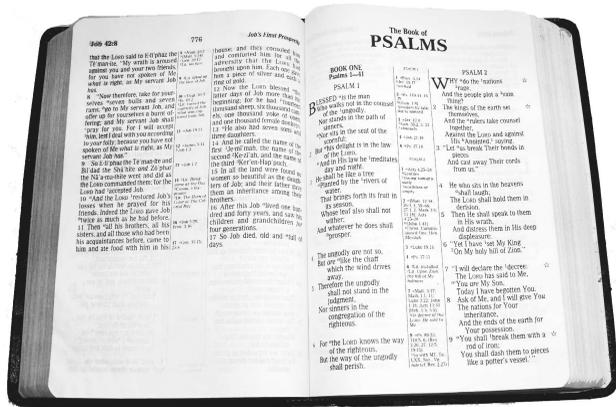


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



October 2021

Exodus chapters 25 to 40

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart

The remaining chapters of the book of Exodus (except 32 to 34) describe the instructions that Moses received for the tabernacle, its construction and furnishings, and for the priesthood. The materials for the tabernacle (or tent) were to be given by the people (1–9). Scripture teaches us that the tabernacle, and the worship and sacrifices associated with it, are rich in spiritual meaning. It was built according to the design given by God as a *copy and shadow of the heavenly things* (Hebrews 8:5). There are three spiritual principles set forth in today's reading which are valid for all time:

1. When we give to God, we must give generously and cheerfully from the heart. The Lord told Moses, '*Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take my offering*' (2–3). We must not give grudgingly, but willingly, *for God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7). Generous, happy giving is a mark of God's grace in our lives (2 Corinthians 8:1–5). Are you a cheerful giver?

2. God's purpose is to dwell among his people (8). Do you ever stop to ponder that the living God is among us when we meet in Christ's name (Matthew 18:20)? **How does this affect your approach to worship?**

3. We are to worship according to the pattern given by God (9, 40). This point is emphasised throughout the latter chapters of Exodus. David ignored God's instructions concerning the carrying of the ark of the covenant to his cost (1 Chronicles 13:10; 15:13). The Israelites were not permitted to use 'innovations' or 'experiments' in worship (cp. Leviticus 10:1–2) and neither are we. We must worship God according to the guidelines set forth in Scripture, *in spirit and truth* (John 4:24).

I will speak with you from above the mercy seat

The tabernacle was divided into two compartments by a veil. The first compartment was called *the holy place* and the second *the Most Holy* (26:33). The *ark of the Testimony* (or the *ark of the covenant of the LORD*; Deuteronomy 10:8; Hebrews 9:4) was kept in *the Most Holy* (26:34; also known as *the Holiest of All* – Hebrews 9:3). The ark was a wooden box overlaid with gold. It was 2½ cubits in length, 1½ cubits wide, and 1½ cubits in height (10–11). A cubit was approximately 17½ inches or 44½ centimetres (the ‘Palestinian’ cubit in New Testament times was 52½ centimetres). The ark was carried by poles (overlaid with gold), which were held in golden rings attached to its corners (12–15).

The two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written (*‘the Testimony’*) were placed in *the ark of the Testimony* (16, 21–22; cp. 31:18; 32:15; 34:28). This points to the importance of God’s Word in the life of his people. The *mercy seat* (17–22) was the pure gold lid of the ark with two cherubim whose wings overshadowed it. On the Day of Atonement the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sin offering on the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:14–15). The Greek word translated *‘propitiation’* (Romans 3:25) is also used to describe the mercy seat (Hebrews 9:5). The mercy seat foreshadows the work of Christ on the cross. His blood is the propitiation for our sins, turning God’s holy wrath away from us, and bringing us into fellowship with him.

The ark was the most important object in the tabernacle. The Lord said to Moses, *‘There I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat’* (22). We now come to a throne of grace, to a mercy seat from which our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, gives mercy and grace to help us in our needs (Hebrews 4:14–16). **How often do you come to the mercy seat?**

*Approach, my soul, the mercy seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before his feet,
For none can perish there.*

(John Newton)

The showbread on the table

The *holy place* (the next compartment to the *Most Holy*) contained the table of showbread, the golden lampstand (both described in verses 23 to 40) and the altar of incense (30:1–10). The furnishings of the tabernacle are rich in symbolic significance. Like the ark the table of showbread was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. It was the same height as the ark but less in length and width. It was carried by poles (26–28). On the table were dishes (plates) for the bread, pans for the incense, and pitchers and bowls for drink-offerings (24).

Luther translated the Hebrew for *showbread* as ‘Schaubrot’ in his German translation of the Bible and William Tyndale carried over the translation into the English with ‘*showbread*’. *The showbread* (30) can be translated ‘the bread of the Presence’ as in the English Standard Version of the Bible.

The showbread on the table consisted of twelve loaves laid in two rows of six; each loaf represented a tribe of Israel. The showbread was changed each Sabbath. *Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by everlasting covenant* (Leviticus 24:5–9). The table with its bread symbolises the fellowship of God with his people and his provision for their daily needs. **We have God’s presence and God’s provision – what more do we need?** We can say even in the darkest times, ‘*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*’ (Psalm 23:5).

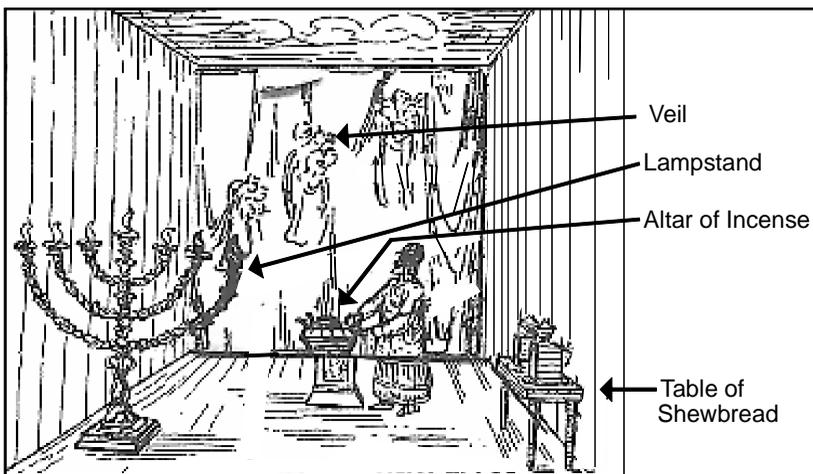
We no longer have a table of showbread, but something more precious – the Lord’s Table. The bread of that table reminds us of the tremendous cost of our salvation. The Lord Jesus gave his body to be broken for us (1 Corinthians 11:24). He *bore our sins in his own body on the tree* (1 Peter 2:24). The Lord Jesus died to save us from our sins and to make us his own. Through him we can know God’s abiding presence with us and his bountiful provision for us. Let us worship him and praise him.

A lampstand of pure gold

The *lampstand of pure gold* is known by Jews as ‘the menorah’. It was made from a talent (66 lbs or 30 kilogrammes) of pure gold and had three branches on either side of the main stem, providing seven lamps. It was hammered into shape from one piece of gold. Many see this as a picture of Christ, the Light of the world (John 8:12). The lampstand was hammered into shape, a symbol of the sufferings of our Saviour. The Lord Jesus is the pure, sinless Son of God who redeemed us with his precious blood, *as of a lamb without blemish and without spot* (1 Peter 1:19).

The lampstand also provides a picture of every Christian. It gave light to the holy place which did not have windows (37). *God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6). We are to reflect his light and shine in this dark world (Matthew 5:16). We share in his sufferings and we shine brightest as we walk with the Lord (Philippians 3:10; 2:15). *You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light* (Ephesians 5:8). **How brightly are you shining?**

Sketch of the Holy Place



Curtains woven of fine linen thread

God had given instructions for the contents of *the holy place* and *the Most Holy* (25:10–40). He now gives the specifications for the tabernacle which was a portable structure measuring approximately 45 feet in length by 15 feet in width. It had a framework of upright boards on three of its sides with the front entrance screened by a curtain made of similar material to that used in the inner coverings and the veil. The furnishings of the tabernacle are described as follows:

The inner curtains (1–7).

The coverings (8–14).

The boards (15–30).

The veil (31–35).

The door of the tabernacle (36–37).

There were ten inner curtains which were coupled together in two groups of five. They were *woven of fine linen thread, and blue and purple and scarlet yarn* (1–6). The tabernacle had three layers which covered the inner curtains; the curtains of goats' hair were covered, with rams' skins dyed red. The outer covering was made of badger skins (7–14). These inner curtains were very beautiful with their colours and designs of cherubim woven into them (1). The cherubim symbolised the very presence of God. The curtains would have appeared very plain from the outside from where only the animal skins were visible. One had to enter the tabernacle to appreciate the beauty of the inner curtains.

The Christian life may appear to be so unattractive to the unbeliever, but, oh, the blessedness and joy of those who know Christ! Satan blinds the eyes of the ungodly to the worth and loveliness of Christ and to the glorious privileges of the child of God. Do you know Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Have you experienced his power in your life? *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in him!* (Psalm 34:8).

Binding one to another

The tabernacle was designed so that it could easily be dismantled and moved as God's people progressed on the journey to the promised land. The framework of the tabernacle consisted of boards which rested in silver sockets (19) and which were linked together by crossbars (26). There were *two tenons ... in each board for binding one to another* (17).

The church is the body of Christ and each member is *joined and knit* (Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:16). We live in days of excessive individualism among Christians. The New Testament does not permit us to 'do our own thing'. We grow in Christ within the local church which is also described as 'a body' with individual Christians as members of that body who need each other (Ephesians 4:12–14; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27). We have responsibilities within 'the body' and we cannot afford the luxury of individualism. We all have gifts given by God to exercise under the leadership of our church (Romans 12:3–8). We must work within the local church, * and there's plenty for us to do!

'*Binding one to another*'. No local church is perfect, but we must learn to live in harmony with each other and to work together in unity. We must be aware of the interests of others and to show our love to each other by practical deeds of kindness. We will then increase in the knowledge of Christ and grow in grace as we apply the Bible to our lives. *To him be glory in the church* (Ephesians 3:21). **How are you fitting in?**

* When speaking of a local church, I take for granted that it is a church where the death and resurrection of Christ for the salvation of sinners is proclaimed, where Jesus is loved and honoured, where the Bible is believed and obeyed, where the gospel is preached. We have no business in joining with those who deny the faith and who have no gospel to declare. Light cannot have fellowship with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14–15).

Behind the veil

The veil dividing the holy place and the Most Holy is described in verses 31 to 35, and the outer veil (or screen) for the door of the tabernacle in verses 36 and 37.

The Lord instructed Moses to *bring the ark of the Testimony ... behind the veil* (33). The inner veil barred the way to the presence of God in the Most Holy. Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, and his successors were allowed very limited access into the Most Holy, inside the veil (Leviticus 16:2). The high priest was only allowed to enter the Most Holy once a year – on the Day of Atonement. The veil teaches us that our sin shuts us out from the presence of the holy God. The high priest was not allowed to go beyond the veil without blood sacrifice (Leviticus 16).

The Lord Jesus is God incarnate (God in the flesh – John 1:14; 1 John 4:2). When he died on the cross, the veil which was in the temple was *torn in two from top to bottom* (Matthew 27:51). The tearing apart of the veil symbolises the freedom of access that we now have into the presence of God through the sacrifice of Christ. We now have *boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh* (Hebrews 10:19–20).

What a privilege it is to be able to come into the presence of God at any time to pray to him! Satan will do all that he can to cause us to neglect this great privilege. Let us be determined to discipline ourselves to have daily fellowship with God in prayer.

*No more veil! God bids me enter
By the new and living way —
Not in trembling hope I venture,
Boldly I his call obey:
There, with him, my God I meet,
God upon the mercy seat!*

(Frances Bevan)

An altar

In the description of the objects of the tabernacle we are led from the ark in the holiest part of the tent outwards to the holy place and then out to the altar and the courtyard in which it is set. The Lord told Moses to *make an altar of acacia wood*. It was five cubits square (about 7½ feet square) and three cubits high (about 4½ feet high). The altar had a horn on the top of each of its corners and it was overlaid with bronze; sacrificial animals were bound to its horns (1–2; Psalm 118:27). A network of bronze was set midway up the altar as a grating through which the fat of the sacrificial animal would drip and the ashes fall (3–5).

When the worshipper entered the courtyard of the tabernacle, he would first see the altar for the burnt offering. The altar demonstrates that we cannot approach God apart from the blood of a sacrifice being shed for us. Leviticus chapters 1 to 7 have detailed instructions for sacrifices offered on the altar. The offerer placed his hand on the head of the animal to be sacrificed as a symbol of his identification with the sacrifice, and of his sin being transferred to the animal (Leviticus 1:4; 3:2,8,13). There was identification and substitution. Another died for him and his death took place in the substitute. The offerer died to his sin in the sacrificial ritual.

All this points to Christ. We no longer need an altar for repeated sacrifices for sin (Hebrews 13:10–12). The Lord Jesus offered himself once to save sinners (Hebrews 9:28; 10:11–12). He is our Substitute (Romans 5:6–11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18). All believers are identified with him in his death so that we are dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:4–14). We have no need any longer to be under the power of sin. This is how Paul sums up the position: *We judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again* (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

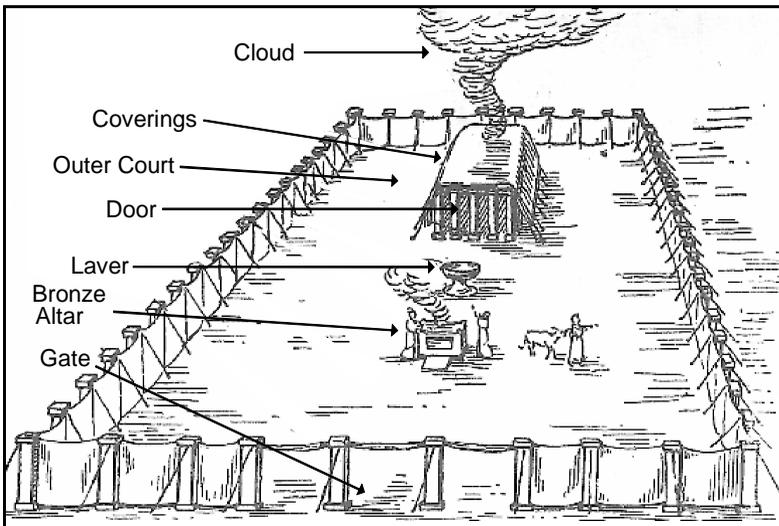
For whom are you living?

Pure oil ... to cause the lamp to burn continually

The tabernacle was enclosed by a courtyard measuring 100 by 50 cubits, approximately 146 by 73 feet or 45 by 22½ metres (1–18). The gate into the court on the east side was 20 cubits wide (approximately 29 feet or 9 metres). The bronze altar and laver were also within the courtyard (30:18–21).

The chapter closes with directions for the care of the lampstand in the holy place (cp. 25:31–40). The priests were to use *pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually* (20). Oil in Scripture is a symbol of the Holy Spirit whose presence is vital in our worship and in our work for God. Just as the lamp needed to be supplied with oil continually in order to give its light, we must depend on the Holy Spirit at all times. We must not grieve him by sinful behaviour, but walk as children of light (Ephesians 4:30 to 5:14). We will only be able to shine in this dark world as he enables us. Without his presence and blessing all our service is in vain. *Be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18).

Sketch of the Tabernacle and its Courtyard



Holy garments ... for glory and for beauty

The next two chapters contain God's instruction for the Levitical priesthood. God did not choose Moses to be the high priest, but Aaron, his brother. This choice did not imply that Aaron was a better man than Moses – he was not (as subsequent great failures were soon to prove). The Lord has different functions for us all. If we fail to recognise that we are different, with differing God-given gifts, we will have trouble in the church (Romans 12:3–13). The names of Aaron's four sons are given in verse 1. The first two, Nadab and Abihu, were killed by the Lord for their disobedience when they offered profane fire before him (Leviticus 10:1–2).

The priestly garments for Aaron were to be made by skilled craftsmen (3). They are described as '*holy garments*'. The word *holy* means 'set apart'. These garments were set apart from all others *for glory and for beauty* (2). Isaiah prophesied of the coming of Christ into the world. He clothes his people with the *garments of salvation*. He covers us with *the robe of righteousness* and gives us *the garment of praise*. He gives us *beauty* and *joy* that *he may be glorified* (Isaiah 61:1–3,10).

Every Christian must be holy ('set apart to God', 1 Peter 1:15–16). Biblical holiness does not produce a sombre or miserable way of life. It brings beauty, joy and praise in our lives; it is warm and attractive. **Are you living as a Christian ought to live? Are you wearing your beautiful garments (cp. Isaiah 52:1)?** *You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9).

*Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

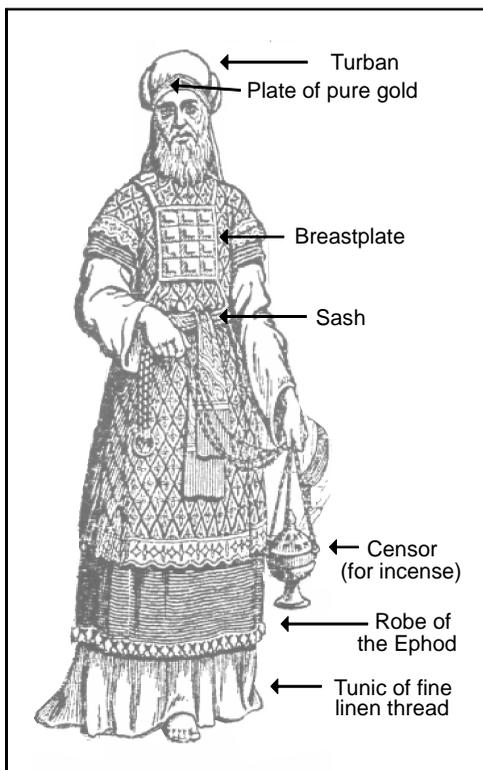
(Nicholas von Zinzendorf; translated by John Wesley)

Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD

The remainder of this chapter describes the garments of the high priest. The colours (5,15,33) are the same as those found in the curtains of the tabernacle with their clasps (26:1,6). The ephod was a two-pieced tunic, the back and front pieces being joined by two shoulder-straps, and having a waistband of the same materials (7–8). Two onyx stones, set in gold, rested on the shoulders of the ephod. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were engraved on the onyx stones (presumably six names on each stone).

The symbolism is explained in verse 12. Aaron was to *bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial*. He bore them up in prayer and carried them into the presence of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14; 9:11). His shoulders are supremely strong. **He carries us on his shoulders through every trial and perplexing circumstance.**

Underneath us are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27). He will never fail us nor forsake us because he has promised to carry us through to old age (Isaiah 46:4; Hebrews 13:5–6).



Aaron shall bear their names ... over his heart

The names of the tribes of Israel were also set in *the breastplate of judgment*. The name ‘judgment’ in *breastplate of judgment* (15, 29–30) does not mean ‘punishment’ but rather ‘guidance’ or ‘utterance’. The *Urim and the Thummim* (meaning ‘Lights and Perfections’) were carried in the breastplate over the high priest’s heart (30). Bible scholars do not know exactly what they were. We do know that they were used to obtain guidance from God (cp. Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; 30:7–8). Where the *ephod* (15) was used to obtain guidance (1 Samuel 23:9–12), it refers to the high priest’s garment which includes the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim. Some scholars believe that the Urim and Thummim were two stones, one indicating a ‘Yes’ answer if drawn from the pouch in the breastplate, the other indicating ‘No’.

There were twelve precious stones set in rows of four in the breastplate, each stone having the name of a tribe engraved upon it (15–21). The symbolism is rich and encouraging, speaking of the love and care of the high priest for his people. *So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart* (29). The names on his shoulders (12) indicate his strength, the names on his heart set forth his love. **Our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, has us upon his heart. He loves us and is passionately concerned for us.** He intercedes for us in the presence of God the Father (Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:25; 9:24).

Christian, do you feel weak or discouraged? Do you feel lonely in some trial with no one seeming to understand? There is One who does understand! He loves you so much that he suffered, died, and rose again to save you. He will never forsake you. He does direct your path and will always be your guide. You are on his heart! Come to him with all your burdens and cares, *casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7)

HOLINESS TO THE LORD

The robe of the high priest went under the ephod (31–36; Leviticus 8:7–8). Bells and pomegranates were set in the hem of the robe. The bells sounded out as he served in the holy place and those waiting outside would know that all was well with him and that God had accepted his offerings on their behalf.

There was a plate of pure gold at the front of the high priest's turban on which were inscribed the words '*HOLINESS TO THE LORD*' (36–38). '*Holiness*' means 'separation'. The gifts and sacrifices of the people were hallowed (separated) to God through the high priest, making them acceptable to the Lord (38). God has chosen us in Christ to be a holy people (Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15–16). We are separated to God to live for him and to serve him. Are you giving him your best?

The high priest and his fellow priests had linen trousers under their robes to preserve their modesty (42–43; cp. 20:26). The worship of the people of God contrasted greatly with that of heathen religions. Many pagan ceremonies involved ritual with immoral practices. Israel had to be different. **The principles for Christian worship are obvious – there must be modesty. The way we dress is important!** The apostle Paul urges women to dress modestly and not extravagantly when they come to worship (1 Timothy 2:9–11). **Nothing must distract us from giving God our best in our worship – after all, we are a holy people**

*O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him, the Lord is his name.*

(John S.B. Monsell)

To hallow them for ministering to me

This chapter contains instructions for the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (1–37; cp. Leviticus chapter 8). God told Moses, ‘Take one young bull and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil’ (1–2). These were to be used as sacrifices and offerings in the consecration of Aaron and his sons.

There were three elements in the consecration:

1. Washing (4) symbolises the cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:7). If we would serve God, we must be cleansed from our sin.
2. Anointing (7; cp. 28:41) symbolises the unction of the Holy Spirit. It is through his work that we are born again (John 3:3–8; Titus 3:5) and his ministry is vital in our lives (Romans 8:12–17).
3. Sacrifice. There were three offerings – a sin offering (10–14), a burnt offering (15–18) and a ram of consecration (19–28). In each case, hands were placed on the head of the sacrifice to show their identification with it. The Levitical sacrifices foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ for sinners (Hebrews 9:11–15, 23–28). The sin offering is described in Leviticus chapter 4 and was offered to atone for sin so that the guilty sinner could be forgiven. Christ died for our sins (1 Peter 3:18). Any religion that denies the necessity and sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for sin is false.

The consecration of Aaron and his sons was *to hallow them for ministering* to God (1). **Do you want to serve God?** You must know the forgiveness and cleansing of sin through the blood of Christ. You need the anointing (unction) of the Holy Spirit in your life (cp. Acts 1:8; 6:3; 7:55).

A sweet aroma before the LORD

The burnt offering (15–18; cp. Leviticus chapter 1) was an offering that rose as *a sweet aroma before the LORD* (18,25). It was a sacrifice intended to give pleasure to God. The sweet aroma indicates that God is satisfied with the offering. In the New Testament, the expression is used in the context of self-sacrifice and a total giving up of self. The Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself for us, *an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma* (Ephesians 5:2).

The Lord no longer requires animal sacrifices from us, but he is pleased with the sacrifice of praise and the giving of ourselves and our possessions in his service (Hebrews 13:15–16). Such sacrifices are a token of our love to him and our gratitude for all that he has done for us. They are a *sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God* (Philippians 4:18). **How do you measure up? Is your life a fragrant smell to God which gives him pleasure?**

The right ear, thumb and toe of the priest were symbolically cleansed with the blood of the ram of consecration (19–28). The priest, as a servant of God, had to have a listening ear for God's voice, and hands and feet to work for God and to walk in his ways. The loss of thumbs and big toes rendered a man weak and useless to serve and to fight as a soldier. They were a token of his strength (Judges 1:6). To dedicate them to God was to dedicate all one's strength to him.

The parts of the ram of consecration used as wave and heave offerings were retained by the priests to provide them with food (26–28). It was one of God's provisions for them. If we seek to honour God and to serve him he will take care of all our needs; he will never let us down (Matthew 6:24–34).

I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God

The closing verses of this chapter give instructions for the daily offerings at the tabernacle. Two lambs were to be offered each day as burnt offerings (one in the morning, one in the evening). Grain and drink offerings were to be offered with them (38–41). The Lord promised to meet with the children of Israel at the tabernacle (42–43). They had great privileges but how much greater the privileges belonging to us! When we meet for worship as a church in Christ's name he is among us (Matthew 18:20). Do you come to worship God each Lord's Day with joy, with gratitude and with praise? Do you expect to meet with God and to hear him speak to you through his Word?

The Lord promised Moses, '*I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God*' (45). The Lord Jesus has given us an even better promise: '*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*' (John 14:23). How wonderful! Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The privileges that we enjoy were purchased for us at tremendous cost, even the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19). **We owe it to him to honour him in our lives.**

*How blest is life if lived for thee,
My loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

*To know I am thy ransomed child,
Bought by thine own most precious blood
And from thy loving hand to take
With grateful heart each gift of good.*

*All day to walk beneath thy smile,
Watching thine eye to guide me still,
To rest at night beneath thy care,
Guarded by thee from every ill.*

(Prust's Supplementary Hymn Book, 1869)

A perpetual incense

The altar of incense was located in the Holy Place directly in front of the veil which separated the Holiest of All from the rest of the tabernacle (1–6). The high priest had to burn incense on this altar every morning and evening when he tended the lampstand (7–8). It was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement (10). The burning of incense was associated with prayer (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3–4). Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist, offered incense in the temple: *And the whole multitude of people was praying outside at the hour of incense* (Luke 1:9–10). The angel Gabriel appeared to him while he was offering the incense to announce that God had heard his prayers for a son.

You will remember that the ministry of the high priest foreshadowed the work of the Lord Jesus in heaven on our behalf. He prays for us (Hebrews 7:25) and appears for us in the presence of the Father (Hebrews 9:24). He is our advocate when we sin, pleading our cause with the Father (1 John 2:1). *A perpetual incense* (8) speaks of the perpetual prayers of Christ for his people. It is wonderfully reassuring to know that the Lord Jesus prays for us. He knows when Satan has designs on us to bring us low, and he prays for us (cp. Luke 22:31–32; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 9:24). He still prays for us, even when we sin and when we fail to pray.

We are encouraged to know that Christian friends pray for us. The apostle Paul was much aware of his need of the prayers of his fellow Christians (Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25). We should pray for one another (cp. Ephesians 6:18). Do you pray much for Christians in your church and for missionaries known to you? **Do you ever wonder why God's grace and blessing are bestowed upon us when we are feeble in our prayers? It is not only that other believers are praying for us, but also the Son of God. Meditate upon this glorious fact and give him thanks.**

Atonement money

When a census was taken in Israel, every man 20 years old and over was required to give half a shekel *atonement money* as an offering to the Lord (15–16). The rich were to give no more than the poor, for all men are the same in God’s sight with the same needs as sinners (Romans 3:23). There were many other opportunities for the rich to show their benevolence. In New Testament times the half shekel became an annual temple tax (Matthew 17:24). The atonement money was used for the upkeep of the tabernacle (16). It did not ‘buy’ forgiveness. Only blood sacrifice can atone for sin (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). The atonement money was given as a token of gratitude for all that the Lord had done for his people. Our salvation is free! We are freely justified by the grace of God through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (Romans 3:24), but we will be generous givers to the Lord’s work if we really love him. Let us never be tight-fisted in our giving, *for God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The bronze laver stood in the courtyard of the tabernacle between the bronze altar and the entrance into the holy place (17–21). The ritual cleansing of the priests is a reminder that sin not only renders us guilty in the sight of God but it also pollutes us and we need to be cleansed daily. We will never be sinless until we reach heaven and, alas, the influences of the world, the flesh and the devil often pollute us. We need cleansing through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). There is also *the washing of water by the word* of God (Ephesians 5:26). **Hearing God’s Word preached and the daily reading of our Bibles has a purifying effect on our lives.**

We need to hide God’s Word in our hearts. The psalmist wrote, *Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you* (Psalm 119:9,11). Someone has rightly said, ‘This Book will keep us from sin, or sin will keep us from this Book.’ The laver was made from the bronze mirrors belonging to the women (38:8). The Word of God is described as a mirror (James 1:23–25). As it speaks to us and rebukes us, let us seek the cleansing of the blood of Christ.

Holy for the LORD

God gave Moses instructions for the making of *a holy anointing oil* (22–25). The tabernacle and all its contents as well as the priests were to be anointed with the same oil (26–28). When a person or an object were anointed, they were *holy for the LORD* (32–33, 37–38). The word ‘*holy*’ means ‘set apart’. The priests were set apart from normal work to serve God. The tabernacle was set apart for the service of God.

The ingredients for the anointing oil and for the incense were very costly, some of the spices coming from distant lands such as India (travelling could be difficult in those times). The recipe for both anointing oil and incense was not to be used except as directed by God for the tabernacle worship. He warned that anyone who made anything like the anointing oil or the incense for personal use would be severely punished (33, 38). What does this passage teach us? The worship in the tabernacle was special, was holy, and quite different from everything in the world. Matthew Henry aptly comments, ‘It is a great affront to God to jest with sacred things, and to make sport with the word and with the ordinances of God. That which is God’s peculiar* must not be used as a common thing.’

Every Christian is called to be holy (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 1:15). We have been bought at great price in order to live for God (1 Corinthians 6:20). We dare not use our bodies as the instruments of sin (Romans 6:12–14). The beautiful fragrance of the anointing oil and the incense would have had a great practical value in overcoming the smells of animals and the blood of the sacrifices. We need to bear the fragrant fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives – *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Galatians 5:22–23). **True biblical holiness is attractive, not forbidding and dull.** *We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing* (2 Corinthians 2:15).

* ‘Peculiar’ in this sense is an old English word meaning ‘special possession’.

I have called by name

The Lord appointed Bezaleel and Aholiab to carry out all the work necessary for the tabernacle and its furnishings. They were also responsible for making the garments for the priests, and for the preparation of the anointing oil and the incense. They were assisted by gifted artisans (1–6). The commissioning of these men is full of instruction and encouragement.

The Lord said to Moses, ‘*See, I have called by name Bezaleel*’ (2). When God calls us into his kingdom or for any special work, he calls us by name (cp. Isaiah 43:1; 45:4). God has set his love on us and he calls us by name. We are not just numbers on a divine computer. The Lord has written our names in his book of life (cp. 32:32; Psalm 69:28; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 21:27).

When God calls us to work for him, he also equips us. The Lord said of Bezaleel, ‘*I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship*’ (3). Natural gifts alone are insufficient for God’s work (6). We need the Holy Spirit and his wisdom to enhance those gifts and to bring them under divine direction. Those who possess natural speaking gifts, teaching or business skills, but lack the hand of God upon them can be a hindrance rather than a help in God’s work. God in his grace has given gifts to each of us (Romans 12:6–8). Have you recognised the gifts that you possess? Are you using them for the glory of God?

*My talents, gifts and graces, Lord,
 Into thy blessed hands receive,
 And let me live to preach thy word,
 And let me to thy glory live;
 My every sacred moment spend
 In publishing the sinner’s Friend.*

(Charles Wesley)

The Sabbath ... it is a sign

Moses was with the Lord on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights (24:18). When God finished speaking with his servant, he gave him the two tablets of stone on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. They were *written with the finger of God* (18; cp. 32:16). Matthew Henry points out in his Bible commentary, ‘they are called *tables of the Testimony*, because this written law testified both the will of God concerning them, and his good-will toward them, and would be a testimony against them, if they were disobedient.’

The Lord ended his instructions concerning the building of the tabernacle and the work of the priests by reinforcing the Sabbath principle. The Israelites had much work before the tabernacle would be ready for worship and sacrifice. However urgent and necessary the work, the Sabbath must be observed. John Currid comments, ‘The Sabbath ordinance appears here also for a very practical purpose: so that the Hebrews should not work on building the tabernacle on the Sabbath in order to get it completed sooner. The building of the place of worship on the day of worship would be a great sin’ (EP COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, volume 2, page 264).

God told Moses to tell the people, ‘*Surely my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you*’ (13,17). It was a sign that God’s people were a holy people, separated to him (13 – ‘*I am the LORD who sanctifies you*’). It was also a sign in which the people acknowledged God as the Creator of the universe (17). The Christian Sabbath, the Lord’s Day, has an additional sign – it is the day that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. In these days when the theory of evolution is accepted as fact, when men deny the resurrection of Christ, and when Christianity has become so worldly, we need the testimony of the Lord’s Day more than ever. **God is our Creator; the Lord Jesus rose bodily from the dead; we are a holy people, special to God. Do you honour God by observing the Lord’s Day?**

Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God

The Israelites had promised Moses, ‘*All the words which the LORD has said we will do*’ (24:3). That promise was soon broken. While Moses was with the Lord on Mount Sinai, the Israelites broke the first two commandments when they turned away from God to worship the golden calf. Aaron showed himself to be a weak, pathetic and compromising leader in the absence of Moses (1–5). He had no excuse for making the golden calf, nor for encouraging the people to worship it as a symbol of God, under the guise of *a feast to the LORD* (5).

There is a great contrast between the disgraceful conduct of the Israelites and the self-effacing love of Moses who interceded for them:

- See the contempt of these rebels for one of the greatest leaders of men in history – ‘*As for this Moses*’ (1). They also had contempt for God in worshipping a dumb idol (8). Little wonder that God was angry with them and would have blotted them out of existence (9–10).
- See Moses whom they so despised. The Lord offered him a new beginning, with a new nation descending from him (10). Moses had bemoaned his lack of eloquence (4:10), but he now prayed with fervour and a moving eloquence. *Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God*. He persuasively pleaded with God that he would not destroy the people (11–13). He reasoned that if God destroyed Israel, his name would be dishonoured for the Egyptians would say that he had only brought his people out of Egypt to destroy them. Moreover, God had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel) that he would multiply their descendants and bring them into the promised land. **When men pray like that, God is pleased and he hears their prayers** (14). May the Lord so move our hearts that we will pray with urgency, fervour and passion. What love Moses had for such an ungrateful, treacherous people! If we are truly burdened for the salvation of sinners, our prayers will flow from aching hearts, and God may be pleased to visit us in his mighty, sovereign, saving power.

Aaron had not restrained them

While Moses was on the mountain, God gave him instructions for the great ministry to be given to Aaron as high priest. At that very time Aaron was sinning in failing to stand for truth. Moses was also receiving details for the use of the gold in the furnishings of the tabernacle, but the people had used some of their gold to make an idol.

When Moses came down the mountain with Joshua, they heard the noisy singing and shouting of the people as they worshipped the golden calf. The same people had recently rejoiced in Jehovah with singing and dancing following the miraculous deliverance that he had given them from the pursuing Egyptians (15:20:21). They were now shouting and dancing before a useless idol. They had broken their covenant with Jehovah.

Moses burned with anger on account of their wickedness and he broke the tablets of stone on which God had inscribed the Ten Commandments. He ground the calf to powder and made the people drink the gold dust with water (19–20). That gold was gone forever – unable to be used for God. If our energy and gifts are used for sinful pursuits, they are lost to the work of God.

Aaron made his excuses and shifted the blame to the people (21–23). It was true, the people were guilty, but *Aaron had not restrained them* (25). He had ordered the making of the idol (4); it did not just pop out of the fire ready-made as he seemed to suggest (24). Moses showed by his leadership that the people could be restrained (20, 26–29). Weak Christian leadership has brought chaos to many evangelical churches. **Pray that the Lord will raise up godly men, fearless and bold in their love for God and his truth, men determined never to compromise with the world.**

*Lord, save us from our golden calves
Our sin with grief we own;
We would no more be thine by halves,
But live to thee alone.*

(John Newton)

Then Moses returned to the LORD

Moses was firm in his leadership and he was determined to deal quickly with the rebellion of the Israelites against God. He stood in the entrance of the camp and challenged the people, ‘*Whoever is on the LORD’S side, let him come to me!*’ (26). His own tribe, the Levites, rallied to him. Moses ordered them to go throughout the camp and to kill their fellow Israelites. They did this, killing about three thousand men (27–28). You may feel that the punishment meted out to the rebels was harsh, but God had commanded it (26–28), and we must not presume to argue against God (cp. Romans 9:20). There was no evidence of any repentance among the people, except the Levites, who were prepared to stand up and to be counted for the Lord and for Moses, and God blessed them (28–29).

The leadership of God’s people must be strong, but it must also be administered with love. If you were tempted to think that Moses was hard in his attitude to the people, see how he *returned to the LORD* to pray for them. Such was his love for the people that he offered himself as an atonement for them (30–32). He was prepared to be cursed and to die for them by being blotted out of God’s book of life, but he could not atone for the sin of the people. Centuries later the apostle Paul showed a similar willingness to be cursed for the salvation of Israel (Romans 9:1–5; 10:1).

God did not accept Moses’ plea. Those who had sinned against him, would be blotted out of his book, not his servant Moses. He would delay visiting punishment upon them and he told Moses to lead them to the promised land, following his angel (33–35). Moses showed tremendous love for an ungrateful, rebellious people. He was willing to spend and to be spent for them. **How do you react to those who have disappointed or hurt you? Do you pray earnestly for them (Matthew 5:44)?**

The LORD spoke to Moses ... as a man speaks to his friend

The Lord told Moses that he would send his Angel ahead of the people to protect them but they would lose the blessing of knowing his presence in their midst (1–3). Though the people were unspiritual and rebellious they mourned the loss of God’s holy presence (4). The Lord instructed them to strip off their ornaments, this being a sign of mourning (5–6); similar ornaments had been the occasion of their sin in the making of the golden calf (32:2–4).

Moses pitched his tent outside Israel’s camp and made it a temporary tabernacle where he would meet God. The glory cloud, a symbol of God’s presence, hovered over the tent when Moses went in to pray. God’s presence was seen to be outside the camp. *The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend* (11). Moses had this precious relationship with Almighty God – he was his friend!

The Lord Jesus said, ‘*You are my friends if you do whatever I command you*’ (John 15:14). When we disobey God, we grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30–31). At such times we lose the reality of God’s presence in our lives and we become cold in heart. **The tragic thing with many of us is that we do not mourn the loss of God’s presence because we do not desire him or thirst after him, to know him better.** Does this describe you? Are you backslidden in heart? Oh, return to the Lord now, and without delay

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.*

*Return, O holy Dove! return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast.*

(William Cowper)

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest

Moses could not contemplate leading Israel without God's presence among them and he pleaded with God for the restoration of that presence. The Lord had said to Moses, *'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in my sight'* (12). Moses reasoned with God that if he had found grace (unmerited favour) in his sight, then surely he would restore his presence to Israel in answer to his prayer (13). God gave Moses this wonderful promise, *'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest'* (14). The *'rest'* that God promised Moses was the *'rest'* of accomplishment, of bringing Israel to the promised land (cp. Joshua 1:13). The Lord Jesus has promised to be with us until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). **God's presence with us is a great encouragement in the face of trouble and trials (Hebrews 13:5–6). His presence will also make us distinct from the world (16).**

When Moses asked God to show him his glory (18), he was asking to see God as he is. However, no mortal man could survive the actual sight of God in all his burning majesty and splendour. Even sinless angels cannot look at the face of God (Isaiah 6:1–3). The Lord told Moses that he would put him in a cleft of the rock while he passed by. He would be allowed to see his back but not his face (20–23). The Lord Jesus Christ came to show us the Father (John 1:18; 14:9) but his glory was veiled from men. The three disciples had a glimpse of that glory at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:2).

The Lord told Moses that he would proclaim his name (that is, his character) before him. He told Moses, *'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion'* (19). Israel did not deserve any compassion from God, but he was gracious to them, giving them favour when they deserved judgment. God is sovereign in bestowing his grace (Romans 9:15–16). We cannot work to obtain it (that would not be grace); it is his free gift (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8–9). Our good news is *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24). When did you last rejoice in God's amazing grace for saving you?

The LORD God, merciful and gracious

The Lord instructed Moses to cut two tablets of stone like the first ones which Moses had broken when Israel sinned (32:19). God told him that he would write the Ten Commandments on these tablets (28). Moses went up Mount Sinai the next day to present himself to God with the tablets of stone in his hand (1–4).

The Lord descended in the cloud and proclaimed his name to Moses as he had promised (5; cp. 33:19). What is God like? There are some who believe that he was unjust, harsh and unloving in his dealings with people in Old Testament times and that he has had a change of nature since Christ came to earth. That is nonsense. The Lord does not change (Malachi 3:6). Look at the description of God in verse 6: *The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth*. God has always been merciful, for he delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). He is just, however, and he will punish sin unless we repent. He is longsuffering, being very patient with us, but he will surely visit wrath upon us if we despise his goodness (Romans 2:4–5). God also abounds in goodness and in truth (or faithfulness, 6). He can be trusted completely and we can be confident and encouraged when we come to him in prayer because he is super-abundant in his goodness.

Moses was filled with awe before God and worshipped him, calling upon him to forgive the sins of his people and to take them as his inheritance (8–9). **God is worthy of our worship. Let us meditate on his wonderful character and worship and adore him.**

*Thy mercy, my God,
Is the theme of my song,
The joy of my heart,
And the boast of my tongue;
Thy free grace alone,
From the first to the last,
Hath won my affections,
And bound my soul fast.*

(John Stocker)

The LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God

Moses was with the Lord on Sinai for forty days and forty nights (as on the previous occasion, 28; cp. 24:18). Though he had no food or water, God miraculously sustained him. The Lord graciously renewed the covenant after Moses had pleaded with him to make Israel his inheritance (9). God promised him that the people would *see the work of the LORD*. He would work in an awesome manner and drive out powerful nations from Canaan (10–11). As a covenant people they would be distinct from other nations. They were not to make alliances with them, but were to destroy every trace of their false religions (12–17). God warned them, *‘Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst’* (12). They were to keep the appointed feasts and the Sabbath was to be observed even in the busy harvest time (18–24).

God told Moses that he *is a jealous God*. His name (nature) is *Jealous* (14; cp. 20:5). Jealousy in men is often very sinful, but there is a jealousy which arises from intense love, which desires the best for the other person (cp. 2 Corinthians 11:2). God had done so much for Israel and he wanted them for himself. He made them special to himself and cared enough to be jealous over them.

Christian, the Lord Jesus has purchased you at great cost. He died a most terrible death to save you. Do you not know that *you are not your own, for you were bought at a price* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)? Jesus commands, *‘Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness’* (Matthew 6:33). **Are you doing this, or are you provoking the Lord to jealousy by backsliding, by straying from him to go after other gods, such as living for money, for pleasure, for your hobbies, for sport? Will you continue to grieve the Holy Spirit?** Repent and be determined that nothing will usurp his place in your life, *for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God* (14).

The skin of his face shone

When Moses came down from the mountain *the skin of his face shone* (28–29). He had prayed to see the glory of the Lord (33:18) and without knowing it, that glory was reflected from his face. Aaron and the people were afraid to come near to him, but he called them to himself. His radiant face confirmed to the people that he had been in the presence of God. He then gave them the commandments that the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai (30–32). Moses put a veil on his face when he finished speaking to the Israelites. Whenever he met with the Lord, he unveiled his face (33–35). John Currid observes, ‘The radiance of his face was recharged. Before the people the divine glow confirmed the message and demonstrated the authority of the messenger’ (EP COMMENTARY ON EXODUS, volume 2, page 324)

Paul refers to this passage of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3:12–18. He pointed out that in using the veil Moses was indicating that the old covenant was not permanent; it passed away with the coming of the new covenant in Christ. The unbelieving Jews (and Gentiles) have a veil over their hearts which blinds them to their need of Christ. When God works in our lives turning us to himself, the veil is removed, there is light and liberty.

If we are walking with the Lord and enjoying fellowship with him, we will reflect the beauty of Christ in our lives. Like Moses, we may not be aware that there is a radiance in our faces, but others will notice. Christians are different! Matthew Henry aptly comments, ‘Serious godliness puts a lustre upon a man’s countenance, such as commands esteem and affection.’

A prayer of Moses the man of God:

Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands (Psalm 90:17).

Both men and women, as many as had a willing heart

Moses called the people of Israel together to hear the instructions given to him by God concerning the construction of the tabernacle (1). Though there was much work to be done the Lord again insisted that the Sabbath must be observed (2–3). The death penalty for those who violated the Sabbath may appear to be harsh, but we must remember that the Lord had given repeated instructions about Sabbath-observance (16:23–29; 20:8–11; 31:13–16). Those who wilfully disobey God's commandments have only themselves to blame for their punishment.

The application of the death penalty upon those who disregard God's commands is not applicable to us today. The Lord Jesus did not sanction the execution of the adulterous woman (John 8:1–11). We must remember, however, that there is a day of judgment and if we rebel against God and refuse to repent of our sin, we will be cast into hell (Luke 13:3,5; John 5:28–29; Revelation 21:8).

Moses went on to repeat God's commands concerning the offerings of gifts and skills for the work of the tabernacle (4–35). All manner of gifts were brought – gold, silver, precious stones, bronze, wood, skins, cloth, spices and oil. Those who made the offerings *came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart* (22). The willingness of the givers is stressed throughout the chapter (5,21–22,29). Everyone was expected to be involved, both men and women. There is work for everyone in the church.

The Lord Jesus willingly offered himself up to die on the cross in order to save us from our sins. He willingly suffered so that we could be freely forgiven and cleansed from our sins. **Do you offer your time, your talents and your money to the Lord with a willing heart?**

Much more than enough

Bezaleel and Aholiab's skills were a gift from God who also gave them the ability to teach others and to train them in their skills. (34). Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit of God (31,34). Those with artistic gifts and skills were not allowed to do as they pleased in the work of the tabernacle. They had to do *all that the LORD has commanded* (1).

Restrictions placed upon artists and craftsmen may stifle creativity and initiative. On the other hand, unbridled freedom of artistic expression in sinful man has resulted in the most terrible perversion and pornography in the arts. If you are skilled in art and craftwork, do you thank God for these gifts and seek to use them for his glory? When men or women dedicate their artistic skills to God and work according to principles found in Scripture, their creativity is enhanced, for they serve the great Creator.

The craftsmen had a problem. They reported to Moses, *'The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do'* (5). Moses was obliged to ask the people not to bring any more gifts (6). God had so worked in their hearts that they now gave generously and there was a great abundance. Where did this great wealth come from? The Lord had given the Israelites favour in the sight of the Egyptians and they had left the country with great riches (12:35–36). We must never forget that it is the Lord who gives us the health and the ability to earn and to acquire possessions. When we give to him, we are only returning to him that which is his by right.

How many churches today are able to say that they have too much in money and resources because their people are so generous (7)? There are great needs in God's work at home and abroad. Are we doing all that we can to meet them? **When God touches a person's heart, they will give generously of their time and money. Joyful, exuberant giving is a blessing not only to a church, but also to the giver.**

The Construction of the Tabernacle

Exodus 36:8 to 39:43 describes the making of the tabernacle with all its furnishings and the making of the priest's garments. The erection of the tabernacle is described in chapter 40. There are also details of the precious metals, etc. used in the work. The description of the furnishings and garments from earlier chapters are repeated in the accounts of the work. Compare the following:

Chapter 36:8–38	with chapter 26
37:1–24	with chapter 25:10–40.
37:25–29	with chapter 30:1–6, 22–38
38:1–7	with chapter 27:1–8
38:8	with chapter 30:18
38:9–20	with chapter 27:9–19
38:21–23	with chapter 31:1–6, 35:30–35
39:1–31	with chapter 28:1–43

According to all that the LORD had commanded

We read that *the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses* (32, 42–43). This obedience to all that God had commanded was most important. They did not deviate from God’s will in the preparation or erection of the tabernacle. *Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did* (40:16; see also verses 21–32).

It is also obvious that the people were united in their work – there was no strife or dissension. The principles are obvious. **If we would enjoy God’s blessing, we must be obedient to all of God’s will, not just what might suit us.** We must take God’s Word seriously enough to render complete obedience to it. We do not have the liberty of picking and choosing what may suit us.

The erection of the tabernacle did not proceed until the Lord gave the go-ahead. He told Moses, *‘On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting’* (2). The principle taught here is that we must not only do God’s work in God’s way, but we must also do it in God’s time. We must *wait on the LORD* (Psalm 27:14) and this often means that we must *wait for him* (Isaiah 30:18).

There are many needs in God’s work but we must avoid the temptation of trying to run ahead of God. We need to be prepared by the Lord whose timing is always right. The great apostle Paul had several years of preparation before he was finally sent on his first missionary journey (cp. Galatians 1:15–18). There is of course, the opposite problem of being too slow to respond to God’s call, and that is probably more common among us. We fail to prepare ourselves, or to learn the lessons that the Lord would teach us, and we just do nothing. There is a harvest to be gathered in (cp. John 4:35–38).

The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle

The obedience of the Israelites to God's instructions is again highlighted. The words '*as the LORD commanded Moses*' appear seven times in verses 19 to 33. The work of erecting the tabernacle was finished one year after the exodus from Egypt (17; cp. 12:2). The Feast of the Passover was kept just a few days later on the fourteenth of the first month, one year after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt (Numbers 9:1–5).

When everything was completed, *the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle* (34). The cloud, which indicated that God was present with his people, rested over the tabernacle continually for all the people to see. They moved on when the cloud moved (36–38). Moses was so right to pray for God's presence in the midst of his people (33:12–16). Without the presence of God they would have been in real trouble on their journey to the promised land.

The glory of God came when the people obeyed his will and did his work. True spiritual blessing only comes to those who are obedient to God's Word. If we disobey God, we should not expect to have his presence with us. Israel had rebelled against God and they repented. They then obeyed God's Word and did his work. If we have been rebelling against God, let us, like Israel, repent and obey his will. We will then know his presence among us and his blessing upon our work for him.

*Round each habitation hovering,
See the cloud and fire appear!
For a glory and a covering,
Showing that the Lord is near.
He who gives them daily manna,
He who listens when they cry;
Let him hear the loud hosanna
Rising to his throne on high.*

(John Newton)