

Exodus 35-40

The final six chapters of Exodus can be taken as a whole. They are the story of the construction and completion of the Tabernacle, the plans for which had already been given to Moses. There are aspects of this the story which are worth noting, yet the rest is merely a repeat of what has been covered before.

First, the instructions for the building of the Tabernacle begin with a reminder that the sabbath is to be maintained throughout its creation. This may be because human beings often invest “things” with value beyond their use. This was what happened with the golden calf. The “thing” was a golden calf, but people declared it to be a god. Here the “thing” is a dwelling for the presence of God, and not something godly. By maintaining the sabbath, the people are reminded that they are making the tabernacle for God, not as a god.

Second, the people are invited to bring to this project what they possessed. In a sense this is very much a community project in which men and women, young and old, are all invited to participate. This gives the people a sense of their own agency. They are no longer slaves commanded to go make bricks, but they are a free people invited by their creator and liberator to participate in the building of God’s dwelling.

Third, the people all participate. They bring all the gold, bronze and cloth required for the creation of the tabernacle. In fact, they are so willing to participate that Moses must call a halt to the fund-raising campaign. This excitement demonstrates that the people had turned a corner in their relationship with YHWH and wanted to express their gratitude for liberation and provision.

Fourth, Moses wants there to be complete transparency in terms of the accounting of the resources brought by the people (38:21ff). He does not want anyone to accuse him of profiting from the construction and so he has someone else keep track of what comes in and how it is used.

Fifth, the work was an expression of faithfulness. Once the work is completed, and before Moses puts all the pieces in place, it is said that *“When Moses saw that they had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded, he blessed them.”* This blessing signifies that the Hebrew people made good use of their second chance, offered following the golden calf incident. They have demonstrated that they are both capable and willing to be faithful.

Sixth, with the completion of this project, Moses will no longer be allowed in the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle will become the sole venue of the priests. While Moses will still hear from God, Moses will receive God’s words outside of the tent of meeting. The differentiation between priest/leader is now complete. In that sense Moses is like all the other people, needing to bring his offerings to the priests for them to mediate (be an intermediary) between him and YHWH.

Seventh, God will dwell in the midst of the people. God will no longer live outside the camp, but will be present to teach, lead and bless the people.

Reflections: In the creation story of Genesis 1, each day/part of creation is deemed to be “good” except human beings. “Good” in the sense used in Genesis means “fit for a particular purpose.” We might speculate that human beings not being declared “good” is because the verdict is still out on whether they will live into their created purpose of caring for God’s creation. As the only creatures with a will, or the ability to choose between faithfulness/unfaithfulness to their purpose, human beings have the capacity to choose wrongly. How then can humanity learn to choose wisely? Exodus has attempted to answer that question through bringing a chosen people through separation/liberation from other powers, offering Law and worship, and through providing for a continuing encounter with the creator God through the Tabernacle. Kass puts it this way. *“Creation produced a hospitable world in which human beings can live. God’s Law sets forth a Way under which they can live. God’s Tabernacle, built for Him by human beings, offers rituals by which they can aspire to be holy, as the Lord is Holy.”* (pg. 598)

Questions:

1. Where have you seen people worship the “thing” as much as the one for whom the “thing” was created?
2. How have you freely given of your resources to glorify God? What was/is that like?
3. Is there something special about being in a holy space that draws you closer to God?