

Exodus – Lesson 28

Erecting the Tabernacle

Read Exodus 39:1-40:38

1. (a) From Exodus 39:1-31, what were the *final* things that Bezalel and the other workers made? Why were they *last*?

The final things that Bezalel had made were the garments to be worn by the high priests as they ministered in the tabernacle. It is logical that these should be made last: the *final* act of building, once the tabernacle was complete, would be to robe those who would serve in it and send them in to do their jobs. Bezalel leaves these robes for last because they become the *final* act of this building project, the actual *use* of the tabernacle for its intended purpose.

- (b) According to Exodus 39:32-43, what did Bezalel and the others *do* with the tabernacle once it was completed? *Why* did they do this?

The final thing they did was to *bring the completed tabernacle to Moses*. Once completed, they brought the *unassembled* tabernacle to Moses *in order that he might inspect it and assure that it was built in accordance with the command of God*. The *final* responsibility for the tabernacle lay with Moses: Moses was the one given the blueprints for the tent and its accoutrements, so *he* would be the one who would *ultimately* have to assure that the tabernacle was built correctly *before God*. Although Bezalel had been given a *delegated* responsibility, Moses was *ultimately* the one who would have to answer to God if anything was wrong. Thus, the workers brought it to him for his blessing.

- (c) Compare the events of Exodus 36-39 to Genesis 1. What *similarities* and *differences* do you find between these events?

The creation account in Genesis 1 is *obviously* different in many details: 1) it is *God himself* who created the world, 2) the creation of the world occurred *ex nihilo*, from nothingness (i.e. the world was simply “spoken” into existence), whereas the tabernacle was formed from pre-existing material, and 3) the creation of the world was a project on a much *grand*er scale. However, the creation account compares similarly to this building project in some ways: 1) in both cases, the *exact details* were determined by God, 2) both “projects” had a specific purpose, specifically, to glorify God, and 3) both projects provided a “place” for God to be worshiped by those he called as his own. The reason for this comparison is this: it is the *express* command of God that *all things* worship him; he is to be glorified above *all things*, and all creatures are to come before God and offer worship to him. The purpose of the creation, therefore, is similar to the purpose of the tabernacle: the world is a place where those formed and called by God can worship him and glorify him (see Romans 11:36). The tabernacle, while nowhere as grand as the universe, holds a similar function. It is a place where the children of Israel could gather together as a people formed and called by God to worship him. The tabernacle becomes, then, a significant part of redemptive history, the work of God to *restore* all glory and honor to himself in his creation. Jesus, who “tabernacled” with his own people, becomes the *pinnacle* of this redemptive history, and the original tabernacle *points* to his person and work as the *culmination* of this redemptive history story.

- (d) What does it mean in Exodus 39:43 that Moses “*blessed them?*”

The word “blessed” in this case probably carries the connotation that Moses *thanked* them or *praised* them for the consistent work that they had done. Moses *affirms* his people that they have done what they were called to do, and he thanks and praises them for their effort. This is, of course, appropriate: leadership of *any kind* must be prepared to offer the *encouragement* of thanks to those who work, especially in the church. It is *essential* to good delegation to thank those who do well and have earned a measure of trust in their work.

2. (a) According to Exodus 40:2, on what *day* was the tabernacle to be erected? What *significance* does this day have in the Hebrew calendar (see Exodus 12:1-3)?

The tabernacle was to be erected on the *first day of the first month* of the year. This is the *beginning* of the Hebrew calendar, and aligns with the time when the Hebrews first left Egypt. The great Feast of Unleavened Bread occurs at the beginning of the year, culminating with the Passover celebration. This would be the *most significant* time to erect the tabernacle, since it would signal a connection to *both* the past and the future: the past is celebrated in the Passover (i.e. God's deliverance from bondage) while the future is celebrated in the tabernacle (i.e. the on-going deliverance of God from sin and evil through the sacrifices).

- (b) According to Exodus 40:17, *when* did the tabernacle first go up? How *long* had it been since the Hebrews had left Egypt?

The tabernacle went up on the first day of the first month of the *second* year since the Hebrews had left Egypt; it had been exactly *one year* since the Hebrews had celebrated the inaugural Passover. This implies that it had taken the better part of 8 months to construct the tabernacle, given that approximately 4 months had been used for traveling to Sinai and for Moses to commune with God and receive instructions. Since it does not specifically say *when* the tabernacle construction began, this can only be a guess, but it is logical given the amount of work that would be necessary to build this all-important structure.

3. (a) List the *order* of setting up the tabernacle that God gave to Moses in Exodus 40:1-8.

Moses was instructed to erect the tabernacle in a *logical* order: put up the tent, put the ark in the Holy of Holies, put up the veil to close off the Holy of Holies, put the table, lampstand, and incense altar in the Holy Place (inside the tabernacle), and then set up the outdoor items, the bronze altar and basin and the courtyard curtains.

- (b) Is there any *spiritual* significance to this order?

There is a *spiritual* order here: the *most important* item would be the ark, placed inside the Holy of Holies. This is where the Mercy Seat would be, and where the presence of God would ultimately "reside." The *first* thing to do in erecting the tabernacle would be to establish his holy place, for God's presence was the *central purpose* for the existence of this tent in the first place. All of the other elements were to be in *submission* to his presence: the altar would offer sacrifice to him, the incense would reflect his presence, etc. Thus, Moses was instructed to set up "the place of God" first, and then everything else would follow, which is the pattern of everything in the entire universe.

- (c) What was Moses to do *after* he had set up the tabernacle (see Exodus 40:9-15)? What does it mean to "*anoint*" something with oil?

After the tabernacle was erected, Moses was to "*anoint*" it (and everything in it and around it) by sprinkling the anointing oil on it. This was to "*consecrate it*" so that it would "*become holy.*" To anoint the tabernacle with oil meant to "set it apart," to establish it as something dedicated to the Lord. The sprinkling with oil would *symbolically* signify that this building, and everything in it, was dedicated to the Lord and was to be used for the express purpose of honoring and glorifying God *alone*. It was to have *no other purpose*, and it was to be kept free from any stain of sin. Any sin that "clung" to the tabernacle (figuratively) would be "covered" by the anointing oil, and the tabernacle would become a holy place, separate from sin and evil and useful to a holy God for his holy purposes.

4. Exodus 40:16-33 indicates that “Moses” erected the tabernacle and anointed the priests. Do you think that Moses did this *alone* or had help? Why or why not?

It is unlikely that Moses erected the tabernacle *all by himself*, given the size and weight of the various items that made it up. The amount of gold, silver, and bronze specified in Exodus 38:24-31 would indicate that no single person would have the strength to move all of the components and put this thing up. No, like the previous chapters where Bezalel is given credit for doing all the work, even though he had a team working under him, it is *likely* that Moses had a team who erected the tent and put all of the various items in place. It is *highly likely*, however, that Moses *himself* moved the ark into the Holy of Holies and put the veil into place, given the significance of this part of the tabernacle. But the rest was probably a team effort and Moses was given credit here in the same way that he gave credit to Bezalel for its construction. It is reasonable to assume that the team used Moses to erect the tabernacle in the first place would also be the team that would *disassemble* it and carry it to the next stop on their journey to the Promised Land.

5. What *happened* to the tabernacle once it was erected (see Exodus 40:34-38)? Why was this to be a sign to the Hebrews to move or to remain camped?

Once the tabernacle was erected and anointed, the “presence” of God filled the tabernacle, in the visible forms of a cloud by day and fire by night. God had said that this would be a place where he would “reside” with the people. So, now that it has been constructed, God takes up his “residence” in this place. This is, of course, a *visible* manifestation of the presence of God with the people, and a keeping of the promise that God had made with them when he freed them from Egypt. However, when the cloud was “*taken up*” from the tabernacle, that became a sign to the Hebrews to move on to their next destination. The picture is of God *leading* the Israelites from place to place: they were not following a human leader (like Moses or Joshua), but were following God *himself* as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land. As God “got up” to leave, so the Israelites would break camp and follow him to the next stop along the way.