

Exodus Chapter 40

Verses 1-33

Finally the time arrived for the tabernacle to be erected with the Holy of Holies and its accompanying Holy Place to the west, and the courtyard entrance to the east.

In terms of pagan religions and their worship of the sun god, some polemic significance might be seen in the High-Priest worshipping God with his back to the rising sun.

All who entered the courtyard also turned their backs to the rising sun as they came in to sacrifice and worship.

The tabernacle was raised up about a year after the Exodus from Egypt, 10 months after they arrived at Sinai.

Moses' faithfulness to the Lord's commands until the work was "finished" is recognized here.

The writer of Hebrews also highlights Moses' faithfulness in the building of the tabernacle (Heb. 3:2; see Num. 12:7).

It is never enough to start strong for God; His servants must also seek to finish well (see 2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Exodus 40:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

When the tabernacle, and the work of it, were finished, and he had taken a survey of it, and everything belonging to it, which appeared to be done as was ordered.

Saying; as follows:

Exodus 40:2 "On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation."

Which was the month Abib (the first month of the ancient Hebrew calendar corresponding to Nisan), as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it.

Which was the month the children of Israel came out of Egypt, out of which they had now been a whole year, with the exception of fourteen days.

"Shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation":

The tabernacle, which had a tent or covering over it, to which the people were gathered at times for religious service.

This was approximately April 1.

I say approximately, because the Hebrews change months with the new moon.

Here, we see after Moses' inspection of all the items, God told Moses to set up the tabernacle on the first day of Abib.

Exodus 40:3 "And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the veil."

The ark or chest where the law was, a testimony of the divine will, and which was to be put into the most holy place of the tabernacle.

"And cover the ark with the veil":

Not with the propitiatory or mercy seat, as the Targum of Jonathan.

For though that was a covering or lid to the ark, yet not a veil.

This was the veil that divided between the holy place and the most holy, and so covered or hid the ark from the sight even of the priests that went into the holy place.

The ark must not be open to public view.

This ark was to be kept in the Holy of Holies and no one could go into the Holy of Holies but the high priest.

This beautiful veil kept the ark hidden.

Exodus 40:4 "And thou shalt bring in the table, and set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it; and thou shalt bring in the candlestick, and light the lamps thereof."

The table of showbread, which was to be set in the holy place.

"And set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it":

Besides the dishes, spoons, covers, and bowls, there were the twelve loaves of showbread to be set in two rows.

"And thou shalt bring in the candlestick, and light the lamps thereof":

Which was to be brought and set in the same holy place with the showbread table.

And though the lamps were to be lighted by Aaron, the priest of the LORD, he being not yet consecrated, the office was performed by Moses.

Exodus 40:5 "And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle."

Not in the most holy place where the ark was, but over against it in the holy place.

"And put the hanging of the door of the tabernacle":

The door of entrance into the holy place, where there were to be no other things set but those now mentioned, the showbread table, the candlestick, and the altar of incense.

And these being brought in, the hanging was to be put up, which hid the sight of the above things, and forbid the entrance of the people there.

The Holy Place was 30 feet long and 15 feet wide.

As we discussed in an earlier lesson, the candlestick, the table for the showbread and the altar of incense were all in the Holy Place.

The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies made up the tabernacle.

This tabernacle was forbidden to the congregation.

They could only go into the outer enclosure.

Read (chapter 3 and 9 of Hebrews), to see how this tabernacle was a miniature of the one in heaven.

Exodus 40:6 "And thou shalt set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation."

Where the sacrifices of the people were to be brought, and offered up by the priests.

And this was to be set up in the open court, as it was proper it should, both because of the smell and smoke of the sacrifices.

"Before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation":

Just a little before the entrance into the holy place.

Exodus 40:7 "And thou shalt set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and shalt put water therein."

As is directed in Exodus 30:18.

Exodus 40:8 "And thou shalt set up the court round about, and hang up the hanging at the court gate."

This consisted of various hangings, east, west, north, and south (see Exodus 27:9).

Verses (6 to 8), were describing what was in the outer court or outside enclosure.

We find the altar of burnt offering and the laver with water here, just inside the gate.

Exodus 40:9 "And thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that [is] therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof: and it shall be holy."

In this, and the two following verses (Exodus 40:10-11), orders are given for the anointing of the tabernacle and its vessels, the altar of burnt offering and its vessels, the laver and its foot.

Whereby they were consecrated for divine use and service.

We see that even though these items were specifically made for the use of the tabernacle, they still needed to be dedicated to God by anointing them and setting them aside for this specific service.

Exodus 40:10 "And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy."

Not really more holy than the rest of the tabernacle and its contents, which are all pronounced "most holy" (in Exodus 30:29).

But requiring more to have its holiness continually borne in mind, since "it was more exposed to contact with the people" than the tabernacle and its vessels (Keil).

Exodus 40:11 "And thou shalt anoint the laver and his foot, and sanctify it."

And to put water in the laver of the court (Exodus 40:7).

After that he was to anoint the dwelling and everything in it, also the altar of burnt-offering and laver, with the anointing oil, and to sanctify them (Exodus 40:9-11).

Even though these items were not in the Holy Place or Holy of Holies, they still needed to be anointed and set aside for God's service.

This tells us that in our churches everything used in God's service should be set aside and dedicated for this purpose.

This includes small items as well as large.

Exodus 40:12 "And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water."

See note on Exodus 29:4.

Ablution, investiture, and anointing had all of them been previously appointed to be parts of the consecration service (Exodus 29:4-5; Exodus 29:7).

Ablution: The act of washing oneself.

Investiture: Investing a person with honors.

Anointing: confer divine or holy office upon a priest by smearing or rubbing with oil.

There are several indications from this water.

Aaron and his sons should be baptized (washed in water).

This could also mean clean (free from sin).

The high priest is symbolic of Jesus and the priests are symbolic of all Christians.

Exodus 40:13 "And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office."

And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

To wash, anoint, and clothe them, as in the two following verses (Exodus 40:13), so that they might minister in the priest's office.

Again, we see that not only the tabernacle and the items would be anointed, but the high priest would put on the garment of righteousness.

He would carry the congregation on his shoulders and on his heart.

His dedication would be forever.

The anointing was to separate him for God.

Exodus 40:14 "And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats:"

Rather, with tunics (compare Exodus 29:8).

Exodus 40:15 "And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations."

For Aaron was first anointed, and then his sons.

"That they may minister unto me in the priest's office":

Which they might not do before their anointing, though separated for it, and called unto it.

"For their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations":

That is, this ceremony of anointing was to be used in all ages at the investiture of the high priest with his office.

Until the Messiah should come, who would put an end to the Aaronic priesthood.

For not common priests, only the successors of the high priest were anointed in later times.

This present anointing with oil serving for all the priests that should follow in later generations, for as long as the priesthood continued.

We see here, that these were set aside (anointed), people for God's service.

This was not a temporary priesthood but was forever.

Remember one more time, that the priests are symbolic of all the believers.

Exodus 40:16 "Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he."

He set up the tabernacle, and everything in its place, and anointed them, and Aaron and his sons.

"According to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he":

By which he approved himself to be a faithful servant in the house of God.

This just meant that Moses anointed and dedicated all these people, the tabernacle and all the items to the service of God.

Exodus 40:17 "And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first [day] of the month, [that] the tabernacle was reared up."

The tabernacle was completed almost one year after the Exodus from Egypt.

The people were at the foot of Mt. Sinai at that time, where the book of Leviticus was given in the first month of that second year.

The record of Numbers begins with the people still at Mt. Sinai in the second month of that second year after leaving Egypt (Num. 1:1).

The tabernacle was set up one year after the Exodus from Egypt (12:2), and nine months after Israel's arrival at Sinai (19:1).

We see that it took a year to prepare, set up the tabernacle and get everything dedicated.

Exodus 40:18 "And Moses reared up the tabernacle, and fastened his sockets, and set up the boards thereof, and put in the bars thereof, and reared up his pillars."

Not of himself, but with the help of others.

"And fastened his sockets, and set up the boards thereof":

Fixed the silver sockets all around, which were the foundation of the building, and placed and established the shittim boards in them.

"And put in the bars thereof:

To keep the boards close and tight.

And reared up his pillars":

The pillars that supported the veil between the Holy and Holy of Holies, and those on which the hanging for the door of the tabernacle was put, as well as the several pillars all around the court of the tabernacle for the hangings of that.

Exodus 40:19 "And he spread abroad the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as the LORD commanded Moses."

Which were curtains of goats' hair.

"And put the covering of the tent above upon it":

Which was of rams' skins dyed red and over that another covering of badgers' skins.

"As the LORD commanded Moses":

See Exodus 26:7.

Exodus 40:20 "And he took and put the testimony into the ark, and set the staves on the ark, and put the mercy seat above upon the ark:"

The ten commands, called the "testimony", because they testified and declared what was the will of God with respect to things to be done, or not done.

The Targum of Jonathan says, he put the broken pieces of the tables into it; but what became of them, or were done with them, we nowhere read.

And it does not appear that any other, but those that Moses hewed by the order of God, were put into the ark (see Deut. 10:1).

"And set the staves on the ark":

That it might be ready to be carried whenever a remove was necessary.

"And put the mercy seat above upon the ark":

Together with the cherubim.

This was just explaining in detail that the silver sockets were set on the ground, the boards were stood upright in them and the bars were put across to keep them upright and then the tent material was draped over that and attached.

As we said, the ark of the Covenant, which held the tables of stone, was put in the Holy of Holies and the pure gold mercy seat was put on top of the ark.

Exodus 40:21 "And he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the veil of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony; as the LORD commanded Moses."

Into that part of it called the Holy of Holies.

"And set up the veil of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony.

The veil which divided between there and most holy place, and so kept out of sight the ark of the testimony within, from being seen by any, even by the priests in the holy place.

"As the LORD commanded Moses":

See Exodus 26:33.

Exodus 40:22 "And he put the table in the tent of the congregation, upon the side of the tabernacle northward, without the veil."

In the holy place.

For there the showbread table, which is here meant, was put.

"Upon the side of the tabernacle northward, without the veil":

On the north side of the tabernacle, at a little distance from the walls, which were the curtains and boards, even in the holy place on the outside of the veil, which divided from the most holy place.

Exodus 40:23 "And he set the bread in order upon it before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses."

The showbread, the twelve cakes of it, in two rows, six in a row.

"As the LORD had commanded Moses":

See Exodus 25:30.

Now that the tabernacle was built and all the vessels ready, Moses was setting it up properly as God had shown him.

Even to the bread on the table of showbread, it was set up.

Every little detail had to be exact.

Exodus 40:24 "And he put the candlestick in the tent of the congregation, over against the table, on the side of the tabernacle southward."

In the same place, the holy place.

Over against the table: the showbread table.

"On the side of the tabernacle southward":

Directly opposite to the table.

You can see that the candlestick was on the opposite side of the room from the table of showbread.

Exodus 40:25 "And he lighted the lamps before the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses."

The seven lamps belonging to it.

This, though it was the business of the priests of Aaron, and his sons, yet they not being at present invested with their office, was done by Moses.

Who in this and several other things mentioned in this chapter officiated as a priest.

As the LORD commanded Moses":

See Exodus 25:37.

Once the light was lit, it must never be allowed to go out.

This was one of the important jobs of the priest: to keep this light burning perpetually.

This Light was to never go out.

We know that Jesus is the Light of the world.

We also know that we Christians must keep this flame burning forever.

We too must not allow the Light of Jesus to go out.

Exodus 40:26 "And he put the golden altar in the tent of the congregation before the veil:"

The altar of incense; so called because it was overlaid with gold, and to distinguish it from the altar of burnt offering, which was covered with brass.

To this altar there is an allusion (in Revelation 8:3).

"In the tent of the congregation, before the veil":

In the same place, the holy place, where the showbread table and candlestick were, and these were all the furniture of it; and this was put, not within the veil, but before it, over against the ark, as that stood within it (Exodus 40:5).

Exodus 40:27 "And he burnt sweet incense thereon; as the LORD commanded Moses."

This is another branch of the priestly office that was exercised by Moses.

For which he would never have done had he not had a command from God for it.

"As the LORD commanded Moses":

He commanded Moses indeed to order and direct Aaron to do this.

But he being not yet consecrated, Moses, being the LORD's priest, did it.

Remember, this was just outside the Holy of Holies and was to be burned twice a day, morning and evening.

This symbolizes the prayers of the saints.

Exodus 40:28 "And he set up the hanging [at] the door of the tabernacle."

See (Exodus 40:5, and compare Exodus 26:36).

That is, at the door of the holy place, all being brought into it that were to be placed there.

Exodus 40:29 "And he put the altar of burnt offering [by] the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation, and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meat offering; as the LORD commanded Moses."

Of which (see Exodus 40:6).

"And offered upon it the burnt offering and the meat offering":

Either the burnt offering the meat offering of the daily sacrifice, as Jarchi interprets it (see Exodus 28:38).

Or it may be rather the burnt offering and meat offering of the consecration of Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29:1).

Here again, we see Moses setting up the hanging for the tabernacle door.

This altar of the burnt offering, as we have said a few times before, was outside the tent of the tabernacle in the enclosure.

We see here, Moses offering burnt and meat offerings just as the LORD had commanded him to do.

Exodus 40:30 "And he set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and put water there, to wash [withal]."

Of which position (see Exodus 30:18).

"And put water there to wash withal":

For the priests to wash their hands and feet with.

A type of that laver or fountain opened for the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem to wash in (Zech. 13:1).

Exodus 40:31 "And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet thereat:"

This laver was for the priests, and Moses, officiating as a priest, washed in it, with Aaron, and his sons.

Whom he was now about to consecrate to the priest's office, and invest with it by offering sacrifice for them.

Jarchi says this was on the eighth day of the consecration.

Exodus 40:32 "When they went into the tent of the congregation, and when they came near unto the altar, they washed; as the LORD commanded Moses."

To the altar of burnt offering to offer sacrifice.

And also to the altar of incense, and burn incense on that.

For before whatever service they performed in the tabernacle they washed.

"As the LORD commanded Moses":

See Exodus 30:20.

This phrase is near twenty times expressed in this and the preceding chapter, to show that everything was done by the workmen, and everything put in its proper place by Moses, exactly according to the will of God.

No one pursuing his own fancy and private judgment, but all consulting the mind of God, and acting according to that.

This washing was symbolic in one way.

It showed how the minister of God had to stay clean from all world pollution.

The literal use was also significant in that walking in sandals got the feet dirty.

The hands had to be clean to keep all of this beautiful linen clean as well.

The ministers of the Lord today could see in this that their walk must be clean (holy), and that their ministering hands must be free of pollution as well.

Exodus 40:33 "And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work."

Which consisted of hangings one hundred cubits long and fifty broads (see Exodus 27:9).

"And set up the hanging of the court gate":

Which was at the east end of it; and the hanging was of twenty cubits, hung upon four pillars (Exodus 27:16).

"So Moses finished the work":

Of the tabernacle, in making it by workmen, and in rearing it up by the help of others.

And as the former was the work of some months, so the latter, it is highly probable, was the work of some days, at least, in doing all that is said to be done in this chapter relative to it.

For though it is said to be reared up on the first day of the first month, yet not then fully set up, or everything done requisite to the use and service of it (see Num. 7:1).

The court was the last thing to go up.

Actually part of its purpose was to shut out the world.

"So Moses finished the work" needs no explanation.

Verses 34-38

The cloud of God's glory and presence showed His approval of the completed tabernacle.

He was now dwelling with His people just as He had promised (in 33:14).

That is still His desire today, because our bodies can be transformed into His holy temples by means of the New Birth (John 14:23; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

The Book of Revelation ends on this theme when it says, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

The cloud led Israel during all their journeys through the wilderness, and apparently into Canaan itself.

Exodus 40:34 "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

"Then a cloud covered ... the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle":

This was the final confirmation for Moses and the people that all the work for setting up God's dwelling place had been properly done and all the tedious instructions obediently followed.

Now that Moses had dedicated the temple and followed all of God's commands to the letter, we see God entered the Holy of Holies.

The presence of God was in this cloud.

This was the same cloud that the children of Israel followed in their wilderness wanderings.

The LORD will not enter a polluted temple (then or now).

This presence of the LORD was over the mercy seat.

Exodus 40:35 "And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

As it was at Mount Sinai (see 24:16-18; 34:5-9, 29-35), the "glory of the LORD" was evidence of God's presence with His people (1 Kings 8:10-11).

This abiding glory and presence is what some refer to as “the Shekinah glory” (see John 1:14).

The close presence of God, as we have read all through this book, is a very dangerous place to be unless the person in question is summoned by the LORD.

The LORD was pleased with this temple and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

As long as this presence was there, Moses or no one else was to say it was time to go.

The presence or absence of the LORD determined when it was time to move.

Exodus 40:36 "And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys:"

God continued to guide the Hebrew people as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night “in all their journeys” (13:21-22).

“Taken up”:

This first occurred (as recorded in Num. 10:11), 50 days after the tabernacle was finished and erected.

Exodus 40:37 "But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up."

It was not a cloud which the sun scatters.

This cloud was a token of God's presence to be seen day and night, by all Israel, that they might never again question, is the LORD among us, or is he not?

It guided the camp of Israel through the wilderness.

While the cloud rested on the tabernacle, they rested; when it removed, they followed it.

The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

In light and fire the Shekinah made itself visible.

God is Light; our God is a consuming Fire.

Yet so dazzling was the light, and so dreadful the fire, that Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, till the splendor was abated.

But what Moses could not do, our Lord Jesus has done, whom God caused to draw near; and who has invited us to come boldly, even to the mercy-seat.

By us being taught by the Holy Spirit and follow the example of Christ, as well as to depend upon him.

To attend his ordinances, and obey his precepts, we shall be kept from losing our way, and be led in the midst of the paths of judgment, till we come to heaven, the habitation of his holiness.

BLESSED BE GOD FOR JESUS CHRIST!

Exodus 40:38 "For the cloud of the LORD [was] upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys."

Or over it, it covered it, when it abode upon it, and rested.

And stood on high over it when it moved and the people journeyed.

"And fire was on it by night":

The same phenomenon which had the appearance of a cloud in the day time shone like fire in the night time.

Or "fire was in it"; that is, in the cloud.

So it appeared in the night.

And it was, as the Targum of Jonathan here calls it, a pillar of fire.

The same with the pillar of cloud and fire, which departed not from the people all the while they were in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21).

And this was:

"In the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys":

Whether by night or by day.

For in hot countries they travel much by night; and as the cloud was both a shelter from the heat of the sun in the daytime, and a direction of their way.

So the fire by night was of the same use for direction.

And might be also terrifying to wild beasts in the wilderness, who are afraid of fire, and so be a security to the Israelites from them.

All which is an emblem of the guidance and protection, light, joy, and comfort, the church of God has from his gracious presence, while in the wilderness of this world (see Isaiah 4:5).

This cloud led the children of Israel and they set the tabernacle and the court of the congregation wherever they stopped.

In another study of a later book, we will study about building a permanent temple in Jerusalem to house this same ark of the Covenant.

David's son Solomon, would be called of God to do the task.

For all the journeys of the Israelites the tabernacle and its court was their place to meet with God.

Exodus Chapter 40 Questions

1. What month and day did the LORD tell Moses to set up the tabernacle?
2. In the author's explanation of verse 2, why does it say the date was approximately?
3. What kept onlookers from gazing at the ark of the Covenant?
4. Where was the ark to be placed?
5. Who was the only one who could enter there?
6. What kept the ark hidden?
7. Where was the table of showbread placed?
8. Where was the candlestick placed?
9. How long and wide was the Holy Place?
10. Where was the altar of incense placed?
11. What made up the tabernacle?
12. What New Testament book has a great deal to say about the tabernacle?
13. Where was the altar of the burnt offering to be set?
14. Name 2 things that were found in the outer court.
15. What was Moses to anoint?
16. What does anointing do?
17. What does all of these items being anointed, tell us about our churches today?
18. What was Moses to do to Aaron and his sons at the door of the tabernacle?

19. What is one spiritual meaning we might see in all of the washing?
20. What was Moses to do to them next?
21. What was said about the priesthood?
22. How long had it taken to get everything ready?
23. As soon as the candlestick was in its right place, what did Moses do?
24. How long was this light to burn?
25. What was to be burned on the golden altar inside the tent?
26. How often?
27. What did the washing of the feet and hands of the priest symbolize?
28. What was part of the purpose of the enclosure?
29. When the LORD saw that Moses had finished it, what did the LORD do?
30. How did the people know when the LORD was in the tabernacle?
31. When were the children of Israel allowed to move?