

Exodus 31

In this short chapter, God chooses two men to oversee, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the construction of the tabernacle and all its furniture (31:1-11) and the chapter concludes with another reminder for Israel to keep the Sabbath day (31:12-18).

TRANSLATION - 31:1-11:

1 And Jehovah spoke to Moses saying, **2** “See, I have called by name Bezelel, son of Uri, son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah. **3** And I filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and in skill and in understanding and in every work, **4** to design plans to make by gold and by silver and by bronze **5** and to engrave a stone to fill and to cut a tree to make in all the work. **6** And I Myself, behold, I will give him Oholiab, son of Ahisamac from the tribe of Dan and by the heart all wisdom of heart I will give wisdom and they will make all which I command you, **7** and the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony and the atonement cover which [is] on it and all the utensils of the tent, **8** and the table and its utensils and the pure lamp stand and all its utensils and the altar of incense, **9** and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils and the laver and its base, **10** and the woven garments and the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons for a priest, **11** and the oil of anointing the fragrant incense for holiness as all which I command, they will do.”

HEBREW WORDS:

“Bezelel” (ver. 2) is mentioned 9 times in the OT, 6 times in Exodus: 31:2; 35:30; 36:1-2; 37:1; 38:22. He is mentioned also in Ezra 10:30; 1 Chron. 2:20; 2 Chron. 1:5. “Uri” is mentioned 8 times, three in Exodus: 31:2; 35:30; 38:22. “Hur” was seen earlier at 17:10, 12. “Spirit” (ver. 3) was used earlier at 6:9. “Wisdom” was used earlier at 28:3. “Skill” is used three times in Exodus (31:3; 35:31; 36:1); it is used 42 times in the OT, 19 times in Proverbs. “Knowledge” is an infinitive in Hebrew; it is used extensively in Exodus, beginning at 1:8. “Work” was used earlier at 12:16. “To design” (ver. 4) is used 124 times in the OT, only in Exodus at 31:4; 35:32. “Plans” is used four times in Exodus (31:4; 35:32-33, 35), out of 56 times. “To engrave” and “to cut” are both the same verb; it is only used here and 35:33.

“Behold” (ver. 6) is used nearly 1,000 times in the OT; it signifies emphasis. It was used earlier in Exodus at 1:9. Exodus uses the word 42 times. “Oholiab” is mentioned here; 35:34; 36:1-2; 38:23. “Ahisamac” is mentioned only here; 35:34; 38:23. “Heart” was used earlier at 4:14. “Wisdom” was used earlier at 7:11. “To command” was used earlier at 1:22. “Woven” (ver. 10) is used four times: 31:10; 35:19; 39:1, 41.

THE ACTUAL FULFILLMENT IS RECORDED IN:

See 35:30-36:2 (especially 35:10-19) relative to Bezalel’s work and 38:22-23 for the completion of his work.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

Moses had written that the Spirit of God was involved in the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2). Here, He is involved in the creation of the tent of worship.

COMMENTARY:

Now that Jehovah has revealed the furniture, the priests, their clothing, and other items essential to proper worship, God tells Moses that He has chosen someone to oversee the work of the tabernacle (31:1). That person is Bezalel, the grandson of Hur, probably the one we have seen before (17:10, 12; 24:14). God would give Him the Holy Spirit so that he would have the wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to engage in the type of craftsmanship that is necessary to construct a place to worship the Holy God (31:3). “Knowledge” would refer to the facts which God has revealed relative to the tabernacle since chapter 25. “Understanding” would refer to the ability to apply that knowledge in constructing the tabernacle according to

God's specifications. "Wisdom" would be synonymous in many ways with "understanding," wherein Bezalel would see to it that the tabernacle, following God's pattern, would meet the spiritual needs of Israel. Bezalel probably already had a natural talent or skill in "craftsmanship" or "workmanship" in order to accept this responsibility.

Bezalel would work in gold, silver, and bronze (ver. 4). He would engrave stones (ver. 5) as well as carve wood. To help Bezalel, God chose Oholiab (ver. 6) from the tribe of Dan. Oholiab, like Bezalel, already had an interest in his heart, if not the skill, to construct yet God, through His Spirit, would enhance that ability so that the tabernacle would be constructed in a way that the Holy God could dwell there.

Verses 7-11 list the items which have already been discussed in more detail in chapters 25-30. The tent of meeting, the ark of the testimony, the mercy seat, and other furniture (ver. 7) are listed. The table and its utensils, the lamp stand and its utensils and the altar of incense (ver. 8) are listed next. The altar of burnt offering (ver. 9) and the laver with its utensils are specified next. In verses 10-11, God arrives at the priests with their clothing requirements and ordination ritual. As we have seen several times before, God specifies that all these items are to be made according to what God had commanded Moses (ver. 11).

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - The phrase "Spirit of God" is used in: Genesis 1:2; Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 24:2.

Later Jewish writers - 1 Chronicles 2:18-20 traces Bezalel's genealogy as well. "Spirit of God" is also used at: 1 Samuel 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 24:20 and in Job 33:4 and Ezekiel 11:24.

NT writers - The NT uses the expression "Spirit of God" 15 times, twice in the gospel accounts: Matthew 3:16; 12:28. Paul uses the expression in Romans 8:9, 14 and most often in 1 Corinthians: 2:11, 14; 3:16; 7:40; 12:3. He uses the expression in Ephesians 4:30; Philippians 3:3. John uses the expression in 1 John 4:2 and Revelation: 3:1; 4:5; 5:6. Just as the Spirit needed to guide Bezalel and Oholiab to build the tabernacle so that God could dwell among men, so the Spirit needs to guide us, which He does through His word, the Bible (see the text from 1 Corinthians 2), in all our spiritual endeavors: what to do to be saved, how to worship, and how the church is to be organized and what it is to do. Just as God emphasized to Moses that the tabernacle had to be built according to His word, so the NT church needs to follow the pattern God set down in the New Testament.

TRANSLATION - 31:12-18:

12 And Jehovah spoke to Moses saying, **13** "And you yourself speak to the sons of Israel saying, 'Surely My sabbaths you will keep because a sign it [is] between Me and you for your generations because I [am] Jehovah Who sanctifies you. **14** And you all will keep the Sabbath because holy it [is] to you; the one profaning it to die he will die because everyone who does in it work even that soul will be cut off from the midst of his people. **15** Seven days he will do work and in the seventh day, a sabbath, a holy sabbath to Jehovah, everyone who does work in the seventh day, to die he will die."

16 So the sons of Israel kept the Sabbath to do the Sabbath for their generations, an indefinite covenant. **17** Between Me and between the sons of Israel, a sign it [is] indefinitely because six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth and in the seventh day, He ceased and He rested. **18** And He gave to Moses when He completed speaking with him at Mount Sinai two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.

HEBREW WORDS:

"Sabbaths" (ver. 13) is used extensively in this chapter. It was first used (in the Bible) at 16:23, 25-26, 29. "To keep" or "to guard," here it is used in the sense of "to obey." It was used earlier at 10:28. "Sign" was used earlier at 3:12. "To profane" (ver. 14) was used earlier at 20:25. "Covenant" (ver. 16) was used earlier at 2:24. "Indefinite" was used earlier at 3:15. "To cease"

(ver. 17) is the verbal form of the word translated “Sabbath.” The verb was used earlier at 5:5. “To rest” is used only here and 23:12; 2 Sam. 16:14. “Tablets” (ver. 18) was used earlier at 24:12; 27:8. “Finger” was used earlier at 8:15.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“To die he will die” (ver. 14, 15) is an infinitive absolute followed by the imperfect form of the same verb, to denote emphasis.

THE ACTUAL FULFILLMENT IS RECORDED IN:

See 35:1-3 for yet another reference to the Sabbath law.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The first reference to sanctifying the seventh day of the week is found in Genesis 2:1-3. Yet, there is no command for man to observe the seventh day (Sabbath) until Exodus 16. There is also no command for any non-Israelite to observe the Sabbath.

COMMENTARY:

The first reference to anyone observing the Sabbath was in Exodus 16:23-30 (there was no Sabbath day celebration in Genesis). Then God made it one of the Ten Commandments: 20:8-11. See also Exodus 21:2; 23:11-12.

Some scholars suggest that God introduces the Sabbath law at this point to remind Israel that they were to observe the Sabbath law even while they were building the tabernacle. That could be true. God does add points to the “Sabbath law” here that had not been stated before. First, the Sabbath would be a “sign” for Israel. See comments at 3:12 on the word “sign.” As a sign, the weekly Sabbath would remind Israel that Jehovah God was the One who sanctifies them (ver. 13). They were to observe the Sabbath as a holy day, specially dedicated to God. Secondly, if one were to profane the Sabbath, that is fail to observe it, then that Israelite would be put to death (ver. 14). The threat of death occurs in Exodus 19:12; 21:12, 14-17, 29; 22:19; 31:14-15; 35:2. To be “cut off” from the people seems to be parallel to being put to death in the same verse. Some think it means to be separated from their people in the spiritual world.

As God did in the Ten Commandments (20:8-11), He reminded Israel that God made the world in six days, but ceased His work on the Sabbath (seventh) day (ver. 15). Just as God ceased His work one day out of seven, so Israel was to cease her work one day out of seven. At the end of verse 15, God reemphasizes the death penalty for those who refuse to observe the Sabbath. The Sabbath law was to be perpetual (ver. 16) until the “rest” would be consummated in Jesus Christ. Verse 17 repeats the main point about the Sabbath found in this passage: it is a “sign” between Israel and Jehovah God, to be observed every seven days, on the seventh day of the week. When God ceased from His labor, He was refreshed, just as Israel should be refreshed on their Sabbath.

Verse 18 picks up with the narrative which ended at 24:18. Moses has been on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. God gave Moses the “two tablets of testimony,” the tablets of stone, which God had written with His own finger. This latter phrase could either state (its literal meaning) that God carved the Law into stone with a “finger” (God is a Spirit - John 4:24 - so He does not have a corporeal body), or it could mean that the Law was engraved by His authority.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - For further instructions on the Sabbath, see 35:2-3; 34:21. One man is stoned to death for violating the Sabbath law (Num. 15:32-36). This is the only reference to the death penalty being implemented for this sin. The “finger of God” is noted in Exodus 8:19 in the plague of the insects. See Deuteronomy 5:12-15 for a reiteration of the Sabbath law. The two tablets of stone of the testimony would be placed in the ark, by which the ark would get one of its names: “the ark of testimony” (31:7; “ark of the testimony” is used

14 times, mostly in Exodus - 10 times; Lev. 16:13; Num. 4:5; 7:89; Josh. 4:16); Deut. 10:5; 1 Kings 8:9; Heb. 9:4.

Later Jewish writers - See Jeremiah 17:21 relative to the Sabbath day. David uses the phrase "finger of God" to denote the creation of the world in Psalms 8:3.

NT writers - Just as the Israelites proclaimed the creation of the world in seven days every time they celebrated the seventh day, it is also true that every first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2), when Christians assembled on the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10), around the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 11:20), they also proclaim their belief in the creation of the world in seven days. Jesus uses the "finger of God" metaphor to suggest that He was casting out demons by the power of God (Luke 11:20); therefore the kingdom of God was about to be established.