prayer but through his atoning death.
- Value Gods presence over material blessings. Paul describes the high point of the churches witness as the moment when someone says: God is really among you. (1 Cor 14:25) Pray that may be so for ourselves.
- Do we have any appetite to see Gods glory?

Exodus 34: 1-14

Once again Moses meets with God. The covenant is renewed and the commandments reconfirmed. What is new this time is God passing before Moses and declaring his name. (6,7) This is his response to the request to see Gods glory. God doesn't deal in the trappings of glory. He doesn't deal in vast possessions or show off his immense power. His glory is who he is. *"The Lord, the Lord the compassionate and gracious God"*

It is because of who God is that there is any hope for a people who default to being stiff necked and wicked with great ease.

Moses will quote these words back to God at Kadesh Barnea where Israel refuses to trust God and enter the land. (Numbers 14:18) With a God like this Moses argued Israel's obstinacy and sin were no real bar to Gods presence going with them.

Jesus is described as the image of the invisible God. The Gospels highlight for us the way these attributes are seen in his life.

We tend to take exception to the reference to judgment especially the phrase *'he punishes the children for the sins of their parents'*. We are though all too aware that parents can influence their children in sinful behaviour. Note too when this phrase is used in the commandments (20:4-6) it is restricted to *those who hate me*. And it is set against his love that is expressed to *a thousand generations of those who love me*.

- God is not unwilling to reveal his glory. He does so principally through his word where we meet his Son. Keep reading his word and learning about his glory.
- Paul prayed to 'know Christ' (Phil 3:10) That would be a good prayer to make your own.
- Moses response to this experience was to worship. (8) Let these words lead you in the same direction.

Exodus 34:15-35

The ten commandments serve as the terms of the covenant. Here is how to live in fellowship with the Lord. In the second half of this chapter particular issues are underlined. These things are emphasised because of Israel's tendency to idolatry (golden calf) coupled with the lifestyle of their soon to be new neighbours.

Faithfulness to the Lord forbids intermarriage. (15,16) Note the highly personal language (*prostitute themselves*) Life is to be ordered by Gods word. The Sabbath (21) is not negotiable even when you are busy. *Three times a year all your men are to appear.* (23) Central to these festivals is the Passover (18) This comes with implications. God's sparing Israel's firstborn implies they now belong to the Lord. Now they must be redeemed. In short Israel is not to think of themselves as free to do as they please. They have been redeemed rather than liberated. They belong to the Lord.

Although he was personally unaware, Moses face was radiant on his return from God's presence. It confirmed the authenticity of his encounter. His person reflected something of the glory of God. In the NT Paul informs us we share in something more wonderful (2 Cor 3:7-18). We are not restricted to words written on stone but have the Spirit who writes Gods law on our hearts. It is that rich internal ministry that produces real change in our lives and enables us to reflect something of Gods glory.

- Do we have a sense of belonging to God and is our life shaped by his order?
- What controls how we use our time and money?
- Can we rejoice in the gift of the Spirit given to bring about Christlike transformation in our lives?

Exodus 35:1-29

The building of the tabernacle, placed in doubt through the creating of the golden calf, is to go ahead. The amount of space given to this (we are given the instructions in detail and now the construction) tells of its importance. This is the arrangement that makes it possible for God in all his holiness to live safely among his people. It becomes the place of sacrifice where sin is forgiven and fellowship restored.

This first chapter highlights the place of the people in the construction process. Some people gave of their skills others of their possessions. The word that recurs is *willing* v5, 21, 22, 26, 29. There is no one rich benefactor supplying everything. In God's scheme of things we are all invited to contribute and we all have an offering to make.

- The NT calls these things 'the shadows' and points us to the reality that is found in Christ. John writes that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. Jesus informed the Jews, "*Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days*" *The temple he had spoken of was his body.* Ask God to help you appreciate the beauty and significance of this.
- Paul describes the Church with these words, 'And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.' Are you willing to play your part in this process.

Exodus 35:30 - 36:7

We are often quick to point out Israel's failure. The building of the tabernacle is a project marked by joy and generosity. Although the materials required are expensive and

numerous the giving of the people more than rises to the occasion. It can't be often that churches complain about their people being over generous. That though is what happened here. (36:4-7)

“One of the glories of the Tabernacle, frequently overlooked, is that, to use a modern expression it opened free of debt. It is a sad thing when any form of work for God starts in debt. This may be due to a failure to grasp God's will, or the seeking of a magnificence intended to glorify man rather than God. All too often it is due to a lack of willingness, partially motivated by the failure to count the cost beforehand. (see Luke 14:28-30)” HL Ellison.

- Are we willing to give generously to God's work?

Exodus 37: 1-29

The ark is mentioned first. This alone will occupy the Most Holy Place. The next three items, the table, the lampstand and the altar of incense are placed in the Holy Place. For all the care that is taken over the manufacture of these items they are not merely religious artefacts, interesting bits of furniture intended to intrigue the tourists as they go round the cathedral. These things function.

The ark serves as God's throne, the place where he will meet annually with the people's representative when sacrifice is offered and forgiveness is granted.

The table is there to display the bread of the presence and the lampstand provides light. Those things are reminders that this is a place where our needs are met. They point beyond food and illumination to the one who would come as the Bread of Life and the Light of the World.

The altar of incense connects to the realm of prayer. As incense conveys a fragrant aroma so our prayers are pleasing to God. (see Rev 5:8)

- Consider your new covenant privileges.
- Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and the full assurance that faith brings
- Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess
- Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds not giving up meeting together.
(Heb 10:19-25)

Exodus 40:1-38

The theme of this chapter is completion. The tabernacle is assembled and its furnishings are put in place. In chapter 39 the theme focussed on the obedience of the people. *So all the work on the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses. (39:32,33)*

In chapter 40 the spotlight moves to Moses. *Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him. (40:16)* It repeats that he *did as the Lord commanded him (19,21,23,25,27,29,32-33)*. It then adds *And so Moses finished the work. (33)*

The people's strict obedience to God's commands demonstrated their repentance after the golden calf disaster and made possible the fulfilment of God's promise to dwell among them.

The descent of the cloud and the filling of the tabernacle with God's glory emphasised the reality of the presence of God among his people. Strangely Moses is not able to enter despite having done everything according to plan. It will be the next book (Leviticus) with its instruction on sacrifice that will reveal how people like us can draw near to this holy God.

- What aspect of obedience does God seem to be challenging you over just now?
- It is possible to recover from serious sin. What encourages you about the response of Israel?
- According to Paul God's glory is now revealed in the gospel. It is God who illuminates people's hearts so that they can see '*the light of the knowledge of God's glory revealed in the face of Christ*' (2 Cor 4:6). Promote the Gospel and pray for God to shine into people's hearts.