

Parashah Seventy-Three

Exodus 38:21–31; Jeremiah 30:18–22; Romans 12:1–13

notes by Tim Hegg

The texts chosen for this Shabbat's readings all focus on the matter of building a place fit for the dwelling of God. This, in itself, is an amazing concept: that the Almighty should dwell among His people. But perhaps even more amazing is that He puts into the hands of His people the responsibility of building the place where He will reside. This is in striking contrast to the norm of the Ancient Near East where Kings displayed their power and wealth by building for themselves mansions of splendor. Each monarch sought to outdo his predecessor, making his palace more ornate and costly.

Now surely the King of all the Universe could have miraculously built a palace for Himself that would have caused all others to pale in its glory. But instead, He solicits the work of craftsmen, and utilizes the building materials that the people would bring. Granted, He endows the craftsmen with the power of His own wisdom and ability by sending His Spirit to aid them. Yet the Tabernacle, in all of its finery, was still a moveable tent (*mishkan*). Its beauty was to be seen in an entirely different fashion, in the way that His presence enabled the people of Israel to walk in righteousness. He used the “common stuff,” brought by the people themselves, to fashion a place for His dwelling. Yet in their bringing the materials for the construction of the Tabernacle, they did so with hearts of gratefulness and worship. In doing so, the common materials were transformed into the palace of the King. God takes the work of our hands, and recreates it into something of eternal value. One cannot help but be mindful of the words of our Master when He taught:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; (Matt. 6:19-20)

In our *parashah*, it is interesting to note that the gold and silver brought by the people is labelled a *tenuphah* (תְּנוּפָה), that is, a “wave offering.” What exactly is the significance of a “wave offering?” Generally, the wave offering was that part of the peace offering (those offerings in which all were allowed to participate) that belonged to the priest. It was waved as unto the Lord, since the priest functioned as His servant to perform the sacred duties in the Tabernacle. The *tenuphah* is found in connection with the guilt offering of the cleansed leper (Lev 14:12, 21, 24), the sheaf of First Fruits (Lev 23:15), the two loaves at Shavuot (Lev 23:17, 20), and even the Levites themselves are designated as *tenuphah* in as much as their entire lives were given over to the service of HaShem.

What should we learn from the fact that the silver and gold donated by the people for the building of the Tabernacle is designated as a “wave offering?” The obvious significance is that the Tabernacle was not first and foremost for the people, but for God. Their gift of silver and gold was not so that they could have a wonderful “cathedral” to set themselves apart from other peoples. The Tabernacle was a dwelling place for the presence of the Almighty—a place in which He could dwell among His people. It was first and foremost for Him and for His glory.

This speaks to the motivation for giving the gold and silver in the first place—it was given as a *tenuphah*, a wave-offering, which by its very description is an offering given to God for His purposes. All too often we fall into the trap of man-made religion in which our “cathedrals” are the

outcomes of our efforts rather than the glory of God. People are more impressed with their religion than they are with their Maker. But if we are living out Torah as God intends, this will cause those who see us to marvel, not at our “religious corporation” or our magnificent buildings, but at the One Who gave us such wonderful wisdom for life and community:

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as Adonai my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is Adonai our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole Torah which I am setting before you today? (Deut. 4:5–8)

Our *parashah* is called *Pekudei* (פְּקוּדֵי) in the annual cycle of readings, after the first distinct word in the portion. *Pekudei* means “reckonings.” In other words, Moses made a careful accounting of all the silver, gold, and bronze that people were bringing. This tells us something about leadership, for the people into whose hands the precious metals were entrusted were leading, trustworthy men. Ithamar, the son of Aaron, along with Bezalel and Aholiab are noted as those with authority in keeping the donated materials. We noted in the previous *parashot* that Bezalel and Aholiab were, in particular, endowed with the Spirit of God for their work. So if these leaders were men of integrity and character, why did Moses feel the need to keep an accurate accounting of the precious metals?

Two answers may be given. First, the integrity of the leaders, including Moses himself, is known by fact, not by assumption. Leaders must be above reproach, and the manner in which they handle the funds that come into their possession must be accounted for. A great many leaders in our day have suspicion hanging over them because of the way they have gathered wealth from the people of God.

Second, an accurate reckoning of the costly materials that the people brought gave witness of God’s miraculous work among them. The Sages note something interesting in our text. All of the silver and gold that was gathered is entirely used in the various implements of the Tabernacle. Usually, during the process of casting and shaping, some metal is wasted. But the text indicates that the amount collected equalled the weight of the objects made—none was lost. The only explanation the Sages can give is that the ability to make the parts of the Tabernacle was given supernaturally to Bezalel and Aholiab by the Ruach HaKodesh. This reminds of the necessary “ingredient” in preparing any dwelling for the Almighty—the Ruach HaKodesh must be active in the work. In our modern world the work of the Ruach is constantly counterfeited or manufactured with smoke and mirrors. How do you know when the work you are doing—the “tabernacle” you are building—is energized by the Ruach? The sure mark of His work is that He accomplishes what no mere mortal can.

Let us consider our own community—the “building” we hope is fit for the presence of the Almighty. Is the Ruach’s work evident among us? The fruit of His work is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Are these the supernatural qualities we find more often than not in our shul? Have we learned true love for Him and for each other? Are we patient, kind, faithful? These are not the characteristics of man-made “tabernacles,” but they are the inevitable reality in the “tabernacle” built by those endowed with the Ruach’s skill.

Let us consider, for a moment, the “fruit of the Spirit” as the silver and gold we bring for such

a “tabernacle.” Paul, in Gal 5:22–23, heads the list with “love.” This begins with love for God, and extends to love for our neighbor. Love for God means love for His truth, for one cannot rightly love God while living in error. How tenacious are we for God’s truth? Are we willing to stand firm for the truth, not being swayed to the left or right to accommodate the fleeting trends of our day? Do we stand firm on convictions, regardless of what it may cost us? If we do, then we will also express a genuine love for our neighbor—a love displayed in care and support, but a love that also is willing to be “tough” and enduring.

Next in the list is “joy.” Our tenacious holding onto the truth does not make us into somber kill-joys who walk about under a cloud of despair. We know the true meaning of joy that surpasses common understanding. We are able to rejoice even in the storm, because we have tasted of God’s goodness. By the grand gift of faith, God has endowed us with a spiritual ability to relax and rest in the greatness of His sovereign love. We know how to trust Him for the future, because we have experienced His faithfulness in the past. And so, even in the midst of trouble, we find deep-seated joy in His greatness, and in the bounty of life He has granted us.

Paul continues the list with “peace.” Shalom is a gift of God, and nothing equals the contentment of faith. Our lives are not characterized by the morose darkness of this fallen world. We have died with Messiah, and are hidden with Him in the heavenlies (Col 3:3). As such, we take from the future and live it out in the present. The glory of our reigning King encompasses our lives with shalom. We know how the story ends, and we live in the reality of that now.

Next is “patience.” Patience is the spiritual ability to leave the outcome to God. When life and relationships seem like a tangled mess of fishing line in the bottom of the boat, we resist the temptation to proceed with scissors. We know that cutting and tying will not yield a suitable outcome, so with patience we seek to untangle the mess and return it to its rightful state. We demonstrate patience when we allow God to work according to His schedule, not ours.

Paul continues with “kindness.” The word itself is built upon the root meaning “grace.” Having recognized the grace that God has shown to us, we willingly extend grace to others. We learn the spiritual exercise of forgiveness, because we know what it means to be forgiven.

Then comes “goodness.” The word itself may emphasize a quality that is seen or known, rather than a mere innate quality. Thus, there is an outward “beauty” to our lives. A good person is one who is characterized by doing good things. He is not a chameleon who changes colors in accordance with his environment. He is single hearted, striving toward the goal of that final day, when he will hear the words “well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21–23).

Paul continues with “faithfulness.” Faithfulness is the ability to remain at one’s post. God has given each of us a task to perform for His glory. “It is required of stewards that one be found faithful” (1Cor 4:1). The stewardship we have received is a sacred trust, with which we must be faithful. As husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters, will we perform the God-given duties we have received and remain faithful? These are the materials we bring to build a place for His dwelling.

Next in the list is “gentleness.” The word itself means “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.” Gentleness and humility are partners, because an honest assessment of oneself yields the conclusion that one is fraught with deficiencies. Recognizing our own foibles makes us gentle when we see lacks in others. We know how to help someone who has fallen, because we have also fallen and have been given a helping hand.

Paul concludes with “self-control.” Maturing faith is not impulsive. Faith relies upon wisdom,

because faith is bound to the truth. Wisdom seeks God’s solutions to the troubles life presents. It does not react from emotions, but seeks to reign in the first impulses, and patiently puts into practice the wisdom that comes from above (James 3:17).

These spiritual characteristics, then, are the silver and gold we bring to build God’s dwelling among us. By His grace, and through the work of His Spirit, we are partners with Him to build the tabernacle of His dwelling.

I might go further in the midrash and suggest that the “tabernacle” built by the Ruach is also beautiful. Try to imagine what the *Mishkan* must have looked like: silver and gold, bronze and tapestries, *techeilet* and scarlet—when it was finally erected it must have been stunning to say the least. It was therefore attractive—the kind of thing that arrested one’s attention.

Is that true of us? We are a building of living stones which should evoke the “ooh’s” and “aah’s” of passers-by? Granted, we are weak—He chose to grace the weak and despised of this world with His presence. Yet in spite of our weaknesses, the glory of His work shines forth, and bespeaks a deeper reality which the world longs to have. Do they see it in us? In our families, in our gatherings, in our community? Do they see it in the way we treat each other, talk about each other, care for each other? “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

And our children—they are being molded after the patterns they see in us. How are they being shaped? It is an interesting fact to contemplate that, unlike the two Temples that were subsequently built, and eventually destroyed, the Tabernacle never is captured or ransacked by Israel’s enemies. Granted, we have no clear notice in the biblical text what became of the Tabernacle, but we likewise never see its demise in the biblical history. Will our children enhance the “building of God’s presence” as they grow into adulthood and carry the truth into the next generation? May God grant us that we will, like the Spirit-endowed craftsmen of old, build a beautiful place where God’s presence is pleased to dwell לְדֹר וָדֹר, from generation to generation.

Yet another lesson is learned from our *parashah*: a good deal of the silver came from the half-shekel tax paid by every male over 20. The lesson in this is clear: everyone has the same to contribute, and when these contributions are combined, the net effect is a significant outcome for HaShem. “But,” you might respond, “surely some have much more to contribute than others!” In reality, this is only how it appears. Like the half-shekel tax, each one is able to “build” only as God enables via His Spirit, and each one who is truly born from above is gifted by the Spirit for this work. Thus, as each one, in accordance with the Spirit, adds his or her craftsmanship to the dwelling place of God’s presence, it takes on the beauty He intends. In this way, He receives the “applause” and not the workers themselves.

It is not as though the workers are unimportant. In our *parashah* Bezalel and Aholiab are both listed along with the tribe from which they came. In other words, the workers gain recognition as the servants of God. He does not intend to accomplish His work apart from us—though He certainly could if that’s what He wanted. Rather, HaShem has designed (for His own divine reasons) to complete His purposes through the efforts of His chosen ones. He calls them, endows them with spiritual abilities, and instructs them how to “build.” Then, in obedience to Him, each servant partners with Him to do His work, and to do it His way. The end result? A tabernacle fit for His presence—the very dwelling of God in the midst of His people.

All of this comes to us with a question: how am I building? We should begin this questioning within our own families, for this is the foundation of the whole building. If someone were to

evaluate how I spend my most valuable resources (time, energy, finances), would they see that I have put my family as the top priority? Am I consistently working hard to utilize the gifting with which God has endowed me, first in the lives of my spouse and children? in the lives of my parents and extended family? From here we can move to the larger community. How am I contributing to the overall “building” of the community with which I identify? By this I do not mean a physical building (though the facility we use is important and a necessary element of our growth as a community) nor the size of our community (as though a growing number who attend indicates some special success). What I mean by “building the community” is that we more and more understand ourselves as a “place,” a community where God’s presence is known—where His covenant righteousness is manifest in the way we treat each other, care for each other, bear each other’s burdens, and especially in the way that the truth of God in Messiah Yeshua is lived out day by day, year by year, generation to generation.

It is clear why the Sages chose the *haftarah* for our Torah portion. Jeremiah prophesies of the future when the dwelling place of God will be re-established within the midst of Israel, and we will worship in peace and thanksgiving. Moreover, like the silver and gold that was “reckoned” and none went missing, so the children of Israel will be multiplied and “not diminished.” Thus the faithfulness of God brings about the very goal of the covenant itself: “You shall be My people, and I will be your God.”

The Apostolic section was chosen for this *parashah* because it likewise describes the building of the community of faith in which God’s presence is known. Paul begins this passage by noting that the manner in which we live out God’s commandments and serve one another constitute “living and holy sacrifices.” He clearly has the Tabernacle or Temple in mind as a metaphor of the assembly of Yeshua. He further emphasizes the need for each member to contribute to the functioning of the whole, through the gifts that God has bestowed. Interestingly, in the listing of the gifts, only one is included in the list he provides in 1Cor 12, that is, “prophecy.” The remainder of the gifts find no direct parallel elsewhere as spiritual gifts. What is more, it appears that the majority of the gifts listed in our Apostolic *parashah* are the common functions of those within the body of Messiah who are intent upon serving each other: “service,” “teaching,” “exhorting,” “giving,” “leading,” and “showing mercy.” One wonders if the gift of “serving” (*διακονίαν, diakonian*) is not a general heading for all that follow, for those who teach, exhort, give, lead and show mercy are, in each of these, serving others.

What is remarkable is that each of these, while clearly the work of the Spirit as an outflow of God’s grace (12:6), is not viewed as miraculous. In other words, the way each one utilizes his or her gifts for the profit of the whole is the “common” activity that goes on in the body of Messiah. Moreover, these are not clear, distinct categories, for the one who prophesies must surely be involved in some aspect of teaching, as is the one who exhorts. Leaders “teach” by example, as do those who give and those who show mercy. Likewise, one who teaches often exhorts, and engages in the prophetic spirit of declaring the mind of God. It may be, then, that Paul is giving us a picture of how those who are led by the Spirit utilize their God-given abilities for the common good. Just as Bezalel and Aholiab were surely craftsmen before they were endowed by the special gift of the Holy Spirit, so we take our individual talents and use them for the success of God’s work in our midst.

In this regard, note Ex 31:6, “...and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you.” The craftsmen who built the Tabernacle were already

skilled, yet God gave them additional skills for the specific work to which they were summoned. In the same way, when we came to faith in Yeshua, the Spirit, who was instrumental in creating us in the first place, added to our individual talents His ability to utilize these talents for the glory of Messiah, and the building up of the *kehilah* for the sanctification of God's name upon this earth.

We are therefore left with this important question: how are we doing in the building of a place for God's dwelling?

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. (1Cor 3:10)