

Bible Study # 69 Exodus 40.1–38 04–27–2021

As Exodus draws to a close and the instructions for the completion of the Tent of Meeting and all associated items having been fulfilled, these verses set out the manner in which the elements came together to form the central worship system of Israel. Several factors are important:

1. Not only had the LORD given the directions to Moses and his associates regarding the making of the various items, but he also proceeded to instruct regarding setting up of the individual items.
2. Anointing marked the setting apart of the items and of the formal institution of the priesthood. In its religious usage, the verb ‘anoint’ designated the separation of something or some person for God’s service. God was the authorizing agent, even though some intermediary performed the action, as Moses did here.
3. The note as to the timing of these happenings is significant. Twice it is written that it was set up on the first day of the first month [in the second year] (vs. 2 and 17). This means that the construction work had taken approximately half a year. The Israelites had arrived at Sinai in the third month after leaving Egypt (19:1). About nine months had elapsed between that time and the first day of the second year when the work was handed over to Moses.

If the days that Moses spent on Sinai (24:18; 34:28) and the time for giving the law (19:1–24:11) are deducted, that leaves about six months for the construction work itself. There is no mention of how long it took to assemble the whole sanctuary. The reference to finishing it on the first day of the first month seems to be a deliberate echo of Genesis 8:13 that records the drying up of the ground after the flood. The dates both marked the commencement of new eras in the life of God’s people.

4. The obedience of Moses to God’s directions is featured prominently. See the repetition of this refrain eight more times in vs. 16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, and 32). In contrast to the earlier rebellion against the LORD’s commands (chap. 32), complete obedience occurred. Precise fulfilment of the requirements was necessary, both because they were divine instructions and because they pointed forward to the blessings to come under the new covenant. They were ‘external regulations applying until the time of the new order’ (Heb. 9:10).
5. This is not a plan of salvation, but a reminder of how we should live in relationship with God. The point made earlier regarding the connection with the creation account in Genesis is reinforced by the final words of verse 33: ‘And so Moses finished the work’. This is so close to the description of God’s creative actions: ‘By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing’. Eden had been God’s sanctuary, as had Sinai. Now a movable shrine became the place where God met with his people, to be replaced later by the temple that Solomon would build. At each stage the relationship between God and His people was marred by human sin. The ultimate fulfilment will be when there is no temple in the new heavenly Jerusalem because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be its temple. No impure person will enter in, for this will be the final dwelling place of God and his redeemed people (Rev. 21:3–4, 22–27).

The book of Exodus reaches its conclusion with reference to the visible signs of God’s presence with his people. On their journey to Sinai the cloud had led them (Exod. 13:21–22), it had descended on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:9, 16; 24:15–16), and on the temporary place of meeting outside the main camp (Exod. 33:9–10).

Now it covered the Tent of Meeting, as it stood ready for use. It was also going to fulfil a similar function as the journey to Canaan continued with many new arrangements for worship and service in place.

V. 34 continues on from the final sentence of verse 33. As Moses' work was completed, so the cloud came down on the Tent of Meeting in confirmation of this. The dwelling-place, the Tent of Meeting, the sanctuary, whatever precise term is used in any passage, denoted not just the symbolic presence of God but contained it. It was his house, and to it his people were invited on specified occasions as guests.

The 'glory' is not defined but was probably some awesome glow in daylight, but it appeared as fire by night (cf. Exod. 13:20–22; 14:24).

At this very preliminary stage, even Moses was prohibited from entering the tent. What had now transpired was God's response to his request in 33:15–16. Later records show how the priestly ministry functioned from this point onwards. The manifestation of God's glory was testimony to His acceptance of the completed sanctuary and the subsequent worship that would be carried out there.

The book of Exodus began with the Israelites seemingly bereft of God's presence and his help in their slavery. The conclusion is portrayed differently in vs. 36–38 portrayed. They now had the visible sign of his presence, not just apparent to the priests but to the people as a whole (v. 38, 'in the sight of all the house of Israel').

God's glory was manifest, with the assurance that his presence was on-going. The decision to move camp was not a human decision, but a divine one, and this applied whether the stay at any place was short or long (see Num. 9:15–23).

Some details of matters before the setting up of the sanctuary, and some later ones, are recorded in the following books of the Pentateuch. However, what is so significant is that Exodus ends with the God of glory present with his redeemed people, Israel.

He had brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and now confirmed his approval of the construction of the sanctuary and the assurance of his abiding presence. Later biblical history will record not only the repeated sinfulness of the people but also the continuing faithfulness of their covenant LORD.

We have come to the end of our study of Exodus. This old man is going to take several days of vacation. I will begin a new Facebook Bible Study on Monday, May 3, 2021. Our next study will be First Corinthians, Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, a congregation which faced challenges within and without. I think the problems they faced has much to teach the church and individual Christians today. I invite you to join this study and also to share it with others. **Grow in God by Growing in the Holy Scriptures and service to God and Others!**
Pastor Milan Weerts