

Reformation Fellowship Notes • March 11, 2018
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Handout #32
Exodus 35 & 36

I. Introduction

- A. Last six chapters of Exodus describe the construction of the tabernacle.
 - 1. Today we will look at chapters 35-36.
 - a) Next week we will look at the last four chapters.
- B. Prefatory remarks
 - 1. When I have read through Exodus in the past, I just raced through these chapters.
 - a) Repetitive and uninteresting
 - b) Eager to get done
 - c) It seemed to me like Moses was writing this down as if to fulfill some legal requirement.
 - 2. I considered skipping or racing through these last chapters.
 - a) Most of the commentaries do this.
 - b) But I began working my way through the text and was surprised.
 - (1) What used to be lifeless, I now find inspiring.
 - (2) It changes the book of Exodus.
 - 3. But before we look at the next two chapters, some background is necessary.
 - a) How we understand this last section is transformed if we approach it with a different set of cultural assumptions.
 - b) There is reason to believe that the Israelites would have had a very different set of cultural assumptions.
 - (1) We need to look at this section through those eyes.
 - 4. So we will spend a little time talking about the literary form of these chapters.
- C. The construction of the tabernacle was in doubt.
 - 1. With the incident of the Golden Calf, the future of the tabernacle was in doubt.
 - a) The tabernacle was to be a place for God to be in the midst of Israel.
 - b) After the incident, God was not going to be with them.
 - (1) This eliminated the need for the tabernacle.
 - c) After the reconciliation and reaffirmation construction, there is again need for the tabernacle.
- D. The last six chapters contain a lot of repetition.
 - 1. Much of this repeats what was said in chapters 25-31.
 - 2. There are even things within these chapters that are repeated.
 - 3. To our ears (eyes) this seems very boring or a mistake in composition.
 - a) Text critical scholars thought this was an indication of various sources being combined artlessly.

- E. To the less skeptical, the repetition appears to have a cultural significance that our culture doesn't pick up on.
1. OT narratives are typically very sparse.
 - a) No unnecessary detail
 - b) So why would there be repetition?
 2. Repetition seems to be used to emphasize exact implementation.

“The theme of the founding and building of a shrine was a stereotyped literary category in the early writings of the Eastern countries; and it was usual for such passages to record first the divine utterance describing the plan of the sanctuary in minutest detail, and thereafter to give an account of the construction, which repeated in identical or similar phrasing the description given in the divine communication. This is, indeed, only a specific facet of the general technique of repetition, which was dearly beloved of the writers of the ancient East. The literary tradition of the land of Canaan, which is continued in Biblical writings, is also fond of this practice. It will suffice to cite here one example from the Canaanite works discovered at Ugarit. In the Ugaritic epic of King Keret it is narrated that this monarch saw El the father of the gods in a dream, and received from him instructions concerning the offering of sacrifices, the mustering of a great army, the organization of a military expedition to the land of King Pabel, the request that Pabel's daughter or granddaughter be given him for a wife, and so on and so forth; these directives contain more than ninety lines. At the conclusion of the instructions we are informed that King Keret did as El had directed him in his dream, and his actions are described by the literal repetition of the terms of the instructions except for changes in the forms of the verbs to indicate the past tense and other variations of formulation, such as a *Waw* conjunctive more or less, the substitution of synonyms, differences in the sequence of the words and the like, as well as other divergences arising from the altered character of the narrative—precisely what we find in the present section of the Book of Exodus. In light of this style of composition, our section is not only not to be regarded as a later addition, but is required where it is, and were it not here, we should have to assume that it was missing from the text” (Cassuto, p. 453).

“The reason for the genre is in fact easy enough to see: elaborate, even tedious repetition forces the reader/listener to agree that a set of important instructions was unquestionably carried out to the letter. In other words, the command-fulfillment repetition pattern is a way of highlighting the importance of what is commanded and the precision with which it was obeyed. By implication the things produced in obedience to the original command must be considered important—they were commanded in great detail and produced in rigorous complicity with the command. In other words, things over which such a great ‘fuss’ have been made in the text can only be seen as of paramount significance, things neither to be ignored nor treated lightly nor taken for granted” (Stuart, p. 743).

- a) There is a delight that can be sensed.
 - (1) God said to do x, y, and z; and we did x, y, and z.
 - (2) This disobedient, but humbled, people could take some satisfaction in having done what they were supposed to do.
 - (a) Empirically demonstrable obedience

- F. The repetition is not just cut and paste.
1. Verb tenses are changed.
 2. A few details are changed.
 3. The order of presentation is changed.
 - a) This is the biggest and most glaring difference.
 4. These changes were made to create interest.
- G. What explains the change in order of presentation?
1. The instructions move from most holy to least holy.
 - a) Furniture for inside the tabernacle
 - b) The tent
 - c) Furniture for outside the tabernacle
 - d) The screen around the courtyard
 - e) Priestly garments
 2. Implementation of the commands
 - a) Tent
 - b) Furniture inside the tabernacle
 - c) Furniture outside the tabernacle
 - d) The screen around the courtyard
 - e) Priestly garments
 3. The most holy furniture is the reason for which the rest exists, so it is first in the plan.
 - a) It moves steadily from most holy to least holy.
 4. But the most holy furniture needs an appropriate place created before it can be actually made, so it is made after the tent.
 - a) This is a more practical ordering.

II. Exodus 35:1-3

- A. A reminder was the last thing talked about when the instructions were given (31:12-17).
1. It is the first thing talked about with respect to implementation.
- B. The Sabbath was intended to play a very important role in their lives.
1. The Sabbath was intended to provoke reflection and to be a reminder.
 - a) “Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy.” In Exodus 19, sabbath is because God rested on the seventh day.
 - b) In Deuteronomy, sabbath is a reminder that God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt.
 - c) “...for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you” (Ex. 31:13).
 - (1) “Not to keep it would be to say publicly to the world, ‘I am not in covenant relationship with the Lord of the Sabbath’” (Stuart, p. 748).

2. They were not to allow construction of the tabernacle to interfere with keeping the sabbath.
 - a) The holiness of the tabernacle was not to take precedence over the holiness of the sabbath.
 - b) More about this later
- C. Why the caution against kindling a fire on sabbath?
 1. There is no such caution in the parallel passage in chapter 31.
 - a) Presumably this was included as a result of the incident with the Golden Calf.
 - (1) They are prone to being influenced by pagan culture.
 2. There is some indication that the Canaanites viewed preparatory activities as not being work.
 - a) For example, it took a long time to create a hot fire for working with metal.
 - b) This process was not considered work.
 3. If this is true, it could have been used as an excuse to do some work on the sabbath.
 - a) God is defining work a little differently, and the Israelites need to follow his definition.
 - b) They need to follow God's rules and definitions and not be tempted to adopt more attractive practices from their neighbors.

III. Exodus 35:4-9

- A. Requesting the contribution
 1. Totally free will
 - a) This is the first indication of the importance placed on voluntary aspect of this project.
 - b) This emphasis will become clearer later in the chapter.

IV. Exodus 35:10-19

- A. To do list for the workmen
 1. In the order of implementation (above I. G. 2.)
 2. There is a similar list when God told Moses what the craftsmen would have to make (Ex. 31:7-11).
 - a) It is slightly abbreviated.
 - b) Same order
 3. It is almost identical to a description of the things to set-up (Ex. 40:1-8).
 - a) Same order

V. Exodus 35:20-29

- A. Taking the collection

1. Many people made contributions
 - a) Men
 - b) Women
 - c) Leaders
 - d) Play on words with “to lift up”
 2. The people contribute many things.
 - a) Jewelry
 - b) Fabric
 - c) Wood
 - d) Precious stones
 - e) Skills
 3. The list is similar to the list of things God said would be needed (Ex. 25:1-9).
 - a) Almost the same order
 4. Only those who really wanted to give
 - a) Materials
 - b) Skilled labor
 - c) That these were voluntary contributions is made very clear.
 - (1) Nine times this is said.
- B. Many people were excited and highly motivated to contribute both wealth and labor to this project.
1. Enthusiasm in response to God’s graciousness to them

VI. Exodus 35:30-36:1

- A. Making work assignments
1. God gifted two individuals.
 - a) Bezalel and Oholiab
 2. God gifted them talent so that they could give back.
 - a) God also moved them to do so.
 3. These men developed their skills as slaves in Egypt.
 - a) They probably had no inkling that their skills would be put to this use.
 - b) They are multi-talented and are able to teach others.
 - (1) Their skills are leveraged to provide a workforce for the job.

VII. Exodus 36:2-7

- A. Super abundance of contributions
1. Moses put a stop to the contributions.
 - a) More than enough to do the job
 - b) More could have been collected.
 - (1) Collecting more could have been justified.
 - (a) The more we have, the more God would be honored.
 - c) But the project was inherently limited.
 - (1) God would not have been more honored with more wealth.

VIII. Exodus 36:8-38

- A. Construction of the tabernacle begins.
 - 1. Corresponds to Exodus 26:1-37
 - a) Almost word for word
 - 2. All done as they were told to do it
 - a) The curtains for the tabernacle
 - b) Goat hair and leather covering
 - c) Paneling for tabernacle
 - d) Bars for the paneling
 - e) Veil and doorway

IX. Conclusion

- A. So these last six chapters show Moses' delight in the fact that the people of Israel did what God asked them to do.
 - 1. The people come at this with real enthusiasm.
 - a) God gave them a role to play.
 - (1) He could have done things otherwise.
 - b) They gave abundantly.
 - c) They provided labor enthusiastically.
 - d) This gave them an opportunity to show their gratitude for God's grace.
 - (1) They were, at this time, devoted to God.
 - (2) This helps explain a handful of passages that depict the time in the wilderness as a time when the Israelites loved God.
 - (a) Jeremiah 2:2-3:
 Thus says the Lord,
 I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth,
 The love of your betrothals,
 Your following after me in the wilderness,
 Through a land not sown.
 Israel was holy to the Lord,
 The first of his harvest;
 All who ate of it became guilty;
 Evil came upon them, declares the Lord.
- B. There is a hierarchy of holy things.
 - 1. Holy time (sabbath) takes priority over holy place (tabernacle).
 - a) Other examples
 - (1) Jesus healed on the sabbath.
 - (a) Works of God take precedence over the holy day.
 - (2) David ate the showbread.
 - (a) Escape of God's king takes precedence over the holiness of the showbread.

2. Sabbath takes priority over Tabernacle.
 - a) Sabbath was the first thing declared holy.
 - (1) God made it.
 - (a) Man can't change it.
 - b) Tabernacle was made by man according to God's instructions.
 - (1) It was destroyed by man or fell into disrepair.