

EXODUS

Lesson 33 - Chapters 38, 39, and 40 (End of Book)

Beginning last week we have been reading of the actual construction of the Tabernacle; and the reason we have not examined it all closely is because it is a repeat of the specifications given much earlier in Exodus. Why this tedious repetition and not just some words stating that just as the Lord had ordered it that is how Israel built it? Because we are speaking of the most important, central, and holy item on the planet. The Sacred Tent has no rival; this is Yehoveh's one and only sanctuary on Earth. There is nothing like it, and only its later replacement, the Temple, is its equal. Therefore excruciating detail is offered to demonstrate that every effort was made to construct the Wilderness Tabernacle according to its blueprint.

READ EXODUS 38 all

About halfway through this chapter, beginning in vs. 21, we see that one of Aaron's sons, a fellow named Itamar, was in charge of accounting for all the materials used in making the Tabernacle. But, likely, this is more than mere accounting; Itamar was also the historian. He chronicled the building of the Tabernacle, and very probably was instrumental in assisting Moses in writing down parts of the Torah.

In vs. 8 we're given this curious information that "the mirrors of the women serving at the entrance to the Tabernacle" were used in the making of the Brazen Laver for holding water. The mirror effect of the water in the Laver is talked about in Solomon's Temple era, and some scholars think that these words about the use of mirrors was a redaction from a later time, in an attempt to bolster a tradition whereby the women of Israel were commended for their special contributions of their mirrors. Mirrors were rare, expensive, and nowhere in the list of items God commanded the Israelites to supply was there a mention of mirrors. So, the idea here is that certain pious women went well above and beyond what was requested in giving up their extremely precious mirrors, as a sign of their gratitude for what Yehoveh was doing in having a dwelling place built so that He could be present among the Israelites.

Mirrors in that age were not made of reflective glass; rather they were highly polished disks of copper or bronze that had been fitted with handles of varying materials. Since mirrors were prohibitively expensive for all but the wealthier, the handles were of course made of expensive materials like ivory.

We also get a record of impressive amounts of precious materials that was used in the construction of the Tabernacle; about a ton of gold, a little less than 7000 lbs of silver, and a little more than 2 tons of bronze. So the precious metal alone weighed in at nearly 7 tons.

While I have described to you the weight of the various construction materials in pounds and tons, in the Hebrew it was given in **kikkars** and **shekels**. The Hebrew kikkar is almost always translated as “talent”. A talent was generally the largest unit of weight measurement of that era (just like in America a ton is usually the largest unit of weight measurement in our era). A talent consisted of 3,600 shekels.

Not for about 8 centuries after this time did the use of coins come into play for the Israelites. When coins finally did become common, the term shekel became the standard unit of Israeli money (similar to the American dollar). But in the eras of Moses, Kings David and Solomon, and right on up to the exile of Judah to Babylon, a shekel was NOT a coin; it was simply a unit of weight, like an ounce. So until the Bible reaches the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, when we hear of a Hebrew having to redeem a firstborn son for ½ shekel, for example, this was not a coin it was but a certain measure of silver weighed out on a scale.

Let’s move on to chapter 39.

READ EXODUS CHAPTER 39 all

Chapter 39 recounts the making of the priestly garments. More to the point, it goes into detail about the making of Aaron’s garment....the High Priest garment. Although we covered this a few weeks ago, let’s take a few minutes to review his splendid outfit.

The multi-layered garment was made using yarns and cloth of colors that were particularly difficult to manufacture, and therefore, were rare and expensive: blue, purple, and scarlet red. Chapter 39 spends most of its time discussing the outer, and most noticeable, pieces of the uniform; and therefore begins with the ephod. The ephod was the piece that looked like an apron. Over the ephod went the breastplate. Although the ephod and breastplate were two different pieces, they worked together, and therefore typically the COMBINATION of the ephod **and** the breastplate were simply called “the ephod”. The Breastplate was a square piece that had 12 precious and semi-precious stones arranged in rows and columns. Each stone had the name of ONE of the 12 tribes engraved on it.....so all 12 tribes were represented on the Breastplate. The Breastplate was held to the front of the ephod by means of two rings attached to the ephod, and it was worn on the chest, over the heart.

Shoulder straps went from the front side of the ephod to a piece worn on the back. Where each of these straps went over the top of the shoulders, a large onyx stone was affixed. The names of the 12 tribes of Israel were also placed on these two stones. While it is not absolutely stated in the Bible, Jewish sages generally agree that the names of the 12 tribes were divided into 2 groups: 6 tribes of Israel were engraved on one stone, and the remaining 6 on the other.

There is much symbolism in these stones. The 12 stones, one name on each stone, worn on the Breastplate indicates the individuality of each tribe, but by being grouped together also shows them to be of one source, of one father, unified. The 2 large stones placed on the shoulders seem to be prophetic that though, to God, Israel is one.....Israel will be divided. Some 400 years into the future, upon King Solomon’s death, civil war will lead Israel to be split into Two Houses.....Two Kingdoms.....some tribes belonging to one house, the remainder belonging to the other.

The long outer garment, over which the ephod and Breastplate were worn, was solid blue. It reached to about midway between the knee and ankle. This outer garment is usually called a robe. All around the bottom hem were golden bells and pomegranates, which alternated. We're told in an earlier chapter that the bells were necessary in order that "the High Priest would not die" when he was doing service in the Tabernacle. The bells were more than a decoration. In fact, later on in the Temple era (the Temple was just a permanent Tabernacle), a rope was tied onto the ankle of the High Priest when he went into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.....the Day of Atonement. The idea was that the lower priests, who would be standing outside the Sanctuary, would listen for the constant gentle jingling of the golden bells as the High Priest moved around, performing his purification rituals; if the jingling ceased for any substantial period of time, then they would assume that Yehoveh has likely killed the High Priest for some breach of protocol, and they would pull him out with the rope attached to his foot. The logic for this procedure is understandable: ONLY the High Priest can go into the Holy of Holies. Anyone else that might dare to venture would be struck dead. So, if something happened to the High Priest inside, there was no way to remove him. Even a quick appointment of a **new** High Priest wouldn't help, because under no circumstance can a High Priest handle a dead body.....not even a member of his own family. Incidentally, there is no record, Biblical or otherwise, of a High Priest dying, and having to be dragged out of the Holy of Holies by this rope.

Under the blue robe was a white tunic. It reached from neck to ankle. So far in chapter 39, all the items listed were worn by the HIGH priest only. But, beginning with the white tunic, the remaining garments were common to all of the priests, no matter their level of status or duty. The turban (a head covering), sometimes called a mitre, although worn by all priestly levels did not include the head plate that was exclusively for the High Priest. The head plate was a golden band with the words "Holy to Yehoveh" engraved upon it.

I would like you to take notice of how the chapter ends. The Tabernacle is completed. And, here we have a very formal recounting of everything that the people made. While this may seem over-the-top for us, these lengthy detailed repetitions of events fit a style and custom of that day. The purpose is to declare to those members of Israel, who were present in the Wilderness, and for posterity, that what they did was ALL that God had instructed, **exactly** as He instructed. And, they are pretty pleased with themselves for having done it.

Now, we should also take notice of the parallels between this part of Exodus, the completion of the Tabernacle, and the Genesis story of Creation. Since some of those parallels overlap chapters 39 and 40, let's read chapter 40 before we discuss it a bit.

READ EXODUS CHAPTER 40 all

Israel has been gone from Egypt just a few days shy of a year. We really should be impressed by the fact that this incredible Sanctuary complex, with its furnishings and the required priestly garments, was completed in about 6 months. We know this is the time frame because it took a little over 2 months for Israel to reach Mt. Sinai after leaving Egypt; then after a little time getting settled Moses spent 40 days up on Mt. Sinai then he came down to attend to the

Golden Calf rebellion, and then went back up for another 40 day stay.....before the detailed blueprints were given by Moses to the people in order that construction could begin. So Israel was at Mt. Sinai for 5-6 months when they began work on the Tabernacle.

Yehoveh tells Moses that on the 1st day of the 1st month they are to set up the Tabernacle and consecrate it. This day is just a couple of weeks shy of Passover, the day they left Egypt. The Hebrews operated on a lunar calendar. The New Moon was what they used to mark the first day of each new month. The New Moon that was about to occur was not only going to be the 1st day of a new month, it was also going to be the first month of a new year. So, by our reckoning, they were to set up the Tabernacle on the 1st of Aviv (which is our March-April time frame). Now, understand, this was the Hebrew religious event calendar year, NOT the Hebrew agricultural calendar year, not the Hebrew civil calendar year, nor the Hebrew Regnal year (a Regnal year is how the length of time a King held office was measured). And, they all existed simultaneously, and each began at different times. This is why when people want to discuss with me calendars in regards to Biblical events, I shy away from it, because it is a terribly complex that can only be dealt with in a fairly extensive manner. There are no quick and easy to remember answers to those questions.

Now, even if their ancient, multiple calendar system seems hard for us to comprehend, understand that it certainly made sense to the Hebrews. As an analogy, just look at our American calendar system; we have our standard solar calendar year, that begins with January 1st, but we also have a thing called the Fiscal Year, which a business can use to determine the 12 month cycle of income and expenses for tax purposes. And, a fiscal year can begin any month a person chooses. Besides that we have school years that vary from state to state, even county to county, and have no bearing on calendar years OR fiscal years.

So even though the erecting of the Tabernacle will occur on the 1st day of the 1st month of the Hebrew religious observance calendar year, it is NOT New Years Day....it is NOT Rosh Hashanna, which is the 1st day of the Hebrew *civil* calendar. Jewish New Year occurs on the first day of the 7th month of the religious event calendar year (fall, about our September). So, it was springtime when the Tabernacle would be erected, and then consecrated, and put into use. In fact, the construction and then consecration of the Tabernacle would occur just in time to use it as the central feature for Passover, and then the Festival of Matza, which began on the 14th of Aviv. The Tent is erected on the 1st of Aviv, and Passover will be just a day short of two weeks later on the 14th of Aviv.

Notice in verse 17 it says that the Tabernacle was erected on the 1st day of the 2nd year. That is not a contradiction with what was said earlier. The "2nd year" is in reference to how long the Israelites had been gone from Egypt. They were coming up on the first anniversary of their release from Pharaoh's grip.....that is, the end of the 1st year, and therefore the beginning of the 2nd year since they left. Are you with me? In Bible speak, the DAY Israel departed Egypt was the 1st day of the 1st year. So, one year later is spoken of as either the last day of the 1st year, or, 1 day later, as the 1st day of the 2nd year.

Beginning in verse 18, and continuing through verse 33, we get a very climactic rundown of the construction and consecration of the Tabernacle. It ends with the words "so Moses finished the

work". The idea here is to bring us to a fitting completion of a task, the building of the Tabernacle.....it's the end of a phase, which in turn readies Israel for the NEXT phase of God's plan for them, which is to begin their journey into the Promised Land.

The principle here is unmistakable: if you're about to undertake a journey, then you must be properly equipped. For the people of God, that means we MUST be equipped WITH God. And, that was the whole purpose of the Tabernacle...that God might dwell WITH the Israelites. Once again this brings us to St. Paul's analogy that WE, as Believers, are God's present day earthly Tabernacles, or Temples.....God's dwelling places on earth.

Once the Tabernacle was built in the midst of the encampment of Israel.....the tribes all carefully arranged around the Tabernacle.....that temporary tent where God was meeting with Moses (the one that was built OUTSIDE the encampment) would have been de-commissioned.

And, in verse 36, we are given the signal that Yehoveh will give Israel each time He is ready for them to move on, and take the NEXT step towards His goal for them.....the Promised Land; the land that was promised to Israel's great ancestor, Abraham. And, the signal to break camp is the lifting upward of the cloud of Glory that hovered above and upon the Tabernacle. To reinforce the instruction, the negative is also given; that is, if the cloud does NOT go up, then they are to stay right where they are.

This Exodus episode ends with another God-principle: when God wants you to move, He'll show you. All of Israel saw the cloud and knew the signal. All of Israel knew when it was time to move on, and time to stay put. This is a very visual parallel to the condition of the church-era believer, who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God is not going to tell ME to tell YOU when its time to move. Oh, He might use me, or your spouse, or someone else to encourage you, or to confirm to you something He has been telling you. But, just as Yehoveh did for Israel, He'll show each of us, one-on-one, His will for our lives.

I'd like to conclude our study of Exodus by examining those parallels between the Creation Story at the beginning of Genesis, and the building of the Wilderness Tabernacle.

Scholars, for quite some time actually, have noticed that beginning in Exodus 25:1 and ending in Exodus 31:11, these verses are divided into 6 very apparent units. When viewed in the original language, Hebrew, each of these distinctive units, or sections, is marked at its beginning by the words, "Yehoveh said to Moses.....". Immediately upon the completion of the 6th unit, we find a 7th unit is introduced; and the subject of this unit is the Sabbath instruction.

It cannot be coincidental that the story of Creation tells of 6 days of "works", and then a 7th day of completion and rest, just as is the pattern for constructing the Wilderness Tabernacle. Here we have emphasized the never-ending nature of the Sabbath, its connection to the 7th day, the holiness intrinsic to it, and the ceasing from our works that is central to its meaning.

If one compares the Creation Story to the building of the Tabernacle, we see a very similar structure and use of phrases. For instance, upon God's completion of His creation, the Bible says that Yehoveh "saw all that He had made, and found it very good". In like pattern, upon

completion of the Tabernacle, Moses looked it all over and pronounced it completed, in accordance to God's plan. That is, the construction of the Universe and the construction of the Tabernacle both represent God's vision precisely brought into existence.

Another invaluable connection to observe in the similarity between the Creation and the building of the Tabernacle is that Creation.....our Universe.....consists of 4 dimensions. Three of these dimensions (length, width, and height) make up what we call "space", and the 4th dimension is time. Our Universe consists ONLY of these 4 dimensions. The Tabernacle enshrines the sacred nature of space, and the Sabbath enshrines the sacred nature of time. Therefore the Tabernacle together with the Sabbath is a monument to the Creation and the Bible will make this connection a number of times.

Now, Moses certainly did not look over all that had been built and use God's pronouncement that "it was exceedingly good".....that would have gone too far. For this dwelling and its furnishings had been manmade, accomplished by human hands, even though it was God-ordained. It was a SHADOW of perfection.....a shadow of God's spiritual dwelling place in Heaven; but, while it strove for perfection, it was NOT perfection as was the World that moment after God created it, and then rested.

Yet, the intent was for the Wilderness Tabernacle to represent a piece of Heaven on earth. A Holy Place. And, when we get into Leviticus, we will see that the primary purpose of the sacrifices and rituals was to protect and maintain, and at times repair, the relationship of holiness between God and Israel.

We also find that the Tabernacle was erected on the first day of the first month of the New Year. This, too, corresponds to the Creation narrative; that is, Creation marks the first day of the first month of the first year in the history of history. Physical life had never before existed. After the completion of the Tabernacle NEW life officially began with God now dwelling among His newly set apart people. A whole new chapter in the Human Race had begun. Even more we see this same pattern had occurred when God destroyed the world by flood; it was on the first day of the first month of the new year that the earth was finally dry.

The 1st of Aviv, the Hebrew religious calendar's first day of the New Year, is all about creation and regeneration. And, it is accomplished, as is all else in the Bible, in a dual manner: spiritually AND physically. Just as the Wilderness Tabernacle was a PHYSICAL earthly model of Yehoveh's SPIRITUAL dwelling place in Heaven, so is the Sabbath a spiritual concept with a physical counterpart.

The Israelites were to PHYSICALLY rest after 6 days of work; Believers are to SPIRITUALLY rest in Messiah, AS WELL AS physically rest on the 7th day, a day of holiness.

Was Moses right? HAD all that God ordained to make His earthly dwelling place acceptable to Him been accomplished? Apparently. Because in vs. 34 we are told that the Glory of God, what would later come to be called the Shekinah, filled the Wilderness Tabernacle....the Dwelling. And, vs. 35 tells us that due to God's presence filling up the Dwelling, Moses could not enter it. So, since that's the case, how is it that shortly, with God's presence still in the

Tabernacle, that Moses WOULD be able to enter it? Well, for the moment, Yehoveh was just stretching His legs. He was occupying every area of the Tabernacle.....both the Holy Place, the front room of the Tabernacle, and the Holy of Holies, the back room of the Tabernacle. But, soon, He would withdraw to exclusively the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant with its Mercy Seat rested, and from that point forward He would occupy only that portion of the Tent. THEN, Moses would be able to enter.

Thus ends the book of Exodus; next up, Leviticus and the complex and all-important sacrificial system that God has ordained for Israel.