



Biblical Stewardship



Bible Study Series

Using What God Gives Me for His Glory - Biblical Background -

EXODUS 36:1-7

So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work just as the LORD has commanded. Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work. 3 They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done. Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work. Exodus 36:1-7 NIV

Introduction

What a difference a year makes! Twelve months earlier, in 1446 B.C. or so, God's people the Israelites had been slaves slogging through Egyptian mud pits. They were making bricks to build their oppressive masters' dreams. But then God stepped onto the scene, set them free, and changed everything. Israelites, who had been born and raised in slavery, walked out of the slime and onto a road that would take them to the land of milk and honey. The Egyptians' slaves became the Lord's free people—God's own treasured possession (Ex. 19:5).

The Israelites couldn't get from Africa to Asia, from Egypt to the Promised Land, on their own. The distance was too

great, the resources too limited, and the threats too daunting for them to make it alone. The only way Israel could ever possibly make it was with God's miraculous intervention. But that had been part of God's good plan all along. He wanted to be there every step of the way protecting them, guiding them, and living among them in a home His people would build for Him.

In exchange for the priceless gift of freedom, God asked the Israelites to do one pivotal thing: to love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:4). Motivated by their love for God then, they were to use who they were and what they had for His glory. Today's lesson shows how the Israelites did just that, and in the process set an example for us to follow today.

1. God gives His people gifts of talent and opportunity. (Exodus 36:1-2)

Moses and the Israelites had a challenging task before them. People who had only built store cities for Pharaoh were now asked to construct a sacred tabernacle—the earthly home of the God of the universe. Those who had been trained to work with mud and straw were now being asked to create masterpieces out of gold, silver, precious stones, exotic woods, fine leather, and linen. Could they do it? Yes, because God, who knew what they would need before the need ever arose, had already provided His people with the talents needed for the tasks. The Lord had given Israel a workforce of individuals equipped with “wisdom and understanding to know how to do all the work of constructing the sanctuary” (Exodus 36:1).

For every great Kingdom task throughout history God has gifted His people with talents and abilities sufficient to accomplish His purposes in their generation. As the apostle Paul put it in his first letter to the Corinthians, “A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial” (1 Cor. 12:7). God Himself has personally equipped every Christian with a special set of gifts and abilities perfectly suited to opportunities for ministry that He has placed in their lives.

The gifts God gives differ from person to person within His kingdom. What’s more, they are given in unequal measure. Not everyone can be as talented as a Bezalel, to whom

God had given “wisdom, understanding and ability in every craft” (Ex. 31:2). Most of us are more like the unnamed craftsmen who were simply “skilled” (Exodus 36: 2). We can’t do everything, but we can do something. And we can do it for God.

2. The gifts God gives are meant to be used to do great things for Him. (Exodus 36:1-2)

God doesn’t *need* our help to do anything. But He wants our help. For each generation and in each location God wants His people to produce achievements that reflect His greatness. He wants us to do things that inspire awe and respect for Him. In the days of Moses the Lord called upon the Israelites to construct “the sanctuary” (Exodus 36:1), a sacred structure which was to house the very throne of God. The sanctuary was to be made of the finest available materials. It would be the largest, most expensive, and most impressive structure found in their civilization—a fitting tribute to the Lord.

Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other craftsmen didn’t have to come up with their own ideas of how to do something great for God. The Lord, the great architect of the universe, had already drawn up plans for the sanctuary in which He would dwell. God showed Moses the model (Ex. 25:40) and directed him to have his people follow it faithfully.

The formula for the Israelites accomplishing something glorious for God wasn’t complex: they were to follow the plan God gave them using the skills God gave them to

accomplish the task God gave them.

How can you do something great for God in our day? By following the same game plan that Bezalel and the other Israelites did in their day: do what God asked you to do with the gifts He gave you to do it, and do it as well as you can.

3. God gives people gifts of material possessions. (Exodus 36:3a)

Not every Israelite had the talent or opportunity to participate in the actual construction of God's sanctuary. But that didn't mean that they couldn't help out in a way that was just as important. Each one could give needed materials that others could use for the work of building the worship center for God.

But how could people who had been slaves all their lives give the gifts of gold and silver needed to build such a magnificent structure to glorify God? As has been true throughout history, at just the right time God had provided His people with the material resources needed to carry out His plan for them. Just before they gained their freedom God had commanded the Israelites to ask the Egyptians to give them gold, silver, and fine clothes (see Ex. 3:21-22; 12:36), perhaps as reparations for the wrongs done to them. At the same time, God changed the hearts of the Egyptians, the wealthiest people in the world of their day, to make them give lavish gifts to those they had abused for so long (Ex. 12:36).

4. God's work prospers when God's people give generously. (Exodus 36:3b-7)

Now it was up to the Lord's free people to give a portion of what they had received to support God's work. The Lord had given them freedom and delivered them from the planet's most powerful army (Ex. 14:13-30). He had given them wealth they didn't earn and provided them with food they didn't have to buy (Ex. 16:13-18). The Israelites' gifts would in some measure be a reflection of their gratitude for God's amazing work in their lives: how generous would they be?

As it turns out, they were very generous. They "continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning" (v. Exodus 36:3). As the contributions mounted it became clear that the people were "bringing more than [was] needed for the construction of the work the Lord commanded to be done" (Exodus 36:5). Great amounts were needed for the project, and great amounts were given. By the time the sanctuary was completed God's people had given a total of 2193 pounds of gold, 7544 pounds of silver, and 5310 pounds of bronze (Ex. 38:24-31) to build a worship center fit for God. In the skillful and trustworthy hands of Bezalel and the others craftsmen, Israel's generous contributions were transformed into a masterpiece for the glory of God.

It's not just the Israelites of Moses' day who have been blessed by God. Our generation of American Christians have been blessed materially more than any other

generation in human history. We possess the resources to do extraordinary things for God. Skilled and committed Christian workers are already in the field doing the work God called them to do. What can we give them to help God's work prosper in our day?