



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text
Exodus 35-39

Topic
Israel gets to work and finishes building the
Tabernacle where they would enjoy worshipping God

Title
“Worship While You Work”

In 1986, Tom Bodett ad-libbed the line, “We’ll leave the light on for you,” while in the recording studio for the first time and the Motel 6 slogan was both an instant and lasting success. The phrase captures a sense of true hospitality for the weary road warrior. Says Bodett, “I think ‘We’ll leave the light on’ works because it is one of those spontaneous and practical things we say to each other all the time.”

In Exodus, God tells the Israelites to leave their lights *off*.

In 35:3 we read,

Exo 35:3 You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day."

There was, however, a light that was always kept on:

Lev 24:2 "Command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps [of the Menorah] burn continually.

Lev 24:3 Outside the veil of the Testimony, in the tabernacle of meeting, Aaron shall be in charge of it from evening until morning before the LORD continually; *it shall be* a statute forever in your generations.

Furthermore, God's presence as a bright pillar of fire by night dwelt within the Holy of Holies, above the Mercy Seat lid on the Ark of the Covenant.

The Israelites weren't in the dark on the Sabbath. God left the light on for them. It was a special day for a precious people to be reminded Whose they were.

As the Book of Exodus goes from *instruction* about the Tabernacle to its *construction*, we want to point out the special, precious relationship God intended for Israel; and that He intends for us.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 The Instruction For The Tabernacle Reminds You That You Are God's Workmanship, and #2 The Construction Of The Tabernacle Reminds You That You Are God's Workfellows.

#1 The Instruction For The Tabernacle Reminds You That You Are God's Workmanship

(35:1-3 & 30-33)

The next five chapters - 35 through 39 - present a special challenge to Bible teachers and pastors. They describe the building of the Tabernacle, but they are basically a repeat of the material presented in chapters 25-31.

The repetition is thematically necessary, because it shows that the Israelites obeyed God to the letter. It also emphasizes just how important this structure was in the on-going plan of redemption.

But having said that, our commentary would be repeating what we've already said. It's therefore not unheard of to skip over this section. Warren Wiersbe, for example, takes all five chapters at once in his chapter-by-chapter commentary, *Through the Word*.

I think the best way to approach these chapters is to look at them as a unit, commenting on what we haven't already commented on in chapters 25 through 31.

Exo 35:1 Then Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said to them, "These *are* the words which the LORD has commanded *you* to do:

I said I wanted to focus on the special, precious relationship God intended for the Israelites. This gathering is a good place to start.

God had previously offered Himself in a covenant relationship with Israel. He would be their God, and dwell among them. They would be His people, and obey Him.

- In chapters 20 through 23, God laid-out the covenant.
- In chapter 24, the Israelites had eagerly agreed to God's covenant.

- From chapter 25 through 31, God instructed Moses on Mount Sinai about the Tabernacle.

Sadly, while God was talking to Moses on Mount Sinai, the Israelites grew impatient, and they demanded that Aaron make them a god. He all too willingly complied, making a Golden Calf from their donated jewelry. As Moses descended Mount Sinai after forty days, the Israelites were fully involved in idol worship in a drunken orgy.

Chapters 32 through 34 chronicle Moses' intercession for the people, and their repentance. In an emotional meeting, God said He would keep His promises to Israel with regard to conquering the Promised Land, but that He would not accompany them there, or dwell there among them.

Moses, representing Israel, refused to let God withdraw. He set up his own makeshift Tent of Meeting, urging God to manifest Himself. God relented and agreed to go with them; He would indeed dwell among them.

As chapter 35 opens, **it's as if nothing terrible had happened.** The story picks-up just as if the incident with the Golden Calf had never occurred.

This opening verse, then, is full of the grace of God. It is an example of, "where sin abounds, grace does much more abound."

We should never think lightly of sin because we're promised grace. But when we do sin, that promised grace can overflow us as we confess our sin.

Are you involved in some sin? Maybe it's still in the planning stages, i.e., in your heart. Confess; repent; let grace lead you back where you ought to be.

Exo 35:2 Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.

No, I'm not going to spend tons of our time explaining, yet again, why Gentiles were never, and are not today, obligated to observe the Sabbath day; or Sabbath years; or the Year of Jubilee.

For our purposes today, I will only remind you of one crucial teaching God gave us on the subject:

Exo 31:13 "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, **for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations**, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you...

Exo 31:16 Therefore **the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations** as a perpetual covenant.

Exo 31:17 **It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever...**

The Sabbaths are a special arrangement between God and the nation of Israel. Listen to how this same thing is described by Ezekiel:

Eze 20:10 "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

Eze 20:11 And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them.'

Eze 20:12 Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies them.

- Who did God lead out of Egypt and into the wilderness? Israel
- To whom did God give His statutes and judgments? Israel
- To who, then, did God give His Sabbaths to observe? **Israel.**

No one on the earth was observing the Sabbath until God made it a sign between Himself and Israel. God never intended anyone else other than Israel to be observing them.

And you know what? That was something special to communicate to Israel how precious they were to their God. They alone in the world, among all peoples, were given rest by their gracious and merciful God.

As we pointed out, the weekly Sabbath wasn't the only Sabbath. Every year after seven years was a Sabbath year, when fields were to lie fallow, and no planting or harvesting was done. And every fiftieth year was a Jubilee year when debts were forgiven and properties reverted back to their original owners.

Imagine what a beautiful testimony that all could have been, as Gentiles came into contact with Israel. It would communicate His care, and faithfulness. They could trust their God to care for them not just once a week, but for a year every seven; and every fiftieth. There was nothing like it. It screamed, "Theocracy," to the governors and governments of the Gentile world.

Jesus had this in mind when He commented, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." It was meant to be a blessing - not the burden the Jews would turn it into with all their prohibitions. It was meant to emphasize how much God loved His people.

Exo 35:3 You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day."

Jews to this day still disagree on the scope of this prohibition. I'm suggesting that in context, it's much more positive - intended to call attention to God's presence among them.

We're going to skip over verses 4 through 29, not because they are a repeat, but because we already commented on them in a previous study. We jumped ahead. In them, the Israelites were told that all who had willing hearts should contribute to the items needed for the building of the Tabernacle.

They do so - over-abundantly. They had to be asked to stop giving. We took the time to discuss our own giving to the work of the Lord in His current 'building' on earth - the church. According to the New Covenant we are under, your giving ought to be Willing... Regular... Cheerful... And Sacrificial.

Exo 35:30 And Moses said to the children of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah;

Exo 35:31 and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship,
Exo 35:32 to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze,

Exo 35:33 in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship.

We've talked about Bezalel before - his calling, his filling with the Spirit of God, and his gifting. What strikes you about him is that the *workman* is simultaneously God's *workmanship*:

- God sees a saved man and “calls” him to specific service. It may or may not be something he or she has any familiarity with.
- God fills that man or woman with His Spirit. The Spirit equips with whatever is needed; in the case of Bezalel, it was wisdom and understanding and the knowledge listed in these verses.

That man, that woman, is therefore God's workmanship. Here God is said to “fill” that person. In another place God is compared to a potter, molding and shaping that person. Whatever the metaphor, we are God's workmanship.

In fact, that's in a verse in Ephesians:

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...

Anytime this verse is mentioned, you're obligated to point out that the word rendered “workmanship” is the word from which we get our English word, *poem*. That's true, but it can refer to *any* creative work of art. It is only used twice in the Bible – here and in Romans 1:20 where it refers to God's work of creating the universe.

When you are saved by grace through faith, you become an entirely new “creat[ion] in Christ Jesus.”

You are God's newly created work of art; His poem, His painting, His song, His sculpture. He begins the work at salvation and continues it, day-by-day, moment-by-moment, until you are completed.

What comes to mind when you think of poetry? A sonnet, or a limerick, or a haiku?

When it comes to you - be thinking **epic poem** that incorporates all styles, being written by the same Person Who spoke into existence the universe.

Then realize you are His greatest, most loved, creation, who He has made a new creature in Christ, and who He has promised to complete.

#2 The Construction Of The Tabernacle Reminds You That You Are God's Workfellows

(35:34-35 & 39:32-43)

The workmanship verse, Ephesians 2:10, goes on to say, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Once saved, you walk a new course – one "prepared beforehand" by God. God has made ready, even before you were saved, a path for you to follow.

What is the path? It is to perform "good works" by depending upon His power. Salvation does not involve any works on your part. It is all from God's love, expressed by His mercy and grace, apprehended by faith. After you are saved, however, "good works" should characterize your daily life.

In another verse, the apostle Paul said, “For we are God's fellow workers...” (First Corinthians 3:9). It can be translated co-laborers, or (as I have) workfellows.

There is some ongoing debate and disagreement among language scholars as to whether or not we are individually co-laborers *with* God, or corporately co-laborers *for* God. They're split on it, about 50/50.

It seems a case could be made for both:

- Since I am to be yielded to the Spirit Who indwells me, I'm a co-laborer *with* God.
- Since I am a member of the household of faith, I'm a co-laborer with others *for* God.

Bezalel had co-laborers in his work for God; one in particular is named.

Exo 35:34 "And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, *in* him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.

Aholiab was right up there with Bezalel. He was like-gifted and like-minded. It's a blessing to have others who are shoulder-to-shoulder with you serving the Lord. Men and women who, as we like to say, are *wings*, not *weights*.

A big part of their work was to teach others the things the Lord had taught them. We recognize in this what we like to call discipleship.

The first Christians were told to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, and then to go out to make disciples of all men. It doesn't seem like much; but the math is staggering.

Supposing each of us led two people to Jesus in one year, and they each led two people to Jesus per year. After two years, there would be six converts.

After ten years, there would be 2,046 new believers ready to lead others to Jesus.

In the 20th year, **there would be 1,048,576 new believers.** The numbers get awe inspiring after that.

If the glass seems half-empty; if it seems we are falling short; think of it this way. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, He had eleven apostles who were included in the 120 gathered in the Upper Room waiting for the promise of the Spirit.

There may have been more than 120 believers; probably were. But let's stick with that small number as a basis. How many multiplied millions of believers have resulted from those original disciples?

The system works.

Exo 35:35 He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*, and fine linen, and of the weaver - those who do every work and those who design artistic works.

Coming out of Egypt, after an ancestry of slavery, the Israelites had the skill to make bricks. That's about it. Any other skills they may have had would have been rudimentary.

I'm sure they were really, really good at brick-making; but the Tabernacle would not require even one brick.

God entrusted a fortune in precious stones, metals, and materials, to be fashioned into the most beautiful Tabernacle ever built - to brickmakers and housewives.

God takes risks. In his book, *The Case for Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote,

The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they've got to be free. Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently, He thought it worth the risk. If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will – that is, for making a real world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings, then we may take it it is worth it.

God takes risks; you're one of them. He's entrusted the Gospel to you. Somehow, lame as we are, He uses us to share about His Son.

What else has God entrusted to you? Who else? It's His risky business to have you participate. You'll need Him to give you the skill you need to work according to His Word and His will.

You should feel inadequate. Think of all the workers God called in the Bible and most of them testified of their inadequacies.

Jeremiah is one. At his calling, he said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth" (1:6).

Moses himself expressed several concerns about his calling at the burning bush:

- Exo 3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"
- Exo 4:1 Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' "
- Exo 4:10 Then Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."
- Exo 4:13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send."

Poster child for feeling inadequate. Not the guy you'd want to entrust with the next major event in redemption history. Yet he as God's pick. He was God's co-laborer.

Exactly how God fills you with skill is His business. With Moses, part of it was in his personal history.

Bible teachers like to point out that his 40 years in Egypt, followed by 40 years herding sheep in the wilderness, suited him perfectly for leading God's flock out of Egypt and into the wilderness.

Jeremiah had no such preparation. God simply empowered him with Holy Spirit boldness.

The apostle Paul seemed the most likely, the most qualified, individual to send to the Jews. He said of himself, "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:5-6).

Instead he was the apostle to the Gentiles - who would care about none of those things.

Think of all the young men that God used - who because of their age we would automatically pass-over:

- We've already mentioned Jeremiah.
- David was but a youth when he faced Goliath.
- Daniel and his three friends were mid-teen aged when God began using them.
- Joseph was young when he had to avoid the temptations of Potiphar's wife.

God doesn't just think outside the box. He sees inside the heart. If He has tapped you for work you feel inadequate for, trust Him.

If you feel adequate - better get over it.

Exo 39:32 Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished. And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did.

Exo 39:33 And they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its furnishings: its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets;

Exo 39:34 the covering of ram skins dyed red, the covering of badger skins, and the veil of the covering;

Exo 39:35 the ark of the Testimony with its poles, and the mercy seat;

Exo 39:36 the table, all its utensils, and the showbread;

Exo 39:37 the pure *gold* lampstand with its lamps (the lamps set in order), all its utensils, and the oil for light;

Exo 39:38 the gold altar, the anointing oil, and the sweet incense; the screen for the tabernacle door;

Exo 39:39 the bronze altar, its grate of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the laver with its base;

Exo 39:40 the hangings of the court, its pillars and its sockets, the screen for the court gate, its cords, and its pegs; all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting;

Exo 39:41 and the garments of ministry, to minister in the holy *place*: the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and his sons' garments, to minister as priests.

Exo 39:42 According to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did all the work.

They'd come a long way in a short time. From unremarkable slaves in Egypt to a nation ruled by God unique on the face of the earth. Transformation is a word that comes to mind. They were transformed, and being transformed, by the grace of God.

Exo 39:43 Then Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moses blessed them.

Final inspections are always a tense time. They passed with flying colors, and earned a blessing for it.

God leaves the light on. His current dwelling place on earth is the church, and we are described in the book of the Revelation as His lampstand in the world.