

Vayak'hel

ויקהל

“He assembled”

Exodus 35:1 – 38:20

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion (along with the next one) describes the actual construction of the Tabernacle along with all its furnishings and associated items. It explains how the materials were obtained and how the actual work was done. There are several lessons we can learn by comparing God’s dwelling place as constructed by the Israelites with God’s dwelling place today.

1. Sabbath Regulations - 35:1-3

In this short passage, God again reinforces the command to keep Shabbat. What do you think is behind His command “not to light a fire in any of your dwellings”?

Oral tradition states that the command “not to kindle a fire” relates specifically to cooking, that is, it is considered work to cook meals on the sabbath. It is not intended that people are to sit in the cold and dark on Shabbat, although some sects of Judaism have interpreted it this way. The inclusion of this command at this point in the narrative is meant to instruct that while construction of the tabernacle is important, work is not to be done on the sabbath.

2. Materials for the Tabernacle - 35:4 - 29

a) The list of materials in verses 5 through 9 is very diverse. What does this suggest to you about the composition of God’s dwelling place today? Do you find any interesting symbolism in this list of materials?

God dwells today in the body of believers which is composed of a very diverse group of people from all nations and backgrounds, both Jew & Gentile. Gold is symbolic of God’s presence, silver symbolizes God’s work of redemption, and bronze symbolizes God’s judgement through fire. This is consistent with the use of these materials in their respective components of the tabernacle. Furthermore, white linen symbolizes purity & righteousness, scarlet - the blood sacrifice of Yeshua, purple - royalty, and blue - heaven, the source and home of Yeshua.

Why revisit the Sabbath regulation?

The remainder of the book of Exodus tells of the actual construction of the Tabernacle. One reason that this short passage about observing the *Shabbat* may appear here is to remind the Israelites that while the work on the Tabernacle is important, it is not more important than God’s command to observe the *Shabbat*.

Symbolism of Materials

Many of the materials used in the construction of the Tabernacle have symbolic meaning. Here is a partial list of some of the materials.

Gold	-	God’s presence
Silver	-	Redemption
Bronze	-	Judgment
White Linen	-	Purity & Righteousness
Scarlet	-	Blood sacrifice
Purple	-	Royalty
Blue	-	Heaven
Acacia Wood	-	Humanity

A Giving Heart

Consider the materials used for the construction of the Tabernacle. God could have miraculously provided the materials for the Israelites. Or He could have required that each Israelite give a specific amount, like a tax. Instead, God chose to obtain the materials from the people as gifts, each giving as his heart moved him (vss 21 & 29). God wants to have a relationship with us, but He won't force us. He desires that we come to Him of our own free will, because we also want a relationship with Him.

Why give to God?

Have you examined your motives for giving to God? Some people give grudgingly, an unpleasant but necessary task. Others give because they seek something in return – a blessing from God. But God wants us to give out of a thankful heart, because we appreciate all that He has done for us and because we want to honor Him with our gifts.

b) How were all these materials collected? Does this give you any insight into God's desire to have a relationship with his people? What does this imply about God's ability to work in the hearts of people?

The materials were collected through free will offerings from the people, each giving as his heart moved him (vss 21 & 29). God desires to have a relationship with his creation, but it must be of our free will: we must choose to draw near to God, to relate to him. On the other hand, God works in the hearts of those who believe in him by creating in them a desire to love and serve him. It may be useful to discuss why people give: guilt, pressure, to get something in return, love, etc.

“. . . and everyone whose heart moved him brought an offering to YHWH for the Tent of Meeting.”

Exodus 35:21

3. Bezalel and Oholiab - 35:30 - 36:7

a) Who chose Bezalel and Oholiab for their roles? How were they equipped to serve? Who worked with them to accomplish their goal?

God chose Bezalel and Oholiab for their roles (vss 30 & 34) and filled them with his Spirit (vs 31). “Every skilled person to whom God had given skill and ability” assisted them in their work (36:1).

b) Each of these two men contributed in two very different ways. What were they? Do you see any application here for your own service to God?

Not only were these men skilled in their craftsmanship, but God gave them “the ability to teach others” (vs 34). As we do our work for God, we also have the opportunity to both learn from others as well as teach others.

c) Were there enough materials to construct the Tabernacle? What does this say about the hearts of the people at this time? Why do you think this was so?

There was more than enough material to build the tabernacle. Moses had to give the order for the people to stop bringing material. Because of their repentant hearts (due to the golden calf affair) God was able to move in their hearts to generously give for the tabernacle.

4. The Tabernacle - 36:8-38

This passage describes in detail how all the different parts were integrated together “so that the tabernacle was a unit” (verse 13). Is this the case in God’s dwelling place today?

The fact that the tabernacle came together as “a unit” from all its diverse parts and workers is a good picture of how God builds his tabernacle in the body of believers today.

5. The Ark, the Table, the Lampstand, & the Altar of Incense - 37:1-29

This chapter describes in detail the construction of the furnishings inside the tabernacle. What were the two primary materials used for these items? Can you see any symbolism in these materials?

These four items were made entirely of acacia wood and gold. Acacia wood symbolizes humanity (of the earth, produced through growth, common) and gold symbolizes the presence of God. Thus we have God meeting with man.

6. The Altar of Burnt Offering and the Bronze Laver - 38:1-8

Compare the descriptions of the altar of burnt offering and the laver. How were they similar? What was used to make the laver? Do you see any symbolism here?

These two items were made of bronze, symbolizing God’s judgment. The altar of burnt offering was specified in detail indicating God’s requirements for sacrifice. The laver, however, was of an arbitrary size, dictated by the number of mirrors the women brought. The laver symbolizes our cleansing through repentance and washing with the word. While this act is necessary for everyone, the depth of cleansing is different with each person.

7. The Courtyard - 38:9-20

Describe the structure used to separate the Tabernacle and its surrounding area from the rest of the camp. About how big was the Tabernacle area in modern terms? What would it have looked like from the outside?

The Tabernacle area was surrounded on all sides by white linen curtains ~ 7-1/2 feet high, except for an embroidered entrance curtain ~ 30 feet long. It would have been ~ 25 yards x 50 yards. Other than the long white fabric walls, one may have been able to see the roof of the Tabernacle itself rising slightly above the curtains.

Scripture Link:

We know that today God dwells in the hearts of His believers (**Ephesians 2:22**). We also know that God desires His followers to be brought together as “one” (**John 17:20-23**), a single unit. Just as the Tabernacle, which was constructed from a wide variety of diverse materials, came together as a single unit, so today God desires that His dwelling place (composed of a diverse collection of human hearts) come together as a single unit. How do you think we’re doing?

What did the laver look like?

You may have wondered why the size and shape of the laver (basically a large wash basin) weren’t specified like the other furnishings of the Tabernacle. According to **Exodus 38:8**, the laver was constructed from the mirrors of the women in the camp. (A woman’s hand mirror was usually fashioned from a polished piece of brass or copper.) The reason the size was not specified is because its size was based on the number of mirrors that were given for its construction. In this way, the size of the laver indicated the willingness of the women to sacrifice their vanity.

Digging deeper

1. First Kings 5:13 - 6:38 and 7:13 - 8:9 tell of the construction of the first temple, built by King Solomon in Jerusalem beginning around the year 966 bce. Compare this structure to the tabernacle Moses built. What were some of the differences? What things were the same? Do you see any symbolism for today's believers in this?

The Symbolism in the Tabernacle

Consider the way that a priest came before God. His first act was to offer a sacrifice. Then he cleansed himself with the water in the laver. Upon entering the Tabernacle, on his left was the Menorah, representing God's guiding light and on the right was the Table of Showbread, which contained the food we need to live. Before the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place sat the Altar of Incense. And finally, behind the veil, was the Ark of the Covenant atop which sat the Mercy Seat, where God met with the High Priest. Can you find any symbolism in these items? (Hint: For example, God says that "Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3))

Although the temple was very different, it had similarities to the tabernacle. The proportions were the same: the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle was 10 x 10 x 10 cubits and in the temple was 20 x 20 x 20 cubits and the Holy Place was the same width and twice the length. The Most Holy Place housed the Ark of the Covenant. Both had the altar of incense and the altar of burnt offering. However, differences abound: the temple had 10 tables for showbread and 10 lampstands instead of one, and the brazen laver in the temple was a huge bowl (~15,000 gals) called the 'sea.' God gave Moses the detailed plans for the tabernacle and according to 1 Chron. 28:11-19, He gave similarly detailed plans to David for the temple by Solomon. God's shekinah glory dwelled in the temple as it did in the tabernacle (1 Kings 8:10).

(Note: 2 Chron. 3-5 is a parallel passage.)

2. List all of the types and shadows (or symbolism) that you can find in the construction and furnishings of the tabernacle.

A particularly rich area is that of gold, silver and bronze: gold is symbolic of God's presence, silver of God's redemption, and bronze of God's judgement. Note also the relative positions of the furnishings in how one enters the presence of God: Entering from the outside world into the courtyard, offering a sacrifice, cleansing with repentance, entering the Holy Place, partaking of the Word of His Presence under the Light of His Holy Spirit, and offering Prayers as incense on the golden altar makes it possible to pass through the veil and enter into His Presence to receive His mercy.

For further study, see

Haftarah : 1 Kings 7:13-26 or 7:40-50

Brit Hadashah : 2 Corinthians 9:1-15; Hebrews 9:1-14;
Revelation 11:1-13