

## The Construction of the Tabernacle; The Sign of the Covenant

### Exodus 31

Exodus 31 – *“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. <sup>3</sup> And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, <sup>4</sup> to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship.*

*<sup>6</sup> “And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you: <sup>7</sup> the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle— <sup>8</sup> the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, <sup>9</sup> the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base— <sup>10</sup> the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests, <sup>11</sup> and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy place. According to all that I have commanded you they shall do.”*

*<sup>12</sup> And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>13</sup> “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. <sup>14</sup> You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. <sup>15</sup> Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. <sup>16</sup> Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. <sup>17</sup> It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”*

*<sup>18</sup> And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.”*

### Background Notes

God’s instructions for constructing the Tabernacle and its furnishings were given in Exodus 25-30. Here in chapter 31 God appointed the craftsmen and artisans who were to do the construction work. Bezalel, from the tribe of Judah, and Aholiab, from the tribe of Dan, were skilled craftsman, and apparently they were put in charge of a number of other skilled artisans who were to be involved in the work.

In chapters 25-30 we saw some of the elaborate and detailed instructions for the design and engravings that God gave for the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Notice that Moses did not tell the Lord that these instructions were too complicated

and too hard to carry out! God always provides the needed help to accomplish what He calls His people to do. God called for artistic designs and elaborate engravings, and He provided the craftsmen and artisans to do the job.

The same is true today: Whatever God's Word commands you to do (or not to do), He enables you to do (or not to do) in obedience to His Word. Obeying God's commands isn't necessarily easy and automatic, but we can never say we *had* to fail because the Lord did not enable us to obey! Nobody can ever say that! This is also true in the area of the ministry or service the Lord calls you to. If God is calling you to do a job!, God will provide the needed ability and skill and people and funds to do the job. (Notice that I added "and funds to do the job." However, it is very important to be sure that you're following the Lord's call and not your own call, or someone else's call – someone who may have some kind of hidden agenda!

In verse 18, Moses wrote down all the details of the Mosaic Covenant that we have here in Exodus through Deuteronomy, but the Ten Commandments themselves were unique – they were written on tablets of stone by the finger of God. This phrase, *the finger of God*, is *anthropomorphic*—that is, human-like language ascribed to God. God does not literally have a body with hands and fingers, but God can take on the appearance of a body. This is called a *theophany*. It was in this way, possibly, that the *finger of God* inscribed the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone, or it's possible that the term *finger of God* is just figurative language for the inscribed letters, as they appear one by one on the tablets of stone.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The sign of the Spirit's filling was special skill.

In verse 3 we read that Bezalel was a Spirit-filled man. He was filled with the Spirit of God. In what way was this "filling of the Spirit" manifested? Did Bezalel speak in tongues? No. Did Bezalel exhibit some kind of dramatic or ecstatic gift? No. Verse 3 says that he was filled with the Spirit of God in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of craftsmanship. The proof that Bezalel was Spirit-filled was not some charismatic display, as many people today use the term. No, the proof that he was Spirit-filled was his God-given and God-empowered craftsmanship. So, Christians today who say that there must be some kind of charismatic proof that a person is Spirit-filled, such as speaking in tongues, need to read Exodus 31. In this chapter, the sign of the Spirit's filling was special skill.

God gave Bezalel and Aholiab and the other artisans certain natural talents at birth. These natural talents were developed into skills, and God empowered these skills by His Holy Spirit. Thus, the ideas for the creative, artistic designs and the know-how and skill for making these creative ideas a reality was all of God.

This is also true today. God gives different natural talents to different individuals, and when these individuals dedicate their developed skills to the Lord, the Holy Spirit can empower these natural skills. Thus, the creative ideas, or artistic

designs, or expert carpentry, or accomplished instrumental music, or composed hymns and songs of praise, or artwork, or needlework, or books for teaching, or talks for edification are all from God!

To be filled with the Spirit means to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. When you dedicate your natural talents and skills to the Lord, and allow **Him** to control these God-given abilities, then the Holy Spirit can empower these abilities. The results give evidence that you are filled with the Spirit.

A word needs to be said here about spiritual gifts. We are born with natural talents, which can be developed into skills and dedicated to the Lord. When we become believers, the Lord gives us spiritual gifts. Both natural talents and spiritual gifts must be developed and put under the Lord's control. Sometimes a Christian may have a dedicated natural talent—teaching, for example—and the Lord has superimposed the spiritual gift of teaching upon the natural talent. When natural talents and spiritual gifts are dedicated and developed so that God can use and bless these skills – this is evidence of a Spirit-filled life and ministry.

So, this doctrinal point is not just for Bezalel of the Old Testament; it has application for today. The sign of the Spirit's filling was special skill.

## **2. The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath.**

God instituted the Sabbath as a sign of the Covenant that made Israel a *theocracy*—a people governed directly by God. The sign of the Noahic Covenant was the rainbow. The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision. Now the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, or the Law, is the **Sabbath**. After His six days' work of Creation, God rested on the seventh, or Sabbath, day. Because Israel was in a covenant relationship with God, they were to do as God had done—they were to rest on the Sabbath Day. Observing the Sabbath Day marked Israel out as God's people. They were God's holy people—that is, set apart for God. Therefore, the Sabbath was holy (v14), and was not to be broken. Working on the Sabbath profaned the Sabbath, and resulted in death (v14-15).

Keeping the Sabbath was a test of Israel's obedience in their covenant relationship with God. God gives us an example of a Sabbath-breaker in Numbers 15:32-36. Clearly, breaking the Sabbath law was serious business. The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath.

## **Practical Application**

### **Don't make Sunday the "new Sabbath."**

Many Christians, with pure motives and good intentions, take the Sabbath laws of the Old Testament and apply them to Sunday. This is really *bad hermeneutics* -- that is, it's an improper interpretation of the Bible! The Christian Sunday is **not** the Sabbath, nor is it some kind of *new* Sabbath. The Sabbath is Saturday, and Sunday is the Lord's Day!

The sign of the Sabbath was part of the Mosaic Law, which was a covenant between God and Israel, not between God and the Church. We are no longer under the Law of Moses (Romans 10:4). The Church is not the new Israel. The Church is the body and bride of Christ.

Sunday is a special day for Christians because it's the Lord's Day. It's the day our Lord arose – the day our Lord was resurrected from the dead. So, Sunday is the Lord's Day. It's not the Sabbath.

Even though Christians are not bound by the Old Testament laws of the Sabbath, we may choose to honor the Lord by not working on Sunday, and by determining to go to church and worship the Lord on Sunday, and to serve the Lord in some special way on Sunday. But let's not be legalistic about it and make Sunday the Sabbath! Sunday is the Lord's Day! Don't make Sunday the "new Sabbath."