

Providing in Advance

February 12 — *Exodus 35:1-36:38*

Day 43 — 322 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Moses called for a contribution from the people for materials to build the tabernacle and its furnishings. The response was incredible. "If their hearts were stirred and they desired to do so, they brought to the Lord their offerings of materials for the Tabernacle and its furnishings and for the holy garments" (35:21). In fact, the people gave so many freewill offerings that the craftsmen, Bezalel and Oholiab, asked Moses to tell them to stop giving. "We have more than enough materials on hand now," they said, "to complete the job the Lord has given us to do!" So Moses gave the command and this message was sent throughout the camp, "Bring no more materials! You have already given more than enough" (36:5, 6). Imagine if people gave to the Lord's work like that today. What ministry force could be amassed to impact the community?

What I marvel at, besides the fact that the people were so generous with their giving, is the origin of their wealth. Remember, the Israelites had been lowly slaves in Egypt. So then, how did they have in their possession all of the precious metals, stones, fabrics, and wood? God had given it to them as they left the land of Egypt. "The people of Israel did as Moses had instructed and asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. The Lord caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So, like a victorious army, they plundered Egypt!" (*Exodus 12:35, 36*). Amazing!

God knew beforehand that He would require a freewill offering for His sanctuary, so He provided Israel with the wealth to do so. Does God do that today? Absolutely. Our God is a God of providence. **He provides in advance**; and, *what He provides, He expects to be used for His glory and ministry*. The only question is, are we responsible enough, as stewards of His money,

to be in a position to give back to the Lord when He needs it?

Daily Reflection

What kind of steward have you been of the Lord's provision? Do you recognize that your money is really His money, to be used for His glory and good purposes? Or is most of your spending on yourself?

Debt is an enemy that often disables Christians from giving to the Lord's work. Have you arranged your life and budget in such a way as His money is free to be given and used for His ministry? Or has His money been tied up with your irresponsible spending?

"Do not be conceited or fix your hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Rather do good and be rich in good works; **be generous and ready to share**" (1 Timothy 6:17, 18).

The House of God

Today In Your Reading...

Construction on the Tabernacle continued. Bezalel and Oholiab made the Ark of the Covenant and its cover — the place of atonement (or mercy seat), the Table of Bread, the Lampstand with all of its utensils, the Altar of Incense with its fragrant spices, the Altar of Offering with all of its utensils, the Wash Basin (or water laver), the Tent of Meeting and Courtyard with their pillars and curtains, the holy garments of the priests and the ephod vest. Thus, all the work of the Tabernacle was completed, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

I've often wondered what it must have felt like to be involved with such a work, building the sanctuary of the Lord, knowing that He would dwell there, that He would speak with Moses there, and that He would forgive Israel's sins there. What a privilege that must have been!

I can imagine that Bezalel and Oholiab did everything to the best of their ability, took all the time they needed to do it right, and made sure that the fine details were given attention. Can you imagine if they would've been in a hurry or maybe muffed the measurements, forgotten this or that? What if their work would have been sloppy, a board missing here or an ornament missing there? It would have reflected poorly on their work; but, more importantly, it would have reflected poorly on the Lord Himself. No, we can be certain that these craftsmen did their best to make sure that all was in order, for the glory of God would reside there.

I wonder, **do we put that much effort into the house of God today?** Do we make sure that all of the details of His sanctuary are given that much attention? Or are we apathetic, cavalier, or lazy in our approach to God's house? What is our approach to the ministries we provide? Are we meticulous and careful or are we in

a hurry, overlooking things, doing enough only to get by, or producing sloppy service to our guests and members? If only we were as dedicated and detailed as Bezalel and Oholiab, that God may be praised by our work in His house. The glory of the Lord would reside there.

Daily Reflection

When a church is disorganized, dilapidated, not clean, poorly attended, or lacking volunteers, these aspects send a message to guests and members alike. What is it?

Why should you care about the Church in general? Why should you be concerned about it portraying an image of excellence?

Every member of the Church is to be a minister, which means that you too play a role in the ministry of your church. Are you involved? Do you attend, do you serve, and do you give your best to ensure that God's house reflects an image of excellence? Be mindful of the image your church exhibits to members and guests. What is it doing well? Where does it need to improve? **The Lord deserves your best, and so does His House.** Be diligent to keep it in order.

Head in the Cloud

Today In Your Reading...

Moses examined all the work of Bezalel and Oholiab, the craftsmen who were gifted for and assigned to constructing the Tabernacle and its furnishings. "Moses inspected all their work and blessed them because it had been done as the Lord had commanded them" (*Exodus 39:43*).

Evidently, Moses was pleased with their work; but he wasn't the only one pleased. Their work pleased the Lord as well. He commanded Moses to set up the Tabernacle on the first day of the first month, New Year's Day on the Hebrew calendar. Moses did all that God commanded and "the glorious presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle." In fact, "Moses was not able to enter the Tabernacle because the glory of the Lord filled it" (*40:34, 35*). He now had an earthly sanctuary in which to dwell.

Though the Tabernacle would be a place in which God would temporarily reside, and it would be the place from which He would communicate with Moses, it would also be a vehicle through which He would lead His people. We read that the pillar of cloud was constantly hovering over this desert sanctuary; but, at times, it would lift, which the people took as a sign that it was time to pack up and move to another place. When the cloud would stop, the people would stop and set up camp. Wherever the cloud went, they went; no matter how long it stayed in one place or how far it went when traveling, they followed the cloud in obedience to God.

If only it were that easy today. Just imagine there being a cloud over everyone's head, which the Lord used to direct our lives; knowing and following His will wouldn't be so mysterious. However, *no matter how difficult it is to know the will of God, we should still seek it.* He is the Lord of our lives and, thus, He is the leader, and

we should do everything we know to do to follow our leader. I guess you could say, then, that it's okay to have your head in the cloud!

Daily Reflection

What are some ways that you keep your "head in the cloud," to know and follow God's will for your life?

Are there times when "the cloud" goes one way but you want to go another? What do you do then? What consequences have you experienced when you decided to depart from "the cloud"?

"If any man wishes to come after Me, let him deny Himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (*Luke 9:23*).

Created for Community

Today In Your Reading...

The leaders of Israel gave their offerings for the Tabernacle. Moses provided a detailed account of all the things that they brought. Meanwhile, God spoke to Moses saying, "Receive their gifts and use these oxen and carts for the work of the Tabernacle. Distribute them among the Levites according to the work they have to do" (7:5). So Moses divided the offerings and gave them to the Levites. Remember, the Levites (or the sons of Levi) were appointed by God to be the priests and the assistants who helped the priests with the Tabernacle responsibilities. Thus, their livelihood was provided through the freewill giving of God's people.

For the last few days a common theme has continued to surface (from *Day 41* and *Day 43*), that **God provides spiritual gifts and material things to be used in His service**. I'm convinced, the more I understand about the Christian life, that *all we are and all that we have is to be given away for the good of others*. God gives us "treasure," not to be hoarded for our own greedy desires, but to be used in His service, to meet the needs of others. God gives us talents, not to be used for our own gain, but for the encouragement and equipping of others. God gives us time so that we can invest in the lives of others and not waste it on ourselves.

We need people and people need us. *God has created us for community*. Thus, it would be wrong to keep what He gives all to ourselves. This mindset — giving instead of hoarding — is foreign to the world, and even to the immature Christian; but, in time, as the Spirit teaches us God's will and ways, we will come to recognize that it's true — *we exist for God's glory and the brotherhood of mankind*.

Daily Reflection

If you took an honest look at the time, talents, and treasure that God has bestowed on you in this life, what percentage of it have you used for yourself, compared to that which you have used for others?

Where in your life are you intentionally giving to others of your time, talents, or treasures?

Remember, God gives to you because He has a need for you to meet, either yours or someone else's. Are you being sensitive and attentive enough to know where those needs are? Are you willing to die to self and give to others?

"Do nothing from selfishness, but each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (*Philippians 2:3*).

The Beauty of the Blood

Today In Your Reading...

God issued instructions concerning the Golden Lampstand and the Levites who would be used as assistants to the priests in the Tabernacle. God also reminded Moses that it was time for the people to commemorate the Passover Feast again. This memorial was very important as it reminded the people of what God did to bring them out of Egyptian slavery. Passover would become a perpetual statute for the Israelites.

Just as it is important for them to remember God's protection and provision, so it is important for us to remember His goodness in our lives. What are some ways that you and your family remind yourselves of all that He's done for you?

Today we also started the book of *Leviticus*. Let me just say up front that reading through *Leviticus* will be a challenge. It's not full of action or deep spiritual truths, but rather it's full of details about the sacrificial system and civil laws, both of which are foreign to us. However, though it may be tempting to skip over part or all of this book, I would recommend staying engaged. God does have good reasons for the detail, and there are hidden in those brutal descriptions many wonderful snapshots of our Savior and His cross.

For example, in the opening chapters, God describes the process of bringing acceptable offerings. **They were to be Israel's first and best, not the leftovers.** Their animals were to be without defect, and their bread was to be made of fine flour without leaven. All of these are symbols of Christ's sinlessness.

This book is bloody, no doubt. It portrays a violent system. It was a culture of death, of blood and guts, of animal sacrifice, and constant burning. I imagine the priests and their assistants were soaked in blood from all of the cutting and

carving of animals. The ground was stained and the air was foul, but what was the point of it all?

God wanted His people to understand the seriousness of their sin and the holiness of His nature. They were unfit for His presence and to be made acceptable required blood spilled on their behalf. **Something had to die for their sin.** Thus, in those bloody scenes is the beauty of atonement, forgiveness, and redemption; and all of it, no matter how gruesome it seems to us, was pleasing to the Lord (*Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2; 9; 3:5, 16*).

Daily Reflection

Today's reading should make you grateful for Christ. First, you don't have to sacrifice animals and stain your hands and clothes with blood. Second, you don't have to do anything to make yourself acceptable to the Lord. You are made right with Him because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. **The beauty of His blood washed you clean for all time.** You are made right with God because of the bloody boards of Jesus' cross. Because He died for you, you get to live with Him! Write a response to this precious gift.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on your behalf, so that you might become the righteousness of God..." (*2 Corinthians 5:21*).

Clearing the Clouds

February 17 — *Leviticus 4:1-6:30*

Day 48 — 317 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Moses told the Israelites what to do in the case that they sinned unintentionally. God had a procedure for cleansing them of their wrongdoing, but they had to do it exactly as He described. It is interesting to note that in every instance, someone had to lay their hands on the head of an animal (4:15, 24, 29, 33). The laying on of one's hands was a visual reminder that the people were transferring their sins onto that which was to be sacrificed; it was, of course, symbolic that this animal was taking their place in death so that they themselves could live.

In the big picture, this process was a foreshadowing of what Christ would do on the cross, as God transferred our sins onto Him. "For He made Him (Christ), who knew no sin, to become sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

As I read all of the scenarios in which the Israelites could sin unintentionally, it was a reminder to me of how sensitive we should be of sin in our lives. **God takes sin very seriously, and so should we.** Therefore, we must be aware of wrongdoing in our lives, so that we can maintain clear communication with the Lord. Of course, Christ paid our penalty at the cross; we are forever clean in His sight, but *sin does tend to cloud our communication and daily fellowship with Him, so we must be diligent to keep the sky "clear of clouds."*

The longer I live, the more fine-tuned my sin-awareness becomes. Early in my Christian life, I could see my big sins and I had to make major changes to remove the fog between the Lord and me. But now that the fog is gone, I can hone in on individual "clouds" that could possibly loom large in the future. **Though you are already forgiven, you should be proactive in identifying and confessing sin.**

Daily Reflection

How would you rate your sin awareness? How sensitive are you in regards to your obedience to the Lord's will?

How proactive have you been to eliminate sin in your life? Is this a practice that you repeat often or would you say that you regularly neglect it?

How clear are the skies of communication between you and the Lord? Are you currently in a fog? You may need to clear up any unconfessed sin so that you can have clear communication and daily fellowship with Him again. He is waiting to hear from you.

"If we say we have no sin, we have deceived ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8, 9 NASB).

The Perfect Priest

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February 18 — *Leviticus 7:1-8:36*

Day 49 — 316 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We joined the Israelites in witnessing the ceremony of ordination for Aaron and his sons, who were chosen to be the priests of Israel. The purpose of the ordination was to consecrate (make sacred) and dedicate them, to set them apart to do the work of the Tabernacle. From this point on, they and their descendants would tend to its details and oversee the sacrificial system.

Did you notice how elaborate the ceremony was? First, Moses washed them with water and, then, dressed them in their holy attire, which included the tunic, sashes, robe, ephod (vest), chest piece (with the lots, Urim and Thummim), and turban. Second, Moses anointed the priests with oil. Third, he slaughtered a bull after Aaron and his sons put their hands on it; he did the same with two rams. One of the rams he sacrificed; the other ram was used to ordain the priests. Moses took some of its blood and put it on their right ears, right thumbs, and big toes on their right foot.

Next, Moses offered unleavened bread for the priests. Then, he sprinkled oil on the priests clothing, to make them holy. Finally, the priests were required to stay in the Tabernacle courtyard for seven days. They could not leave at any time, and they had to do everything that the Lord required.

Why did these men have to endure such a detailed ceremony in order to serve in this capacity? Simple, they were sinful, yet they would be representing the people before the Lord, mediating for them to remove their sins. As mediators, their sins could not be a deterrent or else the sacrifices meant nothing. For the Lord to honor the sin sacrifices, the priests themselves had to be honorable; thus, in order to be honorable, the Lord required this elaborate ordination. Imagine the pressure these men felt, knowing

that they would be held accountable for such a heavy responsibility.

These priests were a type of Christ, He who would be the final Mediator between us and the Lord. He was our Great High Priest (*Hebrews 4:14*). However, the difference between Christ and the Old Testament priests is significant. The most important difference perhaps is that **the priests that were described in *Leviticus* were flawed men**, sinners who constantly had to sacrifice for their own failures.

Christ, on the other hand, **was sinless and needed no such ordination to make Him holy for service**. Because of His perfection, His mediation is perfect; and, because His mediation is perfect, you and I, whom He represents to God the Father, can have confidence to approach and stand before Him!

Daily Reflection

Imagine that you were the one ordained that day to represent the people before a holy God. Consider all of your sins and shortcomings. It doesn't take long to realize that your mediation would be an utter failure.

So then, thank the Lord today for sending Christ, the Perfect Priest, to reconcile you to a holy God. You did nothing to receive such grace, and yet **Christ has done everything necessary to make you right with God**.

"The former priests existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (*Hebrews 7:23-25*).