

God Our Provider

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One of God's names is *Yahweh Jireh*—the Ever-Living One, our Provider. Our Father supplies *all* our needs—what we need for our daily living as well as what we need to carry out *His* work. The story of the building of the Tabernacle of Meeting illustrates how God provides all we need to do His work. Today, this story serves as an encouraging example (I Corinthians 10:6) to us as we actively collaborate with God in building another structure—His church.

The Tabernacle of Meeting was an important structure to God—it functioned as a portable Temple where He could dwell while His people trekked through the Wilderness of Sin. In a physical sense, the Tabernacle served as the focal point of their relationship with God:

When the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys (Exodus 40:36-38).

Similarly, God sees His church as a building—a spiritual Temple. In I Peter 2:5, the leading apostle of his day states that we are living stones "being built up [into] a spiritual house."

Paul also compares God's church to a building. In I Corinthians 3:9, he tells us that we are "God's building." In Ephesians he more thoroughly develops the analogy between God's church and a building. He calls us

members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

This spiritual Tabernacle is God's habitation, just as, physically, the Tabernacle of Meeting served as His habitation in the wilderness.

Building the Tabernacle

The story of the Tabernacle's construction teaches us a great deal about God's care for us. God gave at least the following four gifts to the children of Israel to ensure that they *could* complete His Work.

- God provided an explicit, clear **commission**. He told Moses, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). He could not be much clearer about what He wanted done!

God went a step further by providing a means to fund, to finance, the building of the Tabernacle. He told Moses, "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering" (Exodus 25:

2). Verses 3 through 7 describe what that offering was to be—gold, silver, bronze, oil, spices, onyx stones, etc. God was aware that the Israelites were not poor; after all, with His help, they had just plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36)! Who knows how much treasure they had hidden among their luggage!

Just as He did with our forefathers in the wilderness, God has given each of us a clear commission: to grow, becoming strong parts of His Temple—pillars in it. Ours now is a spiritual work; ancient Israel's work was physical. But in both cases it is a work of building, of edification and of growth. We are building, with God, the spiritual Temple to which Christ "will suddenly come" (Malachi 3:1).

- God provided a detailed *pattern* for the building of the Tabernacle and of its furnishings. Part of His commission was to follow that pattern precisely. God stressed that Moses build the Tabernacle *exactly* to specifications: "According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it" (Exodus 25:9). These "blueprints" were substantial, taking about five chapters to outline. They are given from Exodus 25:10 through Exodus 30:38.

God has also given us the blueprints of the Temple we are building with His help. He has given us a whole Book of specifications, every word of which "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17). Notice, God's Word is designed to make us fit for His *work!*

But, God did not stop there! He has provided us with, as it were, a *living blueprint* to supplement His written Word. This He has given us in the person of Jesus Christ—the Logos. These two forms of God's revelation—the written and the living Word—agree with each other in every aspect. Jesus Christ is our pattern, our model. We are to become "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

- God took special care to provide the children of Israel with a qualified *leader*. He told Moses:

See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works. (Exodus 31:2-4)

Who was Bezaleel? Was he a chief architect and designer of Raamses or Pithom, the treasure cities the children of Israel built while enslaved in Egypt (Exodus 1:11)? Was he trained by the best artisans of Egypt? Of course, we cannot say for sure. What we do know is that he was an expert in his field. Now, once freed from Egypt, God called him and supplied him with wisdom *and* understanding *and* knowledge. More than all this, God imparted to him His Spirit along with another very important gift of God: "The ability to teach" (Exodus 35:34). Why all these blessings? So Bezaleel could provide the instruction and leadership the other craftsmen needed to build the Tabernacle.

God even gave Bezaleel a lieutenant, apparently a second-in-command, to lead the other craftsmen. He told Moses, "I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab..., of the tribe of Dan" (Exodus 31:6).

In this area as well, God has done His part for us today. He has given us a leader filled with His Spirit, a teacher with wisdom, understanding and knowledge. The children of Israel had their Bezaleel; we have a pastor. And, as Bezaleel had his Aholiab, so our pastor has elders, deacons and other converted leaders to assist within the congregation.

- God provided ***His Spirit*** to empower our forefathers to construct His Tabernacle and its furnishings. God, of course, did not give His Spirit to all the children of Israel at this time. But He did give it to the man He had called to lead the building of the Tabernacle, as Exodus 31:3 indicates.

Today, God has given His Spirit not only to the ministry, but also to *all of us* as our Helper to do His work (*cf.* John 15:26). With it, we "are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The Father knows how essential that Spirit is if we are to grow and to complete the work. God's Spirit gives us the power to *live* the way God wants us to live; it gives us the power to be effective witnesses for God (Acts 1:8).

In short, just as God gave the ancient Israelites all they needed to complete the Tabernacle of Meeting, so He has given us all we need for our part in building the holy Temple, the church of God: a commission, directions, leadership and power through His own Spirit.

Being Good Stewards

This is one of those rare, refreshing cases where the children of Israel serve as a *good* example. True, it was not a perfect example. After all, in this section running from Exodus 25 to the end of the book—right in the middle of all their efforts to construct the Tabernacle—Israel committed their first large-scale apostasy: the fashioning of the golden calves (Exodus 32-34). Moses had to come down from Mount Sinai to put the people back on track again. They had taken their eyes off God and started doing the *wrong* Work!

But, after Moses' intervention, notice what good use the children of Israel made of the gifts God had given them.

They took God's commission seriously. He asked the people to give offerings—and they gave and gave and gave! So wholeheartedly did they do their part in God's work that Moses eventually had to rein in their enthusiasm. Exodus 36:5-7 tells a story we do not hear very often. The craftsmen came

to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do." So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much.

Not only did the people do God's will, but for once they actually *did it His way*, following His specifications exactly:

All the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished. And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did....
According to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did all

the work. Then Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, just so they had done it. (Exodus 39:32, 42-43)

Yes, the congregation in the wilderness were good stewards of the gifts God provided them (*cf.* Luke 12:42-48). As a result, God accepted their efforts. "Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:33-34). God dwelt in the Tabernacle; His glory filled it.

Israel's First Love

Let's conclude by placing this incident in its broader historical context. Just before God gave Israel the assignment to build the Tabernacle, He had married them. God looked on the agreement He made with Israel recorded in Exodus 23:20-33 and Exodus 24:1-8, as a *marriage covenant*. The prophet Isaiah pointedly told Israel, "Your Maker is your husband" (Isaiah 54:5). Jeremiah, in a passage where he called Israel to repent, quotes God as He pleads, "Return, O backsliding children...for I am married to you" (Jeremiah 3:14).

But it is Ezekiel who, in one of the most poignant passages of his book, connects the Old Covenant with marriage:

When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine. (Ezekiel 16:8)

Jeremiah speaks in more detail about the relationship between God and Israel when Moses sprinkled the blood of animals to confirm the Old Covenant (*cf.* Exodus 24:8). In Jeremiah 2:2-3, He speaks to a highly apostate, corrupt Judah some 850 years after the construction of the Tabernacle. The house of Israel was already in exile, and soon Nebuchadnezzar would carry the house of Judah captive into Babylon. Jeremiah quotes God as He fondly—almost wistfully—looks back in time, remembering Mount Sinai, remembering when the Old Covenant was confirmed:

I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase.

God actually said that, "Israel was holiness" to Him! When they built the Tabernacle of meeting, physical Israel was probably closer to God than they ever were or would be in their history. In fact, they were in their first love! One of the fruits of their extremely close relationship with God was the properly finished Tabernacle. Israel submitted to its husband, *Yahweh Jireh*.

History bears witness to the fact that Israel made a colossal mistake by abandoning its first love. Let's not make the same mistake. God, living up to His name, has provided us with everything we need to complete His work. As ancient Israel pleased its husband through obedience, let's please Christ—soon to be the husband of the church (*cf.* Revelation 19:7 and 21:9)—by wholeheartedly carrying out the commission He has given to each one of us. Let's grow "into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:21-22).