

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 18: The Ark, the Table, and the Lampstand

Exodus 25:1–40

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal aim of this lesson is to read the tabernacle correctly: as a God-designed shadow of heavenly realities (Hebrews 8:5; 9:23–24) that points forward to Christ and His once-for-all work, and not as a pattern to be reinstituted or bound on Christians. The student must hold two truths at once. First, every detail of the sanctuary mattered because God specified it; worship is approached on His terms, not ours ('exactly as I show you,' 25:9, 40). Second, the whole system was a shadow whose substance is Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8–10), so we honor it not by copying it but by seeing how it is fulfilled in Him and in the church as God's dwelling.

Be disciplined with typology. The New Testament authorizes real connections: the bread, the lampstand, the High Priest, the blood, the Most Holy Place all find fulfillment in Christ and His people. But avoid the temptation to assign hidden meaning to every loop, color, and clasp. Stay anchored in the text and draw the connections Scripture itself draws or that are natural and accurate. A class fed on fanciful over-reading learns to distrust sound interpretation; a class shown careful, text-anchored typology learns to love Christ in all the Scriptures.

The formation aim runs through the whole chapter. God's first word is an invitation to willing-hearted giving, which models the cheerful, purposeful generosity the New Testament commends (2 Corinthians 9:7) without binding the old tithe. God's central desire is to dwell among His people, which presses the student to live as one whom God genuinely wants near. And God's repeated insistence on building by the pattern presses the student toward worshiping God as He directs, not as personal preference dictates. Aim, then, at a heart that gives gladly, draws near confidently through Christ, and submits its worship to God's revealed will.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 25:1–2. God tells Moses to receive an offering 'from every man whose heart moves him.' What does it reveal about God that He builds His dwelling place from freely given, willing-hearted offerings rather than compelled payment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Exodus 25 opens the long section (chapters 25–31) in which God gives Moses the pattern for the tabernacle and its furnishings. It begins not with construction but with a contribution. God tells Moses to take an offering 'from every man whose heart moves him' (25:2). The list of materials follows in verses 3–7: metals, yarns, linen, skins, wood, oil, spices, and gemstones.

The key phrase is 'whose heart moves him.' The Hebrew describes a heart stirred or made willing. This is freewill giving, not taxation. God, who owns everything, chooses to build His dwelling from the glad offerings of His people. That is a striking divine self-revelation: He desires willing love, not mere compliance.

Note that this comes right after redemption from Egypt. A people who had nothing, who left Egypt with goods given to them by the Egyptians (12:35–36), now return a portion to the God who freed them. Giving flows out of being saved, not as a price for salvation. This order (redeemed first, then giving in response) is exactly the gospel order.

Teach the principle without binding the specifics. We are not commanded to bring acacia wood and onyx stones. But the principle endures: God delights in willing-hearted giving from a people He has redeemed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God builds His dwelling from freely given, willing-hearted offerings.
- Giving flows out of redemption already received, not as a price for it.
- The phrase 'whose heart moves him' stresses willingness over compulsion.
- God who owns all things still delights in the glad gifts of His people.
- The principle of willing giving endures even though the specific materials do not.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God choose to build His dwelling from voluntary offerings?
- How does the timing (after redemption) shape how we understand giving?
- What does willing-hearted giving reveal about a person's love for God?

Question 2

Student Question:

Read 25:2 again, alongside 2 Corinthians 9:7. God wanted offerings from a willing heart, and the New Testament says God loves a cheerful giver. Examine your own giving: is it cheerful and purposeful, or reluctant and pressured, and what would need to change in your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question carries the willing-heart principle of 25:2 into the student's own giving and connects it to 2 Corinthians 9:7: 'Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.'

Be careful not to bind the Old Testament tithe as law. The New Testament pattern is purposeful, regular, proportionate, cheerful giving (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8–9). The aim is to examine the heart behind the gift, not to set a percentage.

Many believers give out of habit, pressure, or guilt rather than gladness. The text invites honest self-examination: when the plate passes, what is in your heart? Reluctance and cheerfulness are both visible to God, who sees the heart.

The cure for grudging giving is not stricter rules but a renewed sense of having been redeemed. Cheerful giving grows from gratitude. Point the student back to what God has given before pressing what we should give.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God loves a cheerful giver and notices the heart behind the gift (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- New Testament giving is purposeful, regular, and proportionate (1 Corinthians 16:2).
- The old tithe is not bound on Christians; the heart-attitude is the focus.
- Reluctant or pressured giving reveals a heart problem, not just a budget problem.
- Gratitude for redemption is the engine of cheerful giving.

Discussion Prompts

- When you give, is your heart more often glad or grudging? Why?
- How does remembering what God has given change how you give?
- What practical step would make your giving more purposeful and cheerful?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 25:8–9. God says, ‘let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them,’ and ‘exactly as I show you... so you shall make it.’ What do these two statements together teach us about God’s desire to be near His people and about how that nearness is to be approached?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 8–9 state the purpose and the principle of the whole project. The purpose: ‘let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them’ (25:8). The principle: ‘exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle... so you shall make it’ (25:9).

The purpose is staggering. The transcendent God of Sinai, before whom the mountain trembled, wills to dwell in the midst of His people’s camp. This is the heartbeat of the Bible’s storyline: God with us. It appears in Eden, in the tabernacle, in the temple, supremely in the incarnation (‘the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,’ John 1:14), in the church as God’s temple (Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Corinthians 3:16), and finally in the new creation (Revelation 21:3).

The principle is equally important: nearness to a holy God is approached on His terms. Israel did not design the sanctuary; God did. They built ‘exactly as I show you.’ This guards against the human instinct to worship God however we please. Right worship is regulated by God’s revealed will, not by personal preference or innovation.

Hold both together. God's desire to dwell with us is warm and inviting; God's specification of how we approach Him is exacting and holy. Grace and order are not opposites here. The God who wants to be near is also the God who shows us how to come near.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's purpose is to dwell among His people, the heartbeat of the whole Bible.
- This longing runs from Eden to the incarnation to the church to the new creation.
- Nearness to a holy God is approached on His terms, not ours.
- Israel built exactly by the pattern God revealed, not by their own design.
- Grace (God wants to dwell with us) and order (how we approach) belong together.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's desire to dwell among His people reveal about His character?
- Why does it matter that the sanctuary was built exactly as God showed?
- How do we hold together God's nearness and His holiness in worship today?

Question 4

Student Question:

Read 25:8. The God of all the earth wanted a dwelling place among a recently enslaved people. Where in your life are you living as though God is far off and uninvolved, and how would it change your day to believe He truly desires to dwell with you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the truth of 25:8 into the student's daily sense of God. Many believers functionally live as practical deists, assuming God is distant and uninvolved, even while affirming His existence. The tabernacle declares the opposite: God chose to dwell in the midst of the camp.

Under the new covenant the truth is even nearer. God dwells not in a tent of skins but in His people by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 2:22). Christ is Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). The student is not waiting for God to show up; God has come near.

The application is to identify the areas of life lived as though God were absent: the workweek, the private struggles, the ordinary hours. The God who pitched His tent among Israel is present in those very places.

Encourage practices that cultivate awareness of God's nearness: prayer through the day, Scripture, gathering with the saints, the Lord's table. Believing He desires to dwell with us reshapes the whole texture of daily life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Many live as practical deists, assuming God is distant.
- The tabernacle and incarnation both declare God's desire to be near.
- Under the new covenant God dwells in His people by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).
- Christ is Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23).
- Believing in God's nearness reshapes ordinary daily life.

Discussion Prompts

- In what areas do you live as though God were far off?
- How would your day change if you truly believed God desires to dwell with you?
- What practices help you stay aware of God's nearness?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 25:10–22. Describe the ark and its mercy seat, where God promised, 'There I will meet with you... from between the two cherubim.' What does the ark, holding the testimony and topped by the mercy seat, reveal about how a holy God meets sinful people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 10–22 describe the ark of the covenant, the most sacred object in the tabernacle, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, carried by poles, and topped by the 'mercy seat' (the cover, atonement seat) with two cherubim of hammered gold facing each other. Inside the ark went 'the testimony' (the tablets of the law).

The arrangement is rich with meaning that Scripture itself draws out. The law of God lies inside the ark; above it sits the mercy seat where, on the Day of Atonement, blood would be sprinkled (Leviticus 16:14–15). So the place where God meets His people is a place where His holy law is covered by atoning blood and crowned by mercy. Justice and mercy meet over the ark.

God's promise in verse 22 is the heart of it: 'There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat... I will speak with you.' The ark is the throne of the invisible God among His people, the meeting place between heaven and earth, where a holy God communes with sinners through blood-bought mercy.

Romans 3:25 calls Christ the 'propitiation' (the same word the Greek Old Testament uses for the mercy seat), set forth by God in His blood. The ark and mercy seat foreshadow how God meets sinful people: not by ignoring His law but by covering it with atoning blood. In Christ, justice and mercy meet, and God speaks peace to His people. Keep this anchored; this is a connection the New Testament authorizes, not fanciful over-reading.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ark held the law and was covered by the mercy seat, where blood was applied.

- Justice (the law within) and mercy (the atonement cover) meet over the ark.
- God promised to meet and speak with His people from the mercy seat (25:22).
- Christ is our 'mercy seat' / propitiation in His blood (Romans 3:25).
- God meets sinners not by ignoring His law but by covering it with atoning blood.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that the law lay inside the ark, under the mercy seat?
- How does the mercy seat picture the way a holy God meets sinful people?
- How does Romans 3:25 help us see Christ in the ark and its cover?

Question 6

Student Question:

Read 25:21–22. God promised to meet His people and speak with them at the mercy seat above the law. When you come to meet with God, do you come expecting Him to speak and to show mercy, or do you approach Him as distant and silent? What shapes the difference?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question draws on the promise of 25:21–22 that God would meet and speak with His people at the mercy seat above the law. The question probes the student's expectation when he comes to God.

Some come to God expecting nothing: a distant deity, a silent heaven, a duty performed. But the tabernacle declares that God is a God who meets and speaks, and who does so over the place of mercy. Under the new covenant we draw near with confidence to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) and have access through Christ (Ephesians 2:18).

The difference between approaching God as distant and approaching Him expectantly is often shaped by whether we truly grasp the gospel. If we think God is mostly angry or aloof, we shrink back. If we know He meets us at the mercy seat through Christ's blood, we draw near boldly yet reverently.

Apply concretely: how does the student pray, worship, and read Scripture? As one approaching a silent stranger, or as one coming to a God who has promised to meet him in mercy through Christ?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God is a God who meets and speaks with His people (25:22).
- We come to the throne of grace with confidence through Christ (Hebrews 4:16).
- How we approach God reveals what we believe about Him.
- A clear grasp of the gospel produces bold yet reverent nearness.
- Access to God is through Christ, our mercy seat (Ephesians 2:18).

Discussion Prompts

- Do you come to God expecting Him to meet you, or as to a silent stranger?
- How does the mercy seat encourage bold yet reverent approach?
- What would change in your prayers if you truly expected God to meet you?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 25:23–30. The table held the bread of the Presence, set before the LORD continually. What was the significance of bread kept perpetually before God's face, and what does it suggest about the fellowship God intended with His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 23–30 describe the table of acacia wood overlaid with gold, on which the 'bread of the Presence' (literally 'bread of the face') was set before the LORD continually. Leviticus 24:5–9 explains that twelve loaves, representing the twelve tribes, were placed on the table each Sabbath and eaten by the priests.

The bread before God's face pictures the people of God continually present before Him, and the fellowship of a shared table in His presence. In the ancient world, eating together signified covenant and communion. The twelve loaves keep all Israel perpetually represented before the Lord.

This connects to the broader theme of fellowship with God that runs through the chapter. The God who wants to dwell among His people also keeps a table set in His presence. It anticipates the deeper communion believers have with God, and the table the Lord spreads for His people.

Be careful not to over-allegorize the bread. The natural and accurate point is fellowship and the people's continual presence before God. We may note that Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:35) and that He spreads a table for His people, but we should not strain every loaf and dish for hidden meaning. Stay anchored in what the text and the New Testament warrant.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bread of the Presence stood continually before God's face.
- The twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes ever-present before God.
- A shared table signifies covenant fellowship and communion.
- The table reflects God's desire for ongoing fellowship with His people.
- Avoid over-allegorizing; keep the natural meaning of fellowship and presence.

Discussion Prompts

- What did the perpetual bread before God's face signify?

- How does the table reflect God's desire for fellowship with His people?
- How can we draw a Christ-connection here without over-reading the details?

Question 8

Student Question:

Read 25:30. The bread of the Presence was to be before God 'regularly,' week after week. What in your life is meant to be a steady, continual practice of communion with God, and where have you let that regular fellowship lapse?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question draws on the 'regularly' or 'continually' of 25:30, the perpetual nature of the bread before God. It presses the student toward steady, ongoing communion with God rather than sporadic spurts of devotion.

The Christian life is built on regular rhythms: gathering with the saints on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25), the Lord's Supper, daily prayer and Scripture, ongoing fellowship. Like the bread set out week by week, these are meant to be continual, not occasional.

Many believers experience their walk with God in bursts: intense after a retreat or a crisis, then lapsing into neglect. The bread of the Presence rebukes that pattern. Fellowship with God is sustained, not sporadic.

Apply concretely: identify which regular practice has lapsed (daily prayer, Scripture, faithful assembling) and what one step would restore it. The aim is steady communion, not perfectionism.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bread was continually before God, modeling steady communion.
- The Christian life is built on regular rhythms of fellowship with God.
- Faithful assembling on the Lord's Day is a continual practice (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25).
- Sporadic, burst-driven devotion is not the biblical pattern.
- Restoring lapsed practices begins with one concrete step.

Discussion Prompts

- Which regular practice of communion with God has lapsed for you?
- Why does steadiness matter more than occasional intensity?
- What one step would restore a continual rhythm of fellowship with God?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 25:31–40 with Hebrews 8:5 and 9:23–24. The lampstand and all the furnishings were to be made ‘after the pattern... shown you on the mountain,’ and Hebrews calls these things ‘a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.’ How are the tabernacle and its furniture a God-designed shadow that points forward to Christ and the heavenly realities, and why must we not bind this system on Christians today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 31–40 describe the lampstand (menorah), hammered from a single talent of pure gold, with a central shaft and six branches, decorated with cups shaped like almond blossoms, and seven lamps to give light in the holy place. It was made ‘after the pattern... shown you on the mountain’ (25:40).

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, anchored in Hebrews 8:5: the priests ‘serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things,’ for Moses was instructed, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.’ Hebrews 9:23–24 adds that these were ‘copies of the heavenly things,’ and that Christ entered ‘heaven itself’ rather than ‘holy places made with hands.’

So the tabernacle and its furniture are a God-designed shadow, a divinely given model of heavenly realities, pointing forward to Christ and His once-for-all work. The earthly sanctuary was never the ultimate reality; it was a copy. This is why we do not reinstitute it. Colossians 2:16–17 calls such things ‘a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.’ Hebrews 8–10 argues at length that the whole system has been fulfilled and set aside in Christ.

Therefore we must not bind the tabernacle system on Christians. We do not build lampstands or set out showbread or maintain a Levitical priesthood. To do so would be to cling to the shadow after the substance has come. Christ is our High Priest; His blood, not the blood of bulls and goats, has opened the way; the church is now God’s dwelling (Ephesians 2:19–22).

We may note the lampstand’s connection to light without over-reading every blossom and cup. Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12), and the church is to shine as light (Matthew 5:14–16; Philippians 2:15). The lamps that kept the holy place from darkness picture the light of God’s presence and witness. Keep the typology disciplined: draw what is natural and what the New Testament warrants, and resist assigning a hidden meaning to every almond and knob.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tabernacle is a ‘copy and shadow of the heavenly things’ (Hebrews 8:5).
- It was made by the pattern God showed, a divinely given model.
- The shadow points forward to Christ and His once-for-all heavenly work (Hebrews 9:23–24).
- The substance belongs to Christ; the shadow is not to be reinstituted (Colossians 2:16–17).
- We do not bind the tabernacle system on Christians; it is fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 8–10).

- Christ is the light of the world, and the church shines as light, but avoid over-reading every detail.
- The church, not a tent, is now God's dwelling place (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the tabernacle was a 'copy and shadow' of heavenly things?
- Why must we not reinstitute the tabernacle system today?
- How do we draw sound Christ-connections without over-reading every detail?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 25:40 once more. Everything was to be made by the pattern God showed, not by Israel's own design. Looking back over the ark, the table, and the lampstand, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you, through this chapter, to worship and serve God as He directs rather than as you prefer.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone returns to 25:40 and the repeated insistence that everything be made 'according to the pattern.' Israel did not get to design the sanctuary by preference; God specified it. This is a foundational principle of worship: we approach God as He directs, not as we prefer.

This principle carries forward. While we are not under the tabernacle pattern, the underlying truth remains that God regulates how He is to be worshiped. The New Testament gives us the pattern for worship and the church: gathering on the first day (Acts 20:7), the Lord's Supper, prayer, singing, teaching, giving (1 Corinthians 16:2), all according to apostolic instruction. We honor God by worshiping as He has revealed, not by innovation rooted in personal taste.

Guard against two errors. One is binding the old tabernacle pattern on Christians, which the lesson has already corrected. The other is the opposite error, assuming that since the old pattern is gone, worship is now a matter of free preference. Neither is true. The God who specified the tabernacle has revealed His will for new covenant worship too.

As a capstone, the question asks the student to look back across the ark, the table, and the lampstand and name one concrete way Christ is teaching him to submit his worship and service to God's revealed will rather than his own preference. The almond-blossom lampstand and the carefully measured ark are reminders that God cares how we come to Him.

Aim the application at the heart's posture: a willingness to lay down 'I like' and 'I prefer' in favor of 'God has shown.' That submission is itself an act of love and trust toward the God who desires to dwell among us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship is approached as God directs, not as we prefer (25:40).
- God still reveals His will for new covenant worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- We avoid both binding the old pattern and treating worship as free preference.
- Submitting our preferences to God's revealed will is an act of love and trust.
- The careful design of the furniture reminds us that God cares how we come to Him.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to worship by preference rather than by God's direction?
- How do we avoid both reinstituting the old pattern and treating worship as free preference?
- Name one specific way Christ is teaching you to worship as God directs.