

LAVER, OIL, CRAFTSMEN

EXODUS 30:17-33; 31:1-18

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that the book is not in strict chronological order, but I have to walk that back. I got lost in exegeting each chapter of the book and forgot where I was in the overall narrative of the book. At this point in the narrative, Moses is on the mountain for forty days receiving God's instructions. Everything we have been studying concerning the Tabernacle and its construction and the priests including their garments and consecration are all future in terms of this point in the book. Moses, in the context of this part of the book, is only receiving the instructions for those things. Therefore, the fact that the instructions don't seem to be in what we would believe to be chronological order, is immaterial. Things will be in order when Moses implemented the full complement of God's instructions once he left the mountain and began the work.

The next set of instructions involved the laver for washing the priests in preparation for the performance of their duties. The priests had to be standing before the Lord in a state of ceremonial cleanliness. The laver was made of the bronze from the mirrors some of the Israelite women brought out of Egypt.

Exodus 30:17–18 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “You shall also make a laver [כִּיּוֹר] of bronze, with its base [בֵּן] of bronze, for washing [רָחַץ]; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it.

Exodus 38:8 Moreover, he made the laver of bronze with its base of bronze, from the mirrors of the serving women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Laver, *כִּיּוֹר*, means a basin, a laver, or a pot. It refers to a basin or a laver for washing or for cooking. In this context, it is used for washing. The root of the word refers to excavating by hammering implying a bowl shape. Washing, *רָחַץ*, means to wash off, to wash away, or to bathe. It refers to washing with water in order to make oneself clean. No one knows what the laver looked like which means you can find numerous artist's depictions of it that all vary one from the other.

This wasn't a washing for hygienic purposes; it was a washing performed in a ceremonial sense signifying one was purified and in a state of cleanliness that rendered one acceptable before God. No soap or other cleaning agent is mentioned in connection with this washing. Perhaps they used some sort of wash cloth, but they are never depicted using one. It is highly unlikely the priests could get completely free from dirt by running some water over their hands and feet. We have to remember how people had to live in those times. Most places did not have sanitary sewage systems and garbage pickup. The Romans did have some sanitary sewage systems; we saw one at Beit Shan, and there were some garbage dumps if people would use them. Animals went up and down the streets daily. The streets were dirt and depending on the weather they were either dusty and dirty or muddy and dirty. The streets were full of sewage, garbage, animal manure, and dirt. That was why people had servants to cleanse

the feet of guests entering their homes. That became a custom out of necessity. That kind of cleanliness isn't the point although some theologians try to make it the point.

Symbolic spiritual cleanliness by means of washing is presented as truth in the Scriptures.

Proverbs 30:12 There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, Yet is not washed from his filthiness.

Isaiah 4:4 When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning,

Some theologians equate the idea of purity with the state of the body being free from dirt. If that kind of cleansing is required for the priests to appear before God, they probably could never appear before Him. They couldn't wash themselves enough to get that spotlessly clean. Washing a sinful body does not make a person spiritually clean before God even if every speck of dirt could be removed. The washing away of dirt from the hands and the feet symbolized the kind of spiritual cleanliness required to appear before a holy God.

The base was made of bronze. It was obviously constructed in such a way the basin would be held in or on the top. It may or may not have been on a pedestal. It could have been nesting in a four-point holder as an extension of each leg which I think is the more likely option because that's how the lavers in the Temple were built.

1 Kings 7:34 Now there were four supports at the four corners of each stand; its supports were part of the stand itself.

Base, כֶּבֶד, means a base, a pedestal, or a stand. It was simply a secure, steady means of holding this basin of water for ready access by the priests. It had to be small because it had to be portable. In contrast, the bronze lavers in the courtyard of Solomon's Temple were quite large. They stood about 8 feet in height and held about 250 gallons of water (1 Kings 7:27-39). The laver used in the Tabernacle would have been easy to clean, but how did they keep the water clean in those huge lavers in the Temple? The water was obviously not running water; therefore, algae would have grown in it. Dust would have settled into the water. Bugs would drop into it. Birds would have perched on the edges. How did they keep those huge amounts of water clean? Unger reported that Jewish commentators stated the water had to be renewed daily.¹ That makes sense for the laver in the Tabernacle, but the lavers in the Temple held large amounts of water that would be difficult to empty and refill especially since they didn't have electricity driven pumps. The huge laver, the molten sea, in the Temple courtyard held about 15,000 gallons of water, if I correctly figured it. It's no small task to remove that much water, cleanse the laver, and refill it with clean water.

The Tabernacle laver was located between the altar and the sanctuary. Exactly where it was positioned is unknown. Most depictions of the Tabernacle show it located in a straight line from the entrance to the outer court, to the al-

¹ Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "laver," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 758.

tar, to the laver, to the entrance to the sanctuary. The fact is, we don't know. The ten lavers and the huge bronze laver, the molten sea, for the Temple were off to the side. The ten small lavers were five to a side on the north and south sides of the sanctuary and the molten sea was near the altar.

The purpose of the laver was for washing their hands and their feet at specific times for performing specific tasks. Failure to follow this command would result in the death of the offending priest.

Exodus 30:19–21 “Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the LORD. “So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations.”

Every time a priest entered the sanctuary, he had to wash his hands and his feet before entering. Every time a priest approached the altar with the purpose of burning a sacrificial offering on it, he had to wash his hands and his feet. This was such an important command, God would put them to death for failure to follow it. This was a command that was in effect for as long as the Tabernacle and the Temple were in existence. This was a very straightforward and simple command, but it presented a powerful doctrinal truth. Only spiritually clean people may come into the presence of the Lord. The symbolic washing of water here is a type or a picture of the washing we received in Christ that makes us spiritually pure. This is not because we are pure in and of ourselves or that we

have made ourselves pure, but because Christ is pure and we have His righteousness applied to us the moment we believe.

The concept of washing representing spiritual cleansing and that truth was also applied in the New Testament. One instance occurred when the Lord washed the feet of the disciples in the Upper Room (John 13:4-20). In this case, washing the feet was equated to confession of personal sin resulting in restoration of fellowship. Paul wrote the church, the bride of Christ, was sanctified by means of cleansing by the washing of water with the word (Eph. 5:26). Paul also compared washing to regeneration (Titus 3:5). Paul's own conversion was followed by a spiritual application of washing.

The next instructions concerned the formula the Israelites were to use for mixing the anointing oil.

Exodus 30:22–25 Moreover, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh [מֵר] five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon [קִנְמוֹן] half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane [קָדָה] two hundred and fifty, and of cassia [קִדְדָה] five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. “You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil.

This oil was not simply olive oil; it was a specially created olive oil mixture to be used to consecrate the Tabernacle and the priests. “This specially formulated oil was associated with the sacredness of the tabernacle and the priests. Their

holiness and dedication to God alone was marked by the special anointing, making them most holy.”²

Myrrh, מֵר, was a yellowish to reddish brown resinous gum or oil related to the Balsam tree or other oily trees, fragrant and bitter to the taste. The myrrh was liquid in form [דָּרוֹר]. Most English versions translate this word as “liquid.” The NET Bible translates it “free-flowing.” The KJV translates it “pure” which is not supported. The presupposition here is the spices are all pure in the sense of being undiluted and in their pure, pristine form as befitting the Lord’s oil of anointing.

Cinnamon, קַנְמוֹן, is the dried inner bark of the cinnamon tree. It is a pleasant-smelling spice that is the same spice we associate with cinnamon today. The sweet flavor in it comes from the essential oil it contains. This was prepared by pounding the bark, softening it in seawater, and then distilling it.³

Cane, קַנָּה, means a rod, a stalk, a reed, a calamus reed. Some translations of the Bible translate this word as “calamus” rather than “cane.” Calamus is also known as common sweet flag which is a sweet herb. The Hebrew is a generic word referring to any reed or rush type of plant. In this context, it apparently refers to an aromatic, fragrant cane of some sort, but no one seems to know exactly what it was. Calamus may or may not be correct. In Jeremiah 6:20, the prophet referred to this as “sweet cane from a distant land”.

² Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., s.v. “מֵר,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, volume 2, ג-ה (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:1095.

³ Jesus Boat, <https://www.jesusboat.com/the-secrets-of-holy-anointing-oil-whats-in-it-and-why/> (accessed 28 March 18).

Cassia, קדה, “is a sweet-smelling bark, similar to cinnamon, but its strength and quality are different. Its bark is darker, thicker and coarser and the corky outer layer is often left on. The outer surface is rough and grayish brown, the inside bark is smoother and reddish-brown. It is cheaper than cinnamon and often sold as ground cinnamon.”⁴

The spices were weighed according to the shekel of the sanctuary, שֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ. Sources do not agree on whether or not the shekel of the sanctuary was the same as the common shekel. The Nelson’s Dictionary says they are the same; the Holman Dictionary says they are different. No one really knows. The term “shekel of the sanctuary” may have referred to the purpose rather than to the weight. The shekel probably weighed about .4 of an ounce. The oil and the spices in this amount make quite a bit of anointing oil.

Exodus 30:22–24 The LORD spoke to Moses: “Take choice spices: twelve and a half pounds of free-flowing myrrh, half that—about six and a quarter pounds—of sweet-smelling cinnamon, six and a quarter pounds of sweet-smelling cane, and twelve and a half pounds of cassia, all weighed according to the sanctuary shekel, and four quarts of olive oil. [NET Bible]

The anointing oil had 12 ½ pounds of liquid myrrh and a gallon of olive oil into which were mixed 25 pounds of spices. Many people wonder how this could make a pourable liquid because it sounds like this much solid material mixed into that relatively small amount of oil would be a wet lump of spices. First, we have to note the myrrh is in liquid form. Perhaps the liquid myrrh combined with the olive oil would have made a pourable liquid once the solid spices were

⁴ Ibid.

mixed into it. Cassuto has an alternative explanation that claims the other spices were also turned into a liquid form and he has Akkadian and rabbinic sources to confirm his theory. Reacting to the criticism of this formula that it wouldn't be in a pourable liquid form, Cassuto wrote: "But those who raise this objection have overlooked the fact that the entire aromatic material was not mixed with the oil, but the spices were subjected to a long and complicated process of soaking in water and boiling etc., over a period of many days, as we are informed by the Akkadian documents that describe the making of the anointing oil, and as is indicated also in rabbinic tradition, and at the end of distillation only the fragrance of the spices remained in the oil, not the raw material."⁵ We already noted that cinnamon bark was softened in sea water and distilled to produce the spice. We will also note that a trained perfumer was employed to formulate the anointing oil. One wouldn't need a perfumer to simply dump a bunch of solid spices into a bucket of oil and mix them together. People who use perfume don't smear a wet, semi-solid mass on their bodies for perfume; they put a liquid on that is not visible once the medium that carries the scent evaporates and leaves the scent behind. This took a process and a professional trained in that process. When bodies were prepared for burial, the spices spread on the burial shroud were in the form of a wet mass that could be smeared on the burial shroud and would dry into a solid. That, however, is a different facet of the spice mixing business and not the same as the process used for perfume.

⁵ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 397.

Objects to be anointed were not inundated with oil. A drop or two was sufficient to anoint something. With the exception of pouring some oil on the head of the High Priest, everything else was sprinkled or smeared with a few drops of oil.

This oil was holy, that is, set apart for sacred use.

Exodus 30:25 “You shall make of these a holy [קֹדֶשׁ] anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer [רֹקֵחַ]; it shall be a holy anointing oil.

Perfumer, רֹקֵחַ, means to make perfume, to mix spices. It refers to a person who prepares and mixes aromatic cosmetic and health products consisting of oils, powders, herbs, and various kinds of fragrant materials. “Making perfume was a highly developed skill, and some [perfumes] were known to retain their smell for centuries.”⁶ This was a skill in demand at that time due to the difficulty in easily obtaining the means to bathe. They simply could not bathe to the extent we think is necessary in our culture today. Presumably, only the wealthy could afford perfumes. In 1 Samuel 8:13, Samuel warned the people that a king would take their daughters to be perfumers among other things. By the time of David, the sons of the priests had assumed the duty of mixing the spices (1 Chron. 9:30). Whether this was for the incense or the anointing oil or both is not stated. My assumption would be both.

Holy, קֹדֶשׁ, means a holy thing or object, holiness, and sacredness referring to a person or an inanimate object which is dedicated and consecrated to

⁶ Ronal F. Youngblood, gen. ed., s.v. “perfume,” in *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 874.

God. This oil was set apart for the purpose of serving God alone. It was not for common use.

This oil was used to anoint the Tabernacle and all its furnishings.

Exodus 30:26–29 “With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand. “You shall also consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be holy.

By anointing the Tabernacle and everything associated with it, these things were made holy and set apart for God. The anointing may have also served to convey that message to the people. This God was no minor God. This God was the one true God, the Creator God of the Universe and the people needed to not only know Him as such, but act like they knew it and conduct themselves accordingly. God is holy and His Tabernacle was holy. The anointing of the Tabernacle and its priests showed the people that this structure, its furnishings, and the men serving the God residing in it were set apart for His service.

Aaron and his sons could not minister before the Lord without being anointed and consecrated, that is, set apart and dedicated to serving God.

Exodus 30:30 “You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate [קִדַּשׁ] them, that they may minister [יָבִיטוּ] as priests to Me.

We know that in the ordination ceremony, only the High Priest was anointed. I think it is likely the anointing of the High Priest represented the anointing of the entire Aaronic Priesthood. That’s why you will see the words “anoint Aaron and his sons” when we know only the High Priest was anointed and other Scrip-

tures confirm that fact. In other words, this is a figurative expression that has to refer to the entire priesthood when the Scriptures say only Aaron was anointed with oil. Consecrate, *קִדַּשׁ*, means to be set apart and dedicated for service to God, and minister, *בָּהֵן*, is the act of serving as a priest and carrying out the duties assigned to the man occupying the position. Remember, we noted earlier that *כֹּהֵן* is the noun meaning priest and *בָּהֵן* is the verb meaning to serve as the priest or to minister as the priest.

The anointing oil was not to be treated as common or profane. It could not be used in the specified formula for any use other than the sacred uses God determined for it.

Exodus 30:31–33 “You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. ‘It shall not be poured on anyone’s body, nor shall you make any like it in the same proportions; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. ‘Whoever shall mix any like it or whoever puts any of it on a layman shall be cut off [כָּרַת] from his people.’”

In case anyone would be tempted to duplicate the anointing oil formula, God had Moses tell the people that act was absolutely prohibited. Not only could it not be duplicated, but it couldn’t even be used to anoint anyone other than the High Priest. Nor could it be used to anoint any object other than those objects specified by God through Moses. This oil was holy and set apart for God’s use alone.

Anyone who mixed that formula to make their own oil for personal use was to be cut off. This prohibition would also extend to any professional perfumer who thought he could cash in by selling this oil to lay people.

Most people believe being “cut off,” *קָרַת*, referred to being put to death because it can mean to exterminate or to destroy. The word can have a violent connotation to it depending on context (Micah 5:10), but it can also mean to ostracize or remove. It can mean to enter into or to cut a covenant, but that is not the context here. It means to cut or to cut off. It refers to severing an object from its source or to cut something into parts implying a violent action. Others think it refers to banishment which would remove the offender from the covenant community and that is a plausible meaning. If that happened, the offender couldn't work, he couldn't worship, and he couldn't be a part of the Israelite society. Rabbis believed it meant the offender would die childless and before his time, but that seems unlikely because it doesn't deal with the issue in a timely manner which the text suggests must be done. It could refer either to putting the offender to death or it could refer to excommunication from the covenant community both of which are serious consequences for violating this command.

The next revelation to Moses concerned the skilled craftsmen God appointed for the construction of the Tabernacle.

Exodus 31:1–5 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “See, I have called by name Bezalel [*בְּצַלְאֵל*], the son of Uri [*אוּרִי*], the son of Hur [*חֹר*], of the tribe of Judah [*יְהוּדָה*]. “I have filled [*מָלֵא*] him with the Spirit of God in wisdom [*חָכְמָה*], in understanding [*תְּבוּנָה*], in knowledge [*דַּעַת*], and in all kinds of craftsmanship [*מְלָאָה*], to make artistic designs [*מְחֻשְׁבָּה*] for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship.

God specifically called Bezalel to serve Him in the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. The text never tells us why this man was chosen.

Presumably, he was already a skilled craftsman, but God filled him with the Spirit in order to enhance the skills he already possessed. Nothing but the best workmanship could go into the construction God's house. While only the Levites could ever serve in the Tabernacle and handle its furnishings, constructing it was apparently another matter because Bezalel was from the tribe of Judah, Oholiab was from Dan, and skillful people from the other tribes were used in the work. Many people had to have been involved in the construction effort from all the tribes of Israel, but once it was complete, they could never touch the holy things again.

Bezalel is the first man in the Scriptures said to be filled with the Spirit. He was not baptized with the Holy Spirit, he was filled. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a unique blessing reserved for this dispensation for those who place their faith in Christ Jesus. The filling with the Holy Spirit is the result of a "sovereign act of God whereby He possesses someone for special activity."⁷ Stuart wrote being filled with the Spirit "is a biblical idiom for 'having from God the ability to do or say exactly what God wants done or said.'"⁸ I'm not sure I would be quite that dogmatic, but that is generally the context we have here. God is going to insure this already talented man, and those working with him, will excel in constructing the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Fill, מִלֵּא, is not a technical word in terms of the-

⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 434.

⁸ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus*, gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 651.

ology; it simply means to fill, to be full, to be complete, to fulfill, or to satisfy. In this case, the word is being used in a figurative sense referring to God's influence on this craftsman to do his very best work. The use of the word is figurative, but the effect is quite tangible; the Spirit of God wasn't visible, but His influence on the completed project was visible. This man was empowered by the Spirit to do the work God wanted him to do in the way God wanted it done. The finished work wasn't a man's idea of what God wanted; it was the completion or the fulfillment of what God wanted. God could have empowered this man for service without revealing it to anyone let alone recording it in the Scriptures, but the Israelites needed to know this Tabernacle was holy and built exactly the way He wanted it built by people doing His will, not their own personal will.

Interestingly, there is a contradictory concept of filling opposed to the filling of the Spirit. If the filling of the Spirit enables people to accomplish God's will, what does the filling of Satan accomplish? It accomplishes the opposite. Being filled by Satan's influence leads one to do the things Satan wants done. That was the problem with Ananias. Peter said, "Ananias why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ...?" (Acts 5:3). Ananias was a believer; therefore, we may conclude that believers are not immune from the influence of Satan in their lives. We are subject to spiritual influences, not indwelling, but influence. It should be our goal to keep our minds focused on Christ which should serve to keep us walking by the Spirit and in that way remain apart from Satan's influence in our lives.

I do not think it would be correct to assume Bezalel lacked wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and craftsmanship before he was filled with the Spirit and God gave him those qualities in total. It would be more accurate to consider the filling of the Spirit to be an act of broadening, sharpening, and enhancing those qualities already possessed by Bezalel. His abilities would be at their peak in these areas enabling him to perfectly fulfill God's will in the construction of the Tabernacle. God could have taken a completely unskilled man and supernaturally given him the skill to accomplish this mission, but I don't think the Scriptures indicate that is what happened.

Let's consider a contemporary example. We wouldn't think that a new Christian who has no Bible knowledge at all would be filled with the Spirit and enabled to teach the Bible at a high, knowledgeable level without study and training, would we? But we would expect that a new Christian who has a desire to learn the Word of God would be enabled by the Spirit to learn and grow and someday acquire that high level of biblical knowledge, wouldn't we? We would also expect a new Christian to be filled with the Spirit such that he can walk by the Spirit and achieve spiritual things in accordance with his level of spiritual maturity, wouldn't we? That's the kind of analogy I think is in play in this situation. In this case, we have a skilled man whose skills are perfected by God to perform the most excellent work possible in His service.

God could have supernaturally built His Tabernacle, but He used human beings operating according to his instructions to build it. He still operates that

way. He uses faithful believers to do His will and through them He accomplishes His will and makes Himself known beyond the revelation of the creation.

Wisdom, *חָכְמָה*, means wisdom, skill, experience, or shrewdness. In this context, it can refer to technical skill, aptitude, experience, and good sense. Being shrewd and exhibiting good sense seem to relate to the ability to conduct one's life well and to have the life skills to interact with people and maintain cordial relationships with them. Biblical wisdom isn't necessarily about one's IQ although that is part of it. It is primarily about one's desire to know and serve God which then allows one to accept instruction and learn according to the wisdom of God not man. Proverbs 1:7 defines wisdom.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Bezalel was apparently a faithful man who desired to know God and who also had the technical skills and aptitude God could use to have the Tabernacle built to His specifications. No one has perfect wisdom and, in this case, God perfected Bezalel's wisdom in order to accomplish the goals set before him.

Understanding, *תְּבוּנָה*, means intelligence, aptitude, skill, from a root meaning understanding, insight, and wisdom. It refers to the capacity for discerning the correct, right course of action. This is the ability to correctly solve problems. Genuine insight and the skill of discernment are made available to the one who fears God.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Knowledge, *דַעַת*, refers to knowledge gained in various ways by the senses. In this context, it is referring to technical knowledge or ability. This characteristic implies an ability to continue to learn new things.

These three words are often used together in the Scriptures along with instruction and law. They are almost synonyms. All things considered, we have a picture of this man Bezalel that describes a man who is a faithful Israelite who fears the Lord and who possesses the skills necessary to conduct God's business in the construction of God's house, the Tabernacle. He is intelligent and he is a leader. He is able to discern the best way to accomplish the task at hand and he is able to continue to learn so that his skills are continually improved upon.

Bezalel was apparently experienced in many different areas that required skill to complete. Craftmanship, *מְלָאָה*, means work, occupation, business, something made, property, or workmanship. The word "all" qualifies "craftmanship" suggesting Bezalel possessed skills in all the areas in which God needed skilled craftsmen in order to complete the Tabernacle.

The skills mentioned here are along the lines of design and artistry rather than the skills of carpentry or masonry. He needed to be able to fashion gold and silver, to work in bronze possibly meaning casting it but certainly decorating it, to be able to work the stones to mount in their settings, and to carve designs in wood. I don't think the text limits him to these activities. If he wasn't actually skilled in the other areas required, he was certainly knowledgeable enough in

“all craftsmanship” that he could supervise and direct those who were skilled in those areas. He apparently possessed the knowledge to judge the work of others such as dyeing and weaving cloth and the carpentry skills necessary to build the Tabernacle whether or not he actually did that work himself.

The word “artistic” is not in the text. It literally reads “devise designs” or “make designs” which is how the TANAKH renders it. Designs, מְהִשָּׁבָה, means a thought, a purpose, a device, or an intention. It refers to the plans or intentions pertaining to skillful work that arise from one’s thoughts. This could be more than just artistry which is too limiting; it could refer to the basic design of the objects the art adorns. Artistry is just a part of the process. The NET Bible explains the use of the word in this verse: “The infinitive emphasizes that Bezalel will be able to design or plan works that are artistic or skillful. He will think thoughts or devise the plans, and then he will execute them in silver or stone or whatever other material he uses.” The KJV uses “cunning works” and the ASV uses “skillful works” but the other major translations use “artistic works” or “artistic designs” or something similar to that.

God appointed a man to be Bezalel’s helper or second-in-command, and He also appointed other skilled men and women to work on the necessary tasks required to construct the Tabernacle.

Exodus 31:6 “And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab [אֹהִיאֵב], the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

All we know about Oholiab is he is from the tribe of Dan. Presumably, he is also skilled in the areas of construction and design and qualified to not only do the work but supervise others as well. God knew all the people who were skilled in the various areas of construction necessary to finish the Tabernacle and He divinely insured everything made was up to His standards. This verse also points out the fact all the Israelites who had the skills necessary to further the construction of the Tabernacle were involved in the effort. Once it was completed and consecrated, they could no longer touch any of it, but they made it in the first place.

Moses then repeated, in general terms, all the things God commanded Moses to build.

Exodus 31:7–11 the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the mercy seat upon it, and all the furniture of the tent, the table also and its utensils, and the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering also with all its utensils, and the laver and its stand, the woven garments as well, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, with which to carry on their priesthood; the anointing oil also, and the fragrant incense for the holy place, they are to make them according to all that I have commanded you.”

Notice the last command: “they are to make them according to all that I have commanded you.” There was no room allowed for freelance artistic expression in the construction of the Tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priest’s clothing. God told Moses what He wanted and He expected it to be made exactly as He commanded it to be made.