

CHAPTER 31

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 31

In this chapter an account is given of the persons whom God had chosen, and qualified for the work of building the tabernacle, and all things relating to it, and for the direction and oversight thereof, (^{<02300>}Exodus 31:1-6) and an enumeration is made of the several things that were to be wrought, some in one way, some in another, (^{<02307>}Exodus 31:7-11) the law of the sabbath is repeated, and the violation of it made death, (^{<02312>}Exodus 31:12-17) and the chapter is concluded with observing, that at the close of the above orders, two tables of stone, with the law written upon them by the finger of God, were given to Moses, (^{<02318>}Exodus 31:18).

Ver. 1. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] 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:

Ver. 2. *See, I have called by name Bezaleel*, etc.] Had pitched upon, chosen, and distinguished him particularly from all other men to be the architect or chief master builder of the tabernacle, and to be the director and overseer of the whole work relating to it: the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem paraphrase it,

““I have called with a good name Bezaleel”;

as if respect was to be had to his name Bezaleel, as given him by God, and very expressive and significant; whereas the phrase of calling “by name” does not signify the imposing of a name upon him, but the singular and personal choice of him to an office: indeed, his name Bezaleel is very

significant, and may be rendered, “in the shadow of God”; and he was under the shadow, influence, and protection of the Lord, and was called to be concerned in making those things, which were shadows of good things to come; and he may be considered in all as a type of Christ, who is the chief and master builder of his church, has the care and oversight of it, and under whom others work; for except he built the house, they labour in vain that build it; he was called by name, or eminently chosen to this work, he took not this honour to himself, but was called of God, as Bezaleel was, and was hid and abode under the shadow of the Almighty all the while he was concerned in it, (see ^{<1901>}Psalm 91:1 ^{<2401>}Isaiah 49:1,2)

the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; Bezaleel’s father’s name was Uri, which signifies, “my light”; and his grandfather’s name Hur, which has the signification of liberty or freedom; the same that Moses left with Aaron to judge the people of Israel during his stay in the mount, and is thought to have been the husband of Miriam; so that his grandfather being living, he may be supposed to be but a young man: the Jews say ^{f927} he was but thirteen years of age when he was employed in this service, but that is not probable; though indeed his antitype, when but twelve years of age, said, “wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” his Father, whom he calls Uri, my light, (^{<1970>}Psalm 27:1) he being the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person; and is the Son of God that makes men free, and they are free indeed; and of whom it is evident that he sprung out of the tribe of Judah, a tribe greatly honoured of God.

Ver. 3. *And I have filled him with the Spirit of God*, etc.] Not with the special graces of the Spirit, or with spiritual gifts fitting for spiritual service in the knowledge of spiritual things, and the instruction of men in them, though, no doubt, he might have them; but with the gifts of ingenuity and skill in manual arts, and mechanical operations, as follows:

in wisdom, and in understanding, and in all manner of workmanship; these explain what is meant by the Spirit of God he was filled with; namely, with a sufficient measure of natural wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in all sorts of workmanship hereafter mentioned, to qualify him for his office as a director therein; that is, he had such a share of knowledge of what was to be wrought, such wisdom and understanding in the ingenious and curious manner of working them, that though he did not work with his own hands, yet could teach, guide, and direct others how to do them: and

this was not an ordinary but an extraordinary gift of knowledge of these things; nor was it owing to a fruitful invention, nor to long study and contrivance; but it was by the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God, which was necessary at this time, the Israelites being now in a general state of ignorance of all ingenious arts and sciences, having lived so many years in a state of servitude, and scarce knew anything but making of bricks: and it may be observed, that God never calls any to any work or service of his but he qualifies for it: in all this Bezaleel was a type of Christ, who was filled with the Holy Spirit without measure; and on whom rested the spirit of wisdom and of counsel, and in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and who, as God's righteous and faithful servant as Mediator, dealt wisely and prudently in all his administrations.

Ver. 4. *To devise cunning works*, etc.] To invent, contrive, and draw patterns, for the weavers particularly, for the making of the curtains of the tabernacle, the vail of the most holy place, the ephod, and the curious girdle of it, which were made of cunning work, curiously wrought by the weaver; and so Jarchi interprets this of the weaving of the work of Chosheb, or cunning work, of the devising of cunning works, or of the knowledge of witty inventions, by Wisdom or the Messiah, (see ~~1082~~ Proverbs 8:12)

to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass; for it is not to be supposed there were either goldsmiths or brasiers among the Israelites; only masons and bricklayers, and brickmakers, and such sort of manufacturers; so that Bezaleel had need of immediate wisdom from the Spirit of God, not only to devise curious works in these several things as in others, but to teach men how to work in them, what tools to work with, and how to use them, how to melt these several metals, and into what forms and shapes to put them, and then to polish them; as there were some things in the temple to be made of gold, as the candlestick, others of silver, as the sockets of the tabernacle, and others of brass, as the altar of burnt offering, and its vessels, with other things.

Ver. 5. *And in cutting of stones to set them*, etc.] Not of marble stones, or of any common stones used in building, and the cutting and hewing of them to be laid therein, for of those there was no use in the tabernacle; but of precious stones, and the cutting of them, and setting of them in their ouches or enclosures, as the onyx stones on the shoulders of the high

priest, and the twelve precious stones in his breastplate: Bezaleel was taught by the Spirit of God the art of jewelling, and instructed others in it:

and in carving of timber; or rather, “in cutting timber”^{f928}; for it is the same word as before, for we have no account of any carved work in the tabernacle; and therefore this must design the work of carpenters and joiners in cutting the shittim wood, making planks and boards of it, and of them the sides of the tabernacle, jointed into sockets; the ark of the testimony, the shewbread table, and altar of incense, which were of timber, and the workmanship of such persons:

to work in all manner of workmanship; in all other manufactories; as spinning, weaving, embroidery, dying various colours, compounding ointment, perfume, etc.

Ver. 6. *And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan*, etc.] To be a partner with him, and to assist in the direction and oversight of the work of the tabernacle; which was done that there might appear to be a sufficiency in the direction, and that too much honour might not be given to one tribe; and it is observable, that as Solomon of the tribe of Judah was the builder of the temple, one of the tribe of Dan also was a principal artificer in it, (^{<424>}2 Chronicles 2:14) and it is no unusual thing for two persons to be joined together in matters of moment and importance, as Moses and Aaron, who were sent to Pharaoh for Israel’s dismissal out of the land of Egypt; the apostles of Christ, and seventy disciples, who were sent out two by two; the two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth, the two anointed ones standing before the Lord of the whole earth; and Joshua and Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the temple: nor is it unusual for both such persons to be types of Christ, as Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Zerubbabel, were; and here Bezaleel, as before, and now Aholiab, whose name signifies “the Father’s tent” or “tabernacle”; he being concerned in the oversight of the tabernacle of God and the building of it, and his father’s name Ahisamach, according to Hillerus^{f929}, signifies, “one supports”, i.e. God; and may be a figure of Christ, whose human nature is the true tabernacle God pitched, and not man, and who, as Mediator, is Jehovah’s servant, whom he upholds:

and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted; men of ingenuity, that had good natural parts and abilities, and minds disposed to curious works, and able to perform them, under the guidance and direction of others:

I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; in the preceding chapters; these persons were to work under Bezaleel and Aholiab, and to do as they were ordered and directed by them; and having good natural abilities, mechanical heads and hearts, and divine wisdom in a large measure communicated to them, they were greatly qualified for the service of the tabernacle, and making all things appertaining to it: thus Christ, the architect and master builder of his church, has wise builders under him, that work in his house, being qualified with the gifts and graces of his Spirit from him, (see ^{<3162>}Zechariah 6:12,13,15).

Ver. 7. *The tabernacle of the congregation*, etc.] That is, they had wisdom given to make that according to the pattern showed to Moses, and under the direction of the two above persons, to whom Moses communicated it; and from henceforward, in this and some following verses, mention is made of the various things wrought by these subordinate workmen; first the house, and then the furniture of it, as follows:

and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle; of that part of it called the holy of holies; the furniture of which was only the ark, the mercy seat over that, and the cherubim overshadowing that, where was the seat of the divine Majesty; this was properly his apartment, (see ^{<0250>}Exodus 25:10-22).

Ver. 8. *And the table and his furniture*, etc.] The shewbread table, with its dishes, spoons, and bowls, (^{<0253>}Exodus 25:23-30)

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, (^{<0251>}Exodus 25:31-39)

and the altar of incense: made of shittim wood covered with gold, (^{<0201>}Exodus 30:1-10).

Ver. 9. *And the altar of burnt offering with all his furniture*, etc.] Which was made of shittim wood covered with brass; its furniture were its pans, shovels, basins, etc. (^{<0271>}Exodus 27:1-8)

and the laver and his foot; for the priests to wash their hands and feet at, (^{<0203>}Exodus 30:18-21).

Ver. 10. *And the clothes of service*, etc.] 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 ^{<0045>}Numbers 4:5-15)

and the holy garments for Aaron the priest; the breastplate, ephod, and robe, the broidered coat, mitre, and girdle, (^{<0284>}Exodus 28:4)

and the garments of his sons to minister in the priest's office; the bonnets, coats, girdles, and breeches, (^{<0280>}Exodus 28:40-42).

Ver. 11. *And the anointing oil, and sweet incense for the holy place*, etc.] Of the composition of both which, (see ^{<0213>}Exodus 30:23-38)

according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do: not only make all the said things, but make them exactly according to the form and pattern given to Moses, communicated to Bezaleel and Aholiab, whose business it was to see that all things were done by the workmen agreeably to it.

Ver. 12. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] 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.

Ver. 13. *Speak thou also unto the children of Israel*, etc.] Notwithstanding all that has been said and ordered concerning making the tabernacle and all things belonging to it; yet this was not to be understood to the violation of the sabbath, or the neglect of that, in which no work was to be done, no, not any relating to the tabernacle and the vessels of it; and though that was to be made, and everything belonging to it, as soon as possible, yet the sabbath was to be observed, and not broken on that account; and this the people of Israel were told of,

saying; verily, or “nevertheless” ^{<0930>},

my sabbaths ye shall keep not sabbaths of years, as the seventh year and the fiftieth year, but of weeks, expressed by the plural number, because there are many of them in course throughout the year, no less than fifty two; and so the apostle uses the same number, (⁵⁰²⁶Colossians 2:16) and so do Heathen writers ^{f931}:

for it is a sign between me and you, throughout your generations; a token of the covenant between them, of his being their God and they his people in a peculiar sense; seeing they observed the same day as a day of rest now, on which he had rested at the finishing of the works of creation, which other nations of the world did not observe; of his sanctifying and separating them from all other people; for this was not a sign between him and other nations, but between him and the people of Israel only; and was to be observed throughout their ages, as long as their civil and church state lasted, but not through others:

that [ye] may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you; had separated and distinguished them from the rest of the nations of the world; but if this law had been given to all nations, it could not have been a distinguishing sign of them from others; nor could it be known hereby that God had separated them to himself above all people; and this was done that it might be known, not only by them, for the word “ye” is not in the text, but by others, the nations of the world, as Jarchi; that they were a distinct people, having distinct laws from all others, and particularly this.

Ver. 14. *Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore*, etc.] Strictly observe it, according to the rules given concerning it:

for it is holy unto you; a day that was set apart of God for holy exercises, peculiarly on their account:

everyone that defileth it; by doing any servile work upon it, or not observing it in a religious way;

shall surely be put to death; by the hand of the civil magistrate; if the law of the Jewish sabbath is now in force, the sanction continues, and the violation of it ought to be punished by a judge with death:

for whosoever doeth any work therein; so much as to kindle a fire, and dress any food, by boiling or roasting, or any other way:

that soul shall be cut off from among his people; that is, shall die by the hand of the civil magistrate, it being but another phrase for being put to death; though the Jewish writers, particularly Jarchi, understand the former phrase, “put to death”, as to be done by a civil magistrate, when there are witnesses and full proof of the case; but this of “cutting off” by the hand of God, by immediate punishment from heaven, when it was done secretly, and there was no proof to be made of it.

Ver. 15. *Six days may work be done*; etc.] Allowed to be done by an Israelite, if he would; for this is not a command to work, but a permission or grant to do it; and therefore, seeing they had so many days granted them for their use, it could not be thought hard and unreasonable that God should claim one day in seven for his own use and service, and oblige them to refrain from work on it:

but in the seventh [is] the sabbath of rest; from worldly labour, and was typical of spiritual rest here, and eternal rest hereafter:

holy to the Lord; separated from other days, and entirely devoted to the worship and service of God, and to be kept holy to the Lord in all holy and religious exercises, as hearing and reading the word, praying, praising, etc.

whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, [he] shall surely be put to death; the Targum of Jonathan adds, by casting stones, and so we find that the first transgressor of this law we read of was stoned to death, (^{Q155}Numbers 15:35,36).

Ver. 16. *Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath*, etc.] 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 polity 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, (^{Q173}Genesis 17:13).

Ver. 17. *It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever*, etc.] In like sense as the land of Canaan was given them for an everlasting possession; and the covenant of circumcision, and the ordinance of the

passover, and the fast on the day of atonement, were for ever; that is, unto the end of the Jewish world and state, at the coming of Christ, when a new world and state of things began, (see ^{<0170>}Genesis 17:8,9,13 ^{<0174>}Exodus 12:24 ^{<0163>}Leviticus 16:29,31,34)

for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed; which is to be understood figuratively after the manner of men, who ceasing from toil and labour find rest and refreshment; but not really and properly, for as not labour, and weariness, and fatigue, so neither rest nor refreshment can be properly said of God; but this denotes his cessation from the works of creation, though not of providence, and of the delight and pleasure he takes in a view of them; this is observed, not as the foundation of this law, and the reason of its being made, but as an illustration of it, and as an argument, showing the reasonableness of it, and the similarity of it with what God himself had done, and therefore the enjoining of it could not reasonably be objected to. (See Gill on “^{<0201>}Exodus 20:11”).

Ver. 18. *And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him on Mount Sinai*, etc.] After all those laws, orders, and instructions before related, which having done, he ceased to converse with him any longer in that manner he had, and at parting gave him

two tables of testimony; the two tables of the law, which is a testimony of the will of God, and contained the duty of the Israelites both towards God and man, and are reducible to these two, love to God, and love to our neighbour: five of the commands of the decalogue were written on one table, and five on the other; or it may be rather four on one table, the first being the largest, and containing the duty owing to God, and six on the other, which regard the duty of men one to another; so Orpheus the Heathen poet, speaking of the law of Moses, calls it *διπλακα ψεσμον* ^{f932}. “Tables of stone”; the Targum of Jonathan will have them to be of the sapphire stone, from the throne of glory; the paraphrast seems to have respect to (^{<0210>}Exodus 24:10) and, with as little appearance of truth, says their weight was forty seahs; it is more probable they were of marble stone, of which there were great quantities in Mount Sinai. Dr. Shaw says ^{f933} that part of Mount Sinai, which lies to the westward of the plain of Rephidim, consists of a hard reddish marble like “porphyry”, but is distinguished from it by the representations of little trees and bushes, which are dispersed all over it. The naturalists call this sort of marble “embuscatum”, or “bushy

marble”; some think Sinai had its name from thence^{f934}. This may denote the firmness, stability, and duration of the law, not as in the hands of Moses, from which these tables were cast and broke, but as in the hands of Christ, and laid up in him the ark of the covenant, the fulfilling end of the law for righteousness: and it may also figure the hardness of man’s heart, which is destitute of spiritual life, obdurate and impenitent, stupid, senseless and ignorant, stubborn and inflexible, and not subject to the law of God, and on which no impressions can be made but by the power and grace of God:

written with the finger of God: by God himself, and not by an angel, or by any creature or instrument: and it is by the finger of God, the Spirit, grace, and power of God, that the laws of God are put into the inward part, and written on the heart, to which the apostle refers, (~~ERR~~2 Corinthians 3:3). This account is given by way of transition to what is recorded in the next chapter.