

26. The Tabernacle

Exod 25-40

Its specifications are given in the last part of Exodus. They anticipate the Jerusalem Temple, and so must postdate Solomon.

This cumbersome quasi-Temple structure is meaningless in the wilderness. It also creates narrative complications. In the Covenant Code (Exod 23:20-33), Yahweh had promised to drive out the natives from the Promised Land. Moses is called up to the Mount to hear the Law, and “was in the mount forty days and forty nights” (Exod 24:18). Then, suddenly, we have this:

Exod 25:1. And Yahweh spake unto Moses, [2] Speak unto the children of Israel, that they take for me an offering: of every man whose heart maketh him willing ye shall take my offering. [3] And this is the offering which ye shall take of them: gold, and silver, and brass, [4] and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats’ hair, [5] and rams’ skins dyed red, and sealskins, and acacia wood, [6] oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense, [7] onyx stones. and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate. [8] And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. [9] According to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it.

The people had left Egypt suddenly, their mixing bowls on their backs. *Where did they get all that stuff?* So obvious was the incongruity that passages were added (Exod 3:21-22, 11:2, 12:35-36) saying that, before leaving Egypt, the Hebrews had “despoiled the Egyptians.” Those patches saved the situation.

Guiding the Wanderers. And now we have two stories. One is early:

Exod 13:21. And Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them by the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might go by day and by night: [22] the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, departed not from before the people.

And one is late. From Exod 25 on, the Tabernacle is finished, with its rings and carrying poles. And then, Yahweh himself descends to take up residence:

Exod 40:34. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. [35] And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. [36] And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward, throughout all their journeys; [37] but if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. [38] For the cloud of Yahweh was upon the tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

So ends Exodus. The Tabernacle, with its priestly love of elaboration, replaces the mere “pillar of cloud.” The guiding Tabernacle replaces the more direct guidance of Yahweh. His presence, his “glory,” eliminates Moses, who is no longer “able to enter the tent of meeting.” We are in a New Age of Yahweh.