

Homiletics Analysis: Exodus 36

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Exodus 36 records the beginning of the tabernacle's actual construction. Bezalel, Oholiab, and the skilled craftsmen — called and equipped by God — receive the freewill offerings from Israel and begin the work Moses commanded. The chapter opens with a remarkable problem: the people bring so much that the craftsmen cannot use it all. Moses must restrain the giving. The chapter then moves into meticulous detail of the craftsmen's work: the ten curtains of the tabernacle (with their linen, blue, purple, and scarlet threads, and their cherubim designs), the eleven goat-hair curtains forming the tent over the tabernacle, the ram-skin and leather coverings, and the frames, bases, and crossbars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. The chapter ends with the construction of the two veil-frames — the outer and inner — completing the structural skeleton of the dwelling place. This chapter is parallel to the instructions of Exodus 26 but moves from divine prescription to human execution.

This Text — Intent:

God intends this passage to demonstrate that when He calls and equips a people for His purposes, the response is wholehearted obedience — so complete that restraint, not exhortation, becomes necessary. The lavish giving and careful craftsmanship are not incidental detail: they show a people transformed by redemption moving in joyful, precise alignment with God's revealed will. God is not merely recording construction history. He is showing what it looks like when redeemed people give themselves fully — their resources, their skill, their labor — to building the place where God will dwell among them. The intent is to model the shape of grateful, consecrated response to God's grace: no withholding, no shortcuts, no improvisation away from what God prescribed.

Subject Sentence: Redeemed Israel gives and builds with wholehearted, overflowing obedience to God's exact design.

Primary Claim: God is displaying through Israel's overflowing generosity and precise craftsmanship what a people fully yielded to His purposes looks like — and calling every subsequent generation of His people to the same wholehearted, grace-driven consecration of their gifts to His dwelling.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Problem of Repetition: The most common interpretive challenge in Exodus 36–40 is the near-verbatim repetition from the instructions of Exodus 25–31. Many readers, and even many expositors, treat these chapters as administrative filler — material to be skimmed or skipped because “we already read this.” This is a significant misreading. The repetition is the point. In ancient Near Eastern literary convention, correspondence between command and execution signals total, faithful obedience. The author is not padding the narrative; he is structuring it so that the reader is meant to feel the completeness of Israel’s compliance. Reformed exposition should resist the modern Western instinct to treat repetition as redundancy. Here, repetition is a theological statement: what God prescribed, Israel executed — exactly, completely, faithfully.

The Excessive Giving — Moralistic Misreading: A Wesleyan or Baptist preaching tradition often reaches this passage and generates a stewardship sermon: “Be generous like Israel.” This is not wrong as far as it goes, but it misses the theological engine driving the giving. Israel’s overflowing generosity is not primarily a moral example to emulate — it is the natural overflow of a people who have just been redeemed from Egypt by grace alone, who witnessed the plagues, who walked through the sea, who received the covenant at Sinai. The giving flows from the gospel already received, not from moral exhortation newly applied. A Reformed reading presses beneath the behavior to the motive: these people gave too much because they had received too much. Application must be similarly grounded — not “give more” as bare command, but “give freely because you have been freely given to.”

Dispensational Concerns: Dispensational interpreters sometimes hesitate to draw direct application from the tabernacle construction, treating it as belonging entirely to the Mosaic economy with no direct line to the church. The Reformed reading acknowledges the discontinuity — Christians are not building a tabernacle — while insisting on the typological and principal continuity. The tabernacle is the dwelling of God among His people; its New Covenant counterpart is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 3:16–17; Eph. 2:19–22), built with spiritual gifts from the Spirit-equipped members of the church. The principle of Spirit-empowered craftsmanship for the place of God’s dwelling is directly applicable; only the form changes. The Reformed reading qualifies the Dispensational concern rather than dismisses it, but refuses to let typological discontinuity sever applicational continuity.

The Craftsmen — Common Grace or Special Endowment: Some interpreters treat Bezalel and Oholiab’s skill as common grace — natural artistic ability consecrated to a holy purpose. Exodus 31 and 35 are explicit, however, that their skill is a specific divine endowment of the Spirit for this task. The Reformed reading holds both: God works through natural gifts and cultivated skills, but the Spirit’s filling here is a special, purposive endowment for building the sanctuary. This is not merely natural talent offered up — it is gifting from above, directed toward a specific sacred end. The distinction matters for application: Christian service is not merely natural competence offered to God; it is Spirit-empowered gifting directed toward building the place of God’s dwelling among His people.

Key Canonical Support

- **Exodus 25–31** — The divine prescriptions for the tabernacle, of which Exodus 36 is the precise execution. The verbal correspondence between these chapters is the structural argument for Israel’s total obedience.
- **1 Chronicles 29:1–19** — David’s overflowing generosity toward the temple, and his recognition that all giving flows from what God has first given: “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” This is the explicit theological explanation of what Exodus 36 displays implicitly.
- **1 Corinthians 3:9–17** — The New Testament identification of the church as God’s temple, built by Spirit-gifted workers, with Christ as the foundation. The craftsmen of Exodus 36 type the apostles, teachers, and gifted members building the New Covenant dwelling of God.
- **Ephesians 2:19–22** — The church as “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit,” built together on the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. This is the eschatological fulfillment of what Israel was building in the wilderness.
- **Romans 12:1–8** — The offering of gifts for the building of the body of Christ, flowing from “the mercies of God” (v. 1) — the same gospel-motivation structure visible in Israel’s overflowing giving at the tabernacle. The logic is identical: receive grace, give gifts, build the place of God’s dwelling.

Aim: To show that the shape of a redeemed people’s life is wholehearted, precise, grace-driven consecration of every gift and skill to the construction of God’s dwelling — and to press this claim on the reader with enough concreteness that it moves from observation to transformation.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
36:1	Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled craftsman are said to have received wisdom and understanding from the LORD to do all the work of the sanctuary	Divine endowment is the precondition for all that follows; “just as the LORD has commanded” governs the entire chapter

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
36:2	Moses calls Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled man “in whose heart the LORD had put skill” — all who are moved to come and do the work	Heart-preparation is divine; response is voluntary; both are present
36:3	They receive all the freewill offerings Israel had brought for the work of the tabernacle	Gifts already given; craftsmen receive what the people have freely offered
36:4–5	The craftsmen come to Moses and report that the people are bringing more than enough for the work	A rare moment: excess giving creates a “problem” — construction cannot absorb the supply
36:6–7	Moses commands the people to stop bringing offerings; the material is already sufficient — more than enough	The restrained-giving command is not rebuke but recognition; “more than enough” (twice) marks this as extraordinary
36:8	The skilled craftsmen begin making the ten curtains of the tabernacle: fine linen with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven in	Matches Exodus 26:1; execution begins
36:9	Dimensions of each curtain: 28 cubits long, 4 cubits wide; all curtains the same size	Precision and uniformity; every detail matches the pattern
36:10–11	Five curtains joined together; five curtains joined together; loops of blue made on the edge of the outermost curtain in each set	Two groups of five; loops prepare for clasps
36:12	Fifty loops on one curtain; fifty loops on the other; loops opposite each other	Exact correspondence
36:13	Fifty gold clasps made; the two sets of curtains joined into one whole	Unity of the tabernacle structure secured by gold; the sanctuary becomes one

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
36:14–15	Eleven curtains of goat hair made to serve as a tent over the tabernacle; each 30 cubits by 4 cubits	The outer covering; slightly larger than the inner curtains
36:16–17	Five curtains joined together; six curtains joined together; fifty loops on the edge of each joining curtain	The outer tent has a different arrangement than the inner curtains
36:18–19	Fifty bronze clasps to join the tent into one unit; a covering of ram skins dyed red, then a covering of hides over that	Bronze rather than gold for the outer coverings; protective layers
36:20–23	Upright frames of acacia wood made for the tabernacle; each frame 10 cubits by 1.5 cubits with two projecting tenons	The structural skeleton begins
36:24	Forty silver bases under twenty frames; two bases under each frame for its two tenons	Silver bases; precise count
36:25–26	Twenty frames for the south side with forty silver bases	Identical structure for the south side
36:27–28	Six frames for the west end; two corner frames	Completing the rectangle
36:29–30	Corner frames paired from bottom to top with a single ring; eight frames total with sixteen silver bases	Structural integrity at the corners
36:31–33	Five crossbars of acacia wood for each side; middle crossbar to extend from end to end	Horizontal stabilizers; center bar runs the full length
36:34	Frames overlaid with gold; gold rings made as holders for the crossbars; crossbars overlaid with gold	Everything visible on the interior is gold
36:35	The inner curtain (veil) made of blue, purple, and scarlet	Separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
36:36	yarn with fine linen; cherubim worked into it Four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold, with gold hooks and four silver bases	The veil's supporting structure
36:37–38	The outer curtain (screen) for the entrance to the tent made of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn with fine linen; five posts with hooks and overlaid tops; five bronze bases	The entrance screen; gold tops but bronze bases — distinctions in holiness maintained to the end

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	36:1–2	The Workers: Divinely Gifted and Willing
2	36:3–7	The Offering: Overflowing Generosity Restrained
3	36:8–13	The Inner Curtains: Precision and Unity
4	36:14–19	The Outer Coverings: Protection and Completeness
5	36:20–34	The Framework: Skeleton of the Sanctuary
6	36:35–38	The Veils: Boundaries of Holiness

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Redeemed Israel gives and builds with wholehearted, overflowing obedience to God's exact design.

Primary Claim: God is displaying through Israel's overflowing generosity and precise craftsmanship what a people fully yielded to His purposes looks like — and calling every subsequent generation of His people to the same wholehearted, grace-driven consecration of their gifts to His dwelling.

Applications (Five)

1. Recognize that your giving flows from your receiving, not your resolving.
(*Affections/Worship*) Israel did not give extravagantly because Moses preached a compelling stewardship sermon. They gave because they had been freed from slavery,

carried through the sea, and met by God at Sinai. The giving was the natural overflow of grace already received. Before asking whether you give enough, ask whether you have truly felt the weight of what you have received — redemption, adoption, the Spirit, eternal life, access to the Father. Giving that flows from that well does not require pleading. It requires restraint.

2. Bring your actual skill to God's actual work, not a watered-down substitute.

(Will/Behavior) Bezalel and Oholiab did not offer rough approximations of what God prescribed. They brought their full technical mastery — spinning, weaving, woodworking, metalwork — and applied it with precision to what God commanded. Consider the skill, craft, time, and capacity you have developed — professionally, creatively, practically — and ask honestly whether it is being brought to the building of God's dwelling. Offering God the leftovers of your capacity while reserving your best for other projects is not what Exodus 36 looks like.

3. Trust that God's design is complete and does not need your improvements.

(Mind/Belief) Not one craftsman in this chapter improvises. The materials change, the technique develops, but every dimension, every clasp, every base matches the pattern God gave on the mountain. The temptation in ministry and in personal obedience is always to modify the design — to make God's prescribed way more palatable, more contemporary, more efficient. Exodus 36 confronts that impulse directly: God's blueprint is complete. The work of the craftsman is not to improve the design but to execute it faithfully. Trust the pattern; build what was shown.

4. Let the sufficiency of what God has provided be enough — resist the anxiety of scarcity.

(Mind/Belief) The craftsmen came to Moses and said: there is too much. Not enough is the assumption that drives most Christian communities in most eras. Exodus 36 deposits a counter-memory: when God's people are yielded and the Spirit's gifts are flowing, the supply exceeds the need. This does not mean every ministry will always be fully funded. It means the anxiety of scarcity is not a reflex that honors God — and it should be interrogated before it governs decisions. God equipped His people for this task with more than they needed. He is not in the habit of calling people to work He has not resourced.

5. Consecrate your ordinary, careful work as worship. *(Affections/Worship)* The tabernacle was not built in a moment of spiritual ecstasy. It was built frame by frame, clasp by clasp, cubit by cubit — measured, cut, joined, and repeated. The craftsmanship of Exodus 36 is not glamorous; it is meticulous. And it is called the work of the LORD. The Christian calling to build God's dwelling (the church, the body of Christ) is similarly daily, detailed, and unglamorous — teaching children, visiting the sick, preparing meals, exercising administration, giving financially, praying faithfully. These ordinary acts of careful obedience are the frames and crossbars of the sanctuary. Bring your whole self to the small, precise work God has assigned you, and do it as worship.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Exodus 36 teaches that God is both the source of every gift needed for His work and the architect of every detail of His dwelling. He does not merely command the construction and leave His people to figure it out; He fills craftsmen with His Spirit, moves hearts toward generosity, and prescribes a pattern down to the cubit. This means that the building of the sanctuary is entirely a work of divine grace from beginning to end — the plan is His, the skill is His, the materials are ultimately His, and the provision is His. The passage also teaches that the appropriate human response to redemption is wholehearted, precise consecration: not giving God something, but giving God everything, held back by nothing. The restraint command in verses 6–7 is a marker of what genuine grace-motivated giving looks like when the Spirit is working freely among a people.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This passage is a wilderness-era picture of the doctrine of total consecration grounded in sovereign grace. The craftsmen do not work to earn God's dwelling — God's dwelling is the gracious gift already promised and already designed. They work in response to that promise, with gifts He supplied, according to a pattern He prescribed. This is the Reformed ordo in architectural form: grace precedes, equips, and shapes obedience; obedience does not produce grace. The overflowing generosity of the people also anticipates the Pauline principle of 2 Corinthians 9:7–8 — that God loves a cheerful giver and makes grace abound — rooting New Covenant generosity in the same theological soil as Old Covenant construction. Furthermore, the tabernacle as the dwelling of God among His people points forward through the typological arc to the incarnation (John 1:14 — “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us”), to the church as the Spirit-indwelt temple (1 Cor. 3; Eph. 2), and to the New Jerusalem where God dwells with His people without mediation (Rev. 21). Exodus 36 is not the end of the story but one of its most detailed anticipations.

Main Takeaway

God does not need your reluctant compliance — He is building a dwelling, and He has already supplied everything it requires. The question Exodus 36 puts to you is not whether you have enough to give, but whether what you have received from Him is real enough to you that giving it all back feels less like sacrifice and more like overflow. A people who have truly been redeemed do not have to be talked into generosity; they have to be restrained from it. Live and give like someone who has been let out of Egypt.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating Exodus 36 as a stewardship text and nothing more.** The passage is often preached as a giving sermon — “Israel gave too much; we barely give enough; let’s change that.” This is not wrong in its conclusion but wrong in its method. The giving is a symptom, not the subject. The subject is the totality of a redeemed people’s consecration to God’s purposes. Reducing it to a financial application skims the surface and leaves the theological engine unexplained. The giving only makes sense in light of who these people are and what they have received.
- **Skipping or skimming the construction details as unpreachable.** The craftsmen’s meticulous work — every cubit, every clasp, every frame — is not filler. The detail is the argument. God prescribed a precise pattern; Israel executed it precisely. The specificity of the obedience is the point. A preacher who summarizes verses 8–38 as “and then they built it” has evacuated the passage of its central claim. The details demand at least a structural comment about what total, precise obedience looks like.
- **Moralizing the craftsmen into bare examples (“be skilled and dedicated like Bezalel”).** The Reformed warning against Clowney’s anti-moralism applies directly here. The craftsmen are not primarily moral models to imitate — they are Spirit-filled workers building the dwelling of God, a type and shadow of what God is doing in the church by His Spirit through gifted members. The application should move through the typological logic (this is what it looks like when the Spirit equips God’s people for His dwelling) and not short-circuit to “develop your skills and use them for God.”
- **Ignoring the command to stop giving (vv. 6–7) as an anomaly.** The restraint command is the most unusual feature of this chapter and one of the most unusual moments in all of Scripture. It should not be treated as a footnote. It is the diagnostic marker for what genuine grace-motivated generosity looks like: the people gave until Moses had to restrain them. That is the standard Exodus 36 sets, and the preacher should not smooth over how far it is from most people’s actual experience of giving.
- **Severing the passage from its New Covenant fulfillment.** Exodus 36 preached in isolation — as history, as ancient construction protocol — misses half its canonical function. The tabernacle is a type; its substance is Christ and His church. The passage should be preached with one eye on the pattern being executed and the other eye on where that pattern is ultimately going: the incarnate tabernacle of John 1:14, the Spirit-indwelt temple of 1 Corinthians 3, the eternal dwelling of Revelation 21. Without this, the sermon becomes an interesting piece of ancient history rather than a claim on the listener’s present life.

- **Failing to preach the sufficiency of God's provision as a pastoral word.** The "more than enough" of verses 5 and 7 is not merely a narrative detail — it is a word about the character of God's resourcing when His people are obedient. Ministries and congregations that live in chronic anxiety about resources need to hear this passage preached with pastoral courage: when God calls people to build His dwelling, He supplies the means. That does not resolve every practical budgeting question, but it does confront the anxiety that often drives poor stewardship decisions and fearful ministry. Bring this as a word of faith, not a rebuke.