

Heaven on Earth Part II

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Date: 25 May 2025

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[0 : 00] Our reading tonight is on page 94 of the church Bibles that are in front of you. So it's Exodus chapter 35 from verse 10 through to 36.

! The tabernacle with its tents and its coverings, clasps, frames, crossbars, posts and bases, the ark with its poles and the atonement cover and the curtain that shields it, the table with its poles and all its articles and the bread of the presence, the lampstand that is for light with its accessories, lamps and oil for the light, the altar of incense with its poles anointing oil, the fragrant incense, the curtain for the doorway at the entrance to the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles and all its utensils, the bronze basin with its stand, the curtains of the courtyard with its posts and base and the curtain for the entrance to the courtyard, the tent pegs for the tabernacle and for the courtyard and their ropes, the woven garments worn for ministering in the sanctuary, both the sacred garments for Aaron and the priests and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests.

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work of the tent of meeting, for all its service and for the sacred garments.

All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewellery of all kinds, brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the Lord.

Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen and all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the gold. Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to the Lord.

[2 : 21] And everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it. Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun, blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen.

And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the gold here. The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod in the breastplate.

They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil for the fragrant incense. And all the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord freewill offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do.

Then Moses said to the Israelites, See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

And he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze.

[3 : 26] To cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts. And he has given both him and Oholiab, son of Ahissamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others.

He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue and purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen and weavers.

All of them skilled workers and designers. So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given skill and ability to know how to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary or to do the work just as the Lord had commanded.

Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given the ability and who was willing to come and do the work. They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary.

And the people continued to bring free will offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work in the sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.

[4 : 43] Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp. No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

If we flip over to chapter 40, the chapters in between describe how, according to the pattern that Moses had been given, the people made all the parts of the tabernacle, the outer parts, the inner parts, the table and the lump stand and all the other parts.

And we pick up just as this work is finished in chapter 40, verse 34. It says this, Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it. And the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whatever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out.

But if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and the fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

[6 : 12] Thanks, David, for reading. Okay, brilliant. We made it to the end of Exodus.

Well done if you've been in it for the long haul through this series. Let me add my welcome to Josh's. We have the last six chapters of Exodus to cover this evening.

The construction of the tabernacle, the mobile sanctuary that the Lord commanded Moses to get the people to build. So we're going to need God's help.

Let's pray and ask for his help, and then we'll get stuck in. Father, we thank you for Christ's promise to build his church, and that nothing will overcome it.

We ask that you would send your Holy Spirit and build us up in your word. And may your glory fill this place this evening, for we ask in Jesus' name.

[7 : 16] Amen. Well, I used to love this time of year when I was at the art school, admittedly looking back with rose-tinted spectacles.

It was probably quite stressful at the time, but this was the time of the year that the place would come alive, literally a manic hive of activity, everybody busy getting ready for the end-of-year degree show.

The rest of the time were just sitting around reading existential philosophers, but at this time of year we got busy, and all the different tribes of artists, the jewelers and the silversmiths with the blackened fingers, the textiles girls, the painters and the sculptors with the dungarees covered in paint and plaster, the architects all in black, obviously.

And there's this energy, this buzz about the place, this creativity in the air, and Garnet Hill, the campus there, was just awash with energy.

You get a bit of that vibe, I think, with the construction of the tabernacle, all the different creatives coming together to produce and to build and construct this thing, pulling together like that.

[8 : 32] And as I was thinking back in the days at the art school with my rose-tinted spectacles, I recall the first time I made it up the hill, Garnet Hill, for an interview, an admissions interview.

The interviewer asked me, after looking through my sketchbooks and my portfolio, he asked me, so why do you want to come and study architecture? And then, without missing a beat, I said, I want to study architecture, I want to do architecture, because I want to leave my mark on the world.

And that's the arrogance of an entitled 17-year-old, I suppose. Well, maybe. But within most of us, I think, there's a desire to live a meaningful life, a life of significance.

And by the time that we get to the end of our lives, if we're able to look back on them, it'd be nice to think that our lives have had some kind of impact, have made some kind of difference, been significant in one way or another.

Now, for the first readers of Exodus, they've looked back on this episode, the chapters here, the construction of the tabernacle, as one of the most significant events in their history.

[10 : 00] They'd see that they had been involved, they or their parents' generation, had been involved in something of deep and lasting significance. For us, when we come to look at these chapters about the tabernacle, they can seem just a little bit abstract, a little bit obscure, a little bit repetitive.

And they can seem abstract until we realize that we are, if we are Christians, if we're in Christ, we are the tabernacle of God.

We have become the dwelling place of God. We are God's temple, to use Paul's words in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. And so when we see it like that, I think that that just helps us to begin to see how this hive of activity that we see in these six chapters that's going on in the construction of the tabernacle, it helps us to see how this points forward to what we've been called to as a church, a spiritual construction site of living stones as we come together to build each other up on a Sunday and through the week in God's word and encourage one another constructively in our walks with Jesus.

And when we see it like that, the construction of the tabernacle has loads to say to us. So first, it's a new creation.

It's coming together, a new creation coming together as God commanded. Now I remember back at a previous church going through these chapters of Exodus.

[11 : 59] One of my friends groaned as we came to these chapters. He was like, we've just had all this detail about how to build it. Now we've got all this detail about how it was built.

It's so boring. Like watching an episode of Grand Designs and then re-watching the exact same episode all over again.

Perish the thought. That's too much. Kevin MacLeod for anyone. And architects can probably be a little bit snobby about Grand Designs. But anyway, what's the deal with all these chapters?

Why the rehash? Why the rerun? Well, let's get our bearings. So in chapter 35, verses 10 to 19, the first bit that David read for us, it reads like a table of contents.

It reads like a schedule of works. So chapter 35, verse 10, let every skilled craftsman among you come and make all that the Lord has commanded.

[12 : 58] And then he lists them out. The tent, the ark, the table, the lampstand, etc, etc. We've already had the detailed architectural blueprints in chapters 25 to 31.

We looked at that a few weeks ago. Now we've got the same detail about the build itself. Practically the same wording. Now you can see the cross references on the screen.

They're in the handout as well on the notice sheet. I've given them there for you so you can check them out at home if you are so inclined. But just to give you a flavor of it.

These will be up on the screen too so that we can compare them side by side. In chapter 26, we're told, in chapter 26, verse 1, there's the instruction to make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn with cherubim woven into them by a skilled worker.

And then in chapter 36, verse 8, all those who were skilled among the workers made the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn with cherubim woven into them by expert hands.

[14 : 17] In chapter 25, verse 31, here's the instruction. Make a lampstand of pure gold. Hammer out its base and shaft and make its flower-like cups, buds, and blossoms of one piece with them.

And then in 37, verse 17, they made the lampstand of pure gold. They hammered out its base and shaft and made its flower-like cups, buds, and blossoms of one piece with them.

Last one, I promise. Chapter 30, verse 25, the instruction. Make a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. And then also verse 35, make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer.

And then in 37, 29, they made the sacred anointing oil and the pure fragrant incense, the work of a perfumer. Right.

So we'll stop there, but you get the point. In chapters 25 to 31, lots of detailed instruction. In chapters 35 to 40, lots of detail about the construction.

[15 : 24] Same, same. Now you boil it down, you boil it down, the only big difference is chapters 25 to 31, the command to make is replaced in chapters 35 to 40 with the confirmation that it's been made exactly to spec.

And this shows us very clearly that the word-for-word repetition, it shows us that they're doing exactly what God tells them to. They're making it exactly the way that they were supposed to.

And by the time we get to chapter 29 or 39 rather, it's spelled out for us in chapter 39 verse 42. The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

By the way, I'll let you into a secret in the construction industry. very rarely pans out like that. What architects draw and what the contractors end up building are all too often two very different things.

And I've seen nails used instead of screws, I've seen doors hung the wrong way, I've seen steel beams cut to the wrong size, I've seen a van crushed by a pallet of concrete blocks, thankfully nobody was hurt.

[16 : 49] Construction fails all over the place. But here with the tabernacle, astonishingly, there's no snagging list. They absolutely nailed it.

And this is all the more remarkable when you remember that sandwiched between the tabernacle instructions and construction, these are the same people who just built the golden calf.

So remember the golden calf was to the people of Israel what Adam's sin in Genesis 3 was to all humanity.

In the same way that Adam sinned and was banished from God's presence, now the people have sinned. But the tabernacle is going to make it possible for the holy God to dwell among the sinful people.

It's impossible to overstate the significance of this. Now we saw this when we looked at the tabernacle the last time, but there's just loads of ways that it echoes Eden.

[18 : 03] And in the last couple of chapters of Exodus we get it again, more ways that it links back to Genesis 1 and 2. So for example, in Exodus chapter 39, Exodus 39 verse 43 sounds a lot like Genesis 1 31.

So Exodus 39 43 says, inspected the work and saw all the work. And this sounds like God saw all that he had made.

And Moses saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. And in Genesis, God saw that it was very good.

And then in Exodus 39, 32, so all the work in the tabernacle was completed. Genesis 2, 1, thus the heavens and the earth were completed.

Exodus 40, 33, end of the verse, and so Moses finished the work. Genesis 2, 2, God had finished the work.

[19 : 20] So it's like here at the construction of the tabernacle, at the end of the construction of the tabernacle, there's all these phrases that are echoing the completion of the narrative of the creation of the world.

And again, I think this is just hammering home to us that the tabernacle is like a new Eden, it's a new creation. So who gets to build this thing?

Whose privilege is it to work on this incredible project? Who gets to be involved? So the second main heading, it's a new people working together as God empowers.

Okay, so in our reading, we came across these two guys in chapter 35, Bezalel and Oholiab. Absolute legends. They're actually introduced back in chapter 31, so let's go there now.

Why don't we go there to chapter 31, page 19. Chapter 31, verse 1.

[20 : 31] 1. Then the Lord said to Moses, See, I have chosen Bezalel of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge, and with all kinds of skills, to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work and engage in all kinds of crafts.

Moreover, I have appointed Aholiab to help him. I love these two guys. Bezalel is a little bit of a mouthful, so if we call him Bez for short, that's not a reference to Bez from the Happy Mondays.

I hope you don't get that reference. If you do, then you'll know what I'm talking about. But Bez and Aholi, Bez is filled with the Spirit of God to equip him for his creative task.

Did you know this is the first time in the Bible that someone is said to be filled by the Holy Spirit? First time anyone is explicitly said to be filled by the Spirit of God.

So this is a really big deal, a mini Pentecost, you could say. Why is he filled with the Holy Spirit? It's to enable him to do the work of constructing the tabernacle, the dwelling place of God.

[22 : 10] The Lord gives Bezalel unique skills and abilities, just the right mind, just the right skill set, just the right abilities that makes him ideal for this significant task.

What a guy. By the way, I don't think it's a coincidence when we come to the New Testament that when the Apostle Paul describes himself in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 as a wise master builder, literally a wise architect, I think there is a really strong case that Paul, the tent maker by trade, Paul is deliberately comparing himself to Bezalel in his work of upbuilding the church.

But Bez is, he's not a lone wolf, he's not a solo maverick doing his own thing. You see, the Lord equips Bezalel with creativity and craftsmanship, but the Lord also equips Bezalel with a helper in Ohuliab.

You remember the last time that we looked at the tabernacle? We said, just as back in Genesis, seven times God said, let there be seven speech acts that bring about the world into existence.

Just as in Genesis, same in Exodus of the tabernacle, seven times the Lord said to Moses, this is the sixth time.

[23 : 48] the Lord said to Moses, see, I have chosen Bezalel, I have given him a helper. Day six in creation, God puts Adam to work in the garden sanctuary, gives him a helper.

The sixth time that the Lord speaks, two workers in creation, Adam and Eve, in the new creation of the tabernacle, Bezalel and his helper Aholiab.

Here's where I think it gets really interesting, really relevant to all of us. Here's where the rubber hits the road, because it's not just this pair set apart to do all the work themselves, but every member of the community gets in on the action in one way or another and gets involved in this project.

So the end of verse six, chapter 31, verse six, also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you.

And so we go back to page 95, chapter 35, and the description of Bezalel and Aholiab at the end of chapter 35. we can see that a big part of their job description, a big part of what they do is to teach others.

[25 : 16] A big part of what they do is to enable and equip everyone else to work on constructing this project. So in 35, 34, the Lord has given both him, Bezalel, and Aholiab the ability to teach others.

He has filled them, the rest of the creatives, with skill to do all kinds of work that is required to bring into being this new creation of the tabernacle.

Set apart teachers, equipping God's people for all kinds of work, releasing them to do their thing towards the shared common goal of constructing God's dwelling place.

things. We see the exact same pattern in the New Testament. We see it most clearly in Ephesians. So in Paul's letter, the Ephesian church is described in chapter 2 of Ephesians as a structure which is being built together.

You see it's a spiritual construction site, built together as a holy temple, God's dwelling place. And then in chapter 4 of Ephesians, it's up on the screen, we're told that Christ gifted the church with pastor teachers.

[26 : 38] What for? To equip, equip who? All God's people for building up the sanctuary. So let's just take stock there for a moment.

Here's the pattern. And again, you can see it on the diagram. With the construction of the tabernacle, there's a mini-Pentecost. A construction team is formed, Bezalel and Aholiab, the set-apart craftsmen, teachers, equipping everyone else to do the temple building work of constructing the tabernacle.

When it comes to the church, it's the exact same pattern. At Pentecost, Christ sends the Holy Spirit to fill all believers.

And a spiritual construction team is formed of set-apart pastor teachers equipping all God's people to construct a new temple, a building of believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

So it's every member ministry, all of you involved, not just Bez and Aholi, not just Martin and the rest of the staff team and the vestry, it's not just those up front on a Sunday, it's all of you, Christian brothers and sisters, all of you, you're all involved in this amazing project, you've all got something to bring to the table, you're all legends, and you've all got skills and abilities, you've all got something that you can do for the upbuilding of Christ's church.

[28 : 17] Now you're not working in purple or blue or scarlet yarn, you're not working in gold filigree, but you're doing the spiritual equivalent.

Have you ever thought about this? Whenever you are seeking to encourage a friend by sharing with them some scripture, you're engaged in constructive temple building work.

When you're creatively preparing a study for kids zone or roots, it's like you're there carving wood or doing the embroidery on the veil.

And you know you can be praying as you prepare for these things. Lord would you fill me with your spirit, with skill and ability and knowledge and imagination to equip me for this special task ahead.

When you meet up with a friend in a cafe to open up the Bible, in the power of the Holy Spirit you are constructing the spiritual tabernacle, you are building up the church.

[29 : 27] Maybe you're here this evening and you're thinking where do I start? How do I throw myself into this business? How do I go about it? Three things, very briefly.

Number one, you need to be willing. In chapter 35 of Exodus, Moses gathers the people and says right, this is the work, this is what we're doing, this is an amazing project that you get to be a part of, this is what God wants from you, who is up for it.

Chapter 35 verse 21, everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work.

See, generous giving can only come from a new heart, a heart transformed by the grace of God, a heart indwelt by the Spirit of God.

This evening, does your heart move you? Are you stirred to give of yourself to the work of the Lord? In what ways do you see yourself contributing to this temple building activity?

[30 : 41] That's the first thing, a willing heart. Secondly, you're to give what you have. So Moses, in chapter 35 verse 5, Moses does a crowdfunder.

Everyone who is willing is to bring to the Lord an offering of their material resources to get the work done. For them, they had gold jewelry to give, plundered from Egypt.

And for us, we've got financial offerings, unless like Mr. T, you've got a large collection of gold medallions that you're willing to pawn.

But by giving of our financial resources, that's one way we get to participate in God's work. One way we get to invest in the project of eternal significance.

Do you have a willing heart? Are you willing to give what you have for this work? Third, are you willing to give what you do? We offer God what we have.

[31 : 46] We also offer God what we do. Building the tabernacle took more than gold and fancy materials. It also required the energetic use of people's gifts and talents and experiences.

Where do your gifts and talents and abilities lie? How can you use them for the work of the gospel? What opportunities might you have to hone your skills in Bible handling, in sharing the gospel, in evangelizing?

Who might you approach to do a one-to-one Bible study with? Something to ponder. So how does this thing end? Well, the climax of the Glasgow School of Art de Grisio is the street party.

Everybody's got their work up, the exhibition is good to go. They shut down Renfrew Street and have a massive street party, Brazilian samba dancers and drummers and all sorts going on on Garnet Hill.

But the climax of the tabernacle construction is even more dramatic. It comes in chapter 40, chapter 40 verse 34.

[33 : 16] Climax is not the completion of the structure. Chapter 40 verse 34. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

So for the first readers, it is impossible to overstate the significance of this moment. Things have come full circle.

We began Exodus, our study of Exodus, with the people oppressed, working on a thankless building project for Egyptian slave drivers.

Exodus concludes with the people rescued, working on this glorious building project for the Lord who has come to dwell among them.

And so actually it's come full circle in the bigger picture too. You see, humanity has been exiled ever since the Garden of Eden from the presence of God.

[34 : 20] But now finally, at last, God will dwell amidst his people. And when we're reading through Exodus, often I think we tend to think that the drama of the narrative in Exodus happens in the first half of the book.

But actually, the real drama of the story of Exodus is not how are we going to escape Pharaoh. The Lord deals with him pretty easily.

The real drama of the book of Exodus is how on earth are these sinful people going to dwell in the midst of a holy God.

And right here at the end of Exodus we're left on a cliffhanger because in chapter 40 verse 35, now even Moses could not enter because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

How is this going to be resolved? Well, I'm afraid that we're out of time this evening, but I would encourage you to read on into the book of Leviticus and when you come to chapter 9, you will find out.

[35 : 36] But for now, let's pray. Oh, Lord God, we pray that you would equip us, your people, by pouring out your Holy Spirit on us.

Would you enable us to minister your word to one another in the power of the Spirit?
Would you provide us with opportunities to build one another up?

Would you move us? Would you stir our hearts and our souls to give of ourselves willingly to the work of building up Christ's church here at St.

Silence, to give of our time and our money and our resources, to give of our skills and experiences out of a willing heart? Would you prepare and equip the launch team for the church plant that the gospel may be extended to many in the east end of the city?

Would you inspire those of us who remain here to do the important work of rebuilding?
And would you in your kindness? Raise up more workers for the harvest.

[36 : 53] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.