

**The People Give Freely**  
**(Exodus 35:1-36:7)**  
Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

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**I. Review and Background**

- a. Moses has come down from Mount Sinai with the second copy of the Ten Commandments.
  - i. Recall that he smashed the first set in anger when he saw the idolatry that the people committed with the golden calf.
- b. When he came down from the mountain, his face was radiating light. Consequently, he covered his face with a veil, uncovering it when he went in to speak before the Lord.
- c. Recall that the prior time Moses ascended Mount Sinai, he had been given detailed instructions on how to build the tabernacle (**Exodus 25-31**). Those instructions covered:
  - i. Materials of construction
  - ii. The construction of the tabernacle proper, and things inside it that included:
    - 1. Ark of the covenant, to be located in the Most Holy Place
    - 2. Veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place
    - 3. Things in the Holy Place, where the priests would minister
      - a. Table of showbread
      - b. Golden altar of incense
      - c. Lampstand
  - iii. Things outside the tabernacle proper:
    - 1. Courtyard, with a system of posts and curtains surrounding it
    - 2. Bronze altar of sacrifice
    - 3. Bronze laver of washing
  - iv. Special priestly vestments:
    - 1. Breastplate of high priest, with 12 precious stones

- 2. Fabric garments (robe, ephod, turban, sash, etc.)
- 3. Golden plate for High Priest with inscription 'Holiness to the Lord'
- v. Formulas for anointing oil and incense
- vi. Instructions for sacrifices and for consecrating the priests
- vii. Designation of Bezalel and Aholiab to oversee the workmanship of building the tabernacle and associated accessories.
- d. Note that in **Exodus 25-30**, the Lord gives Moses instructions regarding how to construct the tabernacle and its accessories. Then in **Exodus 35-40** we see much of this detail repeated, as Moses records that the workmen did, in fact, build it just as the Lord had instructed.

## II. Freewill Offerings of the People

- a. Read **Exodus 35:1-36:7**.
- b. Storyline:
  - i. Moses gathers the people and tells them two things.
    - 1. **A Command:** No working on the Sabbath, including even kindling fires in their homes (tents). Anyone working on the Sabbath is to be killed.
    - 2. **A Request:** Anyone "with a willing heart" is invited to give the materials needed for building the tabernacle (including gold, silver, bronze, incorruptible wood, skins, precious stones, etc.)
  - ii. The people depart and then bring as freewill offerings all kinds of the materials requested by Moses.
    - 1. Some of the women spin yarn into the kind of fabric needed and bring that.
  - iii. Moses announces that the Lord has given Bezalel and Aholiab "a divine Spirit of wisdom, understanding and knowledge in all things", to have the artistic skills to make the things of the tabernacle. Based on **Exodus 36:1-2**, it appears that this Spirit was given to other men involved in the construction as well. So I assume Bezalel and Aholiab were the chief artisans, the ones in charge of overseeing the other workers.

1. This “divine Spirit...”, the Spirit of wisdom, understanding and knowledge, seems to me to be referring to the *Spirit of God*, the *Holy Spirit*, as described in **Isaiah 11:1-3**.
  - a. Wisdom, understanding and knowledge are three of the attributes of the Holy Spirit (of a total of 7 attributes listed in the text in the LXX, versus 6 in the Masoretic Text).
  - iv. The people bring gifts every morning. In fact, they give more than enough. They give so much that the workers need to tell them, “Please stop giving. We have more than enough!”
- c. **Question:** Where did the people, out in the Wilderness, get all this stuff? Former slaves traveling in the desert don’t normally carry gold, silver, precious stones, dyed animal skins, etc., with them!
  - i. Read **Exodus 3:18-22**.
  - ii. At the first encounter at the burning bush, the Lord had told Moses that the Israelites would depart Egypt *with the wealth of the Egyptians*: silver, gold, special clothing, etc.
- d. Finally, in **Exodus 35**, we find the people do something *praiseworthy*!
  - i. To this point in **Exodus**, Moses and a few other individuals (Hebrew midwives, Aaron, Joshua) have shown heroic faith. However, it seems that the Israelite people as a group were almost always falling into sins and revealing their flawed character.
  - ii. **Question:** Can you think of *anything* good or praiseworthy that the people have done before this point?
    1. Honestly, I can’t think of anything. Let us review what we have seen in the people thus far:
      - a. Complaining all the time, in every hardship.
        - i. When Moses tried to intervene to help a fellow Israelite by killing the Egyptian oppressor (**Exodus 2:11-14**). His fellow Israelite complains, “*Who made you prince and judge over us?*”
        - ii. When Moses returned and started challenging Pharaoh, and Pharaoh doubled down, “*Make bricks without straw*”. The people then *blame Moses and Aaron*, saying, “*you have made us*

abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants” (**Exodus 5:20-21**).

- iii. When the Egyptian army was closing in on the fleeing Israelites, they *complain*, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the desert? Didn’t we tell you, ‘Let us alone that we serve the Egyptians.’ For it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.” (**Exodus 14:11-12**)
  - iv. Soon after miraculously crossing the Red Sea, the people *complain* that they have nothing to drink (**Exodus 15:24**).
  - v. Then the people *complain* about a lack of food, and longingly recall the pots of meat and bread they had in Egypt (**Exodus 16:2-3**).
- b. Then after the Lord provides manna, some of the people *disobey the Lord* and go out seeking more manna on the Sabbath (**Exodus 16:26-27**).
- c. Then they again *test the Lord and complain* about nothing to drink (**Exodus 17:1-3**).
- d. Upon hearing the voice of the Lord at Mount Sinai, the people tell Moses, “We don’t want to hear His voice anymore, lest we die. *You* go and talk with Him and tell us what He says; we will do whatever He tells you.” (**Exodus 20:18-20, Deuteronomy 5:22-27**).
- i. However, just a few weeks later, as Moses is delayed in returning from Mount Sinai, *the people ask Aaron to make gods to go before them* (**Exodus 32:1**).
  - ii. Moses finds the people involved in a feast of *pagan revelry*, centered on *idolatry with the golden calf*, when he comes down from the mountain (**Exodus 32:6**).
  - iii. When Moses calls, “Whoever is on the Lord’s side, come to me”, only the Levites answer the call. *All the people from the other eleven tribes decline to respond.* (**Exodus 32:25-26**).

2. **Questions:** To this point, have the people done anything positive? What does this tell you about the heart of the people, the Israelites? What do you learn about them?
  - a. The Israelites have been faithless. They abandon God in the face of any challenge that comes up; whenever the journey starts getting hard.
  - b. They complain about everything.
  - c. They have very selective memory. They quickly forget everything good the Lord had done for them. However, they longingly remember pleasant details about their past life in Egypt (where they were in slavery).
  - d. They quickly turn back to the sins of their old life.
3. A rather sobering thought: The Israelites in the Wilderness *foreshadow us, the Christian church!*
  - a. That is the point made by Paul in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**; similar points are made in **Hebrews 3-4** and **Jude v. 5**.
  - b. Most of those who began the journey, who were “baptized” and “ate the spiritual food and drink” and “drank from the rock...Christ” did not make it to the Promised Land.
  - c. This is a clear warning to Christians that we will fail to reach heaven, the goal of our own journey, if we imitate the kind of sins that led to their deaths in the desert.
4. On the other hand (finally!), in this account of the people giving freely to the construction of the tabernacle in **Exodus 35**, we see something positive in them that we can learn from, be encouraged by, and seek to imitate!
  1. This was a freewill offering. No one was compelled to give any specified amount.
  2. Obviously, you can't have a freewill offering unless you have free will: the ability to *choose whether or not* to do something good (in this case, giving to the Lord)!
- iii. The people gave generously, daily, to the Lord. They gave so much in response to the invitation of Moses that they had more than enough to meet the need.
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- a. Unlike what John Calvin taught, the human race did not lose all ability to choose to do good after the Fall of Man in **Genesis 3**. While our human nature was negatively impacted by the Fall, the human race *did not become totally depraved*. We retained free choice and the ability to choose between:
  - i. doing good or evil,
  - ii. being righteous or wicked, and
  - iii. being generous or selfish.
- b. Moses taught clearly that we have free will.
  - i. Read **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**.
    - 1. Moses said the people had a choice between two paths: one leading to death, and the other leading to life. He then pleaded with the people: "Choose life!"
      - a. There is no question that Moses believed that the people had a choice and ability to choose good over evil.
    - 2. Note that this passage immediately follows something that would be used by Paul in **Romans 10:1-10**, where he quotes from Moses to explain that the righteousness God desires is *by faith*, rather than by following the Law of Moses.
    - 3. This passage was quoted by several early Christian writers to support the idea that we do have free moral choice (everything is not predetermined by God or by fate).
      - a. See Origen in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 305; and Cyprian in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 547.
      - b. For more on the topic of the early Christian view of free will vs. predestination, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David

Bercot, article on 'Freewill and Predestination'.

- c. Jesus taught the same thing; and provided more detail.
  - i. Read **Matthew 7:13-14**.
    - 1. Jesus makes a similar point to Moses (we have a choice between two ways).
    - 2. He then adds something Moses did not mention: *relatively few people will choose the way that leads to life*, which is difficult; while many would choose the wide road that leads to destruction.
  - ii. Jesus also said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!" (**Luke 13:34**, NKJV)
- d. Peter taught the same thing (we have free choice) *regarding what we do with our own money and possessions*.
  - i. Read **Acts 5:1-11**.
  - ii. What do we learn about our possessions and money?
    - 1. They are ours to do with what we choose.
    - 2. The land belonged to Ananias before he sold it. Then the money from the sale was his after he sold it. We own things. They are ours, under our own control.
      - a. This is not Marxism (where the government or 'the community' owns everything. We own property; it is under our control.
      - b. If people voluntarily choose to live with possessions in common, as some Christians have done through the ages, there is nothing

wrong with that; however, this certainly is not a requirement for all Christians.

- iii. The problem was that Ananias and his wife lied about it (claiming to give all the proceeds but keeping some back).
  - iv. Peter says, "You have lied to the *Holy Spirit*...you have not lied to men, but to *God*". (**Acts 5:3-4**)
    - 1. **Question:** What does that statement reveal about how Peter understood the nature of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God?
- iv. Today, Christians are called to give generously (following the spirit and example of the Israelites who gave generously to the construction of the tabernacle).
  - 1. Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." (**Luke 6:38**, NKJV)
  - 2. Read **2 Corinthians 8:1-8**.
    - a. Many of us recall hearing this passage being read right before the weekly church contributions were taken up on Sunday mornings (mostly used to fund local church staff and building-related expenses).
    - b. The focus in this passage appears to be on meeting the material needs of the saints who were in need.
    - c. Paul points the Corinthian Christians to the generous example of Macedonian Christians.
    - d. He also points to the example of Jesus Christ, who "though He was rich, for your sakes became poor" (**2 Corinthians 8:9**).
  - 3. Read **2 Corinthians 9:6-15**.
    - a. Basic principle: He who sows generously will reap generously.
    - b. Basic principle: *God loves a cheerful giver!*

- c. The nature of God Himself: He is a generous God, who disperses His gifts abroad and takes care of the poor.
- v. Challenges for us:
  - 1. Do you see God and Jesus as extremely generous?
  - 2. Are you a generous giver? A cheerful giver?
  - 3. Areas in which Christians are called to give:
    - a. To the poor (**Matthew 25, Luke 16**, etc.)
      - i. "Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'" (**Matthew 19:21**, NKJV)
    - b. Those who devote themselves full-time to leading the church.
      - i. "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (**1 Timothy 5:17-18**, NKJV)
    - c. Those who spread the gospel to a lost world.
      - i. Read **Romans 10:13-15**.
        - 1. Rhetorical questions:
          - a. How shall they call on Him unless they believe?
          - b. How can they believe unless they hear?
          - c. How can they hear without a preacher?
          - d. How shall they preach unless they are sent?
            - i. The challenge: to send out preachers. This requires financial sacrifice in order to save the lost scattered all

over the world, who  
desperately need to hear  
the gospel!

4. Taking care of family members, especially parents.
  - a. Jesus addressed the religious hypocrites on this in **Matthew 15:1-8**.
  - b. "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (**1 Timothy 5:8**, NKJV)
5. Practicing hospitality to other believers.
  - a. Read **Romans 12:9-13**.
  - b. Read **1 Peter 4:7-11**.
    - i. "Be hospitable to one another *without grumbling*." (**1 Peter 4:9**, NKJV)
- e. As we learn from the bad example of the Israelites in **Exodus**, let us not forget to learn from this wonderful positive example as well: being generous with what we have been given.
  - i. Putting into practice the two greatest commandments.
    1. Loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind & strength (**Deuteronomy 6:5**).
    2. Loving our neighbors as ourselves (**Leviticus 19:18**).
  - ii. Let's meet the needs of the kingdom by giving to others out of free will, giving cheerfully!