

## Prayer

May we press onwards, Lord God, and in Your strength, go forward each day with all faith, with all love, with all service, with all worship and with all confidence in You. May we show Your glory not through our own personal effort but through the way You use everything we do in Your name; and may we prove worthy of Your call each day: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Education

*Pray today for people you know who are involved with education, as teachers, assistants, administrators, governors, and others. Pray for them and the integrity of their work.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray that politicians will grasp the importance of people's real needs*
- *Pray for Morocco, where people died in a crush at a music event*
- *Give thanks for your liberty; pray that freedom in this world will grow*

## Meditation

Fulfil Your calling in me, O God, and keep me safe:

Send me where I would like to go,  
For I can see the need and want to do my best for You:

Send me where I do not wish to go,  
So that I discover new things about others and myself:

Send me where I might never go,  
For without Your prompting, I would not know the need:

Send me where I am afraid to go,  
So that I face my inadequacies and learn to trust in You:

Send me where ought to go,  
But have so far avoided because of my inadequacies:

Send me where no one else goes,  
Because that is where You would go if You were here:

Fulfil Your calling in me, O God, and make me complete.

## Bible Study - Exodus 25:1-9

<sup>1</sup> Then LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> 'Tell the Israelites they should bring me an offering; take my offering from all whose hearts prompt them to give. <sup>3</sup> This is the offering you shall take from them: gold, silver and bronze; <sup>4</sup> blue, purple and scarlet materials, fine linen, and goat hair; <sup>5</sup> tanned ram's skins and finished leather; acacia timber; <sup>6</sup> olive oil to burn for light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; <sup>7</sup> and onyx stones and gemstones for mounting on the ephod and breastpiece.

<sup>8</sup> *They are to make me sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them.* <sup>9</sup> *Indeed, you will make everything, the tabernacles and its furnishings, according to the pattern that I show you.*

## **Review**

It is not often noticed, but a remarkable change takes place at this point in Exodus, and the book changes its emphasis completely. Up to this point, we have read the amazing story of what God did for the Israelites by delivering from Egypt and bringing them to Sinai, then giving them His blessing in the form of the Law and the Covenant. From this point onwards, however, the focus of Exodus is on worship, which was the only proper response of the Israelites to what was done for them. The rest of Exodus is therefore about the establishment of a system of worship for Israel based around a 'residence' for God, the Tabernacle, and people to service that worship, the priesthood. Firstly, Instructions were given for both the tabernacle and the priesthood (25 to 31), and later, Exodus describes the construction of these things (chapters 35 to 40), using almost identical words!

So as we study Exodus (25:1-9), there is much at stake, for although our reading is straightforward and even fascinating, it is the beginning of the establishment of Israel as we know it. Moreover, this passage is repeated almost word for word in Exodus 35:4-19 (but with additions), so when we come to study Exodus 35:4-19 we will do so in the light of this study today. Certainly, when Scripture repeats something, it is of great importance, and the studies for chapters 35-40 will bear this in mind, examining how the instructions first given in chapters 25 to 31 were carried out.

In the light of all this, it is worth bearing in mind that between the instructions (25 to 31) and the construction (35 to 40), there is a narrative about Israel's disobedience (32 to 34). The placement of this whole tragic story between these two major sections of Exodus is significant, and illustrates Israel's fundamental problem with being obedient to God and worshipping Him according to His will. This theme is never far from the surface of the Old Testament.

Much of the detail within our passage today is to do with the gathering of materials for the creation of both the Tabernacle and vestments for the priesthood. Everything on the list is something that was readily available in Sinai. The natural surroundings yielded precious metals, precious stones and acacia wood; the Israelites themselves had cloth plundered from Egypt (see Ex 12:35), such as 'blue purple and scarlet materials and fine linen'; and trade within Sinai gave them access to items such as spices and oils for perfume and anointing. We will look at these in more detail later on in the study, but the list reminds us that this was a profoundly practical enterprise that made great demands on the people.

The other remarkable thing about our passage today is that it contains some truly important spiritual principles that are often ignored in the rush to speed through a section of Exodus that is normally considered boring. The first of these is the principle of giving indicated in verse 2. So much is made of tithing in Christian circles today, it is too often forgotten that the basic Biblical principle of giving is that you give what the Lord requires. This is admirably expressed in the words 'take my offering from all whose hearts prompt them to give' (25:2), which reminds us of Paul's words, 'each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor. 9:7). The second spiritual principle is that God wants to be seen with His people; so the Tabernacle was built both as a 'dwelling place' for God and as a place where people could worship (25:8). Lastly, the whole passage emphasises the importance of being obedient (25:9), for God's people must work according to His plans if they are to witness to Him rather than to themselves. We will explore each of these in the rest of the study.

dwelling with us is no personal favour, but something that is expressed in the company we keep and the fellowship of Christian people with whom we worship, however. If we individualise God's presence and fail to give credence and support to the church today, we go counter to God's revealed will, and just as God's people of ancient times, we are committed to worship the Lord together with His people and in His presence to this day; we should not fail to do this.

All of us are called to obedience, and to turn away from living for ourselves. Only then will we find the fruit of the Spirit evident in our lives and have the courage to act on our faith. Moses had to walk a path of total obedience to God, and we need to follow this same pathway if we are to be used by Him for the great things that He plans for our age. Without our obedience, He has no servants!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. If you were attempting to build a 'house for God', what would you need to complete the task?
2. How can we best help God's people know what is the best way to give money and offerings to the church?
3. Would it be true to say that the lack of movements of God's Spirit amongst some parts of the church are due to disobedience? How can we tell?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*These studies in Exodus never fail to touch on important aspects of Christian faith! It is not surprising however that what is found here in the formative years of the life of Israel is also important for us today. God's Spirit is constantly seeking to work amongst His people, and He is looking to see who knows and understands the lessons He has already taught us through the experiences of His people of the past. We need to learn from these Scriptures if we are to see new and great things happening in our day.*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Go and spend some time walking around your own church building. What does the place say to you, or perhaps to anyone who walks into it, about God? We know that Christ lives with people rather than buildings, but the evidence of the Tabernacle suggests that buildings do have some meaning. What does your building say about your faith?*
- *Pray, and ask the Lord to help you be obedient. You may have various issues that need your attention, but you find it hard to do what God says. These are essential, so seek the help of the Holy Spirit to fulfil what God requires of you.*

## Final Prayer

Lord God, Holy Father and great Creator of all things; we cannot give You the fullest praise of which You are worthy, except to offer our best. Neither can we do all the works of love and faith that might prove our thanks, because we are not perfect. Nevertheless, You overcome these insurmountable obstacles and accept what we offer! Praise be to Jesus Christ our Lord who makes us worthy! AMEN.

## Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- What are the materials given and for what were they used (25:3-7)?
- What is the importance of the principle of general giving (25:2)?
- Why does God want to 'dwell with' His people (25:8)?
- Why is it important that we are obedient to God's plans (25:9)?

## Notes on the text and translation

- V1** *'Then the Lord said to Moses' Please note that the verse begins with the Hebrew word for 'and', which ties it inextricably with what went before. Logically, this is therefore what God said to Moses on the Mountain top, and I have indicated this with the opening word 'then', so that we do not forget!*
- V2** *'they should bring me an offering' The Hebrew tense is unclear, but I have translated this as a 'jussive'. This type of verb expresses a command with a request, and this seems to me to be what is happening here. The Hebrew does not begin the sentence with a command, because a response from the heart is required (see study).*
- V3** *'This is the offering ...' Some Bible versions say 'These are the offerings ...' but the Hebrew here is singular. The whole offering is one thing, and one part of it is not enough. Everything is necessary for the completion of the work.*
- V5** *'finished leather' The Hebrew word here is unknown but clearly refers to some kind of fine leather, used later for the covering of the tabernacle. Some believe this was the hide of sea creatures such as dolphin, or seal. Others suggest this was impossible and reckon that the passage merely refers to fine leather generally.*

## Going Deeper

### **What are the materials given and for what were they used (25:3-7)?**

The materials gathered from the people are listed meticulously; and this is not a representative list. As we read through the following chapters, we will find a specific need for each of the raw materials listed here. To begin with, gold, silver and bronze were the basic metals available. Gold and silver were precious metals used for the decoration of precious objects in the Tabernacle (25:3), mainly the Ark of the Covenant and the 'Mercy seat' (25:10-22). Bronze was the basic cast metal used for creating poles and pillars and other objects such as snuffers and shovels for use at the altar, and generally called 'utensils' (27:3,30:28, 31:9 etc.).

A combination of fine materials were used either in the construction of the Tabernacle or the vestments for priests (25:4). Women were the traditional workers of cloth, though men were known to be involved as well, and the skills of working with fine cloths and leathers would have been learned in Egypt. The Hebrew words used in this text occasionally give away the Egyptian origins of the pigments (for example, the scarlet), or indeed, the fine linen. From ancient times to this very day, Egypt has been known to manufacture and trade the finest linen. By contrast, goat hair was readily available from the flocks. It was coarse and suitable for making a thick tent or screen material that was waterproof.

Other materials mentioned are various leathers including rams skins and other fine leathers of unknown origin (25:5 – see notes above). These were used for the holy tent coverings of the ark at the centre of the Tabernacle complex. Later, we will hear more of the general layout of the Tabernacle, but it is best to imagine it as a tent containing the 'Ark of the Covenant' (we will read about this tomorrow), a screened courtyard around this for priests

serving God and making sacrifices, and an extensive outer courtyard for worshippers to gather around for worship. A considerable amount of screening material would be required, along with a fine quality central tent!

Lastly, the text describes raw materials required for the lighting of the Tabernacle and also incense. Sight, sound and smell were all regarded as important for the worship of God, indeed, you could say that all the five classic senses (including taste and feel) were essential for worship as first prescribed by God. Lastly, the precious stones were required for the vestments worn by priests, and these were not merely symbolic. Twelve precious stones represented the twelve tribes of Israel on the breastpiece of the High Priest (28:4f.) and stones were required to make the 'Urim and Thumim', stones placed within the 'Ephod' worn by the High Priest, and used to discern the will of God (28:30f.).

#### **What is the importance of the principle of general giving (25:2)?**

This amazing collection of materials required considerable work to gather, and the people were asked to give up some of the things they had pillaged from the Egyptians when they left (12:35). Everything to be given had value, and the things God was asking for would have determined people's wealth and status, even in Israel. To some extent, God was asking the people to give sacrificially to express their gratitude to Him for their deliverance. If their thanks to God and their worship did not affect their possessions, then it was hardly an expression of commitment!

However, the nature of the appeal is interesting. Earlier in Exodus, we read about the giving of 'first fruits' (23:16,19) and the giving of 'the best' (22:5), but we have not yet come to any reference within the law to 'tithes'. We might have expected one of these to be the principle of giving used for collecting the necessary resources, but no, God required a new and more basic form of giving. Verse 2 is not a classic 'command' of God to give (see notes above), remarkably, it conveys what sounds more like a polite request, than an absolute demand. However, the only way we can understand this is to accept that for this special and unique project, God did not want people's gifts unless they were freely given; or as this verse explicitly says, they were given 'from the heart'. Standard giving was for the normal routines of life, but special giving was needed for a special project.

One other feature of this is interesting. In verse 3 (see notes above), the materials and objects given are described as one gift and one 'offering' to God; though this is obscured by some translations that put the word 'offering' into the plural, thinking it makes more sense (e.g. the NIV). In truth, when God makes an appeal, He knows what is required, and nothing short of this will suffice. He places it on people's hearts to give (25:3), and it is up to the people to respond; but it is a radical shift for us to think of the offering as one gift belonging to God to which we all contribute, rather than a composition of 'gifts' given by individuals! Our difficulty with grasping this concept is probably to do with our individualistic society!

#### **Why does God want to 'dwell with' His people (25:8)?**

Yesterday, we looked at the importance of God's desire to dwell with His people, but our starting point, however, was God's 'dwelling' on Mount Sinai and His special meeting with Moses on the top. It is clear from this passage and what follows, that the Sinai experience was a 'one off' that could not, and would never be repeated. What was necessary was a permanent 'place of residence' for God amongst His people. So when Moses went onto the mountain top and first heard God speak, he heard God tell him of the need to engage in a massive project (for a people on the move in the desert) to make a mobile dwelling place for God. There is no doubt that the whole project would consume the people and their efforts for some time; but once completed, it would be the focus of their life as God's people on earth.

In the course of time, the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant placed at its centre, was taken by Israel through the wilderness and into the 'Promised Land'. However, it is uncertain what happened to it for several centuries after this, until we find it coming to prominence again in the story of Samuel (1 Sam 1f.). It subsequently begins to play a part in the life of Israel again, and David eventually establishes the Ark as the focus of the people's worship in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5). Once established there and placed in the Temple by Solomon, the people began to appreciate the importance of having a visible sign of God's presence with them.

#### **Why is it important that we are obedient to God's plans (25:9)?**

God was very particular in telling Moses what to do in this whole passage, and we are only just getting started; many more instructions are to come which contain significant details! The specific instructions are like a 'construction pattern', and we know that even in ancient times, building projects, for example in Egypt, were carried out using plans, diagrams and measuring techniques that were certainly not 'primitive'. What is remarkable about what we read here is that it is a written account of the building of the Tabernacle, and the record is very ancient. Recent attempts by scholars to date the book of Exodus some centuries after the event described have been shown to be suspect, and although we can never know exactly when it was written, it is very ancient.

Behind this whole text is the requirement that Moses and God's people act in obedience to God's will. Worshipping God would have little significance if the people were not obedient in making the Tabernacle! However, the existence of the Tabernacle and the great traditions it gave rise to in Israel show that the instructions were indeed followed, and although God's people were a flawed vehicle for God's work and purposes, they were ultimately used by God.

There is a long tradition that the Tabernacle was an earthly representation of the realities of heaven, and this is referred to in Hebrews:

*'when Christ came, ... he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter it by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.'* (Hebrews 9:11,12)

For this reason, it is worth looking carefully at what the Tabernacle represents, even for Christians. God required His people to be obedient in the building of this Tabernacle for a reason, and this was so that we could understand something of His will, and we will only do this if we persist with our study of what He asked His people to do.

### **Application**

Scriptures suggest a variety of means of giving to God, and the means are related to different circumstances and different projects. It is helpful to recall that no one method of giving is regarded by Scripture as paramount or absolute, and our recent studies show that God asks of His people what He needs to do His will. For many people, this means tithing their giving on a regular basis; for others, this means living on what they need and giving the rest away (as Paul indicates in 1 Cor 16:2); and for others, this means simply giving what is required by God, as here. It would be desperately sad if pastors gave people the impression that God is only happy with one method of giving.

We have a wonderful treasure in the presence of Christ and His Holy Spirit, who live with us to this day, enabling us to do God's will. Their dwelling with us is not something we can take for granted because we are talking not about some casual friend we can do with as we wish, God Himself, made real through our Saviour Jesus. We must remember that Jesus'