The Construction of the Tabernacle

(Guidance to Heaven)

Exodus 35-40

Key Verse: 39:42 “The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses.”

40:38 “So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.”

1. The attitude for the construction.

There is a saying that preparation is everything. This means that when we prepare well before we start work, everything will go well until we finish. People also say that starting is a job half-done. This means that once we start, we will surely finish. This tells us about the importance of action. So, now the Israelites are about to build the tabernacle according to God’s instruction. Today let’s study how they prepared for this construction, how they built it and what the response of God was to the construction.

How did they prepare for the work? First, Moses collected all the materials for the construction of the tabernacle and the garments of priests. Whenever you make or build something, you need materials. You can’t start work without them. How did Moses collect materials? Look at verse 5. “***From what you have, take an offering for the Lord. Everyone who is willing to bring to the Lord an offering of gold, silver and bronze….***” I can’t say all materials written here, but look at v. 6-9. Also pay attention to the word ‘willing’. In chapter 35 the word ‘willing’ appears 5 times and the word ‘freewill’ once. All materials were collected as offerings from those who were willing to give. Look at verse 21-22a. “***and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on 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 jewelry of all kinds***….” There was no one who was unwilling or reluctant or forced when they brought material. They all were willing to serve the Lord and offer their treasures for the work of God.

God is pleased with those who are willing to serve him and are willing to offer, and he uses them for his good purpose. God blesses a willing person. God blessed Abraham who was willing to obey his command. Jesus called those who were willing to follow him. In the beginning, God gave men freedom as a gift. Men were free to eat all kinds of fruits which God had provided, just as we are free to pick up either apples or grapes in the market. God wanted men to use their freedom to do what is good. But they chose what is bad and evil after being tempted by Satan. They abused freedom. God wants us to use this freedom, this freewill to do what is good. Galatians 5:13 says, “*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.*” When we use our freedom, freewill, to serve the Lord and to do what is good, we become willing. We become willing to serve, willing to offer, willing to work, even willing to obey. God is pleased with those who are willing. He does not use those who are unwilling or complaining. God punished the 10 unwilling spies who had explored the Promised Land and brought back a bad and discouraging report. But, God blessed the two willing men, Joshua and Caleb, to enter the Promised Land. God disciplined the unwilling prophet Jonah. Jesus did not call the rich man who was unwilling to give up his possession to follow him. We must use our freedom, freewill, to serve the Lord and work for him.

What happened next through those who were willing? Look at 36:6-7. “***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***.” Materials were overflowing. They collected more than necessary. So, Moses ordered his people not to bring anymore. This is the result of willingness. Willingness brings more than enough. Willingness brings overflowing blessing. God blesses and helps those who are willing at school, at work, and in ministry. God provides wisdom, understanding, and knowledge more than enough for those who are willing. You become creative, persistent, and confident. History proves God has raised many willing people as leaders of this world.

Those who brought the materials were happy to bring their gold, silver, bronze, and all other materials. They brought them willingly, joyfully, and gratefully. In fact, all they had came from the Lord. When they left from Egypt, God commanded the Egyptians to give to them whatever they asked. So, the Israelites took gold, silver, bronze, and all others from the Egyptians. In the same way, all we have now came from the Lord. When we were born, we brought nothing to this world. But, now we have much. When we are asked to offer and to serve, let us do it willingly, joyfully, and gratefully. 2 Chronicles 9:7 says, “*God loves a cheerful giver*.”Amen. Now they were ready to work.

2. Trust and obey: chapter 36-39 describes how the Israelites built using the materials which were collected. Under the leadership of Moses, the two skilled workers, Bezalel and Oholiab, began to work starting with the tabernacle, the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering, the basin for washing, the courtyard and the priestly garments. When they finished them, Moses inspected the work. The important thing in their construction is that they did all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. In chapter 36-39 the phrase “*as the Lord had commanded him.*” appears more than 20 times. Moses and the Israelites built the tabernacle just as the Lord had commanded them. As we studied in previous chapters, God gave very detailed instructions about the tabernacle and the priestly garments, starting with their materials, design, and even location. God gave the detailed materials, size, shape and pattern for the ark, the lampstand, the table, the altars, and so on. God also gave designs for the priestly garments. Moses and his people followed God’s instruction completely without any changes or alterations. Look at verses 39:42-43. “***The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them***.” Full and complete obedience is very important in doing the work of God. God wants us to do his own way, which is the best way. God’s way is higher than our way and his thoughts are better than our thoughts. He is the Creator who made all things with his wisdom and power. How can we, as mere men, compare to God the Creator. In the past, God commanded Noah to build the ark, the ark of salvation. God gave detailed instructions and Noah obeyed him. Noah built the ark just as the Lord had commanded him. The ark of Noah saved not only his family, but also all the living paired creatures who entered the ark. Later, scholars proved that the ark had the perfect size and design to accommodate all the paired creatures and float over the water. How did Noah, an old farmer, know this engineering and architecture? He simply obeyed what God instructed him.

Some Bible scholars say that the pattern of the tabernacle is the same as that in the kingdom of heaven. I am not sure of this. But, I believe that all things on the earth are the shadow of the heaven. There is another reason why God commanded the Israelites to build as he had instructed. This is because he wanted them to make a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God asked them to obey his command not to make them slaves, but to make them a blessing. When they lived as slaves in Egypt, they were miserable. Slaves have no freedom. Slaves cannot be a blessing for the world. God delivered them out of Egypt and made a covenant people. They would become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex 19:5,6) But, there is a condition for this covenant. The Lord God said to them in Exodus 19:5, “*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,…*” God wanted them to live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In order to do so, they needed to live as God’s people, people belonging to God.

In chapter 32 we saw the result of their disobedience to God. They worshiped God in their own way. While Moses was on the mountain, they made a golden calf saying, “*These are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt*.” (32:4) When they followed their own way, they sinned against God. They did not fully obey God. The result was death and destruction. The problem was that sinful men abuse their freedom, freewill, for wrongdoing. In the Garden, Adam and Eve obeyed God’s word in their own way. So they fell into temptation. The incident of the Tower of Babel has continued throughout human history. Men continue to build their own way up to utopia. They have tried to find the way to reach heaven. Through human reason, experience, and science they want to reach the throne of God. When they follow their own ways, they are trapped in serious moral problems. They are confused in their identities and live against God’s creation order. Human philosophy, ideology, and technology made us more dehumanized and demoralized. The result of following their own way is death and destruction, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden.

The word of God, the truth of God, made our life simple. Trust and obey, there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. Jesus made the way to heaven simple and easy. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16) Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. (Jn 14:6) This world claims to know many ways to reach to heaven. But there is only one way to heaven, Jesus Christ. Except Jesus, all others are golden calves. God wants us to simply trust in him and believe his promise and follow his words. There are some who like to argue with the words of God. There are also some who like to obey God in their own way. But, God is pleased with those who simply trust and obey. Moses did not add or subtract from God’s instruction. He did exactly what God had told him to do. In Deuteronomy 12:32 Moses said to the Israelites, “*See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it*.” The authority and power of Moses came from his absolute obedience to God’s word. His reverence and love to the Lord God made him great.

3.Guidance to Canaan (journey to heaven) the Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year. The first year of the Jewish calendar is the year they came out of Egypt. How did God respond when the tabernacle was set up? Look at 40:34-35. “***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***.” The Lord God was so pleased and filled the tabernacle with his glory. The cloud was the symbol of the presence of God. God was pleased because he could dwell among his people. God was pleased because they obeyed his command. God’s glory was filled in the tabernacle when their job was done. Thank God that the story of Exodus finishes with a happy ending. The history of the Israelites in Exodus started with misery, but finished with glory. Their destiny started as slaves, but finished as a kingdom of priests and holy nation. We can compare this to our lives and our journey to the kingdom of heaven. We were slave to sin. Our life was miserable before we came out of slavery through Jesus, our Savior. We are now on the way to our Promised Land, the kingdom of God. We are God’s covenant people and his treasured possession. Our life will finish with a happy ending, just like the Israelites. Our life will be filled with the glory of God.

He will guide us, provide us, and protect us until we arrive at the Promised Land as he did the Israelites. God led them with the pillar of cloud and of fire during their journey. They had no problem as long as they followed him. Look at verses 36-38. “***In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever 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 fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels***.” The cloud of the Lord was the signal for their journey. Numbers 9:22-23 says, “*Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the Lord’s command they encamped, and at the Lord’s command they set out. They obeyed the Lord’s order, in accordance with his command through Moses*.”

What is the signal for our journey to heaven? According to what do we encamp or we set out? The psalmist says, “*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path*.” God’s word is the signal for our journey. Blessed is the man who meditates God’s word day and night! Blessed is the man who builds his or her life on the word of God! Above all, blessed is the man who obeys God’s word and follow his will! Those who follow the word of God are guided by the Holy Spirit. Like the pillar of the cloud and fire, the Holy Spirit guides us day and night when we mediate on God’s word. The Holy Spirit directs us the way we should go. Romans 8:6 says, “*The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace*.” Here governed means ruled. When we are ruled by the Holy Spirit, we bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit including life and peace. In our journey to heaven as pilgrim we need the signal for our safe and secure journey. May God help us not to follow false signals or fake signs, but to follow the Holy Spirit! May God help us to finish our journey to heaven until we see the glory of the Lord in heaven. Amen!

Thank God for helping us to finish our Exodus study. The Lord is God who brought out the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. The Lord is God who made a covenant with them through Moses. The Lord is God who we must worship and love with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our strength. Amen!