

Parashah Seventy-Four

Exodus 39:1–40:38; Isaiah 33:20–34:8; Ephesians 2:11–22

notes by Tim Hegg

A Place for the Dwelling of God

In this final *parashah* of *Shemot* (Exodus) we are struck by the repeated refrain “according to all that God had commanded, so they did” (or something similar). No less than 18 times in our text for this Shabbat is it noted that the people and Moses did just as the Lord commanded. Perhaps never before, and never again (until the return of Messiah), would the nation as a whole operate in such an obedient way. What is to be derived from this remarkable emphasis? What should we learn from it?

First, the conclusion of *Shemot* is clearly focused to teach us that the primary purpose of the exodus and of the Tabernacle with its services and priesthood, was that God should dwell among His people. Here, in our section, we have the crowning event, the descending of the Shekinah (שְׁכִינָה, God’s dwelling presence) to fill the Tabernacle with the glory of HaShem. The glory which had been displayed upon the mountain in the sight of Moses, Aaron and the others would now come to dwell in and over the Tabernacle so that all could see His presence. Now we understand why the oft repeated phrase of Israel’s obedience to God’s commandments in constructing the Tabernacle is found here: preparing a place for God’s presence begins with the obedience of His people.

In our pluralistic society we have unwittingly fallen prey to the *Zeitgeist*, the “spirit of the times”—we have begun to think that there is a little bit of good in all things, in all modes of thinking. We’re hesitant to teach and more hesitant to believe that God is the God of separation, that He refuses to dwell among the rebellious and wayward, among the spiritual harlotry of man-made religion. Consider Is. 57:15, “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” Or Is. 66:2 “For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the Lord. “But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” God does not wait for people to be perfect to take up His abode with them (else He would only dwell with His people in eternity). He rather provides redemption for them, and then asks for humble and contrite hearts—hearts that tremble at His word, meaning that there is a ready spirit of obedience toward the Lord. “just as He commanded, so they did”—this is an essential element of preparing a place for God’s presence.

A second element is evident as we read of Moses erecting the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle): the people had contributed abundantly to make the final product a reality. We are stunned by the amount of gold, precious stones, fine materials of woven cloth, etc. which went into the making of the *Mishkan*. (Conservative calculations would put the value of the materials for the Tabernacle at 20+ million dollars if valued by today’s standards.) In 35:5, 20, 21 the text indicates that the people gave out of “willing hearts.” The Hebrew is נְדָבָה (*nēdiv*), which could mean “noble.” In 35:21 a second expression is found, translated “whose heart stirred him,” literally “whose heart lifted him” (נִשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ).

These expressions would indicate that the people had a genuine desire for companionship with God. They were willing to give sacrificially in order to prepare a place for God’s presence to be

manifested. It is worthwhile for us to inquire of our own hearts how much we desire friendship with God. What a remarkable statement of James (2:23) that Abraham was “a friend of God!” Do we desire to have this kind of relationship with the Almighty? If so, our willingness to sacrificially prepare a place for His presence will characterize our lives.

How might we assess our heart’s desire for God’s presence? Might I suggest two simple questions: 1) How high a value do I put on things? and 2) What takes priority in my schedule? Wealth and Time—the two most valuable commodities in our lives—God asks us to put His friendship above both. It doesn’t mean that these things are unimportant, or somehow “evil.” On the contrary! Our *parashah* put a high value upon the materials that were used for the construction of the Tabernacle, as well as the skill and time of those who did the actual building. The issue is a matter of priority.

The principle of the tithe attaches to the issue of “things,” while the appointed times (Sabbath and festivals) attach to the matter of our “time.” Would we have been willing to give up our savings account in order to prepare the *Mishkan*, a place for God’s *Shekinah*? Would we have conformed our schedules to match God’s requirements? It is very interesting that God prescribes exactly when the *Mishkan* was to be erected: “On the day of the first new moon, on the first of the month....” God asks us to demonstrate the level of our desire for His presence by submitting to Him the two things we value the most: our material possessions and our time. Even in the building of the articles for the *Mishkan*, God’s appointed times (Sabbath) were to be kept (35:1-9), and the people were expected to give from their own possessions in order to make the *Mishkan* a reality. All this teaches an important principle: God dwells among those who put Him first—who desire His presence above all else.

A third element in preparing a place for God’s presence is evident in our text: God desires the abode of His presence to be one of beauty. One can only imagine what the High Priest must have looked like as he ventured out of the *Mishkan* into the courtyard. Had the sun been shining, the golden clasps, rings, chains, engravings, etc. would have illuminated the deep, rich colors of his vestments. He would have struck an imposing image. Likewise, the *Mishkan* itself, with its fine linens and weavings, the gold and silver, and the embroidery—all of it would have made the place a mini-mansion.

It is no secret why such elaborate measures were ordained for the priestly vestments and the Tabernacle itself—all of these foreshadowed the person and work of Yeshua, our Great High Priest. And here we find a simple yet profound truth: for the Father nothing is more beautiful than His Son, Yeshua. If you want to be near the *Shekinah*, find the Son, for the Father and the Son dwell together as one. Would our hearts be fashioned as place for the *Shekinah*? Would we invite the very presence of HaShem to dwell in the contrite halls of our hearts? Then we must be conformed to the image of His Son if we would erect a place of beauty for His dwelling. When I am “in Messiah” and He is in me, then surely the *Shekinah* will take up His dwelling where such beauty resides. This is the metaphor used by the Apostles. We are being built into the very abode of His dwelling as we are more and more conformed into the image of the Son.

How are we conformed to the image of Yeshua? Some might point to the life of obedience which Yeshua manifested—that as we obey the Torah we become more and more conformed to the image of Yeshua, and this, of course, is correct. But it is too easy to list those things of the Torah to which we are willing to be conformed, and to neglect that heart of the Torah that Yeshua Himself emphasized, namely, loving God by loving our neighbors; showing submission to God by

submitting to our authorities; showing our reliance upon God by loving our enemies, and doing good to those who hate us. Our desire to become like our Lord Yeshua must mean a desire to live out the Torah not by the letter (i.e., devoid of the Spirit) but by the Spirit through whom the letter will be followed in a spirit of humility and love, being patient with those who are learning, and caring about those who need to learn. Nothing, it seems to me, is more anti-Torah than to fail to be conformed to the pattern of Yeshua in His Torah observance (cf. 1Cor 9:21 where Paul speaks of “the Torah of Messiah”). Rather than writing the masses off, He grieved over them, longing that they should know the truth. And when He disagreed with the teachers of His day, He confronted them directly while still evidencing a willingness to submit to God’s ordained authority.

A fourth element I wish to emphasize as we see the manner in which the people prepared for the *Shekinah* is that they were ready to be lead by the *Shekinah*. It is one thing to sacrifice and prepare for the presence of the Lord, and another thing to commit oneself to following wherever the presence of God leads. I could imagine some who were eager for the “event,” the descent of the Cloud upon the *Mishkan*, but who had not thought beyond the grandeur of the event itself. Yet our *parashah* goes on to describe how the people travelled when the Cloud lifted, and they remained encamped when the Cloud remained stationary. They submitted to the will of God as He dwelt in their midst.

How wonderful it would be if we had such a tangible guide—to know precisely whether to turn to the left or right in the decisions of our lives by simply waiting to follow a visible cloud. Yet through the eyes of faith we are led by the Spirit. To the extent that the presence of God dwells with us, to that extent we can be assured of His guidance in life and in life’s decisions. Consider once again Prov 3:5, 6:

Trust in Adonai with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways (*halachah*) acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.

תִּזְקַח וְתִתְחַזַּק!