

# OpenTheo

## March 29th: Exodus 36 & Matthew 27:57—28:20

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Constructing the tabernacle. The burial and resurrection of Christ and the Great Commission.

Some passages referenced:

Isaiah 26:16-19 (womb and tomb); Isaiah 53:9 (grave with the rich); Isaiah 51:1 (hewn from the rock); 1 Kings 7:9-12 (hewn rocks for the Temple); Jeremiah 1:8-9 (the call of Jeremiah); 2 Chronicles 36:23 (the commission of Cyrus); Deuteronomy 31:23 (commission of Joshua).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Exodus 36 Bezalel and Aholiab and every craftsman in whom the Lord has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded. And Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him to come to do the work. And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work of the sanctuary.

They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do. So Moses gave command, and the word was proclaimed throughout the camp, Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work and more.

And all the craftsmen among the workmen made the tabernacle with ten curtains. They were made of fine twined linen, and blue and purple and scarlet yarns, with cherubim skilfully worked. The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits.

All the curtains were the same size. He coupled five curtains to one another, and the other five curtains he coupled to one another. He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain of the first set, likewise he made them on the edge of the outermost curtain of the second set.

He made fifty loops on the one curtain, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set. The loops were opposite one another. And he made fifty clasps of gold, and coupled the curtains one to the other with clasps, so the tabernacle was a single whole.

He also made curtains of goat's hair for a tent over the tabernacle. He made eleven curtains. The length of each curtain was thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits.

The eleven curtains were the same size. He coupled five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves. And he made fifty loops on the edge of the outermost curtain of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the other connecting curtain.

And he made fifty clasps of bronze to couple the tent together, so that it might be a single whole. And he made for the tent a covering of tanned ramskins and goatskins. Then he made the upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood.

Ten cubits was the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. Each frame had two tenons for fitting together. He did this for all the frames of the tabernacle.

The frames for the tabernacle he made thus. Twenty frames for the south side. And he made forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons.

For the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty frames, and there forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame, and two bases under the next

frame. For the rear of the tabernacle westward he made six frames. He made two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear, and they were separate beneath but joined at the top, at the first ring.

He made two of them this way for the two corners. There were eight frames with their bases of silver, sixteen bases, and at every frame two bases. He made bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the tabernacle at the rear westward.

And he made the middle bar to run from end to end half way up the frames. And he overlaid the frames with gold, and made their rings of gold for holders of the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold. He made the veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.

With cherubim skillfully worked into it he made it. And for it he made four pillars of acacia, and overlaid them with gold. Their hooks were of gold, and he cast for them four bases of silver.

He also made a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework, and its five pillars with their hooks. He overlaid their capitals and their fillets were of gold, but their five bases were of bronze. Exodus chapter 36 continues the description of the construction of the tabernacle and its contents, a description begun in chapter 35.

And the description here is almost verbatim repetition of the relevant sections in chapters 25-30. These chapters should be seen as the obedient answer to the earlier chapters, and this is particularly important in light of the intervening events concerning the golden calf. It also follows literary conventions that we find elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature of the period.

But the most important point is that they are following God's instructions to the letter. It underlines the movement from pattern to image, the way in which they're taking God's pattern and bringing it into practice. It also has the effect of stressing just how important the tabernacle is, by giving it so much space within the text.

Chapters 25-31 and 35-40 are almost entirely devoted to the tabernacle. In a book that considers such great events as the giving of the law at Sinai, the plagues upon Egypt and the exodus from Egypt and the institution of the Passover, other things like that, it seems strange that so much space is given to the tabernacle, and the fact that it is should be an indication of just how important this particular thing is. This could also be considered in relationship to things such as the genealogies of 1 Chronicles, or the descriptions of the territories of the various tribes in the land of Joshua.

By giving so much space to boring details, to details that just rehearse things that we've maybe read elsewhere as well, their importance is driven home to us. We are, as the reader, being challenged to think and meditate upon these details, to consider even if the details are not particularly illuminating, that they are details of something immensely important and central. The amount of column inches, as Jonathan Sachs puts it, given to the building of the tabernacle within the Book of Exodus is a curious feature of the book that should raise many important questions.

Why does a book about the deliverance and foundation of a nation give so much attention to the building of a sacred tent? And Sachs suggests that a people formed of newly liberated distinct tribes, surrounded by a large mixed multitude, would be in danger of division, as they do not yet have a clear unity. They are always in danger of being reduced to an undifferentiated mob, as we see in the Golden Calf event. And the unification of the people in the Sinai event, and in the construction of the tabernacle it arises from and perpetuates the meaning of that event, is a crucial part of the movement of the people from slaves to a new unified nation.

It's a symbolic way of founding the continued life of Israel upon the event of Sinai. Furthermore, the tabernacle is the divine palace at the heart of the people, around which the people are gathered under the rule of the Lord. This is a crucial part of the nation building.

It's also a victory building pattern. The Lord has vanquished his enemies, he's delivered his people, he's established a new political order, and now he secures his unrivaled kingship and then builds his palace in the midst of the people. One interesting detail that's worth noting is the return to the language of the tabernacle, or dwelling place, from the language of the tent of meeting.

Tent of meeting language is used for days 4-6 in the earlier creation pattern that we see in chapters 25-31, and tabernacle is used for days 1-3. The distinction suggests two different aspects of the tabernacle, two different ways of seeing it. The tabernacle is primarily the dwelling place of the Lord, but it's secondarily the meeting place where Israel met with the Lord.

And tent of meeting language, for instance, is typical language in the book of Leviticus, where the focus is upon interaction between God and his people. But in this chapter it's tabernacle and God's dwelling there that is prominent. God is the source of skill in people's minds and willingness in their hearts, and God is the master of men's hearts, whether the heart of Pharaoh or the hearts of Israel at this point as they willingly give to the construction of the tabernacle and express the skill of the mind that God has given to them.

The story of the Exodus begins with labourers being starved of materials that they need for the construction of bricks for building houses for Pharaoh, and now we have a

superfluity of materials for building the house of the Lord. The materials themselves probably largely came from the spoiling of the Egyptians and from trade with the Midianites and other peoples in the wilderness. And we should also bear in mind that the Israelites had been involved in construction work as slaves in Egypt, one of the most materially and technologically advanced societies of their day, so they probably had a lot of expertise to bring to this particular project.

We don't know exactly how everything was constructed though, because many of the details that we have are insufficient. Many of the popular images that people have of the tabernacle may be quite badly wrong, and it may have been more like a typical tent in its structure. We are given a verbal description of some details, but many of the details seem to have been given through a vision to Moses, so Moses saw the things on the mountain, he saw a pattern, he saw an archetype in terms of which the tabernacle should be constructed.

We see this expressed in the book of Hebrews for instance. The two principal persons involved in the construction of the tabernacle are Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, and Aholiab. Bezalel's name means the shadow of God, and he's the son of Uri, which means the Lord is light, or my light, or fiery, or light of the Lord.

And maybe we should see in this themes of light and shadow, darkness and light, these are the themes that come at the very beginning of the creation story. God creates light, and he creates day and night. The tabernacle is the protecting shadow of God in which Israel can take refuge.

For instance, in Psalm 91 verse 1, he who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Aholiab means father's tent, and both names reveal something about the meaning of the tabernacle. The tent is the tent of the father of Israel, and Israel is God's firstborn son.

It's also the protecting shadow of the light-giving God in which Israel can take refuge. Bezalel and Aholiab are not architects. Moses is the one who receives and reveals the plans from the Lord, and Bezalel and Aholiab are the helpers, or as it were the sons given to him to perform the building work, with Aholiab as the assistant to Bezalel.

So we have the source of the plans, which is God, the prophet who reveals the plans, Moses, the master builder, Bezalel, and the helper of the master builder, Aholiab, and then the others who assist them. God gives the plans of the temple, in a similar way, to David. David is the prophet who reveals the plans to Solomon.

Solomon is the one who oversees the building of the temple, and Hiram is the one who works under Solomon's direction. In the New Covenant we see a similar pattern. God the Father is the one who establishes the new temple and gives the plans, as it were.

The Son is the one who reveals the plans. The Spirit is the one who orchestrates the building work. And people like Paul and others are the ones who work under the Spirit's direction, as gifted master builders.

It is not an accident that Paul's profession was that of a tent maker, and the metaphor of building a building for the establishment and the growth of the church is something that we find throughout the Pauline epistles and elsewhere in the New Testament. This is a new tent that's being built. It's following the same sort of pattern that we see within the Old Testament.

Hearing the details of the construction of the structure again, we should consider the gradations of holiness that we've already seen. As you go further up and further in, you move in gradations of holiness, from bronze to silver to gold, and such gradations of holiness give a sense of the gradual approach to God's glorious presence at the very heart. A question to consider.

The use of cherubim imagery in the tent is an arresting detail, especially when we consider the resistance to imagery more generally in the presence of God. Why do you think cherubim imagery is so prominent within the tabernacle, and what connotations and scriptural associations might help us to understand its purpose? Matthew chapter 27 verse 57 to chapter 28 verse 20. When it was evening there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.

He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, Sir, we remember how that imposter said, while he was still alive, After three days I will rise.

Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples go and steal him away and tell the people he has risen from the dead, and the last fraud will be worse than the first. Pilate said to them, You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.

So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow, and for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen as he said.

Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. And behold, he is going before you to Galilee.

There you will see him. See I have told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.

And behold, Jesus met them and said, Greetings. They came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me. While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, Tell people, his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.

And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

We have reached the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus is buried, rises from the dead, appears to his disciples and gives them the great commission. Rather a lot of ground cover. Joseph of Arimathea comes at evening asking for the body of Jesus.

Arimathea seems to be the same place as Samuel came from, which we see in 1st Samuel 1. Jesus is the Davidic king and it seems fitting that a figure associated with Samuel is burying him into the chamber from which he will come forth as the risen Lord. That Joseph of Arimathea is a rich man and a disciple is also an interesting detail of this narrative. Throughout Matthew's Gospel the theme of riches and money has often come up and here it comes up again but now although the earlier rich man who wanted to become a disciple failed to do so, here is one that has.

It's an encouraging note towards the end of the Gospel. The presence of two Josephs,

remember earlier Mary is the mother of James and Joseph, and two Marys in the account of the burial of Jesus brings our minds back to the beginning of the story of the Gospel which also began with a Joseph and a Mary. Jesus is placed into a new tomb, a virgin tomb, and the connection between the womb and the tomb is important throughout scripture.

We can see this in places like Isaiah chapter 26 verses 16-19. O Lord, in distress they sought you, they poured out a whispered prayer when your discipline was upon them, like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth. So were we because of you, O Lord.

We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise.

You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy, for your Jew is a Jew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. Just as the Gospel begins with the opening of the virgin womb, it will end with the opening of the virgin tomb. The sudden presence of Joseph's and Mary's should alert us to this association.

Also the emphasis upon the presence of the women, as weight to birth themes here. The body is carefully taken care of by Joseph. He wraps the body in a clean linen shroud, like the clothes of the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

And the presence of this rich man at this particular junction might also cast our minds back to Isaiah 53 verse 9, one of the passages that is often referred to in these stories of Christ's suffering. In fulfillment of that prophecy, Christ has his grave made with a rich man. It's cut into the rock, like stones taken from a quarry.

We can maybe think back to Isaiah chapter 51 verse 1. Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord, look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you, for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. Christ is the great stone that will become the chief cornerstone of the new temple.

The great stones of the temple of Solomon are described in 1 Kings chapter 7 verse 9 of the house. A stone is placed over the mouth of the tomb. It's a blocked up entrance that will have to be removed.

And the women's presence at the burial and the tomb is noted by Matthew. They're present at the cross, they're present at the burial, and they're present on the morning of resurrection. They are the heart of the faithful community.

While we can often focus upon the male apostles as the appointed leaders and guardians of the people of Christ, Christ himself wants us to attend to the women and the children



at the heart of the community of faith, as models of faith. And here we see them singled out once more as figures to pay attention to. The chief priests, who were largely Sadducees and the Pharisees, both join together to ask Pilate to set a guard at the tomb and to seal it.

And it seems that having Jesus as a common enemy makes unlikely friends. The opposing sects of the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the Roman governor Pilate are all united in this. Also, the guard on the tomb makes clear that the prophecy that Jesus would rise again on the third day was widely known, even before Easter morning.

They knew that Jesus had said that he would rise again on the third day. This is not something that was said later on and placed back into the story. There was a guard present at the tomb because the resurrection was foretold by Christ, right down to the day on which it would occur.

Furthermore, the presence of a guard upon the tomb, which is a strange thing indeed to have a guard at a tomb to prevent its occupant from breaking out, also makes us think of the tomb as a prison and the resurrection as a great prison break. Christ is the one who's trapped in the bonds of death. And we'll see a number of stories of prison breaks in the book of Acts, stories that often take the resurrection as their pattern.

Acts chapter 12 being a good example of that, where Peter is delivered from prison by an angel of the Lord and then appears in a sort of resurrection appearance to the disciples and appearing first to a woman who is not believed by the disciples but then appearing to them all. Death and its servants hold Jesus in their custody but they are incapable of holding on to him and he breaks free of their clutches. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, probably Mary the mother of Jesus, come to the tomb on the first day of the week.

It's the start of a new week and as we'll see the start of a new creation. Once again, as at the beginning of the Gospel, there is an appearance of an angel of the Lord and a descent from heaven, reminding us both of the appearances of the angel of the Lord to Joseph and of the descent of the spirit in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism. The description of the angel is also similar to the description of the transfigured Christ.

The descent of the angel from heaven, the lightning of his countenance, the earthquake with which he comes are also features that pick up elements of Jesus' description of his coming and the day of his power in the Olivet discourse and perhaps we should see this as a foreshadowing of that, that there is a coming of Christ here in his return from the grave. The earthquake also connects with the earthquake described in the previous chapter. The presence of the angel of the Lord here might also invite us to think of the tomb of the risen Christ as the beachhead for heaven's invasion of earth.

The guards, the opposing forces, tremble and collapse like dead men. The angel of the

Lord presents the empty tomb as evidence that Christ is no longer there to the women and then sends them to tell the disciples that he has risen from the dead and is going before them to Galilee. As the women leave the tomb in great fear and joy they are met by Jesus himself and they take hold of his feet and they worship him.

Jesus then commissions them to tell his brothers to go to Galilee where they will see him. They are returning to the site where it all began. But as the women are bringing news to the disciples there is another message being sent to the chief priests by the guards.

As the disciples will later be, the guards are entrusted with a message to spread, a false gospel of the authorities that is opposed to the message of Christ. It's important to consider that the chief priests and the elders have a first hand report of the resurrection and choose to reject it because they know what it means. They have received a sort of gospel and their first concern is to pervert and undermine the message for the sake of their power.

And the exchange of money in order to buy the silence and the lies of the guards is also a reflection upon the character of their message and of their power and authority. They had previously used money to get Judas to betray his lord and now they've used money to buy off their guards, to get them to tell lies. In all of these cases we're seeing something about the corrupting power of money again and the way in which both the love of money destroys the rich and also enables them to corrupt others.

This warning about money should be taken very seriously. The disciples worshipped Jesus in Galilee on a mountain to which they had been directed. Jesus' teaching began on a mountain and now it ends on a mountain.

The Great Commission is like the calling of the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 1 verse 8 to 9. The disciples are being given a prophetic calling to go out into the world as a prophet and to declare the word of the Lord, the risen Christ. It's also like the final verse of the last book of the Old Testament in the typical Jewish ordering. In 2nd Chronicles chapter 36 verse 23 we read The Gospel of Matthew began with an allusion to the very beginning of the Old Testament the genesis of Jesus Christ and to the story of Abraham, to the story of Joseph and now it ends at the very end of the Old Testament story.

The Gospel of Matthew has been throughout telling the entire story of the Old Testament through with Jesus fulfilling each step of it from the dawn of creation to the return from exile. If Jesus on the cross was ruined Jerusalem, the Great Commission is the return from exile and the rebuilding of the temple. Jesus is worshipped by the eleven here.

The eleven bow down to him. In this sense Jesus is a new Joseph. He's one delivered from the pit, the one who comes out of prison.

He's raised up to authority and his brothers bow down to him. Note that Jesus refers to them as his brothers in verse 10. He's the one that gives bread to the nations.

He's the dead brother betrayed to the Gentiles by a new Judah who has come back after they have forsaken him. We might also think of Deuteronomy chapter 31 verse 23. The Great Commission comes at the beginning of a new conquest narrative.

Not the conquest of the land but the conquest of all the nations. They are being sent out to speak to every one of the nations. Perhaps we might also see some connections with the original commission given to mankind, the Dominion Commission.

Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and exercise dominion over all its creatures. This is a similar message of universal extent to go out into the world to baptise and to teach and to prepare people to be disciples of all the nations. This is a universal commission like the original commission given to humankind.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ. All nations must be made disciples of. All that Christ has commanded must be taught and observed.

Christ will be with them at all times. Christ is the Lord of all. Every single part of the world comes under the rule of this new emperor, this new king of kings.

As they make disciples they are to baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the name of the Triune God is placed upon us. And notice the name.

It's a unified name that is shared by Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There's an identification and a unity of the Triune Persons. Here we see that Jesus is more than just a great teacher or a moral example or some other great deliverer.

He's something more than that. He's one who possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. An authority that only belongs to God.

He calls them to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Placing himself in the midst of the Father and the Spirit as one to be worshipped and glorified. He is worshipped by his disciples at the beginning here just as he was worshipped earlier by the women.

He declares that he will be with his disciples always to the end of the age. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He's the one who never comes to an end.

He is the one who is always present with his people. He is the one that is not subject to the limitations of time and space as we are. And as the story of Matthew's Gospel comes to its close it invites us, the reader, to join in this worship, to share with the disciples in this response to the risen Christ and in sharing that response to be sent out with them in

that great commission.

A question to consider. At the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew we are told that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. And this theme of God being with us in Jesus Christ returns at the very close of the Gospel.

How can this key theme illumine the Gospel more generally?