

Aholiab / Oholiab a tabernacle artisan

Exodus 31:1-7

31:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **31:2** See, I have called by name **Bezaleel** the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: **31:3** And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, **31:4** To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, **31:5** And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. **31:6** And I, behold, I have given with him **Aholiab**, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; **31:7** The tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle, ...

Exodus 35:30-36:2

35:30 And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name **Bezaleel** the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; **35:31** And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; **35:32** And to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, **35:33** And in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. **35:34** And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and **Aholiab**, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. **35:35** Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work. **36:1** Then wrought **Bezaleel** and **Aholiab**, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and under-

standing to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded. **36:2** And Moses called **Bezaleel** and **Aholiab**, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it:

Exodus 37:1-2

37:1 And **Bezaleel** made the ark of shittim [acacia] wood: two cubits and a half was the length of it, and a cubit and a half the breadth of it, and a cubit and a half the height of it: **37:2** And he overlaid it with pure gold within and without, and made a crown of gold to it round about.

Exodus 38:22-23

38:22 And **Bezaleel** the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD commanded Moses. **38:23** And with him was **Aholiab**, son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver, and a cunning workman, and an embroiderer in blue, and in purple, and in scarlet, and fine linen.

Where are the godly craftsmen?

Many skilled workers in the Bible made idols (Ex. 20:4, 32:4, Deut. 27:15, 2 Kings 17:16, Acts 19:23-28), but where are the godly craftsmen?

Skilled inventors created catapult-like weapons for the defense of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 26:15). More peacefully, however, the building of the tabernacle brought two skilled workers, Bezale(e)l and Aholiab (or Oholiab), to the forefront. Though they are not mentioned nearly as much as Moses and Aaron, they still deserve careful study. In this lesson, we will focus more on Aholiab / Oholiab, the lesser of the two.

negatives

The importance of the tabernacle and the sacrificial system that went with it are well known since such is the subject of most chapters in the second half of Exodus as well as Hebrews chapter nine. Even so, Aholiab (or Oholiab), one of the two artisans who were in charge of building the tabernacle and making all its furniture, is hardly mentioned. He is only named five times. The main artisan, Bezale(e)l, is named nine times, which still is not very often. Apparently, the tabernacle itself was more important than the two men who were in charge of forming the materials and making its furniture. This is the subject of the lines in the A section below.

Secondarily, it is helpful to compare the two artisans. This is covered in the six B section lines below. As already stated, Bezalel is mentioned more than Aholiab, but there are some other differences as well, though in many ways the two were probably much alike.

Aholiab is obviously the less prominent of the two craftsmen, but that does not necessarily mean that line B is totally correct. The answers to lines A, A-6, B, and B-5 all depend on how the term “important” is understood. It can be taken more than one way. Most other lines are more specific and therefore somewhat easier to judge.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A () **The tabernacle was more important than Bezalel and Aholiab.**

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| A-1 | () The tabernacle is mentioned often. Bezalel and Aholiab are not. |
| A-2 | () Bezalel and Aholiab are mentioned less than the alter and the ark. |
| A-3 | () Bezalel and Aholiab are not mentioned after Ex. 38:23. (2 Chr. 1:5) |
| A-4 | () Moses put the tabernacle together (40:16-33). B. and A. did not. |
| A-5 | () God designed the tabernacle (36:1, 38:22). B. and A. did not. |
| A-6 | () Every great building is more important than its builders. |
| A-7 | () The tabernacle was built by the entire nation (35:1-35). |
| A-8 | () The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (40:34). |

B () **Aholiab was not as important as Bezalel.**

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| B-1 | () Bezalel was named before Aholiab (31:2-6, 35:30-34, 38:22-23). |
| B-2 | () Bezalel was Spirit filled (31:3, 35:31). Aholiab was not (36:1). |
| B-3 | () Bezalel made the ark (37:1-2, 2 Chr. 1:5). Aholiab did not. |
| B-4 | () Aholiab was mostly just Bezalel's assistant (38:22-23). |
| B-5 | () Helpers are not as important as their leaders. |

positives

Bezalel and Aholiab provide a special opportunity to think about the various skills involved in “the trades.” Today, people specialize more, but there is a long list of gifts and abilities attributed to these two ancient craftsmen. Each of the skills deserves to be considered separately though most of them are lumped together in 31:4-5 and 38:23.

An engraver (38:23) was one who skillfully worked with solid materials, metal, wood, or stone. Along that line, it may be significant that the ability to work with gold and silver is attributed more clearly to Bazelel (31:4-5, 35:32-33, 37:1-2) than to Aholiab (38:23).

Though skillfully using one’s hands is emphasized, there was far more to the work than that. Neither Bezalel nor Aholiab worked alone. Interpersonal skills were required since there were many other workers (31:6, 36:1-2), including many women (35:22, 25, 26, 29, 38:8). Did the two leaders need to be good public speakers (C-3) in order to train other workers (35:34)? What about their level of motivation (C-7)?

Thankfully, the tabernacle was completed despite the golden calf incident in chapter 32. Like many Gentile craftsmen (Isa. 41:7), Aaron misused his metal working skill to make an idol.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C () **Aholiab was gifted by God in various ways.**

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| C-1 | () The Lord gave him wisdom, skill, and understanding (36:1). |
| C-2 | () Bezalel and Aholiab were able to teach other artisans (35:34). |
| C-3 | () They were both probably good public speakers (35:34, 38:23). |
| C-4 | () Aholiab was a skilled engraver, i.e. a materials worker (38:23). |
| C-5 | () He was creative and able to design things (35:32, 35, 38:23). |
| C-6 | () He could embroider and weave various threads (38:23). |
| C-7 | () He was probably highly motivated (35:21, 26, 36:2). |
| C-8 | () He was chosen for his skills (36:1, 2 Chr. 2:13-14). |

D () **Aholiab did good work.**

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| D-1 | () He apparently worked well with others (36:1-2). |
| D-2 | () He did as the Lord commanded (31:6, 36:1, 38:22-23). |
| D-3 | () His creative design skill was not needed (35:32, 35, 38:23). |
| D-4 | () His gifts (38:23) probably complemented Bezalel’s (31:2-6). |
| D-5 | () The tabernacle was completed and God approved it (40:34). |

worksheet answers

There are two important lines which are obviously incorrect. First, it is wrong to assume that Bezalel and Aholiab were good public speakers (C-3). Training other craftsmen required good demonstrations more than speaking eloquently. Second, Aholiab used his creative design skills in procedural matters and in the details (D-3), even though each part of the tabernacle and its furnishings were designed by God in some detail. There is a lot more to making something than having a good set of plans!

In addition, there are many lines (A-3, A-6, A-7, B, B-2(?), B-4, B-5, and C-8) which are probably best marked partly correct. Three of these (A-6, B, and B-5) have to do with being important.

The tabernacle, and later the temple, played a bigger role in the life of Israel than the builders did (A-6). Yet, most of the nation was involved in the project (A-7), and individual builders were without doubt more important to their families than the building projects.

Both Aholiab and Bezalel were needed to complete the project, even though Bezalel was more prominent (B). Likewise, in general, helpers are necessary as well as leaders, though leaders are more important in some ways (B-5).

So what?

One of the most difficult lines, B-2, is about Bezalel being filled with the Spirit of God in contrast to Aholiab. Both men are said to have been filled with wisdom for the work (35:35). Yet, only Bezalel is directly said to have been Spirit filled (31:3, 35:31). Perhaps this is the biggest difference between the two and why Bezalel was over Aholiab.

In line with this, it is probably at least partly true to say that Aholiab was chosen because of his skills (C-8). God had worked in his life so that he was skilled for the work, but this does not necessarily mean that he was a spiritual man like Bezalel. Perhaps he was, but for some reason Bezalel was chosen to build the ark rather than Aholiab (B-3).

Later, when the temple was built, the king of Tyre sent Hiram, his master craftsman, to help on the project. The emphasis in 2 Chr. 2:11-14 is on Hiram's skills, and little or nothing is said about his spirituality.

Occupational skills are highly valued, but God searches the heart (Jer. 17:10). **The bottom-line point in this study is that skills are important and can lead to a good job, but being a spiritual person is even more important.** Perhaps Aholiab was such a person as well as Bezalel, but we do not know that with certainty.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
