

The Art & Artists of God

Exodus 31:1-11

The priests and Levites will serve at the tabernacle, but who will build it? The Lord calls Bezalel and fills him with His Spirit to design, construct, oversee, and finish the tent with all of its furnishings. The Spirit transforms those who love the Father to imitate His artistry.

NOTES

Overview of the Text

God calls Bezalel by name, the grandson of Hur, from the kingly tribe of Judah (v2). Hur is famous for, along with Aaron, holding up Moses' hands in the battle against Amalek. The prophet sat on a rock while supported by kingly and priestly helpers (Ex. 17:12). The Lord filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God with four results: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and all workmanship, so he can "craft craftsmanship, to work with gold, with silver, and with bronze, and in cutting jewels for setting, and carving wood, to work in all manner of workmanship" (vv4-5). Yahweh also appoints Aholiab from the tribe of Dan, and "put wisdom in the wise-hearted that they may make all that I have commanded you" (v6). Interestingly, Samson, the most famous Danite, tore down the Philistine temple at his death (Jdgs. 16:28-30), and Hiram, king of Tyre, sent his master craftsman with similar skills, a half-Danite named Hiram, to help Solomon build the temple (2 Chron. 2:13-14). The entire tabernacle including the ark, mercy seat, furniture, utensils, clothing, anointing oil, and sweet incense will be made by these people (vv7-11). *Bezalel* means "in the shadow of God", and *Aholiab* means "the Father is my tent". These men labor on God's house while under His care.

Filled with the Spirit

This is the third time the *ruach Elohim* is mentioned in Scripture (v3). First, the Spirit of God hovers over the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2). Second, Pharaoh sees the exceeding wisdom of Joseph governing the land: "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" (Gen. 41:38). Moses had a mountaintop experience on Sinai, but only Bezalel—a layman laborer—and his crew are filled with the Spirit of God in order to get this job done. What does it mean to be filled by the Spirit? We hear nothing about emotional experience or spiritual insight. To be Spirit-filled means receiving from God through His Holy Spirit the ability to do or say exactly what He wants. The prophet Micah is filled with the Spirit in order "to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8). The Spirit does sanctify and enable us to proclaim the good news about Jesus to sinners (Ps. 51:13), but we ought to remember He equips us for everything else we are called to do. Even those who proclaim the gospel on a regular basis must labor in word and doctrine, in rigorous and sometimes tedious tasks, in disputes, conflicts, accusations, administration, and so on. The tabernacle is a new and overwhelming endeavor, the house of God Almighty. Some details have been given such as the dimensions of most of the furniture, but many details have to be figured out. All of it has to get done, and the men and women must be productively managed in order for that to happen (cf. 35:22, 25). We are made by God and filled by his Spirit to work. You cannot shirk or despise or slump through what God has called you to do and honor the Spirit of God: "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys" (Prov. 18:19; cf. 2 Thess. 3:10). We have no reason to think that Bezalel and company learned their disciplines by a sudden "download" of the Spirit. Rather, He blessed the ability and expertise they had already cultivated through years of industry. This is how Jesus Himself grew and flourished (Lk. 2:52). Be the kind of person who fundamentally works, finding and getting it done, and not one who has to be assigned a "job" in order to do anything. Be the kind of student who is not only taught

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by others, but who learns on his own. Be a Spirit-filled disciple of Jesus Christ.

Wise-Hearted

Ask one hundred orthodox Christians if they believe in absolute truth and goodness, and you'll get near or complete unanimous assent. Ask the same group if they believe in absolute standards of beauty, and the popcorn will fly. God equips these craftsmen by "putting wisdom into the hearts of all the wise-hearted" (v6). In other words, aesthetic ability and goodness go together. Artistic wisdom is not simply a technical skill, but begins with the fear of the Lord (v6; Prov. 9:10). Due to pietism that reduces the Christian faith to an emotional relationship between "me and Jesus", the church has significantly abandoned excellence in the arts. We still make music, paintings, and stories, but they're not of high quality. When sentimentalism (predominance of sentiment over reason) is applied to aesthetics, you get kitsch: "something of tawdry design, appearance, or content created to appeal to popular or indiscriminating taste." Think of Precious Moments figurines and posters of kittens in a basket with a verse underneath it. There's nothing wrong with kittens or baskets, but to compare them to Lord is foolishly sentimental and borderline blasphemous—Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, not a kitten. By His common grace, God gives talent to people who do not know Him, but when consistent unbelief takes on medium, the results are predictably ugly. This includes John Cage's Silence, Bauhaus architecture, and Picasso's cubism. Picasso was an artistic savant who drew beloved women in his life in realistic and beautiful fashion, and then in cubist distortion after broken relationships. E. Michael Jones: "Cubism, according to the evidence in Picasso's paintings, is less the abstract juggling of shapes and colors than an index of sexual disgust...Realism denotes the beginning of the affair; Cubist distortion its end." Many modern artists make God-glorifying art, and can't help imitating the one in whose image they are made, but it's a conflicted effort.

Makers

The tabernacle is an arts and crafts endeavor. We are not calling for high culture, but we are calling for Christian culture. Culture is religion externalized. Whether you are brewing beer, knitting a scarf, painting a painting, coding, writing a poem, or getting dressed, you are creating something to the glory of God. This is part of what it means to be made in God's image. We take the materials He has supplied and imitate Him in making things. You are more empowered by the Spirit than Bezalel and Aholiab. You may not be as talented in the areas they were, but the Spirit of Jesus has been poured out in fullness. When Jesus died on the cross, He took on all of our ugliness into death: "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:2-3). What looked like the worst vandalism of the image of God ever perpetrated was actually the production of His masterpiece: "For we are His workmanship (*poiema*), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). When God calls us to Himself through the blood of Jesus, He is calling us into the beauty of holiness.