

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS CHAPTER 36

In this chapter,

I. The work of the tabernacle is begun, **#Ex 36:1-4**.

II. A stop is put to the people's contributions, **#Ex 36:5-7**.

III. A particular account is given of the making of the tabernacle itself; the fine curtains of it, **#Ex 36:8-13**. The coarse ones, **#Ex 36:14-19**. The boards, **#Ex 36:20-30**. The bars, **#Ex 36:31-34**. The partition veil, **#Ex 36:35-36**. And the hanging for the door, **#Ex 36:37**.

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 7.

I. The workmen set in without delay. Then they wrought, **#Ex 36:1**. When God had qualified them for the work, then they applied themselves to it. Note, The talents we are entrusted with must not be laid up, but laid out; not hid in a napkin, but traded with. What have we all our gifts for, but to do good with them? They began when Moses called them, **#Ex 36:2**. Even those whom God has qualified for, and inclined to, the service of the tabernacle, yet must wait for a regular call to it, either extraordinary, as that of prophets and apostles, or ordinary, as that of pastors and teachers. And observe who they were that Moses called: Those *in whose heart God had put wisdom* for this purpose, beyond their natural capacity, and *whose heart stirred them up to come to the work* in good earnest. Note, Those are to be called to the building of the gospel tabernacle whom God has by his grace made in some measure fit for the work and free to engage in it. Ability and willingness (with resolution) are the two things to be regarded in the call of ministers. Has God given them not only knowledge, but wisdom? (for those that would win souls must be wise, and have their hearts stirred up to come to the work, and not to the honour only; to do it, and not to talk of it only), let them come to it with full purpose of heart to go through with it. The materials which the people had contributed were delivered by Moses to the workmen, **#Ex 36:3**. They could not create a tabernacle, that is, make it out of nothing, nor work, unless they had something to work upon; the people therefore brought the materials and Moses put them into their hands. Precious souls are the materials of the gospel tabernacle; they are *built up a spiritual house*, **#1Pe 2:5**. To this end they are to offer themselves a free-will offering to the Lord, for his service (**#Ro 15:16**), and they are then committed to the care of his ministers, as builders, to be framed and wrought upon by their edification and increase in holiness, till they all come, like the curtains of the tabernacle, *in the unity of the faith, to be a holy temple*, **#Eph 2:21-22; 4:12-13**.

II. The contributions restrained. The people continued to bring *free offerings every morning*, **#Ex 36:3**. Note, We should always make it our morning's work to bring our offerings unto the Lord; even the spiritual offerings of prayer and praise, and a broken heart surrendered entirely to God. This is that which the duty of every day requires. God's compassions are new every morning, and so must our duty to him be. Probably there were some that were backward at first to bring their offering, but their neighbours' forwardness stirred them up and shamed them. The zeal of some provoked many. There are those who will be content to follow who yet do not care for leading in a good work. It is best to be forward, but better late than never. Or perhaps some who had offered at first, having pleasure in reflecting upon it, offered more; so far were they from grudging what they had contributed, that they doubled their contribution. Thus, in charity, *give a portion to seven, and also to eight*; having given much, give more. Now observe,

1. The honesty of the workmen. When they had cut out their work, and found how their stuff held out, and that the people were still forward to bring in more, they went in a

body to Moses to tell him that there needed no more contributions, **#Ex 36:4-5**. Had they sought their own things, they had now a fair opportunity of enriching themselves by the people's gifts; for they might have made up their work, and converted the overplus to their own use, as perquisites of their place. But they were men of integrity, that scorned to do so mean a thing as to sponge upon the people, and enrich themselves with that which was offered to the Lord. Those are the greatest cheats that cheat the public. If to murder many is worse than to murder one, by the same rule to defraud communities, and to rob the church or state, is a much greater crime than to pick the pocket of a single person. But these workmen were not only ready to account for all they received, but were not willing to receive more than they had occasion for, lest they should come either into the temptation or under the suspicion of taking it to themselves. These were men that knew when they had enough.

2. The liberality of the people. Though they saw what an abundance was contributed, yet they continued to offer, till they were forbidden by proclamation, **#Ex 36:6-7**. A rare instance! Most need a spur to quicken their charity; few need a bridle to check it, yet these did. Had Moses aimed to enrich himself, he might have suffered them still to bring in their offerings; and when the work was finished might have taken the remainder to himself: but he also preferred the public before his own private interest, and was therein a good example to all in public trusts. It is said (**#Ex 36:6**), *The people were restrained from bringing*; they looked upon it as a restraint upon them not to be allowed to do more for the tabernacle; such was the zeal of those people, who gave *to their power, yea, and beyond their power, praying the collectors with much entreaty to receive the gift*, **#2Co 8:3-4**. These were the fruits of a first love; in these last days charity has grown too cold for us to expect such things from it.

Ver. 8 thru Ver. 13.

The first work they set about was the framing of the house, which must be done before the furniture of it was prepared. This house was not made of timber or stone, but of curtains curiously embroidered and coupled together. This served to typify the state of the church in this world, the palace of God's kingdom among men.

1. Though it is upon the earth, yet its foundation is not in the earth, as that of a house is; no, Christ's kingdom is not of this world, nor founded in it.
2. It is mean and mutable, and in a militant state; shepherds dwelt in tents, and God is the Shepherd of Israel; soldiers dwelt in tents, and the Lord is a man of war, and his church marches through an enemy's country, and must fight its way. The kings of the earth enclose themselves in cedar (**#Jer 22:15**), but the ark of God was lodged in curtains only.
3. Yet there is a beauty in holiness; the curtains were embroidered, so is the church adorned with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, that *raiment of needle-work*, **#Ps 45:14**.
4. The several societies of believers are united in one, and, as here, all *become one tabernacle; for there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism*.

Ver. 14. thru Ver. 34.

Here,

1. The shelter and special protection that the church is under are signified by the curtains of hair cloth, which were spread over the tabernacle, and the covering of rams' skins and badgers' skins over them, **#Ex 36:14-19**. God has provided for his people a *shadow from the heat, and a covert from storm and rain*, **#Isa 4:6**. They are armed against all weathers; the sun and the moon shall not smite them: and they are protected from the storms of divine wrath, that hail which will *sweep away the refuge of lies*, **#Isa 28:17**. Those that dwell in God's house shall find, be the tempest ever so violent, or the dropping ever so continual, it does not rain in.
2. The strength and stability of the church, though it is but a tabernacle, are signified by the boards and bars with which the curtains were borne up, **#Ex 36:20-34**. The boards were coupled together and joined by the bars which shot through them; for the union of the church, and the hearty agreement of those that are its stays and supporters, contribute abundantly to its strength and establishment.

Ver. 35. thru Ver. 38.

In the building of a house there is a great deal of work about the doors and partitions. In the tabernacle these were answerable to the rest of the fabric; there were curtains for doors, and veils for partitions.

1. There was a veil made for a partition between the holy place, and the most holy, **#Ex 36:35-36**. This signified the darkness and distance of that dispensation, compared with the New Testament, which shows us the glory of God more clearly and invites us to draw near to it; and the darkness and distance of our present state, in comparison with heaven, where we shall be *ever with the Lord and see him as he is*.
2. There was a veil made for the door of the tabernacle, **#Ex 36:37-38**. At this door the people assembled, though forbidden to enter; for, while we are in this present state, we must get as near to God as we can.