

Exodus 40

Preceding Text

(Where are we? Chapters 25-40 **Presence – Tabernacle**)

Once the teaching of the Covenant Code is completed, God starts to engage Moses on what the design of a dwelling place for him should be. At the end of the first set of instructions, God says the tabernacle is where he will meet with the people, and “I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their God” (Exod 29:44–45). But then with the episode of the golden calf, God not only wanted to destroy the people but also that he did not want to go with them. He would send an angel instead to lead them to the land of promise. In the conversation with God Moses says there is no need to go further if God is not with them!

The renewal of the covenant between God and Israel, symbolized by the second set of stone tablets (the first were broken by Moses upon seeing the sin of the golden calf), finally allows for the construction of the tabernacle to proceed. From 36:8–38:20 we read a repetition of the instructions already given, but here the verbs are in past tense. The project is complete at the end of chapter 39.

Current Text: Themes and Background

God moves in. At Sinai, God was at the top and people down below. Sinai cannot move, so they are given a horizontal facsimile of the mountain (also with strong reference to the Garden of Eden!). This enables God to dwell among his people. But remember how terrified the people of God were when they were near his presence at Sinai? God is sacred and needs a sacred space.

Everything has been made, and God tells Moses to culminate the labors by setting up the tabernacle. It was erected on the first day of the first month of the second year (see 12:2 – this is one year from the Passover event). The tent and the furnishings are anointed, and the priests are installed. God’s presence filled the tabernacle.

Engage the Text: Discussion Questions

1. What did you hear as the main point of the sermon? Or what was your primary takeaway?
2. Read Exod 24:15–17; 40:33–38; and 1 Kings 8:10–11. What is similar in each of these narratives? What is the connection between Mt. Sinai and the tabernacle and the temple?
3. Take note of the way the book ends – and take a moment to think through the whole narrative. How did the book begin? What is the story of redemption? What did redemption lead to (the significance of Sinai)? Now God has moved into the tabernacle and is in their midst. As the book ends, what questions do you have? Do you have hope and/or trepidation?
4. The gospel of John pulls heavily from Exodus. Read John 1:14; 1 Peter 2:4–10 – how are the New Testament writers pulling from the themes of Exodus to explain how they understand their present moment? What does this mean for the church today?

Aside: In the book of Revelation, the whole of creation becomes a temple. In fact, there is no need for a temple with various designated spaces because we all dwell with God. No need for a temple because God moves in and is at home with all creation.

5. What is the text telling us about God's character, God's revelation, and God's mission in the world?