

Exodus 39: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Exodus chapter 39 From the blue and purple and scarlet yarns they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place. They made the holy garments for Aaron as the Lord had commanded Moses.

He made the effort of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. And they hammered out gold leaf and he cut it into threads to work into the blue and purple and the scarlet yarns and into the fine twined linen in skilled design.

They made for the effort attaching shoulder pieces joined to it at its two edges and the skillfully woven band on it was a one piece with it and made like it of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen as the Lord had commanded Moses.

They made the onyx stones enclosed in settings of gold filigree and engraved like the engravings of a signet according to the names of the sons of Israel. And he set them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod to be stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel as the Lord had commanded Moses.

He made the breast piece in skilled work in the style of the ephod of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It was square.

[1 : 16] They made the breast piece doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth when doubled. And they set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz and carbuncle was the first row and the second row an emerald, a sapphire and a diamond and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx and a jasper.

They were enclosed in settings of gold filigree. There were twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They were like signets, each engraved with its name for the twelve tribes.

And they made on the breast piece twisted chains like cords of pure gold. And they made two settings of gold filigree and two gold rings and put the two rings on the two edges of the breast piece.

And they put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breast piece. They attached the two ends of the two cords to the two settings of filigree. Thus they attached it in front to the shoulder pieces of the ephod.

Then they made two rings of gold and put them at the two ends of the breast piece on its inside edge next to the ephod. And they made two rings of gold and attached them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod at its seam above the skillfully woven band of the ephod.

[2 : 38] And they bound the breast piece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue so that it should lie on the skillfully woven band of the ephod and that the breast piece should not come loose from the ephod as the Lord had commanded Moses.

He also made the robe of the ephod woven all of blue and the opening of the robe in it was like the opening in a garment with a binding around the opening so that it might not tear.

On the hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. They also made bells of pure gold and put the bells between the pomegranates all around the hem of the robe.

Between the pomegranates a bell and a pomegranate a bell and a pomegranate around the hem of the robe for ministering as the Lord had commanded Moses. They also made the coats woven of fine linen for Aaron and his sons and the turban of fine linen and the caps of fine linen and the linen undergarments of fine twined linen and the sash of fine twined linen and of blue and purple and scarlet yarns embroidered with needlework as the Lord had commanded Moses.

They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold and wrote on it an inscription like the engraving of a signet Holy to the Lord. And they tied to it a cord of blue to fasten it on the turban above as the Lord had commanded Moses.

[4 : 00] Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished and the people of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses. So they did. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars and its bases the covering of tanned ram skins and goat skins and the veil of the screen the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat the table with all its utensils and the bread of the presence the lampstand of pure gold and its lamps with the lamps set and all its utensils and the oil for the light the golden altar, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense and the screen for the entrance of the tent the bronze altar and its grating of bronze its poles and all its utensils the basin and its stand the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases and the screen for the gate of the court its cords and its pegs and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle for the tent of meeting the finely worked garments for ministering in the holy place the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons for their service as priests.

According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses so the people of Israel had done all the work and Moses saw all the work and behold they had done it as the Lord had commanded so had they done it then Moses blessed them.

In Exodus chapter 39 there is a repeated emphasis upon everything being done according to Moses' command there is a thorough observance of everything that God has instructed and we find a similar expression used of Noah in Genesis chapter 6 verse 22 7 verse 5 and 7 verse 16 Noah obeys God's commandments concerning the ark in great detail and Moses and the people observe God's instructions concerning the tabernacle in great detail and we've already seen some of the associations between these two things the ark and the tabernacle are performing similar purposes the tabernacle is a new sort of ark it's a place for God's presence in a world of chaos the construction of the tabernacle can also be sharply contrasted with the construction of the golden calf which was much more haphazard here we have great attention given to the detail and to constructing things according to a pattern that has been given by the Lord in the case of the golden calf no such care was taken we haven't commented upon the different colours of the yarn to this point they are clearly important as we see in Numbers chapter 4 verses 4 to 15 this is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting the most holy things when the camp is to set out Aaron and his son shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it then they shall put on it a covering of goat skin and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue and shall put in its poles and over the table of the bread of the presence they shall spread a cloth of blue and put on it the plates the dishes for incense the bowls and the flagons for the drink offering the regular showbread shall also be on it then they shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet and cover the same with a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and they shall take a cloth of blue and cover the lampstand for the light with its lamps, its tongues, its trays and the vessels for oil with which it is supplied and they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of goat skin and put it on the carrying frame and over the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue and cover it with a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and they shall take all the vessels of the service that are used in the sanctuary and put them in a cloth of blue and cover them with a covering of goat skin and put them on the carrying frame and they shall take away the ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it and they shall put on it all the utensils of the altar which are used for the service there the firepans, the forks, the shovels and the basins all the utensils of the altar and they shall spread on it a covering of goat skin and shall put in its poles and when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary as the camp sets out after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these but they must not touch the holy things lest they die these are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath are to carry the high priest's garments contain materials used in the inner layer of the tabernacle and also associated with the veils and entranceways but their clothing is not just associated with the tabernacle it also has associations with some clothing that regular Israelites would wear in Numbers chapter 15 verse 37 to 41 we read

The tassels on Israelites' clothing would seem to connect their clothing with the clothing of the high priest reminding them of their priestly status or at least their belonging to a nation a kingdom of priests the high priest isn't just someone who acts on behalf of regular Israelites in some sense he

also symbolizes Israel as a whole and all Israelites participate to some degree in his status while we have light that is associated with the eyes in the tabernacle with the lampstand and we have food associated with the mouth in the table of the showbread and we have incense associated with the nose in the altar of incense we don't really have sound and it's something that happens later with the introduction of music through David in particular and his introduction of musicians to the worship of the tabernacle and the temple later on the one set of sounds that we do have are the bells on the clothing of the high priest bells that bring a sound in with him as he comes into the presence of the Lord perhaps we should see this as some sort of precursor for the music with which we'll enter into God's presence in the future the high priest has garments that connect him with the tabernacle on his forehead he has a turban which has a gold plate or blossom on it saying holy to the Lord and we can see that gold plate as being associated with the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat the whole of the tabernacle is a sort of body image just as the body of the high priest is dedicated in its various parts anointed with blood and with oil so different parts of the tabernacle are anointed in a similar way there's an association between the body and the building or the body and the tent the tabernacle is a garment-like building made of cloth and other fabrics and the clothing of the high priest is tent-like clothing there's an analogy between these two things and they help us to understand the way in which the high priest represents the tabernacle and the way that the tabernacle represents the body the tabernacle more generally can symbolise the righteous man if we reflect upon the different parts of the tabernacle we can see analogies with different parts of the body the most holy place which is the seat of God's presence which contains the ark of the covenant with the tablets of stone inside represents the heart and the mind of the human person [11:56] God should dwell in that realm and his law should be meditated upon should be hidden within our hearts whereas if you go out to the holy place you have things that are associated with the senses you have the altar of incense and the incense is connected with smell Jesus taught that the lamp of the body is the eye and the lampstand represents sight and the eyes it gives illumination enables us to see but also symbolises the eyes more generally the table of the presence is associated with the mouth and food that we take into ourselves the ear hears the tinkling of the bells of the high priest's garments the tabernacle structure itself is the skin or the body that's over us terms are used for the construction of the tabernacle which remind us of the body it has ribs and it has shoulders there are faces too the altar is the place where we offer up our life and our works through symbolic substitutes and the laver is the place of cleansing where we wash the bounded courtyard represents a well-ordered life in our public affairs the laver could also be connected with our procreative capacity which is why I think it's particularly associated with women and with the spring or the well and these other symbols that are associated with women in scripture such symbolism gets developed further on in scripture in such things as Solomon's temple or the poetry of the song of Solomon or in the new testament as that imagery is developed further in prophecy in places like revelation or in the teaching that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit both individual and corporate in the temple of Solomon for instance there are two pillars set up at the entrance which very naturally connect with pillars of legs in the holy place you now have five tables on each side and five lampstands on each side which very naturally connect with the fingers on each hand the water chariots associated with the bronze sea which suggests the movement of water out of the tabernacle into the world invites association with other imagery of waters flowing out from the temple and giving life to the world imagery that's used of the bride in Song of Solomon chapter 4 verse 15 in verse 32 it's referred to as the tabernacle of the tent of meeting this terminology is usually separated it's usually called either the tabernacle or the tent of meeting but this highlights that it's both dwelling place and meeting place it's dual function it's place of God's dwelling and it's the place of communion with God and the people bring the tabernacle to Moses the way that this is described in a context that's so full of references to the original creation suggests to me that we may think back to Genesis chapter 2 and the bringing of the woman to the man at the end of that chapter the woman that's formed out of his side built up in the same way as the tabernacle is built the construction of the tabernacle is done by the people under the leadership of Bezalel and Aholiab and through the gift of the Holy Spirit it's the spirit and the bride creating this tent it's a bridal tent and the bridegroom would come to dwell in it and be represented by the male priests within it but I think we are justified in seeing some gendered symbolism here they finish the work and Moses blesses them there's a new creation event here this time with man as the creator under God it ends in a manner reminiscent of

