

Exodus Chapters 26-27 - John Karmelich

About two months ago, I met a professional mid-wife. At that time, I kept thinking of a famous line in the movie "Gone With the Wind": One of the main characters Prissy said, "I don't know nothing about birthing no babies". That's kind of how I feel about studying these chapters of Exodus which are about construction details for building a place for God to be worshiped. Every time the Israelites got to move locations in the desert they'll have to disassemble it and take it with them. It was also used for the next 500 years after that! Since it no longer exists, nor is it a model of how to build our churches, how does it apply today? Yes I know that the book of Hebrews (8:5) says God's throne is based on this structure (again that we get lots of details about here). That fact alone is a good reason to study this. "Prophesy Buffs" will tell you these details point to Jesus in amazing ways. I'll give a few examples in this lesson. I'd argue the most important reason to study this text is it is model of how to appreciate God. I'll begin with the assumption most of us don't know much about "fancy tent construction", as most of us men no little about "birthing no babies". With that assumption stated, let's get started!

About 20 years ago (how time flies!) a church not far from me was going through Exodus. When they got to this section, they had there a full tabernacle model like the one we're studying here. I got to tour it like many others. What I recall was, from the outside it is not very impressive to look at. There was a courtyard with high curtain walls so it inside covered building can barely be seen from the outside. The only entrance to the courtyard reveals the covered building. It's nothing special to look as it is covered in animal skins. It is only when one goes inside of it that one sees the gold objects and the beautiful tapestries! I realized to have a relationship with God is in effect the same thing! Seeing God "from the outside" isn't something hard to appreciate. Many people get bored by any bible study, just as there are some people will only listen to Gospel music from outside a church (they fear going in). It's things like that and this tabernacle which is a reminder that the beauty of God is only appreciated once we commit our lives to serving Him. That is why we only appreciate the beauty of God from the "inside"! On that thought, God told Moses all these building construction details not only to show how it's to be built but to appreciate how beautiful a relationship with God is once we make a commitment to serve Him. Yes I know our lives won't be a "bed of roses" from now on. It means, we can have joy from knowing God from well, "the inside out"!

Now that you get the purpose of these chapters, let's get into the details! In the last chapter, we got the construction details of what went inside the structure that the Israelites are to use to worship God. Here in Chapter 26 the focus is on the structure itself. The first thing God tells Moses to build (obviously it's something the Israelites are to build, but God's talking to Moses) is a finely woven set of cloths that do link together via gold hooks. Later in the chapter we read that these draperies hang over a gold-covered wood beams that make up the inside. When I saw the inside of the model, I recall it was very beautiful to look at. However, over this is a larger covering made of goat hair.

To explain that we have to go back to the first mention of goats in the bible: It was when Jacob fooled his (old) going-blind father by wearing goatskins on his arms to make them feel more hairy like that of his brother Esau. Realize the first time something is mentioned in the bible is usually a great clue as to the symbolism of a thing! To a biblically minded person, goat hair is a symbol of sin! That hair covers the beauty of God that He wants us to draw close to! Above the goats hair was a covering of ram skins died red. Again back to Genesis: In chapter 22, a ram was a substitute given to Abraham when he was about to kill his son. I'm just saying a ram is a substitute picture of Jesus covering our sins and the fact the ram skins are died red also ads to that picture!

On top of the ram skins is another covering where the original Hebrew term is obscure. This covering could be a bunch of porpoise skins. There was a type of porpoise that existed in the Nile River and the Sea the Israelites crossed. Could be among the gifts the Israelites took with them when they left Egypt? Some say the word's referring to goat skins. Whatever this final cover was, it protected the tabernacle. I'd argue that just as we use our lives to "cover" what Jesus did for us with our efforts to honor Him, so this covering is a protection as the tabernacle travels in the world! Again if you saw all of this from the outside, it's nothing special. From the inside one sees the beauty of what God did for us. The inside has a lot of gold and beautiful tapestry to represent His throne room. I'm convinced we'll get close to God for all of eternity, so we might as well know what His throne room is like!

Next comes the wood bars that hold this thing up. The wood came a tree available in that area. Again, the bars were gold covered. The bars rested on silver sockets. Silver's associated with a blood sacrifice but I'll spare you that long argument. Those sockets weighed about 100 pounds each, so imagine if you had to lug that around the desert for 40 years! Next we get what's a description of the only door to this structure. It's more finely woven tapestry with Cherubim woven in it. As I mentioned in the last lesson, the only image we get of cherubim is what we get in the book of Ezekiel (Chapter 10) which describes it as a four-faced creature. I believe each of the four faces ties to Jesus, but you get by now how all of this structure points to Him! (When I teach Gospel of John (next) I'll explain that one by the way!)

This leads to Chapter 27. In this text we focus on things outside of that structure but inside a courtyard that surrounds it. We get a description of a bronze altar used for sacrificing animals. Bronze holds up well in heat and is symbolic of judgment. Let me ask quickly, why were innocent animals sacrificed at this altar? Obviously Jesus is our sacrificial lamb, but these sacrifices represent our "work" to show we are committed to using our lives to glorify Him. When we make our effort to use our lives in ways that we can glorify Him (from prayer to Bible study to leading people to Jesus, etc.) those are ways that we can show that we are committed to Him just as He's given His life for us. Yes, we get technical details on how it's built. Personally I like the horns on the corners as I suspect it's for tying down the animals! Like the other portable objects, poles were made to carry them. Just as the ark must be carried to show our commitment to carry Jesus wherever we go, so we carry the "sacrifice altar" to remind us that God expects us to use our lives as a witness for Him via our works once we are saved!

The last section describes the courtyard hangings. The "walls" are high enough that one cannot see the inside unless elevated. Again, the specifics are given on the construction. They are tapestries that rest on silver hooks and bronze (symbol of judgment) basins. There was only one door to enter and it had a decorative entrance (more cherubim). The idea is something beautiful is inviting us inside to get close to God. Before we can approach the "blood covering" over the sin covering over the beauty of God the perfect sacrifice for sins must be offered first! As I said earlier, the beauty is only seen from the inside just as we don't appreciate the beauty of God until we draw close to Him and realize what He's done so we can draw close to Him. Bottom line is these pictures help us appreciate what Jesus did for us!

There is a final verse that seems out of place. It mentions the Israelites are to prepare oil to be used to light the lamp that's inside the structure. I guess that's needed to explain how to keep it lighted always.

I know in a short time we'll forget the construction details. Unless we're dealing with an issue daily, it's not something we keep our focus on. What I'd like us to remember that when we pray, we must realize that the price for sin has been paid, so we can enter through the only door and draw close to see what is the beauty of God from inside. That's why when Jesus died the Gospels mention that the temple veil is torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51, et.al.) so we can draw close to Him as the price for sin is now completely paid in full on our behalf! Hopefully that makes us appreciate this model all the more!

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John