

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Exodus

By Ken Miller

WEEK 10 READING



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The Motivation to Give Sacrificially

¹ Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, “These are the things that the Lord has commanded you to do. ² Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. ³ You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.”

⁴ Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “This is the thing that the Lord has commanded. ⁵ Take from among you a contribution to the Lord. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord’s contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; ⁶ blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats’ hair, ⁷ tanned rams’ skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, ⁸ oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁹ and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

¹⁰ “Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the Lord has commanded: ¹¹ the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; ¹² the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; ¹³ the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; ¹⁴ the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; ¹⁵ and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door, at the door of the tabernacle; ¹⁶ the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; ¹⁷ the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; ¹⁸ the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; ¹⁹ the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests.”

²⁰ Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. ²¹ And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the Lord’s contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. ²² So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord. ²³ And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats’ hair or tanned rams’ skins or goatskins brought them. ²⁴ Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the Lord’s contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. ²⁵ And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. ²⁶ All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats’ hair. ²⁷ And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, ²⁸ and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹ All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord. – Exodus 35:1-29 ESV

His face aglow with the glory of the Lord, Moses delivered his latest message to the people of Israel, and he began with a reminder of the Sabbath day of rest. With the construction of the Tabernacle not yet begun, Moses knew that the Israelites would be tempted to violate God's prohibition against working on the Sabbath in order to complete the massive project as quickly as possible. Since the Tabernacle was to house God's presence, it would be to their advantage to finish its construction in record time. They likely believed that the longer it took them to build it, the greater the risk that God might abandon them. So, God had Moses warn them against working on the Sabbath.

"In six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there must be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of complete rest to the Lord. Anyone who does work on it will be put to death." – Exodus 35:2 NLT

They were not to allow the project's size and scope and their zeal to complete it to lead to further disobedience. Violating the Sabbath would not be an acceptable compromise. In fact, God reminds them that even the simple task of kindling a fire on the seventh day would result in death. All of God's were equally valid and binding. There were to be no concessions or compromises. Attempting to fulfill the will of God by breaking the law of God was never acceptable. The Tabernacle was to be built according to God's terms and no shortcuts or loopholes were allowed. The people were expected to do everything God's way or not at all.

With the golden calf incident behind them, the Israelites were to prepare for the construction of the Tabernacle. It was time for God's design to become a reality but before they could begin, the people had to provide the materials for its construction. This was not the first time the people had heard about God's command for a voluntary contribution of building materials.

"Tell the people of Israel to bring me their sacred offerings. Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them. Here is a list of sacred offerings you may accept from them:

*gold, silver, and bronze;
blue, purple, and scarlet thread;
fine linen and goat hair for cloth;
tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather;
acacia wood;
olive oil for the lamps;
spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense;
onyx stones, and other gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's
chestpiece.*

"Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them." – Exodus 25:2-8 NLT

The people had been more than willing to donate their gold so that Aaron could make the golden calf but would they prove generous when it came to all the material needed to build God's house? And the list was a long and expensive one. Precious metals, rare gems, fine linen, timber, thread, oil, tanned animal skins, and incense were all required for God's house. Without the building materials in hand, the craftsmen would find it impossible to create the walls, framework, and furniture for God's house. There would be no bronze altar, ark of the covenant, or mercy seat. The walls that designated the Holy of Holies where the presence of God would rest above the mercy seat could not be built. The entire structure would remain little more than an idea, instead of becoming a tangible reality and the place where God would dwell among His people.

So, Moses reissued God's call for donations and restated that this was to be a voluntary contribution, given by those "of a generous heart" (Exodus 35:5 ESV). This was not a mandatory tax but was to be considered a freewill offering. God was giving His people an opportunity to participate in His work by donating their time, treasures, and talents. The promise of His presence would require sacrifice on their part. For God's house to become a reality, they would have to give of themselves, sacrificially surrendering their resources and their lives to the cause. And the people responded.

So the whole community of the Israelites went out from the presence of Moses. Everyone whose heart stirred him to action and everyone whose spirit was willing came and brought the offering for the Lord for the work of the tent of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. – Exodus 35:20-21 NLT

Motivated by the Spirit of God, the people rose to the challenge and contributed all the resources God had requested. Nothing was missing. No items were left out or withheld. And Moses records that this voluntary effort had 100 percent participation.

Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the Lord's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. – Exodus 35:24 ESV

Everyone gave something, whether wood, gold, silver, fabric, spices, oil, yarn, or talent. The entire Israelite community got involved and engaged.

All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord. – Exodus 35:29 ESV

God moved among His people, creating the desire to fulfill His will. This was not a case of coercion or forced generosity. Their hearts were moved to do the right thing. Left to their own devices, the Israelites would have proven to be stingy and stubbornly resistant to God's request. But He moved their hearts to do the right thing. And this movement of the Spirit of God was a foreshadowing of things to come. Centuries later, God would declare His intention to

move in their lives yet again, transforming their sin-hardened hearts so that they might do the right thing.

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” – Ezekiel 36:26-27 NLT

God’s will is always done His way, but He graciously chooses to use people to accomplish His will. To do so, He transforms hardened hearts so that they might respond to His invitation to serve alongside Him in His work. God could have built the Tabernacle Himself, but He chose to give His people a part to play in its construction. Their time, talents, and treasures would be essential ingredients in the making of His earthly dwelling place – for their good and His glory.

Sufficient for the Task

³⁰ Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; ³¹ and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, ³² to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, ³³ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. ³⁴ And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. ³⁵ He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer.

¹ “Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the Lord has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded.”

² And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. ³ And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, ⁴ so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, ⁵ and said to Moses, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.” ⁶ So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, “Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.” So the people were restrained from bringing, ⁷ for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more. – Exodus 35:30-36:7 ESV

While living in Egypt, the Israelites had been used by Pharaoh as forced labor to construct a wide range of building projects. From the manufacturing of bricks and site excavation to actual construction methods, the Israelites learned a variety of useful skills from their Egyptian overlords. But none of that had adequately prepared them for the task that God had for them to do. This time, the Israelites would be building a structure designed by God and intended to function as His earthly dwelling place. There would be no bricks and mortar, scaffolding, cranes, or heavy stones to move. The materials for building God’s house would be donated by His people and crafted by men who had been divinely commissioned and gifted by God Himself.

Bezalel had been filled with the Spirit of God and equipped with all the skills he would need to oversee the construction of the Tabernacle. He and his assistant, Oholiab, were to manage a special task force of skilled craftsmen whose giftings were divinely ordained and specifically suited for the task at hand. God had not only devised the plans for the Tabernacle but had also sovereignly supplied the talents and skill sets required to bring that plan to fruition. Even those who volunteered to be trained by Bezalel and Oholiab were motivated by the Spirit of God. This building would be unique in every way, from the details concerning its design to the actual

fabrication of its building materials and the final assembly of all the parts to form the completed structure. God left nothing to chance.

And God's Spirit-empowered workforce had no shortage of building materials to begin their construction project. The Spirit had also inspired the people of Israel to give generously in response to God's call for donations.

Moses gave them the materials donated by the people of Israel as sacred offerings for the completion of the sanctuary. But the people continued to bring additional gifts each morning. – Exodus 36:3 NLT

The workmen eventually became overwhelmed by the sheer volume of donations that began to pile up. They had more gems, precious metals, fabric, and lumber than they could use. This unexpected problem led them to ask Moses to declare the fund-raising effort officially over.

"The people have given more than enough materials to complete the job the Lord has commanded us to do!" – Exodus 36:5 NLT

God had miraculously supplied everything necessary for the completion of His earthly dwelling place. Yes, the Israelites had donated precious metals, gemstones, fabric, oil, leather, yarn, and a variety of other elements needed to build the Tabernacle, but they had done so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Their hearts had been moved to give generously and willingly; so much so that they had to be ordered to stop giving. And God had supplied the skill sets required to carry out the design of this one-of-a-kind structure.

Bezalel had been filled with "great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts" (Exodus 35:31 NLT). He was "a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze" and "skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood" (Exodus 35:32-33 NLT). In short, he was a master at every craft. And he and Oholiab had been divinely equipped to train others so that they could carry out the various tasks required to complete the Tabernacle on time and according to God's detailed plan.

This entire endeavor had God's seal of approval and divine enablement. No one could take personal credit for any aspect of the Tabernacle's construction. Even the gifts donated by the people of Israel had been provided for them by God. During Israel's exit from Egypt, God orchestrated a massive transfer of wealth from the Egyptians to His chosen people.

The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. 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 12:35-36 ESV

Little did the Israelites know at the time that this financial windfall would be the source of their largess when it came time to build the Tabernacle. They would actually construct God's house

with resources plundered from their former overlords and oppressors. Egyptian cloth, jewels, gold, and silver would be used to create God's sacred dwelling place among the people of Israel.

Well in advance of the need, God had provided everything the Israelites would need to obey His command. Even the talents and skills required to build the Tabernacle had been bestowed by God long before the need arose. The money, materials, and manpower were sovereignly provided for in advance. The Tabernacle had been fully funded and the talent pool for its construction had been fully filled even before God had shared the plans with Moses on Mount Sinai. Nothing stood in the way of the Israelites obeying God's command and completing the construction of His house. God had done His part; now it was up to the people to fulfill their God-ordained role.

A House Fit for God

⁸ And all the craftsmen among the workmen made the tabernacle with ten curtains. They were made of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns, with cherubim skillfully worked. ⁹ The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. All the curtains were the same size.

¹⁰ He coupled five curtains to one another, and the other five curtains he coupled to one another. ¹¹ He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain of the first set. Likewise he made them on the edge of the outermost curtain of the second set. ¹² He made fifty loops on the one curtain, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set. The loops were opposite one another. ¹³ And he made fifty clasps of gold, and coupled the curtains one to the other with clasps. So the tabernacle was a single whole.

¹⁴ He also made curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle. He made eleven curtains. ¹⁵ The length of each curtain was thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains were the same size. ¹⁶ He coupled five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves. ¹⁷ And he made fifty loops on the edge of the outermost curtain of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the other connecting curtain. ¹⁸ And he made fifty clasps of bronze to couple the tent together that it might be a single whole. ¹⁹ And he made for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins.

²⁰ Then he made the upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. ²¹ Ten cubits was the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. ²² Each frame had two tenons for fitting together. He did this for all the frames of the tabernacle. ²³ The frames for the tabernacle he made thus: twenty frames for the south side. ²⁴ And he made forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons. ²⁵ For the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty frames ²⁶ and their forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame and two bases under the next frame. ²⁷ For the rear of the tabernacle westward he made six frames. ²⁸ He made two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear. ²⁹ And they were separate beneath but joined at the top, at the first ring. He made two of them this way for the two corners. ³⁰ There were eight frames with their bases of silver: sixteen bases, under every frame two bases.

³¹ He made bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, ³² and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the tabernacle at the rear westward. ³³ And he made the middle bar to run from end to end halfway up the frames. ³⁴ And he overlaid the frames with gold, and made their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold.

³⁵ He made the veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; with cherubim skillfully worked into it he made it. ³⁶ And for it he made four pillars of acacia and overlaid them with gold. Their hooks were of gold, and he cast for them four bases of silver. ³⁷ He also made a

screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework,³⁸ and its five pillars with their hooks. He overlaid their capitals, and their fillets were of gold, but their five bases were of bronze. – Exodus 36:8-38 ESV

Like any other construction project, the Tabernacle was built in phases – literally from the ground up. Chapter 36 contains Moses’ description of the first stage of the project, when Bezalel orchestrated the fabrication of the Tabernacle’s structural frame, exterior walls, roofing membrane, and the more intricate veils that would form its interior rooms. Having already reintroduced Bezalel as the primary foreman for this massive project, Moses makes it sound as if this one man did all the work alone.

He coupled five curtains to one another... – vs 10

He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain... – vs 11

He also made curtains of goats’ hair for a tent over the tabernacle... – vs 14

But it is safe to assume that Bezalel had plenty of help. His role was supervisory in nature. While Bezalel was “filled him with the Spirit of God...with all craftsmanship...for work in every skilled craft” (Exodus 35:31, 33 ESV), he did not do all the work alone. Moses makes it clear that “all the craftsmen among the workmen made the tabernacle with ten curtains” (Exodus 36:8 ESV), but Bezalel was responsible for overseeing all the intricate details that God had specified for the Tabernacle’s construction. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, this one man served as the principal project manager with the responsibility of ensuring that God’s house was constructed according to God’s plans.

This one man was expected to safeguard the stockpile of gemstones, gold, silver, timber, fabric, and leather that the people had donated for the Tabernacle’s construction. The potential for theft would have been high. There would have been a constant temptation for workmen to pilfer some of the overstock of building materials. After all, they seemed to have far more inventory than the building plans required. But Bezalel would have understood that every single item the people had given belonged to the Lord. Nothing was to be lost, looted, or allowed to disappear from the inventory. Every gold bracelet, silver amulet, or yard of fabric was to be accounted for and reserved solely for its part in the completion of God’s earthly dwelling place.

Each item donated by the people of Israel was unique and necessary. Together they would form the completed sanctuary of God. Under the skilled hands of Bezalel and his team of gifted craftsmen, these ordinary objects would be transformed into a dwelling place fit for God Almighty. The apostle Paul picks up on this concept when he describes the believers in Corinth in a similar way.

Don’t you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. – 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NLT

In his second letter to the very same people, Paul reemphasized their status as God's temple.

For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people." – 2 Corinthians 6:16 NLT

Paul was simply reiterating the promise God had made to the people of Israel.

"I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people." – Leviticus 26:12 ESV

"My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." – Ezekiel 37:27-28 ESV

The Tabernacle would be comprised of tens of thousands of individual donations that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would be transformed into a single structure designed to serve as the temple of God. Bezalel and his craftsmen would melt down all the gold jewelry, melding them into loops that would hold up the beautiful woven tapestries that adorned the Holy Place. The individual donations of tanned rams' skins and goat skins would be woven into a single unit that would serve as the outer walls of the Tabernacle, protecting its sacred interior from the elements. Every piece of acacia wood that was donated to the cause was painstakingly planed and finished so that it could become part of the support frame for the entire structure.

Everything had a purpose and a place in God's plan. Each item, no matter how small or insignificant, was needed to complete God's house. And when the Tabernacle was finished, every Israelite who had donated to the cause would know that their contribution had played a part. Their gift had been transformed by the Spirit of God into a house fit for Yahweh. And, once again, the apostle Paul uses the analogy of the Old Testament Tabernacle as a reminder to New Testament believers that they too have been formed into a dwelling place for God Almighty.

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit. – Ephesians 2:19-22 NLT

God's Glorious Throne Room

¹ Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ² And he overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. ³ And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. ⁴ And he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold ⁵ and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark. ⁶ And he made a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ⁷ And he made two cherubim of gold. He made them of hammered work on the two ends of the mercy seat, ⁸ one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. ⁹ The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim. – Exodus 37:1-9 ESV

In this chapter, Moses begins his description of Bezalel constructing the various pieces of furniture that God had designed for His house. With the Tabernacle itself well underway, Bezalel turned his attention to these sacred “household items” that would become an important part of the ceremonial role of this sacred structure.



He began with the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. These two items actually formed the single piece of furniture that was to occupy the Holy of Holies, the innermost and most sacred section of the Tabernacle. This rectangular wooden box was covered with gold filigree and topped off with a matching lid on which were placed two golden images of angelic creatures with

their outstretched wings extended toward one another. This removable lid was actually called the Mercy Seat because it was there that God's presence would dwell. Yahweh had designed the Tabernacle as His earthly dwelling place and had promised to live among His people with the divine manifestation of His presence resting over the Mercy Seat and the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

“...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.” – Exodus 25:8-9 ESV

God had provided Moses with detailed instructions for making the Mercy Seat and Ark of the Covenant, and He had assured His servant that, upon their completion, He would fulfill His promise and take up residence in the Holy of Holies.

“...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.” – Exodus 25:21-22 ESV

Now, Bezalel was putting the finishing touches on these two sacred objects. It seems that the crafting of these two vital pieces of furniture was his responsibility alone. God had specially equipped Bezalel with all the skills and abilities he would need to turn Moses’ instructions into actual objects that met God’s approval.

One fascinating aspect of the Tabernacle and all the pieces of furniture associated with it was their need for portability. This large and complex structure had to be constructed in such a way that allowed for easy disassembly, packing, and transportation. The Tabernacle was not meant to be a permanent structure that remained in one location. As the Israelites made their way from Sinai to the land of Canaan, they would need to be able to carry the Tabernacle with them and erect it at their next campsite. So, it had to be constructed in such a way that allowed for both stability and portability. That would have made Bezalel’s task all the more difficult. The massive wooden framework had to be designed for easy disassembly and yet sturdy enough to support the Tabernacle’s large and weighty animal skin covering.

Even the Ark of the Covenant featured four gold rings through which two gold-covered poles were placed to facilitate its transport from one place to another. This sacred object was never to be touched by human hands so that its holy status might be preserved at all times. Centuries later, long after the Israelites had occupied the land of promise, King David ordered the Ark of the Covenant to be moved from Baale-judah to the city of Jerusalem. In their attempt to relocate the sacred object, they loaded it onto an ox cart, and somewhere along the way, one of the men in the procession reached out to steady the Ark of the Covenant. What happened next was devastating.

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 6:6-7 ESV

The Ark of the Covenant was meant to be carried by the Levitical priests. That was the whole purpose of the poles that Bezalel had crafted and placed on either side of the sacred object. God had warned Moses about the danger of treating the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat with disrespect or dishonor.

“Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.” – Leviticus 16:2 ESV

The Ark of the Covenant was to be a symbol of God’s glory, greatness, and goodness. God had instructed Moses to place certain objects inside it as reminders of His power and provision. One was a sample of the manna He had provided during their journey from Egypt to Sinai.

Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations.” As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. – Exodus 16:32-34 ESV

Somehow, God would miraculously preserve this sample of manna, preventing it from evaporating like all the rest. It was to be a permanent reminder of His providential care.

The second item to be associated with the ark was Aaron’s staff. God had told Moses, “Place Aaron’s staff permanently before the Ark of the Covenant to serve as a warning to rebels” (Numbers 17:10 NLT). This was in response to a rebellion that had arisen among the people. A group of disgruntled Israelites, under the leadership of a man named Korah, had attempted to stage a coup and arrest leadership away from Moses. In response to this organized rebellion, God gave Moses the following instructions:

“Tell the people of Israel to bring you twelve wooden staffs, one from each leader of Israel’s ancestral tribes, and inscribe each leader’s name on his staff. Inscribe Aaron’s name on the staff of the tribe of Levi, for there must be one staff for the leader of each ancestral tribe. Place these staffs in the Tabernacle in front of the Ark containing the tablets of the Covenant, where I meet with you. Buds will sprout on the staff belonging to the man I choose. Then I will finally put an end to the people’s murmuring and complaining against you.” – Numbers 7:2-5 NLT

The next day, Moses entered the Tabernacle of the Covenant and “found that Aaron’s staff, representing the tribe of Levi, had sprouted, budded, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds” (Numbers 17:8 NLT). This miraculous sign confirmed the leadership of Moses and Aaron and put a stop to the insurrection of Korah and his companions. God then ordered Moses to “Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumblings against me, lest they die” (Numbers 17:10 ESV).

It seems that the staff of Aaron was placed *before* the Ark and not in it. But it served as another vivid reminder of God’s power and provision.

The next item to be placed in the Ark of the Covenant was the second set of the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments served as the official document that sealed the covenant agreement between the people of Israel and Yahweh. Placing the two tablets containing the “testimony” of God inside the ark and under the mercy seat served as a permanent reminder that God expected obedience from His people. As the manna illustrated, He would provide for all their needs. But the law was there to remind them that He expected obedience. And Aaron’s rod was there to remind them that rebellion was an unacceptable response to His divine will. His law was to be obeyed. His appointed leader was to be respected. His providential care was to be trusted at all times.

And on the top of the Mercy Seat, the presence of the two cherubim was to provide a constant reminder that this was a holy place. These two angelic creatures served as symbols of God’s heavenly throne room where He sits “enthroned upon the cherubim” (Psalm 80:1 ESV). Centuries later, the apostle John was given a vision of God’s throne room in heaven, where he saw four cherubim standing before God declaring His glory. and greatness

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

*“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!” – Revelation 4:8 ESV*

Bezalel had been tasked with creating the earthly throne for God Almighty, and he took his work seriously, pouring every bit of his Spirit-endowed creative power into his efforts. The results would be “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5 ESV), but they would serve as constant reminders of God’s glory, holiness, mercy, and righteousness. He was a God to be revered, trusted, obeyed, and worshiped – at all times.

Purified and Repurposed for God's Glory

¹⁰ He also made the table of acacia wood. Two cubits was its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹ And he overlaid it with pure gold, and made a molding of gold around it. ¹² And he made a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and made a molding of gold around the rim. ¹³ He cast for it four rings of gold and fastened the rings to the four corners at its four legs. ¹⁴ Close to the frame were the rings, as holders for the poles to carry the table. ¹⁵ He made the poles of acacia wood to carry the table, and overlaid them with gold. ¹⁶ And he made the vessels of pure gold that were to be on the table, its plates and dishes for incense, and its bowls and flagons with which to pour drink offerings.

¹⁷ He also made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand of hammered work. Its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers were of one piece with it. ¹⁸ And there were 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; ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And on the lampstand itself were four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers, ²¹ and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out of it. ²² Their calyxes and their branches were of one piece with it. The whole of it was a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. ²³ And he made its seven lamps and its tongs and its trays of pure gold. ²⁴ He made it and all its utensils out of a talent of pure gold.

²⁵ He made the altar of incense of acacia wood. Its length was a cubit, and its breadth was a cubit. It was square, and two cubits was its height. Its horns were of one piece with it. ²⁶ He overlaid it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And he made a molding of gold around it, ²⁷ and made two rings of gold on it under its molding, on two opposite sides of it, as holders for the poles with which to carry it. ²⁸ And he made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold.

²⁹ He made the holy anointing oil also, and the pure fragrant incense, blended as by the perfumer. – Exodus 37:10-29 ESV

Seven different times in these verses, Moses mentions Bezalel using “pure gold” to overlay or fashion the various objects he was creating. Many of these items, like the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Shewbread, and the poles used to carry them, were made of wood. But they were covered in a thin veneer of gold leaf that transformed them into objects of beauty and great worth. Though made of common materials, their appearance was greatly altered and enhanced by Bezalel’s careful addition of the gold overlay. These sacred objects were meant to symbolize God’s power to take that which was ordinary and transform it into something holy and set apart for His use.



The table that Bezalel created was to sit just outside the Holy of Holies in the Holy Place. But it was nothing more than a well-made wooden box, 36 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 27 inches tall. It was not impressive in and of itself. But when the gold veneer was added, it took on a different appearance. The ordinary was transformed into the extraordinary. The commonplace became uncommonly beautiful and worthy of being set apart for God's use. In some ways, what the layer of gold did to the Ark of the Covenant and the Table of Shewbread was exactly what happened to Moses when the glory of God transformed his face. During his 40-day encounter with God on Mount Sinai, Moses' countenance was dramatically altered so that his face literally glowed.

This ordinary and highly flawed man had

been radically transformed by God. To the people of Israel, he no longer appeared as the Moses they had grown to know. They were terrified by his glowing face and he was forced to cover it with a veil.

But God is in the transformation business. He had taken Moses, who had been nothing more than a common shepherd and a convicted murderer, and transformed him into the man who would stand before Pharaoh and deliver the people of Israel out of their captivity in Egypt. The timid and tentative Moses had to be divinely altered so that he might accomplish that task the Lord had assigned for him to do. Moses was still Moses, with all his faults and failings, but he had been transformed by the power of God and equipped with all the resources he needed to accomplish the will of God.

There was nothing special about the table that Bezalel crafted, but the layer of gold leaf he affixed to it gave it an aura of worth and value beyond comprehension. Its value increased dramatically and made this ordinary table worthy of occupying the inner recesses of God's house. And on this golden table would be placed the Bread of the Presence – a memorial food offering to the Lord. This was to be God's dining table. But the bread placed on the table was meant to symbolize God's presence. It was to be baked from the finest flour and placed on the table each Sabbath day.

"You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the Lord. Every Sabbath day Aaron

shall arrange it before the Lord regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the Lord's food offerings, a perpetual due." – Leviticus 24:5-9 ESV

God graciously allowed Aaron and his sons to eat the Bread of the Presence that sat on the golden table in the Holy Place. But they had to be wearing their designated priestly robes and had to have gone through the proper purification ceremony. Their divinely-designed garments, like the gold leaf on the table, not only altered their outer appearance but transformed them from their normal, ordinary state to that of set-apart servants of God. They were worthy of entering His presence and sharing a meal from His table.

Located in the windowless recesses of the Tabernacle, the table was illuminated by a special lampstand that Bezalel also handcrafted. But unlike the Table of Shewbread, the lampstand was to be made from nothing but gold. There would be no wooden substructure. Bezalel "made the lampstand of pure, hammered gold. He made the entire lampstand and its decorations of one piece—the base, center stem, lamp cups, buds, and petals" (Exodus 37:17 NLT). It is estimated that this ornate object was crafted from 75 pounds of the purest gold. As a skilled metallurgist, Bezalel would have gone to great lengths to ensure that the gold he used to craft this lampstand was only of the highest quality. He would accept no impurities and imperfections. As the sole source of light within God's house, this lamp had to be both functional and beautiful. It would burn 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the oil used to light its flames would be of the highest quality as well. Its rays would illuminate the darkness of the Holy Place, reflecting off the golden Table of Shewbread and the Altar of Incense.

This lamp was covered in golden blossoms and buds, symbolizing life. So, it represented both light and life, and offered a fitting image of the one who would eventually come to earth as the light of life.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – John 1:1-5 ESV

The lamp contained no wood. It was made of the purest gold and, therefore, of extraordinary value and worth. There was no gold leaf veneer covering an inferior interior. Like Jesus, who referred to Himself as "the light of the world" (John 8:12), this lampstand was perfectly pure and holy. The apostle Paul described Jesus as sinless.

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. – 2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT

His light was pure and able to illuminate the darkness of sin that pervaded the lives of men. He gave light to the world and life to all those who would step into His glorious presence.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... – John 1:9-12 ESV

The final piece of furniture Bezalal crafted for the Holy Place was the Altar of Incense. Just 18 inches square and 36 inches high, this wooden altar was far from impressive in size. Yet, it too was covered in a layer of gold and equipped with carrying poles that were veneered with a fine layer of gold leaf. But this diminutive piece of furniture had a significant role to play in God's house. It was from this altar that the priests would burn sweet-smelling incense to the Lord. And even the recipe for this incense was proprietary in nature, and only to be used within the confines of the Tabernacle. It was to represent the prayers of God's people and illustrated their dependence upon Him.

Glistening gold, brightly shining light, sweet-smelling incense. All of these elements were to reflect the glory of God, but it must not be missed that they emanated from ordinary objects made by human hands. Yet, God transformed them from their ordinary, pedestrian state to that of holy and set-apart objects worthy of use in His house. God had communicated their design and designated the nature of their purpose. He made sure that they would be holy and distinct, perfectly unique, and totally dedicated to His use.

The apostle Paul reminds us that, as Christians, we too have been set apart for God's use. We have been transformed from ordinary, sin-stained people into His holy temple. He has covered us in the righteousness of His Son and transformed us into objects of beauty and holiness, worthy to be used for His glory.

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? – 1 Corinthians 3:16 NLT

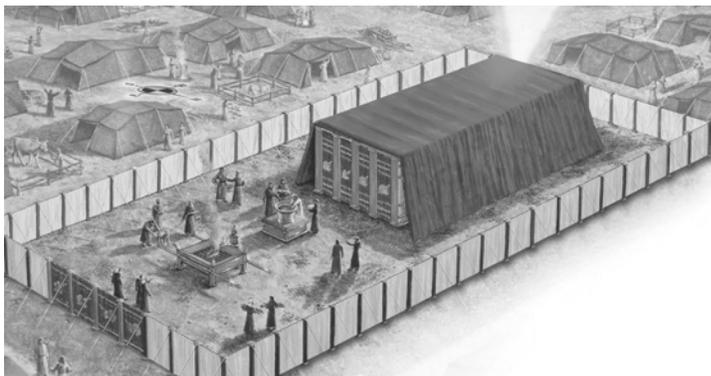
Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT

Entrance into God's Presence

¹ He made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood. Five cubits was its length, and five cubits its breadth. It was square, and three cubits was its height. ² He made horns for it on its four corners. Its horns were of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. ³ And he made all the utensils of the altar, the pots, the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the fire pans. He made all its utensils of bronze. ⁴ And he made for the altar a grating, a network of bronze, under its ledge, extending halfway down. ⁵ He cast four rings on the four corners of the bronze grating as holders for the poles. ⁶ He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. ⁷ And he put the poles through the rings on the sides of the altar to carry it with them. He made it hollow, with boards.

⁸ He made the basin of bronze and its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting.

⁹ And he made the court. For the south side the hangings of the court were of fine twined linen, a hundred cubits; ¹⁰ their twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹¹ And for the north side there were hangings of a hundred cubits; their twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹² And for the west side were hangings of fifty cubits, their ten pillars, and their ten bases; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹³ And for the front to the east, fifty cubits. ¹⁴ The hangings for one side of the gate were fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. ¹⁵ And so for the other side. On both sides of the gate of the court were hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three bases. ¹⁶ All the hangings around the court were of fine twined linen. ¹⁷ And the bases for the pillars were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. The overlaying of their capitals was also of silver, and all the pillars of the court were filleted with silver. ¹⁸ And the screen for the gate of the court was embroidered with needlework in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It was twenty cubits long and five cubits high in its breadth, corresponding to the hangings of the court. ¹⁹ And their pillars were four in number. Their four bases were of bronze, their hooks of silver, and the overlaying of their capitals and their fillets of silver. ²⁰ And all the pegs for the tabernacle and for the court all around were of bronze. – Exodus 38:1-20 ESV



God's house had a yard. Surrounding the Tabernacle was a large fenced enclosure referred to as the courtyard. The perimeter of this roughly 75-foot by 150-foot space was marked by a fence made of linen fabric hung between 56 wooden posts. Each of these wooden posts featured a bronze base and a top overlaid with silver. The east side of the enclosure, which

always faced the rising sun, had a screen that served as a gate and was “embroidered with needlework in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen” (Exodus 38:18 ESV).

Even the fence which surrounded the Tabernacle was intended to reflect the glory of God and serve as a barrier to keep out prying eyes and all those who were unworthy to enter God’s presence. God’s house was at the same time both accessible and off-limits. There was a gate through which entrance into God’s courtyard could be gained, but its use was restricted to the priests only. The rest of the Israelites were required to remain outside the fence, which was high enough to keep anyone from seeing what took place inside. God had agreed to dwell in the midst of His people but access to His presence would be highly restricted and regulated by stringent ceremonial laws. In a sense, the fence served the same purpose as the boundary that God had Moses place around Mount Sinai.

“Mark off a boundary all around the mountain. Warn the people, ‘Be careful! Do not go up on the mountain or even touch its boundaries. Anyone who touches the mountain will certainly be put to death. No hand may touch the person or animal that crosses the boundary; instead, stone them or shoot them with arrows. They must be put to death.’” – Exodus 19:12-13 NLT

God had just told the Israelites, “Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6 NLT). Yet, their status as God’s chosen people and His special treasure came with restrictions. They could not enter into His presence flippantly or inappropriately. There were conditions. He was holy and they were not. That is why God instructed Moses to have the people of Israel go through a purification process before they came anywhere near the mountain.

“Go down and prepare the people for my arrival. Consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their clothing. Be sure they are ready on the third day, for on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai as all the people watch.” – Exodus 19:10-11 NLT

Mount Sinai was immovable, so it served as a temporary meeting spot between God and His people. The Tabernacle was designed to be movable so that God could have a permanent, yet portable place in which to dwell among His people. Yet, wherever His presence came to rest, that place became holy and inaccessible to all those who were marked by the impurity of sin. That’s why Aaron and his son had to go through their own purification ritual before they could pass through the gates of the courtyard and enter God’s house. Even their clothing had to meet God’s exacting standard before they could pass through the gate and perform their priestly functions.

“Clothe your brother, Aaron, and his sons with these garments, and then anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they can serve as my priests. Also make linen undergarments for them, to be worn next to their bodies, reaching from their hips to

their thighs. These must be worn whenever Aaron and his sons enter the Tabernacle or approach the altar in the Holy Place to perform their priestly duties. Then they will not incur guilt and die.” – Exodus 28:41-43 NLT

And when they entered God’s courtyard, their first responsibility was to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. There in the center of the courtyard stood the Bronze Altar. This 8-foot wide by 5-foot-tall structure was built by Bezalel and his team of craftsmen. It was made from acacia wood and then covered in beaten bronze. This metallic layer made it fireproof so that it could withstand the constant heat of the perpetual flames that burned day and night.

The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out. – Leviticus 6:12-13 ESV

The altar that Bezalel made was second in importance only to the Ark of the Covenant. This one sacred object would receive almost constant use as the priests offered up the countless sacrifices and offerings provided by the people of Israel. It was the Bronze Altar where the priests placed the whole burnt offerings of the people. These offerings could be “livestock from the herd or from the flock” (Leviticus 1:2 ESV). These were sacrifices of atonement, where the animal served as a substitute for the sins of the people. The priests also offered up sacrifices to restore fellowship with God, atone for specific sins, and atone for guilt. And once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would offer sacrifices for his own sins and those of the people.

The Bronze Altar would prove to be a well-used and vitally important part of the Tabernacle’s ritual service. Its location in the courtyard of God’s house provided a much-needed means by which the Israelites could receive cleansing, atonement, and forgiveness. This was to be the place of reconciliation and purification.

“It dominated the entrance, reminding them of the wages of their sin and offering them a way to get right with God. Only a blood sacrifice could save them. As they came to offer their sacrifices, again and again they learned that blood was the way to God.” – Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus*

It is impossible to miss the juxtaposition between the opulent splendor of the Tabernacle and the gruesome nature of the sacrificial system that accompanied it. The courtyard of the Tabernacle would have been a place of slaughter with the blood of countless animals soaking the ground around the altar. The immaculate garments of the priests would have been covered in blood by day’s end. So, God provided a large basin of bronze in which the priests could cleanse themselves. Before they could enter the Holy Place to minister to God, they had to be cleansed from all the impurities they had taken upon themselves as they offered sacrifices on behalf of the sins of the people. In a sense, they had taken upon themselves the sins of the

people and required purification before they could enter God's presence. The bronze basin served that purpose.

"They must wash with water whenever they go into the Tabernacle to appear before the Lord and when they approach the altar to burn up their special gifts to the Lord—or they will die!" – Exodus 30:20 NLT

Everything about the Tabernacle was intended to illustrate the glory and holiness of God. But there was a constant contrast between God's holiness and man's sinfulness. The courtyard would have been a place of death and blood. It was there that the atonement for Israel's sins would have taken place. And the priests of God, having offered up sacrifices on behalf of the people, would have been required to go through their own purification process before they could enter God's presence. Sin separates people from God. Unrighteousness cannot dwell in the presence of perfect righteousness. So, God made a way for sinful men and women to come before Him, and it involved the shedding of blood. But, like so much about the Tabernacle, it was a shadow of something far greater to come. As the author of Hebrews points out.

Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. – Hebrews 10:11-12 NLT

Jesus was the great high priest who offered the final atoning sacrifice that fully satisfied the just demands of a holy and righteous God. He offered His life as the final payment for the sins of mankind, providing a permanent means of forgiveness "and when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices" (Hebrews 10:18 NLT).

The Providence and Provision of God

²¹ These are the records of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were recorded at the commandment of Moses, the responsibility of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. ²² Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the Lord commanded Moses; ²³ and with him was Oholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver and designer and embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.

²⁴ All the gold that was used for the work, in all the construction of the sanctuary, the gold from the offering, was twenty-nine talents and 730 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary. ²⁵ The silver from those of the congregation who were recorded was a hundred talents and 1,775 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary: ²⁶ a beka a head (that is, half a shekel, by the shekel of the sanctuary), for everyone who was listed in the records, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men. ²⁷ The hundred talents of silver were for casting the bases of the sanctuary and the bases of the veil; a hundred bases for the hundred talents, a talent a base. ²⁸ And of the 1,775 shekels he made hooks for the pillars and overlaid their capitals and made fillets for them. ²⁹ The bronze that was offered was seventy talents and 2,400 shekels; ³⁰ with it he made the bases for the entrance of the tent of meeting, the bronze altar and the bronze grating for it and all the utensils of the altar, ³¹ the bases around the court, and the bases of the gate of the court, all the pegs of the tabernacle, and all the pegs around the court. – Exodus 38:21-31 ESV



The Tabernacle was the work of Bezalel and his team of skilled artisans and craftsmen, but the material used to construct this one-of-a-kind structure had been donated by the Israelites. In other words, it was a community-wide effort, and it had all been under the direction of Yahweh. This entire project had been His idea and its completion had been made possible because He had deemed it so. God had been the one to order the collection of all the building materials so that His house

could become a reality, and the willing participation of the people would play a vital role in bringing His sanctuary to completion.

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.” – Exodus 25:1-9 ESV

The inventory Moses provides helps to give a sense of scale to this massive project. In a rather matter-of-fact way, Moses records the staggering amount of gold, silver, and bronze required to complete God’s house. And it would seem that the people of Israel supplied every single ounce that God had called for in His design. More than a ton of gold was donated by the Israelites. Their bracelets, amulets, rings, and necklaces were melted down so that Bezalel and his associates could adorn the Tabernacle and its furniture just as God had commanded. According to Moses’ inventory, the Israelites contributed an additional 3.75 tons of silver and nearly 3 tons of bronze for use in the construction of the Tabernacle.



For a nation of former slave laborers and shepherders, this represents an amazing amount of wealth. But they had neither earned nor worked for it. According to the early chapters of Exodus, God had preordained a massive wealth exchange between the Egyptians and the Israelites. In His original call to Moses, God had revealed His plan to provide the Israelites with the resources they would later need to fulfill His request for donations to build His Tabernacle.

“So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.” – Exodus 3:20-22 ESV

And God had delivered on this promise. When the time came for the Israelites to leave Egypt, they followed God’s instructions and asked their Egyptian neighbors for a parting gift.

The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. 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 12:35-36 ESV

After watching the Egyptians suffer under the ten plagues brought upon them by God, the Israelites must have felt a bit strange asking these devastated people to hand over their gold, silver, and bronze. After all, every household in Egypt had just suffered the loss of their firstborn. For the tenth and final plague, God sent His death angel throughout the land of Egypt, so “there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead” (Exodus 12:30 ESV). The staggering loss of life associated with this last plague left the Egyptians stunned and eager to see the Israelites leave their land.

The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." – Exodus 12:33 ESV



So, when the Israelites made their rather bold request for parting gifts, the Egyptians eagerly complied. No doubt, the Egyptians viewed their gifts as offerings to the God of the Israelites. By this time, they feared and were eager to appease the wrath of this powerful and death-delivering deity. So, they willingly turned over their valuables to the parting Israelites. And it is likely that many of these pieces of jewelry bore the images of their false gods. Egyptian amulets, rings, and pendants were often adorned with depictions of their diverse assortment of deities and it seems likely that these trinkets made their way into the plunder that the Israelites took with them from Egypt.

Little did the Israelites know that their sudden windfall would later be used to prepare a dwelling place for Yahweh. And when they departed Egypt, they led their extensive herds and flocks. During their 400-year stay in Egypt, they had served as shepherds and herdsmen for Pharaoh, and over time, they had seen their own livestock increase greatly in number. So that by the time they left, they did so “with great flocks and herds of livestock” (Exodus 12:38 ESV). And, once again, they had no way of knowing that these animals had been providentially provided by God so that they might have ample sources of animals once His sacrificial system was instituted. God had provided all that they would need to build the Tabernacle and fulfill His command for blood sacrifices.

Amazingly, during the fifth plague, God had brought death to all the livestock of the Egyptians, but had spared the flocks and herds of the Israelites.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.”’” And the Lord set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land.” And the next day the Lord did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. – Exodus 9:1-6 ESV

God had protected the assets of His people, and when it came time for them to leave the land, God had provided them with gold, silver, and bronze – in abundance. The Almighty had providentially planned ahead for the future. Every animal they would eventually sacrifice in the wilderness had been provided by God. Every ounce of gold, silver, and bronze they would need to construct the Tabernacle had been provided for in advance and at the expense of the Egyptians. In a sense, the Egyptians bankrolled the construction of a house for Israel’s God.

Their gold adorned the Mercy Seat upon which Yahweh would sit in the Holy of Holies. Their bronze necklaces would be melted down and hammered into sheets that would be affixed to the Bronze Altar. And on that altar, the Israelites would offer the livestock that God had spared in the land of Goshen. The Egyptian gold, silver, and bronze would be used to build a sanctuary to the God of the Israelites. The jewelry that had once adorned the bodies of pagan Egyptians would be used to glorify Yahweh, the all-powerful and unparalleled God of Israel.

Robed in Righteousness

¹ From the blue and purple and scarlet yarns they made finely woven garments, for ministering in the Holy Place. They made the holy garments for Aaron, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

² He made the ephod of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. ³ And they hammered out gold leaf, and he cut it into threads to work into the blue and purple and the scarlet yarns, and into the fine twined linen, in skilled design. ⁴ They made for the ephod attaching shoulder pieces, joined to it at its two edges. ⁵ And the skillfully woven band on it was of one piece with it and made like it, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

⁶ They made the onyx stones, enclosed in settings of gold filigree, and engraved like the engravings of a signet, according to the names of the sons of Israel. ⁷ And he set them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod to be stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

⁸ He made the breastpiece, in skilled work, in the style of the ephod, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. ⁹ It was square. They made the breastpiece doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth when doubled. ¹⁰ And they set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle was the first row; ¹¹ and the second row, an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond; ¹² and the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; ¹³ and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They were enclosed in settings of gold filigree. ¹⁴ There were twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They were like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. ¹⁵ And they made on the breastpiece twisted chains like cords, of pure gold. ¹⁶ And they made two settings of gold filigree and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece. ¹⁷ And they put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece. ¹⁸ They attached the two ends of the two cords to the two settings of filigree. Thus they attached it in front to the shoulder pieces of the ephod. ¹⁹ Then they made two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. ²⁰ And they made two rings of gold, and attached them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, at its seam above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. ²¹ And they bound the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, so that it should lie on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece should not come loose from the ephod, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

²² He also made the robe of the ephod woven all of blue, ²³ and the opening of the robe in it was like the opening in a garment, with a binding around the opening, so that it might not tear. ²⁴ On the hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. ²⁵ They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates all around the hem of the robe, between the pomegranates— ²⁶ a bell and a pomegranate, a

bell and a pomegranate around the hem of the robe for ministering, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

²⁷ They also made the coats, woven of fine linen, for Aaron and his sons, ²⁸ and the turban of fine linen, and the caps of fine linen, and the linen undergarments of fine twined linen, ²⁹ and the sash of fine twined linen and of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, embroidered with needlework, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

³⁰ They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, “Holy to the Lord.” ³¹ And they tied to it a cord of blue to fasten it on the turban above, as the Lord had commanded Moses. – Exodus 39:1-31 ESV

In this passage, Moses virtually repeats the instructions God had given him for the design of the high priest’s sacred robes. Chapter 28 contains the conversation that took place between God and Moses that set apart Aaron and his sons to serve as priests in God’s house.

“Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.” – Exodus 28:1-3 ESV

Now, in chapter 39, Moses is describing Bezalel’s creation of those “holy garments” for Aaron and his sons. But something significant had taken place between these two chapters. Not long after God had given His blueprints for the Tabernacle and chosen Moses’ brother, Aaron to serve as high priest, the Israelites had chosen to turn their backs on God by demanding that Aaron make them replacements gods.

When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. “Come on,” they said, “make us some gods who can lead us. We don’t know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt.”

So Aaron said, “Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me.”

All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf. – Exodus 32:1-4 NLT

Rather than rebuke the Israelites for their rash and ungodly demand, Aaron obliged them by taking up an unsanctioned offering. He personally collected gold from the people and then hand-crafted it into an idol fashioned in the form of a calf. This “golden calf” was likely crafted

in the likeness of the Egyptian god, Apis. The cult of Apis sanctioned the worship of a living bull that was worshiped during its lifetime and then mummified after death. Upon its death, the search began for a new calf that would take its place. The Egyptians believed the dead Apis bull reincarnated as a new calf and perpetuated its own line. They believed this “god” had been created by a bolt of lightning from heaven and by careful study of its behavior, the priests of the Apis cult could divine omens and declare sacred oracles.

Whether Aaron used this particular Egyptian god as the model for his golden calf idol is unclear. But in fashioning this false god, Aaron led the people into idolatry and away from worshiping Yahweh. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai and discovered what had happened in his absence, he immediately confronted his brother.

“What did these people do to you to make you bring such terrible sin upon them?” – Exodus 32:21 NLT

Rather than own up to his role in the matter, Aaron tried to persuade Moses that he had been an unwilling pawn in the hands of the insurgents.

“Don’t get so upset, my lord,” Aaron replied. “You yourself know how evil these people are. They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will lead us. We don’t know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt.’ So I told them, ‘Whoever has gold jewelry, take it off.’ When they brought it to me, I simply threw it into the fire—and out came this calf!” – Exodus 32:22-24 NLT

He attempted to absolve himself from any responsibility in the affair. While 3,000 Israelites died for their roles in the rebellion, Aaron somehow escaped with his life. And when God sent a plague among the people of Israel as punishment for their idolatry, Aaron was spared once again. And amazingly, chapter 39 states that Bezalel and his craftsmen “made the holy garments for Aaron” (Exodus 39:1 ESV).

How could God allow this man to serve as the high priest over the nation of Israel? Had he not forfeited the right to wear the sacred garments and enter the Holy of Holies where the presence of God was to dwell? Aaron had willingly and blatantly violated God’s commands.

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...” – Exodus 20:3-5 ESV

And yet, this man would be allowed to wear the exquisitely crafted garments described in chapter 39, including “the ephod of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen” (Exodus 39:2 ESV). On his chest, he would wear the breastplate containing the “stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel” (Exodus 39:7 ESV). He would be adorned in a rich blue robe made from fine linen and hemmed with bells of pure gold and pomegranates made from blue,

purple, and scarlet yarns. And on his head would be placed a turban with a golden plate that bore the inscription: "Holy to the Lord."

Everything about this chapter seems wrong. It appears as if God has made an unwise and unjust decision by letting this man enjoy the privilege and honor of serving as the high priest. But God was not overlooking Aaron's flaws and failures. He was not making concessions or compromising His holiness by appointing this obviously fallen man to such a lofty and sacred position. In a sense, Aaron was the perfect person for the role. He was a sinner who had been shown grace and mercy from God. He had deserved death for his actions but had been allowed to live so that he might offer atonement for the people of Israel.

As high priest, Aaron would serve on behalf of the people, but he would do so as one who struggled with sin just as they did. And because of his sinful nature, Aaron would be required to go through a ritual of purification before he would stand before God. He would also have to offer sacrifices on his own behalf before he could make atonement for the people. He too would have to experience the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God before he could serve as the people's mediator. And the author of Hebrews reminds us that Aaron, in his role, was a foreshadowing of the greater high priest to come.

He [Jesus] is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins. The law appointed high priests who were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made the perfect High Priest forever. – Hebrews 7:26-28 NLT

Aaron would have to be made holy by God before he could serve. But Jesus was holy because He was God. In his humanity, Jesus was the visible image of the invisible God and His sinlessness made Him the perfect high priest. Jesus needed no purification. He required no robes to make Him holy. He had no sins of His own that demanded atonement. Unlike Aaron, Jesus was robed in perfect righteousness. He was the sinless Son of God who became the perfect high priest.

Aaron's robes could only symbolize righteousness. But Jesus was righteousness incarnate.

Mission Accomplished

³² Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses; so they did. ³³ Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; ³⁴ the covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins, and the veil of the screen; ³⁵ the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat; ³⁶ the table with all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; ³⁷ the lampstand of pure gold and its lamps with the lamps set and all its utensils, and the oil for the light; ³⁸ the golden altar, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance of the tent; ³⁹ the bronze altar, and its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the basin and its stand; ⁴⁰ the hangings of the court, its pillars, and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords, and its pegs; and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting; ⁴¹ the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons for their service as priests. ⁴² According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. ⁴³ And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them. – Exodus 39:32-43 ESV

Moses fast-forwards the narrative and compresses the timeline to reflect the completion day of the Tabernacle. He provides no details as to how long it took Bezalel and the other craftsmen to wrap up this massive project, but the day came when their work was done. God's house was complete.

The next step was to present every single item to Moses for his inspection. While Bezalel had served as the project's foreman and primary craftsman, Moses had managed the entire process from start to finish, communicating every detail concerning the Tabernacle's construction that he had received from God on Mount Sinai. With the work completed, it was time to determine whether the finished product met God's exacting standards. And Moses reflects his satisfaction with their efforts by blessing them. They had done everything according to the plan he had provided. Nothing had been left out, scrimped on, or compromised. Every board, yard of fabric, utensil, or piece of sacred furniture received Moses' seal of approval.

The Israelites had done everything just as the Lord had commanded Moses. – Exodus 39:32 NLT

This statement conveys the obedience of Bezalel's team. Regardless of the scope of the project and the pressure to complete it on time and on budget, they did everything according to God's plan. There were no corners cut and not even the smallest alteration was made to the design. Somehow, without the benefit of CAD drawings and blueprints, these men were able to successfully manufacture a vast array of individual elements that would seamlessly fit together to form the completed Tabernacle.

As Moses stood looking over the stockpile of completed building materials, he must have felt a sense of relief mixed with joy. He understood the importance of this day. No matter how long it took to complete the fabrication of all these elements, he could still vividly recall the day he had come down off the mountain and found the people of Israel worshiping a false God. At that moment, he had feared the worst because God had told him, “I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation” (Exodus 32:9-10 NLT). God had threatened to destroy the people of Israel for their disobedience and unfaithfulness.

That had been a dark chapter in Moses’ life. He had begged God to forgive the people for their sin, but God had responded, “No, I will erase the name of everyone who has sinned against me. Now go, lead the people to the place I told you about” (Exodus 32:33-34 NLT). God held the guilty responsible for their actions but allowed the majority of the Israelites to live. Then He commanded Moses to complete the task of leading the people of Israel to the promised land. But before they could leave their camp at Mount Sinai, Moses had to oversee the construction of the Tabernacle, the portable structure that would serve as God’s dwelling place among the people.

Now, it was done. And the piles of completed building materials were a reminder to Moses that his God was still with them. Despite what they had done, Yahweh had not abandoned them. And once the pieces of the Tabernacle were painstakingly fitted together, God would keep His promise and take up residence above the Mercy Seat within the Holy of Holies.

Moses must have felt a sense of eager anticipation as he thought about the next step. With everything ready and approved, it was time to begin the assembly of the Tabernacle. All the pieces were there, but now they must be carefully placed in their proper position so that, together, they could form God’s sanctuary.

The apostle Paul used a construction metaphor as a way to remind the Gentile believers in Ephesus of their rightful place in God’s house.

...you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
– Ephesians 2:19-22 NLT

From the smallest golden bell that would adorn the hem of the high priest’s robe to the heaviest beam that would hold up the roof of the Tabernacle itself, every piece was essential to the whole. No part was insignificant or could be left out if the Tabernacle was going to serve as the holy dwelling of Yahweh. Every single part had been designed by God Himself and they each had purpose and meaning. Paul used the analogy of the human body to convey God’s divine plan for His ultimate temple: the Church.

He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. – Ephesians 4:16 NLT

The most exciting part of the entire project was about to begin. Moses and the people of Israel were going to watch as the pieces were placed together, slowly transforming the parts into the whole. And soon, on the barren plains of the Sinai wilderness, the house of God would take form. The dream would become a reality. And once the Tabernacle was complete, the next step in the journey to the promised land could begin again.

