

Exodus Chapters 28-29 - John Karmelich

For the second week in a row (the trend ends here) I'm going to open with a famous movie line. It goes "If you build it, they will come". That's from the movie "Field of Dreams". I tie that reference to these chapters of Exodus as God required those Israelites build a portable worship structure. They'll then get to take it with them through the wilderness (for 40 years) and into Israel. The next question is now that they know how to build it, how do they work it? That's what these two chapters are about. My favorite question applies of why do I have to care about all of this?" I'll answer the latter question first: The role of all Christians are to be priests in the sense that God wants each of us to lead people to Jesus and help others draw close to Him. That includes the idea of helping people go through the normal struggles of life. The details in these chapters are a model of how we're to be a witness for God. Hopefully that is a good incentive to read further!

Chapter 28 will focus on how they are to dress while working here. Chapter 29 is about the priests will be "ordained" to work there. Again if you only see all this as being about ancient history, you miss the lesson! What's to be learned as we go through all of this is how it applies to our lives. If Chapter 28 is all about how the priests were to dress and God calls Christians to be priests do we have to dress as the text says? Of course not! Many Christian men believe they must wear suits to church. In California, a joke is, "We don't like to change closes as we go from church to the beach!" Men in the original church wore robes as opposed to pants so I'll let you decide how best to dress when one worships God!

That leads back to the question if God told Moses to build this thing, why spend a chapter on how they are to dress for work? Great question: The first thing to realize is God picked Moses' brother Aaron to be the first top priest and his four sons were to assist him. In a few chapters we'll read of Aaron leading a revolt against God. In another incident God killed two of Aaron's sons for failing to do the rituals for this structure as God ordained. (See Leviticus 10). If God picked these "losers" to be the first priests in this role, what does that say about God picking us to minister for Him? Remember that God picks who He picks and we need to be grateful for our salvation and the fact He picks us at all. It's a reminder that despite our problems, God's called us to make a difference for Him we must accept that!

OK then time for the details: First remember that Moses is by himself on a mountaintop. I don't know if Moses was taking dictation or God was showing him visions as Moses wrote this down. Anyway, it begins by naming Aaron and his four sons. Keep in mind they were chosen just as we were chosen for the purpose of helping others draw closer to God and draw God closer to people! The first thing Moses was told to make (i.e., get people skilled in sewing garments) to make an ephod. It is sort of a covering over the priest's robe! There was a robe itself, a turban (hat) and a sash (belt). Each of these garments was finely woven and let's be honest, they make the priest stand out.

Next is jewelry: There were two stones to be worn on the shoulders engraved with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. On a breastplate were 12 precious stones (each a different type) and each representing a different Israel tribe. The idea is the priest doesn't minister on his own behalf but on behalf of those he represents ("bears on his heart and his shoulders" so to speak). When we pray we do not pray for the 12 tribes of Israel per se, but for those we care about or those we want to be believers. We may be praying for people to draw closer to God or help them in some situation. Just as the high priest "bears them", so God want us to bear others both in prayer and helping people when we can.

I'm not going to get into all the construction details on a two page summary! There is something called the "Urim and the Thurmin" that were kept in the high priests pockets to make decisions. Most likely it

is some sort of dice-like objects to make decisions when it could not be determined any other way. We don't know what this actually was and if God wanted us to know, He'd explain it!

Bottom line, the high priests garments were described from the "underwear to the head gear". They are given in specific details as to colors and materials. I'm fascinated by the fact nothing is told about what to wear on their feet, just as the tabernacle never described the floor covering. I believe but can't prove that just as Moses had to take his shoes off in God's presence at the burning bush, so these priests went barefoot before God at this location. In that culture, slaves went barefoot and it's a sign of who's really in charge as we work to make a difference for God, and no we don't have to work barefoot for Him!

Anyway, that's a very brief description of a long chapter that gives great details on how the priests had to dress there. Chapter 29 is the rituals of preparing Aaron and his sons. Again, Moses is with God so what we are reading is the instructions before the actual event took place. Realize as we go through all of Chapter 29, things are done TO Aaron and his sons and in effect they don't do anything but watch as they prepare for service. To me it's how God prepares us to be His witnesses. In effect, He does all the "heavy lifting" as He paid the price for our sins. The way we learn to serve others is by learning how it is others do it. So just as Aaron and his sons had to "watch and learn" so God prepares us for service as we watch and learn training for service and learn by trial and error!

To put it simply a few animals were sacrificed by Moses while Aaron stood there and watched. What I also realize was the culture the Israelites came from, those animals were worshipped and humans were sacrificed. So the Israelites were learning how to honor God and Him alone! The blood from all of this was sprinkled on altar. What Moses had to do was well, a "bloody mess". For example the skin of the animals as well as its waste and fat were separated from the "meat" and burnt on the altar. The animal (what was left) was burnt up as a symbol of a full commitment to God (put our "all into it"). A second animal was killed and this time Aaron and his sons ate the "good parts". They had unleavened bread as part of that meal! Each of those foods have meaning, but the underlying idea is we associate with God by saying part of what we sacrifice are given in service to those doing the work!

Another part of the ritual was a bit of that blood was put on Aaron's right ear, thumb and big toe. This is symbolic that God goes with us wherever we go and even whatever we hear! Why not the eyes? I'd argue it's because he needs to see where he's going! By the way, this isn't a "kill a few animals eat and run" ritual. This was repeated for seven days. Yes the seventh day is tied to rest but I also think it's for Aaron and his sons to realize the seriousness of this ritual and to "watch and learn through repetition".

A key thing to remember is one is "messing with God" so to speak. It meant they had to learn how this is to be done properly. Each of the rituals is obviously symbolic of our relationship with God. As most of us know we learn from repetition, so the priests were to learn all of these rituals that way as well.

The final instructions go way past Aaron: It is that an innocent lamb is to be fully burnt on the altar as a twice a day ritual. A daily reminder of how our lamb was sacrificed for our sins! All of this leads to the good news. God promises that if the Israelites honor Him then He'll be with them to guide them as they use their lives for His glory. Sound familiar? God calls us as believers to use our lives to glorify Him. In exchange as His priests, He promises to guide us again, to glorify Him.

Bottom line, is this tabernacle was built so that "we will come to worship Him" as well as use our time to minister (pray for and help others) draw close to Him. That's why I thought that movie line fits well with how we are to "work" in places (our church, and the world) to serving Him.

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