

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 24: The Tabernacle Built and Filled with God's Glory -- Exodus 35:1-40:38

Think back to where this book began. A people in chains, groaning under the lash, crying out to a God they feared had forgotten them. Then plagues and a Passover lamb, a sea split open, bread from heaven, water from a rock, thunder on a mountain, a covenant given, a covenant broken over a golden calf, and a God who, against all expectation, chose to forgive and stay. Now, in these final chapters, the long story of Exodus comes home. The same God who heard the cries of slaves in Egypt comes down to live in a tent in the middle of their camp. From bondage to belonging. From 'let my people go' to 'I will dwell among them.' This is where the whole journey has been heading.

And look at how it happens. God does not build the tabernacle by Himself with fire from heaven. He invites the people to bring, and they bring, gold and silver and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarn, fine linen and goats' hair, acacia wood and oil and spices and precious stones. They bring so freely, so generously, that the craftsmen finally have to beg Moses to make them stop. There was more than enough. After all their failures, the people whose hearts had once melted gold into an idol now pour out that same gold, freely and joyfully, to build a house for God.

Then the work itself. Chapter after chapter, with a refrain that beats like a steady drum: 'as the LORD had commanded Moses.' Again and again, the curtains, the boards, the lampstand, the altar, the priestly garments, all made exactly as God had said. Not as the people preferred, not as Bezalel improved upon, but as the LORD commanded. The golden calf was worship invented by human hands; the tabernacle is worship received from God's hand. Here is a people learning, at last, to serve God His way.

And then the moment everything has been building toward. The tabernacle is finished and assembled, every piece in place, and the glory of the LORD comes down and fills it, so thick that even Moses cannot enter. God has come to dwell among His people. Hold onto that picture, because the story does not end in a tent in the desert. The Word would one day become flesh and tabernacle among us, full of glory. God's Spirit would fill not a tent but a people, the church, His living temple. And in the end, a voice from the throne will cry, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.' Exodus ends with God moving in. So does the whole story of redemption.

Group Discussion: The people gave so generously to build the tabernacle that Moses had to restrain them, for they had more than enough (36:5-7). What does this picture of joyful, freewill giving teach us about how God's people should give today, and how does it compare with the way we often give?

Personal Reflection: The refrain 'as the LORD had commanded Moses' runs through these chapters like a heartbeat. Where in your worship and service are you most tempted to do what you prefer rather than what God directs, and what would it mean to serve Him on His terms instead of your own?

Read Exodus 35:1–40:38

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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)?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 1:14, the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father; Ephesians 2:19–22, you are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit; 1 Corinthians 3:16, you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you; Revelation 21:1–3, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them; Hebrews 8:1–6, Christ is a minister in the true tent that the Lord set up, of which the earthly was a copy and shadow

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com