

Prayer

All our praise belongs to You, Lord Jesus Christ
Receive it with our thanks.
All the glory in the heavens is Yours, Holy Father
Receive it with our love.
All power and authority in the world is Yours Holy Spirit
Use it as You will.
We praise You Lord God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Amen.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Church Unity

This subject often crops up in our studies because the Bible frequently speaks about God's people as one, whether in the Old or New Testaments. Pray for the unity of God's people.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the swine flu pandemic; for the ill, and for health services*
- *Pray for scientists who assess the phenomenon of 'global warning'*
- *Give thanks for neighbours, friends, and people you meet regularly*

Meditation

The beauty of life is variety,
and the endless diversity of what may be found on earth.
God save us from human greed,
and the way it destroys everything that is good in our world.

The wonder of life is love,
and its wondrous link to bearing children, and family life.
God save us from demeaning sex,
and the immense damage it does both to people and society.

The marvel of life is learning,
and the truth that motivated people have incredible potential.
God save us from poor education
and the limits it places on vast numbers of people in the world.

The miracle of life is faith,
and the fact that most people living know that a God must exist.
God save us from blinkered secularism
and its failure to give a moral basis for a life of peace and love!

The expectation of life is the future,
And the awesome destiny Christ offers to each through His love.
God save us from failing to pass on
The amazing truth that Christ waits to greet us in His heaven!

Bible Study - Exodus 40 (selected texts 40:1,2, 12-21, 33-38)

¹ The LORD said to Moses: ² Set up the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting on the first day of the first month.

¹² Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, wash them with water, ¹³ clothe Aaron with the sacred vestments, and anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as priest. ¹⁴ Bring his sons as well and put tunics on them, ¹⁵ and anoint them as you anointed their father, so that they may serve me as priests: their anointing will admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout all generations to come.

¹⁶ Moses did everything just as the LORD had commanded him. ¹⁷ In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the Tabernacle was set up. ¹⁸ Moses set up the tabernacle; he laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars; ¹⁹ and he spread the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent over it; as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁰ He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat on top of the ark; ²¹ and he brought the ark into the Tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant; as the LORD had commanded Moses ... ³³ He set up the court around the Tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.

³⁵ Moses was unable to go in to the Tent of Meeting because the cloud settled on it and the Glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.

³⁶ Whenever the cloud lifted up from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; ³⁷ but if the cloud was not lifted up, then they did not journey until such time as it was lifted up. ³⁸ So it was that the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of the entire family of Israel, on each stage of their journey.

Review

The conclusion of the book of Exodus comes as something of an anti-climax. From chapter 35 to 39, we read virtually the same information found in chapters 25 to 31, and the vision of the Tabernacle and the priesthood described in the earlier chapters are now put into effect and made by the people of Israel, in particular by the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab (31:2,36:1f.). In the last chapter of Exodus (40), Moses finally assembled the Tabernacle according to the Lord's instructions and ordained his brother Aaron to the priesthood so that he could serve the Lord in the Tent of Meeting.

So there is almost nothing within this reading (before verse 34) that tells us more than what we already know, apart from the timing of construction, on the first day of the year, one year after leaving Egypt (40:17). All the details of the Tabernacle construction together with Aaron's vestments and ordination can be found in at least two other places within the second half of Exodus, and Moses' work in putting it all together simply confirms that the work has been done properly and according to God's instructions. The state of the Covenant between the Lord and Israel after the making of the golden calf (32:1f.) was perilous, so the completion of this vision was a miracle of God's grace, and doubtless a cause of rejoicing, but we do not read about any reaction to this from the Israelites. The end of Exodus does not focus on the Israelites, but on God Himself.

The climax of the chapter comes as God consents to come and dwell in His Tabernacle, His 'Tent of Meeting' after everything had been prepared and set in place. The same cloud that had been seen on the top of Sinai, had led the people of Israel out of Egypt (13:21f.) and through the Red Sea (14:19f.), now came to 'dwell' in the midst of His people to lead them to their Promised Land. Moreover, the cloud had the same properties noticed earlier; it was a cloud by day, and at night, people could see a fire inside it (40:38), just as the Israelites had seen when they left Egypt (13:21f, 14:24).

If we want to understand this passage, we must remember that the book of Exodus is a story on an epic scale, and its end will make sense if we reflect on how far the people of Israel had come since its beginning. In the first two chapters of Exodus, the descendants of Jacob's family had lost touch with their God, and they had called out for help in the midst of their slavery, as any oppressed people might do. Exodus 2:23 indicates that the people barely knew to whom they were calling for help, yet God, the God of their forefathers heard them. He had already set in motion a plan to use one man named Moses (2:10), to lead them out of their slavery by miracles and acts of power (Exodus 12), and then forge them into a nation. Israel was shaped firstly by these redeeming acts of God, and then in the rigours of their flight from Pharaoh and the Egyptian army (Exodus 13,14). Finally, they were established through their worship of the Living God at the foot of Mount Sinai and their receipt of His commandments.

The story of Exodus is full of drama and symbolism, and consequently, Israel was given the essential instructions for its future national life and its witness to the God of earth and heaven. To this day, Jewish people use the Law given to Moses as the basis of their faith in God. Christians find in this great book the essential evidence of God's redeeming and saving work, which points to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Both believe that in the revelation of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), God has made known the basic moral truths that undergird the Universe He has made. Exodus cannot be underestimated.

At the end of Exodus, these essential truths are established in a living community that has a future and a purpose. God's plans for the world would have no meaning unless they were made real within the life of a community, and although this community would prove to be an unreliable vehicle for God's saving and redeeming power, it was sufficient to give the background and legacy of godliness that gave birth to God's Son, the Messiah. Exodus is an essential part of the historic record of our faith.

Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- When was the Tabernacle set up and when did the people of Israel leave Egypt?
- What was the meaning of God's coming to fill the Tabernacle?

Notes on the text and translation

- V2** ***'set up the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting'** Here, the word 'Tabernacle' and the phrase 'Tent of Meeting' mean the same thing. The clue to this is in the words themselves, because the word 'Tabernacle' means 'dwelling place', and obviously, one goes to meet God where He dwells. The connection between the two is obvious in Hebrew, but less so in English.*
- V20** ***'he took the Testimony'** Many Bible versions say the 'Covenant' here, but the Hebrew word is different from 'covenant', and it refers to the tablets of the testimony, the two stones on which the Ten Commandments were written. They formed the evidence, the 'testimony' of the covenant between God and His people.*
- V36** ***'...on each stage of their journey.'** The Hebrew says here 'in all their setting forth'. The implication of this is that this happened every times they set out on each stage of their journey, as I have translated. Incidentally, the Hebrew for 'setting out' means 'pulling up the tent pegs'! The word itself reminds us of the origins of the Israelites in a nomadic lifestyle (from the days of Abraham).*
- V37** ***'... until such time as it was lifted up.'** The Hebrew says '... as far as the day it was lifted' There is no special emphasis on the word 'day'; in this case it indicates the occasion or time when the cloud lifted.*

Going Deeper

When was the Tabernacle set up and when did the people of Israel leave Egypt?

Moses completed the Tabernacle when everything was ready and all the pieces were made. He ordained Aaron and his sons to work in the courtyard and the Tabernacle tent (40:12-14) and he methodically placed all the pieces of it together (40:16f.) according to the vision he had received (Exodus 25-31). What Moses did was not functionary, it was also symbolic; all the pieces had been made separately, but as they were constructed, their fitting together verified the vision. When the whole complex was complete, God gave His approval and blessing by coming to live in the house made for Him (40:34f.).

Now the day on which the Tabernacle was completed was the first day of the second year after the people had left Egypt (12:2f.). There are a number of references in scripture to the time sequence of what happened when the Israelites came out of Egypt (see also Numbers 9:12f. and Exodus 23:15f.), so it is hard to be exact about what happened when. However, it seems that just as we date things today from the birth of Jesus (OAD, at least, in theory), the ancient Israelites began their national life by dating everything from when they left Egypt; the first day of the first year (12:2). This understanding is now reinforced by what we read here, for our passage says that the Tabernacle was constructed exactly one year later; 'in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month.' Everything points to the Passover and the construction of the Tabernacle as being the founding, perhaps the 'starting points' of the Israelite year and also symbolically of their national identity and purpose under God.

Later on in the Old Testament, we read from time to time about 'New Year' festivals. The prophets often speak about them in derogatory terms. It is likely that what was happening was this. The Israelites slowly succumbed to accepting the pagan practices of other nations that had alternative 'New Year' festivals, probably signifying other pagan practices. The prophets were furious at the abandonment of the incredibly important practice of the Passover at the beginning of the Jewish 'New Year'; even though this took place at a different 'time of the year' from the general social practices of later times, such as the later Greek or Roman calendars. The redeeming acts of God and His presence with the people should have been the focus of Israel's faith for eternity.

What was the meaning of God's coming to fill the Tabernacle?

The glory of God came down to fill the Tabernacle (40:34-38) from the height of Sinai in a great demonstration of divine blessing. So it is surprising for us find that when God's glory came, Moses was unable to go into the tent (40:35). At this point, we should recall that 'the Tent of Meeting' meant the Tabernacle tent itself, divided into two rooms; the 'Holy Place' containing the Table of the Bread of the Presence, the incense altar and the seven branched candlestick, and the 'Most Holy Place' containing the Ark, covered by the 'mercy seat' and cast with two gold cherubim. We must assume that what is described here was simply what happened on this occasion, because in years to come, the High Priests would serve God in these same places. So what did this mean, and why could Moses not go into the Tent? He had been inside the cloud already when on the mountain top of Sinai, and he had met God (although not 'seen' Him face to face on the mountain).

It is possible that the ban on Moses symbolised the divine possession of the tent, a possession that was exclusive and meant that not even Moses could enter. One commentary I read likened this to the hand over of a home from a builder to an occupant, but it means more than this. God needed the people of Israel to worship Him in the future, not Moses; Moses was the servant, and if Moses had been able to enter the tent at this most symbolic of moments, there may have been a danger that the people would have begun to equate Moses with their divine God. It is possible that some had already begun to think in this way, especially after Moses' coming down from the mountain with his face 'shining' (see the reaction of the people when they saw Moses' shining in 34:30f.). God's exclusive possession of the Tabernacle after its construction was not a rejection of Moses but the clear evidence that God would not be usurped even by implication.

From this time onwards, only the High Priest would serve Almighty God from within the Holy Place. The practice established and described in Leviticus was that once a year, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the people of God (Leviticus 16). Little detail is given in Exodus of the ritual practices developed for the people of Israel, apart from the general instructions found in Exodus 29. This task is given to the book of Leviticus; the book that describes the duties of the 'Levites' in their service of God and of the people.

The book of Exodus comes to an end with the glory of God residing with His people; it was a defining moment in the life of God's people.

Application

One of the great joys of attempting to read through the whole Bible and study it in depth is that in the process, we look at the story of God's work in the world with a broad perspective. Many good Christian people are uncertain about how the different stories of the Old Testament fit together, for example, and would be hard pushed to place Abraham, Moses, David and Elijah in any date order, for example. Yet by remembering that the book of Exodus describes the forming of a nation out of the descendants of Jacob (and Isaac and Abraham), we place an important perspective on everything we read. It is crucial for the Christian witness to say with accuracy that God has revealed Himself systematically and logically over the centuries, leading up to the time of Christ.

Again and again in Exodus, we realise that a particular revelation of God described is the first such revelation recorded in Scripture. Here in our passage today, the awesome truth of God's dwelling or 'abiding' with His people is set out with respect and awe. The details of God's Tent, His 'Tabernacle' have been set out in a vision and then made; God's Covenant with His people has been tested and found capable of withstanding the stress of human sin; the visible presence of God (in the cloud and fire) has come into the midst of the people and is no longer distant. In addition, the chosen people of God are moulded into one nation, with unity of purpose and intent. All this signals God's intent to be with His people in Christ, to be faithful to us despite our sin, and to work with His people in the world to achieve His goals.

There are many places within Exodus where we can find inspiration to help us as God's people today, but this last chapter of Exodus reminds us of some vital truths. God is faithful and longs to be with His people as they work to do His will and become fruitful; and if we are obedient to Him, then we will enjoy His presence and be empowered for all that lies ahead. Our faith is not a concoction of spiritual lifestyle options, but the truth of real life lived for God.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What was the purpose of the priesthood and the its service in the Tent of the Meeting?
2. Discuss - Imagine yourself to be an Israelite who has been through the experience of the Exodus; what would the Tabernacle mean to you?

3. What difference does the cloud of God's presence make to the Tabernacle? What does it mean for God to dwell amongst His people?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have found that studying the book of Exodus has been immensely rewarding. If you have stayed with these studies since I first began them in 2007, then you have been exceptionally faithful to these studies. There is something in Exodus about what we might call 'stickability' today. It is an epic story encompassing the immense themes of God's compassion and love for His people and His desire to work with them for a purpose. This means a great deal to me, because as I read about God's revelation of Himself in this book, I am reminded that the God who has made our world is the God who I have met in Jesus. He has fulfilled and made sense of this great story, and He has made God's redeeming love real for me, just as it was made real to the people of Israel so many years ago.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Take the opportunity to reflect on what you know of the book of Exodus. What great themes stand out to you? Make a list of what comes to mind, and use this as an aid to our own reflection on the good things God has done for you.*
- *Pray for the church of God, that it might continually rediscover its heritage in God's Word. Pray that preachers and people alike will actively have faith that God will reveal Himself through every part of Scripture, including those parts (even in Exodus) that seem on the surface to be difficult to understand!*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord God; give us courage to face what is wrong and evil in this world, and not shirk our responsibility before You to deal with it both in word and deed. If and when we face evil, give us the right words to say and a deep trust in You, so that we may defeat the enemy and stand triumphant over all that is evil. May Your glory be shown: ALLELUIA!

Full Text

¹ The LORD said to Moses: ² Set up the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting on the first day of the first month. ³ You shall put in it the ark of the covenant, and you shall screen the ark with the curtain. ⁴ You shall bring in the table, and arrange its setting; and you shall bring in the lampstand, and set up its lamps. ⁵ You shall put the golden altar for incense before the ark of the covenant, and set up the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. ⁶ You shall set the altar of burnt offering before the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, ⁷ and place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. ⁸ You shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen for the gate of the court. ⁹ Then you shall take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it shall become holy. ¹⁰ You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, so that the altar shall be most holy. ¹¹ You shall also anoint the basin with its stand, and consecrate it. ¹² Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, wash them with water, ¹³ clothe Aaron with the sacred vestments, and anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as priest. ¹⁴ Bring his sons as well and put tunics on them, ¹⁵ and anoint them as you anointed their father, so that they may serve me as priests: their anointing will admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout all generations to come.

¹⁶ Moses did everything just as the LORD had commanded him. ¹⁷ In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the Tabernacle was set up. ¹⁸ Moses set up the tabernacle; he laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars; ¹⁹ and he spread the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent over it; as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁰ He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat on top of the ark; ²¹ and he brought the ark into the Tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant; as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²² He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the curtain, ²³ and set the bread in order on it before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁴ He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, ²⁵ and set up the lamps before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁶ He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the curtain, ²⁷ and offered fragrant incense on it; as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁸ He also put in place the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. ²⁹ He set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³⁰ He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, ³¹ with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. ³² When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed; as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³³ He set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.

³⁵ Moses was unable to go in to the Tent of Meeting because the cloud settled on it and the Glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.

³⁶ Whenever the cloud lifted up from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; ³⁷ but if the cloud was not lifted up, then they did not journey until such time as it was lifted up. ³⁸ So it was that the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of the entire family of Israel, on each stage of their journey.