

THE DEDICATION OF THE TABERNACLE, THE CENTRE OF WORSHIP: EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD EXODUS 40:16–38

Introduction

Man is made to worship God. When man fails to worship God fails to worship God in the right way — his soul becomes empty, void of purpose. Man's soul begins to hunger and thirst after purpose, after meaning and significance. The only way a person's soul can be filled and fruitful is to worship God in the right way. If there is any one message man needs to heed, it is the truth just stated: "The only way a person's soul can be filled and fruitful is to worship God and to worship God in the right way." This is the reason God gave the Tabernacle to Israel, so they could worship Him and He could dwell among them...

- filling them with the fullness of life
- guiding and protecting them as they journeyed to the promised land

But there was another reason why God gave the Tabernacle to Israel: He wanted the Tabernacle to be a picture, a shadow of Christ. He wanted us to look at the Tabernacle and seek out its fulfilment in Christ. God intended that the Tabernacle of Moses benefit not only the people of Moses' day, but us as well. Now, even today, the lessons and symbolism of the Tabernacle speak to the hearts of believers. The ministry of Jesus Christ leaps from the Tabernacle, its priesthood, and all of its furnishings leaps and causes us to focus our worship upon God. This is the subject of this final portion of Scripture from the book of Exodus. It is the great climax to one of the most exciting stories in all of Scripture: *The Assembly and Dedication of the Tabernacle, the Centre of Worship: Experiencing the Presence of the LORD*, Exodus 40:1-38.

I. The instructions of the LORD (vv. 1 -15).

II. The obedience of Moses: he did everything God commanded (vv. 16-33).

III. The response of the LORD (vv. 34-38).

I. *Exodus 40:16–33 The Obedience of Moses in Setting up the Tabernacle*

There was the obedience of Moses; he did everything God commanded. This is one of the major points and themes of this chapter: obedience to God. Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded. Note that his obedience is mentioned eight times, after each major step of setting up the Tabernacle (vv. 16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). The wisdom behind God's choice of Moses is seen time and again in this portion of Scripture. God did not need...

- a man who wavered back and forth
 - a man who might or might not follow instructions
 - a man who might or might not finish the job
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God needed a man just like Moses, a man who would be faithful and obey Him, a man who would follow instructions. God needed a man who would do exactly what God said. Moses was such a man.

1. Moses set up the Tabernacle exactly according to God's instructions: on the first day of the first month in the second year of their wilderness wanderings (vv. 17-19). Moses constructed the bases, the frames, the crossbars and the posts (v. 18). He then spread the tent over the Tabernacle and put the covering over the tent. Note that he did all this just as God commanded (v. 19).

Thought 1. It is very significant that the Tabernacle was the first thing God had Moses set up. Before God's glory could come, before His presence could dwell with men, before sacrifices could be made for sins, the Tabernacle had to be built. This was also true of Jesus Christ. Before He went to the cross and made an atonement for our sins, before He put His glory in us, Christ was born and came to "tabernacle" (dwell) with us. According to Strong's Concordance, Jesus Christ figuratively "encamped" with us. Jesus Christ resided with us "as God did in the tabernacle of old, a symbol of protection and communion." (James Strong. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.) There had to be a Tabernacle in place before God could do anything else.

John 1:14-16 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Isa 7:14 *Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

Isa 9:6 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Luke 1:31 *"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus."*

2. Moses then placed the Testimony [the Ten Commandments] in the Ark, attached the poles, and placed the Mercy Seat on the top (v. 20). Note once again the great importance of these furnishings: the Ark and the Mercy Seat were the centre for the worship of God. A special manifestation of God's presence and glory rested right above the Ark and Mercy Seat. The Ark symbolized God's presence: His rule and reign and His mercy. The fact that mercy flowed out from the presence of God is significant: this meant that man could find the mercy and help of God by coming into God's presence, by coming to the Tabernacle. The Mercy Seat pointed to the perfect demonstration of God's mercy and grace, the giving of His Son to die for the sins of the world.

Heb 4:15-16 *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Titus 2:11 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.*

2 Tim 3:5 *Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

Titus 3:5-6 *Not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

3. Moses placed the Ark in the Tabernacle (v. 21). He then hung the inner curtain and shielded the Ark of Testimony just as God commanded (v. 21). As everyone looked on, imagine the emotions that filled the hearts of the people. This would be the *last time* that Bezalel, the builder of the Ark, would ever see the Ark again. The crowning achievement of his life was being forever hid from his sight. The other workers looked on, marvelling at the beauty of the gold-covered chest. For them it would also be a final gaze as Moses hid the Ark from view. From now on, as long as the Ark remained in the Holy of Holies, only one man would be able to see the Ark and live: the High Priest. Note that Moses did all this just as God commanded (v. 21).

Thought 1. It is through the ministry of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, that we now have access to the very throne of God. In His name we come through the veil and gaze upon the glory of God.

Mt. 27:51 *At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split.*

John 10:9 *“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Heb 6:19 *We have this hope [the hope of heaven and of God’s acceptance] as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.*

Eph 2:18 *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

Eph 3:12 *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

Heb 10:19-20 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.*

4. Moses placed the Table of Show-bread in the Tent of Meeting or Tabernacle (vv. 22-23). He set it on the north side outside the inner curtain (v. 22). Moses then set the bread before the Lord (V. 23). All of this Moses did just as God commanded him (v. 23).

John 6:32-35 *Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it was my Father who gives you the true bread from*

heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” “Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.” Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

John 6:48-51 *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”*

5. Moses placed the Lamp-stand in the Tabernacle and set it opposite the Table on the south side (v. 24). (See outline and notes, Exo 25:31-40.) He set up the lamps before the LORD. Moses did all this just as God commanded (v. 25). Remember, up to this point there was no light in the Tabernacle. The only light was coming through the entrance into the Holy Place. What had been set up so far could not be clearly seen, not the Tabernacle and its coverings, not the Ark and the Mercy Seat, not the inner curtain, and not the Table of Show-bread. By this stage, the Holy Place was full of shadows. But after Moses lit the lamps before the LORD, the Holy Place was filled with light. This is the quality of light: it always melts the dark shadows and fills the void with rays of light. The Lamp-stand pointed to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

John 8:12 *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

John 12:46 *“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

1 John 1:5 *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

6. Moses placed the Altar of Incense in the Tent of Meeting in front of the curtain (v. 26). He burned incense on it just as God commanded him to do (v. 27). The Altar of Incense pointed to Jesus Christ as the great Intercessor and Mediator who represents us before God and makes our prayers acceptable to God.

John 16:23-24 *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”*

Rom 8:34 *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

Heb 13:15 *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise the fruit of lips that confess his name.*

7. Moses put up the curtain at the entrance (v. 28). This curtain divided the Tent of Meeting from the Courtyard. This curtain shielded the Holy Place and prevented people from gazing into its holy sanctuary. The curtain pointed to Jesus Christ who made a new and living way into God's presence, who made it possible for us to approach and worship God in spirit and in truth.

Heb 10:19-20 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.*

John 4:24 *"God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

8. Moses set the Altar of Burnt Offering near the entrance to the Tabernacle (v. 29). Once he had set it up, Moses offered burnt offerings and grain offerings to the Lord (V. 29); once again Moses was careful to set this up just as God commanded (v. 29). The Altar of Burnt Offering pointed to Jesus Christ as the Perfect Sacrifice for sin, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

John 1:29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

1 Pet 1:18-19 *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

9. Moses placed the Wash Basin between the Tent of Meeting and the Altar. He put water in it after he had set up the basin (v. 30). The Wash Basin was used by Moses, Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and feet before entering the Tent of Meeting or approaching the Altar (vv. 30-32). Moses did this just as God commanded. Remember, the washing symbolized spiritual cleansing and forgiveness of sins. (See note, Exo 30:17-21.) The Wash Basin pointed to Jesus Christ as the One who cleanses us from sin.

Eph 1:7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

10. Moses finished the work (v. 33). Note Moses' final act: he hung the curtain that was to be the entrance into the Tabernacle, the one curtain or one door that was to stand for (symbolize) God's invitation for man to enter His presence.

Keep in mind that Moses could have quit and walked away but he did not. Moses was faithful to God: he finished the work. Moreover, he did everything just as God commanded.

Thought 1. Two strong lessons can be gleaned from the obedience of Moses.

(1) We must obey God.

Deu 26:16 *The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Josh 1:8 *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

1 Sam 12:15 *“But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.”*

1 Sam 15:22 *But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”*

Mat 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

Mat 7:24 *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”*

2 Th 1:7-9 *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the LORD and from the majesty of his power.*

Heb 2:3 *How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*

Rev 22:14 *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”*

(2) We must finish and conclude what God gives us to do. We must never quit; but instead, endure and persevere to the end, completing the race and work set before us.

Acts 20:24 *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.*

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

Ga1 6:9 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time He will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

2 Tim 4:6-7 *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

Heb 12:1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

1 Pet 1:13 *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Rev 3:11 *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

Job 17:9 *Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger.*

II. **Exodus 40: 34–38** *The Glory of God Filled the Tabernacle*

There was the response of the LORD. In one of the greatest manifestations of God's power in all of Scripture, God's glory came to the Tabernacle and filled it. Note how God responded to the completion of the Tabernacle.

1. God covered and filled the Tabernacle with His glorious and awesome presence, with the cloud of His glory (v. 34). Remember the pillar of cloud that God had used to lead Israel through the wilderness wanderings: this was the cloud of God's glory, the Shekinah glory, the cloud that descended upon the Tabernacle. However, there was one difference in this event: a far greater display of God's glory descended upon the Tabernacle. How do we know this? Because Moses was not able to enter the Tabernacle. Remember Mt. Sinai, when the cloud of God's glory descended upon it (Exo 19:18-20); and remember Moses' tent that had been set up for worship, when God's glory covered it (Exo 33:7-11). Moses was able to stand before God's glory in both cases, but not now, not when God's glory filled the Tabernacle. Scripture declares...

- that God is light

1 John 1:5 *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

- that God is a consuming fire

Heb 12:29 *“For our God is a consuming fire.”* (see Deu 4:23-25).

Just as the pillar of cloud descended upon the Tabernacle, there was obviously a burst of light that broke forth from the Holy of Holies, a burst of light...

- that broke forth in all the splendour, radiance, brightness and illumination of God's presence

The glory of God broke forth in the brightest light imaginable. The light of God's nature was shining so brightly that Moses could not enter without being blinded and consumed. God was giving His people a very special manifestation of His presence. His awesome presence was to remain in the Most Holy Place right above the throne of God, right between the two golden cherubim on the Mercy Seat. God's presence and glory were to give direction and lead His dear people to the promised land.

2. Note how God guided the Israelites with the cloud of His glory. If the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle, the Israelites marched in the direction of the cloud (v. 36). If the cloud did not lift, the Israelites stayed put (v. 37).
3. Note this wonderful fact: God gave the cloud to hang over the Tabernacle by day and a fire within the cloud by night. God gave it as a testimony so that all of Israel could see it. By seeing the cloud, they would know that God was with them, guiding and protecting them as they journeyed to the promised land. Note that God was faithful to the very end: He led His dear people to the very end; He gave the cloud during all the wilderness journey (v. 38). For the next thirty-eight years, this cloud would be a constant companion to God's people as they wandered in the wilderness. God led them until they reached their eternal destination, the promised land of God.

Num 9:15-23 On the day the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.

God's promise to be with His dear people, to give His wonderful presence to His people, was now becoming a reality. God's promise to guide and protect His dear people was now being fulfilled. God's promise to live and dwell among His dear people was now been realized. Without question, they would reach the promised land of God. Nothing — no enemy, no force of nature, no form of evil — would be able to stand against them, not victoriously. God's people would be triumphant. All because

God now dwelt among them and lived in their midst. God guided and protected them until their final destination was reached, the destination of the promised land of God.

Thought 1. What caused the glory of God to fill the Tabernacle? What stirred God to give His people this special experience, this very special manifestation of His presence? Obedience. When we obey God — keep His commandments and do exactly what He says — God gives us a very special and very deep sense of His presence. Moreover, when we have a very special need, God gives us a most special manifestation of His glory. All because we obey Him.

(1) When Moses obeyed the LORD and built a place for Him, God filled the Tabernacle with His presence and glory.

Exo 40:34-35 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

(2) When Solomon obeyed the LORD and built a place for Him, God filled the Temple with His presence and glory.

1 Kng 8:10-11 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

(3) When the Christian believer obeys the LORD and builds a place for Him, God fills the heart of the believer with His presence and glory.

John 14:21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

John 14:23 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

John. 15:10 “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”

Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

1 Cor 3:16 Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?

1 Cor 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

2 Cor 6:16 *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

Exo 19:5 *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine.*

Thought 2. The glory of God was so brilliant and intense that Moses was unable to draw near God's presence. But what Moses could not do in that he was weak through the flesh, Jesus Christ did. Jesus Christ was obedient to God, obedient in the absolute sense. He never disobeyed God, not once. He was sinless and perfect before God. Therefore, He was able to enter God's presence, not only for Himself but for every man, woman, and child throughout all the ages. He is the Perfect, Ideal Man. Therefore, He is able to stand before God as the Perfect, Ideal Man, able to stand before God in our behalf, as our High Priest, our Representative, our Intercessor, our Advocate (attorney). Jesus Christ opened up a new and living way into God's presence for us. Note this wonderful and glorious declaration of Scripture:

(1) Through Christ, we can approach God in a new and living way.

Heb 10:19-20 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body [through His death upon the cross].*

(2) Through Christ we are acceptable to God and saved to the uttermost.

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

Heb 9:24 *For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.*

(3) Through Christ we shall inherit the promised land of heaven, living with God forever and ever.

2 Cor 5:1 *Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed [our flesh], we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*

Phil 3:20-21 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the LORD Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

1 Pet 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade kept in heaven for you. ■*