



Exodus - Chapter Forty

II. Exodus 19:1-40:38 - The Covenant at Sinai (continues/concludes)

II.g Exodus 35:1-40:38 - The Tabernacle: Preparation for the Presence (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Forty

It was almost one year after the people had left Egypt to them completing the work required for the construction of the tabernacle. Now that work is complete, the tabernacle and its courtyard were erected for the first time. It was to be laid out precisely as the Lord had commanded starting with the Holy of Holies and working outwards. Once everything was in place it was to be anointed with the special oil that had been made for this purpose. After this, Aaron and his sons were washed, dressed in their priestly garments and anointed for their duties.

Once all this had been completed the glory of the Lord came in a cloud and filled the tabernacle so that not even Moses could enter it. From that day on, whenever the glory of the Lord was in the tabernacle then the people would remain encamped. When the Lord's glory lifted from the tabernacle, they could break camp and continue their journey, but the Lord remained with them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to guide them.

II.g.iii Exodus 40:1-33 - The Tabernacle Erected and Its Equipment Installed

The Lord once again speaks to Moses and instructs him as to when and how he is to set up (vv.2-8) and anoint the tabernacle (vv.9-15), and which tasks he then carries out (vv.16-33).

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses: ² On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. 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.

Exodus 40:1-5

On the first day of the first month. This indicates that it was a year since Israel came out of Egypt. This was an amazing year in the history of Israel. They could count the great works of God and measure their own spiritual growth. It is fair to use the passing of time to see how far a believer has come with God. Some Christians never grow much beyond their initial experience with God. Some who have been Christians for ten years have only the maturity of a one-year-old Christian; they simply repeat their first year over and over again.

You shall put in it the ark of the covenant. The tabernacle had to be built and assembled according to the pattern God had shown Moses on the mountain, starting with the one thing that was to be kept in the inner Most Holy Place.

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.

Exodus 40:6-11

You shall set the altar of burnt-offering. Having given instruction for the arrangement of all the items within the tabernacle, the command is now focused on setting up the courtyard and the items that would be kept there.

¹² Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall wash them with water, ¹³ and put on Aaron the sacred vestments, and you shall anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as priest. ¹⁴ You shall bring his sons also and put tunics on them, ¹⁵ and anoint them, as you anointed their father, that

they may serve me as priests: and their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout all generations to come. ¹⁶ Moses did everything just as the Lord had commanded him.

Exodus 40:12-16

The anointing and ordination of Aaron and his sons that is commanded here is described in full in Leviticus Chapters 8 and 9.

Introduction to Exodus 40:17-33

In correspondence to the repeated concluding statements that the people had done all that the Lord had commanded through Moses in constructing the tabernacle and its pieces, this section emphasises that when he erected the tabernacle, Moses did everything according to all that the Lord commanded him; it repeats this at each stage and then states that he finished the work. The people's strict obedience to God's commands demonstrated their repentance after the golden calf disaster and made possible the fulfilment of God's promise to dwell among them; refer to vv.34-38.

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.

Exodus 40:17-19

Moses set up the tabernacle. God had finished commanding how the tabernacle was to be constructed and laid out. Now the work of construction begins.

²⁰ He took the covenant and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy-seat above 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.

Exodus 40:20-21

The Ark of the Covenant is set in the Most Holy Place, and the veil is set in place.

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.

Exodus 40:22-23

The table is set up in the Holy Place and the Bread of the Presence is laid upon it.

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.

Exodus 40:24-25

The lampstand too is placed in the Holy Place in its correct position.

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.

Exodus 40:26-27

Finally, the golden altar that would be used to burn incense was placed in the Holy Place as the Lord had commanded Moses, a phrase used nineteen times in this chapter alone.

²⁸ He also put in place the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle.

Exodus 40:28

The screen was the curtain that prevented anyone in the courtyard from seeing into the Holy Place.

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.

Exodus 40:29

The altar of burnt-offering, made of bronze, and all its utensils were placed in the courtyard outside of the tabernacle ready for the first sacrificial offerings.

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.

Exodus 40:30-32

He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar. The bronze basin was placed in the courtyard to be used by the priests for their ritual cleansing.

When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed. This describes the priestly use of the bronze basin. They could not properly perform their duties without a ritual cleansing, indicating that God wanted service from pure hands and feet.

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.

Exodus 40:33

So Moses finished the work. When the tabernacle was finally assembled, it was an earthly model of a heavenly reality. Since Moses was instructed to build and arrange everything according to pattern, it is not surprising that elements of this tabernacle arrangement in the Bible's descriptions of heaven are revealed:

- In Revelation 4:1-6, the Ark of the Covenant, representing the throne of God, the lampstand, and the basin all correspond to a heavenly reality.
- In Revelation 8:2-4, the altar of incense in heaven is mentioned.
- In Isaiah 6:1-7, the tabernacle structure is implied by the mention of the temple, and the brazen altar is described.
- In Hebrews 9:23-24, it states that at some point in time after the Cross Jesus entered the heavenly reality represented on earth by the tabernacle, and appeared in the presence of God to offer a perfect atonement for the sins of everyone. Therefore, every time before this event, when the High Priest made atonement in the earthly tabernacle, it was merely a rehearsal, looking forward to the perfect atonement the Son of God would offer.

II.g.iv Exodus 40:34-38 - The Cloud and the Glory

The repetition in the narrative of these verses emphasises the point that the Lord is present with all his glory in the midst of his people: there was to be the tent of meeting where the Lord's presence was signified by the cloud and fire, so that they might be sanctified by the glory of the Lord and know that he was their God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt in order that he might dwell among them.

When Solomon built the temple: *<<a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord>>* (1 Kings 8:10b-11), echoing these verses.

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Exodus 40:34-35

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Obviously, God was pleased with the obedience of Israel. This was not so much because it showed his superiority over them, but it was more so because it proved they really did believe him and love him. There is a real and significant connection between the continually mentioned obedience of Moses and Israel, ‘as the Lord had commanded Moses’, and this remarkable display of glory; no one should not think that Moses or Israel earned this display of glory because of their obedience; yet their obedience welcomed it.

This is an enduring principle. No one earns their rescue, and God does not love a person more when they obey him. Yet, undeniably, when one walks in God’s light and truth, there is blessing. Proverbs 3:5-6 speaks beautifully to this: <<Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths>>.

Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it. The same thing happened when Solomon completed and dedicated the temple, the glory of God so filled the temple they could not stay in it (1 Kings 8:10-11). Without the glory, it was just a fancy tent. The same could be said of a church, of a home, or of the human heart.

³⁶ Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; ³⁷ but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

Exodus 40:36-38

Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey. This is beautiful evidence that God did answer Moses’ prayer in 33:14. God’s presence was with Israel, despite the golden calf debacle. The book ends with the fulfilment of the promise of 29:45. Yahweh is living among his people: the theology of the presence of God has become the fact of his presence.

At each stage of their journey. The Book of Exodus ends with great hope and trust in God. Although Israel was in the middle of a desolate desert, had fierce enemies in the Promised Land, and was weak and liable to sin and rebellion, God was with them. This gave them great cause for faith and confidence. To speak of a journey is to look for an arrival: <<*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ*>> (Philippians 1:6). The goal is to finish the race.