

## BEZALEL

Those of you who came to church two weeks ago when Anne was speaking on Melchizedek will have heard her tell of the photo that I sent her of the street in Jerusalem that we happened to walk down the day before her sermon. Over the course of the next year or so, you can expect little references to our biblical tour of Israel as it was absolutely amazing in so many ways.

Today's minor character in the Bible is Bezalel and, though we did not visit it, we heard that there was a Bezalel school of art in Jerusalem, which, as it was founded in 1905, was the first higher education establishment in Israel and is now well-renowned throughout the world for its teaching.

You also might be wondering if I have got my seasons wrong as you heard a Christmas story as the gospel reading. I assure you I have not and I hope that you will understand my choice once I have finished this talk. Suffice to say now that the word Shadow is one of the link words. What do you think of when you hear that word? Do you remember playing find my shadow as a child or watching yours or other peoples children enjoying their shadow. Perhaps it is quite a negative word in your mind thinking of scary books or films with shows looming over the situation. In the context of the Bible it is a very positive word, you could even say an oxymoron and one of the best places to be and it is this which I now want to explore a little.

Yet you might still be a baffled as you did not hear the word shadow in the first reading. You are right - you didn't but Bezalel's name means in the shadow of the Almighty. I have often mentioned that Hebrew names tell us a lot about the person and here is such a case. Let me elaborate... Psalm 36:7 says *'How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings'*. This implies more than simply protection – it is pointing to intimacy, care, love, and a place to be. When we hear Jesus lamenting over Jerusalem *"How often I have longed to gather together your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings... but you were not willing."*, we know that he is referring to the city in general being more interested in following rules than having a relationship with God and letting him look after them.

So, here we have Bezalel. First thing we notice is that his ancestry is mentioned. That does not always happen and it emphasises the importance of this man. Jewish theology suggests that he is actually Moses' great nephew but the jury is out on that. Whatever his family history, while he did not wage war like Joshua or lead a nation like David, God used him for a specific purpose. When it was time for the people of God, journeying from Egypt to the promised land, to build a tabernacle, so that God may dwell among them, they needed workers. The actual construction of the *Mishkan*—God's "among-dwelling" tent—was assigned to a chosen man... Bezalel. God had already sorted it. *"And I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft.."* Bezalel was an astonishingly accomplished artisan.

He was metalworker, jeweller, gem-cutter and woodworker and later on we learn that he was an engraver, designer, embroiderer and weaver, and performed "every inventive work". Craftsmen today, who well know how long apprenticeships take in only one craft, can attest that Bezalel was gifted and talented in the extreme to the extent that it could only be divinely led. I wonder how often you have thought about the creative power of the Holy Spirit. We are told on the opening page of the bible that the holy Spirit - the *Ruakh* - hovered over the waters which speaks of the Spirit, hovering or brooding over this formless void, over the waters, before God began His creative activity. He created life where there was none.

Well there is linkage between that work and the tabernacle. "*I have filled him with divine spirit*" is another way of saying he is filled with the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit." And so not only is the Spirit present at creation, but the Spirit is called here the force behind the completion of the tabernacle project. As God brings the world into being through His Spirit, He also brings the tabernacle into being through His Spirit. In fact, we see here that the tabernacle is something like a mini representation of the universe that God has made. God orders all its design, all its components, and brings it into being just like He does our world or universe, which is recorded as being brought into being in Genesis 1 and 2.

And just to continue on that one thought, the tabernacle was going to be the place where god dwelt in the desert, to show people that He was protecting them. It too would need protection and God had planned it covered with multiple layers so that it would be the one place in a hot desert that was shaded, dark, covered and this man who is given the job of crafting it, is named appropriately in the shadow of God, under the protection of God. There is much, much more that I could say on this but I need to quickly look at our gospel reading for a few more links.

The Angel Gabriel visited Mary to tell her God's plan to redeem the world - that she was now to bear a son and Mary asked how this could be as she was not ready to bring life into the world... she was unprepared and could not see how it was possible. The answer was that the Holy Spirit would overshadow Mary. Ever thought why the passage did not just say God - might have been more simple. Well...Just as the Spirit was *hovering* or *brooding* over the waters, ready to take that which had been created and mould it and fashion it, giving it form and beauty, so he was going to do the same in Mary. The Spirit was in the business of creating. God's life-creating Spirit/Power overshadows, envelops and fills Mary's body—where new life begins. Yet Mary's experience isn't entirely surprising. For in the rest of the Christmas story in Luke, we see a woman who previously dwelled in the shadow of God every day as a disciple. Her hymn of praise that we know as the Magnificat proves this. As Paul Sumner, a Hebrew scholar says: "*The creative overshadowing that engendered her child comes almost as a natural progression of her faithful obedience and trust.*"

Back to our subject - Bezalel. Firstly, can you 'see' him all sweaty and smelly sitting under his tent in the hot desert sun, working away with his tools? What is the point to be understood here? Just because the Holy Spirit is at work in us, it does not mean that we will not have to work ... and work hard! The Spirit of God is the One who will give us the wisdom, skill, ability and knowledge but we are the ones who must sweat it out and get the work done! We cannot expect God just to do it. Bezalel worked according to the plan of God, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and created something of immense significance. We too can do that - Bezalel was no king, he was a craftsman.

Have you been equipped by God to do a task for him - whether big or small? Have you carried it out? If we are to build his church, it is imperative that we perform the tasks he has anointed us for. What Bezalel crafted was not just for his day, or even future generations of Israelites, it was meant to be the next stage in God's plan to dwell among his people which Jesus said is now happening through us as we become the temple of the Holy Spirit. We all have a work to do, a ministry to perform... to be like Bezalel and Mary, and be willing to follow God's instructions and trust in the living presence of the Holy Spirit within us.

There is a place in the shadow of the Almighty for all His children, great and small... and He has made room for you to play a significant role under His direction, by means of His equipping, and in the power of His Spirit... isn't that exciting?