

# Explore the Bible: February 2

*Inhabited! • Exodus 40:16-21,34-38*

*By Wayne VanHorn*



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### **Instructions followed (Ex. 40:16-21)**

A striking literary feature of Exodus 40:16-21 is the recurrence of the phrase, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." The phrase appears 16 times, found in Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua. In Exodus 12:28, 50, Aaron is included after Moses. However, the phrase is primarily used in Exodus 39-40 in association with the building of the tabernacle according to the plans God had revealed. In order for the tabernacle to be a place to experience God's presence, it had to be built in obedience to His instructions. The ten-fold appearance of the phrase, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses," serves to underscore the precision and care Moses and the craftsmen took

to conform to God's word.

Christians are to live by the instructions of God also. Are we as meticulous in applying God's word to our lives as Moses was in constructing the tabernacle? Yes, we are saved by grace, but are we excused from obeying the Lord's instruction as we live out our daily lives?

Moses built the tabernacle, put the testimony (Ten Commandments) in the ark, and placed the mercy seat atop the ark. Then he positioned the ark and mercy seat in the holiest part of the tabernacle and concealed it with the veil. Following these meticulous, God-given instructions emphasized the holiness of the Lord. God was to be so respected among His people, that obeying His commands would bring delight to them.

### **Tabernacle inhabited (Ex. 40:34-35)**

Our lesson title derives from this central passage. The greatest blessing Christ-followers can experience is the presence of the Lord. His presence is not limited to a single day or time on the calendar. As in the days of Adam and Eve, God seeks to walk with and fellowship among His people.

Once Moses completed all the Lord's instructions, the tabernacle was ready. The LORD inhabited the tabernacle. His cloud covered the tent of meeting; His glory filled the tabernacle (Ex.40:34). How expressive the apposition "tent of meeting!" God sought to meet with His people. The tabernacle provided the place of holiness suitable for God's people to honor Him. God's glory refers to His awesome presence.

Once the cloud settled on the tent and glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, Moses had to stand at a distance and observe (Ex. 40:35). An otherwise common tent had been transformed into the tabernacle of the living God. His glory and presence were overwhelming. The cloud provided a visible symbol of God's presence among the people. His presence was to be honored and respected.



The tabernacle was located in the midst of the camps of Israel, with three tribes stationed on each of the four sides of the tent. The Levites were responsible for setting up and taking down the tabernacle and did so in response to the Lord moving or stationing His cloud over the tent of meeting. With God leading Israel, they were invincible. The only real threat to the people came in times of their disobedience.

### **Guidance given (Ex. 40:36-38)**

The phrase, "Throughout all their journeys," opens (40:36) and closes (40:38) this passage, forming a literary *inclusio*, emphasizing the theme of God's faithful guidance. The journey from bondage in Egypt to blessing in the land of promise was perilous. The Lord's presence and guidance assured success.

When God lifted His cloud from over the tabernacle, the people were to set out following the cloud to their next destination (4:36). Whenever the cloud remained stationary, the people camped in place until the Lord began to move them once more (4:37).

God guided His people. The cloud, easily visible by day, became fire by night "in the sight of all the house of Israel" (Ex. 40:38). The reminder the cloud/fire was on the tabernacle "throughout all their journeys" speaks to God's faithfulness in guiding His people to the promised land.

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