

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 24: The Tabernacle Built and Filled with God's Glory

Exodus 35:1–40:38

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, these closing chapters of Exodus bring the entire book to its goal: the glory of God filling the tabernacle so that the holy God comes to dwell in the midst of His redeemed people. The student must see the grand arc, from a people enslaved and crying out in Egypt, through deliverance by the blood of the Passover lamb and the parting of the sea, through covenant at Sinai and even covenant-breaking forgiven, to this final scene where God moves in. Exodus is the story of redemption leading to relationship, of a God who delivers His people in order to dwell among them. Along the way two principles stand out: the willing, generous, freewill giving of the people (35:4–29; 36:5–7), and the exact, obedient construction summarized in the refrain 'as the LORD had commanded Moses.'

Teach these two principles with care and without binding the old covenant on Christians. The lavish, restrained-only-because-it-was-too-much giving models cheerful, freewill generosity for God's work (2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), without reinstating the old covenant tithe as law. The relentless refrain of obedience teaches that God is to be worshiped and served as He directs, not as we prefer, the very principle the golden calf violated and the tabernacle honors. The climax, the glory filling the tent (40:34–35), is the doctrinal high point and must carry the heaviest weight: God comes to dwell with His people. Present the tabernacle as a God-designed shadow fulfilled in Christ, in whom the Word tabernacled among us full of glory (John 1:14; Hebrews 8–10), in the church as God's dwelling by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Corinthians 3:16), and ultimately in the new creation where God dwells with His people forever (Revelation 21:3). Do not bind the tabernacle system, priesthood, or sacrifices on Christians; they are fulfilled in Christ.

The formation aim, fitting for the final lesson of this study, is that the student would marvel at a God who saves in order to dwell with His people, and would live as one in whom God now dwells. The book that began with groaning slaves ends with the glory of God among them; the student should see his own life inside that story, redeemed by the true Passover Lamb, brought into covenant, and made part of God's living temple. Aim the heart at glad, generous, obedient service and at the wonder of the indwelling presence of God, looking forward to the day when the dwelling place of God is fully and forever with His people.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 35:4–29. The people brought freewill offerings for the tabernacle, everyone whose heart stirred him and whose spirit moved him. What does this generous, willing giving reveal about the kind of offering that pleases God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the Sabbath instruction (35:1–3), Moses calls the whole congregation to bring a contribution for the tabernacle: gold, silver, bronze, fine yarns and linen, goats' hair, skins, wood, oil, spices, and precious stones (35:4–9). The offering is explicitly freewill: 'whoever is of a generous heart' (35:5), and the people respond, 'everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him' (35:21), men and women alike bringing brooches, rings, fabrics, and skilled labor (35:22–29).

The emphasis falls on the heart. This is not a tax or a forced levy but an outpouring of willing generosity. God wants givers whose hearts are stirred, who give gladly rather than grudgingly. The offering is measured not merely by its size but by the spirit in which it is brought.

There is grace in this picture. The same people who had so recently sinned grievously with the golden calf now pour out their treasure freely for the worship of God. Forgiven hearts become generous hearts. The gold that had been melted into an idol is now offered to the LORD.

Teach the principle of willing, heartfelt giving, which carries forward to the New Testament. God 'loves a cheerful giver' (2 Corinthians 9:7). Christian giving is to be willing, generous, purposed in the heart, and an act of worship. We do this not under the old covenant tithe as binding law, but as people whose hearts have been stirred by grace to give to the Lord's work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tabernacle offering was a freewill gift from generous, stirred hearts (35:21).
- God desires willing givers, not grudging or forced ones.
- Forgiven hearts became generous hearts after the golden calf.
- Christian giving is cheerful, willing, and an act of worship (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- We give freely from grateful hearts, not under the old covenant tithe as law.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the freewill offering reveal about the giving that pleases God?
- How did forgiven hearts become generous hearts?
- How does this shape the way Christians give today?

Question 2

Student Question:

Read 36:2–7. The people gave so much that the craftsmen had to ask Moses to restrain them, for the material was more than enough. When have you given to God's work out of a stirred and

willing heart? What holds you back from cheerful, generous giving (2 Corinthians 9:7), and what would loosen your grip?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question draws from the remarkable scene in 36:2-7. The people kept bringing freewill offerings morning after morning, until the craftsmen came to Moses and said, 'The people bring much more than enough.' So Moses commanded that the giving be restrained, 'for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.' This may be the only place in Scripture where God's people had to be told to stop giving.

What a picture of generosity. Their hearts were so stirred that the problem was an excess of devotion. Most of us know the opposite problem far too well, the tightly closed hand, the reluctant gift, the calculation of the minimum. This scene holds up a different standard.

Examine honestly what holds us back. Fear about the future, love of comfort and possessions, a grip on money that reveals where our trust really lies. Generosity is finally a matter of the heart's treasure (Matthew 6:21). When the heart is stirred by God's grace, the hand opens.

Connect to the New Testament standard: 'Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Corinthians 9:7). Press the student to name when he has given freely and what currently holds him back. What would loosen his grip and free him to give with joy?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The people gave so much they had to be restrained (36:5-7).
- Their problem was an excess of devotion, the opposite of our usual reluctance.
- Fear, comfort, and love of possessions often choke generosity.
- Generosity flows from where the heart's treasure lies (Matthew 6:21).
- God loves a cheerful giver, not a reluctant one (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Discussion Prompts

- When have you given to God's work out of a stirred, willing heart?
- What holds you back from cheerful, generous giving?
- What would loosen your grip and free you to give with joy?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 35:30-36:1. God filled Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit, with skill and ability, to do all the work of the sanctuary. What does this teach about God equipping His people, and about offering our skills and labor as service to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 35:30–36:1 introduce Bezalel and Oholiab, whom God filled ‘with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship,’ and gifted to teach others as well. Together with all who were skillful, they were to do the work ‘as the LORD had commanded.’

This reveals that God equips His people for the work He gives them. The skill to weave, carve, engrave, and craft is itself described as a gift of God’s Spirit. Practical ability is not separate from the spiritual life; it is given by God and can be offered back to Him in service.

There is dignity here for ordinary work. Bezalel was not a priest or a prophet; he was a craftsman. Yet his Spirit-given skill served the worship of God as truly as any sacrifice. God uses the gifts He distributes, varied and practical, to build His house.

Apply this to the student. Whatever ability God has given you, skill with your hands, your mind, your words, your administration, can be offered to Him as service. The New Testament continues this theme: varied gifts given by the same Spirit for building up God’s people (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–7). Offer your skills and labor to the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God filled Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit for skilled work (35:31).
- Practical ability is a gift of God to be offered back in service.
- Ordinary work and skill have dignity when given to the Lord.
- God distributes varied gifts to build His house (1 Corinthians 12:4–7).
- We are to offer our skills and labor as service to God.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God filled the craftsmen with His Spirit?
- How does this give dignity to ordinary skill and work?
- What skill has God given you to offer back to Him?

Question 4

Student Question:

Read 36:8–38 and consider the patient, careful work of construction. Do you tend to serve God carelessly or faithfully in the unseen details? Where is God calling you to do your ordinary work, even the parts no one sees, as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question draws from the long, detailed construction account of chapter 36 and following, where the curtains, boards, frames, bars, and veil are made with painstaking care,

each exactly to specification. The work is patient, careful, and largely unseen, much of it hidden inside the structure or behind the veil.

The lesson for the heart is faithfulness in the details, including the parts no one sees. The craftsmen did not cut corners on the hidden boards or the inner frames. The work was done well because it was done for God, whether or not anyone would ever notice.

This confronts a common temptation: to serve God impressively where others are watching and carelessly where they are not. But God sees the unseen work. The quality of our service in the hidden places reveals whom we are truly serving.

Apply Colossians 3:23: 'Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.' Press the student to consider his ordinary, unseen labor, at home, at work, in quiet acts of service, and to do it faithfully as unto the Lord. Where is God calling him to bring excellence and integrity to the parts no one sees?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The construction was patient, careful, and often hidden from view.
- Faithfulness in unseen details reveals whom we truly serve.
- We are tempted to serve well when watched and carelessly when not.
- God sees and values the hidden work (Colossians 3:23).
- Ordinary labor done for the Lord becomes service to Him.

Discussion Prompts

- Do you serve God carefully in the unseen details, or only when watched?
- What hidden work is God calling you to do faithfully?
- How does doing your work 'as for the Lord' change it?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 39:32–43. When the work was finished, Moses inspected it and saw that they had done it 'as the LORD had commanded,' and he blessed them. Why does Scripture stress so repeatedly that the work was done exactly as God commanded, and what does this teach about how God is to be worshiped and served?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In 39:32–43 the work of the tabernacle and the priestly garments is completed and brought to Moses, who inspects it all. The text emphasizes that 'according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work' (39:42), and Moses sees that they have done it exactly so, and blesses them.

The refrain 'as the LORD had commanded' runs through chapters 39 and 40 like a drumbeat, repeated more than a dozen times. This relentless emphasis is no accident. It teaches that God is to be worshiped and served precisely as He has directed, not according to human improvement or preference.

The contrast with the golden calf is deliberate and instructive. There, the people did what seemed right to them, fashioning worship by their own design, and it was sin. Here, they do exactly what God commanded, and it is blessed. The difference is not the sincerity of the worshipers but whether the worship was God-given or self-invented.

Teach this principle clearly: acceptable worship and service follow God's revealed will. We are not free to reinvent worship by preference (compare John 4:24; Colossians 2:23). While the tabernacle pattern itself is fulfilled in Christ and not bound on us, the underlying principle abides: God reveals how He is to be approached, and faithful hearts gladly conform to His direction rather than their own taste.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The work was done exactly 'as the LORD had commanded' (39:42).
- The refrain is repeated more than a dozen times for emphasis.
- The contrast with the golden calf shows God-given versus self-invented worship.
- Acceptable worship and service follow God's revealed will, not human preference.
- The pattern is fulfilled in Christ, but the principle of worshiping as God directs abides.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Scripture stress so often that the work was done as God commanded?
- How does this contrast with the golden calf?
- What does this teach about how God is to be worshiped and served?

Question 6

Student Question:

Read 39:42–43. Moses blessed the people because they had done the work just as the LORD commanded. Is there an area where you have been serving God by your own preference rather than His direction? What would it look like to bring that area under His revealed will this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the refrain of obedience (39:42–43) into the student's life. Moses blessed the people precisely because they had done the work just as the LORD commanded. Their obedience was complete and exact, and it brought God's blessing.

The heart issue is whether we serve God on His terms or our own. The perennial temptation, the same one behind the golden calf, is to substitute 'what I prefer' or 'what seems good to me' for

‘what God has revealed.’ This shows up in worship, in service, in how we relate to the church, in how we handle Scripture.

This is not legalism. It is love and trust expressed as glad obedience. ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments’ (John 14:15). The God who designed every detail of His dwelling knows best how He is to be served. Submitting to His revealed will is not bondage but the path of blessing.

Press for concreteness. Where specifically has the student been serving God by his own preference rather than His direction? What would it look like this week to bring that area, whether in worship, service, relationships, or obedience, under God’s revealed will?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moses blessed the people for exact, complete obedience (39:43).
- The temptation is to substitute our preference for God’s revealed will.
- This was the very error behind the golden calf.
- Glad obedience is love and trust, not legalism (John 14:15).
- Submitting to God’s direction is the path of blessing.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you been serving God by preference rather than His direction?
- How is glad obedience different from cold legalism?
- What area will you bring under God’s revealed will this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 40:1–33. God commanded that the tabernacle be set up, and Moses did everything ‘as the LORD had commanded him,’ arranging every piece in its place. What does Moses’ careful, complete obedience teach us about faithfulness in carrying out all of God’s will, not just the parts we choose?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 40 records the actual setting up of the tabernacle. God commands Moses to erect it on the first day of the first month (40:1–2) and to put every piece in its place: the ark and the veil, the table, the lampstand, the altar of incense, the screen, the bronze altar, the basin, and the courtyard (40:3–8). Then, item by item, Moses does it, and after each step the text repeats, ‘as the LORD had commanded Moses’ (40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32).

Moses’ obedience is careful and complete. He does not pick and choose; he carries out the whole of God’s instruction, every piece, in its proper place and order. The repeated refrain

underscores that this was obedience to all that God commanded, not a partial or selective compliance.

This teaches faithfulness to the whole will of God, not just the parts we find agreeable. It is easy to obey God where His commands suit us and to neglect them where they do not. Moses models a thoroughgoing obedience that holds nothing back.

Apply this to the student. God calls us to do all His will, not a convenient portion of it. Partial obedience, obeying where it is easy and ignoring where it is costly, was the failure of Saul and others (1 Samuel 15:22). Faithful service means carrying out all that God has shown us, completely and in order.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moses set up the tabernacle exactly as God commanded, piece by piece (40:1–33).
- His obedience was complete, not partial or selective.
- The refrain stresses obedience to all that God commanded.
- We are tempted to obey God only where His commands suit us.
- Faithful service means carrying out the whole will of God (1 Samuel 15:22).

Discussion Prompts

- What does Moses' careful obedience teach about faithfulness?
- Where are we tempted to obey God only in part?
- What does it mean to carry out all of God's will, not just the easy parts?

Question 8

Student Question:

Read 40:33. 'So Moses finished the work.' The great task begun in chapter 25 is now complete. As you near the end of this study of Exodus, what work of obedience has God placed before you that you need to see through to completion rather than leave half-finished?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question draws from the simple but weighty statement, 'So Moses finished the work' (40:33). The great task begun in chapter 25, the receiving of the pattern and the building of God's dwelling, is now complete. The work was seen through to the end.

There is a lesson here about completing what God gives us to do. It is one thing to begin a work of obedience with enthusiasm; it is another to see it through to the finish. Many good intentions and started projects of faith lie abandoned half-done.

As the student nears the end of this study of Exodus, this is a fitting moment to ask what work of obedience God has placed before him that he needs to complete. Perhaps a reconciliation

begun but not finished, a habit of service started but not sustained, a step of obedience delayed, a commitment left hanging.

Encourage perseverance. Jesus 'finished the work' the Father gave Him (John 17:4; 19:30), and we are called to finish our course (2 Timothy 4:7). Press the student to name one specific work of obedience he needs to see through rather than leave half-finished, and to take the next step toward completing it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 'So Moses finished the work,' completing the task begun in chapter 25 (40:33).
- Beginning a work of obedience is easier than completing it.
- Many good intentions of faith lie abandoned half-done.
- Jesus finished the work the Father gave Him (John 17:4; 19:30).
- We are called to finish our course faithfully (2 Timothy 4:7).

Discussion Prompts

- What work of obedience has God placed before you to complete?
- Why is finishing harder than starting?
- What is one step you can take this week toward seeing it through?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 40:34–38. When the work was finished, the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle so that even Moses could not enter, and the cloud and fire led Israel onward. How does this climactic moment, God coming to dwell among His people, find its fulfillment in Christ (John 1:14), in the church as God's temple (Ephesians 2:19–22), and ultimately in the new creation (Revelation 21:3)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block, the climax of the chapter and of the entire book. When the tabernacle is finished and assembled, 'the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle' (40:34–35). The cloud and fire then lead Israel onward throughout their journeys (40:36–38).

This is the goal of the whole book. Exodus began with God's people enslaved and crying out, far from God, in Egypt. It ends with the glory of God descending to dwell in their very midst. The God who heard their groaning and delivered them has now come to live among them. Redemption has led to relationship; deliverance has led to dwelling. So thick is His glory that even Moses cannot enter, a vivid reminder that this is the holy God Himself who has moved in.

Teach that the tabernacle is a God-designed shadow, fulfilled in Christ. John 1:14 says the Word 'became flesh and dwelt among us,' literally 'tabernacled' among us, 'and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.' The glory that filled the tent now dwells bodily in Christ. Hebrews 8–10 shows that the whole earthly tabernacle was 'a copy and shadow' of the true tent, fulfilled and surpassed in Him. We do not rebuild or reinstitute the tabernacle, its priesthood, or its sacrifices; they are fulfilled in Christ.

The fulfillment continues in the church. By the Spirit, God now dwells not in a tent but in His people: 'you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit' (Ephesians 2:22); 'you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you' (1 Corinthians 3:16). The glory that filled the tabernacle is, in a greater way, the presence of God indwelling the church. Keep this typology grounded in these explicit New Testament connections, and avoid fanciful over-reading of every fitting and fixture.

And the fulfillment reaches its consummation in the new creation. John hears a great voice from the throne: 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God' (Revelation 21:3). The longing that filled this final scene of Exodus, God dwelling with His people, will be fully and forever satisfied. The glory that filled the tent in the wilderness points to the day when God dwells with His people in unhindered glory for eternity. This is where the whole story of redemption is heading: God with us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle, so that even Moses could not enter (40:34–35).
- This is the goal of Exodus: God comes to dwell among His redeemed people.
- Redemption leads to relationship; deliverance leads to God dwelling with us.
- The Word tabernacled among us in Christ, full of glory (John 1:14).
- The tabernacle was a shadow fulfilled in Christ, not bound on Christians (Hebrews 8–10).
- God now dwells in the church by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22; 1 Corinthians 3:16).
- The dwelling of God with man is consummated in the new creation (Revelation 21:3).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the glory filling the tabernacle the goal of the whole book?
- How is this fulfilled in Christ, in the church, and in the new creation?
- Why must we not reinstitute the tabernacle system today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 40:34–38 once more, and look back across the whole book of Exodus, from bondage in Egypt, to the blood of the Passover lamb, to deliverance through the sea, to the covenant at Sinai, to God dwelling among His people. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus, in whom God

has tabernacled among us and made us His dwelling, is forming you through this entire journey to live as one in whom God dwells.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers up not only chapter 40 but the entire book of Exodus, and indeed the whole arc of redemption. From bondage in Egypt, to the blood of the Passover lamb, to deliverance through the sea, to the covenant at Sinai, to the broken covenant graciously renewed, to this final scene where the glory of God fills the tabernacle, the story has moved from slavery to the presence of God dwelling among His people.

The student should see his own life inside this story. We too were in bondage, not to Egypt but to sin. We too have been redeemed by a Passover Lamb, Christ our Passover sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). We too are brought into covenant, the New Covenant in His blood, and made into the dwelling place of God by His Spirit. The same God who came down to a tent in the wilderness has come, in Christ, to dwell in us and among us.

This question asks the student to look back across the whole journey of Exodus and name one concrete way Christ is forming him through it. The unifying theme is a God who saves His people in order to dwell with them, and who now dwells in His people. Press for specific formation: perhaps a deeper gratitude for redemption, a more generous and obedient heart, a hunger to live as one in whom God dwells, a reverence for the holy God who has drawn so near.

End the entire study on worship and wonder. Exodus opened with groaning slaves and closes with the glory of God among His people. The God who heard those cries hears ours; the God who came down to dwell with Israel has come, in Christ, to dwell with us and to make us His temple. The fitting response to the whole book is glad, grateful, obedient surrender to the God who saved us so that He might dwell with us forever.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Exodus moves from bondage to deliverance to covenant to God dwelling among His people.
- We too were in bondage to sin and redeemed by Christ, our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7).
- Believers are brought into the New Covenant and made God's dwelling by the Spirit.
- The God who dwelt in the tent now dwells in His people through Christ.
- The fitting response to the whole book is glad, grateful, obedient surrender.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the whole story of Exodus move from bondage to God dwelling with His people?
- Where do you see your own life inside this story of redemption?
- Name one specific way Christ is forming you, through this journey, to live as one in whom God dwells.