

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Exodus 40:16-31, 34, 38

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 24, 2013
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 24, 2013**, is from **Exodus 40:16-31, 34, 38**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Exodus 40:16-31

(Exodus 40:16) Moses did everything just as the LORD had commanded him.

Moses received one of the greatest compliments the Bible can give when the Holy Spirit inspired these words in the Book of Exodus: “Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded.” Later, Moses did disobey God when he misused the staff of God and struck the rock to give water to the people. Earlier, God had commanded Moses to strike the rock for water, and he obeyed (see Exodus 17:6). Later, God commanded Moses to “tell the rock before your eyes to yield its water,” and thus show the power of God’s word, but Moses disobeyed God and struck the rock with his staff (see Numbers 20:6-13). But, from the time he met God at the burning bush to the time of the second Passover, Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded. He obeyed and built the tabernacle exactly as God told him to do, and this verse refers primarily to the time period of Moses building and furnishing the tabernacle (see Exodus 40:17 below).

(Exodus 40:17) In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was set up.

The new first month of the year was established by God at the celebration of the first Passover. During their first year of freedom as Israelites, God revealed to Moses the exact details and dimensions of a tabernacle, which means “tent of meeting,” that Moses was to build as a place where God would meet him and where the Levite priests would make appropriate sacrifices. God also revealed to him how the Levites were to make sacrifices to God.

(Exodus 40:18) Moses set up the tabernacle; he laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars;

The Bible describes the tabernacle as God intended for it to be built (not a house, not a building, not a temple), but a tent for God to use so He could speak to Moses and lead the people from place to place on their way to the Promised Land. Exodus describes a very elaborate tabernacle and even mentions the details about the tent poles among other items for use inside and outside the tabernacle. The fact that God wanted a tent built indicated that the Israelites were not to consider their wilderness wandering their true or final home. The New Testament sometimes calls our human bodies a tent, because our bodies on this earth as we currently reside are not the eternal home that Jesus has prepared for all who believe in Him as Lord and Savior (see John 14:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

(Exodus 40:19) and he spread the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent over it; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The completed tabernacle was a tent that was covered by another tent. The outer tent would protect the inner tent, the tabernacle, from the seasonal changes in the wilderness as the people traveled to the Promised Land. The tabernacle was holy to the LORD and required the greatest respect and care.

(Exodus 40:20) He took the covenant and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat above the ark;

The ark was an elaborately decorated box covered with gold, and God commanded Moses to put the two stone tablets upon which were written the 10 Commandments inside the ark. The 10 Commandments were the moral law of God that applies to all people everywhere. Above the ark was a mercy seat that indicated mercy from God and forgiveness was possible for those who broke God's law but repented and participated in the correct sacrifices for their sins. The poles were used by Levites to carry the ark, because the ark was too sacred to be touched with human hands and God had commanded how the ark was to be carried by the Levites (as Uzzah and King David discovered when they mishandled the ark; see 2 Samuel 6).

(Exodus 40:21) and he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The Bible not only teaches that Moses did everything regarding the tabernacle "as the LORD had commanded," but he also obeyed God's rules for setting up and moving the tabernacle in the future "as the LORD had commanded," and the rules needed to be followed exactly "as the LORD had commanded," and Moses recorded these rules for others to follow later after his death "as the LORD had commanded."

(Exodus 40:22) He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the curtain,

The tabernacle would be entered only by appointed Levite priests from a north side opening. A curtain or screen separated the priests who worked daily in the service of God from the most holy place, “the holy of holies,” that contained the ark of the covenant, an area in the tabernacle that only the high priest could enter for worship.

(Exodus 40:23) and set the bread in order on it before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The table held the bread that the priests presented before the LORD. Bread was essential for life and health, and unleavened bread was eaten at Passover and during the feast of unleavened bread following the Passover. Jesus called himself “the bread of life.” It would be appropriate to offer what is essential for life in the temple, though God of course does not need bread to eat. Believers should not be afraid to offer their lives in service of God, even as the priests offered to God what was essential for human life.

(Exodus 40:24) He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle,

As the priests entered the tabernacle, they would come first to the table to present the bread to the LORD. As they looked up from the table, behind the table they would see the lamp stand that would provide light for the tabernacle and would also serve as a reminder that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. Jesus said He was the light of the world.

(Exodus 40:25) and set up the lamps before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The rules that the LORD commanded Moses and all the priests who follow were very practical rules for setting up a place of worship and for conducting sacrificial worship in an orderly manner. Later, these rules will be modified somewhat and adapted to worship in Solomon’s Temple.

(Exodus 40:26) He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the curtain,

In addition to the table for the bread and the lamp stand, God commanded Moses to put a gold altar in front of the curtain that hid the ark of the covenant from view during normal times of worship. Only the priests were permitted to dismantle the tabernacle and move it, and only the priests could offer fragrant incense on this table and work in other parts of the tabernacle.

(Exodus 40:27) and offered fragrant incense on it; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Whereas the priests would offer sacrifices to the LORD outside of the tabernacle, the LORD commanded them to burn incense on the golden altar inside the tabernacle. Both

were considered offerings to God. The tent of meeting would have been made beautiful in every way and a place worthy of meeting God when everything was completed “as the LORD commanded Moses.”

(Exodus 40:28) He also put in place the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle.

The screens served as cloth “doors,” which would effectively keep those who were only curious from looking inside the tabernacle. They would also serve to remind the priests that they were about to enter a holy place and show them the boundaries beyond which they could and could not go. Only the high priest could pass behind the inner curtain and into that part of the tabernacle that contained the ark of the covenant.

(Exodus 40:29) He set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Two offerings were mentioned here that the LORD commanded Moses to offer outside the tabernacle. Offerings were of various types called peace offerings, thank offerings, offerings for the forgiveness of sins, wave offerings, etc.

(Exodus 40:30, 31) He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, (31) with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet.

After the priests offered their sacrifices, their hands and feet would be dirty; therefore, God commanded that a basin of water be placed between the altar and the tabernacle for the priests who wash before they entered the tent of meeting. Every aspect of the tabernacle and its parts provided a practical and orderly reason for worship.

Exodus 40:34, 38

(Exodus 40:34) Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Because Moses had done everything as the LORD had commanded him, the tabernacle or tent of meeting was ready for the LORD to fill with His presence. The LORD filled the tabernacle in the beauty of holiness, and the people saw God’s glory come into His tabernacle. They learned from this experience that God was in their midst and not to be found only on a mountain top or in a cloud or pillar of fire.

(Exodus 40:38) 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 LORD visibly demonstrated His presence to the people so they knew the LORD was present with them and led them and also met with Moses, a prophet of God. In spite of

all God did for them and showed them, the people still complained about God to Moses and also complained about Moses and his provision and leadership while they were in the wilderness.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why would it be important to these Israelites that “Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded”?
2. Why would it be important to all of those who entered into and lived in the Promised Land that “Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded”?
3. Why should it be important to us that “Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded”?
4. Why do you think God appeared to the Israelites in the cloud and in the pillar of fire, and then visibly entered the tabernacle?
5. Why do you think it was important for God to remain in the cloud and in the pillar of fire above the tabernacle instead of just disappearing inside the tabernacle and talking to Moses inside the tabernacle so Moses could then tell the people when God wanted them to move and where God wanted them to move?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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