

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 40:34-38.

To understand how the Book of Exodus ends.

Read the Text:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 36 Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. 37 But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. 38 For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys. (Exodus 40:34-38)

Study the Text:

The Glory of the LORD

The Book of Exodus closes with the most appropriate focus: “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34). Over and over again, the LORD has demonstrated His power over every opposing force to bring out His people from Egypt and into the land He has promised to them. That Israel will inherit anything is a sole testimony to the power of God. Therefore, this book has no greater subject matter than the glory of the LORD.

THE CLOUD AND THE FIRE

God’s glory and presence were manifested among His people, once again, through “the cloud” and “the fire” (Ex. 40:38). This manifestation of His presence has been consistent throughout the entirety of the work. God first appeared to Moses in a fiery bush (Ex. 3:1-4). In Exodus 13:21-22, God led His people out of Egypt and towards the Red Sea “in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.” He continued leading His people in this way through the wilderness in Exodus 14:19-24 and 16:10. The cloud appeared on top of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:9-16 and 24:15-18. The cloud again appeared at the entrance to the tent of meeting in Exodus 33:9-10 and 34:5.

THE OVERWHELMING PRESENCE

God’s presence in the Tabernacle was so overwhelming that “Moses was not able to enter the tent” (Ex. 40:35). Some have suggested that this creates problems for the Exodus narrative in that the entire point of the Tabernacle was for the LORD to dwell there and therefore to preclude Moses’s entering it would contradict its purpose. However, two problems arise from this suggestion. For one, Aaron, not Moses, was the high priest invited into the Holy of Holies. While Moses was the unique mediator between the LORD and Israel, it stands to reason that the normative pattern set up by God for the Tabernacle would eventually be instituted and that even Moses would be required to obey.

However, secondly, verse 35 doesn’t even preclude the possibility of Moses ever entering the Tabernacle. Instead, God’s presence was so overwhelming that it required God’s invitation into the Tabernacle before Moses could enter it. That may sound speculative, but there is textual warrant. Exodus 24:15-16a says: “Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount

Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days.” The same cloud that filled the Tabernacle was on Mount Sinai. Moses was not able to enter into it, until God called out to Moses to invite Him in: “And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud” (Ex. 24:16b). Then, *and only then*, could Moses enter into the cloud: “Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights” (Ex. 24:18).

The idea behind this passage is that God’s glory is so overwhelming that man cannot enter it without invitation. God is unapproachable on our own terms. We can only come to Him through His gracious invitation, which has been made with even greater clarity in Jesus Christ.

THE GREATER PRESENCE

Jesus is the presence of God in every way. Jesus is the Word who was both “with God” and “was God” (Jn. 1:1). Jesus Himself said: “If you have seen Me you have seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). In John 8:58, Jesus took upon Himself the divine title of YHWH. In John 10:30, He said, “I and the Father are one.” Colossians 1:15 says he is “the image of the invisible God.” Colossians 2:9 says, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” Hebrews 1:3 states that Christ “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,” and that he “upholds the universe by the word of his power.” To be in the presence of Jesus is to be in the presence of God because Jesus Christ is God. As the Nicene Creed states: “He is light from light, true God from true God.”

The presence of Jesus Christ changed reality. God had appeared in numerous ways throughout human history, as recorded by the Old Testament, and while significant, none were as important as God’s appearing in Christ. Why? Because in Christ, God became man and fundamentally changed what it means to be human. God doesn’t change Himself to become human; He changes humanity in His union with humanity. And now, when we put on Christ, we are no longer required to be invited into His presence as outsiders. In Christ, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14). Ephesians 1:5 says: “In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ.” We are a part of the family of God through adoption and, therefore, no longer outsiders.

And as a result of this, we have access to the glory of the LORD through the Spirit in a way that even Moses did not have: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). The LORD no longer dwells in a Tabernacle or a Temple made with hands. Paul says: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In every way, the presence of Jesus Christ ushered in the presence of God in a greater manner than ever before, and His appearing has fundamentally changed how we relate to God. And yet, in the same way, God invites you to enter this glory through the Son by confessing your sin, believing the Gospel, and being born again.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

In 1999, *The Matrix*, starring Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss, and Hugo Weaving, hit the theaters with universal success. The movie, in many ways, changed film. The virtual effects, choreographed fight sequences, and philosophical undertones influenced several films in the following years. Near the beginning of the movie, there's one scene when Mr. Anderson (Reeves), also known as Neo, is being

apprehended by authorities at his place of work. Simultaneously, he receives a phone in the mail, which subsequently rings upon opening it. On the other side of the call, Morpheus (Fishburne), tells Neo that “agents” are after him, and that if he wants to escape, he must do exactly as he said. Morpheus issues prompts to move at precisely the right time, helping Neo narrowly miss the agents as they search for him. The timing is perfect and entirely up to Morpheus. To avoid danger, Neo (*the chosen one*) must go when Morpheus says “go,” and he must stop when Morpheus says “stop.”

It’s a great illustration of the relationship between Israel (*the chosen ones*) and God. When God goes, they go; when God stops, they stop. They narrowly escape danger and thwart their opponents only because of the divine direction they receive. The Book of Exodus closes by revealing that this pattern of the cloud and the fire leading the people through the wilderness continued “throughout all their journeys,” until they reached the Promised Land, and that “all of the house of Israel” were witnesses to it (Ex. 40:38). Again, this establishes the people of Israel could verify a normative pattern for how God worked that through the generations.

What About Now?

One takeaway is the reality that no one can enter the glory of God without first being invited. Moses was asked to enter the Tent of Meeting as the presence of God filled the Tabernacle. Similarly, we are invited into the glory of God through faith in Jesus Christ, the ultimate presence of God, who has united Himself with humanity. Another takeaway is how obedience to what God says preserves us from the pitfalls of our sin and our enemies. God has established life in such a way that, generally speaking, our lives are well when we obey His commands (Prov. 3:5-6).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 40:34. What covered the tent? What filled the Tabernacle?

2. Read Exodus 40:35. What was Moses unable to do? Why?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 40:36. Whenever the cloud was taken up from the Tabernacle, what would the Israelites do?

2. Read Exodus 40:37. What would the Israelites do if the cloud was not taken up?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 40:38. What led the people by day? What led the people by night? For how long did this occur?

2. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. How does this verse correlate to the story of Exodus? What does this passage teach about our relationship to God in contrast with the Israelites?

Day Four

1. Proverbs 3:5-6. What does this proverb say God will do for those who love and obey His commandments?

2. Read Colossians 1:15 and 2:9. What do these verses reveal about the nature of Jesus Christ?

Discuss the Text!

Week 87 Discussion: Obedience Leads to Life

One of the takeaways of this passage is that only by following the LORD do we have a better chance at the “good life.” The Israelites depended on the cloud of the glory of the LORD to move before they would move. They waited on God, and God led them well. This is true for us today, as well, in some sense. When God leads us to move by Word or Spirit, we are to move with Him—failure to do so results in unnecessary hardships. Talk as a group about how obedience to God has benefitted you, and how disobedience has led to greater consequences.

1. Icebreaker: If you follow the laws of the country you live in, are you likely to get into trouble? Why or why not?
2. If you follow God’s law, will you likely end up in hardship? Why or why not?
3. How has obedience to God’s Word led to blessing in your life? Give a specific example, if possible.
4. How has disobedience to God’s Word led to hardship in your life? Give a specific example, if possible.
5. Why is “following God’s rules” always talked about so negatively? What is actually negative about being obedient?
6. Kid Talk (For Home): Talk to your kids about their house or classroom rules. Ask them, “If you follow the rules, will you still get in trouble?” Explain to them that, generally speaking, this is true concerning God’s rules for us as well.

Takeaways:

1. Moses could only enter the presence of God when he was invited in.
2. The cloud and the pillar of fire led the Israelites through the wilderness in their journeys.