

# EXODUS—WEEK 19

## FURNISHINGS



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Moses' Descent from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments by Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680) on display at the Royal Palace, Amsterdam*

God starts specifying the design of His holy tabernacle (or tent of meeting). But before He details the tabernacle itself, He specifies the furnishings that will go in it. The order is important.

In ancient Hebrew and Greek, order denotes importance. “First things first.” The furnishings in the tabernacle are the key holy elements.

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Thank you.

Exodus 25:1–40 — Furnishings  
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1 Exodus 25:1–9 (ESV)

*The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.*

Why do the Israelites have all these things to offer? Because they got them from the Egyptians.

*And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. — Exodus 12:36 (ESV)*

Since the LORD had effectively delivered this bounty to them, it's fair for Him to expect them to be generous with it. Nevertheless, God is very clear that any contribution must be voluntary. *From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.*

Each contribution must be from the heart. This is one of the key principles undergirding all service to God. If giving isn't voluntary, it isn't giving at all. It's a tax.

Giving is all about the heart. God doesn't need our money or anything else. If we choose to give something to the LORD (time, money, resources, effort, worship), it's important, but not because He couldn't have gotten along without it.

It's how faith puts its boots on.

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Christianity today has a problem with people not giving. The problem isn't laziness or lack of instruction; it's weak faith. Strong faith energizes people and makes them interested in getting things done.

But how do you cure weak faith? You can't just choose to have more faith. What you believe, and how strongly you believe it, is determined by things and events outside of your control.

Or is it? Maybe we can do things that affect our faith. Is there something I can do to stimulate my faith?

Yes; up my giving. Getting more involved in kingdom service boosts faith. God responds to action with action of His own. Things happen that cannot be explained by random luck.

Living a supernatural life kicks faith into high gear. Throw yourself into serving the kingdom, and the twists and turns will knock your socks off. There may be trials; there surely will be challenges.

But when you start seriously serving the Lord, you will not be bored.

2 Exodus 25:10–16 (ESV)

*“They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.*

God specifies the ark first. The house is being designed around the things in the house, not the other way round. This may seem odd, but it makes perfect sense, especially in view of the structure of ancient languages.

Putting something first is a way to emphasize it. In Biblical Greek, a word may be placed first in a sentence for emphasis. This is called prolepsis.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0007%3Apart%3D4%3Achapter%3D51%3Asection%3D126>

Understanding this is crucial to the correct translation of the last part of John 1:1 — *“and the Word was God.”* In the Greek, “God” (Theos) is actually the first word. That’s for emphasis.

Putting the most important thing first isn’t just an ancient practice. Modern newspaper articles put the most important things first in a structure called the inverted pyramid.

<https://www.mnngroup.com/articles/inverted-pyramid/>

The Ark of the Covenant is God’s throne. It is described first because it is the key to the whole tabernacle. Everything else is in support of the ark and God’s presence above the ark.

And inside the ark will be the Ten Commandments—the most precious document in the history of man.

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What’s the most important thing in your house? Last year, I’d have been tempted to say, “The heat pump.” The microwave also rates, as does the refrigerator.

But really it’s the Holy Spirit and the angels. Have you ever prayed to expel any evil spirits from your house? This is specifically mentioned by Richard Foster in his best seller, *“Prayer.”*

Consecrate your home. Declare it as holy ground. In the name of Jesus Christ, command all evil spirits to leave. If you’ve been struggling lately, try praying this prayer in every room. The first time I tried that, something happened as I entered the last room that scared me so much I almost screamed.

3 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.*

It isn't possible for a human to sit on the mercy seat; that's blocked by the wings of the cherubim. *The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings.*

God 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.* The mercy seat is not a mercy chair.

This is useful. It helps correct an 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.

*But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”* — Exodus 33:20 (ESV)

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 fully understand this side of eternity. We need to recognize our limitations.

That should humble us.

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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 all our physical challenges, but at least we comprehend them.

That's a problem. We tend to bring God down to our level and think we're pals or something.

But He's our Lord, not our buddy. Yes, He loves us, but why would we think He admires us?

## 4 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.

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 ignored, with tragic results.

*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 6:3 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 obeying a perfectly clear command. This may seem harsh, but it’s a warning about something that can kill you. Holy things are different. Do not assume.

Is it harsh or mean to say to a child, “If you see a snake with a rattle on its tail, do not touch 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.

## 5 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.”*

Today, a talent (75 pounds) of gold is worth about \$3 million. 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 many images of the lampstand on the internet—and they look similar—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’s 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.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Have you noticed a specific response to your commitment to serve the LORD?
2. Have you ever prayed to consecrate a place?
3. What is your mental image of God?
4. What assumptions do we make to our peril?
5. Has a second or third message from God ever made you realize you weren't paying attention?