

## **UNIT 60: SABBATH OBSERVANCE**

### **(Exodus 31:12-18; 35:1-3)**

There is some question about the arrangement here in the book. After the filling of the Spirit for the beginning of the work there is a reiteration of the Sabbath laws (vv. 12-17). Why these should be here is hard to say, unless God was ensuring that as they now were to begin the work of the tabernacle they were not to violate the Sabbath law. Or, it may be that there now actually was to be a sabbath day at the end of the instructions of the Law. Moses had gone up into the mountain in Exodus 24. He waited seven days, and on the on the seventh day the LORD spoke. He then was there for 40 days and 40 nights. If that seventh day was actually a sabbath, then 40 days later would be a Thursday, on which Moses took the tablets and came down. This is, of course, all very speculative.

What seems most likely is that the arrangement of the “Instruction Speeches” in Exodus follow the pattern of the seven days of “Creation.” The arrangement of speeches does not follow the English chapter and verse divisions, but narrative marker “Yahweh said to Moses”; and the speeches vary in length and complexity:

Speech One: Exodus 25:1–30:10

Offerings and Revealed Plans (25:1-9)

Ark of the Covenant (25:10-22)

Table of Bread (25:23-30)

Light (25:31-40)

(From God to Worshiper)

Tabernacle (26:1-37)

High Altar (27:1-8)

Courtyard (27:9–21)

Priest’s Clothing (28:1-43)

(From Worshiper back to God)

Ordination of Priest (29:1-46)

Altar if Incense (30:1-10)

Speech Two: Exodus 30:11-16

Ransom Money

Speech Three: Exodus 30:17-21  
Laver for Washing

Speech Four: Exodus 30:22-33  
Anointing Oil

Speech Five: Exodus 30:34-38  
Incense

Speech Six: Exodus 31:1-11  
People to Work and Serve

Speech Seven: Exodus 31:12-17  
Instructions for Sabbath

Just as there were six days of creation and then a seventh of rest, so there are six speeches about the making of the sanctuary, and a seventh about the sabbath rest (and there is some correlation between motifs in the instructions and the six days). Then, after the interlude, 35:1-3 opens with a call to observe the sabbath (1-3), and then gives instructions for the preparation for making the sanctuary, which is actually a summary of the previous seven speeches (4-19). The account of the building of the sanctuary then begins with the report of the willing workers (35:20-29), which is a fulfillment of 25:1-7 (and so chiasmic).

What is interesting is that 35:1-3 picks up with the warning of violating the sabbath, and is just prior to the instructions for giving the offerings for the tabernacle. Perhaps after the idolatrous escapade the people needed to start over with the sabbath rest (the outward sign of the covenant) and instructions for giving (not to make an idol now). We do not know exactly when the golden calf incident took place, but it is probable it took place before they put the tabernacle together (it seems to have interrupted God's giving Moses the instructions in chapters 25-30).

I would think that it is the art of the narrator to put the "filling of the humans with the Spirit" (corresponding to creating humans on day 6) before the "sabbath reminder" (corresponding to day 7 of creation's week) before the idolatry passage (and in Genesis Adam and Eve seem to break the sabbath day); and then after the idolatry passage there is the "sabbath reminder" again (a restoration of sabbath rest) and then the "filling of the Spirit" material (as in redemption when God restores the forgiven sinner to try to do what he was originally created to do).

It is likely that the idolatry incident came near the end of the 40 days, because Moses had the tablets, but then had to return to the top for the completion of the instructions. So the material has been arranged a little for effective style, getting the instructions in first, then the interlude, and then the compliance. It is the most effective arrangement. In 31:12-18 God told Moses to instruct the people about the Sabbath; and in 35:1-3 he did it, after coming down from the mountain after 40 days.

So we might offer a fairly straight chronology: Moses receives the Law (20:1-31:17), ending with *Call for the sabbath before the work begins*. Moses receives the tablets God wrote at the end of the 40 days. Moses breaks these tablets and intercedes for the people when he sees their idolatry, and then kills the rebels. He returns to the LORD for new tablets and confirmation of the Presence. He returns to the people and instructs them to keep the sabbath day. Then they built the sanctuary faithfully.

Having said this I am not so sure that I would devote an exposition to these passages on the Sabbath. The subject has been discussed before so there is no need to rework it now in these notes. There are new elements here, however. First (v. 13), the purpose of the sabbath is a sign that every generation may know that the LORD sanctifies his people. Keeping covenant signs is a memorial to God's sanctifying work. He was making them holy.

Another emphasis here is that it is a sabbath of sabbath rest (emphatic construction, v. 15). This is an expression found elsewhere in the Law. It is a superlative genitive, and so a day of complete cessation, totally holy/set apart to God.

Finally, the sabbath is based on God's rest at creation in which he refreshed himself (obviously an anthropomorphism to refer to spiritual celebration and enjoyment rather than the need for physical restoration).

*So God's covenant people must faithfully keep the sign of the covenant as a living commemoration of the finished work of the LORD and as an active part in their sanctification.* As is well known, the "sign" of the New Covenant is different—it is the "cup of the new covenant." And likewise our sign is a living commemoration of the finished work of the LORD in the re-creation of people. So the Church is not under the Law, and keeping sabbath day (Saturday) or sabbath year is not a commandment for New Testament believers (even though some legalists insist on going back under the Law). There is no problem in individuals

taking sabbath days to refresh and devote to celebration of the Lord; but if it is made binding on Christians, or if Sunday is called the Christian sabbath, then there are serious biblical difficulties.