

The Tent of Meeting Set Up

Exodus 40:1-33

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

May 14, 2003

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus 40. We have come to the second to the last study in this great book that we've been looking at for a long time now—93 sermons ago we started the Book of Exodus, so persevere! You're almost there!

Now, let's look at Exodus 40 together. In Exodus 40:1-33, we are given a view of the completion of the tabernacle and its consecration into the Lord's service. The tabernacle is to serve as the center for Israel's corporate worship, and so it's set apart for that function here in Exodus 40. And again, as we've seen so many times already in the Book of Exodus, God's sole prerogative in establishing how we are to worship is stressed. Eight more times in this passage it's emphasized that the children of Israel are going to worship just as the Lord commanded.

And in Exodus 40:1-15, we get a detailed set of divine instructions on how the tabernacle is to be erected, or set up; and then, in verses 16-33, we get a description of the carrying out of those instructions for the setting up of the tabernacle, and it's in that section of Exodus 40 that you get the repetition of just as the Lord had commanded Moses or its equivalent. It's repeated eight times in this section, and so again we see the importance of worshipping God, God's way.

So let's give attention to God's word here in Exodus 40:1.

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You for this word. As we come to the end of this book, as we come to the end of this description of the setting up of the tabernacle, we ask that You would open our eyes to behold wonderful truth from Your word, and that You would bring to bear this truth of Your word on the way that we worship even now. *In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.*

This account of the instructions for the setting up of, and the actual setting up of the completed tabernacle, has much to teach us about how we worship now. We don't worship with this kind of elaborate ritual. We don't worship that way on

purpose. The author of Hebrews explains to us why: We have a great High Priest who has passed through for us, and that has dramatically changed the way we worship today, especially with regard to ceremony. And yet, there are underlying principles in this passage and throughout the Book of Exodus that teach us much about worship and even more about the Mediator — not only the old covenant mediator, Moses, but the new covenant Mediator, Jesus.

And I'd like to look at two parts of this passage with you tonight: the first part in verses 1-15, which gives us the instructions for the setting up of the tabernacle; and then, the second part in verses 16-33, which actually describes for us the setting up of the tabernacle.

Beginning in verses 1-15, we see a description of God's instructions to Moses, spoken to him for the setting up of the tabernacle, and we learn in this passage much about worshiping God according to God's command; worshiping God with a view to the new creation; worshiping God in total consecration; and, worshiping God with a desire for communion and presence with Him.

Look at verse 1. Here we see “The Lord spoke to Moses....” Again we find God giving direct verbal instructions to Moses about the setting up of the tabernacle. Moses is told in this section where to place the articles of the tabernacle. Do you remember when we were reading through Exodus 36-39, though the articles of the tabernacle are described there, you're never told where they are to be placed? Now, their placement was spoken of the first time God gave the instructions to Moses, but they're not repeated in chapters 36-39, so God does here. He repeats to Moses precisely where all the articles, where all the furniture of the tabernacle is to be placed.

Secondly, in this passage Moses is told to consecrate the tabernacle — the very pieces, the parts of the tabernacle are to be consecrated for their service. They are to be set apart for a holy use. They're common...they're beautiful, they're expensive, but they're common objects being set apart for a holy use, and so they're to be consecrated.

And then, finally, in this section you see the commands about the installation of the priests. Just as the tabernacle articles are anointed and consecrated in accordance with Exodus 30:26-29, so also the priests are consecrated according to the commands that are set forth in Exodus 30:30. So Moses is given direct verbal instructions from God about the setting up of the tabernacle: where to place the articles, how to consecrate the tabernacle articles, how to consecrate the priests. And that's carried out.

Secondly, if you look at verse 2, the date of the setting up of the tabernacle is drawn attention to by Moses: “On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.” So, when is the tabernacle supposed to be set up? It's supposed to be set up on New Year's Day. Now that's very

significant, because that's a year from the Exodus, and about a year, of course, from the Passover. This time last year, they were out looking for those Passover lambs that they were going to slaughter for the celebration of that feast for the first time. Now the tabernacle is being set up. The dedication of this whole tent of meeting is appointed for the first day of the first month, and that is obviously a reference first of all to God's creation; and, tying together the tabernacle as a reflection of God's new creation, the dedication constitutes an act of creation, forming God's people and setting apart God's people to the Lord. And so by having the tabernacle dedicated on New Year's Day, we are tying in the tabernacle to creation. It becomes symbolic of the new creation of the re-creation that God is doing in redeeming His people.

The tabernacle is tied to the exodus through this consecration date, because the Passover had occurred about one year earlier. Notice how God pulls creation and redemption together in the tabernacle. And in worship we experience the provision that brings about the new creation, and we are transformed into what the new creation entails. And so this date for the tabernacle dedication and setting up, New Year's Day, is very significant in terms of what pulls in to the symbolism of the tabernacle.

Look again at verse 2. At the end of verse 2, the tabernacle is called "the tabernacle of the tent of meeting." Now throughout Exodus 25 to the very end of chapter 40, two names are given to the tabernacle. It's called the tabernacle, and it's called the tent of meeting, and about five times, it's called the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. This is one of those times. You can look down in verse 6 and you'll see another time where it's called the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. And the last time we were together, we said that points to the two sides of the tabernacle. It is the tabernacle in the sense that it is the place that God manifests His presence; it is the tent of meeting in the sense that it is the place in which He speaks to His mediator. And so it both serves to symbolize His nearness to and presence with His people, and His speaking to His people through His mediator. And thus the tabernacle of the tent of meeting reminds us of both the reality that God speaks to us by His Mediator, and that God in His mercy dwells with us — that He's near to us, that He shares His presence with us.

If you look at verses 3-15, you'll find in those verses no fewer than eleven repetitions of God's you shall...you shall...you shall. All these imperatives to Moses in verses 2-8, all the you shall's have to do with the setting up of the inner sanctum of the Holy of Holies and the surrounding tabernacle. All of these parts are assembled and screened off. Verses 9-11 gives you the account of the anointing, or consecrating, or setting apart of the tabernacle itself; and then, verses 12-15 point to the anointing, or consecrating or ordaining or setting apart, of the priests for service.

Now each of these parts of the tabernacle has a symbolic value and point to particular truths. For instance, the brazen altar, you remember, reminded the

people that they only approach God in worship through atonement, through sacrifice. Sin had to be dealt with in order for them to come into the presence of God. The laver, out of which the priests wash, reminded them that they had to be clean in order to serve the Lord in the tabernacle. They had to be ceremonially cleansed in order to serve the Lord faithfully. The ark reminded the people of God's presence. It was the visible symbol of the presence of God. The ten words — the tablet placed in the ark, the testimony, the covenant — reminded the people of the covenant relationship with God. The veil of the tabernacle reminded people that access was not easy and flippant into the presence of Almighty God, but it was restricted, and only the priests could enter into the presence of God on the Day of Atonement in the Holy of Holies. And so the priests representatively went into the presence of God, and God's people with him.

All of this, you see, points to the importance of God's worship instructions here, worshiping in accordance with God's command. Ashby says this:

“Worship is the meeting of the natural with the supernatural; of the creation with its Creator; of people with God. It is the most important task that people can undertake. It is the visible sign of faithfulness to God.”

That perspective explains the extensive space given to liturgical instructions in Scripture, and not just here in Exodus. In Exodus, yes, you have the description of the tabernacle, but in Ezekiel you have that long, eight-chapter description of the design of the new temple. Paul has an extensive discussion in the middle of the Book of First Corinthians that runs from, really, from about chapter ten to about chapter 14 (with interruptions along the way), much of which deals with — what? How the people of God are to worship. And the Book of Revelation gives us a description, a vision, of heavenly worship.

Well, there's a reason why the Bible gives so much attention to the subject of worship. It's the most important privilege and responsibility we have, and this is stressed here again for about the umpteenth time in Exodus 40:1-15.

Now as we look at verses 16-33, the focus changes. Yes, it's still on the commands of God being carried out as God commanded them, but now I would suggest that the focus is primarily on Moses.

Now, if you'll look back to chapter 40:1, the whole section begins with “The Lord spoke to Moses....” But if you will look at verses 16 and 33, you will see that Moses begins and ends this section just like he begins the overall section: “Thus Moses did according that the Lord had commanded him, so he did.”

Now look down to verse 33:

“He erected the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the veil for the gateway of the court. Thus Moses finished the work.”

I'm going to suggest to you that in this section God draws attention to the person of the mediator in the carrying out of the instructions. We see the mediator exalted here in the completion and setting up of the tabernacle, in the building of the tent.

Let me point you to two or three things.

First of all, notice the now familiar refrain, "Thus Moses did, according to all that the Lord commanded him, so he did." That phrase is echoed seven more times in verse 19, verse 21, verse 23, verse 25, verse 27, verse 29, and verse 32. Here's what Matthew Henry has to say about that:

"Moses not only did all that the Lord directed him to do, but in the order that God appointed, for God will be sought in due order. To each particular there is added an express reference to the divine appointment which Moses governed himself by as carefully and conscientiously as the workmen did; and, therefore, as before so it is here repeated: 'As the Lord commanded Moses....' Seven times in less than 14 verses, Moses himself, as great a man as he was, would not pretend to vary from the institution, neither to add to it nor to diminish from it, in the least punctilio. Those that command others must remember that their Master also is in heaven, and they must do as they are commanded."

And so the tabernacle is set up on New Year's Day. We pointed that out when we were looking at the first section. It's set up on New Year's Day according to God's command, connecting creation and redemption in the worship. As we said, it's a year after the exodus; it's nine months after Israel had arrived at Mount Sinai. And the tabernacle is set up on New Year's Day, and yet the focus here in verses 16-33 is on the role of Moses.

He's the only one named here. If you hadn't read all the stuff about Bezalel and Oholiab, you would have thought that Moses was putting this thing together by himself...if you were just reading Exodus 40:16-33. "Moses did this...." It's almost as if Moses is out there putting the bars in, himself...putting the tablets in himself...setting up the curtains himself...setting up the surrounding part of the courtyard himself...setting up the laver himself...placing the furniture himself...as if he is acting all on his own. He sets up the tabernacle—that's the language of Exodus 40:16-33, but that points to his key mediatorial role.

You remember this whole incident started with the people of God rejecting him as mediator, and now here he is as mediator setting up the place where they will experience communion with and the presence of God.

But you know, this passage not only points to Moses' key mediatorial role, it points forward and sets up a glorious contrast for the author of Hebrews, who says this in Hebrews 3:1-6...turn with me there.

You see, Christians are pointed to Jesus as the Mediator in these verses. Moses was faithful as a servant in the house of God — not, of course, in the physical house/tabernacle of God, but as Numbers 12:7 says, “...faithful in the whole household of God...faithful in the whole people of God.” He was faithful, but he was faithful as a servant. Jesus was faithful as a Son. He was the owner of the house. He was the inheritor of everything in the house. The house belongs to Him. Moses was a steward. He was faithful in that stewardship, but Jesus has a more prominent place in relation to the household: Moses was God's servant, Jesus was God's Son; Moses was a servant in the house, Jesus was the Son over the house; Moses' ministry was temporary and pointed forward to the coming of Christ, Christ's ministry is eternal and is the fulfillment of Moses' ministry.

What Moses represents in Jewish history is incomplete. He points forward to what God would do in the future, and so the author of Hebrews says when you contemplate what Moses did in the midst of the household of God, when you contemplate what Moses did in the setting up of the tabernacle of God, it ought to lead you to do this: to consider Jesus, who was better than Moses, and who Himself becomes the place at which His people meet God. Have you ever thought of it? Jesus becomes the place, as our Mediator, where we meet God; where we know God; where we experience His presence; where we enjoy communion with Him; where we are brought into union and communion with Him. As we are united to Christ, so we are brought into fellowship and united to God.

Samuel Rutherford once said, “Every day we may see some new thing in Christ. His love has neither brim nor bottom.” And Moses, in his faithfulness, points forward to Jesus, who loves us like that, and who has brought us into union and communion with God. Let's think about that when we think about the picture that God gives us in the tabernacle. It's a foreshadowing of the presence that we enjoy through Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the picture of the tabernacle — the pattern shown in the mount of this celestial sanctuary. We thank You for many things about it. It teaches us how much You care about worship, because You go into so much detail about how You are to be worshiped. It teaches us how we need to be cleansed to come into Your presence; how we have to come into Your presence by sacrifice, because we're sinners. But most of all, O God, it points forward to the Lord Jesus Christ and His work. He's greater than Moses; He's greater than the tabernacle; He has tabernacled in our midst, and in Him we have been united to You by faith. Help us, then, to pay heed to the author of Hebrews, who tells us to consider Jesus. Help us to place our trust in Him, and to be confident that if we are in relationship with Him, with His people, we know Your presence now, and we will know that presence then, and forevermore. We

ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).