

Scripture Lesson Text

EXOD. 40:16 Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he.

17 And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first *day* of the month, *that* the tabernacle was reared up.

18 And Moses reared up the tabernacle, and fastened his sockets, and set up the boards thereof, and put in the bars thereof, and reared up his pillars.

19 And he spread abroad the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as the LORD commanded Moses.

20 And he took and put the testimony into the ark, and set the staves on the ark, and put the mercy seat above upon the ark:

21 And he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the vail

of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony; as the LORD commanded Moses.

29 And he put the altar of burnt offering *by* the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation, and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meat offering; as the LORD commanded Moses.

30 And he set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and put water there, to wash *withal*.

34 Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

38 For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

NOTES

Obedience in Building the Tabernacle

Lesson Text: Exodus 40:16-21, 29-30, 34, 38

Related Scriptures: *II Chronicles 3:1-15; 5:2-14; Ezra 1:1-11; 6:1-18*

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Sinai desert

GOLDEN TEXT—"Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he. And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up" (Exodus 40:16-17).

Lesson Exposition

The planning, preparation, and setting up of the tabernacle took a lot of work. In fact, it was a year after their departure from Egypt before everything was ready and the tabernacle was set up (Exod. 40:17).

THE PEOPLE'S PREPARATIONS— Exod. 40:16-21, 29-30

The tabernacle raised (Exod. 40:16-17). The children of Israel had been camped at Mount Sinai for about nine months (19:1).

Detailed instructions had been given to Moses about how to prepare for the tabernacle, including the gathering of all necessary materials and other supplies. It had been a community project in which everyone participated, especially by contributing from their own resources. This serves as a good example of how God wants His people to participate in His work today.

The preparation is summarized in "According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work" (39:42-43). Immediately after that, God com-

manded him to set up the tabernacle on the first day of the month (40:2). After some review of procedure, Moses carried out everything according to the Lord's instructions.

It was near the one-year anniversary of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, making this event a meaningful act of remembrance. There was now a visible reminder to the people that God was constantly present with them and that they were not on this unique and difficult journey on their own.

The tabernacle covered (Exod. 40:18-19). Israel had been given a law from God to guide them. "Now the final phase of that divine preparation is focused in a tent—the dwelling-place of God. The tabernacle was to be the focal point of Israelite worship and spiritual encounter. From this time until the days of Saul it would be the focal point of national life" (Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, Baker).

The design of the tabernacle was such that it could be set up and taken down rather quickly. Once the children

of Israel left Mount Sinai, they followed the pillar of cloud and fire. Whenever these moved, they had to quickly pack up their own belongings and tents, take down the tabernacle, and follow the pillar. Whenever the pillar stopped, it stood over the place where the tabernacle was to be set back up. When the priests carrying the various parts of the tabernacle arrived at that spot, it was reconstructed.

The first thing Moses did was put up the framework (Exod. 36:20-33). The tent went over this structure and consisted of ten beautiful curtains fastened together in groups of five (36:8-10). This was covered with eleven curtains made of goats' hair and another layer of curtains made of rams' skins dyed red (vss. 14-19). These layers made the tabernacle weatherproof and thus preserved the articles inside.

The ark installed (Exod. 40:20-21).

As soon as the building was erected, Moses put the ark of the covenant in its place inside the most holy place of the tabernacle (26:33-34). The "testimony" (40:20) refers to the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments that Moses had been given by God (25:16). These were placed inside the ark and, according to Hebrews 9:4, so were a pot of manna and Aaron's rod that had budded after the conflict with Korah and his followers (Num. 17).

The ark of the covenant had been made with rings on its corners for the insertion of poles used by the priests to carry it (Exod. 37:3-5). These were put in place at this time and were thus always ready for use. God was very specific about carrying the ark in this way. When it was carried on a cart in David's time, Uzzah lost his life for grabbing hold of it when it jostled (II Sam. 6:2-7).

God had also instructed Moses to have a mercy seat built to place on top of the ark of the covenant (Exod.

25:17- 22). It had cherubim on it, with their wings covering it, forming a place where God would meet with the high priest. Since the place of the ark was such a sacred spot, God later instructed Moses that only the high priest could enter there—and only once a year when he made atonement for the children of Israel.

In order to ensure that nobody entered the direct presence of God, a veil was hung to partition off the most holy place from the holy place. Other priests could enter the tabernacle, but this veil was a dividing curtain to keep them from going further. Once again we read that this was done "as the Lord commanded Moses" (40:21).

The altar installed (Exod. 40:29).

Two large articles were placed outside the tabernacle. The tabernacle and these articles were inside a courtyard.

"The whole arrangement of the outer court and in particular the placement of the altar of sacrifice and the laver speak pointedly of man's approach to God. The tabernacle is a fitting example of how God provided for man's sin and guilt in the Old Testament economy" (Davis). The first article encountered as one entered the courtyard was the large, square altar to be used by the priests for the offerings brought by the people. It was built with acacia wood and was covered with bronze (38:1-7).

This altar was usually known as the altar of burnt offering (Lev. 4:7, 10, 18). It was approximately seven and one-half feet square and four and one-half feet high (assuming that a cubit was about eighteen inches). It had a grate halfway up on the inside on which sacrificed animals were laid, and it had rings on its four corners for carrying. Acacia-wood poles overlaid with bronze were used for moving this altar. This was the first item Moses put in place outside the tabernacle and within the courtyard. After Moses had

put it in its place, he offered a burnt offering and a grain offering according to how he had been instructed earlier.

The laver positioned (Exod. 40:30). The other item that was important in the sacrificial system was the big, round laver, or basin, in which the priests washed regularly. It was made from the bronze mirrors of the ladies who came regularly to the tabernacle (38:8). It was located between the altar of burnt offering and the tabernacle (30:18), and it was to be filled with water. The priests were to wash their hands and feet every time they entered the tabernacle or stepped up to the altar to offer a sacrifice.

This was so important that God said, "When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the Lord" (30:20). The necessity of being clean before ministering in the Lord's presence is clear in this action. Keil and Delitzsch made this observation: "The making of this vessel is not only mentioned in a supplementary manner, but no description is given of it because of the subordinate position which it occupied, and from the fact that it was not directly connected with the sanctuary, but was only used by the priests to cleanse themselves for the performance of their duties" (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson).

THE SIGN OF GOD'S BLESSING— Exod. 40:34, 38

Divine approval (Exod. 40:34). "When final preparations were complete Moses along with the people of Israel erected the tabernacle at this appointed time which was about one year after they had left Egypt (v. 17). The furniture was put into proper place (vv. 22-30) and Moses, along with Aaron and his sons, washed themselves

preparatory to entering the tent (vv. 31-33). The moment of real thrill and satisfaction, however, was when God put His approval on the place by exhibiting His personal presence in the form of a cloud (v. 34)" (Davis).

This was the same cloud that had appeared to lead them right after the Passover (Exod. 13:21-22). It was a symbol of God's presence and would accompany and direct them throughout their wilderness journeys.

Continual presence (Exod. 40:38). The cloud became a pillar of fire at night, so even then God's presence was visibly represented. God wanted to be with His children, just as He desires to be with us today.

—Keith E. Eggert.

QUESTIONS

1. In what way was the preparation for the building of the tabernacle a community project?
2. When was the tabernacle set up?
3. What purpose was the tabernacle intended to serve in the life of God's people?
4. Why was it important that the tabernacle be constructed in a way to allow for quick assembly?
5. What was the "tent" that made up the tabernacle? What covered it to protect it from weather?
6. What article of furniture went inside the most holy place? What was placed inside this?
7. What did Moses place outside the tabernacle first?
8. What was the other article outside, and what was it used for?
9. What happened as soon as the tabernacle was set up?
10. What did this cloud show?

—Keith E. Eggert.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Biblical obedience requires full commitment to whatever God commands (Exod. 40:16; Deut. 29:29; Josh. 1:8).
2. Everything that God commands has a purpose (Exod. 40:17-19).
3. In the service of God, the details do matter (vss. 20-21).
4. God-pleasing worship is always founded on purity and sacrifice (Exod. 40:29-30; cf. Heb. 10:1-10).
5. The knowledge of God's presence serves as both a comfort and a warning (Exod. 40:34).
6. In every generation, God directs His people (Exod. 40:38; II Tim. 3:16-17).

—Don Kakavecos.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What do all of God's details and all the preparations for the tabernacle indicate about its importance?
2. Why was it important that Moses fully followed God's instructions for setting up the tabernacle?
3. What was the "testimony" that was put into the ark (40:20), and why was it important to have it in the tabernacle (20:1-26; 25:16)?
4. In 40:26-27, Moses is seen carrying out priestly duties. How is this possible if he was not of the priestly line?
5. The representation of God's presence was located in the Old Testament tabernacle. Where does God dwell today (cf. I Cor. 3:10-23; 6:19-20; Eph. 2:20-22)?

—Don Kakavecos.

Golden Text Illuminated

"Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he. And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up" (Exodus 40:16-17).

This is the shining testimony of Moses: "According to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he." Moses was obedient and humble—"meek" in the language of the Torah (cf. Num. 12:3). Here we have the most illustrious figure of the Old Testament, and his greatest quality was that of humble obedience.

This should be a great encouragement to all of us who desire to serve God well. Success in serving the Lord is not to be found in self-promotion or ambitious pursuits that look good on our résumés. It is to be found through humility and unpretentious obedience to God.

The result of humble, patient obedience is the great joy of seeing God's kingdom become a reality and knowing that we had a hand in it. Moses humbly did all that the Lord commanded him, and the tabernacle became a finished reality for God's people.

Just imagine the joy of Moses and the Israelites in seeing the completed tabernacle, with all its meticulous, ornately beautiful workmanship, suddenly invaded by the Shekinah-glory pillar of cloud. That glory was the sign that the presence of Yahweh had come to dwell there, the assurance that the Lord fully approved of their humble obedience.

—John Lody.