

GIFTS FOR THE TABERNACLE

19th July 2020, URC Canterbury

OVER THE LAST 2 WEEKS we have considered how the Israelites struggled with their new-found freedom from slavery – due to thirst and hunger in the wilderness and then the awesome encounter they had with God at Mount Sinai.

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us or we will die.’ **Exodus 20:18-20**

The Israelites believed that anyone who actually saw God would die; and they were clearly overawed by the power that God displayed when he descended upon Mount Sinai

But Moses said to the people, *‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.’*

AND WE HAVE A CHALLENGE with that word ‘test’; because we usually associate it with something we need to pass – such as a driving test.

But the Lord our God uses testing as part of his process of refining his people and strengthening their relationship with him --- it is an ongoing process of sanctification.

Nevertheless, it is the fear of God that should keep his people from sinning. IN OUR OWN DAYS it should be our sense of awe and reverence for God that creates the desire to avoid sinning --- even though we know it is only through faith in Jesus that we can be considered clean in God’s sight.

And as we think about their awesome encounter with God at Mount Sinai, the writer to the Hebrews makes an interesting comment in **Hebrews 12:21** that:

so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.” --- even Moses!

AFTER THAT ENCOUNTER AT SINAI the Lord gave Moses a number of laws regarding social responsibility, e.g.

“If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal will be his.”

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.”

When Zacchaeus met Jesus, it was that law that prompted him to say that, if he had cheated anyone out of anything, he would pay back four times the amount.

A CONSUMING FIRE – Then just before Chapter 25 we are told that:

'the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.'

Exodus 24:16-17

That phrase 'consuming fire' is an important one, repeated in the letter to the Hebrews, where the writer says:

'since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."' Hebrews 12:29

That phrase speaks of God's passion for his people, which is also referred to as his jealousy.

THEN WE COME TO THE PASSAGE READ FOR US EARLIER – **Exodus 25:1-9**

And the first point to notice is that the offering should come from **each man whose heart prompts him to give** --- Other translations say '**giving wholeheartedly**' --- the attitude we should have today.

Interestingly, we are told in Chapter 36 that they kept on giving --- more than enough!

The offerings were varied and special:

- gold, silver and bronze;
- blue, purple and scarlet yarn
- fine linen; goat hair;
- ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows;
- acacia wood;
- olive oil for the light;
- spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense;
- and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

And we might wonder, how could a group of slaves own all that?

The Lord had prompted them to ask the Egyptians for gold, silver and clothing when they left.

So, in a way, God even provided the materials himself, causing the Egyptians to be willing to give.

EVERY ASPECT OF THE TABERNACLE WAS TO BE SPECIAL, let's pick out a few items:

GOLD was to be used to overlay the wooden Ark of the Covenant and to make the mercy seat, its cover, including the two Cherubim --- the place where the Lord would dwell.

And to overlay the table for the Bread of Presence, as well as make the lampstand.

PURPLE DYE was extremely difficult to make in those days, so purple yarn would normally have been reserved for clothing royalty

The curtains for the Tabernacle were to be made of FINELY TWISTED LINEN – good quality linen, embroidered with cherubim using the blue, purple and scarlet yarn – a skilled task.

SPICES – God specified the mixture to be used for both the anointing oil and the fragrant incense

And he warned the Israelites not to make any anointing oil or incense for themselves using the formulae given --- they were holy to the LORD.

So holy that the punishment for wrong use was to be cut off from Israel --- cut off from God.

GEMS were to be used for the High Priest's breastpiece in four rows of three, making 12 different precious stones --- one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The High Priest would wear these over his heart --- precious reminders of all 12 tribes of his people.

And we should remember that Jesus is our High Priest --- for Gentiles as well as Jews.

The Lord *'gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart'* **Isaiah 40:11**

THE PURPOSE OF ALL THIS: to **make a sanctuary for God so he could dwell among his people.**

The living God wants to dwell among his people.

We see this in Jesus coming down from heaven to be born as a man --- GOD WITH US.

AND even more so later, through the gift of the Holy Spirit --- GOD IN US.

BECAUSE THE HOLY GOD was going to live among a sinful people, it was essential to make this tabernacle and all its furnishings **exactly as God showed Moses**, with divine guidance about how God could be approached.

And we might ask, who is up to the task of making such a special structure?

God himself provides the answer, naming Bezalel, whom he had **filled with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship.**

In effect, God had made Bezalel a MASTER CRAFTSMAN and he provided Oholiab to help him, as well as others in whom God had put skill. **Exodus 31:1-11**

GOD HAD PLANNED AND PROVIDED EVERYTHING NECESSARY --- the Israelites had to put his plan into action.

There are many lessons for us in all of this, God has planned and provided everything necessary --- a glorious Saviour in his Son Jesus and our precious guide, the Holy Spirit.

Our task is to put his plan into action, seeking him for everything we need and living our lives in awe and reverence toward him.