



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

LESSON 25 – STUDY QUESTIONS EXODUS 40:16-38

DAY ONE

1. What thought from the reflection or commentary caused you to stop and think?

Read Exodus 40:16-19

2a. At the end of our study this year we skip to the very last chapter of the Book of Exodus. In today's passage we see Moses obediently performing the work of setting up the tabernacle. From verse 16, record the phrase describing how he did this work.

b. Why do you think this phrase is repeated 14 times in the chapters on the building of the sanctuary?

3a. When was the work finished?

b. If the Israelite calendar year began with the first Passover, approximately how much time had elapsed since Israel's departure from Egypt (verse 17)?

4. According to verse 18, Moses set up the tabernacle. What four things did Moses do?

5a. With the framework in place, what did Moses do next, according to verse 19?

b. Read Hebrews 8:5-6. What do these verses tell of God's intention regarding the design and arrangement of the tent or tabernacle?

6. CONNECTION: One of our first lessons in Exodus depicted God's appearance to Moses in the burning bush, erasing the line between the sacred and the secular. Here we encounter the overlap of those two worlds once again. In today's passage, Moses builds the dwelling place of God. It is a piece of heaven on earth. We, too, are called to erase the line between the sacred and the secular in the world. How do you live in God's sanctuary on earth every day? How does your life reflect the presence of God? Give a specific example.

Read and record 1 Corinthians 3:16. Let thoughts of being God's temple lead you into prayer.

DAY TWO
Read Exodus 40:20-23

7a. Today we observe Moses as he continues to fastidiously follow God's plan. He begins to set up the innermost part of the tabernacle brought down from Mount Sinai. According to verse 20, what did he do first?

b. How does Moses then set up the ark?

8a. According to verse 21, what did Moses do with the ark after he had prepared it so carefully?

NOTE: The ark was held in the "Holy of Holies," a small room that only the high priest was permitted to enter and then, only once a year. The curtains separated it from the rest of the tabernacle and prevented access by the people. When the Israelites later built the temple in Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies was moved inside the temple.

9a. What happened to the curtain in the temple that separated the Holy of Holies after Jesus' death? Refer to Matthew 27:51.

b. Considering what you've learned in this lesson, how would you explain the symbolism involved the verse from Matthew?

10a. Next, Moses put a table in the tent, which is called the Table for the Bread. Where was it located (verse 22)?

b. How is this table described in Exodus 37:10-12?

11a. Verse 23 states that Moses “set the bread in order on it (the table) before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded...” This is called the Bread of the Presence (Exodus 25:30). Read Leviticus 24:5-9. Describe how Moses was to set the bread in order.

b. According to the Leviticus passage, what was the purpose of this bread?

12. CONNECTION: God commanded Moses to place loaves of bread on the table just outside the most sacred area of the tent. The “bread of the presence” was to be Israel’s “perpetual offering” to the Lord. It served to remind the people that the bread for each day originates in the goodness of the Lord. We see this concept repeated in the “Our Father” where Jesus taught us to ask God to “give us this day our daily bread.” Do you take your daily bread for granted? Do you realize that everything you receive each day is a gift from God? He gives you all you need to live. Are you aware of your continual and complete dependence on God? Please explain your answer.

Read and record Psalms 23:5. Let this thought lead you into prayer of praise and gratitude.

DAY THREE
Read Exodus 40:24-27

13a. According to verses 24-25, what article was placed next and where was it located?

b. What tradition do we maintain, in our Catholic churches that is similar to this idea of a lamp near the Bread of Presence?

14a. Where did Moses put the golden altar (verse 26)?

b. What did he do on the altar (verse 27)?

15a. Read Exodus 30:34-35. Here God gives Moses the “recipe” for the special incense that was to be used. How was it to be made?

b. According to Exodus 30:36-37, what further directions does God give Moses about incense?

16. When is incense used in our Church today?

17. CONNECTION: The sweet smell and lingering presence of the incense was to remind the people of God's lingering presence and sweet fragrance. The smoke rising was to remind them of their prayer, rising to God. As incense was used in the tabernacle of Israelites to honor the Lord and to make their place of worship sacred, incense can be a special way to make our prayer places especially sacred for us. The wonderful visual it provides and the sweet fragrance can help our worship to be richer. What are some of the ways you have made your prayer place special – different from any other place in your life? Record a detail or two here to share with your group.

Read and record Psalm 141:2. Maybe candles or incense would enhance your personal prayer time. Begin your prayer with the thought of your prayers rising up to the Lord.

DAY FOUR
Read Exodus 40:28-31

18. According to verse 28, what was the next thing Moses did in preparing the tabernacle?

19a. Verse 29 tells us that Moses set up the altar of burnt offering. Where was this located?

b. What two kinds of offerings did Moses offer on the altar of burnt offerings?

20a. According to verses 30-31, Moses set out the basin of water and put water in it. Who was to use the water basin and for what purpose?

b. Read Exodus 30:17-21. Describe the basin Moses set in the temple.

21. Today, again, we have seen Moses meticulously obeying God's instructions. But in today's passage we also see sacrifices offered to God. Record the definition of obedience and sacrifice below:

Obedience:

Sacrifice:

22a. What would you say those two things (obedience and sacrifice) have in common, now that you have defined them?

b. Read 1 Samuel 15:22. In your own words, explain what this verse teaches about obedience and sacrifice.

23. CONNECTION: When we think about obedience, sometimes we have the idea that it refers to big, huge, lofty decisions and actions. That can be true, but obedience can also be practiced in the little things of our everyday lives. For instance: slowing to a stop when we see a traffic light turn yellow, rather than speeding up to “beat” the red light; or putting a shopping cart in the proper place when finished with it. What other “little” things can you think of that call for an obedient spirit? Record a few here.

"Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love." Saint Therese of Lisieux. Let that thought lead you into prayer.

DAY FIVE

Read Exodus 40:32-34

24a. According to verse 32, what are Aaron and his sons, the Levite priests, to do with the basin of water that was prepared by Moses?

b. Refer to Exodus 30:19-20. What more do you learn about this ritual to be performed by Aaron and his sons?

25a. In what way has this practice been carried down into our Catholic liturgy?

b. What does it symbolize?

26a. What were the last two details of this tremendous job that Moses was given to do (verse 33)?

b. Record the last sentence of verse 33.

27. According to verse 34, when Moses had finished his work of putting the tabernacle together, there was a spectacular happening. What was it?

28. CONNECTION: The work is finished! Moses built the ark and tabernacle precisely to God's specifications. He made sure that every piece of furniture and every utensil was anointed and placed where it ought to be. Yet, Moses was not to take the credit for the work or pride in his accomplishment. He was to give the glory and honor to God. It is certainly right for us to feel good about a job well done for the Lord, but we are not to boast or be prideful. It is God who is the author of all. He gives us the wisdom, the skills, and the materials we need to accomplish His work. What jobs or ministries have you undertaken for God? Have you given Him the credit for your successes or have you taken it for yourself? Record some examples.

Read and record Hebrews 3:4. Aware of God as the source of all the good that you do, begin your prayer.

DAY SIX

Read Exodus 40:35-38

29a. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. What effect did this have on Moses, according to verse 35?

b. What visible symbol indicated that the glory of God was present?

30. Read 1 Kings 8:6-11. Record the similarities between these passages.

31a. According to verse 36, what would happen when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle?

b. What if the cloud was not taken up (verse 37)?

32a. When was the cloud present (verse 38)?

b. What was in the cloud by night?

33. We have encountered these pillars of cloud and of fire, throughout this study. The first reference was in Exodus 13:21. From that verse, what are the words telling us that God was leading the Israelites' journey?

34. So, we see that the journey of the Israelites began with God's leading and ends with God's leading. And yet, we also see that it DOESN'T end. The last verse of Exodus implies a continual journey. What phrase from verse 38 indicates that their journey is not finished?

35. CONNECTION: The Book of Exodus ends by speaking once again about the Lord's presence among His people, mentioning the cloud and the glory of God. The cloud will stay with the people throughout their journey in the desert showing them the way to go. In Christian tradition, the cloud is seen as an image of faith, which guides the Christian night and day as he makes his way to the Promised Land—eternal life in heaven. As we end this sacred journey through the Book of Exodus, think back over all you've learned. What will take with you from this study as YOU continue your journey on your way to the Promised Land? Record some thoughts to share with your group.

Read Matthew 28:20. Record the last sentence and let these words of Jesus lead you into a journey of prayer as you conclude this study of Exodus and prepare for the next stage of your journey. Pray in thanksgiving for the blessings of your trip through Exodus and for the friends who have accompanied you.



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

LESSON 25– COMMENTARY
By Rev. Paul J. Niemann, D. Min
EXODUS 40: 16-38 & Conclusion

Exodus 40:16-19

The completed work is brought before Moses, and *when Moses saw that they had done all the work just as the LORD had commanded, he blessed them* [39:43].

The final chapter of Exodus opens with YHWH's instructions to set up the holy Dwelling and all its furnishings on the *first day of the first month*, that is, the first day of Abib (Nisan), the month of spring. The Dwelling will be set up just fourteen days before the first anniversary of Israel's departure from Egypt.

Following the usual pattern, Exodus then goes on to say that *Moses did everything just as the LORD had commanded him. In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle*, that is, the sacred tent of the Dwelling itself, *was set up*.

In order to emphasize the divine authority of this construction, the text says that *Moses set up the tabernacle*, as though he did all the work personally. What is meant is that everything was done with Moses' permission, direction and supervision. Moses *laid its bases*, the metal brackets which hold the wooden planks upright. He *set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars*, the wooden crossbars, and other supports which stabilized the wooden framework of the shelter.

Moses then *spread the tent*, the embroidered linen cloths described earlier, *over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent*, the layers of goats' hair and leather, over the tent. The refrain of this chapter is: *as the LORD had commanded Moses*. Moses carries out the instructions to the letter as a sign of Israel's desire to abide wholeheartedly by their covenant with YHWH.

Exodus 40: 20-23

Recall that the *tent* or Dwelling is one of the signs of divine presence for the Israelites. Some biblical historians believe that each tribe or group of tribes had their own encounters with God and used various symbols to recall those theophanies: ark, lamp, table, etc. It was only in the time of David that all these sacred symbols were integrated into one place of worship in

Jerusalem. Others suggest that ancient peoples always imagined their gods as having human qualities and needs, so that even God needed furniture in his house! The Israelites would not have made an empty tent, but would have furnished it with light, a table, and a place to rest.

Whatever the historical facts may have been, our text describes a fully furnished and decorated dwelling. If the tent is the primary symbol of the holy Dwelling, the next is the Ark of the Covenant. Moses *took the covenant*, the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, *and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat above the ark.*

The two most important symbols are joined in the next verse: *he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant*, because the presence of YHWH was not to be seen by ordinary people.

The work on the dwelling now moves from the Holy of Holies to the Holy Place, an area a little less sacred and therefore slightly more accessible. This is the larger, rectangular room in the Dwelling toward the east side. Here the Dwelling is referred to as *the tent of meeting* as well as *the tabernacle*, perhaps joining two more ancient traditions into one. *On the north side* of this Holy Place Moses placed the golden *table and set the bread in order on it before the LORD*: twelve loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel, also known as the show-bread. These loaves were replaced each day and the old ones eaten by the priests [Leviticus 24:5-9; I Samuel 21:4-7; Mark 2:25-26].

Exodus 40:24-27

Next Moses brings in *the lampstand*, in Hebrew, *menorah*; this beautiful piece is described in great detail in 25:31-39 and 37:17-24, but its dimensions are not given. Since it stood on the ground, it was probably five to six feet tall. Its seven lamps symbolize divine perfection; its arrangement of branches and floral motifs make it a stylized representation of the burning bush. Moses set it *in the tent of meeting, opposite the table*, that is, *on the south side of the tabernacle*.

The lampstand or *menorah*¹ was not a candelabrum, but held *lamps* which were small bowls or cups for oil. These bowls usually had a lip or spout on one side to support the wick. The wicks of these lamps were toward the inside of the Holy Place so as to illuminate the interior. The oil lamps were to be filled and lighted each evening to burn through the night [27:21]. In the time of the Temple, at least one of the lamps burned continually. When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (A.D. 70), the *menorah* was carried off as war booty and has not been seen since; it is depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome. From then on, the synagogues kept a

¹ Another familiar form of *menorah* is that used by Jewish families to celebrate the *Chanukah*, or dedication, of the Temple in the time of Judas Maccabeus (December, 164 BC). It holds nine candles or lamps, one for each of the eight days of the feast, and a ninth candle used to light the others. Some of these resemble the old Temple *menorah*, others are original designs.

single light or lamp burning before the “ark” or cabinet containing the Torah scrolls. The lamp is called in Hebrew *ner tamid*, “regular light” or “perpetual light.”²

The third furnishing of the Dwelling is the *golden altar*, a wooden pedestal covered with gold, on which the *fragrant incense* burned twice a day, morning and evening. Moses offers the first offering, thus inaugurating the altar. A more elaborate dedication ritual is described in Numbers 7:1-89.

Exodus 40:28-31

After bringing in all the ceremonial furnishings, Moses hung up *the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle*.

Then, in center of the outdoor Court, Moses erected *the altar of burnt offering*. This was a structure 7 ½ feet square and 4 ½ feet high, made of wooden boards covered with bronze or copper. It is likely that these metal-plated boards served as a container for earth or rocks; the mound of earth within the wooded frame was the actual altar for the sacrifices. The altar was inaugurated by the offering of a sacrifice.

Finally, Moses *set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet*. The custom of washing hands and feet before prayer is an ancient one.

It is still practiced by the Jewish *kohanim* (priests) who have their hands washed before bestowing the blessing of Aaron. Catholic and Orthodox Christian priests wash their hands before offering the eucharistic liturgy. Muslim men wash their hands and feet whenever entering the mosque for prayer.

Exodus 40:32-34

Verse 32 explains that the priests were to wash themselves *when they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar*, that is, before any kind of prayer or ritual of sacrifice.

Then Moses *set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen at the gate of the court*. This is the partition of linen hangings described in 27:9-19 and 38:9-20. This partition separates the holy ground of the Dwelling and the altar from the common ground of the settlement.

² The custom of a continually burning lamp in Catholic churches to indicate the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament began in England in the 13th century and was made obligatory in the entire Church by the 1611 edition of the *Roman Ritual*.

These same divisions were observed in the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. When the Second Temple was expanded and renovated in the time of Christ, Herod provided a vast courtyard around the Temple. Nonetheless, balustrades were set up close to the outer wall of the Temple buildings, warning Gentiles not to enter the area reserved for Jews, on pain of death. In the incident known as the cleansing of the Temple, Jesus objects to the commercialization of this outer “court of the Gentiles,” since it was meant to be a place of worship for those who were not Jews [Isaiah 56:3-8; Matthew 21:12-17; John 2:13-22].

So Moses finished the work. All of YHWH’s instructions have been carried out: the sanctity of Mount Sinai has been re-created in liturgical form. To indicate YHWH’s satisfaction with the Dwelling and all its furnishings, *the cloud*, that familiar sign of divine presence, *covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.* The theophany of Sinai is now visible in the holy Dwelling.

Exodus 40:35-38

Exodus suggests that this theophany is even greater than what Moses experienced on Mount Sinai. There Moses entered the cloud to converse with YHWH and see some part of the divine glory; here the holy Presence is much more intense: *Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.* No one should envy Moses or wish to return to the holy mountain, for now God dwells among his people [Zechariah 8:23; John 1:14; Revelation 7:15 and 21:3]. Wherever the holy covenant is honored and the prescribed sacrifices are offered, there one may find God [Isaiah 2:2-5; Matthew 18:19-20].

The cloud of the divine presence continues to lead the Israelites on their way; *whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up.* It is not Moses, nor the chieftains or priests, who direct the journey of freedom; only the LORD himself, for the ultimate journey of the redeemed is into the heart of God [Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:5-7].

For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey. The luminous cloud which first appeared in 13:21-22, and which led the people to the holy mountain, has now taken up permanent residence among the Israelites. Our story, which began in lamentation and a sense of abandonment [2:23-25] concludes with assurance. It is a story of faith and of hope.

Conclusion

Israel’s journey of faith has not been an easy one. There were many setbacks and reversals. A failure to trust at the border of the promised land resulted in a generation of wandering in the

wilderness [Numbers 14:1-45]. The conquest of the land under Joshua led to alternating times of peace and war with neighboring peoples. Israel's prosperity reached its peak under David and Solomon, culminating in the building of the Temple, but this prosperity quickly dissolved into a divided kingdom and exile.

After 70 years in Babylon, the people of Judah returned to rebuild their temple, only to endure occupation by Greeks and then Romans, who finally destroyed Jerusalem and renamed the promised land "Palestina" after Israel's old enemy, the Philistines. Jews were dispersed around the Mediterranean world, bringing the light of the Torah to many nations while having no country of their own. God's chosen people continue to journey and to look forward to a home.

Our own time has witnessed another "Egypt" and another "Exodus" for the Jewish people. They have survived the Nazi persecution and the attempted extermination of their people: the *Sho'ah*, or "catastrophe," also known as the Holocaust. They have established a Jewish state in their ancient homeland.

Our daily papers are like so many more chapters to the Exodus story as Israeli and Palestinian, Jew and Christian and Muslim continue to contend for the land — and the water— of Canaan/Israel/Judea/Palestine. Jerusalem, the city of *shalom*, has been divided, reunited and expanded, and yet its heart is troubled. The Temple Mount, that "house of prayer for all peoples," readily triggers violence and bloodshed as warring nations claim it as their own. The words of Psalm 122 are a most necessary prayer in this 21st century:

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers." For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

Our study of the book of Exodus has come to end, but the mystery of Exodus lives on in us. As Christians, we have spiritually walked this holy journey, in the company of our Jewish sisters and brothers. We too have known a passage through the sea and the guidance of a fiery cloud, for we have been baptized in water and the Holy Spirit. We have partaken of living water which flows from Christ our Rock [I Corinthians 10:1-5]. We pray that our faith and our hope — our pilgrimage — will lead us surely to our promised land, the fullness of life and communion with our God.

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