

## HIS PRESENCE

Exodus 39:42-43, 40:1-4,34-38

As we conclude the study of the Exodus, we see a time period of a little more than eighty years beginning when the Egyptians were seeking to limit the growth of the Israelite population which happened about the time Moses was born. Israel and his sons had moved to Egypt 215 years before the Exodus. It was during the last 116 years of this time they had been enslaved by the Egyptians. During the 215-year period they had grown from seventy direct descendants of Jacob (one daughter, 12 sons, plus grandsons) to either 600,000 men or (as some have suggested) to 600 families.

During the period of time of fifty weeks since they crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites had experienced many miracles that included provisions of water and food, they had been offered a covenant which they had broken by committing idolatry, they had been given the Law of Moses and the pattern for a dwelling place for God. They had made all the parts of the Tabernacle where the presence of God would abide and the time had come that on their first anniversary (the first day of the first month of the second year) of becoming a “nation” they were ready to set up this temporary dwelling place for God for the first time.

### Finished – 39:42-43

<sup>42</sup> So the sons of Israel did all the work according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>43</sup> And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the LORD had commanded, this they had done. So Moses blessed them. Exodus 39:42-43 (NASB95)

Apparently, all the work that was done to make all the items that pertained to the Tabernacle was performed while the assembly was encamped near the base of Mount Sinai in Horeb. They arrived there the first day of the third month and approximately three months later the work would have begun to gather the contributions with which to make the Tabernacle and all the various furnishings. About seven months later, the project had been completed and the assembly of all the parts could begin.

All of us have purchased items and when they arrive we sometimes see the dreaded comment on the box “some assembly required.” The instructions will usually start out with a strong suggestion to make sure all the parts and pieces are there. This is somewhat like the idea of what happened prior to the erection of the Tabernacle. Moses checked out all the work that various people had done to make sure that it was done as the Lord had commanded him. This inspection was important since all the parts made by multiple craftsmen needed to properly fit together to create this dwelling place for God.

We can make a logical jump from the physical parts and pieces that defined the Tabernacle to a spiritual consideration that the members of a church body need to fit together properly so that it functions as God intended it to operate.

We could come up with many lessons to be learned from what happened in this physical example that could be applied to the church today. The first and perhaps the most obvious lesson is that a pattern needed to be followed and that the right materials were to be used. For the Tabernacle, Hebrews eight tells us that the pattern was based on the true tabernacle in heaven and the physical expression was said to be a “shadow and example” of that spiritual reality. For us, the perfect example and pattern is Christ and we follow the Way He has shown us and that was the way of self-sacrificing love ultimately expressed on the cross. As we emulate Him we also die and are reborn so that we have the right “composition” to be incorporated into the spiritual tabernacle.

In the physical realm, the component parts were inspected or examined to make sure that they were, in fact, made of the right materials and properly fashioned to do the appointed work for which they were created. This examination would imply that someone literally knew and was familiar with the pattern and understood the function of each part. Moses had been on the mountain and had seen the pattern and he was used in this step of accountability to ensure that what went into the makeup of the Tabernacle would function properly and had the right appearance. In the church, Paul made specific comments regarding deacons and elders being examined to make sure that they met the requirements outlined in the Scriptures for these offices. By implication (since God is not a respecter of persons and shows no partiality), every position of ministry in the church has requirements and those who minister should be examined. An obvious question is which members of a local body of believers are exempt from such accountability? The answer could be “those who do not have a ministry in the church.” Let’s examine who might these people be who do not have a ministry.

As we can learn from the Scriptural account of the materials that were donated or offered to the Lord, none of these could be immediately used or incorporated into the Tabernacle. The materials were given and they were just stacked up and nothing was happening to them and they were not fulfilling any function related to building a dwelling place for God other than being available.

How many times have we said (or have heard others say) that all we need to do is be available and God will use us? How did the materials offered for the Tabernacle actually become useful? A skilled person was appointed to bring together a team of persons and train them to pick out the appropriate materials and fashion the raw materials into a finished product. The skilled person had to be aware of the object that was needed and be able to recognize what raw materials would be useful to be shaped or fabricated to meet that need. If a pole was needed to carry the Ark of the Covenant, then the appropriate raw material would be a long piece of wood and not a piece of leather that would (otherwise) be used as a covering.

In dealing with people as the raw materials that can be fashioned into useful parts of the “tabernacle” (church) there is an additional factor of these “raw materials” having a mind of their own and being willing participants in the needed transformation. We could logically argue that this process of taking a basic raw material and using a skilled craftsman to fashion that raw material into something that God can use in the “corporate” dwelling place is what discipleship is about.

Moses then blessed the people who had been working on all the parts of the Tabernacle. It is an important part of accountability to give feedback and we do a fairly good job of giving feedback when things are not done well, but we are sometimes neglectful to provide praise (blessing) when things are done well.

#### Assembly Required – 40:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> “On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. <sup>3</sup> “You shall place the ark of the testimony there, and you shall screen the ark with the veil. <sup>4</sup> “You shall bring in the table and arrange what belongs on it; and you shall bring in the lampstand and mount its lamps. Exodus 40:1-4 (NASB95)

We could title this section as “all the right parts in all the right places.” In these brief four verses we see a portion of all that needed to be done to bring it all together to make a suitable dwelling place for God. The instructions continue on through verse sixteen. In those verses we read about the physical arrangements of all the parts inside (such as the Ark) and outside (such as the curtains that surrounded all of it). Instructions were then given as to how

these parts were to be consecrated for the special purpose of being where God was to dwell among them. Finally, instructions were included regarding how those who were to minister in the Tabernacle were to be washed and clothed.

What we see from this is that not only did God specify how the parts were to be made, He also specified the details of how they were to be assembled, how to set these things apart for sacred use and what special attention and details those who ministered there were to observe. We probably have a tendency to think about applying the lessons from these three areas to the church building and to the ceremonies and rituals that we practice as we come together for corporate worship. That is an appropriate way to think about this; however, it may be more beneficial for us to give consideration of how to apply the lessons to ourselves as individual dwelling places for God. If each of us gets it right on an individual basis, then the corporate aspects will likely work out in the right way also.

Since we have been born again of the Spirit of God, we can have confidence that we have the right material. If we have been learning (being disciples) then we should know how to arrange the various parts of our lives so that we are living according to what pleases God. The Outer Court of the Tabernacle provided a place of sacrifice and offerings that were presented to God on an ongoing basis. A New Testament parallel would be for each of us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice which is our reasonable service of worship. We could think of the altar as an interface of our interaction with the world and with the Kingdom of God. Many times the opportunity to “sacrifice” is when we take up our cross and endure hardships from the world for the sake of Christ.

There was also provision for cleansing just prior to going into the Holy Place in recognition of how special and set apart that part of our lives is. The priest in the Old Covenant would literally wash off any dirt in the laver which was positioned just before the entrance to the Holy Place. We, as priests unto God, can engage in what Paul called “washing as with water by the word of God.” Meditating on God’s word and measuring philosophies that we encounter by the standard of the Word of God has a way of cleaning up our thoughts and attitudes.

As we enter the Holy Place which is more insulated from the world we discover the Menorah which we can relate to the light of understanding that comes from the Living Word of God. We also see the Table of Bread in this Holy Place where we can be spiritually nourished in preparation for our time of fellowship with God. All the while we sense the special stimulus of the odor of the incense that comes from the same fire that consumed our sacrifice and now rises as our prayers and petitions and praises to God Who is there in the inmost being of our very lives.

We find him at the center of the Tabernacle which would be parallel to the heart of “who we are” and He is atop the seat of mercy which is covering the words of the vows of our relations which are now engraved upon our hearts and have become part of who we are.

After the instructions were given, Moses then lead in the actual work of the initial set up of the Tabernacle which was reported in verses 17-33.

### Glory Shown – 40:34-35

<sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:34-35 (NASB95)

In Exodus 25:8 we see the first mention of God’s intent to dwell with His people. This intent is mentioned again in 29:45 in the form of a declarative statement (a promise) that says “And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.” This promise was

fulfilled immediately upon the completion of the Tabernacle as the cloud moved to cover the “tent” which can be assumed to be the entirety of the area enclosed by the fence panels. The glory was apparently a separate manifestation from the cloud and it filled the “tabernacle.” This may be a reference to the enclosure of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

The radiant glory of God apparently did not always appear in the cloud that represented the presence of God. This aura was seen at special times and perhaps marked special occasions such as the initial filling of the tent of the congregation and the Tabernacle by God. The fact that not even Moses could enter the area of the cloud (even though he had previously entered the cloud on the mountain) can be interpreted as meaning that even the most righteous among them (exemplified by Moses) did not have the capability of viewing the “unveiled majesty” of God.

Some commentaries have noted that this was apparently a dark cloud which tended to hide the glory of God as in a mystery as characteristic of the Old Testament times. This is contrasted with the cloud that Peter, James and John experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration which was a bright cloud that would point to the coming unveiling of the glory that would be associated with the completed work of Christ in which He entered into the holy place not made with hands. Now He has opened the way for us to draw near with confidence into the very presence of God.

The parallel of the filling of the tent of the assembly and the Tabernacle with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is obvious. God is dwelling within us individually and manifests His presence in all that we do as He fulfills His promise to be our God.

#### God Led – 40:36-38

<sup>36</sup> Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; <sup>37</sup> but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. <sup>38</sup> For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel. Exodus 40:36-38 (NASB95)

The obvious message is that God provided leadership and direction for their journey to the Promised Land. Simply stated, they followed the leadership of the manifested presence of God. This presence provided the Tabernacle with protection from the burning sun by day and gave light during times of darkness. It was positioned so that all the people of Israel who were encamped around the Tabernacle could see it.

In Roman 8:14 Paul wrote, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” The presence of the Spirit of God in the life of each believer is still guiding us along life’s journey to the ultimate destination of inheriting the promise of God.