

The title for this week's Scripture portion is found in the first word of the first verse:

***Vayakhel Moshe et-kol-adat B'nei Yisra'el vayomer alehem ele hadevarim
asher-tsiva HaShem la'ashot otam:
Sheshet yamim tease m'lacha uvayom hashevi'i yihye lachem kodesh Shabat
shabaton laHaShem kol-haose vo m'lacha yumat.***

***Then Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together,
and said to them, "These are the words which HaShem has commanded you to
do: Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for
you, a Sabbath of rest to HaShem. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to
death."***

Exodus 35:1-2

Of particular interest to us today is the use of the word "vayakhel." It comes from the root verb *kahal*, or to "summon to assemble." From it we have the noun *kahal*, which is usually translated "assembly" or "congregation."

The Septuagint (also known as "LXX") uses the word "sunathroizo" [assembled] in this verse. It also uses the word *sunagoge* [synagogue, or congregation]. Another word used in the LXX for an assembly or congregation is "ekklesia." These words are used interchangeably in the LXX, both represent the Hebrew word "*kahal*" [assembly, congregation].

The dirty little secret is that Apostolic Scriptures uses these two Greek words (*sunagoge* and *ekklesia*) interchangeably as well. You won't find it in the English, because we have been always taught, "Synagogues are where Jews go, and churches are where Christians go." This is not biblical. The fact is that the English words "church" and "synagogue" in the Apostolic Scriptures are translators' contrivances. See how your English Bible translates James 2:2:

*For if there should come into your assembly [sunagoge] a man with gold rings, in
fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes...*

James 2:2

There is only one English translation that translates this word as "Synagogue" - *The Complete Jewish New Testament*. It seems that the translators have no problem translating *sunagoge* as "synagogue" when it they want to show it is a "Jewish" place - after all, in their minds, "Synagogues are for Jews, and churches are for Christians."

But all of this misses the point: a *sunagoge*, an *ekklesia*, a *kahal*... is **not a place**. It is **the gathering** of G-d's people. And the act of "gathering" or "assembling" the people of G-d together is not based upon man's calendar, or man's schedule of events. Man has wrongly made the *Kahal* of HaShem into all manner of things.

- A **building** on the corner of 6th and Main Streets (labeled "Church" or "Synagogue").
- An **organization** that has a charter under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code of the United States' Treasury Department.
- An **entity** distinct from Jewish people.
- or an **entity** distinct from non-Jewish people.

Beloved, the *Kahal* of HaShem is none of these. The Bride of Messiah is none of these. The assembling of His *Kahal* has nothing to do with these either.

This week's parasha is about assembling G-d's elect. It is about bring us together around Him. Look to the translations tricks that separate "synagogue" and "church" and you will find the same bias at work regarding another topic discussed in these opening verses of this week's portion: ***the Sabbath***. You know the line, "Saturday is for Jews and Sunday is for Christians." Again, the traditions of men have all but erased the commandments of G-d for so many of those who count themselves as being a part of the Bride of Messiah.

This passage begins with instructions for the now familiar pattern of the Divinely ordained week. Have you noticed that these "*six-days-of-work-but-the-seventh-is-a-Sabbath-rest*" phrases are found in what seems to be odd places? It is as if they are simply placed randomly in the Torah. Not so, beloved. There is a reason for every stroke in HaShem's Holy Word - and with regard to the Almighty's weekly timetable, we know full well that it is not a random thing.

Let's reexamine where we have found Shabbat [Sabbath] instructions so far in the Torah.

- Exodus 16: Before Sinai, in connection with gathering manna.
- Exodus 20: With the giving of the *Aseret HaD'varim* [the "Ten Words," or the "Ten Commandments"].
- Exodus 23: During the revelation at Sinai in the details of HaShem's commands.
- Exodus 31: At the end of the instructions for building the Tabernacle, before the Golden Calf incident.
- Exodus 34: After the Golden Calf incident when HaShem reveals His character and attributes to Moses on Mount Sinai.
- Exodus 35: Before continuing the instructions for building the Tabernacle.

For the sake of our discussion, let's look at four of these references, beginning with the first in Exodus 16, and then the three references that seem to be placed in the oddest of places.

In Exodus 16, before the "Covenant of Sinai," HaShem gave Israel an object lesson that appears to be designed to teach them about dependence upon HaShem for every need. Six days of work and a seventh day Shabbat are demonstrated in the six days of manna provision, and the double-portion on the sixth day which provided for a seventh day rest (Shabbat). This makes perfect sense when we read it, although it is may be somewhat troubling to some. Maybe they do not recognize that Exodus 16 is where the Shabbat is instituted officially for all Israel - not in the so called "Ten Commandments" or the "Covenant of Sinai." On the other hand, for those who recognize that no instructions from the Creator of the Universe should ever be considered passé, we know that the Shabbat, like all of HaShem's gracious instructions originated not at Sinai, or in the Wilderness weeks earlier, but in eternity past - because they do not have a beginning as we might consider beginnings. They are ***the expressions of His own character***.

The *seemingly* odd places for the Shabbat instructions are these three:

- Exodus 31: At the end of the instructions for building the Tabernacle, before the Golden Calf incident.
- Exodus 34: After the Golden Calf incident when HaShem reveals His character and attributes to Moses on Mount Sinai.
- Exodus 35: Before continuing the instructions for building the Tabernacle.

In all three of these instances, the "*six-days-of-work-but-the-seventh-is-a-Sabbath-rest*" formula seems oddly out of place. Why give Shabbat instructions in the midst of a discussion on how to build the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle]? Why give a Shabbat instruction (along with Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) discussion in the midst of revealing the full meaning of His Name and the revelation of His character? Beloved, I believe it has to do indirectly with the Golden Calf incident, and what that whole episode teaches us about the works of men, versus the grace of HaShem.

As we saw last week, the Exodus 34 passage seems to be meant to be juxtaposed against the incorrect, albeit well-intentioned, Golden Calf episode. If you remember, we saw last week that the people appear to be well-intentioned in setting up the Golden Calf. After all, they called it *Ek* (G-d), and commemorated its worship with a feast day to "AD-NAI" (using HaShem's most Holy Name). They even offered sacrifices and peace offerings in the pattern of the biblical sacrifices. The only problem is, it may have been well-intentioned, but it was not according to HaShem's instructions. HaShem has no token of worship or veneration - nothing is supposed to be made to represent Him, no matter how pure our intentions are. Anything less than HaShem's commands regarding the worship of Him, is simply *idolatry*. ***It is the height of wickedness***, and stems from the original sin in the Garden.

This week's instructions regarding the Shabbat are the final bookend in making the point: ***Good intentions do not count. Simple Obedience does***. There is a lesson in this for us today. Just like last week we saw that it does not matter if we *think* we are worshipping the Almighty correctly - if we are not following His instructions, then it is not HaShem we are worshipping, but a god of our own making.

One we thing we see in this week's parasha is that G-d does not accept the notion that sacred construction can violate His expressed will, simply because the cause is good. Therein lies the truth of the two bookends of Shabbat instructions found in the midst of instructions for building the Tabernacle. Some people in modern times have suffered under a deception made popular by the Church Growth Movement - namely, that as long as something is done to "save the lost" it is good. Under the guise of fulfilling the Great Commission faithful believers have been asked for every spare cent to a *build-the*-[fill in the appropriate metaphor] program - creating a Build-It-And-They-Will-Come Gospel.

Quite honestly, there is nothing wrong with a group of people getting together and erecting buildings and programs. In fact, it can be quite beneficial. The problem, beloved, is not *the doing* - it is in the *how* it is done. It is most often presented as "G-d's will." Like the Children of Israel who were concerned over the delay of initiating the "Plan" (while they thought Moses was delayed), taking on the service of HaShem *by their own initiative*, many congregations today have moved on in a perverted taking of the Promised Land ... without Messiah leading them.

We can imagine the sights and sounds of a people who think that they are accomplishing "G-d's will" by *taking the initiative*, and who are comfortable in what they think is worship of G-d. There are sounds that at first sound like spiritual warfare, like Joshua mistakenly thought about the noise of the people worshipping the Golden Calf - but instead turn out to be the people *playing*. There are sights that appear to be sacred, with emotion and devotion - sights of people with hands raised, or bowing down... with the Name of HaShem on their lips... while they bow before a god of their own making. These should be frightening and heart-wrenching scenes for each one of us. Such are the scenes when we abandon HaShem's clear instructions in favor of the traditions and theologies of men - ***when we seek to accomplish Divine acts and purposes with human effort.***

As have seen in the past few weeks, our faithfully and simply acting out HaShem's loving instructions is how we take the common and the mundane, and sanctify His Name. This is the call of each of us as individuals. We do not sanctify His Name by taking the sacred and accomplishing it *in our own way*. To do that, is to *profane*, or *make common* the work and purposes of the King of Heaven and Earth.

Beloved, even the building of the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle] was a Divine act. It had to be. The people did contribute materials (notice the complete lack of financing by the Bank of Sinai) - but the construction was **not** by the effort of man. The artisans of the *Mish'kan* were *supernaturally endowed*. Its erection was a miracle wrought by HaShem. The Shabbat teaches grace - and how human effort will never attain HaShem's favor.

*Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a **perpetual covenant**. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel **forever**; for in six days HaShem made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.*

Exodus 31:16-17

*"For as the **new heavens and the new earth** which I will make shall remain before Me," says HaShem, "So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and **from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me**," says HaShem.*

Isaiah 66:22-23

*If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and **call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of HaShem honorable**, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, **Then you shall delight yourself in HaShem...***

Isaiah 58:13-14a

*Also the **sons of the foreigner who join themselves to HaShem**, to serve Him, and to love the name of HaShem, to be His servants - everyone **who keeps from defiling the Sabbath**, and holds fast My covenant - even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and **make them joyful in My house of prayer**. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; **for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.***

Isaiah 56:6-7

The lesson of the Shabbat continues to amaze me. Many have abandoned it as legalistic, cold, and temporary. Maybe they have allowed the traditions and theologies of men to overrule the clear teaching of Scripture. I have yet to see an even half-hearted attempt to explain how the Seventh Day turned into Sunday. At least Roman Catholics are honest about it - they say, "We changed it." Most denominations play silly games with the subject, none of which are Scriptural.

Regardless, the Shabbat is the essence of the Gospel message, and will endure for eternity even as HaShem Himself has declared. It is no wonder that many believe that the ways of business and the world dictate how HaShem's people should congregate together. They have found another way. It is not HaShem's way. Parasha *VaYakhel* teaches us this.

Shabbat's message is clear even today: Not by the will of man. Not by good intentions. Not by human effort. It is HaShem's grace, and His grace alone that provides for us. HaShem will do what man can never do for himself, if we will only learn to depend solely upon Him and by doing so, enter into His rest. The weekly Shabbat *continually* reminds of this.

Even the work on the holy *Mish'kan* can wait until the first day of the work week.

Can we rest?

Prayer Focus for Vayak'hel - 'Yihi Ratzon' - [May it be Your will]

The last paragraph of the *Shemoneh Esrei* [also known as the *Amidah*], which we pray three times each day petitions HaShem for the rebuilding of the Temple.

*May it be Your will, HaShem our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy
Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days.
Grant us our share in Your Torah that we may serve You there as in days of old and
in former years.
Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to HaShem, as in days of
old and in former years.*

-- ArtScroll Translation