

Exodus Chapter 31

Verses 1-5

“Bezalel”, a master craftsman, had a particular skill that was needed for worship.

He was “filled ... with the Spirit of God” (a phrase typically used in the Old Testament for prophets and kings).

For those who are willing, the LORD can and will use every gift He provides His servants as a means to worship Him.

In (verses 1-11), God identified two men by name as specially chosen and divinely endowed with ability, or Spirit-filled, to make all He had revealed to Moses (28:3; 36:1).

None of the craftsmen were left untouched by divinely bestowed understanding in the intricacy of their work.

They were called “craftsmen,” suggesting previously developed skill.

They were to make all that is prescribed (in Exodus chapters 25-30).

Exodus 31:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

After the LORD had given Moses instructions about building a tabernacle, the model of which he had shown him.

And what should be the furniture of it, who should minister in it, and what clothes they should wear.

He acquaints him that He had provided artificers for this service.

Which would prevent doubts and objections that might rise up in the mind of Moses, how and by whom all this should be done.

Since the children of Israel had not been brought up, nor used to any curious work in Egypt, out of which they were but just come.

Saying; as follows:

Exodus 31:2 "See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah:"

It is a high honor to be called of God by name.

He thus calls only those whom He appoints to some great work, as Moses (Exodus 3:4; 33:12), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), and Cyrus (Isa. 45:3-4).

"Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur":

Hur, the grandfather of Bezaleel is generally supposed to be identical with the Hur who supported Moses's hands (Exodus 17:12).

And was left joint regent with Aaron when Moses went up into Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:14).

"Of the tribe of Judah":

Descended from Judah through Pharez, Hezron, and Caleb (1 Chron. 2:5; 2:18-20).

When God calls anyone "by name", it is to take over a godly task.

God Himself had called a man named Bezaleel to work for Him.

This was the first mention of this man in the Bible.

He was an unknown.

Moses or Aaron might never have gone out and searched him out to do this job.

He had no background or recommendations.

Bezaleel seemed to drop in out of nowhere to do this job for God.

His only claim to fame up until now was that he was the grandson of Hur, who stayed the arm of Moses to help with the battle.

You see, God does not always choose someone who the world thinks might do a good job to do work for Him.

God chooses whom He will and that was certainly the case here.

Exodus 31:3 "And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,"

"And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom":

The basic idea behind the Hebrew word for "wisdom" is skill.

To gain wisdom means to develop the ability to live life skillfully and produce something of quality.

This is the use here and (in Exodus 36:1): “In whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary.”

(Psalm 107:23-29), provides a good illustration as it relates to skilled mariners who were unable to cope with a severe storm.

The phrase (in verse 27), “and are at their wit’s end,” is literally “their wisdom [*chokmah*] is swallowed up.”

Their “skill” or “ability” to get themselves to shore had been reduced.

God had filled Bezaleel with the knowledge and the Spirit of God which it would take to do this job.

It seems as though God not only gave him the knowledge, but the skill as well.

Exodus 31:4 "To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,"

The Israelites, who had been masons and bricklayers in Egypt, were not qualified for curious workmanship.

But the Spirit who gave the apostles utterance in divers tongues, miraculously gave Bezaleel and Aholiab the skill that was wanting.

The honor which comes from God, is always attended with a work to be done; to be employed for God is high honor.

Those whom God calls to any service, he will find or make fit for it.

The LORD gives different gifts to different persons.

Let each do his proper work, diligently remembering that whatever wisdom any one possesses, the LORD put it in the heart, to do his commandments.

All of the details for this magnificent tabernacle would have to be indelibly imprinted in his mind.

There was no way he could get all of these details accurate unless it was in his mind.

God had miraculously prepared him.

Exodus 31:5 "And in cutting of stones, to set [them], and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship."

That is, in cutting and setting the precious stones, and in graving on them what God commanded.

“In carving of timber”:

Rather in cutting of timber, as the same word is rendered in the beginning of the verse.

For we do not read of any carved work about the tabernacle.

You may be assured that if God calls you to do a job for Him, He will give you whatever you need to finish the job with.

You see, in the case of Bezaleel, God didn't stop with giving him just one gift.

He filled him with everything he needed to get the job done.

Exodus 31:6 "And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee;"

It has been observed above that Bezaleel's work was general, Aholiab's was special.

Our version, indeed, styles the latter “an engraver, and a cunning workman, and an embroiderer” (Exodus 38:23).

From which it might be supposed that, like Bezaleel, he cultivated various branches of art.

In the original, however, nothing is said of engraving, and the true meaning seems to be that Aholiab had the charge of the textile fabrics needed for the sanctuary.

And directed both the weaving and the embroidery, but did not intermeddle in other matters (see note on Exodus 38:23).

"Of the tribe of Dan.":

The tribe of Dan is among the most undistinguished; but it produced two great artists.

Aholiab, the skillful maker of the textile fabrics of the tabernacle, and Hiram, the master workman employed in the ornamentation of Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 2:14).

"All that are wise hearted":

On the expression “wise hearted” (see note on Exodus 28:3).

We see that God had given Bezaleel a helper.

These two, Bezaleel and Aholiab, would supervise all the work.

Bezaleel would be over all and Aholiab would be his helper.

These men both had natural ability to do this job, which was a gift from God.

We see in these previous verses that God had given them even more wisdom and natural ability than they had before.

By the power of the Spirit of God teaching them and anointing from the inside with the power of the Spirit to carry out this job that God had given them.

As I said before, if God calls you to do a job, He will equip you supernaturally to do it.

Exodus 31:7 "The tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that [is] thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle,"

The enumeration of the holy objects follows the order of the instructions given concerning them (Exodus 25-30).

Except that the tabernacle itself is placed first, and the altar of incense mentioned in its natural position, together with the table of shewbread and the golden candlestick (Exodus 31:8).

We see in verses 7-10, detailed explanations of all the things they were to make.

It is interesting to me, that he was to construct it the way a person does a house.

He was to build the outside first, so that strange eyes would not be allowed to look at the sacred items.

As I mentioned before, it was very unusual for a person to be skilled in the working of so many different materials.

This certainly had to be God moving upon Bezaleel to give him all of this knowledge.

Exodus 31:8 "And the table and his furniture, and the pure candlestick with all his furniture, and the altar of incense,"

The shewbread table, with its dishes, spoons, and bowls, Exodus 25:23.

"And the pure candlestick with all his furniture; called "pure", because made of pure gold, and was to be kept pure and clean by the priests, and in which pure oil olive was burnt, and gave a clear light.

Its furniture were its lamps, tongs, and snuff dishes (Exodus 25:31).

"And the altar of incense":

Which was made of shittim wood covered with gold (Exodus 30:1).

Exodus 31:9 "And the altar of burnt offering with all his furniture, and the laver and his foot,"

Which was made of shittim wood covered with brass; its furniture was its pans, shovels, basins, etc. (Exodus 27:1).

"And the laver and his foot":

For the priests to wash their hands and feet at (Exodus 30:18).

Exodus 31:10 "And the cloths of service, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office,"

Either those the priests ministered in in the time of service, and which they never wore but when in it.

And so might with propriety be so called, and what they were the following words explain.

Or else these were clothes of blue, purple, and scarlet, and coverings of badgers' skins, in which the ark, the shewbread table, the candlestick, and the golden altar, and other instruments of the tabernacle were wrapped.

As Aben Ezra observes when the Israelites journeyed in the wilderness (see Num. 4:5).

"And the holy garments for Aaron the priest":

The breastplate, ephod, and robe, the brodered coat, mitre, and girdle (Exodus 28:4).

"And the garments of his sons to minister in the priest's office; consisting of the bonnets, coats, girdles, and breeches (Exodus 28:40).

Exodus 31:11 "And the anointing oil, and sweet incense for the holy [place]: according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do."

The most fantastic thing in all of this to me, was the fact that God Himself, chose Bezaleel and Aholiab to do this work.

He did not tell Moses to go and find someone capable.

God went and called them to this job.

Verses 12-17

Instituted on Mount Sinai, the “Sabbath” was a “sign” of the distinct and special relationship between the LORD and Israel.

The basic idea of Sabbath is not worship but rest from work (see note on 20:8-11).

Exodus 31:12 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

After he had described to him the place of worship, and appointed the priests that should minister in it, and ordered the making of all things appertaining to it, and the workmen that should be concerned therein.

He repeats the law of the Sabbath, and puts in mind of the time of worship: saying as follows.

Exodus 31:13 "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it [is] a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that [ye] may know that I [am] the LORD that doth sanctify you."

Orders were now given that a tabernacle should be set up for the service of God.

But they must not think that the nature of the work, and the haste that was required, would justify them in working at it on Sabbath days.

The Hebrew word “Sabbath” signifies rest, or ceasing from labor.

The thing signified by the Sabbath is that rest in glory which remains for the people of God.

Therefore the moral obligation of the Sabbath must continue, till time is swallowed up in eternity.

This other message about the building of the tabernacle and the outer court enclosure was not given to the people, themselves.

This was not something they needed to know, so God did not tell them.

Here we see something that was very important to them.

In fact, it was a life and death matter.

This was not an option.

They had to do this if they were to live.

God had given signs to their ancestors.

One of the signs had been the rainbow in the sky which promised that God would never destroy the world again with water.

Circumcision of their males had also, been a sign to the rest of the world that they were a separated people.

Just the fact that God miraculously delivered them out of Egypt and let them cross the Red sea on dry land was a sign, that they were God's chosen people.

Exodus 31:14 "Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it [is] holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth [any] work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people."

This is a new enactment, and must be regarded in conjunction with the new dignity attached to Sabbath observance by its having become the special covenant sign between God and His people.

The Sabbath breaker now threw himself out of covenant with God, and not only so, but did what in him lay to throw the whole people out of covenant.

His guilt was therefore great, and the assignment to it of the death penalty is in no way surprising.

Rather, it is in accordance with the general spirit of the code (see Exodus 21:16-17; 21:29; 22:18-20).

When the occasion arose, there was no hesitation in carrying the law out (Num. 15:32-35).

"Cut off":

Or, separated, set apart from.

His act at once cast him out from the number of God's people, made him an outlaw, and he was excommunicated.

This was a very little thing for God to ask in return.

Even this was for their own good.

A person can work much better, if he will take one day in seven to rest his body.

The body and the mind function better if you rest occasionally.

God said one day in seven and I do not dispute that.

Jesus said: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath (Mark 2:27).

Exodus 31:15 "Six days may work be done; but in the seventh [is] the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth [any] work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death."

Compare Exodus 20:9.

"The sabbath of rest":

Rather, a Sabbath of rest, or a complete rest.

The repetition "Sabbath" gives an idea of completeness.

God made heaven and earth in six days and on the seventh day rested.

He was showing us a formula that would work.

Men's bodies are made so exacting and every little part has to function properly.

This rest one day a week is for man's benefits as well as being a time set aside to worship God.

This set aside time was so important to God, that those who broke this sabbath were put to death.

Exodus 31:16 "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, [for] a perpetual covenant."

On whom the Sabbath of the seventh day was only enjoined, as well as that of the seventh and of the fiftieth years, being all ceremonial and shadowy.

"To observe the sabbath throughout their generations":

So long as the Mosaic dispensation lasted, and their civil government and church state continued, even until the Messiah came, when all those Jewish shadows, rites, and ceremonies, fled away and disappeared.

"For a perpetual covenant":

Just in the same sense as circumcision was (Gen. 17:13).

Exodus 31:17 "It [is] a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for [in] six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed."

A sign of the covenant between us: that I will be their God and they will be my people.

Both that depends upon this among other duties, and upon this in an eminent degree.

"Was refreshed":

Not as if he had been weary with working, which surely he could not be with speaking a few words, nor can God be weary with anything (Isa. 40:28).

But it notes the pleasure or delight God took in reflecting upon his works, beholding that everything he had made was very good (Gen. 1:31).

This was saying, be like your Father in heaven.

Use Him as your example.

If He needed only six days to do all of this, you can make it on six days' work also.

Then He said, how will the other people know that you belong to Me?

He told them, we have made an agreement and I will keep my part of this agreement, but you must keep your agreement as well.

As we said, besides fulfilling their agreement with God in this, it would also refresh their bodies and minds.

Exodus 31:18 "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."

"Two tables of testimony":

See note on 25:13.

"Written with the finger of God":

This is a figurative way of attributing the law to God.

Here we see that God Himself had prepared these tables of stone (testimony).

The fiery finger of God had engraved this in the stone.

The Ark of the covenant was actually built as a permanent resting place for this testimony.

Moses had been forty days and nights on Mount Sinai receiving this.

Moses came and went when God decided it was time.

God said now to Moses, "We are through talking for this time."

Exodus Chapter 31 Questions

1. Who did God call by name to build the tabernacle?
2. Who was his grandfather?
3. What tribe was he from?
4. What had God filled him with?
5. What all was God asking him to do?
6. When God calls someone by name, what is He doing?
7. Had this man been mentioned before in the Bible?
8. What did this show us about God's calling?
9. If God calls you to do a job, what will He do?
10. What was so unusual about Bezaleel's gifts?
11. Who did God give him for a helper?
12. What tribe was he from?
13. What did God give them that they might do what He commanded them to do?
14. Where does natural ability come from?
15. What was he to do first?
16. Why was this?
17. What solemn warning was Moses to give the people?
18. How long were they to recognize the Sabbath?
19. What was the punishment for not keeping Sabbath?
20. Why did God not tell the common people about the tabernacle?
21. Who was Sabbath made for?
22. Where was the Scripture found?
23. What does the Sabbath show the world?
24. What did He give Moses as physical proof of his communing with God?
25. Where would they be housed?

26. What were they written with?