

THE PLAN FOR WORSHIP

Series pt 14: Exodus 25-28; 35-39
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 11/5/23, Matt Heerema

Please turn with me to Exodus chapter 25.

Have you ever heard the phrase “the devil is in the details?” It means something like things are always more complicated than they seem, and those complications are going to cause you problems if you find out about them too late.

I learned this week that that phrase is a spin on an earlier more popular phrase: God is in the details. And that is what our passage teaches us this week.

Exodus 25:1-9 (CSB)

1 The Lord spoke to Moses: 2 “Tell the Israelites to take an offering for me. You are to take my offering from everyone who is willing to give. 3 This is the offering you are to receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze; 4 blue, purple, and scarlet yarn; fine linen and goat hair; 5 ram skins dyed red and fine leather; acacia wood; 6 oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; 7 and onyx along with other gemstones for mounting on the ephod and breastpiece. 8 “They are to make a sanctuary for me so that I may dwell among them. **9 You must make it according to all that I show you—the pattern of the tabernacle as well as the pattern of all its furnishings.**

We are in the back half of the book of Exodus finally, and we’re now past most of the exciting, monumental, miraculous acts of God to save Israel that are described in Exodus, and the book at this point takes a strange turn. It turns out that about a quarter of the book describes, in minute detail, down to measurements and specific materials, how to build the tabernacle, and all of the implements relating to the proper worship of Israel’s God.

Many New Year’s resolutions to read the whole Bible cover to cover, crash on the rocks of Exodus chapter 25-28. Here’s a clip:

Exodus 26:7-14 (CSB)

7 “You are to make curtains of goat hair for a tent over the tabernacle; make eleven of these curtains. 8 Each curtain should be forty-five feet long and six feet wide. All eleven curtains are to have the same measurements. 9 Join five of the curtains by themselves, and the other six curtains by themselves. Then fold the sixth curtain double at the front of the tent. 10 Make fifty loops on the edge of one curtain, the outermost in the first set, and make fifty loops on the edge of the corresponding curtain of the second set.

11 Make fifty bronze clasps; put the clasps through the loops and join the tent together so that it is a single unit. 12 As for the flap that remains from the tent curtains, the leftover half curtain is to hang over the back of the tabernacle. 13 What remains along the length of the tent curtains—a half yard on one side and a half yard on the other side—should hang over the sides of the tabernacle on either side to cover it.

Have you ever read this for your morning devotional? *Super deep, and meaningful and encouraging, right?* And it goes on and on this way, eleven chapters worth! And the second half of it basically repeats the first half, almost word for word!

Many commentators have observed that while it took God only 6 days to actually speak all of creation into existence, according to the end of chapter 24, it took him 40 days and 40 nights to explain how to how to build the tabernacle!

Why all this detail? Is it important? What am I supposed to do with it?

We're going to take a high level look at this detail this morning, and I want to tell you that this detail is all very important, because it points us to Jesus.

Because the detail is actually a shadow, and that shadow, we will see, is of Jesus himself.

Let's dive in and see what that means.

DETAIL

The ark

Exodus 25:10 (CSB)

10 "They are to make an ark of acacia wood, forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high.

Exodus 25:22 (CSB)

22 I will meet with you there above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony; I will speak with you from there about all that I command you regarding the Israelites.

As we read the description of the construction of the ark, which was to be the focal point of the tabernacle worship, we note that the space between the cherubim, where God said he would

meet with his priest, was empty space. In any other religion this would certainly have been an idol, a statue, an image of some sort used to represent the god. Why is it empty? Because only false gods need images to represent them. It would be The Most High God himself who would meet with the priest in the space between the bowing cherubim.

The table and the bread

Exodus 25:23 (CSB)

23 "You are to construct a table of acacia wood, thirty-six inches long, eighteen inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high.

Exodus 25:30 (CSB)

30 Put the Bread of the Presence on the table before me at all times.

The point of this section is the bread not the table.

Food set down in front of an idol was (and still is!) a common feature in false religions. It was often a sign of a symbiotic relationship. The god did something for the people, and the people fed the god food. Not so with The Most High. The bread (we find out later) is for the priests to eat. The priests, who represent the people before God, were fed this important bread, showing that God always provides for his people, at all times.

The lampstand

This is a complicated lamp, but look at verse 40.

Exodus 25:40 (CSB)

40 Be careful to make them according to the pattern you have been shown on the mountain.

We're going to see this phrase repeated a few times, and it is a key for us today.

The tabernacle

Chapter 26 is all about one of the central themes in all of the old testament. We're going to cover the tabernacle in its own sermon in the future. For our purposes today though, once again just scan this passage and look at the detail.

Chapter 26 is a wonderful source for expert-mode bible trivia: how many golden clasps were to be made for the tabernacle?

The altar of burnt offering

Exodus 27:8b (CSB)

They are to make it just as it was shown to you on the mountain.

Again we see this comment about making it according to the pattern shown.

The courtyard & Oil for the lamp

Exodus 27:21 (CSB)

21 In the tent of meeting outside the curtain that is in front of the testimony, Aaron and his sons are to tend the lamp from evening until morning before the Lord. This is to be a permanent statute for the Israelites throughout their generations.

The Priestly Garments

Exodus 28:1-2 (CSB)

1 "Have your brother Aaron, with his sons, come to you from the Israelites to serve me as priest—Aaron, his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 2 Make holy garments for your brother Aaron, **for glory and beauty.**

The Ephod, a piece of clothing draped from shoulder to thigh, the Breastpiece, the Robe, the Turban, the Tunic, Sashes, Headbands, all the way down to their Underwear! All prescribed in vast detail by God.

What are we supposed to do with this?

The first part of answering that question is to understand what the original author was trying to say to the original audience. And in this case, there is no great theological treatise being unfolded by Moses. No profound theological truths being preached. Rather, we are being shown something: a pattern to be followed.

What was Israel supposed to do with all this information?

First, they were supposed to notice something missing. Completely unlike their neighboring religions, these were **not objects of worship**: these were not images to reverence, or artifacts to touch and receive some sort of mystical power. These were **tools used for worship**. God wasn't going to set up a system where he would remain distant, and we were supposed to look at statues and imagine him. He was going to show up himself in the tabernacle.

Second, they were supposed to build it. And they actually ended up doing so in chapters 35-39! We'll talk about that next week. But why did God want them to do all this? And why doesn't the Bible just say "God told Moses, build a tabernacle, with a lamp, and a table, and an altar." Why do we have all the detail?

God is setting up practices for Israel to do for about 1,500 years, as part of a rescue plan. To prepare his people for rescue, not just from physical slavery in Egypt, but for rescue from their ultimate slavery to sin. And he's doing that, through these detail, because these details, are actually a shadow. And he's pointing us to the one who is casting the shadow.

SHADOW

Hebrews 8:5 (CSB)

5 These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain.

The author of Hebrews tells us that Moses was given all this detail, and was to be careful to do everything precisely according to God's instructions, because that pattern is a shadow. And Paul picks this same theme up and lets us in on the mystery, that the one casting the shadow is Christ himself.

SUBSTANCE

Colossians 2:17 (CSB)

17 These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ.

In the tabernacle, the bread of the presence, the priestly garments, and the altar - God is with his people, providing for their every need, and paying attention to the sacrifice made by his great high priest who is clothed in glory and beauty.

Who does this remind you of? Jesus.

So can't we just skip to that? I wouldn't recommend it. Where's the profit in reading through this stuff if it's the primary bail-out point for those trying to read through the Bible in a year? Use it to slow down and read the Bible at the Bible's pace.

Put yourself in Israel's shoes. Feel the fabric. Hear the clink of the metal rings on the poles. Open your mind's eye to imagine the beauty of the glint of the lamplight in all those gold implements. Imagine the fear, the weight, the reverence, of this Holy place, holy clothing, and holy items for the purpose of worship. Think of the care and the craftsmanship that went in to creating these objects that would be used for the next 480 years until the temple was built.

But most of all, let it point you to Christ, our great high priest, clothed in majesty, the one who became one of us and dwelt among us, the one who sacrificed himself to atone for our sins..

Hebrews 9:11-12 (CSB)

11 But Christ has appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.