



DANIEL R. HYDE

G O D  
*in*  
O u r  
M I D S T

*The* TABERNACLE & OUR  
RELATIONSHIP *with* GOD

## ENDORSEMENTS

“It is refreshing to have an exposition of the tabernacle that avoids the allegorizing excesses that have so often been a feature of the ‘Christianizing’ of this important part of the Old Testament. Daniel Hyde seeks to give a sound exegesis of the text and, only then, to lead us ‘to see it through New Testament eyes,’ and thus to discover its testimony to Christ and its role in edifying the faithful.”

—DR. GRAEME GOLDSWORTHY

Visiting lecturer in hermeneutics

Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia

Author, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*

“Saturated with sound exegesis, helpful insights, pointed application, and warm devotion, *God in Our Midst* helps us to see in the tabernacle not merely pieces of furniture or sets of curtains, but Christ Himself, in the beauty of His holiness and the peace of His pardoning grace. This book will drive pastors from the study to the pulpit, and parishioners from study to worship.”

—REV. BRIAN VOS

Pastor, Trinity United Reformed Church, Caledonia, Michigan

“Danny Hyde has distinguished himself as someone who is historically and theologically grounded while consistently keeping things clear, Christ-centered, and relevant. This book on the tabernacle is no exception. Each chapter is a fine meal elegantly served up for the nourishment of the saints. I know now where I will turn first when it comes to books on the tabernacle.”

—DR. GERALD M. BILKES

Professor of New Testament and biblical theology

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

“This work on the tabernacle not only demonstrates how the tabernacle foreshadows Christ in its exposition of Exodus 25–40, it lays out principles to help people read the Old Testament properly. The appendix on ‘Preaching the Pentateuch’ is worth the price of the book. Such passionate preaching of the Old Testament is greatly needed in the church today.”

—DR. RICHARD P. BELCHER JR.  
Professor of Old Testament  
Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina  
Author, *The Messiah and the Psalms*

“In *God in Our Midst*, Rev. Danny Hyde provides a true feast for the reader. He demonstrates a grasp of the Scriptures in terms of the grand storyline as well as the particular texts that flesh out the points he makes. His examination of the tabernacle—its building, sacrifices, personnel—are gateways to discuss a wide variety of theological matters and directions of rich, spiritual application. The tabernacle centers around the person and work of Jesus Christ. This book is rich in content devoted to theology and to piety. Lay members and ordained pastors will learn and relearn much in this book. Highly recommended!”

—REV. MARK VANDER HART  
Associate professor of Old Testament studies  
Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dyer, Indiana

“As children learn with concrete objects and figures, the Old Testament people were taught by God with physical symbols such as the tabernacle. With centuries in between, most Christians have missed the beauty of God’s provisional dwelling place. Danny Hyde takes us back in time through the lens of the New Testament to grasp God’s artistic demonstration of His awesome and redeeming presence. What pointed to Christ in His first coming will shine with much more splendor in God’s definitive tabernacle in the new heaven and new earth.”

—DR. HEBER CARLOS DE CAMPOS JR.  
Chaplain and professor of systematic theology  
Instituto Presbiteriano Mackenzie, São Paulo, Brasil

“How refreshing to have a book that unlocks the treasures of this section of God’s Word so clearly and so faithfully. Daniel Hyde has handed us not only an excellent series of devotional studies on the tabernacle, he has given us an example of how to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. So many have sought the key to unlocking these chapters in allegory, imagination, and speculation, all of which has proven to make things complex and unprofitable. Instead, we are guided to simply read the text as it was intended to be read. Daniel helps us to hear God teaching His people about the promised Savior, Jesus, and the great things He would do to redeem and transform sinners. The secret, the mystery in it all, is Jesus. It is so exciting to be able to see these things for oneself. After the first few chapters of this little book, I am sure readers will be able to see the patterns for themselves, and make connections with more familiar New Testament passages. What could be more exciting than to know in greater detail the wonder it is to experience God in our midst? This would be an excellent resource for any Bible study group or class to open up a section of Scripture that sadly continues to remain closed to so many.”

—DR. DAVID R. JACKSON  
Head teacher, biblical studies

William Carey Christian School, Prestons, Australia  
Author, *Crying Out for Vindication: The Gospel According to Job*



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## ABBREVIATIONS

- BC—Belgic Confession
- CD—Canons of Dort
- HC—Heidelberg Catechism
- WCF—Westminster Confession of Faith
- WLC—Westminster Larger Catechism
- WSC—Westminster Shorter Catechism

## INTRODUCTION

“An earnest and prayerful study of the tabernacle, and the purposes it served, cannot fail to increase our knowledge of the grand truths of redemption.”<sup>1</sup> This is how William Brown, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, called serious students of the Word of God to read and meditate on the tabernacle narratives of the Old Testament.

Yet few Christians seem to have done this. I learned this over the first seven years of my ministry. In those years, I preached through a great portion of the New Testament: John, Acts, Romans, Colossians, Titus, Hebrews, 1 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. I did this in order to lay a foundation of solid biblical doctrine for the church I was planting. Toward the end of those years, the Holy Spirit led me to give my people a basic overview of the Old Testament so that they could read it in a Christ-centered way, as the Apostle Paul did: “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20, KJV). I ended up preaching a series that highlighted the story line of Christ and His redemption, beginning in Genesis and going through His coming in the Gospels. Though I thought this would be just a brief survey before I returned to preaching through the New Testament, I realized that my people—like so many other Christians today—had a woefully inadequate grasp of the Old Testament.

What I experienced has been confirmed to me by many colleagues. Vast numbers of Christians and churches in our time and place do not know the Old Testament well.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Brown, we pastors need

to give our people an earnest and prayerful study of the Old Testament, including the centerpiece of its religion for four hundred years, the tabernacle. That is what I hope to provide in this book.

Of course, one challenge we face in doing this comes from the New Testament itself:

A tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. *Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.* (Heb. 9:2–5, emphasis added)

Ever since those words were written, generations of Christians and preachers have wished that the Apostolic writer *had* spoken in detail of the tabernacle and its furnishings. But since one aspect of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is not only that the authors were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21) in their writing, but even that they were led away from writing what they originally intended (Jude 3), the Holy Spirit did not go into detail about the furniture in the tabernacle. Because of this, the task falls to preachers to exposit and to apply the meaning of these structures and articles of furniture. Let us, then, enter behind the curtain and into the Most Holy Place.

However, before we jump in and start seeking to understand the particulars of the tabernacle, we need to grasp some general facts and principles: what the tabernacle was; how it fit into the story of Israel's wilderness wandering; how we can best read and understand the narratives about it, especially in light of the theme of God dwelling with His people; and how we ought to respond as Christians to the biblical teaching about it.

## WHAT WAS THE TABERNACLE?

The tabernacle (Latin, *tabernaculum*, “tent”) was the Lord’s temporary dwelling place during the Israelites’ forty-year wilderness wandering and their first three hundred-plus years in the land of Canaan. God revealed the instructions for building it to Moses (Ex. 25:1–31:11) and inspired him to write an account of its construction (Ex. 35:4–40:38).<sup>3</sup>

The tabernacle actually has several Hebrew names in the narrative of Scripture, all of which signify something about its purpose. First, it is called “the sanctuary” (Ex. 25:8, *miqdash*; Ex. 38:24, *qodesh*), as it was the place of the holy presence of God. So, it was a holy place. Second, it is called “the tent of the Lord” (Ex. 25:9, *mishkan*; Ex. 26:7, *’ohel*), as it was the place of His temporary dwelling among His people. It is also called the “tent” in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 8:5; 9:21, *skēnē*). Third, it is called “the tent of the testimony” (Ex. 38:21; Num. 9:15; cf. Acts 7:44, *’ohel ha-edut*), as it was the place where He testified to His covenant of grace with Israel.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the two tablets of the law were also called the “testimony” (*edut*). The conservative Lutheran commentator C. F. Keil (1807–1888) wrote that the law of God was described as the “testimony” because it was housed in the tent of the testimony:

[The tablets were so called] not merely because they bore testimony to the divine will, but also and at the same time to the divine nature, because they manifested those divine attributes under which Jehovah reveals Himself, His essence and being, in and to Israel. It is not merely what Jehovah requires of His people Israel as their covenant God, but it is, at the same time, what He is and desires to be for Israel, that was embodied in the ten words written upon the tables of stone; and this testimony it was that constituted the pith and essence of the old covenant.<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, the tabernacle is called “the tent of meeting” (Ex. 27:21; 28:43; 30:20; 40:32; Num. 8:24, *’ohel moed*), as it was the place where

the Lord met with His people, as represented by the priests. In fact, until the tabernacle was constructed, the Lord met with Moses alone, as the representative of the entire people, in another tent also known as the tent of meeting, “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11). That meeting and fellowship between the Lord and Moses was to occur on a larger scale in the tabernacle between the Lord and His people, although the one-on-one, personal aspect was lessened.

## THE STORY LINE

We also need to be familiar with the story line of the book of Exodus and how the tabernacle fits into that story. What happened before and after the tabernacle was built? How did the tabernacle flow from and into this larger story?

### *Geography*

The story line of the book of Exodus takes place in three geographic locations. The story opens where Genesis ends—with Israel in Egypt—and continues there in chapters 1–13 (cf. Gen. 50:22–26). After leaving Egypt in the dark of night, the Israelites proceed into the wilderness, the Sinai desert, which is the setting for chapters 14–18. Surprisingly, however, the book of the “exodus,” that is, the departure from Egypt, does not spend most of its time on that dynamic event. Instead, the majority of the book takes place at a static location: Mount Sinai. The narrative in this location covers more than half of the chapters, 19–40.

There is a wonderful theological and practical reason why more than half of Exodus is set at Sinai. The Holy Spirit is teaching us that redemption occurs for the purpose of invocation, that salvation happens for the purpose of adoration. The Israelites were saved from Egypt that they might serve the Lord. Likewise, our purpose for being called out of the darkness of the world is that we might be called into the brilliant presence of God. We exist, as the memorable words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism teach us, “to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever”

(Q&A 1). Meditating on the tabernacle, then, like meditating on the rest of Scripture, should help us fulfill this purpose, “that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9b).

### *Literary*

This last and largest section of Exodus can be divided into two parts. In chapters 19–24, the Lord enters a sacred covenant relationship with His liberated people. In chapters 25–40, He gives His covenant people the means to worship Him for that liberation in the tabernacle. The largest subsection of this largest part of the book of Exodus, then, deals with the instructions for and construction of the tabernacle, where the Lord met with His people and where they served Him in sacrifice and prayer. How important is this fact? One of the great Dutch Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century, Herman Witsius (1636–1708), expressed it this way: “God created the whole world in six days, but he used forty to instruct Moses about the tabernacle. Little over one chapter was needed to describe the structure of the world, but six were used for the tabernacle.”<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the Holy Spirit wants us to notice that the tabernacle was extremely important to the faith and life of His old-covenant people—and, since it is part of inspired Scripture, to us.

With that in mind, how do we proceed to navigate through this largest section in the narrative of Exodus? As we work our way through these chapters, we will notice the following literary divisions. First, from 25:1 through 31:11, the Lord gave Moses *instruction* to build the tabernacle. Second, from 31:12 to 35:3, we find an interlude dealing with the golden calf narrative (which we will not deal with in this book).<sup>7</sup> Third, from 35:4 to 40:38, Moses recorded the actual *construction* of the tabernacle.

These details may seem boring, but they reveal the beautiful structure that the Holy Spirit gave to the book of Exodus. He inspired it, or breathed it out (2 Tim. 3:16). The details of the Word of God matter. For example, Jesus based an entire argument for the resurrection on the present tense

of a verb (Luke 20:37–38), and Paul based an entire argument for Jesus being *the* seed of Abraham on a singular noun (Gal. 3:16).

It is clear, then, that we need to read and meditate on this portion of the Word of God purposefully and prayerfully. When we read the Word in a studious, contemplative, and prayerful way, we come to see not only the individual pearls of doctrine and application contained therein, but also how all of those pearls hang together like those on a necklace. The Word of God is as beautiful in its presentation as in its proclamation.

### *Reality*

In saying all of this, I am assuming, as a Bible-believing Christian, that all the events related in these chapters really happened the way the text says they happened. These narratives are reality, not fantasy. Critical scholars, though, have sought to demonstrate the implausibility of these narratives by pointing to several “problems.” Among these are alleged errors and alleged later additions by multiple editors and redactors. For instance, it has been said that all the materials listed in Exodus 38:24–31 would have been impossible to gather in the wilderness, that it would have been impossible to transport all these materials, and that a nomadic people certainly would not have had the skills necessary to construct the tabernacle. Likewise, some claim that the tabernacle was a myth that later editors added to the Bible as a way of giving a historical precedent for the construction of the temple. Both Jewish and Christian scholars have addressed these concerns with great force and ability, both literarily and historically.<sup>8</sup>

The most convincing reason for accepting these chapters as reality, though, is the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of this portion of Exodus as the Word of God. When did He do that? He did so when He taught His disciples about Himself from the Old Testament after His resurrection: “And beginning with Moses [that is, Genesis—Deuteronomy] and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27, emphasis added; cf. 24:44).

Following that tradition, the first martyr of the early church, Stephen,

testified about the reality of this section of the Word when he said Moses “was in the congregation in the wilderness” and “received living oracles to give to us” (Acts 7:38). The words of Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 are among those “living oracles” (*logia zōnta*). Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews certainly had no question that the tabernacle narratives were part of the “living and active” Word of God (Heb. 4:12, *zōn . . . kai energēs*), accurate and historically reliable, when he quoted from them to show how Jesus fulfilled them (Hebrews 8–9). In fact, the writer said Moses “was instructed by God” when God said to him, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain” (Heb. 8:5; cf. Ex. 25:9).

Finally, the Apostle Paul repeats the story within this section of Exodus of Moses’ meeting with the Lord face to face, saying: “The Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end. . . . Moses . . . would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end” (2 Cor. 3:7b, 13). He then equates the reading of the Old Testament with Moses himself: “For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts” (2 Cor. 3:14b–15).

## HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

Now that we know the overall story line and structure of the large section of Exodus dealing with the tabernacle, we need to determine how to interpret it. This is the task of hermeneutics, interpreting the text of Scripture in order to come to a true understanding of its meaning.<sup>9</sup> In order to do this, we have to engage exegesis. Exegesis is drawing out of the text what it means, as opposed to eisegesis, which is pouring into the text our own meaning and expectations. The ancient church father Hilary of Poitiers (300–368) described the process of hermeneutics and exegesis in his monumental treatise *On the Trinity* (1.18):

For he is the best student who waits till the words reveal their own meaning rather than imposes it, who takes more from the words than (puts) into them, and who does not force a semblance of meaning on the words, which he had determined to be the right one before starting to read. Since then we are going to speak of the things of God, let us leave to God knowledge of Himself and let us in pious reverence obey His words. For He is a fitting witness to Himself who is only known through Himself.<sup>10</sup>

In this section, I want to give a brief historical survey of how the tabernacle has been interpreted, then lay out some basic principles that will help us derive its true meaning.

### *History of Hermeneutics*

Ancient interpreters looked at the tabernacle in a highly symbolic and allegorical way. Among these interpreters was the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–AD 50). He saw in the tabernacle the universe in miniature. He arrived at this conclusion on the basis of his allegorical interpretation of the four kinds of materials used to construct the tabernacle, which he saw as the four elements of nature, and on the basis of his allegorical interpretation of the precious stones in the ephod, which he regarded as the signs of the Zodiac.<sup>11</sup>

Another example of this allegorical approach is found in the writings of the early church father Clement of Alexandria (150–215). He saw meanings behind the colors of the curtains: “For purple is from water, linen from the earth; blue, being dark, is like the air, as scarlet is like fire.” He also said the altar of incense was the symbol of the earth, the courtyard symbolized the middlemost point of heaven and earth, the covering of the tabernacle was the barrier of popular unbelief, the lampstand represented the seven planets, the two cherubim were the two hemispheres, the golden mitre was the regal power of the Lord, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Medieval expositors in particular applied this allegorical approach to the tabernacle. The Jewish rabbi Maimonides (1135–1204) interpreted

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the tabernacle as a symbol of a royal palace, with the priests symbolizing servants who offered honor through the ceremonial rites.<sup>13</sup> However, the allegorical approach found its greatest expression in the work of Bede the Venerable (673–735). Bede’s *De tabernaculo*, “On the Tabernacle,” was the first Christian exposition of the tabernacle narratives. In it, he followed what was known as the *quadrige*, the fourfold interpretation of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> This approach distinguished among the *historical* sense, which described literal things that happened; the *allegorical* sense, which described Christ and the sacraments; the *tropological* sense, which described how to live morally; and the *anagogical* sense, which described the heavenly and future state of things.<sup>15</sup>

What about Reformed Protestant theologians? In the seventeenth century, several interpreted the tabernacle. Johannes Cocceius<sup>16</sup> (1603–1669) said the tabernacle was the invisible church, while the outer court was the visible church. He also said the Holy Place was the church militant, while the Holy of Holies was the church triumphant.<sup>17</sup> One of Cocceius’ contemporaries, the aforementioned Witsius, also interpreted the tabernacle as a symbol of the church: “The tabernacle, be it observed, was a figure of the Church; and the candlestick, of the Holy Spirit, to whom the Church is indebted for all her light.”<sup>18</sup> Witsius went on to say that since the ark of the covenant was made of wood and gold, it was a type of Christ with His two natures.<sup>19</sup> In the nineteenth century, Brown wrote a wonderfully detailed explanation of the tabernacle’s details, yet followed an unbounded allegorical approach. For example, he said the two silver tenons into which each board in the wall was placed represented faith, while the gold bars that ran across the boards were those who were leaning on Jesus for salvation, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

What is wrong with all of this? The main difficulty with such allegorical and symbolic interpretations is that they are highly subjective and arbitrary. Witsius saw in the wood and gold the humanity and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, but what keeps me from saying these elements really represented the suffering of Christ on the cross and His glorious resurrection? Who is correct? How can we know?

That brings us to principles of proper interpretation. In what follows, I offer several basic keys to interpreting the tabernacle narratives. These are in no way exhaustive, but I trust they are helpful.

### *Reading Them as Scripture*

First, we need to read these stories as Holy Scripture. Jesus received the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) as the prophetic Word of God (Matt. 11:13) and taught His disciples about Himself from these books (Luke 24:27, 44). When Paul reminded Timothy that from the days of his childhood, “you have been acquainted with the sacred writings [*hiera grammata*], which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” he was referring to the books of the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:15). These writings, just as much as the New Testament, are “breathed out by God [*theopneustos*] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (vv. 16–17).

This means that we need to read the story of the tabernacle, first, because it is the Word of God, and second, because reading it as such is profitable and a blessing to our souls (cf. Rev. 1:3). The Westminster Larger Catechism expresses this truth when it says that “the holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God” (Q&A 157).

### *Reading Them Devotionally*

Second, we need to read them devotionally. This means that our highest purpose in reading the Word is not to search for theological proof-texts or principles for successful living, but that we might be led to worship the triune God. The great psalm that extols the Word of God, Psalm 119, shows us how knowledge of God’s Word leads us to praise Him:

I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. (v. 7)

Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! (v. 12)

Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your rules. (v. 108)

Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules. (v. 137)

Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules. (v. 164)

Martin Luther wrote that our approach to reading the Word was outlined in Psalm 119, consisting in prayer (*oratio*), meditation (*meditatio*), and spiritual conflict (*tentatio*).<sup>21</sup> The great poet of Israel, David, also spoke of this prayerful, meditative, and transforming reading of the Word when he said:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. . . .  
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.  
(Ps. 19:7–8, 10)

When we read the Word, our souls are revived, we are made wise, we rejoice, we are enlightened, and we find what we desire most: the Lord Himself.

Gerald Bilkes writes that the church needs to recapture this reading of the Bible with the heart.<sup>22</sup> He says this involves recognizing the total claim of the Word of God; demanding the allegiance of our whole being; depending on grace so that our hearts may profit from the Word of God; and looking to the triune God to transcribe the Word of God on our hearts.

As we read the tabernacle narratives, we must be claimed by their

authority, depend on the grace of the Holy Spirit to understand them, and expect God to inscribe their teaching on our hearts.

### *Reading Them through the Lens of the New Testament*

Third, we need to read the tabernacle narratives through the lens of the New Testament. In reading the Old Testament, especially the tabernacle narratives, it is essential for us to look to the New Testament as the basis of our interpretation.<sup>23</sup> The dictum that Augustine (354–430) wrote in the year 419 must be our guide: *In Vetere Novum latet, et in Novo Vetus patet*. This means, “In the Old [Testament] the New [Testament] is concealed, and in the New [Testament] the Old [Testament] is revealed.”<sup>24</sup> We need to realize that the Old Testament is incomplete. It is merely the first of two volumes, with the New Testament being the second. In the Old Testament, God spoke “at many times and in many ways” (Heb. 1:1), but when Jesus came in the flesh, God spoke through His Son, bringing that old revelation to completion (Heb. 1:2).

The Dutch commentator Willem Hendrik Gispen (1900–1986) applied this truth to the tabernacle narratives when he said, “When we consider the meaning of [the tabernacle] for us as Christians, we must stay with what the Scriptures, and especially the New Testament, say, and look at the tabernacle as a whole, rather than seeking a ‘deeper’ meaning in every loop, clasp, and crossbar.”<sup>25</sup>

What is the reason for relying so much on the New Testament to understand the Old? The reason is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. As Robert Strimple wrote, “In the New Testament Christ’s church has been given, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that post-resurrection, post-Pentecost revelation that is absolutely authoritative, her infallible guide in all matters of faith and life.”<sup>26</sup> The Spirit reveals the deep things of God (Rom. 8:1–27; 1 Cor. 1:18–2:16) and the realities of our redemption (2 Corinthians 3–4). As Paul told the Corinthians:

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze

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at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:12–18)

This veil that lies over the eyes of unbelieving hearts can be removed only by Jesus Christ working through the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that we desperately rely on the Holy Spirit, whose inspiration led to the writing of the New Testament, to help us properly understand the meaning of the Old Testament by His illumination.

### *Reading Them as Fulfilled in Jesus Christ*

Fourth, we need to read the tabernacle narratives with the understanding that they are fulfilled in Christ. As Jesus said when He rebuked the Pharisees, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). His rebuke was for those who thought “in-depth” Bible study, with all the obscure details, was itself saving; instead, He said, the study of Scripture must be centered in Him. In Witsius’ words, Jesus is “the key of knowledge . . . without which nothing can be savingly understood in Moses and the prophets.”<sup>27</sup>

Jesus demonstrated this to His disciples on the Emmaus road. After His resurrection, He led these downcast brothers through the Word of God to teach them of Himself: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). He then returned to Jerusalem and spoke to those He had made Apostles: “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything

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written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44–45).

This Christ-centered approach to the Old Testament was not only a hallmark of ancient Christian interpretation, as the above quote from Augustine illustrates, it was how our Reformation forefathers read the Old Testament. Arguably the greatest of the seventeenth-century English Reformed theologians, John Owen (1616–1683), described this Christ-centered approach when he said:

There is herein a *full manifestation* made of the wisdom of God, in all the holy institutions of the tabernacle and temple of old. Herein the veil is fully taken off from them, and that obscure representation of heavenly things is brought forth unto light and glory. It is true, this is done unto a great degree in the dispensation of the Gospel. By the coming of Christ in the flesh, and the discharge of his mediatory office in this world, the substance of what they did prefigure is accomplished; and in the revelations of the Gospel the nature and end of them is declared. Howbeit, they extended their signification also unto things within the veil, or the discharge of the priestly office of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, Heb. ix. 24. Wherefore, as we have not yet a perfection of light to understand the depth of the mysteries contained in them; so themselves also were not absolutely fulfilled until the Lord Christ discharged his office in the holy place. This is the glory of the pattern which God showed unto Moses in the mount, made conspicuous and evident unto all. Therein especially do the saints of the Old Testament, who were exercised all their days in those typical institutions whose end and design they could not comprehend, see the manifold wisdom and goodness of God in them all, rejoicing in them for evermore.<sup>28</sup>

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*Reading Them Simply*

Fifth, in contrast with the allegorical and highly symbolic approach described above, we need to read the tabernacle narratives simply, not speculatively. We have to realize that they are symbolic, but a symbol is not wild speculation, with every detail of shape, size, location, and color meaning something hidden.<sup>29</sup> The Reformers described how we are to read the Word, simply allowing its own words to give us its meaning, when they said *Scriptura Scripturae interpres*: “Scripture is the interpreter of Scripture.”<sup>30</sup> When we allow the Word to guide our understanding, we can make a distinction between a symbol and an allegory. The difference is that while a symbol has one simple meaning and purpose, an allegory has many at one time.

What does it mean to read the Word and the tabernacle story simply? It means that we must read it theologically. In reading, then, we ask not about the hidden meaning of minor details such as the rings, the poles, and the boards of the tabernacle, or the color of the stones in the high priest’s ephod, but questions such as, “What does this passage teach me about God, about my sins, about Christ’s redemptive work, and about how I am to live for the glory of God?”<sup>31</sup> In the words of John Calvin:

It would be puerile to make a collection of the *minutiae* where-with some philosophize; since it was by no means the intention of God to include mysteries in every hook and loop; and even although no part were without a mystical meaning, which no one in his senses will admit, it is better to confess our ignorance than to indulge ourselves in frivolous conjectures. Of this sobriety, too, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a fit master for us, who, although he professedly shews the analogy between the shadows of the Law and the truth manifested in Christ, yet sparingly touches upon some main points, and by this moderation restrains us from too curious disquisitions and deep speculations.<sup>32</sup>

*Reading Them as Instructive Morally*

Sixth, we need to read these narratives as instructive morally. One of the purposes of Scripture is to guide God's people in lives of godliness. The Scriptures were given "for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Apostle Paul engaged in this reading of the Old Testament. In writing to the Corinthians, he drew on the Old Testament stories as the basis for moral catechesis. In the following passage, notice how Paul parallels the life of the Israelites in the wilderness with the life of new-covenant Christians:

I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (1 Cor. 10:1-5)

Paul assumes here that the new-covenant church is the continuation of God's covenant of grace that He made with Israel. This is why Paul can say the Israelites were "our fathers." He even speaks to those who participated in the Lord's Supper by saying that their "fathers" ate "the same spiritual food" and drank "the same spiritual drink" because they partook of Christ. But God was displeased with the wilderness generation, and Paul goes on to say:

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were

destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (Vv. 6–11)

These Old Testament stories are our “examples.” The word Paul uses, *tupoi*, speaks of these stories as patterns or types of what happens to us.<sup>33</sup> Notice how Paul gives an exhortation and then bases it in an example: we should not “desire evil as they did” (v. 6); we should not be “idolaters as some of them were” (v. 7); we should not “indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did” (v. 8); we should not “put Christ to the test, as some of them did” (v. 9); and we should not “grumble, as some of them did” (v. 10).

While the tabernacle narratives may not present such obvious examples, we still must read them for the moral instruction they contain, for our holy God calls us to be holy as He is holy. This was not just an Old Testament exhortation (Lev. 11:44); it is also a New Testament command (1 Peter 1:16).

#### THE TABERNACLE AMONG THE TABERNACLES

One final hermeneutical key to understanding the tabernacle merits its own section. The tabernacle was not the first dwelling place of God with His people, nor would it be the last.<sup>34</sup> I would like to trace the theme of God’s “tabernacling” (dwelling) among His people throughout Scripture to show the overall context of the tabernacle in the midst of Israel.

By means of such a survey, we will see that the Scriptures are like a rose, one that began to bud early in the Old Testament as God, the great Kingdom Builder, established His kingdom in the garden of Eden. Even when the Devil used Adam to desecrate this kingdom, the Scriptures continued to blossom as God began rebuilding His kingdom. He called Abram to be the father of a new kingdom-people who would live in a kingdom-place. He saved the Israelites from Egypt and brought them to that promised kingdom-place in the days of Joshua. Again, though it was

defiled in the days of the judges, God reformed the church in the days of David and Solomon, giving His people a temple at which to worship. Finally, the rose of Scripture came to full bloom with the coming of our Lord—“God with us” (Matt. 1:23), “the Word” who was “made flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us” (John 1:14).

### *Beginning at the End—Revelation 21–22*

We begin by going to the end of the Bible, Revelation 21–22. In the words of the contemporary New Testament scholar G. K. Beale, “Eschatology is protology: the goal of all redemptive history is to return to the primal condition of creation from which humankind fell and then go beyond it to a heightened state, which the first creation did not reach.”<sup>35</sup> Since we live after “the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise” (HC, Q&A 7), to study what God did in the beginning is to study what God will do in the end, and vice versa. Revelation 21–22, then, vividly pictures the pinnacle of God’s plan of creation, salvation, and human history.<sup>36</sup>

This pinnacle is painted in visionary pictures using the biblical and theological themes of the new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem, and the final pronouncement of God’s covenant promise: “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:27). Everything God ever intended for His creation is described here in breathtaking terms that stretch “the limits of human vocabulary and thought.”<sup>37</sup>

The end of the book of Revelation portrays the climax of creation, as the “first heaven and the first earth” (Rev. 21:1), which were created at the beginning (Genesis 1–2), are renewed, transformed, and purified. The new heaven and new earth, then, will be “the same heaven and earth, but gloriously rejuvenated, with no weeds, thorns or thistles, and so on.”<sup>38</sup> God will not annihilate what He made and create another heaven and earth like the first, out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).<sup>39</sup> The Belgic Confession describes creation’s climax, saying, “our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, bodily and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty,

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to declare himself the judge of the living and the dead. He will burn this old world, in fire and flame, in order to cleanse it” (Art. 37).<sup>40</sup>

After seeing this glorious new creation, John wrote his vision of “the holy city, new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2). This city is not of this earth, but its origin is heavenly: it comes “out of heaven, from God.” This vision of the New Jerusalem pictures the joining of the heavenly reality to the newly renewed heaven and earth. The New Jerusalem is the triumphant and glorified church of Jesus Christ described symbolically. It is a picture of God’s people.<sup>41</sup> It is the reality of Paul’s description of the cleansed and purified church: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27).

The people of God are described with other metaphors. Revelation 3:12 speaks of the overcomers being pillars in the temple of God, meaning that the people of God are the “literal” temple. Revelation 19:7–8 describes the marriage supper of the Lamb and notes that the bride “has made herself ready,” being adorned in fine linen. The image of fine linen is then explained: “For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” The bride, then, is the church. This language is reflected in Revelation 21:2, which says “the holy city,” New Jerusalem, has been “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” In 21:9–27, John’s vision of the New Jerusalem continues with more detail. An angel shows John “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (v. 9). As the angel takes him up to a high mountain, he again is shown “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (v. 10). So the bride of Christ, once again, is paralleled with the New Jerusalem.<sup>42</sup> In the words of Hebrews 12:23, the heavenly Jerusalem to which we have come is “the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.”

Not only does John see the church coming down out of heaven, he learns that God is coming, too. Revelation 21–22 proclaims the climax of God’s covenant bond with His people, which began in the garden.

Revelation 21:3–4 states the essence of God’s relationship with His people and the heartbeat of history. Here we find the fulfillment of the redemptive-historical process of God coming into covenant with His people, to be their God and make them His people. John hears a “loud voice from the throne” that pronounces this climactic event: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.” This means that “He will dwell with [or, among] them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with [or, among] them as their God.” As the Old Testament speaks of Zion being restored (Isa. 35:10; 65:19), this obviously must entail a new dwelling place of God on earth.

But the climactic tabernacle of John’s vision is not a structure called a tabernacle. Revelation 21:22 says, “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” So John’s description is characterizing what God’s dwelling with His people will be like. The Immanuel promise characterizes God’s tabernacle with His people. It means unbroken fellowship (Ex. 3:12; Lev. 26:11–12; Isa. 7:14) and a personal relationship (cf. Ex. 6:7; Deut. 14:2; 26:18–19) forever, in perfect fullness in the presence of the Lord Himself. It is “fully to enjoy him for ever” (WLC, Q&A 1).

### *The Garden as Tabernacle*

Revelation 21 can describe God’s dwelling among His people in the new heaven and new earth because He dwelt among His people in the first heaven and earth. We see this particularly in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9–14). In the description of the garden and its rivers, we read of gold (v. 11) and the precious stones bdellium and onyx (v. 12). Eden was adorned with beauty as the temple of God, the first true Holy Land, anticipating Israel’s tabernacle and later its temple (Ex. 25:3, 7; 1 Kings 6:20–22, 28, 30, 32, 35).

God showed Himself to be powerful in creating the vast realms of space, sky, land, and seas, but also as an ingenious and creative artist who filled those forms.<sup>43</sup> The creation process recorded in Genesis 1:1–2:3 was a massive construction plan. God first subdued the darkness and deep of

the original state and made earth a place suitable for habitation. In days one through three, He gave form to the earth. The psalmist describes this in terms of God's temple and palace:

Bless the LORD, O my soul!  
 O LORD my God, you are very great!  
 You are clothed with splendor and majesty,  
 covering yourself with light as with a garment,  
 stretching out the heavens like a tent.  
 He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters;  
 he makes the clouds his chariot;  
 he rides on the wings of the wind. . . .  
 From your lofty abode you water the mountains;  
 the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.  
 (Ps. 104:1–3, 13)

The prophet Isaiah echoes this view, saying, “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in” (Isa. 40:22).

In days four through six, God filled the form of the earth. The psalmist again describes this:

O LORD, how manifold are your works!  
 In wisdom have you made them all;  
 the earth is full of your creatures.  
 Here is the sea, great and wide,  
 which teems with creatures innumerable,  
 living things both small and great. (Ps. 104:24–25)

He then rested from His holy work. This form and fullness became His holy habitation, His dwelling among His people. It became the place where the pinnacle of His creation—Adam and Eve—enjoyed His presence.

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### *David's House*

After the creation account, we go on to read of God dwelling with Noah and his family in the ark (Genesis 6–9), with the patriarchs in their journeys (e.g., Gen. 31:3), and with the Israelites in Egypt (Ex. 2:23–25) and in the wilderness, both in the form of a pillar of cloud and fire (Ex. 13:21–22; Ps. 78:14), as well as in the tabernacle (Exodus 25–40).

We then read of another structure in which God dwelt with His people in the days of David. After he had finally been anointed over the tribe of Judah and eventually over all Israel (2 Samuel 5), King David was in his house enjoying the Lord's rest from his enemies (2 Sam. 7:1). This led David to desire to build a house for the Lord, seeing that He was the true King of Israel.

In the ancient Near Eastern world, whenever a god won a battle by means of his king, the king built a house for his god as a tribute. The Lord was the divine warrior who had triumphed over His enemies through David and granted rest to the land. Therefore, David desired to follow the accustomed pattern in grateful devotion. While he lived in a house, the Lord lived in a portable tent. When the Lord triumphed over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, His sanctuary was fitting for His people's transient existence. It had to be temporary because the people were a pilgrim people. But with the people settled in the land and David's throne established, a more permanent sanctuary was appropriate.

As the story unfolded, the Lord caught wind of David's desire to build Him a house (2 Sam. 7:4–17). The Lord then turned the tables on David—David would not build a house *for* the Lord but would receive a house *from* the Lord. The Lord used a literary device called a double entendre when he spoke of building a “house” for David. While David was thinking in an earthly manner, wanting to build an actual house for the Lord, the Lord was planning to build for David a familial house. It was as if God were saying, “You want to build a building for Me, but I am going to build a kingdom for you.”

Why did God do this? In Deuteronomy 12, the Lord gave specific instructions about a central place of worship in the Land of Promise.

Six times He said He would “choose” the place where His name would dwell (Deut. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26) and nine times He spoke of this place of His choosing as “there” (vv. 5 [twice], 6, 7, 11 [twice], 14 [twice], 21). The Lord is God and will not give His glory to another. He would choose the place and builder—not David. We see that in the language He used in 2 Samuel 7. It is unilateral, covenant language. The Lord said over and over again, “I will . . .” He promised to make David’s name great (v. 9); to appoint a place for His people (v. 10); to plant His people (v. 10); to give David rest (v. 11); to make David a house (v. 11); to raise up David’s son (v. 12); to establish that son’s kingdom (v. 12); to establish that son’s throne (v. 13); to be a father to that son (v. 14); and to discipline that son (v. 14).

This covenant promise was gracious, as the Lord reversed the typical ancient Near Eastern pattern of the earthly king building a house for the heavenly King. He did not receive a house from David, but granted one to him (v. 11). The Lord even promised that when David’s son, Solomon, would sin, He would not cast him off in a covenant curse, but would discipline him as a son, saying, “my steadfast love will not depart from him” (v. 15). “Steadfast love” translates the Hebrew word for God’s covenant faithfulness (*chesed*). We learn from this that God’s dwelling among His people is a matter of grace, an immense privilege.

### *Solomon’s Temple*

What David desired to do, his son Solomon accomplished (1 Kings 7:51). The language of 1 Kings 6 indicates that the temple was a greater tabernacle because of this permanence. No longer would the Lord dwell in a portable tent, but in the permanence of a glorious temple. We learn also that the temple’s greatness was beyond the tabernacle in the revelation of its dimensions. The tabernacle was thirty cubits long and ten cubits wide (Ex. 26:15–30).<sup>44</sup> The temple was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high (1 Kings 6:2)—twice the size of the tabernacle. This expansion is seen even in the size of the Holy of Holies. In the tabernacle, it was ten cubits by ten cubits, according to ancient

tradition,<sup>45</sup> while in the temple it was twenty cubits by twenty cubits (1 Kings 6:20). This glory of the temple was eventually celebrated in the Psalms: “In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion” (Ps. 76:1–2).

We see the continuation of the plan of God in the language used to describe the temple. The temple was a new garden of Eden. Why do I say this? First, there are creational themes in the descriptions of the temple. As 1 Kings 6–7 recounts the building of the temple, the word *finished* occurs seven times. Although not the same term used in Genesis 2:1, the creational theme is similar. First Kings 6:9a: “So he built the house and finished it.” First Kings 6:14: “So Solomon built the house and finished it.” First Kings 6:38b: “the house was finished.” First Kings 7:1: “Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished his entire house” (Solomon’s house was a part of the temple complex). First Kings 7:22: “Thus the work of the pillars was finished.” First Kings 7:40: “So Hiram finished all the work that he did for King Solomon on the house of the LORD.” First Kings 7:51: “Thus all the work that King Solomon did on the house of the LORD was finished.”

We also see this creational, Edenic language in the descriptions of the materials and design of the temple. It was made of stone and then overlaid inside and out with cedar from Lebanon. Psalm 104 praises the Lord for creation, following the account of the six days of creation: “The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted” (v. 16). Inside the temple were wooden carvings of gourds, flowers, and palm trees (1 Kings 6:18, 29). The wood was covered both inside and out with pure gold (1 Kings 6:20–22), which is described as being in the region of Eden in Genesis 2:11–12.

What was most striking about the temple as a new Eden was its appearance. The prophets reflected back on the appearance of Eden, saying in it was a mountain, a high place, where the Lord dwelled. From that mountain came the four rivers that watered the earth.<sup>46</sup> The prophet Ezekiel wrote: “You were in Eden, the garden of God . . . you were on the holy mountain of God” (Ezek. 28:13–14). But what does a mountain

have to do with the temple, a building? Understand how the temple was constructed. In 1 Kings 6:5–6, we learn that there were three levels of side chambers against the temple, with the levels getting wider as they went higher. This means that this surrounding structure of the temple made the temple seem to be an inverted stepped pyramid, a ziggurat, or a high mountain. Unlike the ancient ziggurat structure, which pointed up to God as man tried to climb up to God, the temple pointed down because it was God’s house on earth.

The common purpose of Eden, the tabernacle, and the temple was that the creature could have fellowship with the Creator. After Adam sinned, the Lord placed a cherub at the gate east of Eden to bar access to that holy place (Gen. 3:24). The temple had cherubim all around the walls (1 Kings 6:23–28), but we read of no swords in their hands. The temple was heaven on earth, for the Lord was giving His people a foretaste of their return to that primal Paradise.

After the temple was built, the Israelites brought the ark of the covenant into the Holy of Holies. As the priests placed it there and came out, “A cloud filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:10). This cloud was the Holy Spirit, who was at the first creation, hovering “over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2), and at the consecration ceremony of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34).

### *The Prophets*

We move from the high point of the temple’s erection to the low point of its destruction, as interpreted by the prophets. In many ways, Ezekiel 10 is the low point of the history of God’s people. A people created for the Lord’s own glory and pleasure from all other peoples transgressed the covenant just as Adam did (Hos. 6:7). Like Adam, they sought the freedom to worship a god in their own image. Like Adam, they were excommunicated from the presence of God.

Second Kings 24–25 chronicles these last days of the southern kingdom of Judah. In those days, the Babylonian kingdom, under the leadership of the great Nebuchadnezzar, besieged Judah. There were

three successive waves of assault, in 605, 597, and 586 BC. According to the curses of the covenant as described in Deuteronomy 28, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple was desecrated, and the people were dispersed to the nations. Second Kings 25:9 says the house of the Lord was burned to the ground, and 25:21b says, “So Judah was taken into exile out of its land.” Deuteronomy 28:68 compares this dispersion to being taken by ships back to Egypt—the last place God’s people wanted to go.

The Scriptures are clear that God decreed the destruction of the temple because of His people’s sin. Second Kings 24:3 says, “Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the LORD, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh.” Second Kings 24:20 says, “For because of the anger of the LORD it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence.”

As we turn back to Ezekiel 10, we are given a glimpse of the meaning of all of this from God’s point of view. Here is the Lord’s seminary course on the significance of the invasion by Babylon. It is a vision of God’s chariot-throne, held up by the cherubim (v. 1). In this vision, Ezekiel sees a “man” who takes coals of fire to cast them onto Jerusalem (v. 2). In the story of God’s dealings with the world, fire is associated with His judgments (Gen. 19:23–28). Judah, then, became like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 1:10). The church had become like the world, and God had had enough of His worldly church. In the later words of Jesus to the church in Laodicea, He was ready to “spit you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16).

Then, the worst of all the covenant curses is depicted: the Lord deserts Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 10:18, we see that the glory of the Lord, His *chabod*, goes out from the temple. This is a visual sign of the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the face of the deep (Gen. 1:2); who led the people into the wilderness (Exodus 13); who filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40); and who filled the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 8:10).<sup>47</sup>

In Ezekiel 10:19, the cherubim mount the chariot of the Lord to take this glory elsewhere. It goes to the east gate of the temple. The temple was the typological return to Eden, to the presence of the Lord, so to go east was to follow Adam and Eve’s footsteps away from the Lord (Gen.

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3:23–24). In Ezekiel, the Lord goes east, away from Eden, leaving the temple *ichabod*, without glory (cf. 1 Sam. 4:19–22).

Yet, while this was a curse on the whole nation, we see the gospel purpose of it for the remnant chosen by grace. Not only did the glory of the Lord go east, the people of Judah also went east. The Lord led His people into exile in Babylon. The Lord deserted the temple and the city but not His people. As the saying goes, while we may feel that God has slipped out of our hands, we have not slipped out of His. He became an alien in a strange land with His remnant. The words of Ezekiel 11:16 are touching: “Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while.”

There is also a promise of the *chabod* of the Lord returning. Haggai 1:1–15 speaks about the rebuilding of the temple of the Lord. While the people of God were in Babylon, the Lord raised up the Persians, who defeated the Babylonian kingdom. Cyrus, the great king of Persia, decreed in 538 BC that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1:1–4)

Then, in Ezra 2, we read that fifty thousand people returned. Those who returned offered eleven hundred pounds of gold and six thousand pounds of silver (Ezra 2), and immediately began rebuilding the ruins of the altar and foundation of the temple (Ezra 3).

This is where the prophet Haggai picks up the story. He tells us that the Jews stopped rebuilding the house of the Lord (Ezra 4:24) and built their own homes instead (Hag. 1:3–11). The year was 520 BC, and the Lord had called Haggai to command the people to finish rebuilding the Lord's house.

First, Haggai confronted the complacency of the Jews in not rebuilding the temple (1:2–4). He spoke in the name of the “LORD of hosts” (v. 2), which should give us a clue that Israel was in for the rebuke of the law. This title is used fourteen times in Haggai, and like its use more than two hundred times elsewhere in Scripture, it has the intention of explaining the Lord's anger, judgment, and kingly right to rebuke His people. It declared that He is the Lord of the heavenly armies and would come in judgment on the Israelites if they remained disobedient.

God referred to Israel as “these people” (v. 2a), not the expected, “My people.” This was a sign of His displeasure, because “these people” were saying “the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD” (v. 2b). “These people” had become complacent with the work of the Lord; therefore, the Lord asked them, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?” (v. 4). Their complacency was a result of their priorities, which were nothing but selfish, and therefore idolatrous.

Israel's complacency led Haggai to pronounce the curse for not rebuilding (vv. 5–6, 9–11). While “these people” said, “The time has not yet come to rebuild,” the Lord said, “Consider your ways” (v. 5). Literally, the Lord said, “Set your hearts upon your ways” (*siymu levavchem al-darecheychem*; cf. Hag. 1:7). The issue was their hearts and attitudes.

Because their hearts were complacent, selfish, and idolatrous, the Lord sent the curses of the old covenant from Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 upon them: “You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but

you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes” (v. 6). The Lord sent the covenant judgments of poor harvest (Deut. 28:38–40), insufficient food (Deut. 28:48), and drought (Deut. 28:23–24). In their complacency, their lives had become characterized by consumerism. Although they worked hard and played harder, they never had enough. The curse was pronounced and summarized in Haggai 1:9 and 1:11 with a pun: while the Lord’s house lay in “ruins” (*charav*), so Israel’s land suffered “drought” (*chorev*).

In the midst of all of this, Haggai, speaking in the name of the Lord, gave the command to rebuild (vv. 7–8). “These people” were humbled by the law and now were called to repentance: “Consider your ways.” They were to change their heart attitudes from complacency to performance, and rebuild what they had started so many years before. Notice the verbs used in verse 8: “go up . . . bring . . . build.” Why? It was not to earn their salvation or to do some sort of penance, but to set things in their proper order: Israel the servant would bring honor to her King. As the Lord said, giving two reasons for rebuilding, “That I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified.”

Repentance leads to good works, and so Haggai describes for us the Israelites’ commitment to rebuild: everyone “obeyed the voice of the LORD their God,” and “feared the LORD” (1:12), and everyone “worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God” (v. 14). As Matthew Henry said, “A holy fear of God will have a great influence upon our obedience to him.”<sup>48</sup> To fear the Lord is to acknowledge one’s sin, to turn from it in true repentance, and to commit oneself to the Word of God.

Finally, Haggai pronounced comfort during the rebuilding. After they were humbled by the law, moved to repentance, and began living in obedience as they worked on the house of the Lord, the Lord spoke a word of comfort, a word of gospel: “I am with you” (v. 13).

Here is the most wonderful thing. While they rebuilt the Lord’s house, the people were only rebuilding something like a child’s model of a temple to come. They were providing an illustration of what the Lord

would do when He made His advent on this earth, when “the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former” (Hag. 2:9).

### *The Coming of the Lord*

With the coming of the Lord, the idea of God dwelling among His people became personal. In the words of John, “And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us” (John 1:14a, emphasis added). The connection between the word *skēnē*, translated here as “dwelt,” and the Old Testament tabernacle is clear, as the Septuagint used the same word for “tabernacle” or “tent.”<sup>49</sup> This is why John could write of Jesus: “And we have seen his glory” (John 1:14b). Jesus was the glory of God that filled the temple in human form.

This was not an abstract idea, but a personal reality, so much so that John could also write: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (1 John 1:1–2).

When the Lord came to earth, He also explicitly pronounced Himself to be the reality of the temple, saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Later, He told the Samaritan woman at the well: “The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . But the hour is coming, and now is here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:21, 23). Since Jesus is the temple, this true worship occurs whenever just two or three are gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20) and wherever His people are found among all the nations of the earth (Zeph. 2:11b; Mal. 1:11).

### *God's Dwelling in the Church*

The Lord still dwells among His people. Despite His ascension into heaven, He promised His church, “And behold, I am with you always, to

the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Because God still dwells among His people, the Apostle Paul tells us that Jews and Gentiles alike, who belong to Jesus Christ, are now members in God’s household (Eph. 2:19), which has Christ as its cornerstone, the Apostles and prophets as its foundation, and believers as the living stones that God uses to build it (vv. 20–22; cf. 1 Peter 2:5). Thus, in this age, the church of Jesus Christ is the living temple of God by the Spirit in the world. Whereas the dwelling for God by the Spirit was once in lifeless materials of wood, stone, and metal, now it is in the living people of the Lord.

In the book of Revelation, John also describes the church as having been redeemed in order to become the new temple of God. Just as Israel’s first exodus involved the Lord’s victory over the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12), leading to His setting up His dwelling among His people, so John describes our redemption using this imagery of “the Song of Moses”—exodus, victory, and God dwelling among us (Rev. 15:3–4). As Paul says elsewhere, God’s dwelling is now among the church corporately (1 Cor. 3:9–17; cf. 2 Cor. 6:16–18) and individually (1 Cor. 6:19).

The church, then, is the tabernacle, temple, and dwelling place of God. In the words of 1 Peter 2:4–10, we are the living stones Christ uses to build His new temple. The gathering of the stones means local church assemblies are temples of worship (v. 5) and places where His witness to the world goes out (v. 10). We are also the priests (vv. 5, 9) who assemble in this temple to offer sacrifices that are acceptable to the Lord (v. 5; cf. Rom. 12:2; Heb. 13:15). All of this is true on the basis of the work of Christ, who has sent His Spirit to His church in this age. Thus, the temple and its sacrifices are now “spiritual,” that is, created by and in reliance on the Holy Spirit.

## OUR RESPONSE

As we read the tabernacle story in light of the above, how should we respond to what God teaches us? Our first response must be to pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes, just as He did with the disciples of

Jesus on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24. Hilary of Poitiers exemplified this response when he offered this prayer in one of his writings: “Our minds are born with dull and clouded vision, our feeble intellect is penned within the barriers of an impassable ignorance concerning things Divine; but the study of Thy revelation elevates our soul to the comprehension of sacred truth, and submission to the faith is the path to a certainty beyond the reach of unassisted reason.”<sup>50</sup> In the historical Reformed liturgies of the sixteenth century, the “prayer for illumination” was an important element of worship. For example, in Martin Bucer’s Strassburg Liturgy of 1539, he prayed the following:

Almighty, gracious Father, forasmuch as our whole salvation depends upon our true understanding of thy holy Word, grant to all of us that our hearts, being freed from worldly affairs, may hear and apprehend thy holy Word with all diligence and faith, that we may rightly understand thy gracious will, cherish it, and live by it with all earnestness, to thy praise and honor; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.<sup>51</sup>

In the liturgy of the Dutch Reformed Churches, first published in the 1566 Psalter of Petrus Dathenus, the minister would pray:

O heavenly Father, Thy Word is perfect, restoring the soul, making wise the simple, and enlightening the eyes of the blind, and a power of God unto salvation for every one that believes. We, however, are by nature blind and incapable of doing anything good, and Thou wilt succor only those who have a broken and contrite heart and who revere Thy Word. We beseech Thee, therefore, that Thou wilt illumine our darkened minds with Thy Holy Spirit and give us a humble heart, free from all haughtiness and carnal wisdom, in order that we, hearing Thy Word, may rightly understand it and may regulate our lives accordingly.<sup>52</sup>

We need to plead for the Holy Spirit to work on us and in us like this as we read the tabernacle story.

Our second response must be to pray that the Holy Spirit will transform us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. In the words of *The Book of Common Prayer*, we need to pray to the Lord, “That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace to hear meekly thy Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit; we beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.”<sup>53</sup> Paul contrasted the blindness of those who read the Old Testament in an unbelieving way with those whose eyes have been opened (2 Cor. 3:16). This opening comes from the Lord through the power of His Spirit, who also transforms us more and more: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17–18).

Our third response must be to seek to know the Lord experientially through the Word. We must not read the Word merely for information’s sake, but that we might be drawn closer and closer, face to face, with our Lord in the bond of covenant fellowship. Jesus expressed this when He spoke of abiding in Him by faith and abiding in His words: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you” (John 15:7). To know the Lord, to be “in me,” goes together with knowing His Word; to know His Word is to know Him.

Our fourth and final response must be to seek to experience the love of God in Jesus Christ as we read and meditate on the tabernacle story. Our prayer must be Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may

dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14–19)

As you read and meditate on the tabernacle narratives with me, I pray that you may come to see that it is not something obscure that happened thousands of years ago. Instead, I pray you will read these narratives as *your* family story. This is how Peter challenged his readers throughout Asia Minor, which was hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, in the middle of the first century, several decades after our Lord’s ministry. He said that the Holy Spirit had revealed to the prophets “that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look” (1 Peter 1:12).

Ultimately, we need to meditate on this, our family story, because we have the same God as our forefathers. The same God who said to them, “I may dwell in their midst” (Ex. 25:8), says to us today, “In [Christ] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). Just as He did for our forefathers, God has come to dwell among us that we might have a relationship with Him based on His amazing grace.



# CONTRIBUTIONS TO BUILD THE TABERNACLE

*Exodus 25:1–7; 35:4–29*

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.” (Ex. 25:1–7)

“**G**race is free, airtime isn’t.” I remember Michael Horton making this statement on the radio program *The White Horse Inn* back when I was in college.<sup>1</sup> It was a witty way to let listeners know that the show could not continue without the financial support of those who listened. As anyone involved in any nonprofit service knows, he was right. In order for Christians to build anything that will spread the good news of Jesus Christ, whether a radio program, a magazine, or a church building, we need to join in sacrificial giving.

The situation was the same with our Israelite forefathers in the wilderness. The Israelites knew that their God had created everything out of nothing (Gen. 1:1). Because of that, He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and does not need man's gifts (Ps. 50:10). Therefore, God could have created a house for His name out of nothing. Yet God determined that the tabernacle was to be created through the ordinary means of His people's giving. For this reason, the tabernacle narratives do not begin with a mallet, chisel, or measuring line, but with an offering plate.

As we begin our meditations on the tabernacle, we turn to Exodus 25:1–7 and its parallel in Exodus 35:4–29. These sections teach us about Israel's contributions to build the tabernacle. Three truths in these passages teach us much about our giving in the church today: the motivation, the ministry, and the materials.

### THE MOTIVATION

First, we learn about the *motivation* for the contributions. The Lord instructed Moses (Ex. 25:1) to command the people to give a contribution (v. 2, *terumah*), that is, some portion of their possessions that was dedicated for sacred service.<sup>2</sup> This is what we call, in common Christian parlance, an offering. But in calling for a contribution, the Lord made clear that it was to be driven by a right motivation. It was to come “from every man whose heart moves him” (v. 2). Those whose hearts had been stirred by the plagues on the Egyptians, the exodus from Egypt, and the Red Sea crossing would want to give freely.

We see another beautiful picture of this in the example of David and Israel. Just before the building of the temple of the LORD, there was another offering. David made a contribution “because of my devotion to the house of my God” (1 Chron. 29:3). Next, he challenged the people to be generous, asking, “Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the LORD?” (v. 5) We then read of Israel's “freewill offerings” (v. 6) and of their joy in giving them: “Then the people rejoiced because

they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD” (v. 9).

Digging deeper, we are struck by the language in Exodus 35:4–29. This section begins, “This is the thing that the LORD has commanded” (v. 4). Thus, there is a wonderful juxtaposition of what we normally think of as two contradictory ideas: heartfelt offering and God’s command. We see these two ideas in the last verse of this passage, which says that the people brought what “the LORD had commanded by Moses . . . as a freewill offering to the LORD” (v. 29). All too often, we set up in our minds a contrast between duty and delight when it comes to serving the Lord. For instance, we contrast form and freedom when it comes to liturgy and worship as if form quenches all freedom or as if freedom cannot have form. But according to this text, there is no contradiction between what we must do and what we want to do as God’s people. The movement of the Israelites’ redeemed hearts to give the Lord an offering was in complete unison with the Lord’s will for their lives.

This is how the Christian life routinely works for the regenerated and justified child of God. Paul says it like this: “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness . . . slaves of God” (Rom. 6:17–18, 22). We once did not serve God and in fact *could not* serve Him because of our rebellious hearts (Rom. 8:7–8), but now that He has taken hold of us we can and want to serve Him according to His commands in His Word. We have become “obedient from the heart.” Because of the Lord’s grace that has changed our lives, we can now delight in the duties of the Lord, which *The Book of Common Prayer* says “is perfect freedom.”<sup>3</sup>

We see this theme expressed in much more detail in Exodus 35. We read that “whoever is of a generous heart” (v. 5) was to bring an offering. Giving was to be with full willingness and generosity. As John Calvin (1509–1564) said of this passage, “All Scripture teaches us that

no obedience is pleasing to God except what is voluntary.”<sup>4</sup> We then read that “everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him” (v. 21), and “all who were of a willing heart” (v. 22), gave to the offering.

For the people of God in the new covenant, giving is to be just as willing and generous. Paul writes:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor. 9:6–11)

What moved the hearts of the Israelites to be willing and generous? It was the operation of the Holy Spirit, who applied the gracious work of God to their hearts. He saved them from Egypt (Exodus 1–14), He provided for them during their journey in the wilderness (Exodus 15–18), and He entered into a sacred covenant relationship with them (Exodus 19–24). In a word, grace led to gratitude; mercy moved their hearts. For the Israelites, then, the motivation for their contribution was their redemption from Egypt, from slavery, and from certain death.

It is the same with us: We “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” because of “the mercies of God” (Rom. 12:1). We give thanks to God because of the lavishness of the grace He has given to us (Eph. 1:8). Paul fleshes out this idea of mercy and grace for the Corinthians: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Our motivation for giving is the grace of God in giving us His Son, Jesus Christ. There can be no other motivation; certainly not merit or compulsion. As the medieval commentator Bede the Venerable (672–735) said against the Pelagians, who believed man had the ability to save himself apart from God’s grace: “We bring the firstfruits of our possessions to the Lord when, if we do anything good, we truthfully attribute it all to divine grace.”<sup>5</sup> Our gratitude must be motivated by grace alone.

### THE MINISTRY

Second, we learn about the *ministry* supported by the contributions. Moses’ words taught the Israelites that by giving for the construction of the tabernacle, they were participating in its *ministry*. What does this mean?

Moses certainly did not mean what so much of popular Christianity believes today: that every member of the church is a minister in the church.<sup>6</sup> There is only one ministry, properly speaking, and that is the ministry of Word and sacrament. It is true that all members of Christ’s church belong to the priesthood of believers, but this is not the same as the ministry. Likewise, although not all the Israelites were priests, all the Israelites participated in the ministry of the priesthood. The Jewish scholar Nahum Sarna (1923–2005), writing about the tabernacle narratives, said the tabernacle was “a cooperative enterprise” that involved all Israel, from the greatest to the weakest member.<sup>7</sup>

Moses writes that Israel’s contributions of gold, silver, and bronze (Ex. 25:3), blue, purple, and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen (v. 4), goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, and goatskins (vv. 4–5), acacia wood (v. 5), oil (v. 6), spices (v. 6), and onyx stones and stones for setting (v. 7) were “to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments” (Ex. 35:21). As noted earlier, the Creator of the heavens and the earth did not need the Israelites’ contributions to build a tabernacle. Paul states it in this way: “The God who made the world

and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:24–25). However, God chose to work through the means of the contributions of His people. Calvin pointed out that it was God who “daily rained down manna from heaven; yet he would have every one, from the very least to the greatest, bring together, in testimony of their piety, whatever was necessary for the sacred work.”<sup>8</sup> He did not need them, but He invited them to participate in the ministry of the tabernacle.

We see this idea continued in the New Testament. As members of the priesthood of all believers, all believers have a vital function in the life of the Christian ministry. Paul describes the giving of the Philippians to support his work as a “partnership” in the gospel ministry: “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of *your partnership in the gospel* from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:3–5, emphasis added). Later, he says that besides the Philippians, “no church entered into *partnership with me* in giving and receiving, except you only” (Phil. 4:15, emphasis added). The Greek word that is translated as “partnership” in these verses is *koinōnia*. This word denotes fellowship, closeness, and an intimate relationship.<sup>9</sup> While not all believers are ministers, all believers participate in the ministries of their pastors.

What Exodus 25 and 35 and the Apostle Paul teach us, then, is that every member of the body of believers who gives of his or her talent, time, and treasure toward the ministry of the gospel, whether in the tabernacle, in Philippi, or today in the church, is a partner in the ministry. The Israelites’ contributions were “to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments” (Ex. 35:21). While believers are taught in this passage that without the ministry there would be no church, this text also teaches ministers that without the members of the church there would be no one to minister to and no one to support ministers.

## THE MATERIALS

Third, we learn about the *materials* that were contributed. The Lord commanded the Israelites to give “gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, goatskins,<sup>10</sup> acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece” (25:3–7). These offerings can be divided into seven distinct categories: metals, dyed yarns, fabrics, timber, oil, spices, and gems.<sup>11</sup> The metals of gold, silver, and bronze are listed in order of preciousness and from most expensive to least expensive. The yarns are also ordered this way.<sup>12</sup>

But how could former slaves in Egypt who had become nomads in the wilderness contribute such costly materials? The answer, again, is the lavish grace of God.

Before the night of the Passover, the Lord instructed the Israelites to ask their Egyptian neighbors “for silver and gold jewelry” (Ex. 11:2). When Israel left Egypt, “The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor [*hēn*] in the sight of the Egyptians, so they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians” (12:35–36).<sup>13</sup> By the favor, or grace, of the Lord, Israel received the wealth of Egypt. Also, on their journey, the Israelites engaged in a war against Amalek (17:8–16). Their success, no doubt, increased their plunder. All of these tangible materials were to be part of the offering the Israelites gave to build a glorious tabernacle that would be the house of God in their midst.<sup>14</sup>

How does this passage speak to us? What materials does the Lord use in the new covenant to build His “holy temple” (Eph. 2:21)? The materials used now are people—you and I. The New Testament clearly proclaims that the dwelling place of God is now the people of God. Peter writes, “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). Paul adds, “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling

place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). Elsewhere, Paul speaks of the church as the temple of God, citing Leviticus 26:12 and Isaiah 52:11:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:14–18)

There is more to the new-covenant fulfillment of the materials of the tabernacle. While the Exodus narratives speak of the Israelites building the house of God with their own hands, who now is described as the builder of the house of God? In the new covenant, God Himself is the builder of the tabernacle, the church:

Therefore . . . consider Jesus . . . who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Heb. 3:1–6)

In light of these verses, I encourage you to examine your heart by reflecting on questions such as these: Am I a part of this house today? Have I died to myself that I might live to God? Have I turned away from living a life of sin and self, and turned to Jesus Christ to live a life for His glory and honor? If you can answer yes to these questions, you should be assured that you are a part of the Lord's tabernacle, in which He dwells among us. You are one of the living stones hewn out of the nations by God's grace alone.

If you are a member of Christ's house, Exodus 25 calls you to contribute to building the means of His dwelling today. Contribute willingly and generously to the church, being motivated by the gospel of Jesus Christ that has saved you from all of your sins. Contribute to the ministry of the church because you desire to partner with it in your locale and to see more and more living stones adorn its walls. Contribute because you are the very material with which the Lord Himself builds, with His own hands, His church throughout the world. As one writer stated it:

New Testament Israelites are invited to bring gifts for the building of a greater temple than the tabernacle, and that all may enjoy the privilege of giving, the very smallest offerings are acceptable. As the hair and the skins brought by some who may not have had jewels to bestow were as necessary for the construction of the sacred structure as the more costly offerings of their richer brethren, so the coppers of the poor, or of little children, are as needful to assist in building the spiritual edifice as the sovereigns of the wealthy.<sup>15</sup>

Grace is free; therefore, freely give.