

Exposition of the Book of Exodus

Sunset Bible Church Adult Sunday School 2021

Week 7: The Tabernacle (25—31)

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. ... and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights (Exodus 24:12-13, 15b-18).

Questions to keep in mind as we study the instructions for the Tabernacle

- What does Exodus 25—31 tell us about YHWH?
- As we work through the features of the Tabernacle and its furniture, what significance can you see in the instructions given for their construction?
- What do you see in the Tabernacle reflected in the New Testament, either in the work of Christ or in our identity in Christ?
- What significance does the Tabernacle have for us today? Why is it important to study? What is the Tabernacle today?

Some preliminary observations on Exodus 25:1—40:38¹

The final sixteen chapters of Exodus center on the theology of the worship of God. The only interruption of this theme is the episode of the golden calf (chs. 32—34). But this section only contrasts the divinely appointed worship established in connection with the tabernacle with the humanly devised worship that adores the work of human hands and leads to debauchery.

The most important question about the tabernacle deals with its significance. Keil² held that the tabernacle embodied the kingdom of God established in Israel, especially since the text stresses forms, numbers, and measurements. This kingdom will one day come to completion and encompass the entire world, just as the Most Holy Place is a cube, which points to the completion of the kingdom of God (cf. Rev. 21—22).

[Kaiser's] view is closest to Keil's kingdom-of-God meaning. The tabernacle, however, primarily embodies the theology of worship. It thereby assumes that God is the Great King who reigns and is therefore worthy of our praise and adoration. Even more specifically, the meaning of the tabernacle is that God has come “to dwell,” “to tabernacle” in the midst of Israel, as He would one day come in the Incarnation (John 1:14) and will come in the Second Advent (Rev. 21:3). The Lord who dwelt in His visible glory in His sanctuary among His people (Exod. 25:8) will one day come and dwell in all His glory among His saints forever.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Exodus,” in *Genesis—Numbers*, Vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and Richard P. Polcyn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 451-452.

² C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., translated by James Martin, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, n.p.; reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), 2:166-167.

Exposition **The Tabernacle³** **Exodus 25—31**

Directions Regarding God's Dwelling among His People (24:12—31:18)

Having given directions clarifying Israel's *obedience* in the Book of the Covenant (20:22—23:33), God now summoned Moses up into the mountain again to receive His directions regarding Israel's *worship*. The Book of the Covenant specified how the Israelites were to live with one another, but the tabernacle showed them how God wanted them to worship Him.

I. The Revelation of the Directions (24:12-18)

Moses stayed in the heights of the mountain 40 days and nights while God gave him the stone tablets of the law and all the details of the tabernacle and its worship. Thus Moses was completely dependent on God. Now that Israel had entered into a blood covenant with God, God purposed to dwell among His people (cf. John 1:14). Similarly God now dwells among Christians by His Holy Spirit since Jesus Christ has ratified the New Covenant by shedding His blood.

The spectacular vision of the glory of God on the mountain “like a consuming fire” (v. 17) should have given the Israelites greater respect for God's revelation than they demonstrated later (cf. 32:1-8). There were three symbols of God's glory: the cloud, the fire, and the voice.

II. Contributions for the Construction of the Sanctuary (25:1-9)

Moses usually employed one of four different terms to describe the tabernacle, each of which emphasizes one of its purposes, though other names also appear.

1. *Sanctuary* (25:8) means “place of holiness” and stresses the transcendence of Israel's God as an exalted being different from His people. However this verse also states that such a God would “dwell among” His people.
2. *Tabernacle* (25:9) means “dwelling place,” emphasizing God's purpose abiding near His people.
3. *Tent of Meeting* (26:36; 29:42-43; 35:21) also stresses the imminence of God. God met with Moses and the Israelites in this tent. The verb translated “meeting” means a deliberate prearranged rendezvous rather than a casual accidental meeting.
4. *Tabernacle (or Tent) of Testimony* (38:21; Num. 9:15; 17:7, 23) indicates that the structure was the repository of the Law. Moses sometimes referred to the ark of the covenant as the “ark of the testimony” (25:22) that contained the “two tablets of the testimony” (31:18) on which were the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are the “testimony.” They were the essential stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, the heart of the relationship between God and His people.

God designed the tabernacle structure and all its furnishings to teach the Israelites about Himself and how they as sinners could have a relationship with Him. The earthly building, as visibly set forth in the pattern shown to Moses, was to embody and display God's thoughts concerning salvation and His kingdom.

The tabernacle also prefigured the redemptive program of God focused in Jesus Christ. It was a remarkable picture of the high priestly work of Christ both here on earth and His eternal work in the heavens.⁴

³ Extracted mostly from Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Exodus,” 2004 edition.

⁴ John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 245-56.

III. The Tabernacle Furnishings (25:10-40)

One writer identified three major problems the interpreter faces as he or she seeks to understand God's revelation concerning the tabernacle.⁵

1. *What was the length of the cubit, the standard measure of length?* Eighteen or 21 inches?
2. *What about the information omitted in the text?* Though detailed, builders would need more.
3. *What was the exact shape of the tabernacle?* Gable-roofed with a ridge pole or flat-roofed?

Another problem is the *extent of typological teaching that God intended*. A “type” is a divinely intended illustration. Thus all types are illustrations, but not all illustrations are types. How much detail did God intend to illustrate His character and relationship with His people?

We know the major aspects of the tabernacle and its furnishings are types because the New Testament writers identified them as such (Heb. 5:4-5; 8:5; 9:23-24; 9:8-9; 10:20). However the amount of detail Moses preserved, and the obvious correspondence of certain details not identified as types, have led many commentators to conclude that God intended these details to be instructive too.

There are many illustrations of New Testament truth in the Old Testament. The illustrative significance of some features of the tabernacle is obvious, even though the New Testament does not identify them as types. An extremely conservative approach would be to identify as types only those things that the New Testament calls types (Gr. *typos*, cf. *antitypos*). These would include Adam (Rom. 5:14), the wilderness wanderings of Israel (1 Cor. 10:6, 11), the holy place in the tabernacle and later, in the temple (Heb. 9:24), and the flood in Noah's day (1 Peter 3:21). Other foreshadowings were simply illustrations.

The order in which Moses described the things associated with the tabernacle in the text is due to two emphases in the revelation. *First*, Moses described things that primarily manifest *God*, and *second*, things dealing with His people's *fellowship with God*. The author first described things in the Holy of Holies where God dwelt, then things in the holy place, then things in the courtyard. This order focuses attention on the presence of Yahweh among His people, which was the most important feature of Israel's life. The tabernacle itself also reflects the importance of Yahweh's presence at the center of His people. “The tabernacle was built on a radiating decrease in value of metal: gold, silver, bronze, from the center (where God dwelt) to the outer edges.”⁶

The materials that the Israelites were to use in the construction of the tabernacle and its worship were the finest and rarest available. This reflected the fact that nothing but the best was appropriate for response to Yahweh. What was at the center of priestly concern was not a building or a ritual but the Lord Himself, present as a gift to His people.⁷

A. The Ark of the Covenant (25:10-22)

The ark was the throne of Yahweh where He dwelt in a localized way and met with the Israelites through their high priest. It was the seat of His sovereignty and the place where He met with His people (v. 22). This is why directions for its construction come first. The testimony (Ten Commandments, vv. 16, 22) lay inside the ark, which was a box. God's dwelling among His people and His relationship with them thus quite literally rested on the Ten Commandments. The *mercy seat* (v. 17) was the “lid” of this box and was solid gold. There the high priest offered sacrificial blood once a year to atone for (cover) the sins of the Israelites as a nation. This offering made propitiation (satisfaction) for their sins for one year (cf. Lev. 16).

The Greek word used to translate “mercy seat” here in the Septuagint (*hilasterion*) is essentially the same

⁵ Ibid., 246-51.

⁶ G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 178.

⁷ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary series (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 355.

word used to describe Jesus Christ as our “propitiation” in 1 John 2:2 (*hilasmos*). The mercy seat was for the Israelites temporarily what Jesus Christ is for all people permanently, where God found satisfaction. The *cherubim* (v. 18) were angels who “apparently have to do with the holiness of God as violated by sin.”⁸ They may have looked like winged human-headed lions.⁹

B. The Table of Showbread (25:23-30)

This piece of furniture stood on the north side of the holy place, the right side as the priest entered from the courtyard. The priests placed twelve loaves (large pieces) of unleavened bread in two rows or piles on this table where they remained for seven days. They substituted twelve fresh loaves for the old bread each Sabbath (Lev. 24:5-8). The term “bread of the Presence” (v. 30) means these loaves lay before God's presence in the tabernacle. The twelve loaves constituted a perpetual thank offering to God from the twelve tribes for the blessings that they received from Him day by day.¹⁰ Perhaps the bread signified both God's provisions and Israel's vocation. Israel was to be a source of spiritual food for the world (19:5-6).

C. The Golden Lampstand (25:31-40)

This piece of furniture was probably similar in size to the table of showbread (v. 39). It stood opposite that table in the holy place against the south (left) wall. It weighed about 75 pounds. The tabernacle craftsmen fashioned it in the form of a stylized plant or tree.

The signification of the seven-armed candlestick is apparent from its purpose, to carry seven lamps, which were trimmed and filled with oil every morning, and lighted every evening, and were to burn throughout the night (27:20, 21; 30:7, 8; Lev. 24:3, 4). As the Israelites were to prepare spiritual food in the showbread in the presence of Jehovah, and to offer continually the fruit of their labor in the field of the kingdom of God, as a spiritual offering to the Lord; so also were they to present themselves continually to Jehovah in the burning lamps, as the vehicles and media of light, as a nation letting its light shine in the darkness of this world (cf. Matt. 5:14, 16; Luke 12:35; Phil. 2:15). The oil, through which the lamps burned and shone, was, according to its peculiar virtue in imparting strength to the body and restoring vital power, a representation of the Godlike spirit, the source of all the vital power of man; while the oil, as offered by the congregation of Israel, and devoted to sacred purposes according to the command of God, is throughout the Scriptures a symbol of the Spirit of God, by which the congregation of God was filled with higher light and life. By the power of this Spirit, Israel, in covenant with the Lord, was to let its light shine, the light of its knowledge of God and spiritual illumination, before all the nations of the earth.

In its seven arms the stamp of the covenant relationship was impressed upon the candlestick; and the almond blossom with which it was ornamented represented the seasonable offering of the flowers and fruits of the Spirit, the almond tree deriving its name from the fact that it is the earliest of all the trees in both its blossom and its fruit (cf. Jer. 1:11, 12). The symbolic character of the candlestick is clearly indicated in the Scriptures. The prophet Zechariah (chap. 4) sees a golden candlestick with seven lamps and two olive trees, one on either side, from which the oil vessel is supplied; and the angel who is talking with him informs him that the olive trees are the two sons of oil, that is to say, the representatives of the kingdom and priesthood, the divinely appointed organs through which the Spirit of God was communicated to the covenant nation. And in Revelation 1:20, the seven churches, which represent the new people of God, i.e., the Christian Church, are shown to the holy seer in the form of seven candlesticks standing before the throne of God.¹¹

In company with the Table attesting Yahweh's Presence in bounty and the Ark attesting Yahweh's Presence in mercy and revelation, the Lampstand symbolized Yahweh's Presence in perpetual wakefulness, through the reminder of the almond tree and the continual brightness of the living fire

⁸ *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Cherub,” by Merrill F. Unger, 192.

⁹ Ronald F. Youngblood, *Exodus*, Everyman's Bible Commentary series (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 122; cf. Kaiser, 455.

¹⁰ Davis, 255.

¹¹ Keil and Delitzsch, 2:174-75.

(cf. Num. 17:1-11). The watcher over Israel never nodded, much less slept (Ps. 121:4).¹²

The seven-branched lampstand (*menorah*) is still a popular symbol of Judaism and Israel even today. The lampstand is commonly taken to be a type of Christ, usually on the basis of Revelation 1:4. It has also been taken as a symbolic image of the Law.¹³

IV. The Tabernacle Structure (Exod. 26)

The tabernacle walls consisted of rigid supports with curtains hung over the boards. These draperies also evidently formed its ceiling. Most commentators believe that the tabernacle was a single structure, but a few believe it consisted of three separate structures one on top of the other. These structures were the tabernacle proper, a tent over it made of goat hair, and another tent of [sea cow?] skins that covered both of these structures.¹⁴

The whole tabernacle illustrates four things according to Scripture: the heavens where God dwells and from which He manifests Himself (Heb. 4:14; 9:23-24), the work of Christ (John 2:19-21; Heb. 3:3-4; 8:2; 9:11-12), the individual believer (1 Cor. 6:19), and the church (1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 10:21).

A. The Curtains (26:1-14)

The extent to which these curtains were visible from inside the tabernacle is not clear and has been the subject of debate. They were of four colors that some have interpreted as having symbolic significance on the basis of other biblical references to and uses of these colors. The colors were white (holiness), blue (heavenly origin and character), purple (royal glory), and crimson (blood and vigorous life).¹⁵ Woven into the fabric of the curtains were images of cherubim, apparently intended to recall the theme of “paradise lost” by alluding to the cherubim which guarded the “Tree of Life” in Genesis 3:24.¹⁶

Within the sanctuary, moving from the inside out, the curtains of fine linen were visible only to the priests who served in the presence of him who is purity and righteousness itself. The curtains of goats' hair were reminders of the daily sin offering that was a kid from the goats (Num 28:15) and of our cleansing from sin (Lev. 16). The covering of rams' skins also recalled the sacrifice used in consecrating the priesthood (Lev. 8); and it was deliberately dyed red, showing that the priesthood was set apart by blood. Finally, the protective coating of the sea cows' [NIV; porpoise or dolphin, NASB; badger, AV, NKJV; goat, RSV] hides marked a protective separation between the dwelling place of God and the world.¹⁷

The total area covered by these tapestries was 45 feet long by 15 feet wide by 15 feet high. The most holy place was a 15 foot cube and the holy place was 30 by 15 by 15 feet.

B. The Boards and Sockets (26:15-25)

It is not clear whether these boards were solid or simply “frames” (NIV). The meaning of the Hebrew word (*qerashim*, “boards”) is probably more accurate. If they were solid, the priests would not have been able to see the colorful curtains hanging down over the outside of the tabernacle from within. If these boards were frames, they could have seen them through the walls. The embroidered curtains seem to have been visible overhead in either case and may have reminded the priests of God's celestial throne.

C. The Bars (26:26-30)

These were evidently rods that the priests threaded through the boards, or perhaps through rings attached to the boards, horizontally to give the boards stability and to hold them upright. They may have had

¹² Durham, 365.

¹³ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 302.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 302-3.

¹⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, 2:185.

¹⁶ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, 303.

¹⁷ Kaiser, 459.

significance to the Israelites or they may have simply served a practical purpose.

D. The Veil (26:31-35)

The veil and curtains were alike in design and construction. The veil hung to act as a wall separating the holy and most holy places into two rooms. The book of Hebrews used the veil in the temple, which replaced this one in the tabernacle, as a symbol of Jesus Christ's body. Torn in crucifixion, it opened the way for access into God's presence (Heb. 10:20; cf. Matt. 27:50-51; Mark 15:37-38; Luke 23:45-46).

E. The Screen (26:36-37)

This was a drapery, like the veil and curtains, that served as the front doorway to the tabernacle.

V. The Tabernacle Courtyard (27:1-19)

A. The Altar of Burnt Offerings (27:1-8)

The height of this altar was 5 feet. The altar had four horns (v. 2), one on each corner, to which the priests applied blood ritually (29:12). People occasionally clung to this altar as a place of refuge (cf. 1 Kings 1:50-51; 2:28). The priests bound some animals to these horns when they sacrificed them (Ps. 118:27). There was a grate (v. 4) halfway to the ground inside the altar that allowed air to circulate under the sacrifices and ashes to fall to the ground below. The "ledge" appears to have projected out from the altar about half way up its sides. Perhaps the priests stood on this ledge while placing the offerings on the altar.

This altar received the offerings of the Israelites. God met the Israelite where he was, in the courtyard, rather than where He was, within the veil. Nevertheless the Israelite had to make a special effort to approach God by entering the courtyard to present his offering (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20). The position of the altar just inside the entrance to the court made it as clear as symbology could that the beginning of fellowship between God and man must be in sacrifice.¹⁸

B. The Courtyard (27:9-19)

The courtyard was 50 cubits wide by 100 cubits long (75 feet by 150 feet). This area is about the size of a modest residential lot in the United States. The curtains that formed its perimeter were only half as high as those surrounding the tabernacle building (7 ½ feet instead of 15 feet). So the Israelites outside the courtyard could see the top part of the tabernacle building.

All its vessels were of copper-brass, which, being allied to the earth in both color and material, was a symbolic representation of the earthy side of the kingdom of God; whereas the silver of the capitals of the pillars, and of the hooks and rods which sustained the hangings, as well as the white color of the [linen] hangings, might point to the holiness of this site for the kingdom of God.¹⁹

The whole arrangement of the outer court, and in particular the placement of the altar of sacrifice and the laver, speak pointedly of man's approach to God.²⁰

This structure provided the same kind of physical separation between the holy God and His people as did the mountain at Sinai (temporal separation is also provided in the annual feasts and celebrations, e.g., the yearly Day of Atonement, Lev 16).²¹

The court preserved the Tabernacle from accidental or intentional profanation, and gave the priests a certain measure of privacy for the prosecution of their duties. Its presence was a perpetual

¹⁸ Frederick B. Meyer, *Devotional Commentary on Exodus*, reprint edition, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981), 349.

¹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, 2:190.

²⁰ Davis, p. 263.

²¹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, 298.

reminder that man should pause and consider, before he rushes into the presence of the Most High [cf. Eccles. 5:2].²²

VI. The Investiture of the Priests (27:20—28:43)

The preceding section (25:10—27:19) emphasized the revelation of the things that revealed God's *character*. Here begins the revelation of those things that pertained to the Israelites' *relationship* with God (27:20—30:38). The priesthood is the primary revelation in this new section.

The responsibilities of the priests in Israel fell into four categories.

1. They were responsible to *maintain the holy place* of the tabernacle. This included burning incense each morning and evening, trimming and refilling the lamps each evening, and replacing the showbread each Sabbath.
2. They also *maintained the tabernacle courtyard*. This involved offering sacrifices each morning and evening and blessing the congregation after the daily sacrifice. It also meant keeping the fire on the brazen altar burning always, and periodically removing its ashes.
3. They were responsible to *inspect and appraise people and sacrifices*. These included lepers, wives accused of adultery, and things dedicated to the sanctuary.
4. Finally, they were to *teach and counsel the people*. They were to communicate the Mosaic Law to the congregation and decide difficult cases of law.

A. The Oil for the Lamps (27:20-21)

These instructions concern the clear olive oil the priests were to prepare for use in the tabernacle lamps. They form a transition from an emphasis on the tabernacle furnishings to the priests' ministry that follows.

The priests had to trim and refill the lamps on the lampstand in the holy place every evening. There was light in the holy place all night (cf. Lev. 24:3; 1 Sam. 3:3).

Oil is clearly a symbol of the Holy Spirit in Scripture (1 Sam. 16:13; Heb. 1:9). The Spirit would be a perpetual source of light for them and also empower God's people to be a perpetual light to the nations.

B. The Garments for the Priests (28:1-5)

Aaron had been functioning as a priest (Heb. *cohen*; 4:16). Now Moses officially appointed him and his sons to this office. God apparently specified Aaron because he was the brother of Moses whom God had already designated as the covenant mediator. Before the priests as sinners could approach their holy God, they had to cover their uncleanness symbolically with holy clothes. The priests had to wear these garments when they served in the tabernacle ritual, but they could not wear them at other times (35:19; Lev. 16:4, 23, 24). The fact that the workmen who made these garments needed to be wise and skillful (v. 3) indicates the importance that God placed on their construction.

Aaron's priesthood prefigured that of Jesus Christ (Heb. 5:5; 7:26; 9:11).

C. The Ephod (28:6-14)

The ephod was the most important and outermost garment of the high priest. It was an apron-like piece of clothing that fit over his robe (vv. 31-35).

The duty of the high priest was to enter into the presence of God and make atonement for the people as their mediator. To show that as mediator he brought the nation to God, the names of the twelve tribes were engraved upon precious stones on the shoulders of the ephod. The precious

²² Meyer, p. 348.

stones, with their richness and brilliance, formed the most suitable earthly substratum to represent the glory into which Israel was to be transformed as the possession of Jehovah (29:5); while the colors and material of the ephod, answering to the colors and texture of the hangings of the sanctuary, indicated the service performed in the sanctuary by the person clothed with the ephod, and the gold with which the colored fabric was worked, the glory of that service.²³

D. The Breastplate (28:15-30)

The breastplate was a pocket of material of the same fabric as the ephod. Twelve precious stones fastened to the front of it, and two objects, the Urim and Thummim that were probably stones also, lay within it. The 12 jewels represented the 12 tribes. Each one was unique. God later called the Israelites His jewels (Mal. 3:17). The high priest carried the tribes on his heart (v. 30) as well as on his shoulders. The heart refers to the seat of feelings and affections in the Old Testament.

The “Urim and Thummim” (v. 30; lit., “lights and perfection”) often were used in times of crisis to determine the will of God (Num. 27:21), but just how they functioned and what they looked like is unknown.²⁴

E. The Robe (28:31-35)

The high priest also wore this garment. It was his basic garment over which he put the ephod. It covered him completely so his natural nakedness did not appear (cf. Gen. 3:21).

God may have intended the pomegranates and bells on the hem of the robe (vv. 33-34) to remind the Israelites of God's commandments. The pomegranate was probably a symbol of the spiritually nourishing quality of God's Word (cf. Prov. 25:11; Ps. 19:8-11; 119:25, 43, 50; Deut. 8:3; Prov. 9:8; Eccles. 15:13). The bell was evidently a symbol of the sounding or proclamation of God's Word through testimony.²⁵ Some interpreters have felt pomegranates and bells represented fruitfulness and joy. Others have seen them as representing the fruits and gifts of God's Spirit.²⁶

F. The Gold Plate (28:36-38)

A plaque of pure gold engraved with “Holy to the Lord” attached to the front of the high priest's turban.

Through this inscription, which was fastened upon his headdress of brilliant white, the earthly reflection of holiness, he was crowned as the sanctified of the Lord (Ps. 106:16), and endowed with the power to exterminate the sin which clung to the holy offerings of the people on account of the unholiness of their nature, so that the gifts of the nation became well-pleasing to the Lord, and the good pleasure of God was manifested to the nation.²⁷

G. The Tunic, Turban and Sash (28:39)

These items completed the high priest's wardrobe. The tunic was an undergarment, the turban covered his head, and the sash served as a belt.

H. The Garments of the Lesser Priests (28:40-43)

The clothing described in these verses appears to be the garments the priests other than the high priest wore. All the priests ministered barefoot out of reverence for the holiness of God (cf. 3:5; Josh. 5:15).

The essential point of the priestly vestments is the central point of all the instructions concerning the media of worship: *Yahweh is present*, and Israel must respond to that Presence, be guided in that response, and be reminded constantly in worship as in life of the reality of the Presence and of the need for response.²⁸

23 Keil and Delitzsch, 2:195.

24 Kaiser, “Exodus,” 467.

25 See Keil and Delitzsch, 2:202-203.

26 Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , 306, recorded several other possible explanations of these decorations.

27 Keil and Delitzsch, 2:204.

28 Durham, 389.

VII. The Consecration of the Priests (29:1-37)

The Israelites carried out the instructions given here later. The record of this seven-day ritual appears in Leviticus 8, where Moses explained the offerings and procedures specified in this chapter more fully. That God specified this ceremony in such detail and Moses recorded it at such length point to its importance for Israel.

To Israel had been granted the privilege of being a special people; to Aaron and his sons was granted the privilege of being a special mediating instrument between that people and Yahweh, their Lord. A covenant meal was always part of such an arrangement (cf. 24:11; 32:6), and that is precisely what is implied in the sharing of the ram of consecration by Yahweh and the priests.²⁹

The priests bathing represented the necessity of cleanliness before God. The priests had sacrificial blood applied to their ears, thumbs, and big toes (v. 20). This symbolized their complete consecration: to hear the word of God, to serve as mediators, and to walk as an example to others. They experienced sprinkling with blood, signifying their complete sanctification. Their anointing with oil (v. 21) represented their endowment with power by God's Spirit for divine service.

VIII. The Service of the Priests (29:38—30:38)

A. The Daily Burnt Offering, Meal Offering, and Drink Offering (29:38-46)

In the offering of a young lamb each morning and each evening with flour, oil, and wine, the Israelites consecrated their lives afresh daily to the Lord. This was an offering of worship and expiation (i.e., the removal of sin, Lev. 1:1-9). It insured Israel's continuing communion with her God. "Thus the day was opened and closed with gifts to Yahweh, from whom all gifts were believed to come."³⁰

B. The Altar of Incense and the Incense Offering (30:1-10)

This altar was inside the holy place with the golden lampstand and the table of showbread (cf. 30:6; 40:3-5, 21-27). The priests would offer incense on this altar each morning and each evening, and the incense would burn all the time. The priests made the daily burnt offering and the daily incense offering together each day. Both were demonstrations of constant uninterrupted devotion to God. Students of Exodus have almost universally recognized the incense offered as a symbol of prayer that ascends to God (cf. Rev. 8:3-4). It was a sweet aroma to Him and was essential to maintain the divine-human relationship. Once a year Aaron applied the atonement blood on this altar to cleanse it afresh for another year (v. 10).

C. The Atonement Money (30:11-16)

The directions regarding the tabernacle opened with instructions concerning contributions for its construction (25:1-9). They close with this directive that every Israelite 20 years or older was to pay a flat fee of half a shekel during Israel's census for the tabernacle's maintenance (Num. 1:2; 26:2). Everyone was to pay the same amount because the cost of everyone's atonement was the same in the Lord's sight.

Israel's leaders collected this money whenever they took a census. In time it became a yearly "temple tax" (Matt. 17:24). A half shekel weighed .2 ounce, and it was silver. "Money" in verse 16 is literally "silver." In Jesus' day it amounted to two days wages (Matt. 17:24). Evidently the taking of a census incurred some guilt (v. 12). Perhaps it reflected lack of trust in God to multiply the nation as He promised (2 Sam. 24).

D. The Bronze Laver (30:17-21)

The laver was a large reservoir for the water that the priests used to wash with as they performed their duties. It stood between the bronze altar and the sanctuary. Its presence there symbolized the fact that

²⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, edited by Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 51.

³⁰ Durham, 396.

cleansing is necessary after the making of atonement and before the enjoyment of fellowship with God.

E. The Anointing Oil (30:22-33)

The special mixture God specified here was for use only in anointing the tabernacle, its furnishings, its utensils, and the priests. Four fragrant spices (myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia) blended with olive oil to produce an excellent perfume. It was holy in that the Israelites used it exclusively for this special purpose in the service of God. The priests could not use it for any other purpose in Israel.

F. The Incense (30:34-38)

As with the anointing oil, only a certain mixture of four ingredients was acceptable as incense for burning on the incense altar. Similarly not just any prayer is acceptable to God; only prayers offered as He has instructed will be acceptable (cf. 1 John 5:14).

Stacte is a fragrant resin obtained from some species of cistus, or “rockrose.” *Onycha* is the horny plate that covers a species of mussel found in the lakes of India which, when burned, emits a musky odor. *Galbanum* is a pleasantly aromatic gum resin derived from certain umbelliferous plants. *Frankincense* (from the Old French for “pure incense”), as used by the Jews, Greeks, and Romans, was a gum resin now called *olibanum* which was derived from certain trees of the genus *boswellia* found growing on the limestone of South Arabia and Somaliland. Thus, three of the four ingredients in the incense burned on the golden altar were *gum resins*. Gum resins are mixtures of gum and resin obtained from plants or trees by incision. Resins burn readily because they contain volatile oils.³¹

IX. The Builders of the Tabernacle (31:1-11)

Chapter 31 summarizes what God required for His people to approach Him. God appointed the men who would be responsible for interpreting Moses' instructions about the tabernacle and constructing it. He filled them with His Spirit so they would make choices consistent with His will (v. 3). God endowed Bezalel and Oholiab, his assistant, with natural ability as well as with the Holy Spirit to do the work He had appointed for them.

Though they were skilled, the narrative emphasizes clearly that they were to do the work of building the tabernacle by means of the skills that the Spirit of God would give them. There is an important parallel here with God's work of Creation in Genesis 1. Just as God did his work of Creation by means of his Spirit (Gen. 1:2—2:3), so also Israel was to do their work of building the tabernacle by God's Spirit.

The parallels between God's work in Creation and Israel's work on the tabernacle are part of the Pentateuch's larger emphasis on the importance of the work of God's Spirit among his people. It is of interest here to note that the two key characters in the Pentateuch who provide a clear picture of genuine obedience to God's will, Joseph and Joshua, are specifically portrayed in the narrative as those who are filled with the Spirit of God (Gen. 41:38; Deut. 34:9).³²

X. The Sign of the Sabbath (31:12-18)

Even though the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings was a sacred work, the workmen were not to overlook the sacred institution of the Sabbath. “You must observe my Sabbaths” is emphatic (v. 13). To violate the Sabbath, even for the sake of working on the tabernacle, would result in death (vv. 14-15). “Profanes” (v. 14) contrasts sharply with “sanctifies” (v. 13). As God's covenant people, the Israelites were to carefully observe the sign of that covenant (vv. 16-17). The Sabbath was the sign of “a lasting covenant” (*berit olam*, “a perpetual covenant”), as were the rainbow (Gen. 9:16), circumcision (Gen. 17:7, 13, 19), and the table of the bread of the Presence

³¹ John V. Myers, “What Was 'Brimstone'?”, *Kronos* 9:1 (Fall 1983):58.

³² Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , 309.

(Lev. 24:8). The Sabbath was thus a gift to Israel signifying that they were a separate people.³³

Observance of the Sabbath was unique to Israel. It distinguished Israel from all other nations. So important was its observance that the Israelite who failed to observe it died (v. 15). This sign was to continue throughout all succeeding generations (v. 13), as long as God continued to work through Israel as His primary instrument (cf. Rom. 10:4; Heb. 9:10). The analogy between God's work of Creation and Israel's construction of the tabernacle is made explicit by the reference to the Sabbath at the end of the narrative. Moses wrote the instructions concerning the tabernacle so they parallel what he wrote about the Creation. Note some of the similarities in the narratives in the following chart.³⁴

This section concludes the record of what Moses received from God during the 40 days and nights he was in the mountain that began in 25:1 (v. 18).

Creation (Gen. 1—2)	Tabernacle (Exod. 25—31)
The subject of the narrative is the establishment of God's good creation.	The subject of the narrative is the re-establishment of God's good creation.
The heavens and earth are the arena for the creation of divine-human fellowship.	The tabernacle is the arena for the restoration of divine-human fellowship.
God's Spirit was the enabling power in creation (Gen. 1:2—2:3).	God's Spirit was the enabling power in the construction of the tabernacle (Exod. 31:3, 6).
Structurally the creation account consists of seven acts each marked by divine speech ("And God said," Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26).	Structurally the tabernacle account consists of seven acts each introduced by divine speech ("And the LORD said," Exod. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12).
God made Adam and Eve according to a specific pattern: the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27).	Moses made the tabernacle according to a specific pattern: a heavenly reality (Exod. 25:9).
The Garden of Eden contained gold and jewels, and cherubim guarded it (Gen. 2:12a, 12b; 3:24).	The tabernacle contained gold and jewels, and cherubim guarded it (Exod. 25:3, 7, 18).
When creation was complete, God inspected and evaluated all that He had done (Gen. 1:31) and uttered a blessing (Gen. 1:28).	When the tabernacle was complete, Moses inspected and evaluated all that was done (Exod. 39:43a) and uttered a blessing (Exod. 39:43b).
God rested on the seventh day at the end of the creation narrative (Gen. 2:1-3).	God told the Israelites to rest on the seventh day at the end of the tabernacle narrative (Exod. 31:12-18).
A fall followed the creation narrative (Gen. 3).	A fall followed the tabernacle narrative (Exod. 32).

³³ Kaiser, "Exodus," 476.

³⁴ Adapted from Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, pp. 289-90, 306, 309.

Creation (Gen. 1—2)

This fall resulted in the breaking of the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 3:14-19).

God covered Adam and Eve's nakedness (Gen. 3:21).

Tabernacle (Exod. 25—31)

This fall resulted in the breaking of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 33:1-5).

God ordered the covering of the priests' nakedness (Exod. 28:42).