

18. The Ark of the Covenant

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When I read the Book of Exodus for the first time in 1987, in my ignorance, I thought, "Who cares about these Tabernacle's decorations and size?" Obviously, God did. He tells His servant Moses how this Tabernacle should be built exactly. There are deep spiritual reasons and lessons behind them to many people's surprise.

In chapters 25 through 30 of Exodus, God gives Israel the blueprint for the Tabernacle and the pattern for the garments for the high priest. Next we have the construction and erection of the Tabernacle and the fact that it was filled with the glory of the Lord. The Tabernacle was to be the center of Israel's life because it was there where man would approach God.

During the time of the Wilderness, these Israelites carried the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle wherever the Lord led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

A. GIVING FROM HEART

Exodus 25:1-9 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. 3 And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; 4 blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair; 5 ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; 6 oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; 7 onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate. 8 And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. 9 According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.

Israel had been out of slavery for only a few months, now the Lord asks them to make a contribution to help build the Tabernacle. The amazing thing is that the children of Israel gave so much they were told to stop giving! A thing like this does not happen very often. I was a pastor for last four years, and I never had to restrain folk from giving to the church. But Moses did! There were a few times when our office manager tells me the total amount of that particular week's offering, I wondered whom I offended. But our God has been faithful to meet our needs every needs.

Our giving should not be done because somebody made us feel guilty or to shut them up. Rather we should give it to the Lord because our willing heart compels us.
2 Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Our God is a rich God and can use any method of providing He wants. Yet He usually uses the willing hearts of His people as the way to support His work. This is because God wants to develop giving hearts within us. When we become givers we become more like God, who is the greatest Giver.

Somebody who is very smart calculated the amount of money to build this Tabernacle and the Ark of God. They say that it would cost 13 million dollars.

For that our first reaction is, "Where did these Israelites who were once slaves obtain these things?" Remember that Israel had just been delivered out of slavery and this

was part of the four hundred years back wages that they collected on their way out of the land of Egypt.

The pattern of the Tabernacle was according to a heavenly reality. It was a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

Hebrews 8:5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the Tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

That means that it had to be made according to exact dimensions, being somewhat of a "scale model" of the area around God's throne in heaven.

B. THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Exodus 25:10-17 "And they shall make an Ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. 11 And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. 12 You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side. 13 And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. 14 You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the Ark may be carried by them. 15 The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. 16 And you shall put into the Ark the Testimony which I will give you."

The first item God told Moses to build was the Ark, later called the Ark of the Covenant. This was the most important single item associated with the Tabernacle, modeled after the throne of God in heaven. The dimension is 3 foot 9 inches long, 2 foot 3 inches wide and 2 foot 3 inches high.

The cubit was a unit of measure based on the length of the forearm from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow. If you measure yours, you will find it is about eighteen inches.

The Ark of the Covenant was essentially a box – an ark means a box, not a boat. It was made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold.

The Ark is a perfect symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ in His deity and humanity. Acacia wood is harder and darker than oak. It is also very durable because wood-eating insects avoid it. This represents a man without sin. Jesus Christ was the God-man. His deity was represented by the gold and His humanity was represented by the wood. It is not a wooden chest, nor a gold chest. There is no mingling of the two material. Not like Centaur who is supposedly half man and half horse from a Greek myth, Jesus was 100% God and 100% man.

Jesus Christ was not merely a wonder-worker. Nor was He a man with an overdeveloped God consciousness. He was God and He is God! Some people who do not know the Bible well tend to argue that Jesus had never proclaimed that He is God. I'd love to ask them how much time they have for me to show the declarations He made throughout the four Gospels.

At the same time, Jesus was also perfectly man. He grew tired. He sat down to rest at a well in Samaria in the heat of the day. He slept, He ate, He drank, He laughed, He wept and beyond all that, He suffered and died. All of these are human characteristics.

The contents of the Ark were also symbolic. Aaron's rod that budded speaks of the Lord's resurrection. The manna speaks of the fact that Christ is the Bread of Life. The Ten Commandments speak of the life He lived on earth fulfilling the Law in all points and fulfilling the prophecies spoken of Him.

It is interesting that each of these three items is connected with rebellion on the part of God's people: the tables of Law with the making of the golden calf. Aaron's rod with the rebellion led by Korah. And the manna with Israel's complaining in the wilderness.

The poles were to remain inserted in the rings, and to be the only proper source of contact with the Ark. Apart from touching the poles, it was forbidden to touch the Ark of the Covenant.

C. THE MERCY SEAT

Exodus 25:17-22 You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. 18 And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. 20 And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat. 21 You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the Ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. 22 And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the Ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.

When someone hears 'the Mercy Seat,' it is easy for them to think it as an actual sitting place, like the Throne of Grace. It was the pure gold cover for the Ark of the Covenant.

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies, where he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the Mercy Seat. This made atonement for Israel's sins for another year. The sprinkled blood covered the sins of the people so that God saw the blood and not their rebellion.

The phrase "Mercy Seat" also means "propitiation." The fulfillment of this was done when Jesus Christ died once for all for the sins of the world and took away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Romans 3:25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

D. THE TABLE OF SHOWBREAD

Exodus 25:23-30 "You shall also make a table of acacia wood; two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. 24 And you shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold all around. 25 You shall make for it a frame of a handbreadth all around, and you shall make a gold molding for the frame all around. 26 And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings on the four corners that are at its four legs. 27 The rings shall be close to the frame, as holders for the poles to bear the

table. 28 And you shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be carried with them. 29 You shall make its dishes, its pans, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring. You shall make them of pure gold. 30 And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always.

Once you come out of the Holy of Holies, you would see three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place:

- 1) the Golden Lampstand
- 2) the Table of Showbread
- 3) the Altar of Incense

Inside the Holy Place is the place of worship. The Golden Lampstand is one of the most perfect figures of Christ that we have. The Table of Showbread speaks of Him as being the Bread of Life. The Altar of Incense speaks of prayer – that the Lord is our great intercessor today, and we pray to the Father through Him.

This table was to be made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold – 3 feet long, 1 foot, 6 inches wide, and 2 feet, 3 inches high.

According to Leviticus 24:5-9, showbread was made of fine flour, and twelve cakes of showbread – one for each tribe of Israel – set on the table, sprinkled lightly with frankincense. Once a week, the bread was replaced and only priests could eat the old bread.

The bread was a reminder that God fed His people spiritually and physically. The showbread speaks of Christ as the life-sustainer.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

E. THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

Exodus 25:31-40 "You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece. 32 And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side. 33 Three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower--and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. 34 On the lampstand itself four bowls shall be made like almond blossoms, each with its ornamental knob and flower. 35 And there shall be a knob under the first two branches of the same, a knob under the second two branches of the same, and a knob under the third two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand. 36 Their knobs and their branches shall be of one piece; all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold. 37 You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it. 38 And its wick-trimmers and their trays shall be of pure gold. 39 It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. 40 And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.

Some of the Bible translations call this as a Candlestick, but the proper translation is the Lampstand.

Local churches are represented by individual golden LAMPSTAND, giving God's light to the dark world. The lampstand in the Holy Place speaks of Jesus Christ, the Light

of the world. The oil for the lamps reminds us of the Holy Spirit, who has anointed us. Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles but failed in their mission. Today, each believer is God's light, and each local church is to shine in this dark world.

When you and I study the Word together, we meet around the person of Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us – just as those lamps reveal the beauty of the lampstand. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ as the Son of God, the One who came to earth on our behalf and who lives in heaven to intercede for us.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Our giving should not be done because somebody made us feel guilty or to shut them up. Rather we should give it to the Lord because our willing heart compels us.

2) The Bible is incredibly engineered by God to point to Jesus Christ as God, the Light of the World, the Sustainer of our lives and the Savior of this dying world.