



## Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text  
Exodus 31:1-18

Topic  
While assigning the work of building the Tabernacle,  
God established the Sabbath as a day of rest for Israel

Title  
*“How the Rest was Won”*

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How much rest does your body really need?

Type that question into Google and you’ll descend into a rabbit hole of research and advice about how many hours you should sleep; or about how many days you should wait between workouts.

What about mental rest? Experts are now saying that “it’s important to schedule more downtime for your brain.”

**What about spiritual rest?** That depends on who you ask.

A sabbatarian is a person who sets aside one day a week as a day of rest in which they “do no work.” Some of them would tell you it is not only important for your spiritual health, but that you might not be going to Heaven if you don’t set aside the Sabbath.

Is setting aside 24hrs a week really our spiritual rest? No, it’s not:

1. First of all, people who try to “keep” the Sabbath *have to work really hard at doing so*. There are so many issues, so many restrictions, and they are always fretting and falling short.
2. But second, and most important of all, our spiritual rest is, well, *spiritual*. It can’t be a certain day of the week, because it is found in a Person - in Jesus.

Our *work* and our *rest* are the topic of Exodus 31. We’ll discover something that you might find surprising: We are to both work AND rest simultaneously, without ceasing.

I’ll organize my comments around two points: #1 You Have The Power To Constantly Work For The Lord, and #2 You Have The Promise Of Constantly Resting In The Lord.

## #1 You Have The Power To Constantly Work For The Lord

(v1-11)

About once a week, someone asks on FaceBook for a recommendation for a contractor to do a project in their home. There are always multiple suggestions on who to use. The most fun is reading about who *not* to use.

God was giving Moses the plans for the Tabernacle. All of it was going to require not just a lot of labor, but incredibly skilled craftsmanship.

I mean, if you've been here for any of the studies when we discussed the furniture in the Tabernacle, you understand that each piece was going to be a one-of-a-kind masterpiece.

The garments of the high priest were like nothing the most accomplished seamstress had ever produced. And the rest of the fabric work, for the tent itself and the fence around it, was no easy task.

Think of all that, and then remember this: The Israelites were camped in the wilderness, far from the nearest Orchard Supply Hardware store.

But there was an even bigger issue. The Israelites had been career slaves in Egypt. The men were skilled at making bricks. They weren't wood workers or metal workers or jewelers or tailors. The women weren't expert seamstresses. There had been no Jewelry District, or Garment District, in Goshen, where Israelites could set-up shops.

How were they supposed to take a pile of donated jewelry, metal, wood, and fabric, and build this beautiful Tabernacle? Let's see.

Exo 31:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Exo 31:2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

It always starts with a man, or a woman. God "calls" a person to the task at hand. God chooses someone; He appoints them.

His call rarely makes sense to us. We could list character after character in the Bible who we definitely would not have called, but whom God chose and appointed.

If you think Bezalel was an incredibly gifted artisan, you're missing the point. God doesn't choose on the basis of skill; we do that - often to our detriment. He looks upon the heart, then builds out from there.

If you are in Christ; if you are saved; God calls you in all the situations in which you find yourself. Guys, if you're married with children for example, you are called to be a husband and a father. Some of you may have been fortunate enough to have a good role model in your own dad; but most of you did not.

Either way, you find yourself called to something you are terribly unqualified and untrained to accomplish:

- You're called to "love your wife as Christ loves the church." That doesn't happen by establishing a weekly date night that usually gets cancelled.
- You're called to raise your kids in the Lord, without provoking them, in a world that is under the dominion of the god of this world, Satan, and his malevolent rulers of the darkness of this world. To say that your task is difficult is an understatement.

You have Christian callings at work, and everywhere else. Yet you're nothing more than a former slave who spent most of your time making bricks building for the god of the kingdom of this world. You have none of the skills necessary for your Christian calling.

Regardless, you're God's choice to accomplish all these things. How are you going to do it?

Exo 31:3 And I have filled him with the Spirit of God...

They didn't send Bezalel back to Egypt, to trade school, where he could become a master craftsman.

Neither was this a mere boost to his natural abilities. This was God supernaturally enabling him.

God's call always includes His enabling. You absolutely *can* be the husband, the wife, the father, the mother, the employer or the employee, that God has called you to be. He wouldn't leave you without the power to do what He's commanded.

We don't need to pause to get a theology of the filling of the Holy Spirit. That's off-point here. What is on-point is to receive, by faith, that God's calling comes with His enabling; that you *can* do all things through Christ Who strengthens you.

Exo 31:3 And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of* workmanship,

Exo 31:4 to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze,

Exo 31:5 in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of* workmanship.

Let's revisit whether or not Bezalel was a master artisan prior to his being called. If he was, then he was a desert DiVinci - an artist, a metallurgist, a jeweler, a master carpenter; "all manner of workmanship" was his forte.

As I indicated earlier - Where would he have learned any of that, or practiced it, while a brick maker in Egypt?

But even more importantly, if Bezalel was that skilled... Who would get the glory for building the Tabernacle? God, or Bezalel?

Here's another angle by which we arrive at the same conclusion. The Spirit God gave Bezalel is described as gifting him "wisdom," and "understanding," and "knowledge," and "workmanship."

The first three - wisdom, knowledge, and understanding - clearly are supernatural empowerings that Bezalel did not previously possess:

- "Wisdom" could be something like what the New Testament calls the gift of the word of wisdom, which is an unprepared word from the Lord that clarifies or resolves some situation.
- "Understanding" could be something like what the New Testament calls the discernment of spirits, which is the recognition of what is really happening in a situation.
- Likewise, "knowledge" could be the word of knowledge - God telling you something you could not otherwise have known.

If all those are supernatural, why not "workmanship?" Do we not think God could so gift Bezalel - or that He could only enhance his already incredible talent?

So why don't we see this today? In one way, we do see it today. But before I can explain what I mean, we need to read the next few verses.

Exo 31:6 "And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

Exo 31:7 the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that *is* on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle -  
Exo 31:8 the table and its utensils, the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense,  
Exo 31:9 the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base -  
Exo 31:10 the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests,  
Exo 31:11 and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy *place*. According to all that I have commanded you they shall do."

Aholiab and others went to work under Bezalel, to build the Tabernacle on the earth. The mention of "wisdom," and of their being "gifted," tells me they, too, were filled with the Spirit.

We have the blessing of the full revelation of God's Word. We know what is happening today, so that when we look back, we can see types and pictures.

Today Jesus is building His church on the earth. It's not a building made with hands, like the Tabernacle. No, it's described like this:

Eph 2:19. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,  
Eph 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,  
Eph 2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,  
Eph 2:22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The Tabernacle was built on the earth to be the dwelling place of God. Today, the church on earth is the dwelling place of God.

Jesus is our Bezalel; we are His Aholiabs. And it's all the supernatural work of God's Spirit enabling us to work for Him.

This is why, in our case, we can say that we have the power to constantly work for the Lord.

To paraphrase Dori, "Just keep working... Just keep working... Just keep working... Working, working."

Constantly working for Jesus puts you in good company:

- Once when accused of working on the Sabbath, Jesus explained, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17).
- The apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, "For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God" (First Thessalonians 2:9).
- In Colossians 1:29, he said, "To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

Labor, striving, night and day, in the power of God's Spirit - **that** is the emphasis of the New Testament, illustrated for us here in the Old Testament.

I don't know what that means for you. I'm not 100% on what it means for me. You will have to determine for yourself what it means for you to constantly work for the Lord.



Just know you'll be in good company; and that you have every resource in heavenly places to accomplish your calling.

One of those resources is rest.

## #2 You Have The Promise Of Constantly Resting In The Lord (v12-18)

To all those who would burden us with the strict keeping of the Sabbath, I say, “**Give it a rest!**” (Get it??)

Before we read these verses, let me pick-out a crucial teaching we find in them:

- Verse 13, “for [the Sabbath] *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations...”
- Verse 16, “the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations...”
- Verse 17, “It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever...”

Unless “Israel” is code for “God’s people anywhere at anytime,” then the Sabbath was *never* intended for the Gentiles before Israel; nor was it intended for the church. Israel is not the church; the church is not Israel. We are two separate groups in God’s prophetic plan.

Our first introduction to the seventh day is in Genesis 2:1-3, when God rested from His labors of creation. He rested, but it is never given as a sign or ordinance to any people except Israel under the Law of Moses:

- In the Garden of Eden, we are not told that God required anything from Adam and Eve except to refrain from eating the Forbidden Fruit. They and their descendants were not told to observe the Sabbath after being banished.
- In Genesis 9, God established a covenant with Noah after the Flood. The sign given of that covenant is the sign of the rainbow (Genesis 9:13-17). There is no mention of Sabbath-keeping there, either.

In our era, in the church age, we read in Colossians 2:16-17, “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon **or Sabbaths**, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

The weekly Sabbath Israel observed has found its fulfillment in Jesus. It was typical, pointing to Him. The Sabbath is no longer a day of the week; it is a Person.

And that’s why we can say Jesus is our rest, and it is constant.

Let’s read our verses.

Exo 31:12 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,  
 Exo 31:13 "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you.

Notice that it is “Sabbaths,” plural. We tend to forget that there was a lot more to the Sabbath than the weekly observance:

- Every seventh year was a Sabbath year. The Sabbath day was a rest every week, and this rest was applied to farmland once every seven years. The Israelites were to let the land rest - not planting or pruning their crops.
- Every year after seven cycles of seven years (after every 49 years) was a special Sabbath year known as Jubilee. All prisoners and captives were set free, all slaves were released, all debts were forgiven, and all property was returned to its original owners. In addition, all labor was to cease for one year, and those bound by labor contracts were released from them.

I could be wrong, *but I don't think any Gentile sabbatarian congregation is observing these other Sabbaths.* Some experts say 2017-2018 is Jubilee on the Jewish calendar. Are any local sabbatarians celebrating it?

Exo 31:14 You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.

Exo 31:15 Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

It's comical, really, to read the history of sabbatarians trying to pin down exactly what is meant by "work." As I said earlier, it's hard *work* to try to figure out what constitutes *work*.

Many Christian denominations argue that Sunday is the Christian's Sabbath. Nope. Sundown Friday til sundown Saturday - **that's** the Sabbath. We typically meet for worship on Sunday because we see the early church doing so in the Bible - *not* because it is the new Sabbath.

Here is something else I don't think I've highlighted before: How is attending a worship service considered "rest?" It's actually a lot of work. Nowhere in the Sabbath verses does it suggest it was a day for corporate worship.

Exo 31:16 Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as* a perpetual covenant.

Exo 31:17 It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' "

It's for Israel, as a sign they are God's chosen people. The fact that God mentions the seventh day of creation doesn't grandfather in everyone else. In fact, if God intended for everyone in human history to observe the Sabbath, He wouldn't have to talk this much about it in Exodus, because it would have already been a thing since the Garden of Eden. It's clear that Israel was not sabbatarian until the Law was given.

He mentions the creation week as an example of how Israel should approach observing the Sabbath - as a time of resting and being refreshed.

Even though the Sabbath was physical, an Israelite could have seen more in it. He was not to work, but to rest:

- Externally, that meant ceasing from his ordinary tasks in order to meet with God.
- Internally, it involved ceasing from all self-sufficiency in order to rest in God's grace.

How is our rest continuous? The New Testament Book of Hebrews has a long section on rest. One passage reads:

Heb 4:9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

Heb 4:10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

Heb 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

These verses describe at least two types of rest:

- Jesus is the “He who has entered His rest” (v10). He rested when, on the Cross, He declared, “It is finished!” Salvation was available. Now whosoever believes in Him is saved. There is no work involved - only grace and faith.
- The writer is addressing the “people of God.” He’s addressing those who already enjoy the “rest” of salvation. He indicates there is another rest beyond salvation that they must be “diligent” to possess. It’s not Heaven; it’s something we are to experience right now, on earth (v9&11).

What is this rest? It is our diligence in cooperating with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit in the daily process of becoming more like Jesus. It requires diligence on our part, but because the Lord is the one doing all the heavy lifting, it is rest.

It is summarized by Jesus when He said, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Simply put: You rest in the power of the Spirit-filled life. Obeying the Lord is not work. The apostle Paul put it negatively when he asked rhetorically, “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3).

I came across the following story that illustrates what I’m trying to say better than I can explain it.

A man is swept out to sea on a homemade raft. Under pressure of wind and wave, it gives every indication of instant dissolution. The man on board struggles desperately just to keep the raft afloat. His paddle, used repeatedly against the pounding waves, does nothing to bring him any nearer the shore.

He looks up from his labors and sees a ship has come alongside. The crew throws him a line and invites him to come on board. He at once abandoned his own efforts to save himself and accept the salvation now offered him. He is saved!

He paces the deck of the great ship with solid planking beneath his feet and massive engines driving that vessel on its way. His standing is now secure.

He is taken to the captain who says, “Welcome aboard, friend.” After some conversation, the captain continues, “And now we would like your help. We are shorthanded. The cook could sure use some help in the galley. Would you be willing to help?”

That has to do with his state. His salvation is sure. Nobody is going to pitch him back overboard if he refuses to help. But his gratitude is such that he is only too willing to help get the necessary work done.

Helping out on board has nothing to do with his salvation. He can rest in that even though a hundred tasks beckon to him now that he is saved.

If you are saved, you have the Lord's promise of continuous rest in His salvation, but also that He is changing you. He Who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. It's not dependent upon your efforts; you can rest in His promise that you will in Heaven awake in His likeness.

Exo 31:18 And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

The "tablets of the Testimony" were the Ten Commandments. We're told elsewhere they were written on both sides, front and back.

In chapter thirty-two, Moses will descend Mount Sinai to find the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf in a drunken orgy: "So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf *and* the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain" (v19).

Super-symbolic in that they were breaking the Law.

In chapter thirty-four, God writes the Ten Commandments with His finger a second time.

I discovered something interesting about the fact that God's finger is said to have written the Ten Commandments twice. It has to do with a well-known story in the New Testament.

In the Gospel of John, a woman who was caught in the act of adultery is brought to Jesus. The Jews say that the Law of Moses demands she be stoned to death. They challenge Jesus to agree or disagree.

Here is the account:

Joh 8:6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.

Joh 8:7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

Joh 8:8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

Joh 8:9 Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

Joh 8:10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

Joh 8:11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

How many times did Jesus "write on the ground with His finger?"  
That's right - twice.

Could it be that He wrote the Ten Commandments, *twice*, just as He did in Exodus? Could it be He was demonstrating to the angry crowd He was the Lawgiver?



Every small detail in the Bible points to Jesus. It's worth reading Exodus just for this! I wonder how much we miss?

Continuous work... Continuous rest. It seems contradictory, but it's not. Our Bezalel fills us with the Spirit to work, while doing most of the heavy lifting as our yokefellow.

You are His workmanship, and though it may not seem like it now to yourself or others - you are His masterpiece.