

Exodus Chapters 35-40 - John Karmelich

Congratulations everyone, we made to the final lesson on Exodus! Yes I know I'm combining a lot of text in this lesson and it's not because I'm tired of teaching Exodus. It's just that all this text effectively is a single lesson. I'll explain: These last six chapters feel like a letdown until we grasp the big picture: The reason I'm combining so much text here is in essence we're going over old ground. The last dozen chapters were mostly about God instructing Moses on how to build a portable tabernacle structure that the Israelites take with them as they travel through the desert for roughly the next 40 years. It weighed several tons so it was tough to lug it around. These last 6 chapters are in essence repeated information saying in effect that the Israelites obeyed God, and built everything according to His specifications.

OK why bother? Why not just a statement saying the Israelites built the thing as God commanded them to do? Why six chapters on this? My first thought is God loves obedience. Remember these are those same Israelites that built an idol a few chapters back and Moses made them destroy it. Now the book is ending with the Israelites living in obedience to what God commanded them to do. OK, why should we care about this? In effect I already did. God loves obedience! Look how much space is given to show that the Israelites were obedient in these chapters. It reminds us that God expects us to live as a witness for Him as we go through life.

Yes we do learn some new things in these chapters and I'll use the rest of the lesson to "fill in the gaps" of what else God wants us to learn as we finish the book. Before I do that, here's some big picture ideas on these chapters and the book as a whole. The book opened up with the Israelites going to Egypt, then living in slavery for hundreds of years. The book ends with the Israelites starting to travel to the land of Israel (The Promised Land) after agreeing to be obedient to God. In effect they "put their money where their mouth is" by doing what God told them to do and built a tabernacle to take with them. As most of you know they will mess up more. What should have been a short trip became about 40 years traveling around hot and tough desert terrain. The point is obedience is the key to how He calls us to live. That means the good news is this book ends with a detailed account of obedience.

OK John, good for them. How do we show obedience? Obviously we have lives to live. The issue for us is about living our lives differently enough that people know we are living witnesses for Jesus. That doesn't mean wearing a billboard for Jesus on a busy street. It just means we believe the Bible is God's Word and we go through our lives making a difference for Jesus. Will we mess up? Of course then it's up to us to confess and turn from sin and move on again as a witness for Him. That's why God created us and that's how we use our lives for His glory. If you get that, you get the basic purpose for life as He intended it to be. Of course we are to use the gifts God's given us and do our share of what's necessary again as a witness for Him!

With that said, let's discuss some of the highlights and new information of these chapters. It opens with a reminder to keep the 7th day "special". I suspect God wanted to get the point across that He does not want the Israelites to be so busy building this thing, they don't take the time off once a week to enjoy a day of rest while focusing on God. The only new thing to that commandment is to not start a fire on the Sabbath. By the way that is why Orthodox Jewish people don't drive on Saturdays as the piston engine is in effect lighting a fire. In Moses' day, it was a lot of work to start a fire with no matches. Fire's also associated with damage and death, so that could be another reason God specified no fires on that day!

Anyway like any good building project, the first thing to do was collect all the materials needed. Yes it shows obedience as most of these six chapters do. I must admit I laughed at the fact Moses had to say to

everyone in effect "that's enough giving, stop everyone!" I just think in the history of both Jewish and Christian services it's the only time anyone ever said, "no more giving that's enough"! I suspect it was because the Israelites still felt guilty about the whole Golden Calf thing and showed remorse by a lot of giving here. My view on giving is giving 10% of what we earn is "living under the law". As most of us know Christians are not bound by the law, but God wants obedience as a witness for Him! Yes I know many Christians disagree with that. I think one should give generously and we cannot out give God so keep that in mind when we give at church or to different causes!

Most of the text in these chapters then repeats the exact building instructions given to Moses on how it is to be built. Just as Moses was told the names of two men who led the effort, these men are named in these chapters as leading the efforts. Most of the items in the construction process had specific rules on the materials to be used and the size of each item. The sizes and materials are repeated here again as to show us the Israelites were obedient to do as God desired. The total construction cost was stated so we know nobody "pocketed" the extra funds. Both men and women are named as groups as doing parts of this project. There were a few things not specified by size such as the height of the lid of the "box" that was associated with God's presence (a symbol of the fact there's no limit to the height of God's mercy!) The only other thing not specified in size was the "washing basin". To butcher a bunch of animals was well a "bloody mess" so I understand the necessity. I suppose the lack of size of the washing basin was to show there is not a limit to the size of our "clean up" for God, but that's just a guess on my part.

All of this goes on till Chapter 40. That includes making all the priests' outfits. I won't get into all that bare feet and bare floor stuff again (from previous lessons), just to say there is no mention of coverings in that aspect. With all that said, we get a time stamp. The thing got erected a few weeks short of one year from the original Passover (when they left Egypt). I'm sure they had a big party to finally put it all together as instructed. The book ends with God saying in effect, "Good job everyone" as a large cloud covered the tent as to imply God's presence was there. Obviously, God is everywhere, but I am sure the cloud was meant to imply He approves of their and our obedience when we do what He asks!

So let me end with the big question: What does God want of us? Over and above being a good witness for Him is there anything specific? That's a great thing to pray about. I'd argue He can't resist a prayer of how we can use our lives to make a difference for Him! For answered prayer, ask God how we can draw closer to Him. Yes, I always preach about using whatever gifts we have to make a difference for Him! Still if you don't know what God calls you to do, trial and error always works and we pray about how God wants to guide our lives for His glory. Again, that's why we were created in the first place.

With that said, I wrote a more detailed lesson on this text many years ago. You can read that if you are interested or call it a week now. Because it is the last lesson on Exodus you can also see a list of those who influenced me in my studies of Exodus. My sources are on the links to the previous lessons that I wrote on these chapters. The only new source since then is a commentary by Dennis Prager (a practical guide written by a well-known Jewish radio host). I'm grateful for you reading this. The more detailed version requires you to click on one of the two links below. Everything else are links to questions some people have. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading, John.

Bottom line, we get two chapters dealing with God traveling with us and what we should and shouldn't do to get God to go with us. The short version is to pray for His guidance, live by His rules as we make the best decisions we can as we go through our day knowing He is guiding us, even when we mess up!

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John