

Worshiping Immanuel
Exodus 25:1–31:18
Series: Book of Exodus [#18]
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Introduction

We have arrived at a lengthy and detailed section of Exodus about the Tabernacle. Many people glance at this section and place it in the dry, dull and boring category, along with the Law we looked at last week and the Bible's genealogies. I won't bother to ask how many of us read this section a number of times in preparation for this morning.

It *can be* difficult to plow your way through these sections. Some consider them a good cure for insomnia. That's not without precedent in Scripture. Esther chapter six tells us that the Persian King Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, "could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of the records, the chronicles, and they were read to the King" (1). What better way to fall asleep than listening to a chronological account of the daily happenings of the court! *BORING* with a capital B!

Take a step of faith as we approach this section. Faith, that as part of God's inspired Word, there is important truth here for you. Faith, that as God gave Israel instructions for worshiping Him, He also has truths here for your worship, for our worship. Faith, that while God was Immanuel—God with them—in a special way in the Tabernacle, there are insights here for us about knowing, experiencing and *worshiping Immanuel*, God with us. We begin with...

The Tabernacle's Importance.

The Tabernacle's importance to Israel is grounded in its purpose as God's mandated central place of worship. Go to 25:8. God told Moses,

"Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it" (8-9).

God designed the Tabernacle and He expected Moses and Israel to follow His design exactly. Our word *Tabernacle* comes from a Latin word for *tent*. The word Tabernacle that Moses used here refers to a dwelling, a dwelling place.

Now Moses knew, just as King Solomon did at the dedication of the Temple, that "... heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain [God], how much less this [Temple] which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). God did not confine Himself to the Tabernacle any more than He did to the manifestation of Himself in the burning bush or pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. Yet it was the central place where God met with the people through the priests. The Tabernacle was the place where God's glory was manifested, where the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire rested until God lifted it up to move them on in their travels.

The importance of the Tabernacle is also seen in its overall place in Scripture. Thirteen chapters in the book of Exodus deal with the Tabernacle. That's almost one-third of the book's 40 chapters. In comparison, God's appearance and call of Moses to lead Israel out of slavery is covered in two chapters, 3 and 4. Moses' encounters with the Pharaoh, including the ten plagues, are covered in chapters 5–12, or 8 chapters. The people leaving Egypt and crossing through the Red Sea is covered in just one chapter, chapter 14.

Moving on to the other four books of Moses, we find the Tabernacle is the subject in 18 of the 27 chapters in Leviticus, 13 of the 36 chapters in Numbers, and 2 of the 34 chapters in Deuteronomy. Then in the New Testament, it is covered in 4 of the 13 chapters in Hebrews.

Whatever God says in the Bible has significance, even if stated only briefly and once. When God dwells on, expands and repeats truths or subjects, it is to give more information and underscore their importance.

The Tabernacle was important to Israel as the focal point of God's presence and worship through the sacrifices. The extent to which God deals with it in Scripture also highlights its importance. Let's move on to the Tabernacle itself, its design.

The Tabernacle's Design.

As we put the first of a few slides on screen, there are a few things to note. While God gave Moses "the pattern" (25:9, 40) or "plan" (26:30), we do not have any design drawings or pictures of the Tabernacle. So, when you look at pictures of the complete Tabernacle or its parts, you will see some differences from one person's concept to another's.

As well, the measurements may be close, but we can't get to absolutely precise numbers because the unit of measurement was the cubit. Originally a cubit was the distance between the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. It was standardized, more or less, to 18", although there were several differing cubits in use over time.

Let's look at the overall plan and dimensions. In addition to what is on screen, there is a diagram in your bulletin, just before the sermon outline. There also is a model at the back of the sanctuary.

- The overall size of the enclosure was 75' wide by 150' deep.
- The tent itself was 15' wide by 45' deep.
- The Holy Place was 15' wide by 30' deep.
- The Holy of Holies was 15' wide by 15' deep.

The basic materials are listed in the first 9 verses of chapter 25. Let's pick it up at verse 3.

"This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones

for the ephod and for the breastpiece” (3-7).

Some have tried to put a dollar value on all the materials described in general terms here and listed in detail in the following verses and chapters. That is very difficult to do. What is clear is that the total value of this portable Tabernacle was enormous. The materials God selected in part point to His greatness and majesty.

Let’s walk through the basic elements of the design, starting from the outside and working in to the focal point. First, of course, there is the gate. 27:16 tells us the gate was 20 cubits or 30’ wide. This was the only entrance. All the priests ministering inside and every person bringing a sacrifice entered here.

Just as there was only one entrance into the Tabernacle area to meet with God for sacrifice, there is only one way to meet with God to have our sins forgiven. That way is Jesus Christ. When Jesus used the analogy of Himself as the good shepherd and His people as the sheep, He said, “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). Then later, He drew people’s minds to the one entrance of the Tabernacle when He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (14:6).

Moving through the gate we enter the courtyard and the first object of God’s design we see is the bronze altar where animals would be sacrificed. The person bringing the animal for sacrifice would come to a priest, confess his sins and place his hands on the head of the animal symbolizing that his sin was transferred to the sacrificial animal. Do you remember what John the Baptist said on the day Jesus appeared when John was baptizing people in the Jordan river? “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). As the apostle Paul wrote, “[God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Then, beyond the altar and before the tent was the bronze laver, or basin filled with water. The priests washed their hands and feet here before entering the tent. In chapter 30 beginning at verse 19 God told Moses,

“Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the LORD” (19-20).

In Ephesians 5 Paul wrote, “Christ [also] loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (25-27).

Moving forward we come to the tent itself. Behind the curtain or veil was the first part, the Holy Place. It had just three things in it, first the lampstand. God’s design for the lampstand is found in 25:31-40. It had seven lights and was the pattern for the Menorahs that Jewish people use today. On the practical side, it gave light to the otherwise dark room. God directed that the lights of this lampstand burn continually (Leviticus 24:4). The symbolism of Christ in this is

clear. Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

The second thing in the Holy Place was the table of “the bread of the Presence” (25:30). It was across the room from the lampstand. In Leviticus 24 we have God’s instructions that there were to be twelve cakes of bread in two rows on the table which were replenished each sabbath day, with the priests eating the week-old bread. *Before you jump there, let me assure you that eating week-old bread is **not** a guideline for pastors’ diets today!* There also were dishes and bowls on the table for drink offerings, as well frankincense. Again, the connection to Christ is clear. For example, Jesus said in John’s gospel, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst” (6:35; cf. 48). He also said He is “the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever” (6:58).

Then, moving straight ahead toward the Holy of Holies was the altar of incense. The priests were to burn fragrant incense on it every morning (30:7, 8). King David wrote in the 141st Psalm, “May my prayer be counted as incense before You [God]” (2). Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 state that Jesus intercedes for us.

Immediately behind the altar of incense was the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. And so we come to the second part of the Tent, the Holy of Holies and the ark, the ark of the testimony or covenant with the mercy seat on its top. Only the High Priest could enter this section and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Inside the ark, or chest, were three things: The tables of the Law (25:16), Aaron’s rod that budded and a pot of manna (cf. Hebrews 9:4). On the Day of Atonement the High Priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat first for himself and all the priests, and then a second time for the people (cf. Leviticus 16). Hebrews 9,

“when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (11-12).

In addition to these things, briefly, note three other parts of the Tabernacle and its ministry. The priests were the ministers of the Tabernacle, ministering for the people before God. God selected Moses’ brother Aaron as the first High Priest and his descendants then continued that role.

Chapter 31 records some of the people who built the Tabernacle—people that God chose Himself, people whom He filled with His Spirit in wisdom, understanding, knowledge and craftsmanship (3, 6). God selected and enabled those who built the Tabernacle.

What about the resources or support for this great project? When we go back to the start of this section, God told Moses in chapter 25 verse 2, “Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution.” These were voluntary offerings. Later, in chapter 31, there was an assessment to be made for the

ongoing ministry of the Tabernacle.

I've given you a fair bit of information so far. Now let's put it in perspective a bit by noting some of the Tabernacles' Value for us.

The Tabernacle's Value Today.

First, the Tabernacle pictures and reminds us that we worship Immanuel, God who is with us. While many things have changed as God has unfolded His plan for the ages, one of the things that has been constant from Adam and Eve to Moses, to the church and, yes, will never change, is God's dwelling with the people He has redeemed. Look at chapter 25 verse 8 again. God said, "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them." The Tabernacle was for dealing with sin through sacrifices, but it also was a place where God met tangibly with His people.

It is not just a coincidence that God directed the apostle John to write of Jesus, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt [*tabernacled*] among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). You may recall Jesus' words to the church in Laodicea, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus was mercifully appealing to those believers who had become lukewarm to Him, as they became comfortable and trusted in the material wealth they enjoyed. He asked them to open their hearts fully to Him and the richness of His personal presence at the core of their being. This invitation is given to all of us today—to open our hearts fully to Christ, to Immanuel, God with us.

And then in the book of the Revelation the apostle John records this part of His vision from God,

"I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them'" (21:3).

When you think of the Tabernacle, remember that Israel worshiped God there, God who was with them. Let the Tabernacle remind you that God is with you, with everyone who opens his or her heart to Him. Remember that as you worship God He is not distant, but with you.

Secondly, the Tabernacle pictures and reminds us that we worship God who is holy, majestic and sovereign. As I said earlier, the great cost of the Tabernacle in terms of materials and labor points to God's greatness and majesty. God's provision of sacrifices to cover sin until *The Sacrifice*, *The Lamb of God*, Jesus, shows both His mercy and His holiness. Sin must be dealt with to receive forgiveness from God and fellowship with Him. And, it must be dealt with in God's way. As well, God does not look lightly on those who sin in worshiping, serving Him in ways that go against His revealed truth. Early on in the Tabernacle's service, two of Aaron's sons disobeyed God's explicit directions on how to perform their priestly duties and, Leviticus 10 tells us, God struck and killed them with fire that came from His presence in the cloud of glory over the mercy seat.

Just as the priests had to cleanse themselves from sin actually and symbolically to perform their service, their worship, so must we. As we shared Communion earlier this morning, I reminded us, we are to come to Communion clearing up all sin with God. We are to look at ourselves and make sure we are right with God, because He is holy.

A third value of the Tabernacle for us is that it pictures and reminds us that we worship Christ, particularly for His salvation. We've seen Christ and His salvation pictured throughout our entire tour of the Tabernacle. God gave Moses instructions for the Day of Atonement which are recorded in Leviticus 16. Jesus Christ's superior, final atonement is described in Hebrews chapters 7-10. He is our High Priest forever who is pure, undefiled by sin and has provided atonement once for all when He offered up Himself. The priests of Israel served "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" covering, not taking away sins, while Christ perfectly provided eternal salvation through His own blood.

When you think of, picture the Tabernacle, the many years of countless sacrifices in it and later in the Temple, pause, be silent. Let the Holy Spirit impress the images and truths deep into your mind and heart. Thank, praise Christ for His great salvation. Worship Him for His salvation which you have received and is available to all who will receive it.

Finally, the Tabernacle has value for us today as it pictures and reminds us to worship God by giving freely and generously. Remember, when God sent out the call for all the materials for the Tabernacle, that great fortune in material terms, He said that "from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution" (25:2). He wanted people to give voluntarily as well as generously. But also remember, as King David would later pray, "all things come from You [God], and from Your hand we have given You" (1 Chronicles 29:14).

The same was true for Israel here in the wilderness. You may wonder, "How did they get all this wealth of gold, silver, bronze and the other materials?" Before Moses agreed to God's call to lead Israel out of Egypt at the burning bush, God told him,

"I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians" (3:21-22).

Then as God announced the tenth plague to Moses, He said, "Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold" (11:2). Finally, after God struck dead all the firstborn of Egypt, Moses recorded,

"Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians" (12:35-36).

Yes, Israel gave voluntarily and generously of the things that they received from God's hand.

That same principle stated by King David, and experienced generations before him by the people preparing to build the Tabernacle, underpins the apostle Paul's call to us in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Whenever you think of the Tabernacle, whenever you consider your giving to God, remember that all that you have comes from the hand of God and that you are the steward, not the owner. Remember that God calls you to give willingly and generously, that He loves a cheerful giver.

Conclusion.

As we started this I asked you to approach this section of specifications and details in faith, in faith that God has truth for you about *Worshiping Immanuel*, God with us. Some of us may feel like we are *out in the wilderness* now as Israel was there at Mt. Sinai so long ago.

- Relationships may be strained, empty or broken.
- Purpose and direction may be nowhere on the horizon as you wander in your wilderness.
- Your body may be letting you down.
- Your bank account may have evaporated.

God is Immanuel, He is with you in the wilderness as well as in the oasis. Thank Him for that. Worship and draw close to Him right now, wherever you are in the circumstances of life.

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