

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS – PART SEVEN – THE PROGRESS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

God had spelled out His plan for His redeemed people. It was to be a relationship based on a covenant, commitment and having consequences in their love for Him as in commandments 1-4, and for their neighbours, commandments 5-10. In chapters 21-23 He provided a taste of how these principles would work out in society where the most basic need would be justice and fairness that gave protection for the weak. This theme would be developed much further in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. At this point however God wanted to demonstrate how a growing understanding of His word should lead to a deepening of His people's relationship with Him. So far only Moses had met the Lord. Jethro had urged him to train leaders,(18) who had so far known God only through Moses, but now those 74 leaders were ready to meet God for themselves. The team consisted of 70 elders, together with Aaron and his two oldest sons, and Joshua. Moses must have been excited at the sight of such a large and impressive group heading up the mountain to meet his God. Sadly all but one, Joshua, would disappoint and fall short of the plan God had for them.

Meeting God was described as 'worship'(24:1) which would begin at a distance, but the gap would be closed through first, hearing and obeying the word of God and secondly, by sacrificing on an altar which in the Old Testament always pictures the cross of Christ. Following sacrifice they wanted more of the word of God to which they again responded. Worship in the church is all too often reduced to ceremony of some kind whereas true spiritual worship is an attitude to God which presents our whole selves, who have been cleansed through Christ's sacrifice, and are now available to Him for whatever He has in mind.(Rom.12:1,2) First Moses and then the 74 were able to see God, presumably as the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is the visible form of an invisible God.(Jn.1:18; 5:37; Col.1:15) Meeting God was accompanied by sharing food and drink, in the Bible the closest form of fellowship.(Jn.13; Rev.3:20) TV and fast food have robbed us of something precious in our modern culture. Now Moses and Joshua were ready to learn much more from God so they embarked on a 40 day training programme in the mountain top Bible school. Meanwhile the other 73 were sent back to help their people learn to apply in real life what the leaders had learned.(24)

The teaching programme for the next forty days concentrated on one topic, the building of a house for God, a place where He could be central to the lives of His people. The tabernacle would be one giant visual aid, every detail of which would explain and remind them of some aspect of their relationship with God. It is easy to get lost in the detail of the tabernacle but there are some very simple principles of interpretation which are the safe way to understand the symbolism without resorting to using our wild imaginations. There are three main ideas. Firstly we need to let the rest of the Bible explain this part of the scriptures. Secondly when a symbol is interpreted in one place, the meaning can be used consistently everywhere else in the Bible. Thirdly we must remember that the message of the whole Bible is Jesus Christ.(Jn.5:46,47) We are the tabernacle or temple of God, individually and as Christ's church, so the message of the Old Testament tabernacle must be of what God wants to do in us individually and together.(I Cor.3:16; 6:19; II Cor.5:1)

Before any part of the plan was given to Moses, the first important question was, how was it going to be paid for? In no way was the cost going to be met by a tax or a tithe. The Lord only wanted a freewill offering which came from the heart with no pressure whatsoever. The tabernacle was to illustrate the wonderful grace of God in salvation.(25:1-9)

In the very heart of the tabernacle was a simple box which was to contain the tablets of the 10 commandments, the summary of God's word. On top of the box was the mercy seat over shadowed by two cherubim, a reminder of the heavenly beings who had once guarded entry to the garden of Eden and provided a meeting place between man and God.(Gen.3:24) The cherubim would still have the same purpose. Everything was to be covered in gold because it was to be the very best. The blood of a bull was to be sprinkled on the mercy seat once a year by the high priest.(Heb.9:5-12) God will speak to us in our heart of hearts, based on His word, made possible through Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the cross. There was to be a golden lampstand, a reminder that Jesus, the light of the world, wants to send us out as lights

into the world,(Matt.5:14-16; Jn.9:5; Rev.1:12,13,20) and a table on which sat the bread of the presence because we are to feed the world with truth.(25:10-40)

The whole building was to be beautifully and carefully made, a reminder that our bodies are to be cared for, not abused, as fitting places for God to live in, but the building itself was not to be the object of worship. It was divided into two sections, the Holy of Holies which housed the ark and the mercy seat, and the Holy Place which contained the lampstand, the bread and the altar of incense. A veil was to hang between the two, keeping all but the high priest out of the Holy of Holies.(26) The whole building was surrounded by an outer courtyard in which were a bronze altar for people to bring their sacrifices for sin, and a place to wash before entering the Holy Place. Oil, which in the Bible pictures the Holy Spirit,(Heb.1:9) was to be supplied by God's people to keep the lamps burning constantly. The priests, who in the New Testament are all Christians, (I Pet.2:5; Rev.1:6) were responsible under the guidance of the high priest, to keep the light burning.(27)

Aaron as the high priest had a central role in the way the tabernacle was to function. His sons could follow him if they were faithful. He was to be dressed in very special robes to make him acceptable to God as a mediator, as Jesus had to 'wear' His sinless life to be our mediator. Aaron wore the names of each of the 12 tribes because he represented each of them before God. He also wore a breastplate of judgement as Jesus was to 'wear' our judgement before God on the cross. The Urim and Thummim were devices for discovering the will of God on difficult matters, as Jesus promises to guide us on every decision we have to make. Aaron wore a gold plate on his forehead, as Jesus has us constantly in His mind.(28) Aaron and his sons had first to be made clean by sacrifices before they could represent the people, as Jesus had to be without sin to represent us. Each of the sacrifices described an aspect of the work of Christ on the cross. The burnt offering reminded them that all their sin was removed. The sin offering spoke of the cross dealing with every new sin in the life of the Christian. The peace offering showed how the cross affects our relationships. The wave offering was a celebration of resurrection. The grain offering showed them that because of the cross we can be fed with the word of God.(29) The great difference between Aaron and Jesus was that Aaron needed first to be cleansed of sin before he could offer sacrifices, whereas Jesus was without sin and could therefore be both the high priest,(Heb.9:11) and the once and for all sacrifice.(Heb.4:15-5:3; 7:26,27)

The Holy Place also contained an altar of incense,(Rev.8:3) a reminder that God wants us to talk with Him daily. Outside the Holy Place in the outer court was to be a place for the priests to wash themselves before they entered, because we cannot talk with God about anything else until we have first let him forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.(I Jn.1:7,9) Anointing oil, which represented the empowering of the Holy Spirit for their ministry,(Acts 10:38) and the incense, were to be prepared with the greatest care from the finest materials.(30) The work of turning the heavenly blue print into an earthly structure was to be entrusted to a very special man, Bezalel, the son of Uri, who would depend utterly on the Holy Spirit to express the plan through his outstanding and God-given artistic talents and craftsmanship. Art and skill are God-given gifts providing we depend on Him alone to use them rightly and to His glory.(31)

SOME QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. At what other times in the Bible does God take people up mountains to know Him better?(chapter 24)
2. How do the pictures used in this story illustrate the secret of becoming a Christian and a faithful witness in the world?(chapter 25)
3. In what sense and for what purpose are we to take care of the bodies God has given us?(chapter 26)
4. How might the three sections of the tabernacle illustrate the three parts of our being, the spirit, the soul and the body? What were the functions of each part?(chapter 27)
5. What can we learn from the parts of Aaron's uniform about the work of Jesus as our high priest?(chapter 28)
6. What do the various sacrifices teach us about the place of the cross in the lives of those who want to be witnesses of Christ?(chapter 29)
7. What does the altar of incense show us about effective prayer?(chapter 30)
8. Why did God give us artistic talents and appreciation of art?(chapter 31)