

## The Spirit Gives Wisdom for Work

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Where the Spirit of the Lord is / Ex 31:1–18

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- Greetings.
- Last week, we began our series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- After the dramatic opening in [Genesis 1](#), where the Spirit of God was hovering eagerly and expectantly to carry out the word of the Godhead and render it effective, the next reference to the Spirit of God is in [Genesis 6](#).
- By this time, the human race had increased in number but had also become so depraved that the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever,” resolving to wipe mankind from the face of the earth with a flood.
- This is an interesting statement that establishes some foundational truths about the Spirit that echo through the Scripture. The statement shows that the Spirit
  - Witnesses to people’s hearts, calling them into right-standing with God.
  - Functions as the channel of communication between God and humans.
  - Is a person with emotions; He can be grieved and His patience can grow thin.
  - Plays a role in judgment.
- However, the reference in [Genesis 6](#) is more of a passing remark than it is a noteworthy appearance of the Spirit of God.
- The next instance where the Spirit explicitly shows up is in [Genesis 41](#), where he indwells and empowers a particular individual — Joseph.

- This appearance is highly significant. It demonstrates a shift from the Spirit as Cosmic Creator to the Spirit as a Personal Empowering Presence inside of a human being.
- This narrative paves the way for how the Spirit often appears in the balance of the Torah, most notably in my text for today — [Exodus 31](#).
- This is the account of Bezalel, who is filled with the Spirit of God to design the tabernacle.
- Before we get to the text, allow me to provide some context.
- From the end of [Exodus 20](#), right up until [Exodus 31](#) — for 10 whole chapters — the bible includes an account of the law and the requirements for the tabernacle that God handed down to Moses at Mt Sinai.
- The instructions for the tabernacle itself, the accompanying articles, the priestly vestments, and the liturgies or rituals that the priests were to follow were all incredibly detailed and needed to be followed precisely if God were to occupy the tabernacle.
- After God had given a comprehensive description of what He wanted done, He then turns His attention to how He will ensure that these things are done.
- And so we arrive at our text for the morning.
- Today, I will be reading from the NIV 2011, because it best serves an illustration that I intend to make in over the course of the message.

### **Exodus 31:1-6 NIV**

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “See, I have chosen Bezalel 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, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—<sup>4</sup> to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, <sup>5</sup> to cut and set stones,

to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. <sup>6</sup> Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you:

**Exodus 31:7–11 NIV**

<sup>7</sup> the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant law with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent—<sup>8</sup> the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, <sup>9</sup> the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand—<sup>10</sup> and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests, <sup>11</sup> and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you.”

- As I was deliberating on this passage, there were 3 areas that stood out to me.
- This morning, I would like to discuss these under 3 headings.

## Infilling

- This idea of being filled with the Spirit of God is something that has fascinated me for my entire Christian life. What does this mean? What can we reasonably expect to experience practically when it happens?
  - Powerful emotions?
  - Sensations and feelings that are other-worldly?
  - A renewed impetus to enjoy life more richly?
  - An ability to hear God’s voice and direction and to relinquish more and more control to Him?
  - A blissful loss of self-control or ecstasy?

- While some these things can and may occur, I find it interesting that in one of the first instances where the bible speaks of infilling, the consequence of that infilling is actually something pretty ordinary — they were filled and they were able to do stuff.
- Now, I think it is reasonable for us to assume that their talents didn't rain down instantaneously. They weren't sitting around and one day just came to realise that they could cut precious stones, work with precious metals, craft things out of wood and sew stuff together.
- Instead, the Spirit had been preparing them for their entire lives, presenting them with opportunities to learn, practice, and grow as craftsmen long before the tabernacle project.
- The implication, then, is that these craftsmen did not receive a fresh, immediate endowment of the abilities themselves. What they received was the gift of the Spirit Himself, who brought with Him certain characteristics that served to enhance and elevate their pre-existing abilities.
- This resonates with my experience somewhat. Every day, I pray that God would fill me afresh with His Spirit. I do not experience some sudden, dramatic charge of energy. I get up and go about my day and over time, I can see that the Lord was empowering me to do the things he had already gifted me to do with greater levels of excellence and efficiency.
- So, in my experience, and seemingly in the case of the people in our text, the results of the infilling were pretty normal. But that does not mean it was insignificant or meaningless!
- This brings us to the second heading.

### Divine Directive vs Artistic License

- Verse 4 tells us that Bezalel was empowered to “make artistic designs.”
- The language here is that of “thinking up” or “devising” something.

- There is a sense in which God clearly allowed for some artistic flexibility.
- But how do we reconcile this with the fact that God was also incredibly meticulous about what the tabernacle was supposed to look like?
- I discovered something really cool this week that may help us understand this tension.
- There exists in this passage an astonishing literary parallel between the terminology that is used here and the terminology that is used elsewhere in the bible to describe creation.
- Let me show you what I mean.
- In [Exodus 31](#), God fills Bezalel with the Spirit. That infilling brings with it 3 characteristics, namely wisdom, understanding and knowledge.
- Now lets look at [Proverbs 3:19-20](#)

**Proverbs 3:19–20 NIV**

<sup>19</sup> By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; <sup>20</sup> by his knowledge the watery depths were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.

- Now, let's look at our Proverbs and Exodus passages side-by-side (show slide).
- In the original Hebrew, there is an identical triad, which the NIV translates as wisdom, understanding and knowledge.
- So, for the building of the tabernacle, Bezalel, in being filled with the Spirit, is equipped with the same 3 capacities that God used to build the cosmos.

- But wait, there is more!
- The parallels are more than just literary. There are visual parallels as well.
- As biblical scholar Desmond Alexander shows, the tabernacle functioned as a model of the cosmos.
  - The dominant colours of the tabernacle fabrics—blue, purple, and scarlet yarns—mimicked the transitions of the ancient sky, from the bright blue of midday to the deep purple and red of twilight.
  - Further, in [Genesis 1](#), God creates the sun, moon and stars and calls them “lights,” a word that is exclusively reserved in the rest of the Torah for the Menorah. The Menorah — a multi-branched candelabra — wasn’t just interior lighting. It was a physical representation of the planetary hosts!
- What these parallels help us to see is that Bezalel and Oholiab, in being filled with the Spirit, are imbued with the attributes that God exercised when He established the cosmos, enabling them to build the tabernacle in a way that renders it fit for liturgy.
- As Kelly Anderson writes, the tabernacle becomes a second garden, allowing the Israelites to enjoy at least some of the connection with God that was lost with the fall.
- You might be thinking, this is all well and fine but what is the point?
- There is too much at stake here for God to allow Bezalel and his co-workers absolute carte blanche.
- While he allows them a certain amount of artistic flexibility, He does not allow complete artistic license.
- Instead, their freedom finds expression within the limits of His divine intention.

- Just as He carried the biblical writers along, allowing them their own character and voice, but ensuring that what was captured was precisely what He intended, so also did He carry these workers along, allowing them their own artistic expression, while ensuring that what was built was precisely what He intended.
- This brings us to the third heading.

### Who was Filled and What the Implications Were

- There are some distinctions, progressions, and inclusions in the text that we need to pay close attention to.
- [Exodus 31](#) makes it clear that Bezalel is singled out as the person who was chosen to be filled with the Spirit of God. Bezalel descended from an exceptionally distinguished line in the royal tribe of Judah. His grandfather was Hur, the very man who had held up Moses' arms in battle.
- [Exodus 31](#) also makes it clear that Oholiab was appointed to help him (verse 6). Oholiab, by contrast, came from the tribe of Dan, one of the lowliest tribes, descended from Jacob's maidservant Bilhah.
- However, later, in [Exodus 35](#), when Moses is relaying this information that he had received to the people, he says in verse 34-35 that God had filled both Bezalel and Oholiab with skill and had given them the ability to teach others. Despite their vastly different social positions, God had elevated Oholiab, demonstrating that divine selection is based on something other than pedigree.
- But wait, there is more!
- By the time we get to [Exodus 36:1](#), we see that God gave skill and ability to *every artisan involved* in the work of constructing the sanctuary. The bible does not tell us from which tribes they came. It is reasonable to assume that they were drawn from across the nation. So, the actual construction was

entrusted to individuals chosen for their spiritual gifting rather than their ancestry.

- So, while the narrative seems to begin with a focus on a single, Spirit-filled visionary, by the time construction begins, accountability has expanded, there is a leadership team in place, and the characteristics that God had initially imbued in Bezalel has saturated the entire working community.
- Now, *every single person, regardless of their background or station*, was standing at a workbench, cutting a gemstone, or lifting a cedar beam, exercising the exact same cosmic characteristics that God used to lay the foundations of the earth.
- So, while Bezalel and Oholiab are called and empowered for a distinct leadership and equipping role, they do not do the work alone. The Spirit collectivises His gifts, spreading them across a diverse team, for the accomplishment of His purposes.
- There are two more things that are particularly striking for me.
- Firstly, God empowered these people to build the tabernacle as He wanted it so that He would be prepared to meet with His people in that space. Until the Spirit empowered these people to do what they did, Aaron and his sons could not serve as priests and God would not meet with His people.
- Without them and the work they did, the Jewish legal system could not begin.
- Secondly, once the tabernacle was built, the ongoing service of the tabernacle was restricted to Levites.

- In time, those whom God had called and equipped and permitted to handle every component of the tabernacle during its construction would be forbidden from touching it.
- There is something incredibly saddening about that.
- But it is also a reminder that when we are called to kingdom work, we should not do it with a spirit of entitlement. The contribution we make is not about us. The contribution we make may be so that someone else has what they need to serve God better.

## Conclusion

- So what can we take away from this passage today? What are the practical implications for us?
- For me, this passage does 2 things.
- It expands our understanding of infilling.
  - For me, [Exodus 31](#) demystifies the concept of infilling. While there were instances where the Spirit came upon certain biblical characters in an extraordinary fashion, this is uncommon. Infilling is not some sort of ecstatic experience that occurs on some elevated plane of existence that we somehow need to induce and aspire to maintain.
  - We can ask God to fill us and we can get on with the day, confident that the Spirit will enhance the abilities He has already instilled in us, raising us up to higher levels of efficacy.
- It expands our understanding of work.
  - This passage obliterates the idea that "spiritual" work is only done by the spiritually elite, by the clergy, or by the church leaders. There is no such thing!

- Christ has levelled the playing field. We are a priesthood of believers. The Spirit continues to empower each and every man and woman who profess faith in Christ to make meaningful contributions to the kingdom.
- Both in the time of Moses, and now, those contributions have far-reaching implications for the facilitation of the worship of God.
- I have great respect and appreciation for the people who work behind the scenes, doing jobs that are hardly ever noticed. Keep going. It is God's work; He empowers you to do it and it is absolutely crucial for the church to operate effectively.
  
- That said, our contributions, although they may bring us great satisfaction, are ultimately for His glory and His purposes, not ours.
- They are like offerings.
  - Once you make them, you do not own them anymore.
  - Once you have given them up, you cannot lay claim to them any more.
- These are not our churches and these are not our ministries.
- They are His, and He invites us and equips us to be a part of it.