

Vayakhel **And (Moses) Assembled**
Torah: Exodus 35:1-38:20
Haftarah: I Kings 7:13-26; 40-50
Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 9:1-11

This portion discusses the gathering of the necessary materials for the Tabernacle and the Court Yard and actually making the various pieces which will eventually be fitted together. Three overriding principles stand out. First, the people have to be willing to give because for this work of art, forced giving would not be acceptable. Next, the work has to be done by talented, gifted people. These people have to also be willing to put their talents towards this amazing project. Lastly, all the necessary materials have to be gathered.

All the materials are either found in an around the camp or come from the spoils the people took out of Egypt. There was enough wood within reach of the camp and the special rain covering of the tabernacle could be made from the hides of an antelope which is just called: tachash or antelope in Hebrew.

This word is incorrectly translated as fine leather, dolphin skins or badger skins. In Hebrew it is just the generic word for an unspecified antelope. The Talmud takes this even further and says that it referred to a single horned creature with rainbow coloured skin. Also, since so many animals were killed to make the rain cover for the Tabernacle, the animals became extinct. There is no biblical evidence to support this fantasy.

Our passage opens with a discussion about not working on the Sabbath, which involves not lighting any fires in their dwelling places. It is not saying that you cannot cook on the Sabbath, only that the cottage industries had to come to a halt. There were no actual factories at this time, so all the work was done in people's homes or outside, nearby.

The people either already had all the material they needed or it was readily available close to the camp. They cut down all the acacia wood they needed and hunted all the tachash they needed. The old English word for Acacia is shittim wood and I am glad the term is no longer commonly used.

All the work and all the contributions had to be voluntary and it is not talking about tithes which was already a requirement. Just in passing, if everyone in shul tithed we would have more than enough money to cover the expenses of running the shul and could even put some away towards the purchase of our own building, instead of just scraping by.

Two men gave leadership to the craftsmen and the ladies – Betsaleel and Oholiab. They gathered all the materials and showed the gifted people how to make what was needed. As they got started, the people brought more than enough than was needed for the task. This kind of abundance is a sure sign of healthy spirituality.

When the tabernacle and the fence of the courtyard were completed, they each formed an "echad" or composite unity or a plural singularity. The same term is used to refer to the trinitarian nature of our G-d.

Each article of furniture, including the altars, were made of coated Acacia wood, so they would not be too heavy to transport whenever the camp moved. Each article of furniture was equipped with coated poles that were never removed. When the camp got ready to move, all the furniture was wrapped up and all the people only saw were the poles.

As you read the account, you discover that the work was intricate, but not complicated. It is probably the best example of folk art, where non professional people completed the work. Not even the exact dimensions were given for the cherubim which were stitched onto the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. They were not idols or graven images, but only represented the necessary distance that had to be maintained between YHVH and the people.

In the Bible, there are four of them who surround YHVH with continual praise. With the tabernacle and the ark, there are also four of them. Two on the veil and two on the lid of the Ark. The lid is sometimes called the mercy seat or the atonement seat and it was the place where the presence of G-d dwelt during the wandering years. On this lid, the two angels were facing directly across from each other and the tips of their wings were touching each other. This special order of angelic beings is only mentioned in relation to the heavenly Holy of Holies where the full presence of G-d dwells.

The ark was made of Acacia wood and covered with gold, both inside and outside. What is inside matters to G-d as much as what is on the outside. Everything which was used in the Holy Place was either made of solid gold or was coated in gold. When it came to the menorah, it too was made of solid or hammered gold. This may be referring to gold that is not 24 carats, because it would have been too soft to keep its shape and would have drooped and lost pieces too easily. It was made of the equivalent of something like 10 carat Gold, which holds its shape well and is still considered solid gold. One talent of gold was used to make the menorah and it is equivalent to 49.2 kilos or 107.8 lbs.

The altar for burnt offerings was made of acacia wood coated with bronze so it would not be too heavy to transport. The stand of the basin of the altar was covered with mirrors provided by the ladies who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

The court yard of the sanctuary was fairly large and could accommodate large crowds of people. It was surrounded by a high fence made from fine linen and was made up of sections of equal size. The linen was attached to each section and each section was attached to the other sections by bronze hooks. The courtyard was never closed and the entrance to the courtyard was made of embroidered linen that was blue, purple and crimson. The sections were held down by bronze pegs so they were not troubled when it was windy. The Court Yard was open to the sky and only the tabernacle was roofed.

All the furniture and the structures were majestic, with none of the grotesque or sensual elements found in Canaanite and Egyptian temples. The whole thing was permanently mobile and was to be the centre around which the camp was organized. The things of G-d and worship need to be the centre around which both our community and our personal lives revolve. Our G-d wants to fill our lives with His beauty and empower us to do great things for Him, as long as we are willing. How is your willingness doing? How much of the beauty and majesty of G-d are you allowing into your life? We are only pilgrims wandering through this life, but He still wants to fill us with beauty all along the way.

Sermon: Spring is Coming: Living According to the Changing Seasons

After an especially cold winter, I am looking forward to the arrival of Spring. It is like a reawakening or a rebirth and there are few places in the world where these changes are as radical as they are in Canada. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy our winter, but after five months of cold temperatures and snow, it is time for a change. Change is the one constant in all of our lives. Recently one of my former students posted a picture of Patti and I as a young couple and caused me to reflect on the changes this old man has lived through.

David said that he had been young and was now old, but he never saw the righteous abandoned or their children begging for their bread (Ps. 37:25). King Solomon said that there was a time for every purpose under heaven and even that G-d has made everything beautiful in its time (Eccl. 3:1 & 11). I sometimes have a difficult time understanding why strange things happen around the world and I find the Russian invasion of the Ukraine especially troubling. But changes come and changes go and the two constants in our lives are change and the wisdom and comfort of our faith.

This is my 50th year since I came to faith and every now and then, I like to look backwards and reflect on Clint Eastwood – you know, the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. Things could have been a lot better, but they also could have been a lot worse. I want to learn from my experiences and let the Messiah teach this old dog new tricks.

Our community is also constantly changing and we need to learn from what we have experienced and what we have seen. I am always sad when good people stop attending, but I am always glad when new people start attending. In the nearly 18 years that B'nai Chayim has been around, a lot has changed. We are in our fifth building and we have seen some pretty amazing people wander through our community. Some of them even stayed!

We are starting to see more newcomers visit us and who knows, some people who used to attend may wander back through. I once heard a church growth speaker say that if we try and chase after people who leave, they will just run faster and you will neglect the sheep it is our call to shepherd. I am hoping for a spiritual thawing in our midst and I am grateful that we will always be sowing and reaping in people's lives, as they enrich us with their presence – some for just a little while and others for a longer time.

As my health improves, I want to get more involved in the life of our small Jewish community and I want to reach out to the churches who should be supporting us and Jewish people worldwide. We should always pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for our Messiah's protection and provision for the nation of Israel. We belong to two Messianic Jewish groups, the CMJC (the Council of Messianic Jewish Congregations of Alberta) and the UMJC (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations) which operates out of Albuquerque, New Mexico. I hold my ministerial credential with the PAOC (Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada) and many fine Pentecostal people pray for us regularly.

But unless we are willing to make changes and to relate positively to the changes that come into our lives, our days are numbered and our vision will dim. We are going through a period where our finances are pretty thin, but as the Covid restrictions become a thing of the past, we can build up some positive steam once again. I have said it before and I will say it again – you have to survive if you want to thrive.

I want you all to know that I pray for all of you regularly, both those who attend and those who join us on our Live Streaming. I want to greet our live streamers and again extend the invitation for them to join with us in person, whenever they are able. I am not afraid about the changes we have had to make, nor am I nervous about other changes we may have to make as we keep our heads above water. I want to learn how to hold virtual Bible Study Yeshivas and to have virtual Prayer Meetings. I want to see us provide for our children as they grow up and for our seniors as we wrinkle up. Wouldn't it be nice to have both a woman's group and a men's group?

It is said that the older you get, the harder you find it to live with changes, but at least in my case and my wife's case, this is not really a problem. But we don't just want to see changes, we want to see people change and become vibrant, effective believers in the Messiah from Nazareth. And once we are changed, I want us to hold on to these changes and grow in the grace and wisdom of our Saviour.

Attacks will come and disappointments will happen. People will let us down and we will let people down. We have to keep on developing new and bolder ways of expressing our unchanging faith as we wander through this changing and darkening world. But there is one thing we should never lose sight of. No matter what stage of life we are at and no matter what is going on in our lives, the faithful provision and protection of G-d will never have an expiry date.

I am glad to be getting regular help with the preaching and we will rebuild our worship team, as we grow in our repertoire of Hebrew Chants. I am glad that we are on good terms with our Baptist landlords and I also want to be on good terms with the other groups who use the building. And even if it is now considered old technology, I would like to make more use of our Facebook page AND our website.

I am not really finding growing old to be a burden, but the thing I want to avoid at all costs is growing stale. Did you know that there is a spiritual form of arthritis that can set in if we do not make full use of our spirituality?

In the last few years, I have suffered a major thrombosis (blood clot) in my leg that was nearly three feet long. I have also been in the hospital for heart failure twice and I severed a tendon in my right leg. I am on more medications and supplements than you can shake a stick at and my allergies and my asthma are still a major concern on the road to get my health back. I know that a lot of this is an extended spiritual attack to do me in and to discourage me, but, honestly, it ain't gonna work.

If we expect that walking with the Messiah according to His Word will give us uneventful lives free of challenges and setbacks, we will soon come to see that this is a false perspective. I am constantly amazed with two things as I wander through this life on my way home to my Father's Home in Glory. The enemy, the world and even our own flesh never cease to come up with new attacks against us and our faith. These will come from the outside and sometimes even from the inside. But I am even more impressed by the new and creative ways G-d finds to provide for us and to protect us. There is one thing in our spiritual lives which will never happen – we will never be cornered, or abandoned and forsaken. G-d intervenes in our lives and in the life of our world to see that His purposes are fulfilled.

The Bible says that there will wars and rumours of war, like the one raging in the Ukraine and there will be floods and earthquakes in diverse places. Did you know that there are regularly nearly 5,000 tremors in the valley of Megiddo, every year? Global warming is leading to more severe storms, both in the winter and in the summer and even if we were to bring our global carbon emissions to an end, it would not stop the warming process. Historically, there are millennial weather patterns that have nothing to do with human activity. We are in one now!

I am totally against pollution and all the waste and garbage our global community produces every year, but as long as we keep on coming up with firm, creative solutions, this too shall pass. Getting discouraged is really just a case of not seeing things from a positive spiritual perspective. I am not a fan of the philosopher Hobbes who said that no matter happens, we are living in the best of all possible worlds. We are living in a constantly changing world and we will win or lose by the way we choose.

The current conflict in the Ukraine may escalate and our global economy may suffer great disruptions and people's hearts might fail them as they are consumed by the fear of the morbid eventuality. I do not know if our community will begin to catch a break over the Spring and Summer, but I do know that Passover is just around the corner and the High Holy Days and Sukkoth are getting steadily near for another year.

I know that the Spirit of G-d is at work in our lives and in the lives of other people so that they will become part of our exciting, dynamic community. I wish they would hurry up and join us and that our finances would quickly increase, but I am prepared to wait on the L-rd, for however long it takes for things to turn around for us.

The writer of Hebrews said that we have need of perseverance, so that after having fulfilled the will of G-d, we would obtain that which promised (Heb. 10:36). Now, we are promised everlasting life when the Eternal Kingdom of our blessed Messiah is set up on a new earth and under a new Heavens. But we are also promised His provision and protection in this life, because He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

There is an old Scots chorus I have been singing to myself lately. It goes like this:

Cheer up ye saints of G-d. You've got nothing make you feel afraid and nothing to make you doubt. Remember Yeshua never fails, so why not trust Him and shout. You'll be sorry you worried at all tomorrow morning.

There is a final tomorrow morning which is drawing closer and even when we go through the ringer and get punished by this fickle life, our place in this coming tomorrow makes it all seem worthwhile. Paul even said that he did not consider the weight of this life's light afflictions, worthy to be compared to the eternal weight of glory which G-d is keeping in store for us (Romans 8:18).

I do not like to see any of our community suffer and be battered around by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. I do not like to see family members sicken, even as I prepare for my own exit from this veil of tears. I do not like to hear of wars and floods and famines and the other pandemics that are waiting to pounce on our shrinking global village. I both weep and feel rage every time I hear about another terrorist attack. Racism and violent crimes sicken me, as does the folly which seems to drive all levels of government globally.

Don't get me started about the mass murder of babies in their mother's womb. Did you know, sadly, that more babies have been aborted in Israel than those who died in the Holocaust? Sexual brokenness and drug addiction of all kinds is on the rise around our darkening world. And it seems like we just put out one fire and see several more ignite.

But G-d is still in final control and the big question for us to ask as we wander through the whatever's of this life, is how much control we are allowing G-d to exercise over us and how we live. As a rabbi, I am not exempt from the tentacles of depression that are constantly besieging my heart and life. But I refuse to get stuck on red alert and succumb to any form of spiritual PTSD. I have seen a lot of heart ache in my short life and the horrors of human history greatly sadden my heart and I would dearly love to go and slap around a certain president and force him to remove his invading army and stay in his own country.

I have not forgotten about the pain and turmoil innocent people are experiencing in Afghanistan. I often think about those Syrian refugees who are languishing in so many refugee camps in any number of countries. With all my heart, I do not want to see Iran develop a nuclear capacity. But I remember people saying that India and Pakistan would blow each other up when they got the bomb. This has never happened, yet.

Totalitarian regimes like China will continue to violate the human rights of their people and their minorities, but there is one great truth which keeps me fairly sane and able to smile and laugh in the midst of the growing storm. This world is broadly divided into two essential cores: the righteous core which is composed of both authentic believers and spiritually hungry people across our globe. At the other extreme is the wicked core where fornicating idolaters, backsliders and G-d hating atheists lurk and do their best to attack and mangle members of the righteous core.

They want to gain control of the world again and cause it to sink back into the global darkness that covered the world in the days of Noah. There is truly an international conspiracy which is trying to take over the world. It is not composed of the illuminati or members other supposed groups of global conspirators. The communists are not secretly plotting in our midst to overthrow our government and socialism is not a great evil which is trying to destroy our world.

There are political and religious extremists, some with armed militias and terror training camps, but they are only the tip of a much greater iceberg. The enemy of our souls is locked in perpetual conflict with the purposes of G-d and sadly, in our day we are seeing many versions of his influence rear their ugly heads, again and again, ad nauseam. Evil, violent people are victims of the enemy's growing power and one of our principle tasks as believers, is not to become infected with any of their bitterness and hatred.

Not all changes in our lives will be good and not all changes in our lives will be bad, but as long as we draw breath, changes will keep parading through our lives, endlessly. Even in the darkest moment, I want to part of the solution and not part of the problem. In Hebrew, we say that the duty of every Jew is to participate in Tikkun Olam, or the healing of the world. Turbulent times they are a'coming and there is really nowhere to hide except under the shadow of His wings as we set straight paths for our wounded feet and keep on getting reminded that in all things we are more than conquerors. Do you realize that this is our constant calling and the place where we need to learn to live. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.