

"THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TABERNACLE"

I. Introduction

- A. We sometimes hear people describe a work of art as "inspired."
1. Art is a wonderful part of life.
 2. Artists help us appreciate beauty.
 3. They help us reflect upon human experience.
 4. Artistic vocations and hobbies are part of the common grace blessings that God pours out upon his world.
 5. But this does not mean that artistic vocations are sacred or that the church should hold them in higher regard than other vocations.
- B. The reason why I mention this is because some Christians think that the main lesson we should draw from this passage about Bezalel and Oholiab is that the arts should be treated as a vital part of the church's ministry.
1. While we can draw some general principles about the arts from this text, I do not think that the main idea here is that the church should have an arts ministry.
 2. This becomes clear when we consider this passage it in light of its immediate and overall biblical contexts.
 3. We have to remember the repeated warnings that God issues throughout this book about how his people are not to be creative in their worship.
 4. The Israelites were commanded to worship God according to his directions, not according to their own imaginations.
 5. The fact that Bezalel was filled with the Holy Spirit indicates that the construction of the tabernacle was not like other artistic

endeavors.

6. These men were performing a very unique task.
7. While God made use of their creative abilities, these men had to be specially empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to carry out this holy task.

- C. As we study this passage today, we will focus upon two things.
 1. First, we will consider what it tells us about the construction of the old covenant tabernacle, a construction project that took place in the days of Moses.
 2. Second, we will use the overall biblical context to think about what this passage teaches us about the construction of the new covenant tabernacle, a construction project that is still taking place today.

II. The Construction of the Old Covenant Tabernacle

- A. Our passage begins with the Lord telling Moses that he has called Bezalel to serve in the lead role in the construction of the tabernacle, and that he has appointed Oholiab and other men to join Bezalel in this work.
 1. Notice that though the Levites were the only ones who served in the tabernacle, all Israel joined in erecting it.
 2. The chief builder was from the tribe of Judah, the second in command was from the small tribe of Dan, and the rest of the workers were drawn from among all of the tribes.
 3. Given what we know about the prominent place that Judah played in the rest of Israel's history, it can hardly have been a coincidence that the leader of this project was from the tribe of Judah.
 4. King David was from the tribe of Judah, and God promised to build David a house and to establish his kingdom forever.

5. Jesus was descended from Judah and from David, and he is the one who is building the house that was promised to David
 6. The fact that the Lord selected a Judahite to lead in the building of the tabernacle pointed ahead to the One who would build the true tabernacle of God: the church.
- B. God tells Moses, "I have filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft."
1. God was the source of Bezalel's natural artistic abilities.
 2. This affirms the goodness of the arts.
 3. Our creativity is one of the ways in which we reflect the image of God.
 4. But this does not mean that every work of art will be good in an aesthetic sense or good in a moral sense.
 5. There is such a thing as low quality art.
 6. There is such a thing as morally objectionable art.
 7. We should also note that artistic ability is not only given to Christians.
 8. Non-Christians can and do produce beautiful works of art and great cultural achievements.
 9. We know this from experience and from Scripture.
 10. Genesis 4 tells us that the first great cultural developments were made by men who were descended from Cain, men who belonged to the line of rebellion rather than the line of promise.

11. Even though all people are fallen, even though everything that we produce is affected by our fallenness, human beings can still produce good and beautiful things.
- C. God was the source of Bezalel's artistic abilities, but those abilities were not sufficient for the building of the tabernacle.
1. Bezalel had to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that his abilities could be perfected for this special project.
 2. It should come as no surprise to us that the Spirit is directly connected to the building of the tabernacle.
 3. The Spirit was also involved in the Bible's first great building project: God's work of creation.
 4. The opening verse of Genesis tell us that when God made the world "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (Gen. 1:2)
 5. God carried out his creative work by his Word and through his Spirit.
 6. The creation account makes it clear that God created the world to be the place where his majestic presence would dwell and where man would live in communion with him.
 7. When we remember that the tabernacle was set up as a sort of restored garden of Eden, it makes perfect sense that the Spirit would be involved in its construction.
- D. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Israel's tabernacle was meant to serve as a type of God's heavenly tabernacle.
1. It was a foreshadowing of the holy temple that God is building with Christ as the chief cornerstone.
 2. We can see the connection between the Old Testament tabernacle and Christ's ministry by noting the central role played by the Holy

Spirit in Christ's life and work.

3. Jesus was conceived by Spirit.
 4. He was empowered by Spirit at his baptism.
 5. He offered himself up as a sacrifice for sin through the Spirit (Heb. 9:14).
 6. He was raised from the dead by the Spirit (Rom. 8:11).
 7. He sent the Spirit to empower the apostles for their ministry and to give gifts for the church's edification.
 8. These things help us to see that Bezalel's filling with the Spirit was not merely about making sure that he had sufficient artistic ability to perform this task.
 9. His being filled with the Spirit pointed ahead to how Christ would be empowered by the Spirit to carry out his great building project: the work of building the church.
- E. We should also note that God once again emphasizes in verse 11 that the tabernacle is to be built in perfect accordance with all that he has commanded.
1. The same idea is reiterated in chapter 36, where it says this:
"Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the LORD has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded." (v. 1)
 2. The Spirit of God was given to these men in order to help them follow God's commands.
 3. The Spirit of God is given to us for the same purpose: he is given to help us obey God.

4. This is why you should never think that the Holy Spirit is leading you if you are contemplating doing something that goes against what God has commanded in his Word.

III. The Construction of the New Covenant Tabernacle

- A. We turn now to our second point: the construction of the new covenant tabernacle.
 1. In order to see how this passage is significant for us today, we need to think about how the reality that the tabernacle foreshadowed has been fulfilled in Christ.
 2. There is no literal tabernacle or temple for God's people today.
 3. This fact alone should make it clear that the main application of this passage is not about the role that artists should play in the church's ministry.
 4. The thing that corresponds to the Old Testament tabernacle and temple today is the church of Jesus Christ.
 5. The church is not a physical structure but a spiritual structure.
 6. As Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." (vv. 19–22)
 7. In light of this, we can conclude that the contemporary parallel to Bezalel and his co-laborers are the people who are filled with the Spirit for the sake of the church's edification.
- B. This leads to the question, 'Who are these people?'

1. They certainly include the apostles and the New Testament prophets who gave the foundational testimony upon which the church is being built.
 2. Paul refers to himself and his co-laborers in the apostolic era as “God’s fellow workers”, and he says to the church in Corinth, “You are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Cor. 3:9)
 3. The apostles and their associates were specially gifted by the Holy Spirit in order to ensure that they got the foundational gospel testimony perfectly correct.
 4. As Peter says in his second epistle, “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pet. 1:20-21)
 5. This is why we look to the Bible as the only supreme and infallible authority for our beliefs and practices.
 6. Just as God sent his Spirit to make sure that the tabernacle would perfectly conform to what he had commanded, he also sent the Spirit to make sure that the apostolic testimony to Christ was exactly what he intended it to be.
 7. As long as the church remains upon that apostolic foundation, it cannot be shaken.
 8. But the moment the church moves away from that foundation, it becomes a human creation rather than the temple of the living God.
 9. God did not permit any creative license in the construction of the old covenant tabernacle, and he does not permit such license in the construction of the new covenant tabernacle.
- C. Another group of individuals who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to edify the church are those who serve in the church’s special offices.

1. We see this in Ephesians 4, where Paul says that the ascended Christ “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12 KJV).
 2. While the focus in that text is upon those who are called to the church’s teaching offices, other New Testament passages make it clear that Christ also gives his church ruling elders and deacons for its edification.
 3. To mix metaphors, Jesus builds his church by providing his sheep with tangible shepherds who take care of their physical and spiritual needs.
 4. This is a point that American Christians really need to take to heart.
 5. We are affected by our culture’s individualism and by its emphasis upon celebrity.
 6. We have a tendency to look inside of ourselves to find God, or to look to famous teachers as the primary source of our spiritual nourishment, rather than to make diligent use of the means that God has ordained to minister his grace to us.
 7. We need to remind ourselves that God’s appointed method for gathering, nurturing, comforting, protecting, and correcting his people is the ordinary ministry that he puts in the hands of officers who serve in local congregations.
- D. There is one other group of people who are filled with the Holy Spirit for the sake of the church’s edification: all believers in Jesus Christ.
1. Every member of Christ’s church is a member of Christ’s body, and the body of Christ does not have any unnecessary parts.
 2. Our physical bodies may be able to get along just fine without an appendix or tonsils or a gall bladder, but the body of Christ needs

all of its parts.

3. As Paul says in Ephesians 4, it is only “when each part is working properly” that the body “builds itself up in love.”
 4. We are given examples of the various spiritual gifts that Christ bestows upon his church in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.
 5. Some of the gifts mentioned in these lists were unique to the apostolic age because they consisted in the giving or authenticating of new revelation from God.
 6. This would include the gifts of prophecy, healing, miracles, and tongues.
 7. The other gifts in these lists continue to be in operation in the church today, and they include things such as service, a special measure of faith or generosity, leading, helping, administrating, and doing acts of mercy.
- E. The key thing for us to understand about spiritual gifts is that they are not given for self-fulfillment but for service.
1. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (v. 7)
 2. You have been given spiritual gifts for the common good of the body of Christ.
 3. Your gifts are meant to be used to edify the body of Christ.
 4. How are you using them to that end?
 5. Look for ways to use your gifts, your abilities, your time, and your resources, to help the body of Christ grow.
 6. In what ways can you help and encourage your fellow believers?

7. In what ways can you try to bring others into the body of Christ?
8. In what ways can you support the work of the church?
9. The Lord has placed you in this congregation not only for your own sake but also for the sake of your fellow believers.
10. Do not keep your gifts to yourself.
11. Use them to seek the welfare of the body.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Israel's tabernacle was a glorious sight, and the temple that eventually replaced it was even more glorious.
- B. But the glory of those structures pales in comparison to the glory of the holy temple that our God is building upon Christ the cornerstone.
- C. Consider the words that the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai: "My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts." (Hag. 2:5-9)
- D. The church is the house that God is talking about in that prophecy.
- E. Glorious things are spoken of the church, but this is not because the church is inherently glorious.
- F. The church is glorious because of the glory of the One who dwells within it.

- G. This means the church is worthy of your time, your toil, your money, your prayers.
- H. Make sure that these words that we so often sing are reflected in your life:

*I love thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of thine abode,
The church our blest Redeemer saved
With his own precious blood.*

*I love thy church, O God:
Her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And graven on thy hand.*

*For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be giv'n,
Till toils and cares shall end.*