# Exodus, Part 19

As we continue with the instructions for building the Tabernacle and all its associated articles of worship, we will have a brief look at the artisans tasked with constructing the Tabernacle and all these articles of worship. That will be followed by a restating of the command to keep the Sabbath. That will be followed by Moses coming down off Mt. Sinai and discovering, much to his dismay, that the Israelites have slipped into idolatry during the 40 days he was on the mountain with the Lord.

## The Ability to Work

> **Exodus 31:1** The Lord said to Moses, 2 “See, I have called by name
> Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 3 and I have filled
> him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge
> and all craftsmanship, 4 to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver,
> and bronze, 5 in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work
> in every craft. 6 And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son
> of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men
> ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: 7 the tent of
> meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it,
> and all the furnishings of the tent, 8 the table and its utensils, and the
> pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, 9 and the
> altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand,
> 10 and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest
> and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, 11 and the
> anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all
> that I have commanded you, they shall do.”

Whenever God calls us to do a job for Him, He gives us the enablement we need and the helpers we needn’t accomplish that job. This He did for Bezaleel and Aholiab. Bezaleel means “in God’s protection;” his father Hur we have met before (Ex. 17:10–16; 24:14). God gave these men all they would need to follow the heavenly pattern and make the things necessary for the Tabernacle. Their wisdom and skill came from the Lord, and they used their abilities in obedience to God’s command.

Application: The Lord will not call you to a task that is beyond your ability to accomplish. It may seem like it is, but if He is calling you, He is obliged to provide you with whatever you need to accomplish whatever He is calling you to do. No exceptions! The *only* question is will you trust Him and obey?

Of special note here is verse 3 “I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship.” As we have previously stated, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was not given to all believers in the Age of Israel as during this Church Age. This enduement of power and ability by the Spirit during previous ages was limited to certain people like kings, prophets, artisans, and others who were tasked by God for some purpose.

In this dispensation of the Church Age, all believers are indwelt by the Spirit and all are called to some purpose, but not everybody is called to the same purpose. God has different tasks for all His children. But whatever the dispensation, the Spirit not only calls to service but also bestows these talents and abilities and empowers those He calls when the time comes for them to be used.

Not all are called to be a preacher, teacher, or missionary. God calls according to *His* needs. There is also a need for Christian writers, artists, musicians, architects, doctors, and gardeners. We can serve the Lord in every legitimate vocation.

> **1 Cor. 10:31** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

For believers in this Church Age, it is how well we respond in obedience to that calling and its execution that is *evaluated* at the Bema Judgment after the Rapture. We are not judged for our sins; those were judged at the Cross. We are *evaluated* for our Christian works, specifically and only those that God has called us to.

> **2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

That word translated as “evil” should more accurately be translated as “worthless” or “of no account” since some of our “works” may not have been the result of God’s calling but were instead something we did for our own gratification (human good vs divine good). These human good efforts are of no value in God’s plan and are seen as wood, hay, and stubble that gets burned up in the fire test.

> **1 Corinthians 3:11** For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Those works done in the calling and empowerment of the Spirit (divine good) are rewarded. However, human good works are not done in the calling and empowerment of the spirit, and even though we might think of them as “good,” they are considered as worthless because they are of no value to God’s plan and get burned up.

Bezalel and Oholiab were the main overseers of the whole project, and under them were a variety of craftsmen, who assisted in constructing the furnishings for the Tabernacle and the clothing for the priests. Two guiding principles for the work are offered:

1. They are to work within the guidance God has given, not introducing anything new or omitting any part of the work.
2. They are able to design the artwork for the furnishings with a measure of freedom (v. 4 “*devise* artistic designs”).

But the emphasis falls on the fact that this is God’s work; the design is His, the workmen are His, and the equipping is His, thus all the glory will be His.

## The Responsibility Not to Work

**Exodus 31:12** And the Lord said to Moses, 13 “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. 14 You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 15 Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. 16 Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. 17 It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’ ”
18 And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

With a responsibility to serve God also comes a responsibility to not work, meaning to rest. This is a restatement of the call to keep the Sabbath, the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. God underlined the importance of the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant between God and Israel that made Israel a theocracy. It was a test of the nation’s commitment to God; failure to keep it a holy day would result in death (i.e., separation from the community which would probably result in death). This command, as stated in the Decalogue (20:8), was based on God’s resting after His work of Creation in six days (31:17). Because the nation was in a covenant relationship with Him, the people were to do as He had done. The Sabbath marked Israel as God’s people. Observing the Sabbath showed that the Israelites were set apart (i.e., holy) to God.

The Sabbath was not given to the Gentile nations but only to Israel as a sign of their special relationship with the Lord. The Sabbath commandment is nowhere given to the Church, for the Church honors the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, the day of His resurrection from the dead. The Sabbath belonged to the old creation (v. 17), but the Lord’s Day belongs to the new creation.

At this point in the narrative, God's instructions to Moses given on Mount Sinai concerning the Tabernacle and its priestly ministry were complete. The Decalogue was somehow inscribed by God on two tablets of stone. "God's finger" (cf. 8:19; Deut. 9:10; Ps. 8:3; Luke 11:20) may suggest that this was God's doing.

Meanwhile, back down below Mt. Sinai in the camp of the Israelites, trouble was brewing.

> **Deuteronomy 9:12** And at the end of forty days and forty nights the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.
> 12 Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them; they have made themselves a metal image.'

The Lord informed Moses that the people had become corrupt by casting an idol in the shape of a calf. Within 40 days they broke their commitment to keep what God had already commanded (Ex. 20:4).

## The Golden Calf

> **Exodus 32:1** When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." 2 So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" 5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." 6 And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

While Moses was experiencing spiritual triumph the people of God plummeted to a low point spiritually. God had repeatedly manifested His power and compassion, but they were soon forgotten. Repeatedly in the Book of Exodus, the Israelites reacted with insensitivity and rebellion to God's marvelous displays of His goodness.

The people became fearful because of Moses' being on the mountain for 40 days, and they went to Aaron, their temporary leader (24:14). Not knowing what had happened to Moses and assuming that he would not return to guide and comfort them, they asked for a substitute or surrogate who will "go before them," that is be their intermediary with God. In suggesting that Aaron make them gods they were not asking for gods to replace Yahweh but for a visible, tangible object to follow–an idol.

Foolishly granting their request, Aaron suggested the people give him their gold earrings (probably acquired from the Egyptians on the day of Exodus, 12:35–36), which he then melted into an idol cast in the shape of a calf. Some commentators have suggested that this represented the Egyptian bull-god Apis, but this seems unlikely because Apis was not worshiped as an image. Even so, the bull symbolized fertility and sexual strength. This explicitly violated the second commandment which the people had already received from God verbally through Moses.

Aaron then made an altar, and the next day in a "feast to the Lord," the people offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. "And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play" (v. 6). "Play" (*ṣāḥaq)* suggests immorality. The term "play" has clear sexual overtones in Genesis 26:8, where Abimelech sees Isaac "playing" with his wife, Rebecca, and deduces that they must be husband and wife. This violated the seventh commandment against adultery (Ex. 20:14). In short, in verse 19 Moses learns of the party's erotic nature, something God had not informed him of earlier. They were singing and dancing (32:18–19) and had "broken loose" (v. 25 "lost all restraints"). Immorality often accompanies idolatry. In Romans, Paul speaks of this sort of behavior associated with idolatry.

> **Romans 1:21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and

their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became
fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images
resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to
the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they
exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the
creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Yet they supposed they were worshiping the true God!

No matter how you look at this sin, it was a great offense against God. The Jews were God's people, chosen by His grace and redeemed from Egypt by His power. He had led them, fed them, protected them from the enemy, and made them a part of His covenant. He had given them His holy laws and the people had agreed to obey (19:8; 24:3–7). Here at Sinai, the people had seen the awesome display of God's glory and had trembled at His power. Yet, in spite of all these marvelous experiences, they impudently disobeyed the Lord and lapsed into idolatry and immorality.

Moses had agreed to God's giving him Aaron as a helper (4:10–17), but now Aaron had become a leader in helping the people sin. Why did Aaron not rebuke the people and turn to God for help? To say that Aaron made the calf as a symbol of Jehovah, stooping to the weakness of the people, does not excuse him. Aaron knew what the Lord had said about idols.

The basic cause of this sin was unbelief: the people became impatient while waiting for Moses, and without true faith, they decided they had to have something they could see. Impatience and unbelief led to idolatry, and idolatry led to immorality.

Hebrews 12:1 speaks of "the sin which so easily ensnares *us."* Most interpret this as referring to some particular weakness each of us has that often entraps us or sin in general, but I think that "sin which so easily ensnares *us"* is simply the lack of faith. Context would support this, as the preceding chapter 11 is appropriately named the "Faith Chapter" since faith is its main subject. Loss of or lack of faith will lead to other sins and our downfall.

> **Exodus 32:7** And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, for your people,
> whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted
> themselves. 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I
> commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and
> have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O
> Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ ” 9 And the Lord said
> to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked
> people. 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot
> against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great
> nation of you.”

While Moses was on the mountain, God told him the people had become corrupt and stiff-necked, that is, stubborn and unresponsive (cf. 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27). In His anger God refused to claim the people as His own or even to claim that He delivered them from Egypt (*your* people, whom *you* brought up out of Egypt, Ex. 32:7; cf. *these* people, v. 9). After telling Moses what they had done (v. 8), God said that He would punish their rebellion by destroying them and that He would build a new nation beginning with Moses (“I will make you into a great nation,” v. 10).

> **Exodus 32:11** But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, “O Lord,
> why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have
> brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty
> hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring
> them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the
> face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this
> disaster against your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,
> your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I
> will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I
> have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it
> forever.’ ” 14 And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken
> of bringing on his people.

Of course the Lord knew what was going on in the camp of Israel. Note how God seemed to “blame” Moses for what had happened, but Moses was quick to remind the Lord that Israel was His people. It was Jehovah’s

glory that was at stake and not Moses' reputation, so Moses reminded the Lord of His promises to the patriarchs.

When Scripture says that the Lord "relented" (v. 9), sometimes translated as "repented," it is using human language to describe a divine response. To repent simply means to have a change of mind, here seen because Moses reminded God of His promises to Israel and their patriarchs. Of course, God did not repent or relent in the usual sense in which we use the terms. Since God always knew in eternity past he would be angry and yet not destroy Israel, we must view this as an anthropopathism, the act of attributing human emotions or feelings to a non-human being, usually a deity.

Twice during Moses' lifetime, God offered to destroy Israel and use Moses to found a new nation (v. 10; Num. 14:12), but he refused. The Jews never knew the price Moses paid to be their leader or how much they owed to him.

> **Exodus 32:15** Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. **16** The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. **17** When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." **18** But he said, "It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear." **19** And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. **20** He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

As Moses descended the mountain with the two tablets of the Decalogue, he rejoined Joshua, who apparently was partway up the mountain and also not aware of what the Israelites were doing. Joshua thought that the camp was under military attack. However, Moses knew from what God told him that the people were singing and were involved in drunkenness and immorality.

In anger, Moses at the foot of the mountain did four things.

- First, he smashed the tablets of the Law, symbolizing the people's breaking of the covenant.
- Second, he burned the idol and reduced it to powder. The idol was likely made of wood and overlaid with gold, thus it would burn.
- Third, he spread it on water (a mountain stream, Deut. 9:21).
- And fourth, he made the people drink it symbolizing that the people had to bear the consequences of their sin.

By this action, he demonstrated both God's wrath and the powerlessness of the calf idol.

> **Exodus 32:21** And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" **22** And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. **23** For they said to me, 'Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' **24** So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

Then Moses summoned Aaron to give an account of what had taken place. Aaron's excuse was as ludicrous as the people's actions. He blamed the people, and then in a lie, he suggested that the idol "just happened". He said, "I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." Aaron, however, had actually shaped the idol himself (v. 4).

"Go before" (v. 23) means to go to the face of or represent. With Moses MIA for 40 days, the idol was meant to act in his place and be a means by which they, in their fear, could interact with God and not have to face Him. That may have been their original intent, but it quickly devolved into worshiping the golden calf and sexual immorality as suggested by verse 25 with the reference to "broken loose" and the previous mention in verse 6 with the term "rose up to play". Regardless of their intent, the act was unquestionably idolatry and forbidden by commandment #2 in the Decalogue. That sin was compounded by the Israelites "breaking loose" and "playing" breaking commandment #7 against adultery.

> **Exodus 32:25** And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose
> (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies),
> 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the
> Lord’s side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him.
> 27 And he said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put your
> sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate
> throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion
> and his neighbor.’ ” 28 And the sons of Levi did according to the word of
> Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. 29 And
> Moses said, “Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord,
> each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might
> bestow a blessing upon you this day.”

Note the statement in verse 25 that the actions of the Israelites had resulted in “the derision of their enemies”. They were not righteously representing God before the Gentiles but rather were bringing “shame” upon Him because their enemies were mocking God. They had become poor witnesses before God.

Then Moses judged the unrepentant. He rallied before the camp all who had not been involved in worshiping the calf. The Levites responded as a group. These were commanded to go through the camp and kill any who persisted in idolatry. The major instigators of the plot were put to the sword. God was even going to kill Aaron, but Moses interceded for him.

> **Deuteronomy 9:20** And the Lord was so angry with Aaron that he was
> ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time.

Three thousand Israelites were killed by swords. Others, however, died by a plague (v. 35). The word translated “plague” is often translated as “smite” elsewhere – they were smitten by God. After completing this gruesome task, the Levites were set apart to the Lord. Later they were assigned the responsibility of carrying the tabernacle (Num. 1:50–53).

> **Exodus 32:30** The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned
> a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make
> atonement for your sin.” 31 So Moses returned to the Lord and said,

> “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” 33 But the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. 34 But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”

Moses recognized that the nation as a whole shared the guilt. Therefore he again entreated the Lord for atonement for their sin. Moses told God that if He refused to forgive His people he would prefer to have his name removed from the book God had written (Ex. 32:32). Some say this was the Book of Life (Rev. 20:15; 21:27) that lists believers’ names but, more likely, it was the census of the people. Moses’ statement probably indicated he was willing to die a premature death but not suffer eternal torment in hell. He did not want to be associated with a sinful, unforgiven people.

Rejecting Moses’ offer, God promised to punish the sinners (by premature death). Some died of a plague and all fighting men except Joshua and Caleb died later in the desert. Yet God said Moses would lead the nation (the younger generation) to the land promised them (v. 34).

The two statements, “My angel shall go before you” (v. 34) and “I will send an angel before you” Exodus 33:2) were the promise of divine help to overcome the inhabitants of Canaan and echoes 23:23 “When my angel goes before you.” The angel may have been a special guardian angel for Israel (perhaps Michael, Dan. 12:1) or, more likely, the Lord Himself as the pre-incarnate Christ.

> **Exodus 32:35** Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

Note that God holds both the people and Aaron responsible for this failure.

With this incident behind them, God instructs them that they are to leave Sinai. And if you are wondering, Moses gets to make two new tablets, and we will see that when we get to Chapter 34.