

THE TEXT OF EXODUS
TRANSLATION

31 And Je-ho-vah spake unto Mo-ses, saying, (2) See, I have called by name Be-zal-el the son of U-ri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Ju-dah: (3) and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, (4) to devise skilful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, (5) and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship. (6) And I, behold, I have appointed with him O-ho-li-ab, the son of A-his-a-mach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee: (7) the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy-seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the Tent, (8) and the table and its vessels, and the pure candlestick with all its vessels, and the altar of incense, (9) and the altar of burnt-offering with all its vessels, and the laver and its base, (10) and the finely wrought garments, and the holy garments for Aar-on the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office. (11) and the anointing oil, and the incense of sweet spices for the holy place: according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do.

(12) And Je-ho-vah spake unto Mo-ses, saying, (13) Speak thou also unto the children of Is-ra-el, saying, Verily ye shall keep my sabbaths: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am Je-ho-vah who sanctifieth you. (14) Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that profaneth it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. (15) Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to Je-ho-vah; whosoever doeth any work on the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. (16) Wherefore the children of Is-ra-el shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

(17) It is a sign between me and the children of Is-ra-el for ever: for in six days Je-ho-vah made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

(18) And he gave unto Mo-ses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Si-nai, the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone written with the finger of God.

EXPLORING EXODUS: CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE
QUESTIONS ANSWERABLE FROM THE BIBLE

1. After careful reading, propose a brief title (topic or theme) for the chapter.
2. How many times does the expression "Jehovah (the LORD) spake unto Moses" occur in chapters 30-31? Does this expression seem to mark the start of new paragraphs?
3. What man had God called to be a skillful workman? (31:2; Compare 17:10, 12; 24:14.) How specific was the call? Of what tribe was he?
4. How had God assisted the craftsman to do his work? (31:3)
5. What particular skills was this man given? (31:4-5)
6. Who also was appointed to work with the first craftsman? (31:6) Of what tribe was he?
7. Were these two the only ones to be given help by God in craft work? (31:6)
8. How is the candlestick (lampstand) described? (31:8)
9. What are the "finely wrought garments"? (31:10; 35:19; 39:1, 41)
10. What items were the craftsmen to make? (31:11, 6)
11. Of whom may these craftsmen possibly have been a type? (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8)
12. What was to be a sign between Israel and the Lord? (31:13, 17)
13. What was keeping the Sabbath to cause Israel to know? (31:13)
14. What does "sanctify" mean? (31:13)
15. What was the penalty for profaning (defiling) the Sabbath? (31:14, 15)

16. What day of the week was the Sabbath day? (31:15)
 17. How did God view the Sabbath? (31:15)
 18. How long was the Sabbath to be kept? (31:16. Compare Col. 2:16-17.)
 19. What did the Sabbath commemorate? (31:17)
 20. What effect on *God* did the seventh day rest have? (31:17)
 21. What did God give to Moses? When? (31:18)
 22. What is the "testimony"? (31:18; 34:28)
 23. How were the tables (tablets) written? (31:18. Compare 24:12, 32:15-16; 34:1, 4, 28.)
 24. How long had Moses been up in the mount? (24:18; Deut. 9:11)
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EXODUS THIRTY-ONE: THE WORKMEN AND THE SABBATH

- I. WISE WORKMEN; 31:1-11.
 1. Called by name; 31:1-2, 6.
 2. Filled with the Spirit; 31:3.
 3. Given skills; 31:4-5.
 4. Appointed to make the tabernacle; 31:7-11.
 5. Limited to what God commanded; 31:11.
 - II. THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH; 31:12-17.
 1. The practice ("Verily ye shall keep it."); 31:12-13.
 2. The purpose ("That ye may know that I am Jehovah."); 31:13.
 3. The preciousness ("It is holy."); 31:14.
 4. The penalty ("He shall surely be put to death."); 31:14-15.
 5. The permanence ("for a perpetual covenant"); 31:16-17.
 6. The proclamation (or commemoration). "In six days Jehovah made heaven and earth."; 31:18.
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GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S MEN! (31:1-11)

1. Filled them; 31:1-3.

2. Furnished them skills; 31:4-5.
 3. Furthered their natural talents; 31:6.
 4. Fulfilled what God commanded; 31:11, 6.
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THE SABBATH, A SIGN! (31:13, 17)

1. A sign God had spoken to Israel.
 2. A sign of concern for human weariness; (Ex. 23:12)
 3. A sign of faith that God is creator.
 4. A sign of faith that God will provide.
 5. A sign of commitment to obey God.
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TABLETS OF TESTIMONY! (31:18)

1. Based on the spoken word; (20:1ff; Deut. 9:10)
 2. Promised by God to Moses; (24:12)
 3. Written by God; (32:16; Deut. 4:13)
 4. Presented by God to Moses; (32:18)
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EXPLORING EXODUS: NOTES ON CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

1. *What is in Exodus thirty-one?*

The chapter tells of God's calling the SKILLED WORKMEN to make the tabernacle, its furniture, etc. Then it commands the keeping of the SABBATH as a sign between God and Israel. The chapter closes with a statement about God's giving the stone tablets of the ten commandments to Moses.

Exodus 31:1 starts a new paragraph, as is indicated by the words "And Jehovah spake unto Moses saying. . . ." Compare 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:12. With the completion of directions for construction of the sanctuary, the names of its builders are now given.

2. *What man had God called as a skillful workman?* (31:1-2)

God had called *Bezalel*, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. His grandfather appears to have been the Hur who, along with Aaron, held up Moses' hands during battle (17:10), and was with Aaron while Moses was in the mountain (24:14). (See notes on these passages.) Bezalel was the chief artificer in metal, stone, and wood; and he performed the apothecary's work in compounding the anointing oil and incense (37:1, 29).

We suppose that Bezalel's ancestry is that given in I Chron. 2:3, 5, 9, 18-19 - Judah, Perez, Hezron, Caleb¹ (or Chelubai), Hur Uri, Bezalel.

Bezalel's name seems to mean "In God's (El's) shadow." We do not feel that this meaning of his name has great significance. But it is significant that God called him BY NAME. God knows us individually and uses us individually. Note that the great Persian ruler Cyrus was called "by name." (Isaiah 45:4).

The workmen who were chosen were *God's* choice, not necessarily Moses's. The power imparted to the workmen was *God's* power and not men's.

Bezalel was more prominent than his co-craftsman Oholiab. Bezalel is sometimes mentioned alone (37:1), and when both are named, Bezalel is always named first (35:30, 34; 36:1, 2).

Martin Noth in his characteristic "liberal" fashion attributes chapter thirty-one to a post-Babylonian exile Priestly author, and then even says that parts (e.g., 31:7-11) of the chapter are "secondary additions" to P. He associates the names Bezalel and Hur with men of the same names in Ezra 30:24; Neh. 3:9; I Chron. 2:50; 4:1, 4. Since these writings are post-exilic, he says "This could suggest a post-exilic origin for the tradition."² Noth fails to mention that

¹Certainly this is not the famous Caleb, son of Jephunneh, who was associated with Joshua.

²*Op. cit.*, p. 240. Noth's argument is unproven, to say the least.

there was also a Hur in the time of King Solomon (I Kings 4:8). (This would not support his theory of late priestly authorship.) Cole³ says that the names Bezalel and Oholiab are archaic, since neither contains a form of the divine name YAH. We agree that they are archaic!

3. *How did God assist the craftsman in his work?* (31:3; 35:30—36:1)

Jehovah filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God. This assisted him in wisdom, in understanding, knowledge, and all manner of workmanship. "Understanding" refers to insight, understanding, and intelligence; whereas "wisdom" seems to be the ability to use intelligence effectively.

Exodus 31:6 suggests that these craftsmen were already naturally "wise-hearted." To their naturally-given talents God added His Spirit. The passage certainly does not belittle natural abilities. They are as much a gift from God as are specially bestowed abilities. Even Moses was possessed of natural ability and training before God aided him yet more. Similarly the seven "deacons" of Acts 6:3 were men of wisdom even before they were appointed to their special work.

Please note that *wisdom* included skills of artistry, mechanics, and construction. Note also that God's *Spirit* bestowed the "wisdom" of this type. We usually think of the Spirit empowering prophecy (as in Num. 11:17ff) and moral and spiritual qualities. But the Spirit also empowers other works. On occasion He may impart military power (Judges 3:10). And here in Ex. 31:3 we read of the Spirit bestowing skill in art and construction. The Spirit thus seems to empower all of life's activities that are within the will of God.

4. *What particular skills was Bezalel given?* (31:4-5)

All types of manual skills are listed. He was to "devise skilful works." The Hebrew words thus translated may also be rendered "to devise devices" or "to think thoughts."

³*Op. cit.*, p. 209.

This suggests that he was to think out artistic designs, ideas, and inventions, all of course within the limits of what God had commanded to Moses. Thus these men were not automated puppets but were granted use of their own creative abilities within limits.

Cassuto⁴ says that later Jewish traditions sought to magnify the tabernacle and said it was built miraculously of its own accord. But he correctly affirms that this is not the meaning inherent in the simple interpretations of the text.

5. *What other man was appointed with the first craftsman?* (31:6-8)

Oholiab of the tribe of Dan was appointed. No other Bible person bears this name. He was from the tribe of Dan, the same tribe as Hiram, the chief architect of Solomon's temple (II Chron. 2:13-14). He appears to have had primary charge of the textile work (38:23; 35:34-35). His name means something like "My tent (or shelter) (is) the father (or God)." His name has in it the Hebrew word *'ohel*, which means tent. This does seem very appropriate since he was the maker of the tent curtains.

The "I" at the start of 31:6 is emphatic. The word "behold" seems to be inserted to arrest our attention upon a significant fact.

Exodus 31:6 mentions that God had also granted wisdom to *others* who were wise, so they also could make the tabernacle parts that God had commanded Moses.

Exodus 31:7-11 lists the items to be made, all of which have been described in detail perviously, and all of which will be described again during the account of the construction, which is given in chapters 35-39.

The "furniture" of 31:7, 8, 9 literally refers to "vessels."

6. *What are the "finely wrought garments"?* (31:10)

This expression "finely wrought garments" (KJV,

⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 402.

“cloths of service”) appears here for the first time. It is also in 35:19 and 39:1, 41. The Hebrew word *serad* (“finely wrought”) occurs only these four times in the O.T. Its meaning is somewhat uncertain. It appears to be derived from a verb meaning to twist, weave together, knot. (This accounts for the ASV translation.) The Greek LXX rendered it “robes of ministry” (*leitourgikai*), from which the KJV rendered it “cloths of service.”

We feel that Barnes⁵ has correctly identified the “finely wrought garments” as the robes of the high priest described in 28:6-38; 39:1ff. The “holy garments” referred to in 31:10 are probably the linen garments worn by the high priest on solemn occasions like the day of atonement. Note the expression “holy garments” in both Ex. 31:10 and Lev. 16:4-5. Ex. 31:10 seems to list as a third class of priestly garments the garments of Aaron’s sons which were made of linen and worn in their regular ministrations (28:40, 41).

Other identifications for the “finely wrought garments” include the rabbinical view that they were wrappers for vessels of the sanctuary while in transit, and Gesenius’ view that they were inner curtains of the tabernacle or inner hangings of the dwelling place.⁶ Cassuto⁷ felt that they may have been inner garments worn by the priests under their tunics in winter time. To us these views seem improbable.

7. *Of whom may these craftsmen have been a type?* (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8)

The scripture does not say they were types of anyone, of Christ or of anyone else. Certainly Christ builds His own church, and Bezalel and Oholiab could have been types of Christ in this aspect (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:19-22).

Jesus also called his holy *apostles* to build his church.

⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁶Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 403.

He called them by name (John 6:70; Mark 3:14-19), as Bezalel was called by name. Jesus gave them power by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1), so they would be led into all truth (John 16:13), and would speak the things of Christ (John 16:14). In these respects Bezalel and Oholiab resembled the apostles sufficiently to justify comparing the two.

8. *What was to be a sign between Israel and the Lord?* (31:12-13, 17)

The Sabbath day was to be the sign. The Sabbath day is referred to here for the first time as a *sign*. Compare Ezek. 20:12, 20.

Circumcision (Gen. 17:1), and unleavened bread (Ex. 13:19) are also said to be *signs* between God and Israel. The Sabbath, circumcision, and unleavened bread were all practiced outside of Israel, but only in Israel did they have a religious significance.

Note that God calls the Sabbath "MY Sabbath."

Most commentators say that the reference to the Sabbath here relates especially to the keeping of the Sabbath during the construction of the tabernacle. As important and exciting as the construction would be, it was not to be done on the Sabbath days. All of this is true, but it is not set forth in the text as the reason for asserting the Sabbath law just here. Rather, the text emphasizes here that the Sabbath was to be kept "throughout your generations." The application is more for all time than for that particular time.

The keeping of the Sabbath was to cause Israel to know^a that God was the LORD who sanctified them (made them holy). Failure to observe times of worship makes men forget that God is the LORD who makes us holy.

^a"That ye may know" is literally just "to know." Some Jewish interpreters have supplied as the subject for "to know" "that all nations shall know." See J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, p. 356. This idea seems legitimate. When the Jews kept the Sabbath, all nations knew that Jehovah was their God. Nonetheless, the text does not definitely imply that "all nations" is the subject of "to know."

Regarding the Sabbath day, see notes on 20:8-11.

9. *What was the penalty for profaning the Sabbath day?* (31:14-15)

Execution! The "surely" in "surely be put to death" is emphatic.

To "profane" (KJV, "defile") the Sabbath is to break it or regard it as unholy.

Is there a difference between being "put to death" for profaning the Sabbath, and being "cut off" from among the people (by excommunication) for working on the Sabbath? We think not. These appear to be parallel statements and not two different assertions. Ex. 31:15 plainly says that doing any work on the Sabbath (such as the work referred to in 31:14) was to be punished by execution. Compare 35:2.

Numbers 15:32-36 tells of one man who was executed (stoned) for gathering sticks on the Sabbath. We have no record of any others who were slain for breaking the Sabbath. Nehemiah later enforced the Sabbath with considerable severity (Neh. 13:15-22). Neh. 13:17-18 declares that the Jews went into captivity because they failed to keep the Sabbaths. Christ was threatened with death for breaking the Sabbath (John 5:16-18). Nonetheless, it appears plain that very few people were ever executed for breaking the Sabbath.

How can we explain this neglect to enforce a plainly-stated penalty for Sabbath-breaking? First of all, if it had been universally enforced, there would have been a near-total depletion of the population! Secondly, God has often laid down clear penalties for certain offenses and then only enforced it occasionally *in this age*, as if to make examples of the few. Thus Uzzah was slain, but not the men who loaded the ark on the cart (II Sam. 6:6-7; Num. 4:15). David and Bathsheba were spared from the penalty of adultery (Lev. 20:10). Ananias and Sapphira died quickly for lying about the use of their money (Acts 5:5, 10), but God in His longsuffering has generally delayed this

punishment, apparently to give opportunity for men to repent and be forgiven (II Pet. 3:8). The punishments for disobeying God will certainly come, but very often God in His grace defers the punishment to allow opportunity for repentance and forgiveness.

7. *How did God view the Sabbath?* (31:15)

He viewed it as "holy to Jehovah" (or "holiness to Jehovah"). (This is the same expression as that on the high priest's golden plate. Ex. 28:36.)

God wanted the Sabbath to be a "Sabbath of solemn rest" (Heb., *shabbat shabbaton*), meaning a complete cessation of work. (The use of *shabbaton* in Lev. 23:3 and 25:5 show it meant "rest" or "complete rest.") Not even fires were to be kindled on the Sabbath. (Num. 35:31.)

8. *What day of the week was the Sabbath day?* (31:15)

The seventh day of the week, our Saturday. For reasons why Christians are certainly not obligated to keep Saturday as a Sabbath rest, see notes on 20:8-11.

9. *How long was the Sabbath to be kept?* (31:16-17)

Israel was to keep it "throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant." "perpetual covenant" is literally "a covenant for distant future." The same expression was applied to the priesthood in 29:9. (See notes on that passage). It does not necessarily mean "for an endless future eternity."

10. *What did the Sabbath commemorate?* (31:17)

It commemorated God's creation of the world in six days and His resting on the seventh day. See Ex. 20:11; Deut. 20:15. Keeping the Sabbath was for an Israelite a constantly recurring proclamation that God was the creator and king of the universe, and thus to desecrate the Sabbath was an open denial of God. We ought to take our worship of God with equal seriousness.

11. *What effect on God did the seventh day of rest have?* (31:17)

He was refreshed! Literally, He "took breath" or "caught his breath." (The verb "refreshed" is a translation of a verb related to the word *nephesh*, meaning soul, life, breath.)

The application of this expression to the creator is surprising and remarkable. It is not used elsewhere in reference to Him. The same expression is used in 23:12 to refer to the rest and refreshing of servants by the Sabbath rest.

We do not feel we should try to be "wise" by commenting on how God might be "refreshed." We leave the statement as the scripture gives it. God does not need our analysis or defense.

12. *What did God give to Moses? When? (13:18)*

God gave to Moses the two stone tablets inscribed with the words of the ten commandments (the testimony). Compare 32:15; 34:1, 28; 25:16. God had promised to give these tablets to Moses (24:12). The other parts of the law were written in a "book," probably a scroll (24:7).

The stone tables were given at the close of God's communing (speaking) with Moses. Moses had been up on the mount forty days. See Ex. 24:18; Deut. 9:11.

The choice of stone as the material and engraving (cutting) as the method for writing both suggests the imperishable duration of the words of God.

The inscription upon the tablets was written with "the finger of God." Does this mean that God himself engraved the writing, or that He wrote it in that he caused Moses to write it? Commentators have mostly taken the latter view. Still the literal force of the statement sounds as if God wrote it. Ex. 32:16 definitely says the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God. Ex. 34:1 instructs Moses to hew out a second set of stone slabs to replace the first set (which he broke), but God indicated that He himself would do the writing. Ex. 34:27-28 contains a commandment for Moses himself to write "these words"; but the words there seem to refer to the covenant words in Ex. 34. The assertion in 34:28 "he wrote" could refer either to God's act or Moses's.

The expression "finger of God" is understood by all to point to a divine source or causation. Its use in Ex. 8:19 to

refer to the plague of lice suggests it refers to a direct work of God, rather than one done by an intermediary. Similarly "finger of God" in Luke 11:20 (referring to Jesus' casting out demons) seems to describe direct divine action. Cassuto⁹ thinks that the use of "finger of GOD" instead of "finger of the LORD" and the use of *finger* instead of hand (since writing requires more, than one finger for man) show that the expression does not refer to God's actual physical act of writing. This argument does not seem very strong to us. But whichever view we take, God was the author of the words on the tablets.

We can only guess as to the size of the ten commandments. Certainly they were smaller than the ark of the covenant, and light enough to be carried in the hand (32:15). Keil and Delitzsch¹⁰ suggest that stone slabs about one cubit by one and a half cubits would be large enough for the 172 words of the ten commandments without the writing being excessively small.

Exodus 31:18 is a transitional verse between the instructions about the tabernacle and the priesthood and the story of the golden calf that follows in chapters 32-34. Notice Ex. 32:15, 19.

THE TEXT OF EXODUS TRANSLATION

32 And when the people saw that Mo-ses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aar-on, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Mo-ses, the man that brought us up out of the land of E-gypt, we know not what is become of him. (2) And Aar-on said unto them, Break

⁹*Op. cit.*, pp. 405, 406.

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, pp. 219, 220.