

Parashat Vayakhel וַיִּקְהַל

Torah: Exodus 35:1–38:20

Haftarah: 1 Kings 7:40–50

Building with Wisdom

General Overview

With these three things [wisdom, understanding, and knowledge] the world was created . . . and with these three things also the Tabernacle was made. . . with these three things the Temple also was built... Also when God will rebuild it in the time to come, it will be with these three things that it will be built... (Shemot Rabbah 58.4)

Parashat Vayakhel essentially begins with the written account of the building of the Mishkan and its ministers' implements. We have continually emphasized that the Mishkan (Tabernacle) is the house of the divine family where God is the Husband and His people, Israel, is His bride. This house is where fellowship and intimacy are accomplished, in a symbolic, yet real way. The Levites, who minister in the Mishkan, are the spiritual representatives of the rest of Israel. They serve God daily, along with serving Israel, in the Mishkan.

Exposition

It is important to examine how the building of the house took place. This is the thrust of this week's sidra and in order to comment we shall do something different this week. This time, we will base our thoughts on the midrash which we have quoted above. First let me explain the context of the midrash, then we will proceed with our commentary. As we do so, there will be three main points:

- I. Building with Wisdom
- II. Building with Understanding
- III. Building with Knowledge

In this excerpt from Parashat Vayekhel, we will focus on section I, Building with Wisdom.

The Meaning of the Midrash

In the midrash quoted above, the sages are discussing the merits of Bezalel, one of the choice craftsmen who was chosen to oversee the construction of the Mishkan. After noting what the Torah says about him, the rabbis summarized Bezalel's main characteristics as "wisdom, understanding, and knowledge." Since he was the one primarily responsible for the building, the sages were able to say that the Mishkan was built with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. They also suggest that both the former Temple and the future Temple share the same characteristics. However, for now, we are mainly concerned with the Mishkan, since that is the focus of our text.

I. Building with Wisdom

In what ways was the Mishkan built with wisdom? We suggest at least two. First, great wisdom was used in providing for the materials with which to construct it. Secondly, the same wisdom was demonstrated in the choice of the workers. Let us look at each separately.

A. The Collection

The parasha opens with an account of how the necessary materials were secured that were to be used in the construction of the Mishkan. As we look at this story, we can learn a great lesson on the nature of giving in God's holy community.

Resources were needed to secure those materials and the only source to obtain them was from the children of Israel. The story is rather familiar; most know what happened. Moshe made a plea for people to voluntarily give what they could — money, jewellery, cloth, etc. They gave so much that Moshe had to turn some down! In addition, they were requested to give of their skills, time, and energies to build the Mishkan. Again, the Torah relates that, in the end, under the leadership of Moshe, Bezalel, and Oholiav, "So all the work on the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses."

1. Commanded Giving

At this point, it might be helpful to look a little deeper at the subject of giving. According to the Torah, there are two types of giving: voluntary and mandatory. Mandatory giving is usually described in terms of the tithe. Contrary to popular opinion, the mandatory giving described in the Torah is not 10%, but somewhere between 20–23% of one's annual income. This includes several types of tithes. This kind of giving served as a kind of an income tax, gathered to supply the needs of Israel's national religious institutions, such as the priests and the upkeep of the Mishkan.

Specifically, the Torah mentions, first, the "Levite's Tithe" in Leviticus 27:30–33. The purpose of this tithe was to supply the Levites with food and resources with which they were able to live. This was because the Levites were the only tribe that was not granted an inheritance of land. Thus, unlike the other tribes, it was not easy for them to have their daily needs met. The Levite's Tithe was designed for this purpose. Since the Levites were devoted to serving in the Mishkan, the national place of worship, God placed the burden of supplying their needs upon the rest of the children of Israel.

The second tithe may be called the "Fellowship Tithe," or "Festival Tithe." Found in Deuteronomy 12:6–7, this tithe provided for what some have called the "national pot-luck dinner." It was taken to the sanctuary and used to provide a wonderful fellowship dinner for the worshipper's family, friends, and priest. This tithe is interesting in that in essence the one who gave it, gave it to himself to be used for himself and his family so that they may rejoice before the Lord.

Many people do not usually think of giving to the Lord in this way. They usually view the giving of tithes as something that they must sacrifice out of their own pockets to put into some collection plate as it passes by them. After they give it,

they are never too sure how it is spent. Moreover, many spiritual leaders, when they teach on tithing, do not even mention this kind of tithe, it does not support their “ministries.” Yet, this tithe is just as commanded as any other. Its ultimate end is to help the one who gave it to come before the Lord with his family and enjoy themselves as God gives them the freedom to do so.

A third type of commanded giving is found in Deuteronomy 14:28–29. This was called the “Poor Man’s Tithe.” It was offered every three years to fund the national social welfare system, feeding the disadvantaged within Israel.

In addition to all of this, farmers were required to leave the corners of their fields uncut for poor people (Leviticus 19:9–10). Also, every seven years the land was to lie fallow (Exodus 23:10–11) causing the farmers to forfeit the whole year’s income that would have been gained from the crops had they been grown.

All of these are examples of different kinds of giving which the Lord commanded the children of Israel to give to Him. As we have already indicated, in reality, this commanded giving was used to support the state institutions such as the national place of worship, the national priests, and the national social welfare system.

2. Out of the Heart

On the other hand, the Torah also teaches that there is a place in the people’s lives for voluntary giving. One such passage is here in this parasha. This passage indicates that God wanted His people to voluntarily give out of their hearts in order to support a special spiritual project, which He commanded to be performed. Thus, essentially, the voluntary giving was to be in accordance with what the Lord would put upon the individual heart (35:5) where the person gave willingly and cheerfully to support God’s causes.

According to the Renewed Covenant Scriptures, the resources for the Body of Messiah are provided in exactly the same way. In fact, the Renewed Covenant Scriptures teach both a voluntary and a mandatory giving in exactly the same way as the Torah.

As far as commanded giving was concerned, Yeshua supported the giving of the half shekel Temple Tax from Jewish believers. This was the mandatory giving to support the national religious institutions. Moreover, Yeshua also taught that believers are to pay the national taxes of the political governments that rule them. This is reflected in the “render unto Caesar” teaching. These are examples of the mandatory giving taught in the Renewed Covenant Scriptures.

However, the Renewed Covenant Scriptures relegate to voluntary giving that which is used to support God’s causes within the Body of Messiah. Look, for example at 2 Corinthians 8–9. Here Paul tells the Corinthian believers that he intended to take up a collection from them to help aid the believers in Jerusalem. He told them, “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). This situation parallels that of Moshe in the wilderness when he asked for support for the building of the Mishkan. The principles are the same.

This may come as a shock for some, but the Renewed Covenant Scriptures do not teach that we should tithe! For, as we have pointed out, neither does the

Torah! True the basic unit of mandatory giving is the 10%, but not all of the time. In one case, the commanded giving is about 3%. In another instance, the Shmittah (7th) year, we could say that the giving amounted to a sacrifice of an entire year's income unto the Lord.

Thus, concerning mandatory giving, the Torah taught that several tithes and some extra, were to be given to support the national religious institutions. The Renewed Covenant Scriptures teach the same.

3. Don't Worry!

There is one additional thought on the subject of giving. Believers are encouraged to give, and give liberally to help supply the needs within the Body of Messiah. This was certainly true if the children of Israel were to follow the Torah. Imagine living a whole year receiving no visible income. This certainly required a great deal of faith and trust from the Israelites.

It is the same with believers today. However, we have additional encouragement. We also have the writings of the Renewed Covenant Scriptures. For example, in Matthew 6:24–34, Yeshua, the head of the Body, exhorts us not to worry about how our needs will be met. He summarizes His teaching on this subject by saying, “Don't worry! But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”

Thus, we are to give and give generously to support God's projects. Moreover, in our giving, we are not to worry how our own personal needs are met. The Messiah will handle that problem.

4. A Havdalah Custom

In order to help encourage you along the lines of giving, may we share how the Lord has worked in our group in Israel? Every Saturday night when our fellowship group celebrated “Havdalah” together, (“Havdalah” means “separation” and is a brief service that is traditionally celebrated to mark the exit of Shabbat and the start of a new week.) we participated in all of the traditional customs — plus we added one of our own.

We brought out a piece of challah saved from our Erev Shabbat dinner on Friday night. After we gave a blessing, we ate it. As we were eating it, someone read Matthew 6:24–34 about Messiah supplying all that we need in order to serve Him faithfully.

With this passage in mind, we all ate the challah as an act of faith. On Friday night, as we welcomed in the Shabbat, we ate the challah as an act of praise for how God supplied our needs during the previous week. At Havdalah, we ate it as an act of faith, taking God at His word that He would in fact, meet all of our needs during the new week we were about to begin.

Invariably, as we did this, someone shared an incredible story of victory and praise about God's miraculous provision. More often than not, that testimony involved someone in the Body of Messiah giving sacrificially to help to meet their needs.