**Chapter 36**

Chapters 25-31 of Exodus contain God’s instructions to Moses for the construction of the tabernacle, all its furnishings and the priest’s garments. Chapters 36-40 record the actual crafting of everything prescribed by God culminating with setting up the tabernacle after which God’s glory filled it. Despite their other failures, the Israelites built the tabernacle exactly according to God’s instructions. While there is much repetition of previous chapters, there are a few things worthy of note.

The participation rate of the Israelites appears to have been very high. People gave materials and labor according to their means and ability so their contributions were proportionate. Verse 3 says that they continued to bring freewill offerings each morning and as we discussed last week, the giving was so generous that Moses stopped the offering. Matthew Henry wrote *“Most need a spur to quicken their charity, few need a bridle to check it”*. Alan Cole noted *“It must have been both a disappointment and a frustration to those who had delayed their gifts because they could not bear to part with their treasures, and who now found that God had no further need of them”. His work was finished, but they had excluded themselves from any share in it.* The people were enthusiastic and more importantly, they were in harmony. I think this was because they had no doubt that they were doing something ordained by God. In the modern church, knowing God’s will is not as easy as when he spoke directly to the people. Often people will propose something that they are convinced is in God’s will while an equal number believe the opposite. Building a new sanctuary sometimes negates the need for more space.

Speaking of sanctuaries, I am somewhat conflicted over the vast amounts of money devoted to church facilities. Many years ago I met a Pentecostal pastor whose congregation met in a building that was closed on the weekends so they were able to rent it for Sundays at a very reasonable rate. He said that he believed they could make better use of their offerings than purchasing a building. Contrast that with my brother’s church in Tennessee which has a sprawling campus which includes a gymnasium. Those facilities may draw people who later come to know the saving grace of Jesus.

The giving was very public and therefore very visible (see Matt. 6:3). This could have contributed to the success of the project through competition and shaming. Today philanthropists are sometimes open about their giving thinking it encourages others to do so as well.

Moses set an example of being a good steward of the resources collected for the project. He could have continued to have the people bring their gifts and converted them to his personal use. There are examples in the modern church of preachers who use the church not just for fair compensation but for enriching themselves (see 1st Tim. 5:18 and Mark 21:1-4).

Certainly the main theme of chapters 35 and 36 is the offering of tangible goods and skilled labor which was given freely. Bob Deffinbaugh had an interesting observation regarding what the Bible says about giving. He said that giving is either voluntary or compulsory and compared Old Testament giving to New Testament giving. The temple tax was compulsory giving in the Old Testament while the collection for the tabernacle was voluntary. In the New Testament, Deffinbaugh views giving to the destitute to be mandatory (see Acts 20:35, James 2:16). Charles Spurgeon wrote *“Our gifts are not to be measured by the amount we contribute but by the surplus kept in our own hand”.* Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The Israelites certainly received a blessing when they were able to see the completed tabernacle. Many bequeath the church substantial sums of money paid out at their death. As Steve said in a recent message, give while it’s still warm in your hand.