

Bible Study # 64 Exodus 35.1–35 04–21–2021

The earlier account containing the instructions for building the Tent of Meeting ended with a note concerning the Sabbath (31:12–17). Now, the instructions for its construction begin with an abbreviated direction concerning its observance.

There was an intimate connection between the Sabbath and the sanctuary, for worship on the seventh day at the appointed place was part of God's claim upon His redeemed people. The Sabbath law was not to be set aside during construction of the Tent.

After assembling the people, Moses reminded them that what he was now commanding them to do was what God had earlier revealed to him (chs. 25–31). The death penalty was prescribed for anyone who worked on the Sabbath.

The instruction not to light a fire on the Sabbath was not contained in the earlier regulations, though it was implied by the direction to cook the manna and the quail on the eve of the Sabbath, and not on the Sabbath itself (16:23). While some Jews have considered this to forbid any fires on the Sabbath, most have taken the view that fires for comfort are permissible. In this context, the prohibition probably applied most directly to the use of fire by those involved in metalwork.

These instructions relate to the materials that had to be provided by the people in order for the sanctuary to be built, and they follow fairly closely the earlier section in 25:1–9.

These verses are a repetition of 25:1–7, with stress again on the voluntary nature of the gifts from the people (25:2, 'the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give'; 35:5, 'everyone who is willing to bring to the LORD an offering'). What is not repeated here is the instruction to build according to the heavenly pattern shown to Moses (25:9, 40), though clearly that is presupposed.

A change comes in verse 10, as the invitation to take part in the work is widened from Bezalel and Oholiab to 'all who are skilled'. The Hebrew simply calls these people 'wise of heart'. In verse 18, 'ropes' are mentioned for the first time, though earlier the note concerning 'tent pegs' (27:19) implied the use of ropes.

These verses record the willingness with which the whole community participated in the task of building the Tent of Meeting and everything associated with it. This list is more extensive than the earlier ones (25:1–7 and 31:1–11).

The voluntary nature of the gifts is emphasized again. Though expressions used here are a little different and fuller than those in 25:2 and 35:5, yet the main idea does not change. The gifts did not come from a reluctant community who were forced to give. Rather, there was a spontaneous response to the call for materials, and later Moses had to restrain the people from bringing more (36:3–7).

In addition to the males in the community, the women were also involved in the presentation of gifts. While it is not recorded in the text, we have to presume that some of the precious metals and jewelry were part of the objects acquired from the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus (Exod. 12:35–36).

These gifts were designated as offerings to the LORD, being referred to as 'wave offerings to the LORD' (vv. 22, 24; see the earlier comments on the wave offering on 29:24). Sacrificial language was applied to the gifts for the Tent of Meeting.

The women had a special role to play in addition to presenting jewelry and ornaments (see v. 22). Those who had the skill (v. 25) and were willing (v. 26) spun yarn or goats' hair to be used in making the curtains. This shows that the construction of the Tent of Meeting was not something that happened overnight, for time was needed to make all the necessary preparations, including those mentioned here.

The leaders were responsible for the provision of the precious stones for the ephod and breast-piece, and also for the oil for the lampstand and for anointing. This may have been just for the initial supply of oil at Sinai, as later in Leviticus 24:2 the instruction is for 'the Israelites', i.e., all Israel, to present the oil. Probably the latter became the regular practice.

The section ends with a summary statement of the generosity of many within the Israelite community. It reinforces what was already said in verses 20–21.

In the earlier instructions the work set out for Bezalel and Oholiab came near the end, whereas in this account of the actual making of the Tent of Meeting, it comes near the beginning. What transpired was accomplished by God's sovereign choice of workmen whom he endowed with his Spirit.

The importance and necessity of this endowment is emphasized by the fact that the Hebrew root denoting wisdom occurs on sixteen out of eighteen appearances in Exodus in the passages relating to Bezalel and Oholiab. Extraordinary skills were needed, and this only came through God filling them with his Spirit (note the references to this in vv. 31 and 35).

Another manifestation of this endowment was the ability of these men to teach others (v. 34). This was implied in 31:6, but now becomes explicit. The verb used appears elsewhere in the Old Testament in practical contexts such as giving directions (Gen. 46:28) and parental instruction to children (Prov. 4:4, 11).

From this verb comes the noun *tôrâh*, 'instruction' or 'law'. It does not preclude the possibility that a period of training somewhat like an apprenticeship could have been involved.

Our next study will be of Exodus 36:1–38.