

MAKE YOURSELF A FIT SANCTUARY FOR THE LORD

EXODUS 24:12-25:9

24 ¹²Jehovah said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandments I have written, so that you may instruct them." ¹³So Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses ascended the mountain of God. ¹⁴He said to the elders, "Wait here for us, until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you; if anyone has a dispute, let him go to them." ¹⁵Moses ascended the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of Jehovah settled upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day he summoned Moses from the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷In the eyes of the children of Israel, the appearance of the glory of Jehovah looked like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. ¹⁸Then Moses entered into the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain. Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

25 Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Tell the children of Israel to bring me an offering. You shall receive the offering for me from every man whose heart makes him willing to give. ³This is the offering you are to receive from them: gold and silver and bronze; ⁴blue and purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ⁵rams' skins dyed red and goatskins;* and acacia wood; ⁶also olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; ⁷and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and the breastplate. ⁸Have them make a sanctuary for me, so that I may dwell among them. ⁹You shall make this tabernacle and all its furnishing exactly like the pattern I will show you."

*Or, "sealskins"

EXODUS 40:1-38

40 Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, ²"On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle, that is, the Tent of Meeting. ³You shall put the ark of the Testimony into it and shield the ark with the curtain. ⁴Next you shall bring in the table and place on it the items that pertain to it. Then you shall bring in the lampstand and light its lamps. ⁵You shall set the golden altar of incense in front of the ark of the Testimony, and hang the curtain across the entrance to the tabernacle. ⁶Place the altar of burnt offering in front of the entrance to the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting. ⁷Place the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it. ⁸Set up the courtyard around it and hang the curtain as a gateway to the courtyard. ⁹You shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that pertains to it; you shall consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it shall be holy. ¹⁰You shall anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils; you shall sanctify the altar and the altar shall be most holy. ¹¹You shall anoint the basin and its stand, you shall sanctify it. ¹²Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water. ¹³You shall dress Aaron in the holy garments, anoint him and sanctify him, so that he may serve me as a priest. ¹⁴You shall bring his sons and dress them in tunics; ¹⁵then you

shall anoint them just as you anointed their father, so that they may serve me as priests. Their anointing shall consecrate them for a perpetual priesthood extending throughout their generations.”

¹⁶Moses did all this; he did everything just as Jehovah commanded him. ¹⁷So it was that the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year. ¹⁸When Moses erected the tabernacle, he laid down its bases, fitted the boards into their bases, inserted the cross bars, and set up the pillars. ¹⁹Then he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering over the tent, as Jehovah commanded him. ²⁰He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, attached the poles to the ark, and placed the mercy seat on top of the ark. ²¹Then he brought the ark into the tabernacle, hung the curtain which served as a screen, and shielded the ark of the Testimony, as Jehovah commanded him. ²²He put the table in the Tent of Meeting on the north side of the tabernacle outside the curtain; ²³he arranged the bread on it in the presence of Jehovah, as Jehovah commanded him. ²⁴He placed the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle. ²⁵He lit the lamps in the presence of Jehovah, as Jehovah commanded him. ²⁶He set the golden altar in the Tent of Meeting directly in front of the curtain; ²⁷and burnt fragrant incense on it, as Jehovah commanded him. ²⁸Then he hung up the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle. ²⁹He put the altar of burnt offering near the entrance of the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering, as Jehovah commanded him. ³⁰He placed the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and filled it with water for washing. ³¹Moses and Aaron and his sons used it to wash their hands and feet. ³²Whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting and whenever they approached the altar, they washed, as Jehovah commanded Moses. ³³Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and the altar and hung the screen as a gateway into the courtyard. So it was that Moses finished the work.

³⁴Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle. ³⁶Throughout all their journeys, the children of Israel would set out whenever the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle; ³⁷but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it did lift. ³⁸The cloud of Jehovah was over the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in the cloud by night, in the sight of the whole house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

Introduction

Suppose you were awakened one night by the wailing sirens of fire trucks and discovered that your church building was on fire. By morning, nothing is left but charred brick and rubble, the whole structure has burned to the ground. You and the members of your congregation must completely rebuild; and you are appointed to the building committee.

You and the other members of the committee meet to consider the question: What kind of structure should we build? Should we build the new church building after the pattern of European cathedrals, or in the early American colonial style, or in a

modern, contemporary style? In the midst of your deliberations the LORD Himself appears and informs you: I am far more interested in the kind of life you are building for Me, than in any architectural design you may choose. Remember, you yourself are called to be My sanctuary.

As we consider the construction of the Old Testament sanctuary, let us bear in mind the fact that God's real desire is for our very heart and life to be His sanctuary, *"Do you not realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"* (1 Cor. 6:19a.)

Just as Old Testament Israel made a fit sanctuary for the LORD, let us make ourselves a fit sanctuary for the LORD, so that He may dwell with us.

I. Make Yourself a Fit Sanctuary for the LORD, Because He Desires to Fellowship with You

The previous twenty-four chapters of Exodus are all preparation for the fulfillment of God's great desire: to dwell with His people. He delivered them out of Egypt, He established His covenant with them, and now He instructs them to build Him a sanctuary, all this so that He may dwell with them. As you consider the construction of the Old Testament tabernacle and its names, you come to appreciate God's desire to dwell with His people.

The sanctuary to be built is called a *"tabernacle,"* a place where the LORD may dwell with His people (Ex. 25:8-9.) This name expresses the LORD's desire to live among His people, (not merely to make occasional appearances as in the days of Abraham.) The great King of glory desires to have His residence with His people and to be their royal Neighbor; the sovereign Lord of heaven desires to be with His people. The fact that the LORD's dwelling place takes the form of a tent shows His willingness to completely identify Himself with His people. Israel was living in tents; the LORD will do so also. Here is a tremendous display of condescension and humility motivated by compassion and love. The ultimate form in which the LORD would dwell in the midst of His people would be the incarnation: *"The Word* [a title for the Son of God] *became flesh, and lived* [literally, *"tabernacled"*] *among us. We saw his glory, his glory as the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn. 1:14.) Consider, also, the testimony of Hebrews 2:14a, *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity."*

The sanctuary to be built is called *"the Tent of Meeting"* (Ex. 29:42.) It was at the tabernacle that the Lord would reveal Himself to Israel and speak to them. Moses would no longer need to ascend the height of Mt. Sinai to meet with God on behalf of the people. The LORD would no longer be distant from His people, now He would be in their very midst and receive them into His very presence. Referring to the birth of Jesus, the angel declares, *"they will call him 'Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us'"* (Matt. 1:23.) Contrast this with the testimony of the pagan

Babylonians about their so-called gods, *“the gods ... do not live among men”* (Dan. 2:11.)

The sanctuary to be built is called *“the tabernacle of the Testimony”* (Ex. 38:21.) The stone tablets containing the covenant, called *“the two tablets of the Testimony”* (Ex. 34:29,) were to be stored in the sanctuary, in the very ark of the covenant, therefore, the sanctuary is called *“the tabernacle of the Testimony.”* As such, the tabernacle bears witness to God’s covenant faithfulness: the LORD’s relationship to us, His people, is not capricious, it is based upon His covenant and His covenant faithfulness.

Finally, the structure to be built is called *“a sanctuary”* (Ex. 25:8.) It is the holy place because dwelling here is none other than the Holy One Himself; sin is an unacceptable practice within its holy precincts. Furthermore, it is the place of refuge, because the LORD who dwells here invites us to find a safe and secure haven under His protective care: *“He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. ⁷My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. ⁸Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge”* (Psl. 62:6-8.)

As you consider the furnishings found within the tabernacle you come to appreciate the LORD’s desire to have fellowship with His people.

Contained within the tabernacle was *“the ark of the covenant,”* as described in Exodus 25:10-11,16-22,

Have them make a chest of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. ... ¹⁶Then put into the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. ¹⁷Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. ¹⁸And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. ¹⁹Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. ²⁰The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. ²¹Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. ²²There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commandments for the Israelites. (Exodus 25:10-11, 16-22.) **Note:** A cubit equals approximately 18 inches or 0.5 meters.

The ark was the focal point of the entire tabernacle. Located within the Holy of holies, the ark was the earthly throne of God, (the cherubim who adorned the ark are the throne attendants of the LORD). Placed on top of the ark was *“an atonement cover,”* or, *“mercy seat”* (literally, *“the covering.”*) On the annual Day of Atonement the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sin offering upon the

mercy seat (Lev.16:15.) The tablets of the covenant were contained within the ark and the blood-sprinkled mercy seat served as the cover of the ark. The LORD demonstrates His desire for fellowship with His people by providing the means of atonement and reconciliation, note 1 John 2:1-2, "*if anyone sins, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*"

Also contained within the tabernacle was the table of showbread, a table upon which rested "*the bread of the Presence,*" as described in Exodus 25:23-25, 30,

*Make a table of acacia wood—two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. ²⁴Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it. ²⁵Also make around it a rim a handbreadth wide and put a gold molding on the rim....
³⁰Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times. (Ex. 25:23-25, 30)*

Twelve loaves of bread were set upon this table, replaced each Sabbath with fresh loaves, and sprinkled with frankincense as an offering to the LORD (Lev. 24:5-9.) The table of showbread portrayed the fact that all of life is lived in the presence of God—even a man's daily work and daily meals—and all is under His care. Note the testimony of the Lord Jesus,

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Matt.10:29-31)

The table of showbread also represented the fact that all of life is lived in the presence of God and is to be consciously dedicated to the glory of God, as the Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthian church, "*whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Cor.10:31.)

Another piece of the furnishing of the tabernacle was the golden candlestick, or, "*lamp stand,*" as described in Exodus 25:31-40,

Make a lamp stand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it. ³²Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lamp stand—three on one side and three on the other. ³³Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lamp stand. ³⁴And on the lamp stand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. ³⁵One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lamp stand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair—six branches in all. ³⁶The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lamp stand, hammered out of pure gold. ³⁷Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it

so that they light the space in front of it. ³⁸Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. ³⁹A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lamp stand and all these accessories. ⁴⁰See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. (Ex. 25:31-40)

The golden candlestick was made to hold seven lamps; the lamps were to burn continuously, being filled with pure olive oil (Lev. 24:1-4.) The lamp stand portrayed the fact that the people of God are to be filled with God's Holy Spirit and have His divine presence radiating from their lives.

One other piece of furniture placed in the tabernacle was the altar of incense, as described in Exodus 30:1-3, 6-8,

Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. ²It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high—its horns of one piece with it. ³Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. ... ⁶ Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you. ⁷Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. ⁸He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before Jehovah for the generations to come. (Ex. 30:1-3, 6-8)

This altar was placed immediately in front of the ark of the covenant, with only the curtain separating the two. Every day the priest was to burn incense upon this altar on behalf of the people. The offering up of the incense coincided with the hour of prayer, as is seen from the account of Zechariah's performance of his priestly duties in Luke 1:9-10, "[Zechariah the priest] *was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.*" The fact that this was done at the hour of prayer shows that the altar with its burning incense was representing the prayers of God's people, which are precious to the LORD, note Proverbs 15:8b, "*the prayer of the upright is [the LORD's] delight.*"

Make yourself a fit sanctuary for the LORD, because He desires to hold fellowship with you.

II. Make Yourself a Fit Sanctuary for the LORD, By Willingly Giving Yourself to Him

For the construction of the tabernacle, the LORD instructs that a free will offering be taken from "*every man whose heart makes him willing [to give]*" (Ex.25:2.) The LORD desires to have fellowship with His people, but if such fellowship is to actually take place, there must be a reciprocal desire for it on their part.

Exodus 35:20-29 describes Israel's response to the LORD's instruction:

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, ²¹and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to Jehovah for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. ²²All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to Jehovah. ²³Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen, or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or hides of sea cows brought them. ²⁴Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to Jehovah, and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it. ²⁵Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. ²⁶And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair. ²⁷The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. ²⁸They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to Jehovah freewill offerings for all the work Jehovah through Moses had commanded them to do. (Ex. 35:20-29)

Beside the call for the free-will offering, there also went forth a divine call for “the atonement money”:

Then Jehovah said to Moses, ¹²When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay Jehovah a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. ¹³Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to Jehovah; ¹⁴all who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to Jehovah. ¹⁵The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to Jehovah to atone for your lives. ¹⁶Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before Jehovah, making atonement for your lives. (Ex. 30:11-16)

Each one of the Israelites was required to contribute half a shekel as an offering to the LORD (vs. 13.) This offering was to be used for the continual maintenance of the tabernacle and its service (vs. 16.)

Our fellowship with the LORD, likewise, requires a continual maintenance. Consider the testimony of a Christian man who came to understand this important truth:

...I had been living so long in a respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity and ... the fire God set within me was quenched and I was walking in the flesh and spiritually starving.

...The problem is that I have not been in vital fellowship with or walking with the Lord as I should have been. I had drifted so far away that I no longer realized where I should be in my spiritual life. Words like total surrender, complete devotion, whole-hearted commitment, faithful discipleship, ... and loving God with a pure heart, in sincerity of soul and in holiness of life returned forcefully to my heart. I saw once again that there is no place for a lukewarm faith in my life.

The result was a renewed understanding of the need for faithfulness in using the means of grace God gave me (the Bible, prayer, Psalms and hymns, devotional books, fellowship, witness, etc.). I'm striving to enter into a new life of spiritual discipline, feeding daily on God's Word, praying and reading devotional classic ...

...I want to be restored to a path of growth in ever greater pursuit of Christ-likeness. I'm already experiencing greater joy and peace than I've known in quite some time. I'm no longer worried about my future. I'm concerned now, each day, about my spiritual growth, devotion and obedience to Christ ...

Make yourself a fit sanctuary for the LORD, by willingly offering yourself to Him.

III. Make Yourself a Fit Sanctuary for the LORD, By Keeping Yourself Pure for Him

Notice the measures that were taken to protect the sanctity of the tabernacle.

A veil or curtain was erected to separate the sanctuary itself (the Holy of holies) from the rest of the tabernacle:

Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. ³²Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases; ³³hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. (Ex. 26:31-33)

A screen was placed at the entranceway of the tabernacle:

For the entrance to the tent make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen—the work of an embroiderer. ³⁷Make gold hooks for this curtain and five posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold. And cast five bronze bases for them. (Ex. 26:36-37)

An enclosed court surrounded the tabernacle:

Make a courtyard for the tabernacle. The south side shall be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains of finely twisted linen, ¹⁰with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. ¹¹The north side shall also be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. ¹²The west end of the courtyard shall be fifty cubits wide and have curtains, with ten posts and ten bases. ¹³On the east end, toward the sunrise, the courtyard shall also be fifty cubits wide. ¹⁴Curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on one side of the entrance, with three posts and three bases, ¹⁵and curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on the other side, with three posts and three bases. ¹⁶For the entrance to the courtyard, provide a curtain twenty cubits long, of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen—the work of an embroiderer—with four posts and four bases. ¹⁷All the posts around the courtyard are to have silver bands and hooks, and bronze bases. ¹⁸The courtyard shall be a hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide, with curtains of finely twisted linen five cubits high, and with bronze bases. (Ex. 27:9-18)

Note that the tapestry work of blue, and purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine twined linen, with the cherubim embroidered on the curtain of the Holy of holies, corresponds to Genesis 3:24, where the cherubim with flaming swords stood guard over the garden of Eden: “[the LORD] *placed the Cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and also a flaming sword which turned in every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.*”

The LORD also commanded Moses to cause to be made a holy anointing oil:

Then Jehovah said to Moses, ²³Take the following fine spices: five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, two hundred and fifty shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, two hundred and fifty shekels of fragrant cane, ²⁴five hundred shekels of cassia—all according to the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil. ²⁵Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. ²⁶Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony, ²⁷the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, ²⁸the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. ²⁹You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy. ³⁰Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. ³¹Say to the Israelites, This is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. ³²Do not pour it on men’s bodies and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. ³³Whoever makes perfume like it and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people. (Ex 30:22-33)

The tabernacle itself and all its furnishings were to be anointed with this special oil, indicating that it had become sacred ground, dedicated to the LORD and filled with the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Make yourself a fit sanctuary for the LORD, by keeping yourself pure for Him.

As obedient children, no longer conform to the passions you formerly [had when you lived] in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶because it is written, "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:14-16)

Conclusion

Old Testament Israel was instructed to make a sanctuary fit for the LORD—made according to the pattern He Himself provided. Likewise, may we as New Testament era Christians strive by God's grace to make ourselves (our lives and our bodies) into a fit sanctuary for the LORD, so that He may dwell with us and we with Him.