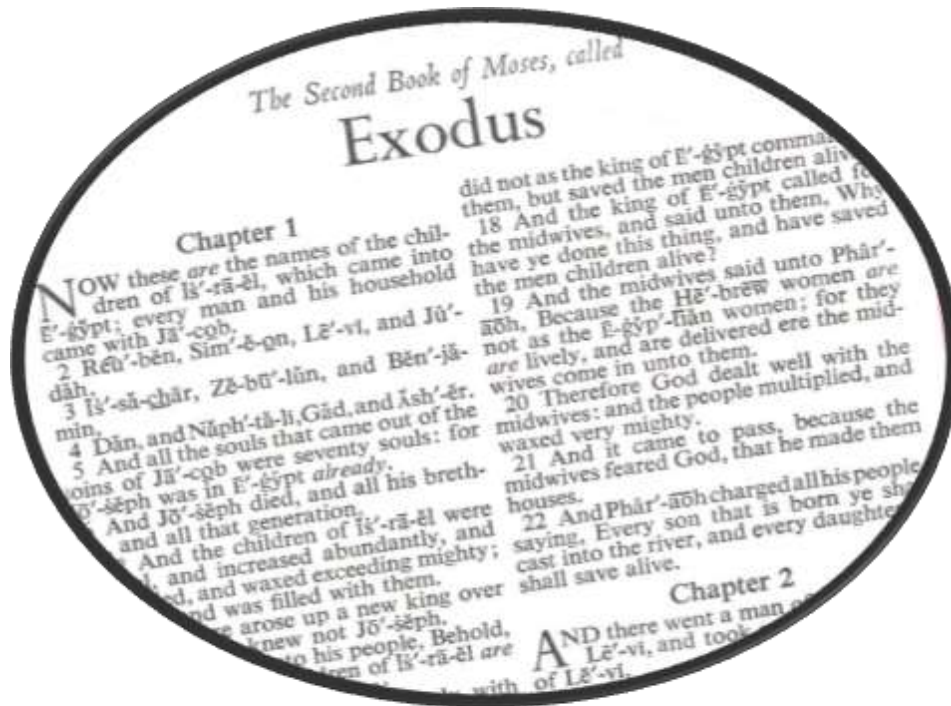


EXODUS – WEEK 17

THE TABERNACLE



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 25:17–26:30 – The Tabernacle

God specifies, in great detail, the design of the tabernacle and the things in it. Having specified the Ark of the Covenant in the previous lesson, He now specifies the lid (the mercy seat), a table for showbread, a lampstand and the walls and roof of the tabernacle itself.

He's tapping into the talents of His people, while forcing them to give up all of their gold. That's a test.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Please visit our website at www.ailbe.org to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs. This includes many email newsletters such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

Exodus 25:17–26:30 – The Tabernacle
Copyright 2019 F. Michael Slay
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Unless otherwise noted all scripture references are from the English Standard Version (ESV) © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NKJV stands for the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 Exodus 25:17-22 (ESV)

“You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

The curious thing about the lid to the ark is that it’s impossible to sit on the mercy seat; it’s blocked by the wings of the cherubim. *The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings.*

God specifically says that He will be above, not on, the mercy seat. *There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.* So, the mercy seat is not a mercy chair.

This is useful. It helps correct a huge error. God is not some guy with a beard, like in the Michelangelo painting of the creation of Adam. The truth is something very different. In fact, seeing His face is fatal.

Exodus is filled with references that imply that the LORD cannot be visualized, yet we cling to a silly image of Him. God doesn’t sit on His throne the way a man would. The design of mercy seat reminds us that He isn’t that much like us, even though we’re created in His image.

The Bible is a finite book about an infinite subject. It touches on a lot of things that we can never really understand this side of eternity. We need to recognize our limitations.

That should humble us.

People are not naturally humble, especially nowadays. Life is too easy. Everything’s under control.

And in a way it is. People don’t get eaten by wild animals any more. Diseases aren’t mysterious the way they used to be. We haven’t eliminated our physical challenges, but at least we comprehend them.

That’s a problem. We have a tendency to bring God down to our level and think we’re “pals.”

But He’s our Lord, not our buddy. Yes, He loves us. Why do we tend to think He admires us?

2 Exodus 25:23-30 (ESV)

“You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it. And you shall make a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.”

There’s a lot of latitude in how the table is made. Many things are specified, but most of the details aren’t. There are four legs but they can be square or round. The rim must be a handbreadth wide but its details aren’t given. Artistic renderings of the table typically depict it as ornately carved.

However, the rings and the poles for carrying the table are specified in detail. The rings are sturdy and located at points of strength. *And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table.* These rings must support the whole weight when the table is moved. *You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these.*

The holiness of the table is more important to God than how it looks. The design of the table is somewhat flexible but it, like the ark, must be transported using the poles, without being touched.

And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, lest they die. – Numbers 4:16a (ESV)

This command will be forgotten, with tragic results.

And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark. ... And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. – 2 Samuel 6:3b-4, 6-7 (ESV)

Whoa, don’t assume you know what’s important to God! He wrote a book for that.

Uzzah assumed that steadying the ark was more important than not touching it.

We assume too, especially in how we serve and worship Him. We tend to think that worship means attending church. That counts, but worship is bigger than that.

Don’t just read and meditate on these devotionals in your quiet times; worship the LORD privately. Declare His greatness. Praise His wonderful works. Give thanks.

3 Exodus 25:31-40 (ESV)

“You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers, and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent of pure gold. And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.”

A talent (75 pounds) of gold is worth over a million dollars. The lampstand is the most expensive piece in the tabernacle, but not the most important. It’s not holy enough to merit rings and poles for carrying.

The description of the lampstand is much more detailed than the descriptions of the ark and table. Note: the calyx of a flower is the leaves that had been the outer husk of the flower pod before it opened.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepal>

But the description of the lampstand is hard to understand. There are zillions of images of the lampstand on the internet – and they all look pretty much alike – yet they don’t show “cups” that look like *three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower*.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almond>

<http://www.turbosquid.com/3d-models/golden-lampstand-menorah-3d-max/613145>

Still, we know that the real one was done right because God then showed Moses exactly what he wants. *And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.*

God communicates this to Moses in two stages. First, He gives the general description, and then He shows it visually to Moses. Moses couldn’t have built the lampstand exactly right based on just the general description. But if Moses only had the visual to go on, he would have been hard pressed to get all the numbers right (e.g., the flowers).

God’s two-stage teaching caters to Moses’ human weaknesses.

Similarly, God sometimes tells us things in multiple ways. Is there something that God has said to you more than once? Have there been recurring hints, or a combination of general and special revelation?

Is God calling you? Are you resisting because it’s so unexpected? Open your heart to the possibilities.

4 Exodus 26:1-6 (ESV)

“Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be the same size. Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. Fifty loops you shall make on the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole.”

So, when all these pieces are joined together, they become a single cloth 40 cubits by 28 cubits (60' x 42'). How does this make a tabernacle?

The tabernacle is a huge tent with a wooden frame. This fabric forms the ceiling of the tent plus covers the outside of the frame.

The frame is described in the next readings. It's approximately 30 cubits long by 10 cubits wide by 10 cubits high (45' x 15' x 15'). If you drop a 60' x 42' piece of fabric over this like a tablecloth, you can almost completely cover the top, two sides, and one end, leaving the other end open for the entrance.

So, this covering hangs almost to the floor on both sides and one end but barely reaches the edge of the “table” on the other end. Of course, you'd never want a tablecloth to be that far off center, but it makes perfect sense here.

That's the basic design. More layers of covering will be added to make it waterproof, but they will follow this geometry.

Sometimes God's instructions are general principles and sometimes He gives specifics. The tabernacle design is specific. Why does this particular task need to be exactly specified while other things don't?

This is an exciting question because the answer would give us insight into God's priorities. That could allow us to serve Him better, or at least alert us to what's most important.

Unfortunately, this question is as difficult as it is exciting. We do have some clues though. This parallels the difference between the Old and New Testaments. The presence of the Holy Spirit gives us liberty.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. – Jeremiah 31:33a (ESV)

It's a tremendous honor to be given flexibility in how to serve God. However, the responsibility is scary.

We who teach will be judged with greater strictness. – James 3:1 (ESV)

5 Exodus 26:7-14 (ESV)

“You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make. The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains shall be the same size. You shall couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and the sixth curtain you shall double over at the front of the tent. You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set.

“You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together that it may be a single whole. And the part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. And the extra that remains in the length of the curtains, the cubit on the one side, and the cubit on the other side, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and that side, to cover it. And you shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and a covering of goatskins on top.”

This section describes the second through fourth layers of covering to go over the tabernacle. There are many distinctions to note. Curiously, the word “tent” is used here for the first time. However, the previous section seems to describe a flat roof. That’s hard to imagine for a tent as it would pool rainwater. Also, the description of the frame in the next section doesn’t include a ridgepole, so we can’t be sure that the roof wasn’t flat. Still, these people made a lot of tents and standard tent-making things may be assumed.

The second layer is slightly larger than the ornate first layer. That may be for protection or may be to leave room for a ridgepole or some other spacing between it and the first layer. The second layer is made of goat hair, which was a standard tent material in Old Testament times due to its durability and rain repellent properties. Nowadays the only goat hair fabrics we see are exotic types such as angora and cashmere, but back then all types of woven goat hair were common.

The last two layers are only briefly mentioned. No details are given, but the goal is obviously weather proofing. Such a short description provides latitude for things like a ridgepole to help the drainage. Note: the word for the last layer’s material is difficult to translate. The ESV says, “goatskins.” The New King James says, “badger skins.” The NIV says, “hides of sea cows.”

Yes, there are sea cows in the Red Sea.

The Israelites were expert tentmakers, and they were on the move, so it’s not surprising that the tabernacle is basically a tent. God often calls us in areas where we bring something to the table. That’s why there are many excellent spiritual surveys designed to help you discern what your gifts are.

We shouldn’t just ask God to show us what we should do, but also show us who we are to **be**. Who is God calling you to be? What gifts and talents has He given you? Where might that be leading?

You’re important.

6 Exodus 26:15-30 (ESV)

“You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. Ten cubits shall be the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. There shall be two tenons in each frame, for fitting together. So shall you do for all the frames of the tabernacle. You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; and forty bases of silver you shall make under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons; and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side twenty frames, and their forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame, and two bases under the next frame. And for the rear of the tabernacle westward you shall make six frames. And you shall make two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear; they shall be separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring. Thus shall it be with both of them; they shall form the two corners. And there shall be eight frames, with their bases of silver, sixteen bases; two bases under one frame, and two bases under another frame.

“You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the side of the tabernacle at the rear westward. The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall run from end to end. You shall overlay the frames with gold and shall make their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and you shall overlay the bars with gold. Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.”

A tenon is a post that sticks out of a piece of wood so as to fit into a hole. A frame isn't a solid board but a truss of boards. That's nearly as strong but lighter. Two tenons on the bottom of each frame fit into holes in two silver bases. This suggests that each frame has two strong verticals joined by cross-pieces.

The striking thing about all this is that the tabernacle seems to be consuming most, if not all, of the plunder the Israelites received from the Egyptians. Much of it is either made of gold or overlaid with gold. How much gold could they have? Now add the 96 solid silver bases to support the frames. They must weigh tons. At 40 pounds each, that'd come to almost 4000 pounds (2 tons).

They're being asked to give of their excess, but it's still a mighty test of faith. Silver and gold do strange things to people. Letting go will be an act of worship that will change them.

Letting go is central to serving Jesus as Lord. We must let go of our dreams, our treasures and, most importantly, control. Our silver and gold aren't metals; they're our plans. Life for the Israelites was already so uncertain that they didn't have much there to let go of. So, the silver and gold were what they could cling to. We cling to our vacation plans, our financial plans, and plans for our children's future.

Amazingly, God usually lets us keep our plans, but when He doesn't, we whine and pout. Ask God to help you see what's really important. We should thank Him for the plans we get to keep and let go of the rest. Think back on the times when God not giving you what you wanted turned out to be fortuitous.

Praise the LORD for these “trials” and “setbacks.”

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What is your mental image of God?
2. When you worship God privately, how should you start off?
3. Has a second or third message from God ever made you realize you weren't paying attention?
4. Have you ever changed your mind about something you thought was OK, but now think isn't?
5. Have you ever felt a calling far away from what you think your aptitudes are?
6. What is the thing you won't let go of?

Items for prayer: