

Reformation Fellowship Notes • September 3, 2017

Teacher: David Crabtree

Handout #25

Exodus: The Tabernacle

I. Introduction

- A. Where are we in Exodus?
 - 1. Early life of Moses (80 years)
 - 2. Plagues and exit from Egypt (Plagues lasted about 1 year.)
 - 3. Journey through the desert (from Passover to Mount Sinai less than one year)
 - 4. Arrival at Mount Sinai and the making of an agreement with YHWH
 - a) God spoke the ten commandments to the people.
 - (1) This was too scary, and the people asked for an intermediary.
 - (a) This becomes a very important theme for the rest of the book.
 - (2) God spoke the rest of God's instructions to Moses to communicate to the people.
 - (a) They held a ceremony in which the people agreed to follow God's commandments.
 - b) Moses goes up the mountain (with Joshua) to receive further instructions from God.
 - (1) Instructions about building the tabernacle
 - (2) Moses was gone for 40 days.
- B. The tabernacle dominates the last 16 chapters.
 - 1. Seven chapters describe the instructions that God gave for its construction.
 - 2. Six chapters describe the construction of the Tabernacle.
 - 3. Three chapters describe the events surrounding the incident with the golden calf.
 - a) These three chapters are in the middle.
- C. Why teach this section?
 - 1. It is long and tedious.
 - a) Several years ago when I taught Exodus, I skipped this section.
 - (1) dull
 - (2) inscrutable
 - b) It is like teaching through genealogies.

“These passages often seem dry, detailed, and uninspiring.” (Berman p. 41)

- 2. I now think it important to teach because it is here.
 - a) For too long I have sidestepped some Old Testament topics.
 - (1) The temple, the sacrifices, the festivals, etc. are all part of the background of Jesus, the apostles, and the NT.

- b) It is an integral part of the book of Exodus.
 - (1) Exodus can't be properly understood without it.
- D. Why is almost a third of the book devoted to the Tabernacle?
 - 1. Amount of time spent on a topic is roughly equivalent to importance.
 - a) Tabernacle and Temple are frequently alluded to in the Bible.
 - (1) Both in OT and NT
 - 2. This begs the question: Why is the Tabernacle so important?
 - a) In the Pentateuch God develops a cultural vocabulary to help him communicate theological concepts.
 - b) Tabernacle is an important part of that cultural vocabulary.
 - 3. Tabernacle provides pictures of holiness.
 - a) Highlights various aspects of holiness
 - (1) One of God's distinctive qualities, if not his most distinctive quality, is holiness.
 - (2) The Tabernacle pictures both God's immanence and his transcendence.
 - b) The Tabernacle is packed with symbolism.
 - (1) I don't understand all the symbolism.
 - (2) One must first picture the Tabernacle.
 - (a) Then one can begin to explore the symbols.
 - (3) This will just be a primer.
- E. What will we do today?
 - 1. What were the Ancient Near Eastern precedents?
 - 2. What were the basic principles of Ancient Near Eastern holy places?
 - 3. What is the purpose of the Tabernacle?

II. Ancient Near Eastern Precedents

- A. Israel borrowed heavily from the surrounding cultures.
 - 1. Portable shrines were common.
 - a) Usually travelled with armies on expeditions
 - (1) Carried idol
 - (2) Place to do divination
 - b) Sometimes a wagon, sometimes carried
 - c) Often red covering
 - (1) This was especially characteristic of Canaan.
- B. The closest analogy is the tent of Pharaoh Ramesses II.
 - 1. Several commentators have made this observation.
 - a) Cassuto, Sarna, Berman
 - b) But Berman makes the argument that Exodus is drawing heavily on Ramesses II's propaganda following his Kadesh expedition to show that God is greater than even Ramesses depicts himself.
 - (1) "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm"

“... consider the familiar biblical refrain that God took Israel out of Egypt ‘with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.’ The Bible could have employed that phrase to describe a whole host of divine acts on Israel’s behalf, and yet the phrase is used only with reference to the exodus. This is no accident. In much of Egyptian royal literature, the phrase ‘mighty hand’ is a synonym for the pharaoh, and many of the pharaoh’s actions are said to be performed through his ‘mighty hand’ or his ‘outstretched arm.’ Nowhere else in the ancient Near East are rulers described in this way.” (Berman, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2015/03/was-there-an-exodus/>)

- (2) The enemies of Pharaoh are described as chaff.
 - (a) This word is used in the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15:7).
 - (3) Pharaoh becomes quasi-divine and routs the enemy.
 - (a) God defeats Egyptians single handedly (Exodus 14:14).
 - (4) Pharaoh defeats the enemy by driving them into the river.
 - (a) God swamps the Egyptians in the Red Sea.
 - (5) The enemy flees in fear, saying Pharaoh is aided by a goddess.
 - (a) The Egyptians say, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.” (Exodus 14:25)
 - (6) The Tabernacle is parallel to Ramesses’ tent used on the expedition.
2. Portable tent for the king
- a) Place for his throne
 - b) Set up in center of camp
 - (1) Camp was rectangular.
 - (2) Pharaoh’s tent was in the middle.
 - (3) Orientation and proportions of Ramesses’ tent same as Tabernacle
 - c) This suggests that the Tabernacle was drawing on the Egyptian practice to claim that Yahweh was present and leading Israel just like Pharaoh lead the Egyptians.
 - (1) And Yahweh is much greater than Pharaoh.

C. This section of Exodus fits into a genre that is well represented in ANE.

“... the entire narrative belongs to a common Near Eastern genre of temple-building reports.” (Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 192)

III. Basic Principle of the Tabernacle

- A. Tabernacle is a kind of temple.
 - 1. Bears a resemblance to ANE temples in form and function
 - 2. Temple in Jerusalem is loosely patterned after it.
- B. Layout
 - 1. Entrance faces east
 - 2. Concentric circles

- a) Each circle has its own symbolism, rituals, and materials.
- 3. House-like
 - a) Characteristics of house
 - (1) Most private is most distant from door.
 - (2) Must have master's permission to progress further into house
 - (3) Furniture
 - (a) Place to eat with guests
 - b) Temples retain these features.
- 4. Temple is god's house.
 - a) Has everything a master needs
 - (1) Most private is most distant.
 - (a) Where idol is located
 - (2) Different people meet restrictions at different places.
 - (a) Gentiles
 - (b) Women
 - (c) Non-priest males
 - (d) Priests
 - (e) High priests
 - b) Temple is place where god is provided with meals.
 - (1) Priests serve the god.
 - c) Tabernacle places the emphasis on eating a meal as reaffirmation of friendship.
 - (1) More about this later
- 5. Tabernacle is not a place of public gathering.
 - a) Many of the rituals are carried out where only priests can see them.

C. Materials

- 1. The more precious the material, the more holy
 - a) Metals
 - (1) Gold
 - (2) Silver
 - (3) Bronze
- 2. The more ornate, the more holy
 - a) Three weaves
 - (1) hoshev—ornate designs (cherubim)
 - (2) roqem—ornate but no figures
 - (3) oreg—no figures, not ornate
 - b) Fabric
 - (1) Gold, wool, linen
 - (2) Wool, linen
 - (3) Linen
 - c) Colors
 - (1) Blue
 - (2) Purple

(3) Red

3. Purity of material is significant,
 - a) “Fine gold” is most holy.
 - b) “Pure frankincense” is most holy.

D. Furniture

1. Ark—throne and footstool
2. Table—for showbread
3. Lamp—for light
4. Altar of incense—cloud

IV. So, what was the Tabernacle?

A. Prolong the Sinai experience

“The erection of the Tabernacle . . . was a logical development. Through its instrumentality, the experience with the Divine Presence that occurred at Sinai could be extended as a living reality.” (Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 190-1)

1. God could travel with Israel.
 - a) A portable dwelling
2. God could eat a meal with the people.
 - a) Maintain a close relationship with them

B. The Tabernacle was a way God could be with Israel, in their midst.

1. There is a big difference between “guiding Israel” and “being with Israel.”
 - a) We will see this when we look at the incident with the Golden Calf.
2. God could be with Israel like he was on mount Sinai.

V. Conclusion

A. How can a holy, transcendent God be with a rebellious, mortal people?

1. God’s holiness will not tolerate rebelliousness.
2. The people can’t be other than rebellious.
3. The recipe for the annihilation of the people

B. Solution

1. God will be in their midst in the Tabernacle.
 - a) With many means by which he is kept separate from the people
2. A mediator will be the go-between between God and the people.

C. The graciousness of God

1. A major theme in this section, if one is willing to see it