

Open Heart, Open Bible

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

Passage for weekly reading (week 20):

Exodus ch.'s 34 – 40

The Tabernacle of Moses

The chapters this week consist largely of a repetition of instructions given to Moses by the Lord on his first 40-day stint on Sinai, as God revealed the detail of the Tabernacle, its furnishings and the elaborate vestments of the High Priest to His servant. This detail was given in ch.'s 25 – 30, with concluding knowledge about who was to do the work in ch. 31. Nothing was left to chance! The difference in this final section of Exodus is that it describes the work as it is now happening, and we can compare that with the vision given to Moses earlier and see how vision and reality precisely coincided. There is nothing haphazard about the plans and purposes of God. The careful assembly of the Tabernacle gives us a wonderful O.T. illustration of this.

The passage begins with the account of Moses' second journey up the mountain, this time carrying the tablets of stone that he had had to make himself. How he must have rued breaking the first ones. The Lord doesn't seem to be impressed with his carelessness either, if I read v.1 correctly. Doing the ascent a second time, with a stone tablet in each hand, must have been a very physically taxing exercise, but the meeting with God, and His Self-revelation of v.'s 6&7 made it so worthwhile. V.6 in particular gives us a beautiful description of the Lord's essential nature, which is often repeated throughout the O.T. Moses was the first to understand the heart of God in this way.

The man of God continues to intercede for the people as a consequence of his worship. The Lord speaks again of the covenant, and follows that up with words which are drawn from the Book of the Covenant, already agreed. Certain things obviously needed re-emphasis, and that emphasis is placed strongly on the need for single-hearted worship(v.14). The reaction of a jealous God clearly flows from His love, and He longs for a reciprocal love to be returned to Him from those upon whom He has bestowed His affection.

On returning to the camp after his second 40-day fast, Moses' face was radiant, and the people, including Aaron, have a fear to overcome before they can come to him. Perhaps their rebellion a few weeks previously had sullied their consciences and made them want to hide. Sin has this effect. Remember Adam and Eve? Nevertheless, they come when called (this time there was no golden calf), and

Moses is able to tell them everything the Lord has shown him. Sabbath observance is given particular stress as he begins to speak to the people. (Worship, and the love relationship which inspires that worship, is the underlying principle behind all of the detail we have in the second half of the Book of Exodus. The reason that the Lord set His firstborn son free was that he might worship (serve) Him – Ex.4 v.'s 22,23. He (the firstborn) couldn't do this whilst in bondage!)

The thing which comes across repeatedly respecting the offering for the Tabernacle is that willingness was the criterion of giving. There was no heavy-handedness in this offering, no hype or manipulation! (ref. v.'s 5, 21, 22, 26, 29). Bezalel and Oholiab, and a skilled work force with them, were now summoned to begin the operation, and, again, willingness was the necessary pre-requisite. No forced labour on this job! The offering became so large that it had to be brought to a close – “restraint” was necessary (v.6)! Here is the God of abundance working through the willingness of His people! I think it was Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission who is often quoted as having said “God’s work done in God’s way never lacks God’s supply”, and here is a clear outworking of this Godly principle.

The work in progress.

Ch.36 v.8 through to ch.39 v.50 give the descriptive detail of the successful undertaking and completion of all the work that the Lord had shown Moses. He instructed the skilled workers the Lord had given him as to how to complete the task, and they were delighted to do it! This was what they had been born to do!

The sequence of the work of construction is exactly that given to Moses by God on Sinai, excepting that the Tent itself is made first, to cover:

- 1) **the ark** (behind the inner curtain - 36 v.35, in the Most Holy Place), with the atonement cover or mercy seat above it, and the two cherubim (37 v.'s 1-9)
- 2) **the table** (on which the bread of the Presence was placed, or “shewbread” - A.V.)
- 3) **the lampstand**, and
- 4) **the altar of incense**, (2 – 4 being behind the outer Tent curtain in the Holy Place).

Outside, in **the courtyard**, **the altar of burnt offering** (for sacrifice) and **the basin** (for the priests to wash) are now cast, followed by the curtaining for the courtyard itself. Moses is now in a place to record the weights of all the precious metals used in the entire construction, an amount that would be measured in millions of pounds in today’s values (38 v.'s 21-31). Finally, the High Priest’s vestments are woven, together with those for his sons. Work finished (39 v.32)! All the items are then listed yet again, just to make sure nothing had been missed. Moses gives the whole thing a final inspection, then blesses the workers for a job well done.

Ch. 40 gives the account of the consecration of the Tabernacle and all its furnishings to the Lord's use, and the anointing of the Priests themselves. It was completed by new year's day, year 2! The whole period of construction was probably about six months. In ch.40 the same style of writing is used as previously. First, we are given the Lord's instructions to Moses, and then the whole thing repeated as Moses does exactly what he has been told to do. By now, we have a good idea of the Tabernacle and its equipment! Isn't this the Holy Spirit's intention? The Presence of God, in all His glory, fills the Tabernacle, the cloud above it testifying to that Presence. The Israelites will now have precise guidance in all their travels towards Canaan.

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) I remember listening once to a powerful sermon from a respected man of God, who brought out that Moses had to "walk past his own failure" – i.e.- he would have to walk past the place where he threw the first tablets down when he went up the mountain again, and, of course, he had to carry the tablets this time. The failure lay in his anger, which led to a loss of temper (lack of self-control, or "temperance", which is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5 v.'s 22,23). What do you feel that Moses was able to learn as a result of his second long fast on the mountain? What did Aaron and the people learn, who had to wait for their leader for another forty-day period?

2) Last week, I spoke of the meticulous care that went into the work of the Tabernacle, and asked if that spoke to us of the care and precision that should go into our service of Him today. It is just as exacting to serve God now in a way which honours Him, as it was then, even though the conditions are very different. We have seen in this week's reading how the attention to detail was worked through, and how the vision became the reality. Have you had any experience of a vision becoming reality? What did it cost you, and those involved with you?

3) Speaking of Aaron, once the Tabernacle was completed, only he could enter it, because only the High Priest could minister there. Moses could not. Before the construction of the Tabernacle, a more informal tent of meeting was used, where Moses could meet with the people, a tent into which he went frequently (see ch.33 v.'s 7-11). V.11 makes the lovely observation that Moses had a relationship with God that was one of "friendship", and that relationship is referred to again at the end of Moses' life (Deuteronomy 34 v.10). You see, Moses didn't have to enter the Tabernacle to meet with God – he lived in God's presence anyway. For Aaron it was ritual, for Moses it was relationship. What is it for us – ritual or relationship? Jesus has called us His friends (John 15 v.15). Can Moses life and example encourage us in this, as we move into John's Gospel?

Next week's passage: John ch.'s 1 - 4

