

## **EXODUS 40: STAGE 1 COMPLETE**

As you know, our street has a bit of a thing about Christmas lights and we have a bit of fun setting them up. A couple of years ago my mate down the road started setting up his lights earlier than me and one day in early December I received a text which said, Stage 1 complete! I knew exactly what he meant as soon as he sent it. It was a bit of fun that continued for a further week or so. That's what I think of when I consider this last chapter in Exodus—with the completion of the tabernacle it's as though it's stage 1 complete.

After all the trauma of the events associated with coming out of Egypt, the people paused for some time at the foot of Mt Sinai. It was there that God again showed his presence and his faithfulness to the covenant he made with Abraham and gave the people his law. It was also there that God gave the people instructions about their worship and the tabernacle that would go with them on their travels.

### **The Tabernacle**

As we heard in the reading this morning, God gave quite specific instructions about setting up the tabernacle and its consecration—of both the tabernacle itself and the priests. The impression I get is that everything was done very carefully and nothing was accidental i.e. everything in the tabernacle, and everything done within it was done with precision, purpose and deliberate intent and each aspect had its symbolic significance. This was a holy place because it was the literal place where God presenced himself with his people.

### **The Glory of the Lord**

Having done all that, the cloud covered the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filled it. This is stage 1 complete. Stage 1 began with God's call of Abraham and the covenant he made with him and it lasted somewhere around 430 years. It included the birth and calling of Moses, the signs and wonders God displayed in Egypt, the exodus, God's provision for them in the desert and the giving of the law. It's as though the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle was the climax of all of that and now everything was in readiness for stage 2 which was moving on to take up life in the promised land.

We've already seen that the cloud, signifying God's presence, was with the people as they left Egypt. So in one sense this was nothing new, although it was now specifically associated with the tabernacle as the place of God's presence. But something different happened here. According to verse 34 it's as though it happened in two stages: firstly the cloud covered the tent of meeting and then the glory of the Lord filled it. God had already manifested his glory in different ways (fire and cloud being two) and both the people and Moses had seen that, especially Moses. But because it appears as though it happened in two stages my reading of that is that something different happened when the glory of the Lord filled it. The fact that on this occasion even Moses couldn't go into the tent says to me something different happened. Once again, everything points to the utter holiness of God. What would that have looked like? What would the people have seen? How special would it be to see a physical manifestation of the glory of the Lord! God was making it absolutely clear that he was present with his people and the fire and cloud stayed over the tabernacle during all their travels.

At this point let's take a pause and consider a couple of things.

### **Grace In Action**

Firstly, this is grace in action. It was at the most only a matter of weeks ago that the people had been worshipping a golden calf. They effectively consigned God and Moses to the scrapheap and worshipped a god of their own image and making. God decided that he was going to wipe them out and that his promise would continue through Moses because he at least had been faithful and obedient. But Moses appealed to God and he relented. The people still came under judgement, but God didn't remove his presence from them and the tangible proof of that was right in front of them. That was all grace on God's behalf. I can imagine that that must have given them a sense of security.

### **Faithful to Covenant**

Even though Israel didn't remain faithful to God and obedient to the covenant he made with them, God did. Despite all the ups and downs associated with their exodus from Egypt—their failures and evident lack of faith—God did not waver. He always had his covenant promise in view and he kept

working towards the fulfilment of that promise. The completion of the tabernacle and God presencing himself there was the outworking of that faithfulness. God was present with his people and would remain so.

For those who believed and trusted, there must have been a huge freedom and joy in this. How much mental and emotional energy does it take when we're trying to work out God's purpose and direction for us and we're not sure if we have it right? The Israelites had it easy! They didn't have to work out where to go or when to move or stop. God's presence in the form of the cloud and fire led them each step of the way. Imagine all the tension that would relieve if we had our own cloud and fire?! But then would we need faith?????!!!!

### **New Tabernacle**

Let's leap ahead for a moment.

#### ***Ezekiel 37:26-28(NIV)***

<sup>26</sup>I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. <sup>27</sup>My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>28</sup>Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.”

#### ***Revelation 21:1-5(NIV)***

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” <sup>5</sup>He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

This is what the tabernacle looked forward to, the time when God's presence would be with his people in a different way. God was present with the Israelites in the tabernacle, but his presence was centred in one place. His presence with us now is of a whole different order. The Ezekiel passage looked forward to that time, and the Revelation passages describes its completion. We live in the in between. The Book of Revelation is an unveiling of what's happening in the heavenly realms here and now. While we are yet to see it's fullness, we still are able to know and experience in part. This description has a far more personal dimension that is actually quite tender and caring. Tweaks something in our spirits because these are the things we hope and long for: no death, no pain, no tears. This is how it's meant to be – God with his people.

### **Exodus Summary**

That brings us to the end of our series in Exodus. That was something new for me because I'd never preached through that type of book before. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did and learnt something from it. A few things have stood out for me.

- It reinforced the story of God. We've seen how even though things happened so slowly, everything fitted together. We are still part of the same story.
- It's a warts and all story and we're given insight into both strengths and weaknesses.
- People are the same, no matter what era. We have trouble seeing how the Israelites could be so hot and cold and then understand how it could be because we realise they're the same as us.
- The one constant in it all is God's glory and his faithfulness to his covenant—something which also continues today.