

# Shavua Tov

## Weekly Parsha

*A Rood Awakening!* Torah Commentary  
By Glenn McWilliams

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Torah Portion: *Vayak'hel* ויקהל "And Assembled"

**Moses assembled the entire Israelite community and said to them, 'These are the words that God has commanded for [you] to do:**

**Vayakhel** Moshe et-kol-adat beney-Yisra'el vayomer alehem eleh hadevarim asher-tsivah Adonay la'asot otam.

Scripture for Study: *Shemot* (Exodus) 35:1-38:20

*Please continue your studies after this portion, Vayak'hel. This week is a double portion. Vayakh'el and Pekudei are most often combined and complete the study of Exodus (Shemot). Pekudei is the next portion on the Torah Studies page. Next week we will begin a fascinating study of the book of Leviticus (Vayikra).*

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Our Torah portion this week begins with some very powerful words.

*"And Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, These are the words which YHWH hath commanded, that ye should do them." (Exodus 35:1)*

Since we as readers are privileged to eavesdrop on the conversation between the Holy One and Moses on Mount Sinai, much of what we hear in this Torah portion has already been revealed to us. But for those who were at Mount Sinai in the days of Moses, this was the first time for them to actually hear the words of the revelation of the Torah. Even though we may have already heard much of this information, we should not be quick to move on or tune it out. Instead we should listen carefully to these opening words of the portion.

*"These are the words which YHWH hath commanded, that ye should do them." (Exodus 35:1)*

One of my most treasured possessions is a Bible that was given to me as a Christmas present from my maternal grandparents in 1962, when I was but five years of age. It is a personal sized, leather covered, Red Letter Edition King James Version Bible with my name in gold letters on

the front and a zipper around it with a brass cross hanging from it. Long before I could even read, this gift given to me by two people whom I loved very much instilled in me a love for the Word of Elohim. I carried this sacred package with me to Sunday School and Church each week, waiting for someone who could read to reveal its holy content to me. As I grew in size and understanding, the uniqueness of this particular book and its contents continued to become even more special to me. My relationship with the Word fluctuated at times, but ultimately my heart would be drawn back to it again and again as my life's journey continued.

As a Lutheran pastor I marveled at how few of the people sitting in the pews brought their Bibles with them to church. I marveled even more when I discovered how few of them even read the Bible. I was appalled to learn that some members did not even own a Bible. I want to be very clear here that I am not advocating worshipping the Bible. The Bible is NOT the Word of Elohim. The Word of Elohim is a living Word. The Bible, especially in its translated form, is the testimony to the Word of Elohim. This is an important distinction to make. The Word of Elohim is that which is spoken, powerful, and living. It is the living Word that creates, heals, transforms, and speaks to men's hearts. What is written, whether on stone, papyri, parchment, or paper, is a testament to that spoken and living Word. We are to be forever listening to the voice of YHWH, regardless of what agent it comes through, so Yeshua teaches us that we should know his "voice."

*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27)*

We may likewise remember that it was the voice of Elohim that was heard in the Garden of Eden and on Mount Sinai.

*"And they heard the voice of YHWH ELOHIM walking in the garden in the cool of the day." (Genesis 3:8)*

*"And YHWH ELOHIM called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid..." (Genesis 3:9-10)*

*"And YHWH spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice." (Deuteronomy 4:12)*

We must recognize that the Holy One may indeed use various means and agents to bring forth His spoken and living Word to His people. The Hebrew word most often translated as "angel" is the word *mal'ach* (Mem, Lamed, Aleph, Kaf), which means "messenger." Thus we often hear of the living Word being delivered by means of divine messengers. In the story of YHWH appearing to Abraham, the Torah tells us that three "men" came to visit, but then later goes on to describe at least two of these men as angels.

*"And YHWH appeared unto him (Abraham) in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, Adonai..." (Genesis 18:1-3)*

*“And YHWH said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for YHWH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” (Genesis 18:13-14)*

*“And there came two angels to Sodom at even...” (Genesis 19:1)*

Likewise at the binding of Isaac, YHWH spoke to Abraham through the agent of a divine messenger.

*“And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of YHWH called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.” (Genesis 22:10-11)*

*“And the angel of YHWH called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith YHWH, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son...” (Genesis 22:15-16)*

Likewise with Moses, YHWH speaks through the agent of the burning bush and a *mal'ach*.

*“And the angel of YHWH appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.” (Exodus 3:2)*

Again it was so with Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother of Yeshua.

*“And there appeared unto him (Zacharias) an angel of YHWH standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard...” (Luke 1:11-13)*

*“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from Elohim unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin...And the angel said unto her, Fear not...” (Luke 1:26-27, 30)*

Manoah, the father of Samson, came to recognize that seeing and hearing the agent of YHWH was the same as seeing and hearing YHWH himself.

*“But the angel of YHWH did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of YHWH. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen Elohim.” (Judges 13:21-22)*

In all of these instances we must realize that the voice may have belonged to the agent, but the word belonged to YHWH. The author of the letter to the Hebrews clearly understood this reality when he wrote:

*“Elohim, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...”  
(Hebrews 1:1-2)*

Every time we open the Scriptures and every time we pray, we should tremble with a phenomenal sense of awe that the testimony we are reading and the words we are hearing read to us are the very words of the Creator and Holy One of Israel. We should be overwhelmed with emotion every time the Torah is read, knowing that these words came straight from the heart, mind, and will of the Eternal One. Every time we open our Bibles we should marvel that we hold in our hands the very testimony to the living Word of YHWH. Those of us who live in free countries are blessed to live in a place, day, and age when Bibles are readily available to us. In the days of Moses there was but one copy of the Torah. There were no writings of the prophets, no psalms, no writings of the apostles, no Gospels – only one copy of the Torah. And yet I cannot even begin to imagine the anticipation, interest, and intensity of the concentration in listening demonstrated on the part of the people of Israel when Moses descended the mountain and declared to them:

*“...These are the words which YHWH hath commanded, that ye should do them.”  
(Exodus 35:1)*

The people had already trembled at the appearance of YHWH ELOHIM at Mount Sinai, and pleaded for Moses to serve as the agent of the Word of Elohim.

*“And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not Elohim speak with us, lest we die.” (Exodus 20:18-19)*

For forty days Moses remained under the cloud amidst the fire on Mount Sinai, receiving the revelation of YHWH ELOHIM. The people grew restless below and worried about their intermediary and leader. This restlessness and anxiety is what provoked the incident of the golden calf.<sup>1</sup> The Holy One sent Moses their shepherd down from the mountain to tend to the wayward flock. After much rebuking, chastising, interceding, and repenting, Moses again returned to the cloud and fire of Sinai for yet another forty days. Still feeling the sting of chastisement, and filled with both the fear of Elohim and the zeal of repentance, the children of Israel waited with great anticipation to hear the words that Moses the agent of YHWH would bring to them from their Deliverer, Redeemer, Savior, and Elohim. The Scriptures give us beautiful testimonies of the reverence and esteem that the children of Israel bestowed upon the Word of the Holy One.

*“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)*

*“And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the*

*words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, wither ye go over Jordan to possess it." (Deuteronomy 32:46-47)*

*"As for Elohim, his way is perfect: the word of YHWH is tried:" (Psalm 18:30)*

*"In Elohim I will praise his word: in YHWH I will praise his word." (Psalm 56:10)*

*"The Torah of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." (Psalm 119:72)*

*"Oh how love I thy Torah!" (Psalm 119:97)*

*"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105)*

*"Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it." (Psalm 119:140)*

*"I hate vain thoughts: but thy Torah do I love." (Psalm 119:113)*

*"Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." (Psalm 119:160)*

*"Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word." (Psalm 119:161)*

*"I hate and abhor lying: but thy Torah do I love." (Psalm 119:163)*

*"I have longed for thy salvation, O YHWH; and thy Torah is my delight." (Psalm 119:174)*

*"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:63)*

*"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)*

*"For we know that the Torah is spiritual..." (Romans 7:14)*

*"If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good." (Romans 7:16)*

*"Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Messiah..." (Philippians 2:16)*

*"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." (1 John 1:1)*

This Torah, this Word, this revelation from Mount Sinai, was to be the source of joy, health, blessing, and life for the children of Israel. This word from the Holy One given to Moses on Mount Sinai was to be the very mission, purpose, and identity of the children of Israel. As the Psalmist declared:

*“He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye YHWH.” (Psalm 147:19-20)*

The Torah is a very unique treasure, but we must be very clear that the Torah is not a sculpture to be displayed in a garden, nor a painting to be displayed on a wall, nor a piece of fine jewelry to be worn around one’s neck. While the Word of the Holy One is indeed a priceless treasure, it was given to us not merely as an idol for us to adore and reverence; it was given to us to do. Moses is very clear in his presentation of the Torah.

*“These are the words which YHWH hath commanded, that ye should do them.” (Exodus 35:1)*

The Torah is the self-revelation of the living Elohim. The Torah is a living Word. The calling extended to Israel at Mount Sinai, the very heart of the covenant, is that the children of Israel would give their lives to embodying the Torah. This reality is seen in the opening words of our portion:

*“And Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together...” (Exodus 35:1)*

In Hebrew the phrase reads:

*“Vayak’hel Moshe et kol a’dat beney Yisrael...” (Shemot 35:1)*

The Hebrew word *vayak’hel* comes from the root word *kahal* (Qof, Hey, Lamed), which means “assembly,” “convocation,” or “congregation.”<sup>2</sup> We should remember that according to our portion, once Moses returned from the mountaintop he related to the children of Israel the directions for building the tabernacle. We have already discussed in previous portions that the tabernacle of wood, gold, wool, and linen was to be a revelation and object lesson to the children of Israel on how they were to become the living tabernacle of YHWH. In other words, when Moses assembled the people, he was in essence already assembling the living tabernacle. We may likewise recall that when YHWH first spoke to Moses concerning the children of Israel building the tabernacle for Him to dwell in, the material for its construction was to be given with the heart.

*“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.” (Exodus 25:2)*

As the materials for the wooden tabernacle were given and received, so too was heart given and received, so that the living tabernacle might also be erected for YHWH to dwell in. And so it is that the children of Israel responded to this calling and word from their Deliverer, Redeemer, Savior, and Elohim.

*“And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and everyone whom his spirit made willing, and they brought YHWH’S offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments. And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted...” (Exodus 35:21-22)*

*“And all the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands....” (Exodus 35:25)*

*“And all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom spun goats’ hair.” (Exodus 35:26)*

*“The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto YHWH, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work...” (Exodus 35:29)*

*“And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart YHWH had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it.” (Exodus 36:2)*

The children of Israel were so moved by the word of YHWH, so stirred by the Torah as relayed by Moses, that they in fact had to be restrained from giving further to the work of the inanimate tabernacle of wood.

*“And they (the builders) spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which YHWH commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much.” (Exodus 36:5-7)*

Clearly the children of Israel realized that the Torah was not something merely to be read or studied, but was something to be lived out in their lives and with their bodies. This idea was again later affirmed among the Jews in the Mishnaic tractate Pirkei Avot. Rabban Gamliel’s son Shimon stated it this way:

*“All my days I grew up among the Sages and did not find anything better for one’s person than silence; not study but practice is the essential thing:”<sup>3</sup>*

Clearly it is not enough simply to know the Torah. We are to do Torah. But there is a very powerful warning given to us in a very subtle way in our Torah portion.

Let us take note of the fact that when Moses comes down from the mountain, the first instructions he bestows upon the children of Israel are neither those concerning the building of the inanimate tabernacle nor the offering to be received. Instead, the first teaching of the Torah that Moses gives to the children of Israel is concerning the Sabbath. There may have been many reasons for Moses to begin his teaching with the instructions concerning the Sabbath, but I will focus only on two of them.

We have already seen the phenomenal enthusiasm with which the children of Israel responded to the offering of materials for the building of the tabernacle. The response was so great that it required Moses to restrain the people with a commandment to stop giving. With this type of zeal and unbridled enthusiasm it is possible to go too far; thus Moses had to remind the children of Israel that the Sabbath was still in effect. As important as this “new” revelation about the tabernacle was, it was not to take precedence over the Sabbath, the very sign of the covenant. To prevent the children of Israel from acting presumptuously as Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, would later do,<sup>4</sup> Moses informed the people of the will and priority of YHWH right from the start.

This still leaves us with the question as to why the Sabbath should be a priority over the erection of the dwelling place of YHWH. This question is answered by the second reason that I believe Moses began his instruction with the teaching on the Sabbath. Let us remember that we have already stated that the inanimate tabernacle was to be a teaching tool and object lesson to the children of Israel, who themselves were to be the living tabernacle for YHWH. As physical beings living in a material world, we often find ourselves busy with external and material realities. It is easy, even natural, for us to focus our lives on doing things. Weaving, spinning, smelting, smithing, cutting, carving, gathering, and numerous other types of work were necessary for the erection of the tabernacle. The sages have delineated thirty-nine different categories of work that went into the building of the tabernacle. Most of us lead very busy lives; even those of us who have given our lives to studying and teaching Torah. Thus Moses wanted us to understand that there is more to Torah than just studying Torah; that there is also more to Torah than merely doing Torah. By beginning with the teaching on the Sabbath, Moses is trying to teach that we are not just to study Torah and we are not just to do Torah; we are to BE THE TORAH. To understand this concept we must understand the difference between doing and being. There is no greater time to learn this difference than on the Sabbath, when all doing comes to a halt and being begins. On the Sabbath we are to be. It is for this reason YHWH gave us the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant relationship between us.

*“And YHWH spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am YHWH that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to YHWH; whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of*



*Israel for ever: for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:12-17)*

It is not just in our doing that we embody YHWH ELOHIM, but in our very being. Just as YHWH exists apart from His work, so too are we to embody the Holy One in our being even apart from what we do. The Sabbath sets apart one day for us to focus upon being who and what we were created and called to be. Clearly it would have been easier for the children of Israel to focus upon building the inanimate tabernacle with wood, linen, gold, and skins, but the Sabbath halted such external activities and distractions and called them back to the harder task of preparing their very beings to become a fit habitation for the Holy One. Likewise the Sabbath calls us back from our occupation with the external and material realities of "doing" to focus on "being," preparing ourselves to be YHWH's living tabernacle or dwelling place.

What a precious honor the Creator has bestowed upon us. He has blessed us not only with his Holy Word, but has likewise granted us the grace to become a living tabernacle. We do not simply receive a revelation written upon stone and delivered by an agent; we receive the living Word itself that we may be his living revelation to the rest of creation. I hope that this Sabbath will bring an incredible sense of intimacy with YHWH.

*Please continue to the next portion, Pekudei for this week.*

SHAVUA TOV !

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 32:1-10

<sup>2</sup> A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, William Gesenius, Oxford University Press. Pg. 874

<sup>3</sup> Siddur Tehillat Hashem, Nusach Ha Ari Zal, Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, N.Y. Pg. 273

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 10:1-2