

Homiletics Analysis: Exodus 26

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Exodus 26 contains the LORD's detailed instructions to Moses for the construction of the Tabernacle's inner and outer coverings, its framework, and its interior curtain. The chapter moves systematically through five layers of construction: (1) the innermost linen curtains embroidered with cherubim (vv. 1–6), joined by golden clasps; (2) the goats' hair curtains forming the outer tent (vv. 7–13); (3) the ram's skin and sea cow hide coverings forming the weatherproofing (v. 14); (4) the acacia wood frames with silver bases forming the structural skeleton (vv. 15–30); and (5) the inner veil of embroidered linen separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (vv. 31–35), and the outer screen at the entrance (vv. 36–37). God gives measurements, materials, quantities, and assembly methods with extraordinary precision. The chapter does not narrate construction — it records divine instruction. The builder receives the design from the architect, not the reverse.

This Text — Intent:

God is not merely specifying a building project. Through the precision, beauty, and layered structure of these instructions, God is communicating who He is and how a holy God may be approached by an unholy people. The intent is to form in Israel — and in every reader — a profound, visceral sense of the weight of divine holiness, the costliness of access to God, and the grace embedded in the very fact that God provides the design for His own dwelling among them. The instructions produce awe: God is not distant, but He is not casual. He has made a way, but the way is His to define. The reader is meant to feel both the privilege of God's nearness and the solemn gravity of His holiness.

Subject Sentence: God prescribes in exhaustive detail the structure that will house His holy presence among Israel.

Primary Claim: The Tabernacle's design — every measurement, material, and veil — is God's own provision for making His holy presence accessible to a sinful people; the costliness and precision of the structure reveal both the weight of His holiness and the magnitude of His grace in condescending to dwell among them at all.

Interpretive Evaluation

The nature and purpose of the Tabernacle instructions: A common interpretive drift here — present in both popular preaching and some critical scholarship — is to treat these chapters as primarily antiquarian or architectural: interesting historical data about ancient Near Eastern tent-shrine construction, perhaps illuminating through comparison with Egyptian or Canaanite parallels, but not carrying a direct theological freight of their own. This reading acknowledges the historical interest while evacuating the theological intent. The text itself resists this strongly. The instructions are given directly by God to Moses (25:1), modeled after the heavenly pattern Moses saw on the mountain (25:9, 40; 26:30), and surrounded by the explicit theological purpose stated in 25:8: *“Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.”* The architectural precision is not incidental — it is the medium through which God communicates His character. This alternative reading is acknowledged for its historical insight but refuted as a governing interpretive posture.

Allegorical and typological over-reading: The opposite error is to treat every measurement and material as a discrete symbolic code to be decrypted — the five pillars represent the Pentateuch, the blue thread represents heaven, the number of clasps represents something else — generating an elaborate spiritual cryptography that the text itself does not authorize. This approach has a long history in both Jewish and Christian interpretation (Philo’s allegorical method is the ancient exemplar; various popular typological preaching traditions carry it forward). The proper Reformed response is to acknowledge the genuine typological freight of the Tabernacle — the author of Hebrews establishes this on solid exegetical ground — while refusing to assign symbolic content to specific elements beyond what the canonical witness supports. The inner veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place carries clear canonical typological weight (Hebrews 10:19–22; Matthew 27:51) and should be expounded accordingly. Whether the exact number of acacia frames carries independent symbolic content is far less clear, and the preacher should resist the pressure to fill every detail with pre-assigned meaning. Qualify rather than wholesale refute: typology is real; over-specified typological code-reading is an overreach.

The Reformed reading: The Reformed and redemptive-historical reading treats Exodus 26 as a component of the Tabernacle instruction block (Exodus 25–31) whose primary theological claim is that God is both utterly holy and graciously near — and that the terms of His nearness are His to set, not Israel’s. The layered structure of the Tabernacle — progressively more restricted access as one moves inward toward the Most Holy Place — embeds the holiness-gradient visually and architecturally. The inner veil is the passage’s climactic element, and it points forward canonically to Christ as the one through whom that veil is torn open. The precision of God’s instructions is itself theologically communicative: it says that approach to this God is not improvised, not casual, and not left to human creativity — it is received, not invented. This reading best accounts for the whole text in its literary context, its stated divine purpose, and its canonical development in Hebrews and the Gospel accounts.

Key Canonical Support

- **Exodus 25:8–9** — God states His own purpose for the Tabernacle: *“Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst... exactly as I show you.”* Grounds the design-as-provision reading and the non-negotiable precision of the instructions.
- **Hebrews 9:1–14** — The author of Hebrews provides the New Testament’s most sustained typological exposition of the Tabernacle structure, specifically naming the inner veil, the two compartments, and the restricted access of the Most Holy Place as types pointing to Christ’s atoning work and His role as the great high priest who passes through the veil for His people.
- **Hebrews 10:19–22** — *“We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain.”* Directly canonizes the inner veil of Exodus 26:31–35 as a type of Christ’s flesh — the veil through which access to God is now permanently opened.
- **Matthew 27:50–51** — The tearing of the Temple veil at Christ’s death is the narrative fulfillment of what the inner veil of Exodus 26 pointed toward: the barrier between God and His people is not merely opened but destroyed, from top to bottom, by God’s own hand.
- **John 1:14** — *“The Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us.”* John’s deliberate use of σκηνώω (to tent/tabernacle) makes Christ the fulfillment of the entire Tabernacle institution — not merely its rituals but its structural purpose: God dwelling among His people in accessible, visible presence.

Aim: To demonstrate that the Tabernacle’s design is God’s grace made architectural — a costly, precise, beautiful provision for the holy God to dwell among an unholy people — and to trace how that provision is fulfilled and surpassed in Jesus Christ.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	General command: make the Tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, embroidered with cherubim	God speaking to Moses; “you shall make” — imperative throughout
1–3	Dimensions and grouping of the linen curtains: 28 cubits	Cherubim woven into the linen place the viewer within the heavenly throne room

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
4–6	× 4 cubits; five joined to five Loops and golden clasps joining the two groups of linen curtains into one unit	symbolically Gold clasps = innermost, most precious joining; unity of the sanctuary emphasized
7–9	Eleven goats’ hair curtains to serve as a tent over the Tabernacle; dimensions slightly larger than linen curtains	Goats’ hair = coarser material, outer layer; the extra half-curtain (v. 9) doubles over the front
10–13	Loops and bronze clasps joining the goats’ hair curtains; the excess curtain drapes down the back	Bronze clasps vs. gold clasps — material gradation from inner to outer reflects holiness gradient
14	Two outer coverings: tanned ram skins (red) and sea cow hides	Weatherproofing; no decoration — purely functional outer shell; the beauty is inside, hidden
15–17	Acacia wood frames: dimensions and tenon joints specified	Acacia wood = durable desert hardwood; overlaid with gold (v. 29)
18–21	North and south side frames: 20 frames each, with silver bases (two per frame)	Silver bases = redemption/ransom associations (cf. Exodus 30:11–16 census ransom)
22–25	West end (“rear”) frames: 6 frames plus 2 corner frames; silver bases specified	Structural precision; the building is both portable and stable
26–30	Acacia wood crossbars, overlaid with gold, running through rings on the frames	The middle bar runs the full length of each side — structural spine; “as shown on the mountain” (v. 30) reinforces heavenly pattern
31–33	The inner veil: fine linen embroidered with cherubim, hung on four gold-overlaid posts with gold hooks and silver bases; separates Holy Place from Most Holy Place	Climax of the chapter; the veil creates the two-tier access structure; cherubim design matches innermost linen curtains
34–35	Placement of the ark, mercy	The veil’s function tied to the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
36–37	seat, table, and lampstand within the two compartments	placement of the furnishings already commanded (Exodus 25)
	The outer screen: embroidered linen, five posts with bronze bases	Less restrictive access at the entrance; no veil design (no cherubim specified) — the gradation of holiness continues

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–6	The Innermost Curtains: Beauty Within, Woven with Cherubim
2	7–14	The Outer Coverings: Protection and Concealment
3	15–30	The Framework: Structure That Holds the Dwelling Together
4	31–35	The Inner Veil: The Boundary of the Holy
5	36–37	The Outer Screen: The Threshold of Approach

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: God prescribes in exhaustive detail the structure that will house His holy presence among Israel.

Primary Claim: The Tabernacle’s design — every measurement, material, and veil — is God’s own provision for making His holy presence accessible to a sinful people; the costliness and precision of the structure reveal both the weight of His holiness and the magnitude of His grace in condescending to dwell among them at all.

Applications (Five)

1. Receive the terms of God's presence as gift, not grievance. (*Mind/belief*) The specificity of God's instructions is not spiritual pedantry — it is grace in architectural form. Every measurement and material communicates that God has solved the problem of His own holiness: He is providing the way of approach that sinful Israel could never have devised on their own. When God's revealed ways of approach feel restrictive — whether in the Tabernacle's design, in the exclusive claims of the gospel, or in the disciplines of corporate worship — the corrective is to understand that precision is mercy. God is not being difficult. He is doing what only He can do: making a way into His presence where no natural way exists.

2. Let the layered structure of the Tabernacle produce a recovered sense of holy awe. (*Affections/worship*) The cherubim-embroidered linen was hidden from the outside; the beauty of the sanctuary was interior and concealed. The most precious materials were closest to the center. The bronze of the outer court, the gold of the inner, the veiled inaccessibility of the Most Holy Place — these are not bureaucratic security levels but a visual, spatial, tactile grammar for the weight of divine holiness. Modern worship often suffers from the collapse of this grammar: God is treated as immediately and casually accessible, and the sense of awe that the Tabernacle's architecture deliberately cultivated is absent. This text calls the worshiper to recover reverence — not as spiritual theater but as the appropriate response to the God who dwells behind the veil.

3. Recognize that Jesus Christ has done what the Tabernacle only announced. (*Mind/belief*) The inner veil of verses 31–35 is not merely an architectural detail — it is a theological statement that awaited its resolution for fourteen centuries. The Most Holy Place was entered once a year by one man under extraordinary conditions (Leviticus 16), because no one else could survive God's full presence. That veil was torn from top to bottom at Golgotha (Matthew 27:51), and the author of Hebrews identifies Christ's body as the veil through which His people now have permanent, confident access (Hebrews 10:20). The Tabernacle's honest architecture confessed: you cannot come all the way in. The gospel declares: in Christ, you already have.

4. Stop treating access to God as ordinary. (*Affections/worship*) The veil that Christ tore open was not cosmetic — it was the boundary between the habitation of God and the domain of sinful humanity. The astonishing thing about the gospel is not that the veil stood for centuries, but that it was ever removed at all. When prayer feels routine, when the Lord's Supper feels like a ritual, when corporate worship becomes mere attendance — the Tabernacle's architecture asks: do you understand what it cost to get you here? You are standing where the high priest stood once a year in terror. The blood that opened this access was not ram's blood. Act like it matters, because it cost everything.

5. Trust that what God builds according to His own pattern will hold. (*Will/behavior*) God told Moses to build according to the pattern shown on the mountain (v. 30). The Tabernacle was not designed by committee or improvised under pressure — it was

received, as revelation, from the one who had seen the heavenly original. In the same way, the church, the gospel, the covenant of grace — these are not human constructs that may need revision or upgrading. They are received structures. Where contemporary Christianity tempts preachers and congregations to redesign the terms of approach to God — to replace the costly, precise, revealed way with something more accessible or culturally intuitive — Exodus 26 says: the pattern is not yours to revise. Build what you were shown.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Exodus 26 teaches that God is both radically holy and radically near — and that the reconciliation of these two attributes is entirely His work, not humanity's. The graduated structure of the Tabernacle — increasingly restricted access as one moves toward the Most Holy Place — is a spatial, material theology of divine holiness: God's presence is real and local, but it is not trivially accessible. At the same time, the Tabernacle exists at all only because God commanded it — the initiative is entirely His. Israel did not petition God for a dwelling; He announced that He would dwell among them and told them exactly how to build the structure that would make it possible. The beauty concealed within the outer coverings — the cherubim-embroidered linen invisible from outside — teaches that the glory of God's presence is not on public display but is received only by those who have been brought in through the provided way of approach.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Exodus 26 is a concrete, architectural expression of the Reformed insistence that access to God is entirely God's initiative and entirely God's provision — sola gratia expressed in lumber and linen. The Tabernacle does not represent Israel reaching toward God; it represents God reaching toward Israel and specifying, down to the number of clasps, how the reach will be received. The inner veil stands as the Tabernacle's most theologically freighted element within the Reformed canonical framework: it is the structural embodiment of the barrier that sin erects between God and humanity, and its canonical resolution — torn at the cross, identified with Christ's flesh in Hebrews — is the architectural expression of substitutionary atonement. Reformed theology's insistence that Christ's atoning work is complete, sufficient, and permanently effective is precisely what the torn veil declares. The Tabernacle's design also grounds Reformed worship's regulative principle: God prescribes the terms of approach; worshipers receive and follow them. Worship is not human creativity directed Godward — it is response to divine revelation about how a holy God is to be approached.

Main Takeaway

God designed every cubit of the Tabernacle — not to complicate Israel's access to Him, but to provide for it. The veils, the layers, the gradations of material were never obstacles; they were honest architecture about the holiness of God and the costliness of nearness to Him. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of every measurement: He is the veil torn open, the way made permanent, the Most Holy Place made fully accessible — and every believer who approaches God in prayer, in worship, in the Lord's Supper is standing in a space that cost the Son of God His life to open. Come in, but come in knowing what it cost.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Reducing the chapter to a historical curiosity.** The most common failure with Exodus 26 is treating it as background information — useful for understanding the rest of the Pentateuch but not itself a text with a claim on the congregation. This evacuates the passage of its theological intent. The chapter is not scaffolding for other passages; it is itself a declaration about the holiness of God, the grace of His condescension, and the terms of approach He provides. Preach it as a theological document, not an ancient building manual.
- **Over-specified typological code-reading.** The opposite error is to treat every measurement as a cipher — the 48 frames represent something, the 100 silver bases represent something else, the five pillars at the entrance encode a dispensational timeline. This approach generates fascinating-sounding exposition that has almost no textual warrant and produces in congregations a sense that Scripture is an encrypted message only specialists can decode. The canonical warrant for the Tabernacle's typological freight is real (Hebrews 8–10; John 1:14), but it is established by the canonical witness, not by the preacher's ingenuity. Preach the typology the New Testament authorizes; resist the temptation to assign symbolic content beyond it.
- **Preaching the veil without preaching its tearing.** The inner veil of verses 31–35 is the chapter's climactic structural element. To preach it only as an ancient architectural feature — or to note its typological significance and stop there — is to leave the sermon half-finished. The veil exists canonically to be torn. Matthew 27:51 and Hebrews 10:19–22 are not optional addenda to an Exodus 26 exposition; they are the resolution that the text has been building toward across the canon. Preach the veil and preach the cross together.
- **Producing guilt without gospel.** A legitimate application of the Tabernacle's holiness-gradient is to recover a sense of reverent awe in contemporary worship. But if the preacher lingers in the passage's emphasis on restricted access without getting to the gospel's full opening of that access in Christ, the sermon produces conviction without comfort and weight without relief. The Tabernacle's honest

confession that you cannot come all the way in must always be followed by the gospel's announcement that in Christ you already have. The architecture is honest about the problem; the gospel announces the solution.

- **Missing the initiative of God.** It is easy to preach Exodus 26 as primarily about the demands placed on Israel — the precision required, the costly materials, the exact compliance with the pattern. But the governing theological fact of the passage is that God initiated, designed, and commanded the Tabernacle's construction before Israel lifted a tool. The initiative is entirely His. Any exposition that presents the Tabernacle primarily as Israel's costly response to God, rather than God's costly provision for Israel, has inverted the passage's theological flow.
- **Skipping the Regulative Principle implication.** Verse 30 — *"Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain"* — is not merely an instruction to Moses. It is the governing principle of biblical worship: the terms of approach are received, not invented. Where contemporary worship is shaped more by cultural accessibility than by revealed pattern, the preacher of Exodus 26 has an obligation to name it. Not as legalism, but as the logical consequence of the passage's claim: when the holy God provides the way of approach, altering it is not helpfulness — it is presumption.