

UNIT 59

THE WILLING ARTISANS (Exodus 31:1-11; 35:4–36:7)

The next unit, the logical one after the instructions for building the tabernacle, is the preparation of skilled workers for the task. This chapter would have been the bridge to the building of the tabernacle (35-39) if it were not for the idolatrous interlude.

The text of 31:1-11 is by itself not too complicated. God declares that He has called individuals and filled them with the Spirit of God “in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship, to devise workings (devise, reckon) . . . to work . . . and to set/arrange. Then, verse 6 starts over with other names of wise men prepared to build all that was instructed. There then follows the list.

If this was to be the substance of the exposition, it clearly would focus on the spiritual gifts of the people who prepared the tabernacle. They were given gifts to know how to do what God had commanded them to do. The obvious parallel is the filling of the Spirit (again = control) and the use of spiritual gifts for the work of the new sanctuary-building and building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4). But again there is a physical level to the text that precedes this spiritual lesson, i.e., the gifted participation in preparing worship. The two are part of one major theme of the *Spirit-filled preparation for the dwelling of the LORD*, but a metaphorical meaning attaches to this in the New Covenant (but one that employs the physical meaning).

If we add 35:4~36:7, then we have other topics that add to this total picture (and press the physical level a little more than the metaphorical one). First, in 35:4-19, *God instructs all the people to give an offering for the service of the tabernacle and to participate in the work*. Here it needs to be stressed that this is a willing offering.

The next section, 35:20-29, records how *The faithful bring an offering for the service of the tabernacle*. Everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone

with a willing spirit (v. 21), came and brought generously. So this section is the people's obedience to the preceding.

The third section reminds the people that *God sets some people apart with special spiritual gifts to do certain kinds of work (35:30-35)*. These folks were gifted craftsman, but they were gifted for the purpose of teaching others (v. 34). Probably the repetition is necessary because the filling and preparation was interrupted by the idolatry. If all the sections are treated, I would subordinate 31:1-11 here and explain the reason for the repetition.

Fourth, because of the Spirit's power and prompting, *The faithful people of God enthusiastically begin the work (36:1-7)*. Actually, this section is the beginning of the rest of the book. But what I would stress here is the bounty of the gifts (vv. 5-7). They had to restrain the people from giving because they had too much. A response like this is the work of the Spirit at a time of great revival. These moments are not common. No doubt great enthusiasm was inspired by two causes: 1) the Spirit-filled leaders in their work and teaching, and 2) the pious devotion and renewed loyalty after the judgment on idolatry. We can only speculate whether they would have responded so if the fear of the LORD had not so recently been kindled.

So the section had the instruction for support, the bringing of the offering, the inspiration of the skilled leaders, and the "inspired" giving of the people. It seems, then, that a two-level cycle is at work here. But the point is clear: *In response to God's commission, and inspired by God's Spirit filling the leaders and the workers, the faithful and willing people rally to support and participate in the LORD's work.*